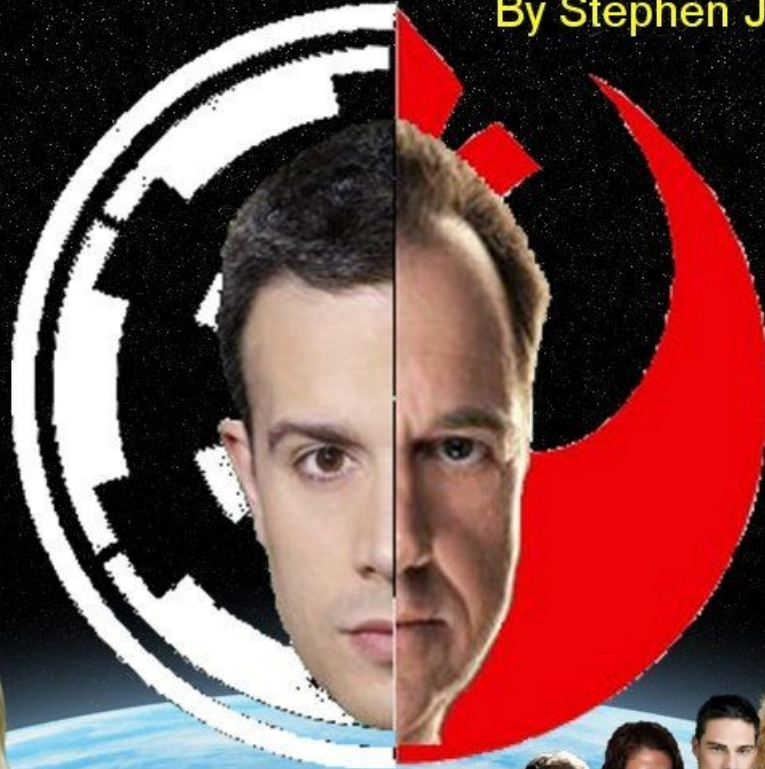


# STAR WARS

## 8-07: Problem Neighbours

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...

## PROBLEM NEIGHBOURS

A CONVOY BOUND FOR ESTRAN IS HIJACKED AND ITS ESCORT DESTROYED. BUT THE ASSUMPTION THAT IT IS THE RESULT OF AN ALLIANCE AMBUSH IS PROVEN WRONG WHEN IT COMES TO LIGHT THAT THE EMPIRE IS NO LONGER AS UNIFIED AS IT WAS UNDER EMPEROR PALPATINE...

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

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# 1.

There were more than forty transport ships of various classes in the convoy, the smallest of which was just over a hundred and twenty metres long while the largest were well over two thousand. The materials carried by these ships were considered vital to Imperial operations and so the convoy was well defended by three nebulon-B class frigates and a single lancer-class anti-starfighter frigate while a pair of TIE fighters from the nebulon-Bs' complements patrolled the outer perimeter. Even with such a powerful defence in place the crews of both the transport ships and the Imperial frigates had valid concerns about the possibility of a rebel attack. The Alliance had recently stolen a large force of capital ships from a shipyard in the sector and Imperial authorities had no way of knowing how close the rebels were to being able to put any or even all of them into action. Therefore, the reaction when the escorts detected a large hyperspace window forming close by was a frantic call to action stations.

"Report!" the captain in charge of the escorting line of warships exclaimed, "How many ships are we talking about?"

"Just one sir." the comscan operator responded and he looked at the line captain, "One of ours. Imperial-class."

"A star destroyer? Contact them. Find out what they're doing here."

"The star destroyer is already signalling us sir."

"Then put them through." the line captain said and moments later a hologram of a man in the uniform of an Imperial admiral appeared on the frigate's bridge and the line captain frowned. There were fewer than two dozen Imperial-class star destroyers in the sector, each one commanded by an admiral and this man was not someone that the line captain recognised, "What ship is that?" he said, looking at his comscan operator.

"This is the Imperial star destroyer *Glaive* and I am Admiral Krex." the holographic image said before the comscan operator could respond.

"Your ship is not part of our sector group admiral. What are you doing here?" the line captain asked.

"I'm here to bring you new orders line captain. Your ships will divert to Protus."

"I'm sorry admiral but my orders are to escort this convoy to Estran. I can't deviate from them without explicit instructions from Fleet Admiral Vretan."

"Vretan isn't here line captain." Krex said, "I am and I've got sixty turbolasers aimed at your ships." and at that point a klaxon sounded on the frigate's bridge.

"Captain! The star destroyer is locking weapons onto us." one of the bridge officers called out.

"Admiral, what is the meaning of this?" the line captain demanded.

"I'm sorry captain." Admiral Krex replied, "But I really don't have time for any of this right now so if you're not going to surrender your ships to me then I'll just have to take matter into my own hands." and then the hologram disappeared.

Almost immediately there followed flashes of green as the star destroyer fired its turbolasers at the escort ships. The first salvo struck the lancer-class frigate in its main reactor and the entire vessel exploded. Then another hit one of the frigates in the central boom that connected the command module at the front to the engines at the back and the ship was broken in half, the two parts burning as they tumbled away from one another. A second nebulon-B was struck multiple times, its shields offering no protection against the heavy turbolasers carried by the star destroyer and it was consumed by fires started all along its length. This left only the line captain's own flagship and the line captain had just enough time to see his force destroyed before a turbolaser blast slammed into his bridge and everyone inside was killed instantly.

Then as the remains of the escort ships were being blasted to dust, aboard the star destroyer Admiral Krex ordered a channel opened to broadcast to the entire convoy.

"This is Admiral Krex aboard the star destroyer *Glaive*. All ships are to prepare to receive boarding parties from this vessel. These will provide new jump co-ordinates that every ship must follow. Any attempt to resist or to escape will result in the complete destruction of the offending ship."

When the Space Rescue Corps sprint-class rescue ship dropped out of hyperspace there were no ships visible on its sensors, only the debris from the four Imperial frigates that had been escorting the convoy at its last reported position.

"I'm not picking up any life signs lieutenant." one of the crew said, addressing the ship's pilot and commanding officer Lieutenant Mirri Cordall.

"I'm not surprised." Mirri responded and she looked out of the cockpit at the wreckage drifting outside, "What could do this to a line of frigates?"

"The rebels." one of her crew said, the contempt in his voice clear, "They murdered almost four thousand people."

"I'm picking up a beacon." another crewman announced suddenly.

"An escape pod?" Mirri asked.

"I don't think so. I think it's a fighter's ID transponder."

"Tell me where." Mirri said.

"Starboard quarter. Plus sixteen degrees."

"Okay I'm on it." Mirri said as she swung the rescue ship around and flew towards the source of the beacon. A sprint -class vessel was built for speed, its purpose being to reach stricken craft as rapidly as possible. But here among the wreckage of multiple ships Mirri was unable to take full advantage of this speed as she wove her way between the various pieces of wreckage, many of which were larger than her ship. But this did not stop her from reaching the source of the beacon in under five minutes and ahead of the ship she saw a standard Imperial TIE fighter drifting through space.

"I'm picking up a life sign from inside. Very weak." one of Mirri's crew told her, "No power other than the transponder though."

