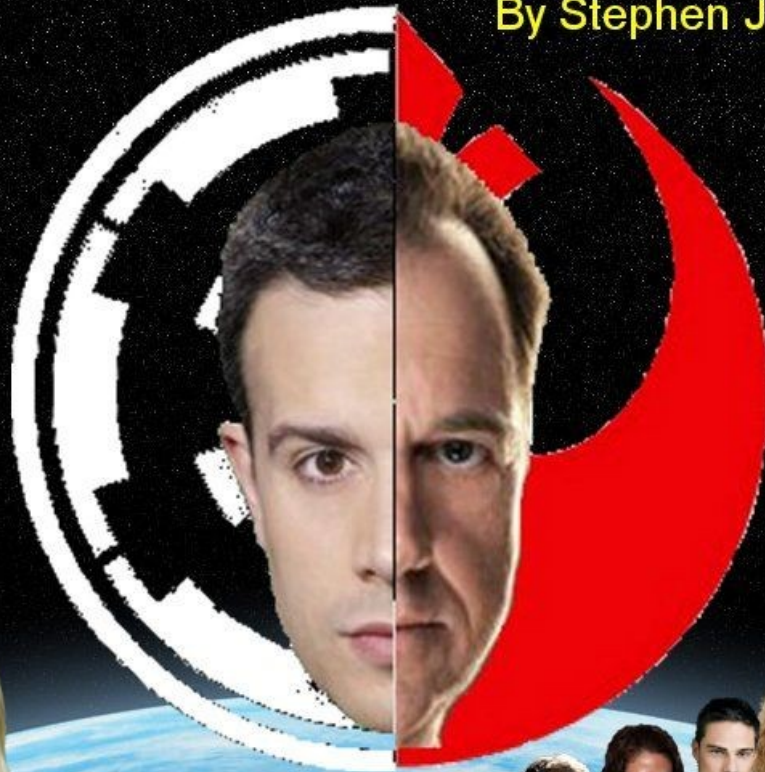


STAR WARS

8-08: Survivors

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...

SURVIVORS

NOT ALL OF THE RAKATA IN THE SECTOR DIED WHEN THEIR STAR FORGE WAS DESTROYED AND WHEN A RAKATA BATTLESHIP ATTACKS AN ALLIANCE SAFE WORLD THE ONLY THING STANDING IN THEIR WAY IS THE CREW OF THE *SILVER HAWK*...

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

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1.

The massive fleets of Imperial and rakata warships exchanged fire while thousands of starfighters swarmed round them. The rakata were doing everything they could to keep the Imperial warships away from the massive space station that had been used to create their fleet and that was the centrepiece of their plan to reconquer the galaxy. The Star Forge used the power of the Force itself to reshape matter drawn from the nebula in which it was hidden to form the ships and weapons they needed. Having the Empire discover the location of the Star Forge had not been a part of the plan, however.

Aboard one of the rakata warships, a copy of a *lucrehulk*-class dreadnought dating to the Clone wars, the ship's captain and his command staff watched the progress of the battle carefully. So far their vessel had not taken much part in the fighting, acting as a blocking ship to safeguard the rakata flank. But when the Imperial fleet was able to break through the rakata lines the ship was too far away to do anything useful and the crew had looked on helplessly as a small fleet of shuttles transported human troops aboard the Star Forge.

"Captain!" one of the command crew called out, "There is an energy build up from within the Star Forge."

"Are they preparing to manufacture reinforcements?" the rakata captain asked.

"Negative captain. The energy build up is remaining within the main reactor core and is not being distributed to the station's fabricators. Also I am unable to raise the Star Forge on any channel."

"What are you telling me?" the captain demanded.

"My lord, the only explanation is that the Star Forge has been set to self destruct."

"Impossible! We cannot lose the Star Forge."

"And we cannot allow it to fall into the hands of the humans' Empire." the ship's first officer pointed out.

"Captain I am picking up launches from the Star Forge." another of the command crew announced, "They are not our ships."

"The humans know that the Star Forge is about to explode." the first officer commented.

"Then the battle is lost." the captain said, "We cannot defeat the humans without the Star Forge."

"Maybe not captain," his first officer said, "but we can still survive. We have this ship and there are other places we could go."

"Agreed." the captain said, "Recall our fighters and set a course away from here."

Tens of thousands of years earlier the planet had been part of the Infinite Empire of the rakata. It had not been a fully fledged colony, of which there had been only just over five hundred, but instead was an outpost on a planet being considered for future settlement. But the Infinite Empire had collapsed as a result of disease and slave uprisings and the rakata that had lived here had either left or died off, leaving behind them their structures.

Some of these had been lost over the millennia but enough remained to make them worth using by the planet's new inhabitants. Members of the Alliance to Restore the Republic and their dependants had come here to hide from the Empire. Though ancient, some of the structures were in good enough condition to be immediately useful while supplies were being brought in to expand the settlement. As well as being somewhere that non-combatant Alliance supporters could live safe from attacks by the Empire the world was also pleasant enough in environmental terms that members of its armed forces could use it as somewhere to relax when granted leave and that was how Lieutenant Colonel Vorn Larcus III and the team of field agents he commanded had come to the planet to do. The group led by Vorn picked its way along a forest trail that led from the main rakata structure to a cluster of damaged buildings that would require significant repair before they would be considered usable.

"Are we nearly there yet?" Jaysica Horbid, the team's demolition and security expert asked as she paused to take another drink from her canteen.

"It's right up ahead little lady. Look." the former mercenary Tharun Verser replied and he pointed down the trail.

"Where? I don't see it." Jaysica commented.

"So try climbing a try to get a better look." another of the women in the group who held an infant in her arms suggested and Vorn frowned.

"Kara please don't give her ideas." he said.

"Sorry boss." Kara replied, "I suppose when she falls she might land on me and baby Vorn here."

"What do you mean 'when'?" Jaysica said, glaring at Kara.

"Because we all know you'd fall." Kara said, "It's inevitable."

"Tobis let's go somewhere else." Jaysica said, turning to the man holding her hand. Tobis was the engineer of the ship that Vorn's team was assigned to, the *Silver Hawk* and also Jaysica's boyfriend.

"Oh, err." he said, wondering how to respond. It had been agreed that the entire team would spend the day

together and he was unsure of how to respond.

"But I thought you wanted to come and see the ruins Professor Drame was investigating." the youngest of the group said. Cass Grayle was the adopted daughter of Mace Grayle, the owner of the *Silver Hawk*.