"Then suit up boys. We're bringing that pilot aboard." Mirri said.

Donning vacuum suits, Mirri and one of her crew exited the rescue ship and used rocket packs to propel themselves across the gap between it and the drifting TIE fighter. They approached the compact single pilot craft from behind where they could not be seen from inside and knocked on the top mounted hatch.

Surprised by this, the pilot jumped as he looked up to see the two vacc suited figures looking back down at him and then slowly gave a thumbs up sign.

"Well he's alive at least." Mirri said to the other SRC officer, "Now let's get him out of there."

There was an emergency release located beside the TIE fighter's hatch and rather than waste time trying to open it Mirri simply used this to jettison the hatch entirely. Clumsily, the pilot then attempted to climb out of the craft but needed Mirri and the other officer to drag him out of it. Then clutching the pilot between them the two SRC officers jumped back off the hull and used their rocket packs to take themselves and the pilot back to the rescue craft.

Once inside the pilot removed his helmet and it was then that Mirri noticed he was shivering after spending so long adrift in a fighter that lacked a functioning heating system.

"Get him a blanket and a cup of caf. Make it strong." Mirri ordered as she helped the pilot to sit down on a nearby bench, "So who are you?" she then asked the pilot.

"Lieutenant Gav Mendell." the pilot replied, "Assigned to the frigate *Forward to the Future*. Or at least I was."

"Why? What happened here lieutenant?" Mirri said, "Was it a rebel ambush?"

"No." Lieutenant Mendell answered, "You're not going to believe this, but it was one of ours. It was a star destroyer."

Imperial Security Bureau Agent Garm Larcus looked at the plaque on his new desk that bore his name and title.

GARM LARCUS – ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

"Assistant director, I like the sound of that." the young woman standing close behind him said as she slipped her arms around his waist, "If I'd known that sticking a letter opener in Ibram's throat would get you this office and this desk I'd have done it the moment he stepped off that shuttle."

"Yes Vay, I think you would." Garm said, turning to face her without breaking her grip on him and embracing her in return.

"So what do you think of your new office then?" Vay asked and Garm looked around it despite having already examined it carefully.

"I have a window." he said, "I've never had a window in my office before." and Vay frowned, "What's wrong?" he said.

"Just thinking how you could do with some blinds so people can't see everything we get up to in here." she replied and Garm smiled at her.

"Watch this." he said and he pressed a button on his desk that suddenly caused the previously transparent window to turn a pale blue, "From outside it's now opaque." he added.

"Great. Now we just need a couch that folds out into a-" Vay began before there was a chiming sound from the door and the two agents quickly stepped back from one another.

"Come in." Garm called out and the door slid open to reveal a young man in the uniform of a junior ISB agent who took two steps into the office before snapping to attention.

"Excuse me sir but Moff Horatian requires your presence in his office." the man said.

"Thank you." Garm replied, "You are dismissed." then as the younger agent turned to leave Garm looked at Vay and added, "Oh well, time to go and find out what a deputy director of the Imperial Security Bureau actually does."

"And his sexually attractive young assistant." Vay commented, "Don't forget that." then she paused for a moment before adding, "Hey, do I get a plaque as well? Assistant-assistant director?"

"I'll let you ask the moff that." Garm replied.

Garm and Vay were shown straight into Moff Horatian's office when they arrived and they found that they were not the only ones gathered there. In addition to Moff Gregor Horatian himself Rodge Larrs, the head of the Committee for the Preservation of the New Order, Fleet Admiral Praus Vretan and Gram's direct superior ISB Director Corvin Helios were already there.

"Ah, Garm, Vay. Do sit down." Moff Horatian said, "We're just waiting on one more person and then we can begin."

"Your excellency," the moff's secretary announced over the intercom, "the lieutenant is here."

Good. Show her in." he replied and the doors to his office swung open again to reveal Mirri Cordall who walked in, stood at attention and saluted., "At ease lieutenant." Moff Horatian replied, "Now I know that Admiral Vretan knows what you are here to say but could you tell the others what he has already told me?" "Of course sir." Mirri replied, "A convoy scheduled to arrive at Estran fourteen hours ago failed to arrive on schedule and my vessel as well as several other SRC and navy craft were despatched to search for it. We found this." and she held up a mem-stick and passed it towards the moff. He took the device from her and plugged it into his desk. In an instant a hologram was projected into the air that showed the remains of the four frigates assigned to protect the convoy drifting through space.

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

"All four escorts had been destroyed," Admiral Vretan said, "and the entire convoy was missing."

"The rebels were able to overpower them all?" Rodge Larrs asked.

"Not exactly sir." Mirri answered, "We found a survivor, a TIE fighter pilot who was able to identify the attacking vessel."

"Vessel?" Garm said, "There was just one ship?"

"I've got a very bad feeling about this." Vay muttered.

"A star destroyer, Imperial class according to the pilot."

"The *Night Wraith* again?" Director Helios said referring to an experimental variant of Imperial-class star destroyer that a rebel field team had stolen.

"No sir." Mirri replied, "The *Glaive*."

"The *Glaive*?" Rodge said, frowning, "I thought I knew the names of all of our-"

"The *Glaive* is not part of our sector group." Admiral Vretan interrupted, "Nor is it a ship that has fallen into rebel hands."

"Then where did it come from?" Rodge said, confused.

"Protus in the Indran Sector apparently." Mirri said, "The pilot monitored communications between the star destroyer and the lead escort. An Admiral Krex ordered the line captain in charge of the escorts to change course to Protus and when he refused the admiral had his ship open fire, destroying all four escorts. The transports were then boarded and taken. The vessels' exit vector had them heading for the Indran Sector."

"What the kriff is going on?" Rodge Larrs exclaimed.

"The Indran Sector is relatively backward." Director Helios said, "The rebellion ignored it for the most part and as such it's never been given much in the way of priority for resources."

"Agreed." Fleet Admiral Vretan added, nodding, "Plus it's only got worse since the death of the Emperor."

"What exactly was in the convoy?" Garm asked.

"Machine parts. Spares for military equipment and heavy industrial machinery." the fleet admiral said, "Vital war materiel but not really something worth deploying a star destroyer for. I thought a standard attack line would be adequate protection."

"Well it seems you were wrong on both counts admiral." Rodge Larrs said and Admiral Vretan scowled.

"Please." Moff Horatian said before the admiral could give voice to his anger, "If anyone to blame it is this Admiral Krex."

"Obviously we can't let this go unanswered." Fleet Admiral Vretan said, "Indran's sector group is well under strength. They have less than half the ships we-"

"Fleet admiral we are not going to war with another sector of the Empire." Moff Horatian said.

"We'll pass our evidence to Coruscant." Rodge Larrs said, "The vizier will-"

"The grand vizier has more important things on his plate than what's going on out here Mister Larrs." Director Helios said before he could finish.

"Indeed he does." Moff Horatian said, "That is why I asked Assistant Director Larcus and Agent Udra here as well."

"To advise on improved security?" Garm asked.

"No." Moff Horatian replied, "You two are to go to the Indran Sector. There you will find out who is most responsible for this act of piracy and bring them to justice."

"Why do I get the feeling that I'm not being asked to bring them back here for trial?" Garm said.

"Because if we wanted a trial then we'd talk to the sector rangers." Fleet Admiral Vretan said, "Not an expert in covert operations and a Force wielding assassin."

## 2.

The freighter *Voslam* had been seized by the Empire when its owner had been caught red handed trying to smuggle spice to Estran. While its former owner had been placed in a labour camp the vessel had been allocated to be auctioned off to recoup some of the costs of his incarceration but for the time being this had been delayed and the ship provided to Garm and Vay as a means of reaching Protus in a ship that would not immediately be recognised as belonging to the Empire on Estran.

"Do you know what you're doing Vay?" Garm asked when he entered the ship's cockpit and found her sat in the pilot's seat working the controls. Like Garm she was no longer wearing her ISB uniform but instead of the casual clothing Garm had opted for Vay wore a skin tight black bodyglove that had been her trademark outfit prior to joining the ISB.

"Why? Do you want to fly or navigate?" she responded.

"I wouldn't know how." Garm admitted as he sat down beside her and watched her, "My father was a navigator but I never signed up for starship operations." then he sighed, "I wonder if this is how he feels?" Garm's father, Lord Vorn Larcus III had at one time been a member of Estran's Parliament who became an increasingly outspoken figure when he started to criticise the Empire's actions. Because of this Vorn had been expelled from Parliament and defected to the rebellion shortly before he was due to be arrested for sedition. The fallout from this had been significant for Garm who had been suspended from his position in the ISB for several months while he was investigated as a potential traitor. After that he had dedicated himself to the idea of bringing his father to justice, something that he had never quite been able to achieve and as his other actions had resulted in his being promoted he had been given assignments that resulted in his having less time to dedicate to this objective.

"You mean before he leaves on his missions for the rebellion?" Vay asked and Garm nodded slowly.

"Something's bothering you about this mission isn't it? I can sense the conflict in you." she added and Garm sighed.

"Vay is this what we've become?" Garm said, "We're about to go off on a secret mission to infiltrate an Imperial facility with the aim of killing a high ranking Imperial official. Just like what my father does for the rebellion. Are we any different?"

"We've dealt with traitors in Imperial ranks before Garm." Vay pointed out.

"Yes I know. Greyan Dassall. Ibram Kellesen. Gayal Tharr. Admiral Trent. Gods know how many more. Vay do you ever stop to wonder what it is about the Empire that means so many corrupt people are able to get into such positions of power? They even looked the other way while my wife was murdered."

*Sounds almost like he's ready to defect to the rebellion himself.*

Vay resisted the urge to frown when she heard the voice of her long dead ancestor Lara Udra from within the Force.

"If it bothers you this much then let's go." Vay said, "We have a ship here we can go wherever we want. Find some planet in the Outer Rim territories where the Empire can't get to us."

"No, I can't do that. I swore an oath to uphold the law and that's what I'll do. Besides I can't uproot Cayla from school to take her out into the wilderness."

"In that case strap yourself in. I've got the jump to Protus plotted, well three jumps actually, I don't want them spotting our entry vector as having come for Estran and the ship and I are both ready for take off." Vay replied with a smile.

Garm was used to the short hops through hyperspace that carried vessels between different systems within the same sector, but travelling to Protus took somewhat longer. This increased journey time was compounded by Vay's decision to pilot the *Voslam* past the Indran Sector so that she could approach Protus from the opposite direction, giving the appearance that the ship had come from somewhere in the Outer Rim Territories. Vay spent much of the time meditating while Garm reviewed all of the available information on the Indran Sector and its Imperial hierarchy and so by the time the *Voslam* dropped out of hyperspace he had a fair idea of what to expect.

The Protus System was the capital of the Indran Sector but it was a much more backwater system than Estran was and rather than being filled with crowds of thousands of starships arriving and departing from all over the sector the space around the planet was relatively quiet. Like Estran, Protus was the headquarters of the local Imperial Navy sector group but as with everything else about the planet the headquarters was less impressive to Garm's eyes than the equivalent facility around Estran. Instead of a massive facility almost fifteen kilometres across that was capable of housing warships more than two kilometres long, the station orbiting Protus was a flat disc barely larger than the pair of Imperial-class star destroyers that were docked against its exterior.

"That's the *Glaive*." Garm said as he read the destroyers' transponders off the sensor display in front of him.

"Think those transports are around here as well?" Vay asked.

"Maybe. But I bet if they are then they'll have been unloaded and their cargoes distributed by now." Garm replied, "I don't see that station out there accepting civilian traffic so take us down on the planet somewhere below it."

"You intend to infiltrate their sector group headquarters?" Vay commented and Garm nodded.

"It was the *Glaive* that hit the convoy so it's only reasonable to assume that someone aboard will know who gave the order." he said.

"Sounds good to me." Vay responded and she turned the *Voslam* towards Protus itself.

### 3.

There were small starports scattered all across the surface of Protus. The planet had only the most basic of surface transport links and so most long range travel here was undertaken by air and the result was that practically every settlement had docking facilities for small craft like the *Voslam*. As Garm had expected by selecting a settlement almost directly beneath the orbiting headquarters meant that it was a place that was frequented by off duty Imperial navy personnel from the station as well as the starships docked there and that meant that there were shuttles in other docking bays that were cleared to fly up to it.

"Let me guess," Vay said as she and Garm watched one of the docking bays were a kappa-class troop transport was docked, "you want us to steal that thing."

"Actually no." Garm answered, "I was thinking that we'd just use it to hitch a lift with the other Imperial personnel."

"Don't you think our clothes would stick out somewhat?" Vay pointed out, "I mean I can affect people's minds to a certain degree but to convince everyone aboard a space station that we're not there is another matter altogether."

*A true jedi could do it. Too bad the Dark Side demands far more than it gives.*

"Oh be quiet for once!" Vay hissed, scowling at Lara's intervention and Garm frowned.

"What?" he said, "I didn't say a thing."

"Sorry. I just thought you were about to say something about my powers, that's all." Vay said and Garm stared at her.

"Sure you did." he said after an awkward pause, "What I was actually going to say was that we need to grab ourselves a couple of uniforms from some of these navy people and then we'll just head up to the station."

"Without any ID?" Vay pointed out and Garm smiled.

"That's where your powers come in." he said, "You can make sure we get past any checkpoints. Unless you're going to shout at me for suggesting it of course."

"No, I can do that." Vay replied, "So who's uniforms do we take?"

"How about a couple of them?" Garm said and he nodded towards the docking bay just as a group of people in Imperial uniforms emerged and all headed down the street, "We'll follow them and see if we can pick off a couple of stragglers." and Vay nodded.

"Fine, let's go." she said and then she and Garm started to follow the Imperial navy personnel down the street, watching them carefully from the opposite side.

The group headed towards a bar that had a sign outside indicating that it served humans only and then all of them went inside together. Garm and Vay then crossed the street and went inside after them. Inside the bar the two ISB agents saw that as well as the entire clientele being human, all of the staff were as well. This was by no means unusual and there were many businesses on Estran that operated the same serving and hiring policies to make their establishments more attractive to the Empire and attract custom from Imperial servants, primarily members of the military.