"I did. But if Kara's just going to make fun of me all day then I'd rather not. Besides I don't think Professor Drame likes me." Jaysica said.

"What, because the first time you met you glued yourself to her?" Mace said and Kara and Tharun both grinned while Jaysica scowled.

"No-one has to stay if they don't want to." Vorn said, "I'm sure that Jaysica and Tobis can find plenty to do back at the ship."

"Yeah, each other." Kara muttered and Vorn sighed.

"Come on Tobis." Jaysica said and she pulled on his hand to get him to turn back as well.

"Oh, err, okay." he replied, glancing back at the other rebels as he was led away.

"Anyone else?" Vorn asked, looking around the group and when there was no response he nodded, "Good, then let's go and see what Jenessa's found."

The rebels then continued to walk down the trail until they reached a cluster of structures that were overgrown and partially collapsed due to neglect. There were four people already present at the ruins, a white haired man and three women significantly younger than he was. One of these looked around when she heard the group approaching and smiled.

"Professor Drame," Mace called out to her, "are the rakata still all dead?"

"Hard to say captain." Jenessa Drame replied, "But around here I'd say definitely."

"Find anything interesting?" Vorn asked and Jenessa smiled.

"In fact yes." she answered, "Emissi, show them." and one of the two younger women reached into a plastic crate and removed a metallic cylinder.

"What is it?" Cass asked.

"Looks like a paint can to me." Tharun commented.

"It's electronic." Emissi told him, "I'm not sure what it does but it's definitely of rakata manufacture." and she looked at the other young woman in her group, "Kay says that it resonates in the Force."

"But it feels cold." Kay added, "It's the Dark Side."

"That's why we're just hanging on to it for now." Jenessa said, "We'll let someone else take a look at it later rather than risk Kay being hurt trying to connect with it." then she smiled, "But that's not the best thing we've found. Come inside and take a look." and she started to walk towards the entrance to one of the structures, waving for Vorn's team to follow.

"Is it dusty in there doc?" Kara asked, "I don't want dust upsetting little Vorn." and she smiled at the child she held.

"Four thousand years of mud I'm afraid." Jenessa told her, "But Thracken can keep an eye on him for you."

"Yes!" the white haired man exclaimed, "Of course I'll help." and he held out his arms towards Kara.

"Err, okay." Kara replied when she looked at Vorn and he nodded. Then she handed their son to the older man who kept the child held out at arm's length and smiled at him.

"I've got a bad feeling about this." Kara muttered as they group then followed Jenessa inside one of the buildings.

The undamaged primary rakata structure was currently being used as a command and control centre and hospital. It was surrounded by an assortment of tents and prefabricated structures being used to house the safe world's current population in an area of the forest that had been cleared to make room for the settlement. All of these were only a single storey high while the rakata structure towered over them, being clearly visible from the edge of the forest. Around this structure were several small starships, including the YT-1300 class *Silver Hawk*. Alliance safe worlds rarely had starships permanently assigned to them so each of these represented visitors to the planet.

"Come on Tobis." Jaysica said, "Let's get to the ship. I want to make the most of our time alone."

The two rebels then made their way through the settlement to the *Silver Hawk* and went aboard. The ship was not completely empty however, inside there were the team's three droids, a protocol droid, an R5 astromech and a boxlike mouse droid. As soon as the two rebels entered the ship they were approached by the protocol droid.

"Oh master Dorfus sir," it said, "you should come quickly. Harvey indicates that there is a ship approaching the planet."

"What do you mean Jeeves?" Jaysica asked.

"Err, perhaps you should show us." Tobis added.

"Of course sir." Jeeves replied and the droid led the rebels into the *Silver Hawk's* cockpit when Tobis' astromech droid was plugged into the control console. Most of the ship's systems were shut down but the passive sensors were still running and Harvey was currently tracking a vessel approaching the Alliance safe world.

"Is it a supply ship?" Jaysica asked as Tobis sat down and looked at the sensor display, at which point Harvey chirped.

"Harvey indicates that the vessel is extremely large Miss Horbid." Jeeves translated.

"Err, I think it's a lucrehulk-class ship." Tobis said.

"The Alliance has several of those doesn't it?" Jaysica pointed out, referring to the vessels of the class that had fallen into the hands of the Alliance in the sector.

"Err, yes. But, ah, I – I don't know why they'd be here." Tobis said.

"Maybe it's the *Golden Empress*." Jaysica said, smiling, "The colonel's daughter could have come to help make the supplies that this planet needs."

"Ah, I don't think so. The *Golden Empress* is being used to produce spares for the Alliance's new ships."

Tobis said, "Err, this is something else."

"But what? Who else would be operating a lucrehulk-class ship Tobis?" Jaysica asked before Harvey let out another stream of electronic sound.

"Oh, err, yes. I see it too." Tobis said, not needing Jeeves to translate when he could instead read a translation off a screen in front of him.

"What did he say?" Jaysica said.

"That, err, there are now a number of smaller craft being launched from the lucrehulk." Tobis replied, "More than a hundred."

"A hundred?" Jaysica exclaimed, "I've got a very bad feeling about this Tobis."

2.

The C-9979 landing craft launched from the *Lucrehulk-class* dreadnought as it entered orbit were escorted by a swarm of vulture droid fighters and heavier hyena bombers. The Alliance safe world lacked any meaningful defence against attack and so the vessels met no opposition as they descended through the clouds.

"My lord, the prey sends no challenge." the *Lucrehulk's* first officer said as he watched the progress of the invasion force.

"They may be holding their weapons back to protect them." the captain replied, "Continue as planned. Have the transports land beyond artillery range and deploy the troops."

Tobis and Jaysica ran from the *Silver Hawk* and looked up into the sky as the rakata controlled landing ships and their escorts flew over the settlement.

"What's happening?" Jaysica said.

"I, err, I think we're being invaded." Tobis replied, "I think it's the rakata."

"What do we do Tobis?"

"Err." Tobis said as he considered this for a moment. He had seen several troop transports among the vessels overhead and he knew that the droids and tanks carried by just one would be enough to wipe the settlement from the face of the planet, "We, err, we need to get out of here." he said and he started to run back inside the ship.

"But won't they just shoot us down?" Jaysica called out.

"Oh, err, I'm not planning on flying us out." Tobis answered from the top of the access ramp, "I, err, I'm going to get all the blasters I can. We, ah, we need to get them to the others."