"They look like they're sticking together." Vay said as she and Garm watched the navy personnel they had followed here at the same time as making their way towards the bar itself.

"Nothing unusual about that." Garm said, nodding in agreement, "But we need to split a couple of them off so we can take their uniforms."

"I think I can handle that." Vay said, smiling. Then she looked at Garm and added, "But how exactly do you intend to get their uniforms from them without raising suspicion? A pair of naval crewmen in their underwear is bound to provoke questions."

*He's going to kill them.*

"We need to remember that the forces in this sector turned to piracy." Garm said.

*Here it comes.*

"Also that they killed thousands of naval personnel in the process." he continued.

*Any minute now.*

"We need to kill them don't we?" Vay whispered before Garm could say it himself and hoping to make Lara be quiet.

"It's the only way to be sure." Garm said, "Do you-"

"I've no problem with that, no." Vay said before he could finish, "It's not the first time I've had to target Imperial personnel."

"I'll not ask." Garm replied, "So how about I slip out back and you go find us a victim?"

"Do it. I'll be five minutes." Vay said and Garm turned away from the bar, heading for a side door out of the building.

Meanwhile Vay continued towards the bar and ordered herself a drink, keeping a careful eye on the people in



Imperial uniforms all clustered together. Then one of them caught her eye, a technician who was about Garm's size and had just broken away from the group and was heading for the bar. Vay made her way along it so that when he arrived there she was in position to speak to him.

"Looking for some excitement?" she asked and he turned towards her and smiled when he saw the polished and skin tight bodyglove she wore.

"What are you offering?" he asked in return and Vay leant close enough to him so that she could whisper in his ear.

"You need to follow me outside." she said softly and she used the Force to turn the seductive whisper into an irresistible command.

"I need to follow you." the technician repeated and Vay smiled back at him before heading towards the same door that Garm had left the bar through.

*Vay think. You can find a way to get what you need without killing. A jedi uses the Force for knowledge and defence, never for attack.*

Vay did not react to Lara's words, instead leading the technician outside into an alleyway and all of a sudden Garm grabbed him from behind, wrapping an arm around his throat so tightly that his face went bright red as he struggled to breathe. But Vay knew that to choke someone to death in this manner could take several minutes and so she whirled around and lashed out with two outstretched fingers that she drove into one of the technician's eyes. There was enough power in the blow that the tips of her fingers punched through the thin layer of bone behind the eyeball and penetrated the technician's brain, killing him instantly.

"I didn't use the Force for that." she said, knowing that Lara would know what she had just said.

"I know." Garm replied as he dragged the corpse further down the alleyway towards a large garbage container, "Now go wash your fingers and find someone with a uniform your size."

Leaving Garm in the alleyway Vay returned to the bar, keeping her bloodstained hand covered as she made her way to the women's bathroom and once inside she went straight to one of the wash basins and began to clean her hand.

Although there was no-one else in sight inside the bathroom Vay could sense the presence of someone inside one of the refresher cubicles and just as she finished washing the blood from her hand Vay heard the sound of the refresher cycling and she looked up at the mirror over the wash basin just in time to see a woman in an Imperial officer's uniform emerge and walk up to the basin beside her. Looking at the woman carefully Vay noticed that she was about her own size and she smiled.

"Can I help you with something?" the woman said, straightening up when she noticed Vay staring at her.

"I've always wanted a uniform like that." Vay said and the woman snorted.

"So go and enlist in the-" she began before Vay took her by surprised and punched her in the throat.

Unable to breathe, the woman's eyes widened and she instinctively began to claw at her own throat as she tried in vain to open up her collapsed windpipe.

Vay then sensed someone else approaching and she grabbed hold of the choking officer and dragged her back into the refresher cubicle and closed the door behind her before whoever it was outside the cubicle could see either of them. But the woman was not dead yet and Vay knew that if she was left free to thrash around she could attract unwanted attention before she finally suffocated and so she reached down with both hands and snarled as she snapped the woman's neck. Then she calmly began to undress the woman, removing her uniform and putting it on over her bodyglove.

Her disguise complete Vay waited until she could not sense anyone outside the cubicle before opening the door and slipping out of it. Then she closed the door again behind her and with a flick of her wrist she used the Force to lock it from the inside. All it would take to unlock the door would be for someone to use a screwdriver but Vay was confident that by the time someone thought to do that she and Garm would already be aboard the orbiting fleet headquarters.

Exiting the bathroom she avoided the area of the bar occupied by the Imperial personnel just in case any of them noticed that she did not belong in the uniform she was wearing. She made her way across the bar to the door that led to the alleyway and stepped through it.

*Danger.*

Vay reacted quickly when she felt the tremor in the Force, stepping aside and turning to face her assailant. Acting instinctively she used one hand to deflect the blow aimed at her while simultaneously reached out to grab hold of her attacker. Only then did she realise who it was.

"Garm!" she exclaimed.

"Vay." he responded, "What are you doing dressed like that?"

"I thought the idea was disguise ourselves." she said.

"Yes but I thought you'd be leading someone out here and that we'd overpower them together."

Vay smiled.

"You were just hoping to be able to watch while I undressed weren't you?" Vay said. Then before Garm could respond she added, "Well it doesn't matter anyway. See?" and she opened her tunic to reveal the bodyglove beneath it."

“Never mind.” Garm said while Vay was fastening her tunic again, “Let's get back to the starport and onto one of those shuttles heading up to the space station.”

## 4.

At the starport the Imperial shuttles were guarded by customs agents rather than naval personnel and they paid only lip service to the idea of security, waving through anyone in an Imperial uniform without bothering to check IDs. This allowed Garm and Vay to simply walk up the access ramp of a troop transport that was already heavily laden with naval staff waiting to be taken back up to the orbiting headquarters.

"Stand by." one of the shuttle crew called out as he walked up to the ramp and started the closing sequence. At the same time there was the sound of the shuttle's repulsorlift engines starting up and mere seconds after the ramp was sealed the shuttle lifted into the air, its wings unfolded and it flew up into the sky.

From inside the shuttle neither Garm nor Vay could see how the flight was progressing but they knew that the short hop from the surface to the space station would take only a few minutes. Sure enough it was not long after the shuttle's ion drives took over from the repulsorlifts as the craft reached the upper edge of the atmosphere that the sound of the engines died again as the shuttle slowed to dock. Unlike the two star destroyers that Garm and Vay had seen on their approach, the shuttle was able to enter an internal hangar that was littered with similar sized vessels. Most of these were other Imperial military craft but there were also a handful of civilian vessels that had been seized and were being stored here until they could be either scrapped or auctioned off.

Unfamiliar with the layout of the station the two ISB agents needed directions to the *Glaive* and so as the occupants of the shuttle were dispersing around the hangar as they all headed towards their own destinations they instead made their way towards one of the hangar's ground teams. The team was made up of five men and three droids who were hard at work servicing another shuttle similar to the one that had brought Garm and Vay to the station. Fortunately all of the ground crew were enlisted men and so being dressed as an officer, Vay appeared to outrank them all.

"You." she said sternly to the closest of the ground crew and the man snapped to attention.

"Yes lieutenant." he replied without pause.