"I think it was some sort of council chamber." Jenessa said as she showed Vorn's team the room that she and her group had worked to remove moss and undergrowth from. At one end were the badly decayed remains of a row of chairs and a long stone table that the chairs would have been behind, "You can see how the council members would have looked this way at anyone attending a meeting." she went on as she stood right in front of the table and looked back towards the entrance at the far end of the room.

"Reminds me of a courtroom." Mace commented.

"It could have been both." Jenessa replied, "Plus a temple of sorts. A small outpost like this wouldn't have had a very large rakata population and the priests would likely have made laws as well as enforcing them."

"I pity anyone who found themselves standing in front of this bench." Vorn said.

"Yeah, two possible sentences." Kara said, "Grilled or fried."

"I don't get it." Cass said.

"The rakata were cannibals kid. They ate people they didn't like." Tharun told her.

"It's just a pity that the ceiling isn't intact." Jenessa added and the rebels looked up at what remained of the structure's roof. The remains of this were covered in black paint that was pitted where small objects had once been embedded into it.

"That's a star chart isn't it?" Vorn said and Jenessa smiled and nodded.

"I think so." she replied, "It could have been a map of their empire. If it was complete it would be priceless."

Just then there was a shout from outside.

"Where's the colonel?" Jaysica shouted.

"Better take one last look around professor." Kara said to Jenessa, "All of this is about to be destroyed."

"We better go and see what's going on." Vorn told Mace and he nodded before the two officers went outside of the ruined temple and saw Jaysica and Tobis walking down the forest trail laden with weapons and carrying a crate between them.

"Tobis? What's going on?" Mace asked, frowning.

"Oh, err, the planet is under attack." Tobis replied.

"We brought weapons for everyone." Jaysica added.

"And it's not even my birthday." Tharun said as he and the other rebels emerged from the temple.

"I didn't hear any explosions." Kay pointed out.

"No, err, the rakata are landing troops." Tobis said.

"Rakata? Here?" Jenessa responded, "Did you see them?"

"We saw some old Trade Federation ships." Jaysica said, "Landing ships and droid fighters. Who else is using them now?"

"The klutz is right boss." Kara said. Then she shuddered, "I can't believe I just said that." she added before looking at Tobis, "Hand me a blaster."

Vorn turned towards Jenessa and her team.

"Do you have blasters?" he asked.

"I do!" Thracken exclaimed and he looked around for somewhere to set Vorn and Kara's son down.

"Perhaps I ought to take him back." Kara said.

"Oh give him to me." Emissi said, "It's bad enough I ended up on this nowhere planet without being expected to fight as well."

"Looks like these two brought enough for the rest of us." Tharun said as he took his heavy rifle from Tobis.

Lines of heavily armoured repulsorlift vehicles glided out of the landing ships and headed towards the Alliance settlement in a column. This spread out when the settlement came into view, with the lighter battle tanks forming a forward rank and the larger troop transports behind them. In unison the fronts of these transports opened up and racks of folded B1 battle droids slid forwards before the droids were lowered to the floor.

"All battle droids in position my lord." one of the rakata crew aboard the orbiting dreadnought told the captain. "Send the activation signal and switch them to autonomous operating mode."

"Yes captain." the rakata officer replied and he tapped at the touch panel in front of him.

The moment that the panel was touched, the battle droids on the surface of the planet stood up in unison as they unfolded and reached for the carbines clamped to their backs. When the army of droids was standing ready a hatch in the turret of one of the battle tanks and another battle droid, this one marked as a command unit appeared.

"Advance!" the droid called out and either side of the tank the battle droid force started to march forwards towards the settlement.

Making their way into the settlement the battle droids broke ranks and began to search each tent and prefabricated building, ordering the occupants out into the open. In places they encountered rebels who had access to weapons but these were not modern military arms and although a handful of battle droids were damaged or disabled their advance continued after those who offered resistance were dealt with.

Tharun and Jenessa watched the battle droids take the settlement, herding all of the inhabitants towards the ancient structure in the centre. Both experienced in wilderness operations, the pair had gone on ahead while the other rebels remained at the ruins. At the same time as this was going on vulture and hyena droids could be seen in the sky providing air cover for the droid army just in case it was needed. However, given the lack of weapons in the settlement they were not being called on. But from among these another small craft appeared, descending out of the clouds and escorted by a pair of vulture droids. The vessel was a sheathipede-class shuttle that landed on the roof of the intact rakata structure and the hatch at the rear opened up. Then from inside a pair of aliens with tall heads and eyes that extended from either side emerged, followed by a group of four B2 super battle droids.

"Well there are your rakata doc." Tharun said and Jenessa nodded.

"No doubt that it's them now." she said.

"Normally I'd be happy that they aren't just slaughtering everyone." Tharun said, "But given the reputation of the rakata I'm not so sure that it's a good thing."

"Agreed." Jenessa replied, "If they're still the same creatures they are reputed to have been thirty thousand years ago then we can expect them to use the strongest as slave labourers and the weakest as food. We need to find a way to free them."

"Well with all those battle droids down there I don't think that just charging in with blasters blazing is going to work. We need a plan."

"Sadly I'm not really an expert in that field. I dig up ancient battlefields, I don't plan actions on modern ones."

"The colonel will know what to do." Tharun said, "You should go back and tell him what we've found."

"What about you?" Jenessa asked.

"I'll stay here and keep an eye on what the rakata are up to. Right now the more we can learn about them the better."

"Are you sure you'll be okay here on your own? What if they see you?"

"Then they better use some of those tanks to take me out from a distance because there's no way I'm being taken out by antique battle droids." Tharun replied.

"Okay, I'll be back as soon as I can." Jenessa replied and she crawled back into the forest before getting to her feet and running down the trail that led to the ruins.

By the time she reached the ruins the other rebels had shared out the weapons that Tobis and Jaysica had brought from the *Silver Hawk* and all of Vorn's team as well as Thracken had a rifle or carbine as well as sidearms of some sort.

"What did you see?" Vorn asked when Jenessa appeared. But rather than reply right away she bent over, placing her hands on her knees as she tried to get her breath back after running so far along the uneven trail.

"Is she having a heart attack?" Jaysica said, "Older people should be careful about physical exertion if they aren't used to it." and Jenessa looked up and snarled at her.

"I'll try and overlook the fact that I'm almost twenty years older than her." Vorn commented.

"If either of you want me to hold her down while you-" Kara began before Vorn interrupted her.

"No, I don't think that will be necessary Kara." he said, "We'll just wait for Jenessa to catch her breath and tell us what's going on."

"It is the rakata." Jenessa said as she stood up straight, "I saw two of them myself. But the real problem is the army of battle droids they've brought along with them."

"Sounds like the Imperial Navy didn't do such a good of wiping them out as they were boasting." Mace said.

"But how did they find us here?" Cass asked, "I thought that the locations of safe worlds were supposed to be kept secret."

"They are." Vorn replied, "But since this used to be a rakata outpost it's possible that they just came here hoping to find somewhere to start over."

"Of course finding a slave labour force already here will be a bonus." Kara added before glancing at Jenessa and adding, "I'm right, right?"

"Right." Jenessa replied, "Tharun and I saw the people from the settlement being driven towards the main structure."

"Will they come here?" Kay asked nervously.

"Is there anything here worth coming for?" Vorn added and Jenessa frowned as she considered this.

"I doubt it. These buildings are beyond repair." she said, "Of course if this was a temple then the spot could have some significance that would bring them here. I wouldn't worry about then surprising us though, Tharun stayed behind to keep an eye on them. He seemed to think that he'd be able to evade the rakata's battle droids if they came after him."

"I need to see this for myself." Vorn said. Then he looked at Tobis, "I take it that the droids are still aboard the *Silver Hawk*?" he asked and Tobis nodded, "Good. Then hopefully we'll be able to communicate with them as well. Mace, Jenessa, Kara, you're all with me. Everyone else should stay here for now. This place may make a useful spot to fall back to."

"Thracken see what you can do about fortifying it would you?" Jenessa added and the older man grinned.

"Yes, yes of course." he replied excitedly, "I knew the rakata existed before anyone else, I won't let you down."

The rebel officers then started back down the trail, with Jenessa leading them towards the spot where she had left Tharun. Despite their trying to keep their approach quiet the former mercenary still heard them creeping up behind him and he rolled over onto his back and aimed his rifle in their direction.

"Relax Tharun, it's us." Mace said.

"What's going on in the settlement?" Vorn added and Tharun looked back towards it.

"I'd say the droids have rounded pretty much everyone up now." he responded, "I heard some shooting so not everyone went without a fight but I'm guessing that anyone who resisted just managed to get themselves killed."

Vorn lifted a set of macrobinoculars to his eyes and started to survey the settlement for himself.

"That's a lot of battle droids." he said.

"It's not the droids I'm so worried about colonel. They're easy to take out if you can isolate small groups. Those tanks and heavy troop transports on the other hand are a major problem." Tharun said.

"What about the rakata themselves?" Mace asked as he too peered through a set of macrobinoculars,

"Jenessa said she'd seen some."

"Yeah, two of them got off that shuttle over there and went inside the main structure but I haven't seen them come out. I have seen the droids bringing out the people who were inside when they landed though." Tharun told him.

"The ships all look intact." Vorn commented when he looked towards the simple landing field, "Though I see a couple of vulture droids walking around over there."

"There are some B-ones as well." Tharun replied, "They looked like they were seeing which of the ships they could get inside."

"Did they get inside the *Silver Hawk*?" Mace asked, concerned about his ship.

"I don't know. I couldn't see from this angle." Tharun answered.

"Let's find out." Vorn said and he took out his comlink, "Vorn to *Silver Hawk*, Jeeves do you read me?" he signalled and initially there was only silence. But just as Vorn was about to try again the voice of his protocol droid spoke from the comlink.

"Oh Colonel Larcus sir, thank the maker it's you." the droid said, "I was afraid that I'd never see you again."

"Jeeves is the ship secure?" Vorn asked.

"Why yes sir. The security seals put in place by master Dorfus before he and Miss Horbid departed proved quite capable of keeping those awful battle droids out."

"Good, now can you tell what they're doing from there?" Vorn said.

"I'm afraid not sir. Harvey has kept our sensors off line just in case they attract any attention." Jeeves replied.

"Okay Jeeves, that's all for now." Vorn said and he shut off the comlink before looking at Mace, "Well at least

the ship is okay and it gives us somewhere else we can fall back to if we have to.”

“So what's the plan colonel?” Tharun said.

“I don't have one yet.” Vorn answered, “But I will once we know more about what the rakata are doing here.”

“Gathering slaves by the looks of it.” Jenessa said.

“Yes, but are they intending to stay or will they load their captives aboard their ship and leave with them?”

Vorn said.

“Well if the Empire's boasts are right then their colony is already gone.” Mace said.”

“Same with that Star Forge.” Tharun added.

“Which makes it more likely that they came here accidentally.” Vorn said, “I think that they're just here to set up a new colony but I can't discount the possibility that they'll move on after finding the planet already inhabited.”

“What difference does that make?” Jenessa asked.

“Time.” Kara responded before Vorn could, “If they're staying put then we've got all the time in the galaxy to put together a plan. But if they're leaving then we need to act before they can depart with our people.”

“And to find out what they're doing I think we're going to have to get somewhat closer.” Vorn said.

“Closer?” Jenessa exclaimed, “How close?”

3.

"Report your status." the rakata captain commanded when the hologram of his first officer appeared on the bridge.

"The settlement is in our hands captain." the other rakata replied, "The inhabitants had few weapons and those they had were obsolete. Those that resisted are dead and the rest are our captives."

"How many slave workers do we have?" the captain asked.

"The droids report that they have gathered together more than eight thousand captain. But a large number of these are too old, too young or too sick to work. This world appears to have been used by the group know as the rebel alliance to hide those considered too weak to be of use in their war from their enemies."

"No matter. Those we cannot make use of as labourers will be made use of in other ways." the captain said, "Have your troops secure the slaves and start clearing the area and then I want your report on how long it will take to establish a new colony here."

"Of course captain." the first officer replied and the hologram bowed before vanishing completely.

On the surface of the planet the first officer then looked around himself at the room he stood in. at one time this had been a great hall where the elders of the colony would address public gatherings but the rebels had turned it into a place where the sick and the weak would be placed until they were fit to work again and the idea of this turned the first officer's stomach.

"Commander," the rakata spoke and a battle droid painted to show that it was a field command unit stepped forwards.

"Yes sir?" the droid asked.

"Commander I want you to send a squad into the jungle. Search for any signs that there are more of these rebels on the planet. Then you are to organise a secure holding area for our new slaves while I assess the work required to restore the glory of this place."

"Roger roger." the droid said before it turned around on the spot and walked out of the room.