"We need to reach the *Glaive*. How do we get there?" Vay asked.

"There's a turbolift cluster at the end of the corridor through that door." the crewman told her and he pointed across the hangar to one of the exits, "You want level seventeen, section eight. Bear right from there and you can't miss her."

"Very good." Vay said, knowing that an officer would be unlikely to express any gratitude and she turned away.

"One thing lieutenant." the crewman called out after her.

"Yes crewman?"

"Admiral Krex is probably doing his rounds right about now. You might want to keep out of his way."

"Thanks." Vay said, smiling at the crewman. The extra information was clearly intended to be helpful and she felt it warranted being acknowledged. She and Garm then made their way to the turbolift cluster described by the crewman. Along the way they passed numerous other members of the station's crew as well as several security patrols but not one of them gave the pair a second look and when they reached the turbolift they found that there were others waiting for it as well.

"Where to?" Garm asked as they stepped into the turbolift and Garm made sure that he was standing beside the control panel, hoping that he would be able to rig the journey so that the other group got out first and did not see where he and Vay went.

"Level seventeen, section eight." one of the group replied while the others remained silent, indicating that they were all going to the same place.

"Small galaxy." Vay commented.

"You heading for the *Glaive*?" another of the group asked, this one a woman in a uniform identical to Vay's.

"We just transferred." Vay replied.

"Really? Where from?" the woman asked and Vay sensed Garm go tense. The more they were probed the more likely it was that something would give them away and Garm took note of the fact that three of the group were carrying blasters.

"That's classified." Vay said and Garm relaxed. There were more than enough top secret operations even in a quiet sector like Indran and simply stating that the pair had been part of one was enough to deflect idle questioning from junior officers and enlisted personnel.

"So what do you know about the *Glaive*?" a male officer asked.

"Only that the admiral is best avoided." Garm commented and the man smiled, as did several other members of the group.

"That's true." he said, "Trust me, never volunteer for anything and never offer an opinion in his presence. Just do exactly what he tells you and try to get your orders in writing. Otherwise he may just move the goalposts

on you and no matter what you do it'll be wrong."

"Thanks for the advice." Vay replied just before the turbolift came to a halt and the doors slid open.

"The *Glaive* is this way." the female officer said and the group headed for the star destroyer.

As soon as the hatch led to the *Glaive* came into view, so did the four stormtroopers standing guard and both Garm and Vay saw the group they were with reaching into their uniform pockets for their ID cards. Garm and Vay dropped back on seeing this, making sure that they were well behind the cluster of genuine *Glaive* crew members but not so far behind that they would be seen to be moving deliberately slow.

One at a time the genuine crew members showed their identity cards to the stormtroopers and were nodded through. But when Vay reached the stormtroopers her hands were empty.

"Identification." the armoured soldier said.

"You don't need to see our identification." Vay replied softly, subtly waving her hand.

"I don't need to see your identification." the stormtrooper said.

"We may go aboard." Vay continued.

"You may go aboard." the stormtrooper told her, stepping back to allow her and Garm to enter the star destroyer.

"So where to now?" Vay whispered as she and Garm walked through the hatch.

"Bridge." Garm whispered back, "We need to access communication logs to see where the order to attack the convoy came from." and Vay nodded.

Unlike the space station, the star destroyer *Glaive* had a layout that the two ISB agents could easily follow. There could be occasional variations from the standard aboard a ship the size of an Imperial-class star destroyer but these did not prevent them from reaching the bridge quickly. Being docked at a space station most of the star destroyer's bridge positions were unmanned and there was only a single junior officer present to command the handful of enlisted crewmen still at their posts.

"Distract that officer." Garm whispered, "I'll go and access the communication records." and Vay frowned.

"Let's just remember which of us is in charge here." she said, tapping the rank badge on her stolen uniform.

"Yes, me. Assistant to the assistant director." Garm said, "Don't get too into your role."

"Oh that's right, pull rank." Vay said, sighing and then she walked towards the front of the star destroyer's bridge where the officer stood.

"Who are you?" the man asked.

"Lieutenant Udra." Vay replied while behind her Garm made his way down into a deserted crew pit and to one of the communication stations, "Dock control wants a status update."

"So why not request one over the comm?" the officer said.

"You'd have to ask them." Vay told him and then she waved her hand and added, "But you don't need to ask them. You just need to tell me."

"Of course. Here." the officer said as he held out his datapad.

Meanwhile Garm sat down at the communication station and activated the console. Given that it was located on the bridge of one of the Empire's capital ships the system was not secured and Garm was able to instantly call up a log of all the signals sent to and from the *Glaive*. This represented a large number of messages and Garm used the time of the attack on the convoy to narrow down his search to only signals sent in the day before and up to an hour after the attack, reasoning that whoever ordered the attack would have received an after action report when the convoy was taken. This was still a considerable list to go through but there were several transmissions that immediately caught Garm's eye. Each of them had been between the *Glaive* and the sector group headquarters and all of them had been directed to the private quarters of Admiral Krex and there were no details present about who he had been in contact with or what had been discussed. However, the timing of the communications, three prior to the attack and one less than twenty minutes after it, meant that they were most likely the communications that Garm was looking for. Satisfied with this Garm shut off the communication console and calmly walked back up the stairs from the crew pit and then made his way to the front of the bridge where Vay was still speaking with the duty officer.

"Lieutenant Udra," he said, "you are needed in engineering."

"Just one moment crewman." Vay responded without looking at Garm and he snarled momentarily, "I better be going." she then told the duty officer, "Forget I was ever here." and she waved her hand again before she and Garm made their way out of the bridge, "So what did you find?" she asked Garm as soon as they were away from anyone who may overhear them.

"There was a series of transmissions made between this ship and fleet headquarters before and after the attack." he told her.

"The orders to hit the convoy?"

"I couldn't tell. The communications themselves were secret. They were channelled directly via admiral Krex's quarters." Garm said.

"So if we don't know what was said where do we go from here?" Vay said.

"I just told you." Garm answered, "The admiral's quarters."

## 5.

Admiral Krex's quarters were located close to the bridge, at the rear of the star destroyer's main control tower.

"Think he's inside?" Vay asked and Garm shrugged.

"Well we were told that he was out and about inspecting his ship so he may not be." he responded, "Plus there's no guard so maybe we're in luck. Only one way to find out though." and he pressed the intercom set into the wall beside the doorway. Then when there was no response to this he stepped back and looked at Vay, "All yours." he told her and she smiled as she reached into the tunic she wore and produced her lightsaber. She and Garm looked around to double check that they were not being watched and then there was a 'snap-hiss' as Vay ignited her lightsaber and plunged it through the wall where the motor that operated the door was located. There was an immediate shower of sparks as the motor exploded. Then with a wave of her hand, Vay used the Force to raise the door and she and Garm dashed into the admiral's quarters.

As was to be expected, Admiral Krex's quarters were larger than those of any other officer or enlisted man aboard the ship and the furniture was more elaborate and expensive looking than the typical mass produced type used elsewhere aboard the Glaive. As was also to be expected the admiral's quarters also doubled up as a private office and there was provision for him to work as well as relax, including a private holographic communication system.