To ease navigation around the settlement, the tents and prefabricated structures had been laid out in rows that formed pathways between them that could be described as if they were streets in a city and this made it easier for the battle droids' tanks and troop transports to move around the settlement without having to increase their altitude or risk smashing through structures that could potentially hold something that would make this dangerous. But although this made their travel around the settlement rapid, it also meant that the droids kept to these routes while the rebels on foot were able to sneak through the much narrower gaps between them and remain out of sight as they made their way towards the ancient rakata structure that the rakata appeared to be centring their operations around just as the Alliance had done prior to their arrival. As they got about half way to the landing field the rebels suddenly heard the sound of repulsorlift engines from overhead.

"Take cover!" Vorn hissed, "We can't let them spot us from the air." and the rebels scattered, taking cover wherever they could so that they would not be seen.

With Kara pressed up against him, Vorn looked up into the sky and saw several shuttles coming in to land. One of these was another sheathipede-class ship that broke off from the main formation to land on the main structure beside the first such vessel to have landed while the others were all the similar but larger maxillipede-class shuttles and these instead set down on the landing field among the handful of rebel craft there.

"We need to know whether they're here to deliver or pick up." Vorn said as he rummaged in his pockets for his comlink. However, just as he was about to try and contact Jeeves aboard the *Silver Hawk* there was the sound of mechanical footsteps as a squad of battle droids came walking towards his hiding place.

"Freeze!" one of the droids called out when it noticed the two humans hiding between cargo containers and the rest of the squad turned to aim their weapons in the same direction, "Come on out you rebel scum." the droid added.

However, before Vorn or Kara could react or the droids open fire there was the sound of a single powerful blaster shot and the droid to have seen the two concealed rebels came apart as the energy blast blew its torso apart.

"Over here!" Tharun yelled and reacting to the attack the entire squad of droids turned on the spot just as Tharun switched his rifle to fully automatic and opened fire. He was joined by Mace who used a rifle of his own to fire on the droids and while they were distracted Vorn and Kara darting from their existing hiding place to another.

"They're getting away." one of the droids said when it noticed this and it turned to engage Vorn and Kara. But Vorn reacted quicker and a quick burst from rifle blew the head off the droid and it staggered about briefly

before collapsing.

The remaining droids began firing in all directions now as the rebels attacked simultaneously from multiple sides. Only Jenessa who was armed only with a simple slug throwing revolver held her fire, knowing that the weapon was of limited use against even the lightly armoured plating of the droids' mechanical bodies.

Between them the other four rebels had a great deal of firepower at their disposal, however and in under a minute most of the droids had been cut down.

"Let's get out of here." one of the remaining battle droids exclaimed as its self preservation routines kicked in.

"Roger roger." another responded before it was hit by a blast from Mace's weapon and it spun around as its arm was torn free before a second shot struck its power cell and it exploded.

"Don't let them escape, they'll warn others." Vorn called out as the three surviving droids started to fall back, still firing short bursts towards the rebel positions.

With the droids focused on the four members of Vorn's team, none of them were paying any attention to Jenessa and when she saw an opportunity to dart out into the open where she could pick up one of the destroyed droids' carbine she took it. Rolling across the ground she aimed the weapon at the retreating battle droids just as one fired a shot that narrowly missed her, passing through the air where she had been only moments earlier. In turn this was all the distraction Mace needed to shoot that droid before it could correct its aim while Jenessa fired on one of the others. Her shot only hit the droid in its leg but this was enough to bring it down to the ground in a heap where Kara finished it off.

Now badly outnumbered the last remaining battle droid from the squad turned and started to flee, not even trying to lay down any suppressive fire to cover its withdrawal and in doing so it left itself open to attack from behind. Seeing this Tharun burst out of his hiding place and walked down the street after the droid, carefully lining up his rifle on the machine and firing a single shot that sent it tumbling forwards and sprawling out over the ground.

"Colonel, I think we may have been overheard." he then said as he heard the sound of a powerful repulsorlift engine and over the top of a nearby tent he saw one of the rakata army's heavy transports making its way towards the rebel position.

"We need to get moving." Vorn said, "Towards the landing field. If we can't stop to communicate with Jeeves then we'll just have to go and take a look for ourselves."

Four rakata were clustered around a holographic projector that showed an image of the settlement taken from above. This was being used to draw up plans for how the ancient rakata outpost would be transformed into the capital of their new world. But as the four aliens discussed the best way to transform the planet they were interrupted by the arrival of a T-series tactical droid that strode between the B-2 super battle droids standing guard at the entrance to the chamber that overlooked the settlement outside.

"What is it?" the rakata first officer demanded as the droid came to a halt in front of the rakata.

"One of our patrols has been ambushed." the droid replied.

"So some of the beings here evaded capture. We put you in charge of the security operation for a reason. You are supposed to know what you are doing."

"My standing orders require that I present all anomalous data to yourselves." the droid explained, "The damage inflicted on the patrol does not match that caused by the weapons seen elsewhere. I calculate a ninety-six point four percent chance that there is a military unit in the area that we were not previously aware of. I would like permission to deploy further troops from the dreadnought."

"You already have more than twelve thousand." one of the rakata pointed out.

"Indeed. But this unit must be operating out of a base somewhere beyond this immediate area. In order to carry out a full search of the surrounding terrain I will require at least twice that number." the droid said, "I would also like to deploy destroyer units to key points around this structure."

"Destroyers? Against a handful of beings who have evaded us by sheer luck? The captain will not look kindly on this." another rakata said.

"My study of the captain suggests that he will like further losses to our forces even less." the droid replied and the rakata that had spoken let out a low growl.

"I will contact the captain." the first officer said, "The decision is his. In the mean time return to your duties. Organise a search for these holdouts in the local area only and using the troops you already have."

"By your command." the tactical droid said before it turned around and marched back out of the chamber.

4.

Continuing to move quickly between the various tents and other lightweight structures of the settlement the rebels soon found themselves beside the landing field. Along the way they encountered no other rebels, indicating that the entire population had by now been rounded up and also no further droid patrols. However, looking out across the landing field they saw numerous droids of various types. Squads of B1 battle droids patrolled the landing field, appearing to check that the rebel transport ships were sealed and where the access ramp of one stood open it was under guard to make sure that no-one could use it to try and escape. In addition to this there were several vulture droids with their wings folded down into their walking configuration so they could accompany some of the squads of their smaller brethren as they patrolled the area. But by far the majority of the droids at work were labour types unloading supplies from the maxillipede-class shuttles and when he saw this Vorn smiled.

"What's so amusing boss?" Kara asked.

"I'm not amused, just satisfied." Vorn answered.

"Why?"

"Because the rakata are shipping supplies in, not people out." Tharun said, "That means that they're staying put. Right colonel?"

"Right sergeant." Vorn replied and Tharun smiled at Kara.

"Told you mom." he said and she scowled.

"Stop calling me that." she hissed angrily.

"You shouldn't have married my father in law then." Tharun said.

"Look, I love all of this kriffed up family banter as much as the next being but don't we have a job to do here?" Jenessa said.

"Yes we do." Vorn said, "Now as Tharun pointed out the rakata are bringing in supplies so that means they plan on staying a while. My guess is that they're looking to establish a new colony here and our people will become their new salve labour force. Sound likely?" and he glanced at Jenessa who nodded.

"It fits with what we know about them." she replied.

"So that gives us time to assess how we prevent that." Vorn continued. Then he looked across the landing field towards where the *Silver Hawk* was visible, "We should get aboard the ship. That'll keep us out of sight."

"At least as long as these battle droids are just checking seals and not forcing them." Mace commented.

"Better than sitting beside a tent and waiting for those clankers to come walking past again." Kara responded.

"We'll need the others. Especially Tobis and Emissi." Vorn said.

"A comlink signal isn't likely to reach the ruins from here, need me to go fetch them colonel?" Tharun asked and Vorn nodded.

"Kara should go as well." he said and she frowned at the mention of her name.

"What for boss?" she asked.

"Emissi's till looking after Vorn." Vorn pointed out, referring to their young son, "We can't leave him at the ruins and he's more likely to stay quiet if you're with him."

"Okay boss." she said and then she looked at Tharun, "Let's go."

"Lead the way mom." he replied and she snarled.

While Kara and Tharun headed back towards the ruins the other rebels studied the movements of the droids, looking for a gap that they could exploit to get to the *Silver Hawk* and Vorn took out his comlink.

"Jeeves are you there?" he signalled.

"Oh yes Colonel Larcus sir. I've been waiting for you to make contact again." the protocol droid replied.

"Jeeves, we're at the edge of the landing field and on our way to you. Can you be ready to open the cargo hatch for us?"

"Why of course sir, but wouldn't the main access ramp be far easier to-" Jeeves began.

"The area is crawling with battle droids." Vorn said, interrupting before the droid could finish, "The cargo hatch is less obvious. Just open it up and forget the lift."

"If you insist sir. But how will I know when you are in position?" Jeeves asked.

"I'll signal you again." Vorn said, "Now get ready, we're on our way."

The three rebels broke form cover suddenly and ran towards a nearby bulk cargo container that now stood empty and they slid to a halt beside it as they waited for a line of labour droids to finish unloading a nearby shuttle, watching carefully for the squads of battle droids still patrolling the area. When the last of the shuttle's cargo was unloaded its engines roared into life and it rose up into the air to reveal the *Silver Hawk* on the far side of where it had been.

"Okay this is our chance." Mace said when he saw that there were no more droids looking towards them or

their ship.

"Jeeves now." Vorn signalled and then all three rebels sprinted towards the *Silver Hawk*. They ducked as they ran underneath and heard the sound of the cargo hatch towards the rear of the ship opening. Mace reached this first but rather than climbing aboard his ship he paused to give Vorn a boost.

"Colonel Larcus sir." Jeeves exclaimed as Vorn appeared in the cargo hold, "What a relief it is to see you safe and sound."

"Thanks. Good work on the hatch." Vorn replied as he turned around and reached down through the hatch to help Jenessa up into the ship before Mace followed her.

"Why Professor Drame, how pleasant to see you again." Jeeves said when the droid saw Jenessa.

"What about me?" Mace asked when Jeeves did not react to his presence and from by one of the doorways leading out of the hold Harvey produced a rude sounding noise.

"There is no call for that sort of language Harvey." Jeeves said, "I was merely greeting our guest first."

"Never mind that now." Mace said and he hurried to the control panel for the cargo hatch and closed it again before any passing battle droids could notice that the ship was no longer fully sealed.

The power inside the *Silver Hawk* had been kept to a minimum to make the ship appear empty from the outside and this meant that once the cargo hatch was closed the only sources of illumination were the tiny lights on control panels and Jenessa reached into her jacket pocket for a glow rod.

"Don't." Mace told her, "At least not until we've checked that the cockpit hatch is closed." and then he carefully made his way out of the hold, heading for the cockpit where he closed the door leading to it.

Returning to the lounge area he found Vorn and Jenessa waiting for him, "Okay, you can use a glow rod now." he said, "Though I wouldn't recommend the main lights. There's a viewport in the turret and anything more than a glow rod may be noticeable from the outside."

"So what are we going to do now?" Jenessa asked as she turned on her glow rod and placed it down on the table before sitting down beside it, "Other than play murder in the dark while we wait for the others to get here?"

"Excuse me Professor Drame, but with only three people available to play wouldn't that make the solution to the game somewhat obvious?" Jeeves said, "Unless you expect myself and Harvey to join in and I am not sure my programming permits me to take part in simulation of violence."

Jenessa sighed.

"She was joking Jeeves." Vorn said, "Now how about you and Harvey bring us up to speed on what you've seen the rakata and their droid army doing while we weren't here?"

When Tharun reached the edge of the settlement again, this time at the head of the group of rebels who had remained at the ruins he looked up into the darkening sky and saw three large transports coming in to land. With a distinctive double wing construction they were easy to identify as Trade Federation C-9979 landing craft that were now being used by the rakata.

"I've got a bad feeling about this." Kay said from behind him, "How many more troops are there in those things?"

"Thousands." Tharun replied, "Plus more armour."

"But what do they need them for?" Jaysica asked.

"Probably to search for us. They probably figured out that we were outside the settlement when their initial force landed and are bringing in reinforcements to start searching the forest for us." Tharun said.

"I'd love to see the look on their faces when they find out we're not out there any more." Kara commented as she adjusted her grip on her son.

"Okay, now the *Silver Hawk* is over there at the landing field. That's where we need to get to." Tharun said, "We can move quickly between the tents but don't get too complacent. There are patrols about. If you get seen don't bother with a warning, just shoot."

"A bit difficult for me holding Vorn here." Kara pointed out.

"Give him to me." Cass replied and she slung her carbine over her shoulder and held out her arms, "Come on, I've babysat for you and the colonel enough times. He knows me better than anyone else."

"He knows me as well." Jaysica said, "He smiles at me."

"Yeah, he likes clowns." Kara replied, handing young Vorn over to Cass and then unslinging her own carbine. Then she looked at Tharun, "Okay sergeant, led the way." she said.

"Sure mom." Tharun replied and he broke into a run before she could respond.