"Okay, let's see what the admiral's been talking about shall we?" Garm asked as he crouched down beside the holographic projection pad while Vay remained by the doorway to keep watch. It was easy enough to bring up a log of all the signals received by the pad and Garm scrolled through these until he found the conversation that took place just after the Glaive had attacked the supply convoy, "Here's the last one." he said, "Let's see who he was speaking to shall we?" and he activated the replay function.

A holographic figure appeared on the pad immediately and Garm and Vay saw that it was of a man wearing an Imperial uniform with a fleet admiral's rank markings.

"Admiral Krex, what do you have to report?" the hologram said and then after a short pause where Admiral Krex would have been speaking the hologram smiled, "Excellent." the man continued, "Once you have the vessels secured I want you to bring them back here so we can offload their cargoes. You are sure that your crew can be trusted to keep quiet about this?"

"Sounds like the operation was off the books." Vay commented when she heard this.

"Yes it does." Garm agreed before the hologram spoke again.

"Good. If the haul from this is as good as our projections suggest then it may be worth repeating this raid but all this needs to be kept secret. No-one outside the navy can know about it." then there was another pause before the hologram nodded and the conversation ended with, "Understood admiral. Henscher out." and the image froze.

"Fleet Admiral Henscher." Garm said, smiling now that he had a name to pursue.

Just then Vay looked down the corridor when she heard footsteps.

"Someone's coming." she hissed and she raised her lightsaber.

"No!" Garm exclaimed, "Don't let them see your weapon. We've got a name now let's get out of here." and he ran towards the door.

Both he and Vay were just starting to run down the corridor away from the source of the footsteps when all of a sudden Admiral Krex himself came round the corner accompanied by a bodyguard of two stormtroopers.

Seeing the door to his quarters wide open and Garm and Vay running in the opposite direction he immediately knew exactly what had happened and he scowled.

*Vay look out!*

"Shoot them!" he yelled and the stormtroopers raise their blasters and opened fire.

Fortunately for Garm and Vay, Lara's warning came just in time and before the stormtroopers fired Vay dived at Garm and knocked him out of the path of the first volley of blaster shots. Knowing that any obvious use of the Force could be used to identify her, Vay instead got back to her feet and dragged Garm back to his during a brief pause in the stormtroopers' shooting and they both rushed around the corner just ahead of them.

"Get after them." Admiral Krex ordered.

"Yes sir." one of the stormtroopers replied and while the two armoured soldiers ran after Garm and Vay the admiral walked up to the doorway to his quarters and looked inside. There he saw the open panel on the side of the holographic communication pad and he frowned.

"I've got a very bad feeling about this." he said to himself.

"Where to now?" Vay asked as she and Garm ran through the corridors of the star destroyer with the

stormtroopers following behind them.

"You can fly a ship right?" Garm replied and Vay nodded.

"Of course," she said.

"Does that included TIE fighters?" Garm said.

"I suppose so. But why would you want us to take one of those things?"

"Because it got the speed and manoeuvrability to get us away from here without us getting shot down." Garm said.

"You do realise that a TIE fighter is only meant for one person right?" Vay pointed out.

"They'll take two in a squeeze." Garm replied, "Now let's get to the hangar and get back to the surface."

The two agents entered the hangar from a hatch on an upper level and this brought them out on the walkways that connected the racks that held the *Glaive's* compliment of TIEs on the hangar ceiling. As it happened the closest squadron of fighters was the single squadron of TIE interceptors that the star destroyer carried and Garm smiled.

"We'll take one of these." he said as he and Vay rushed up to the nearest interceptor and Vay climbed in first, sitting down in the only seat inside and started to adjust its position to best match her height while Garm climbed in after her and squeezed into the small space behind the seat.

"Okay, fuel looks good and we have life support." Vay said.

"Then I suggest you get us going." Garm said as he heard the sound of armoured boots running along the walkway above them.

"Hang on." Vay said, "Let's just hope that the Force is with us." and Garm frowned at her, wondering why she would use such an odd phrase for a servant of the Empire. However, before he could comment on what she had said Vay sealed the TIE interceptor's hatch and engaged its replusorlift engines. However, she neglected to release the clamps that held the starfighter in place on the rack and as she increased the power output of the engines the interceptor ripped itself free, dragging a large section of the walkway away from its mounting in the process and the squad of stormtroopers that had been pursuing them suddenly found themselves falling to the floor below.

"Stang!" Garm exclaimed, "What was that?"

"Oops." Vay said as she finally released the docking clamps, allowing what remained of them stuck to the TIE interceptor to fall away just as the starfighter hurtled out of the hangar.

Just then there was an alarm in the fighter's cockpit and Garm looked around.

"What's wrong?" he said.

"That? Oh that's just the target lock warning." Vay replied, "Someone's trying to lock onto us. Possibly to grab us with a tractor beam but it could be a turbolaser."

"Can you evade them?"

"Of course. Neither the *Glaive* nor the station were at action stations so we're just talking about a couple of guys trying to calculate a firing solution, not a fully manned battery crew. They'll never catch us after I do this." Vay replied and she pulled on the control column suddenly to cause the tiny craft to roll rapidly to port as Vay descended towards the planet below. Garm gasped and grabbed hold of the pilot's seat tightly as he felt himself being pushed around.

"Hey careful up there." he said, "Not all of us have safety harnesses."

"What worries you more Garm? A bump on the head or being blasted into atoms by a direct hit from a turbolaser? Remember, this thing doesn't have any shields."

"Okay I get it. But just try not to break my neck on the way down okay?"

*There is no try. Only do or do not.*

"Don't be ridiculous." Vay said in response to Lara's comment as she made another sudden turn just before the TIE interceptor reached the upper edge of the atmosphere.

"It's not ridiculous." Garm said, "I'm rather attached to my neck."

"Oh never mind." Vay replied, "Now hang on, we're going down."

"Yes admiral?" Fleet Admiral Henscher asked when the image of Admiral Krex appeared in front of him. The fleet admiral had been attending a dinner party and was not pleased about being disturbed but the call had been described as urgent and he had not even had time to change into his uniform.

"Fleet admiral we may have a problem." Admiral Krex replied, "Two intruders gained entry to my private office and were able to access the communication logs in my transceiver. Our conversations about-"

"You fool Krex!" Admiral Henscher snapped before his subordinate could finish, "How could you let this happen?"

"Fleet admiral, they knew what they were doing. My security staff are investigating now but the way that they were able to move around my star destroyer before escaping in a fighter stolen from our hangar suggests that they are members of a department of the Imperial government. Intelligence perhaps."

"I don't care who they are. All I care is that you could have ruined everything by not even being able to keep your own ship secure. Now get out of my sight while I try and figure out a way of cleaning up your mess." and

then the hologram vanished as Fleet Admiral Henscher abruptly terminated the conversation.

Landing a stolen TIE interceptor at a commercial starport was out of the question, especially when it was obvious that the starfighter would be being tracked by both ground based and orbital sensor array. Therefore, Vay set the interceptor down in an area of broken ground outside the city where the freighter that had brought them to the sector was landed. Lacking landing gear, Vay had to set the interceptor down carefully, using its wings to support the mass of the fighter. All versions of TIE fighters were designed to be capable of tolerating this but Vay had little experience in flying them and no previous experience in one of the more advanced interceptor types and when she shut off the repulsorlift engines she and Garm only found out that she had not landed it flat on its wings when the fighter suddenly pitched forwards and Vay felt Garm roll into the back of her seat.

"Are we there yet?" Garm asked.

"Well if that means safely down on the planet in one piece, then yes we are." Vay replied and she released her safety harness before standing up and opening the top hatch. Then she climbed out of the hatch and reached back down into the fighter to help Garm follow her through it, "So what now?" she asked, "Off to see this Fleet Admiral Henscher?"

"No" Garm replied, shaking his head, "A fleet admiral will be surrounded by security that we'd never be able to breach."

"So what then? Surely you don't mean we just give up and go back home?"

"No, of course not." Garm said, "But confronting a fleet admiral isn't my idea of the correct way to progress an investigation. More like suicide."

"Then what do we do?"

"Well first we get back to the *Voslam*. There's something aboard the ship that we're going to need."

"Really? And what's that exactly?"

"Our uniforms. Our real uniforms. We're off to see the moff and let him know that his military officers are trying to start another civil war in addition to the one we've already been fighting."

## 6.

Both dressed in their ISB uniforms, Garm and Vay walked right up to the main entrance to the capital building for the Indran Sector. Just as with the equivalent building on Estran this served as a hub for all the Empire's military and political activity within the sector with all branches of the government active within the sector having some form of presence within the building.

As was to be expected for such an important building, security was as tight as it could be and it was not possible for an individual enter without having their identity checked. Garm and Vay did not bother relying on faked identities or trickery using the Force though. Instead they simply handed over their genuine identity cards and waited while they were checked.

"These aren't from this sector." the man sat behind the front desk said.

"Yes I do know where we came from corporal." Garm said sternly, "But the simple fact of the matter is that I am an assistant director in the ISB and you should remember that when you speak to me."

"Of course sir. I apologise. But your cards do not give you clearance to this building."

"And nor should they." Vay replied, "But they should tell you that you have a problem. One that requires us to speak with Moff Jarro."

"You'll need to make an appointment with her."

"Those cards are our appointment corporal." Garm interrupted.

"Is there a problem here?" a voice said from behind them and Garm and Vay looked around to see another ISB agent standing there. The man's rank badge indicated that he was a senior agent, though he was still outranked by Garm.

"That depends." Garm said, "Does anyone in this sector know how to behave when an assistant direct needs to see the moff on a matter of urgency?"

"You've checked their identities?" the agent asked, looking at the guard behind the desk.

"Yes sir." he replied and he passed Garm and Vay's ID cards to the agent. The man took them and looked closely at them, initially suspecting that they could be rebels attempting to assassinate the moff. However, the cards clearly belonged to Garm and Vay and they appeared to be genuine so the agent returned them to the two ISB agents from Estran.

"I can take you up to the top floor assistant director." he said, "But it'll be up to the moff whether or not she sees you."

"That will do agent – I'm sorry, I don't know your name." Garm said.

"Senior Agent Tellim sir." the agent replied, "Oh and I'm afraid you will have to leave your weapons here."

"Of course." Garm said and he reached down to his belt and slowly removed the blaster from its holster, ejected the power cell and placed both on the desk in front of him. Then he looked at Vay, "Agent Udra, your blaster." he said.

"Yes assistant director." she said, noting exactly what Garm had said. Vay did not have a holster on her belt like Garm did because she did not have need of one. Instead of a full sized military-issue blaster pistol Vay carried a much more compact hold out blaster that she kept tucked under her tunic and she produced this before ejecting the power cell and surrendering it just as Garm had done with his sidearm.

"Thank you." Agent Tellim said, "Now if you'd like to follow me I'll show you both up to the top floor." then before he started walking he looked at the man behind the desk and added, "Let them know we're on our way up."

The turbolift took Garm and Vay straight from the capital building's reception area to the top floor where the moff and her most senior staff had their offices. As soon as the turbolift doors slid open on this level Garm and Vay found themselves confronted by a squad of stormtroopers who levelled their weapons but did not fire.

"Stand down." Agent Tellim said, "I am in no danger."

"So that's why you told the man at the desk to call ahead?" Vay said, "In case this was a trap?"

"Correct." Agent Tellim replied, "If you'd overpowered me in the lift then the stormtroopers would have dealt with you and the moff would remain safe. Now if you'd like to follow me I'll show where her office is."

Though the capital building was constructed from the same standard modular components as any Imperial facility was, the upper floor had been heavily customised according to the moff's personal tastes. Garm was not surprised by this, Moff Horatian had done exactly the same thing on Estran. But he did notice that despite the Indran Sector being provided with fewer resources and not being as wealthy, its moff appeared to be trying to make up for this in the way that the top floor of the building was decorated. Therefore, in place of the generally subdued and discrete artwork and vegetation that Moff Horatian had had placed on Estran, Moff Jarro instead gave the impression of having gone for the most elaborate decoration possible and every



single wall featured some form of painting.

Unsurprisingly the moff's office itself had another unit of stormtroopers positioned outside as a last line of defence but they remained motionless as Garm and Vay were directed to a couch by the moff's secretary, a thin and wiry man in an army captain's uniform and wearing a headset that allowed the moff to speak to him without anyone else overhearing what was said.

"You may wait there." he said and Garm nodded as he and Vay sat down.

Agent Tellim then departing, leaving Garm and Vay to wait while the secretary continued with his own work and the guards remained silent and motionless.

"How much longer do you think we'll have to put up with this?" Vay whispered after they had waited for some time, apparently ignored by everyone else in the room.

"Until the moff is ready to see us." Garm replied, "Which I'm guessing she could have done some time ago but she just wants to make us sweat to get us off balance. Remember we're from another sector and she has no idea why we're here. Be patient."

*Yes, be patient. A Jedi is patient. Have faith in yourself and faith in the Force.*

Vay frowned briefly at Lara's interruption. Then she looked away from Garm before he could notice her expression and say anything.

All of a sudden the secretary activated the intercom on his desk as the moff contacted him and pressed a hand to his headset.

"Of course your excellency." he said. Then he looked at Garm and Vay, "The moff will see you now." he told them and the doors to the moff's office swung open.

Moff Jarro sat behind an ornate desk, just as Moff Horatian did back on Estran. However, it felt strange to Garm to see a woman behind such a desk and wearing a moff's uniform. The Empire was notoriously chauvinistic and few women achieved high rank. Of course, the fact that Indran was not a high profile sector meant that it would not be assigned a high profile moff as its governor.

"Assistant Director Larcus." Moff Jarro said as Garm and Vay crossed the office and sat down in front of her desk, "I've just been looking into your history. The son of a traitor who somehow avoided being thrown out of the ISB in disgrace. Did I miss anything?"

"How he demonstrated his loyalty to the Empire often enough that he was appointed an assistant director of the ISB by Moff Gregor Horatian." Vay commented and the moff snarled at her.

"Moff Jarro," Garm said, leaning forwards in his chair, "we've come here to alert you to a situation that could spin wildly out of control if it is not dealt with quickly."