Tharun held his rifle at the ready as he lead the other rebels through the settlement. At one point from ahead of him he heard the sound of a battle droid patrol backed up by a repulsortank and he waved at the rebels to stop. Then he took a knife from his belt and in one quick stroke he cut a slit in the tent beside him so they could hide within it.

"How much further?" Kay whispered when they were safely inside the tent and Tharun watched through the slit he had cut.

"Oh, err, I think we're about half way there." Tobis replied.

"Good guess lad." Tharun added as he counted the armoured vehicles moving past.

"So how much longer do we have to wait in here?" Cass asked, "I'm not sure little Vorn here will stay quiet much longer."

"Find a way." Tharun said, "I don't think this is just some patrol. I think it's reinforcements from one of the landing ships we saw coming in heading out to search for us."

"Makes me wish I we'd left some charges at the ruins." Jaysica commented and Emissi winced.

"Don't even joke about that around Drame." she said, "She freaks out if anyone suggests mistreating of her precious artefacts."

"Let me see." Thracken said and he pushed Tharun aside so that he could see out of the tent as well, "This is what I was afraid of, that they'd invade our worlds. But I couldn't get anyone to listen."

"Err, I thought we did listen." Tobis said, frowning.

"Forget it." Emissi commented, "That laser brain's been in a galaxy far, far away since a long time ago as far as I can tell."

"Oh, oh, they're leaving." Thracken said, smiling and ignoring the insult directed at him.

"Everyone ready?" Tharun asked as he raised his rifle again and pulled back the tent flap.

"I could wait a while longer." Emissi commented.

"We're ready." Kara said, glaring at the other woman.

"Okay let's go. Stay close." Tharun said and he promptly vanished through the slit in the tent.

Following him back into the open, the rebels continued to dart from one hiding place to another until they reached the landing field and they paused behind the same cargo container that Vorn's group had used as a hiding place earlier while Tharun studied the area.

"I can see the *Silver Hawk* from here." Jaysica whispered, "It doesn't look like anyone's inside."

"That's probably the idea." Kara said and then she took out her comlink, "Boss, can you hear me?" she signalled and there was a brief pause before Vorn responded.

"Kara, I'm right here aboard the *Silver Hawk* with Mace and Jenessa." he said, "Where are you?"

"Edge of the landing field. We've got eyes on the ship."

"Good. Now listen, I'll stand by the cargo hatch and be ready to open it as soon as you bang on the outside." Vorn told her and she nodded.

"Okay I've got it." Kara said and then she put her comlink away, "One last quick dash guys." she commented.

"Not just yet." Tharun said, "There are still some droids over there. They look like they're on they're way away from here though. Shouldn't be long now. This gloom will help." then as the last of the droids disappeared from view Tharun ran from behind the container.

"Oh, err, I suppose we're going." Tobis said and he started to run as well before the other rebels followed as well.

Tharun skidded to a halt beneath the hull of the *Silver Hawk* and took another look around to make sure that there were no droids close enough to hear when he banged his fist on the cargo hatch. Moments later this slid open and Tharun looked up to see Vorn staring down at him from inside the *Silver Hawk*.

"The others are right behind me." he said as Mace appeared and reached down to help Tharun up into the ship. The two men then proceeded to help each rebel up through the cargo hatch as they appeared. The only variation was when Cass appeared and she first handed the young Vorn up to the father he had been named for. When Kara subsequently climbed through the hatch she then took their son from him and as soon as the last of the rebels was aboard Mace closed the hatch again.

"Wow it's dark in here." Jaysica said, "What's wrong with the lights?"

"Turning them on will tell every battle droid around that we're in here." Mace pointed out.

"And there are a hell of a lot more of them to notice right now." Tharun added.

"They're bringing in reinforcements?" Vorn responded and Tharun nodded.

"My guess is that they know we're around and are about to start searching the forest for us." he said.

"Then it's a good job we're all in here." Jenessa said, "Do you think they'll come looking for us here?"

"Eventually, yes." Tharun said, "But we'll have a fair few hours yet. Maybe a day."

"That's long enough." Vorn said.

"So you've got a plan then boss?" Kara asked and Vorn smiled.

"Hey, it's me." he said, "I always have a plan."

"So how about you let the rest of us in on it?" Jenessa asked.

"Of course." Vorn replied, "As far as I can tell we are dealing with a Lucrehulk-class vessel that has a full complement of battle droids, so that's more than sixty thousand."

"And there are less than a dozen of us." Emissi pointed out. Then she sighed, "if you lot hadn't kidnapped me I could be back home on Estran right now liberating people's secrets."

"Like their bank details?" Kay asked.

"Hey!" Emissi exclaimed, "I never once sliced into someone's bank account and stole from it."

"But I bet you would have if someone had paid you to." Jenessa commented.

"Actually that's the skill we're going to need." Vorn said.

"Boss, are you suggesting that we take control of these battle droids like we did aboard the *Golden Empress*?"

"No." Vorn said, shaking his head, "The *Golden Empress* had only a few hundred battle droids as its security force. The ship in orbit above us still has tens of thousands aboard and I doubt that Tobis can take control of them even with help from Emissi. What I'm proposing is that we simply shut them all down."

"Tricky." Emissi said, "We'd need to be aboard their ship to gain access to the transmitter."

"I know that. Our ships will be recognised by their sensors but we can stow away on one of their landing ships and let it take us up to their mother ship. Then we just need to find a way to command all of the droids to shut down."

"Err, ah," Tobis began, "colonel I don't think that we'll be able to do that from the main droid control. It'll be too well guarded."

"I thought you might say that." Vorn said, "That's why my plan is for Emissi to break into the main transmitter and send a fake order for all of the battle droids to shut down. Hopefully that will give all of the captives the opportunity to deal with the handful of rakata on the surface. But the drawback with that is that the *lucrehulk* will still be in orbit and my guess is that the crew will react to having their droids shut down by firing on the settlement. To stop that we're going to have to deal with the ship itself so while Jenessa and her team make sure that Emissi gets to where she needs to be the rest of us will head for the engineering section and sabotage the power distribution system. Ideally we'll just leave the ship dead in space but if it becomes necessary we'll overload the reactor and blow it up."

"One slight problem." Emissi said, "Any signal I put into the system to shut down all of the droids down here may not affect any of them up there on the ship. We'll still be up to our necks in them."

"Err, what if I cross connect the internal and external communications?" Tobis suggested and Emissi nodded.

"Sure, if you can do that I could take all the droids down in one go." she said, "Hardware isn't really my thing but if someone else rigs it up right then I can make it work for us."