"Really? What might that be assistant director? Frankly I don't see what could be so serious as to justify an agent of the ISB crossing jurisdictions like you have." Moff Jarro said and she smiled at Garm.

*Deception.*

Vay sensed that the moff was hiding something but could not tell exactly what it was and she remained silent while Garm continued.

"Moff, a ship from your sector group, the *Glaive*, attacked a supply convoy bound for Estran. The frigates escorting the convoy were all destroyed and the transports seized." he said.

"Then how could you have identified the vessel responsible?" Moff Jarro asked.

"Because one of the TIE fighters assigned to the escorts survived the attack and the pilot told us what happened." Garm said, "We also have the flight data recorder from the fighter."

"You are saying that my captains are acting as pirates?" Moff Jarro asked.

"It's worse than that moff." Garm replied, "We were able to get aboard the *Glaive* and we found evidence that the attack was ordered by Fleet Admiral Henscher."

"I see." Moff Jarro said, leaning back in her seat. Then she leant forwards again and activated her intercom, "Would you have Fleet Admiral Henscher sent to my office with a security detail?" she said.

"Yes your excellency." her secretary replied and Moff Jarro smiled as she shut off the intercom.

"We'll soon get to the bottom of this." she said.

But Vay noticed something odd about her reaction. She had taken Garm's revelation perfectly calmly. Being told that the man in charge of her sector group was using his ships to attack neighbouring sectors had not come as a surprise to her and now there were armed troops on their way to the office.

"Garm we should go." Vay said softly, leaning towards him.

"Go?" he whispered back, "Why?"

"It's a trap." Vay told him and Garm's eyes widened, knowing full well that Vay could sense such things.

"Perhaps we should leave you to deal with this moff." Garm said and he started to get to his feet, "We can send you all the-" but before he could finish the doors to Moff Jarro's office opened once more to reveal Fleet admiral Henscher and a full squad of armed naval fleet troopers, indicating that they had been conveniently close at hand when the moff had sent for them.

"Leaving so soon Assistant Director Larcus?" Fleet Admiral Henscher asked.

"As you can guess I am already aware of the fleet admiral's actions." Moff Jarro said, "You see the truth of the matter is that the Empire is collapsing around us and the Indran sector needs to have the resources to

defend itself when our central supply is cut off. Fleet Admiral Henscher told me he could obtain them if I gave him the latitude to do as he wanted and I agreed. It was only when you started poking around aboard the *Glaive* that he came to me and told me how he was obtaining them. But survival in the Empire has always been about the survival of the fittest.”

“And right now that doesn't mean you two.” the fleet admiral added.

“When we fail to return Moff Horatian will know-” Garm began before Admiral Henscher interrupted him.

“He'll know only that you vanished together.” he said, “We found your ship and we know that it hasn't sent any signals back to your own people. No-one even knows that you arrived here, let alone what you found.”

“And when there are no further attacks in your sector Moff Horatian will have no further reason to suspect us of anything.” Moff Jarro added, “We know that the rebels captured a star destroyer from your sector group and we'll be able to rig enough evidence to show that the *Glaive* never left the Indran Sector. Imperial high command will place the blame for the attack on the rebellion using an altered transponder.”

“I don't think so.” Garm said, “Not when we tell them what happened.” and the fleet admiral and moff looked at one another and laughed.

“Assistant director, you won't be telling anyone anything.” Fleet Admiral Henscher said before he looked around at his men, “Shoot them both.” he ordered.

In an instant Vay sprang into action. Garm had told her specifically to surrender her blaster and in doing so had effectively told her to retain her lightsaber. Now there was a 'snap-hiss' as the bright red blade ignited before she plunged it through the shocked officer's chest.

Garm dived aside as the first of the fleet troopers aimed a blaster at Vay and fired. But she sensed the imminent threat and spun around to place her lightsaber blade in the path of the shot and deflected it back at the firing trooper. As he fell the blaster dropped to the floor as well and Garm rolled towards it and scooped up the weapon before shooting another of the troopers.

“Guards! Guards get in here!” Moff Jarro screamed as Vay continued to hack her way through the squad of fleet troopers. In response to this the stormtroopers outside the office rushed towards it. However, before any of them could get clear of the doors Vay raised her hand and unleashed a wave of telekinetic Force energy that knocked fleet troopers off their feet and slammed the heavy doors shut in the faces of the stormtroopers. The slamming of the door was done with such power that it dislodged the gears of the motors used to operate it normally and when the moff's secretary tried to open the doors again there was nothing but a metallic screeching as jammed metal attempted to move.

Meanwhile inside the moff's office Moff Jarro watched in horror as the fleet troopers were effortlessly despatched by Vay and as the last of them fell dead she turned and ran towards a corner of her office. But as she ran Garm pointed his recovered blaster and fired a single shot into the wall ahead of her.

“Not so fast moff.” he said and then he looked at the corner she had been heading for, “Now why would you be trying to get over here so eagerly?” then he walked over to Moff Jarro and grabbed her by the arm, “Show me.” he ordered, pressing the muzzle of his blaster under her jaw and she winced because of the residual heat still present. Moving together they continued towards the corner and Moff Jarro reached out to press on an innocent looking detail on the wall that triggered the opening of a hidden door.

“A secret escape route.” Vay said, “No moff should be without one. I know Gregor isn't.”

“Presumably leading to a fast ship to take her away from here.” Garm added and he looked at the moff, “Leaving us so soon?”

Just then there was dull pounding sound from the other side of the main office door.

“I think they're trying to get in.” Vay said and Moff Jarro smiled.

“You'll never escape from here.” she said.

“Oh but we will.” Garm replied, “You may have our ship but now we have yours.” and he glanced towards the hidden passageway.

“They'll shoot you down before you reach orbit.” Moff Jarro hissed.

“Oh I don't think so. They won't looking for us.” Garm said, “Now get on your knees.” and he pushed Moff Jarro to her knees before aiming his blaster at the back of her head.

*Vay, you have to stop him. This isn't justice, it's murder.*

“Garm what are you doing?” Vay said.

“What we were sent here to do.” he replied, “Making sure that there won't be any more attacks on our sector.” then he looked down at Moff Jarro, “Now there are two ways that this can go,” he said sternly, “either the Indran Sector can start being a good neighbour to us and the attacks can stop. Or alternatively the next time my blaster won't be set on stun.” and then there was a flash of blue as he fired a stun blast into the back of the moff's head and she collapsed.

“It was set on stun?” Vay said in surprise.

“Of course it was.” Garm replied, “You didn't think I'd just kill her did you? Trust me, that doesn't always work out well. If I had killed her then whoever replaced her might come after us in revenge or think that they could do a better job of raiding us. Now though she knows we can get to her and she'll behave herself.”

“And if she doesn't?”

"Then the next time we will have to kill her. Now come, let's get out of here before that lot outside find a way inside."

"But how do we stop them coming after us or shooting us down?" Vay pointed out, remembering the moff's warning.

"They won't know where we went." Garm said, "You can close this door using the Force and then they'll have to wait for the moff to wake up before she can show them how to find and open the door."

"Okay, let's go." Vay replied, taking one last look at the office door and listening to the pounding before she ran towards the hidden passageway and she and Garm disappeared inside.