"Which just leaves the rakata themselves to deal with." Tharun pointed out, "How many are we talking about?"

"Hundreds possibly." Mace said.

"Jaysica if you can get into the security system could you drop specific blast doors before we cut the power?" Vorn asked and Jaysica smiled.

"Of course. Dropping them all in one go should be simple." she replied.

"That's not what I want. I want you to only drop the blast doors that aren't keeping any of us from the nearest escape pods." Vorn said.

"So you're not planning on us going down with the ship then boss?" Kara asked.

"No I'm not. But it would help if we could get straight to where we needed to be to get off while the rakata are all stuck behind blast doors with no power. Then we can call for back up and our troops can flush them out properly." Vorn explained.

"And you get to add yet another ship to the Alliance fleet huh Vorn?" Jenessa said, "Come on, you must realise that's what will happen."

"The thought had crossed my mind, yes." he said with a grin, "Though we may be forced to destroy it yet."

"What about the kid?" Emissi asked.

"Hey!" Cass protested, "I can take care of myself."

"I was talking about the baby." Emissi pointed out.

"Oh." Cass said.

"Jeeves can look after him." Kara said, "We'll only be gone a few hours at most. Right boss?"

"Right." Vorn replied, "Now I suggest we gather whatever tools and equipment we might need. If there's anything we don't have then figure out where we might be able to get it aboard the battleship because we can't afford to waste any more time if we're going to get aboard it."

5.

The rakata's landing ships were touching down in an area of ground that had been cleared of vegetation by the Alliance to allow the settlement to expand into but had not yet been used. This allowed a single landing craft to touch down and deploy its forces at a time while others waited overhead. In turn this lack of space compelled the empty landing craft to take off again to make room for the next one in the queue and this was just what the rebels needed.

The battle droids had been deployed to prevent anyone from sneaking out of the forest to attack the landing craft as they sat vulnerable on the ground but because it had been assumed that the rebels were located somewhere within the forest less attention was being paid to the direction of the settlement and so the two teams of rebels were able to circle around the edge of the forest, keeping between the landing craft and its screen of defensive troops until they were located to its rear. The main entry to the landing craft was through the prow of the ship that opened up to allow the carefully loaded tanks and troop transports to be unloaded in the fastest possible time but there were other access points as well. One of these was a maintenance hatch located to the rear of the ship that was just above ground level and it was this that the rebels ran towards.

"How long will it take to get this open?" Jenessa asked as Jaysica started to try and override the hatch's security seal, "We are kind of exposed out here."

"Done it." Jaysica said before anyone could give Jenessa an estimate.

"That quick?" Jenessa said in surprise.

"This ship design dates to the Clone Wars. It's decades out of date." Jaysica replied while she climbed up into the hatch. However, all of a sudden she came to a stop with her legs still dangling out of the hatch.

"What's wrong?" Vorn asked.

"I'm stuck. I think I'm caught on something." Jaysica replied, "Can someone check?"

"Go on Tobis," Kara commented, "you're more intimately familiar with that part of the klutz than any of us."

"What? Oh, err." Tobis responded.

"Incoming." Tharun said suddenly from where he was keeping watch and both he and Thracken raised their weapons and aimed them towards the sound of droids marching through undergrowth.

"Inside." Vorn hissed.

"But I'm stuck." Jaysica protested.

"There's room to get around you." Vorn replied then he looked at the other rebels and added, "Now."

Kara was the first to climb through the hatch, deliberately grabbing hold of Jaysica to use her as support while she climbed and after she was inside the landing craft the others started to follow each of them squeezing past Jaysica and ignoring her protests. This was except for Tobis, who came to halt when he was level with her.

"Oh. Err." he said as he considered the best way to climb over her without angering her.

"No time for that sort of thing now Tobis." Kara said and then she and Mace both reached out to drag him through the hatch.

This left just Tharun outside and he tossed his rifle up through the hatch before jumping up and grabbing hold of Jaysica, who in turn started to scream before Kara pressed a hand over her mouth while Vorn helped Tharun through the hatch.

"Okay so now what?" Kay asked, "That hatch is still open."

"And I'm still stuck." Jaysica added.

"Just hold still little lady, I'll help you out." Tharun said and he took hold of her by her wrists and pulled as hard as he could. This produced a snapping sound as Jaysica's belt broke and a tearing as her trousers split all down the side of one leg. However, Jaysica was still pulled free and as soon as the hatchway was clear Thracken reached out and closed it.

"There." he said, "All done. No problems."

"Yes there's a problem." Jaysica said, "Look at my pants. Does anyone have any spare?"

"Spare pants weren't on the list of essential equipment for this op little lady." Tharun pointed out and Jaysica frowned.

"This is your fault. You tore them." she said.

"Tharun just did what needed doing." Vorn said. Then he looked at Tobis, "Tobis, do you perhaps have some duct tape?"

"Oh, err, yes. I think so." the engineer replied and he began to rummage through his pack.

"Good. Then Jaysica can use it to fix her pants." Vorn replied. Then he took the time to look at the small compartment that they were all squeezed inside, "So where are we?"

"Err, a secondary maintenance shaft." Tobis told him, "It, err, it's used to access the life support and repulsorlift systems."

"So no-one ought to be coming down here while the ship's in flight and all we need to do is wait." Mace said, smiling.

It took just a few minutes for the battle droids to complete the unloading of the landing craft, after which the rebels heard the sound of the forward section slamming shut. This was followed by the roar of powerful repulsorlift engines as the craft took off and headed back towards the orbiting dreadnought. The inside of the maintenance shaft rapidly became very hot and stuffy, made even worse by the fact that there were almost a dozen rebels crammed inside it and this heat did not subside even when the landing craft left the atmosphere and switched from its repulsorlifts to its ion drive. Fortunately for the rebels the *Lucrehulk-class* dreadnought was in a relatively low orbit specifically to speed up the process of deploying and recovering craft to and from the surface and so the landing craft soon arrived in the massive vessel's extensive hangar.

"Okay we've arrived." Vorn said, "Now let's get out of here."

Being closest to the hatch they had used to get aboard the ship, Thracken opened it just enough to be able to see that the rear of the landing craft was facing a wall and it was safe for the rebels to disembark without being seen. To signal this he just smiled and nodded at the others and then quickly jumped down onto the hangar deck.

"Do you know where you're heading for?" Vorn asked Jenessa when the rebels were all outside the landing craft.

"Central core, upper levels." she replied, nodding and he nodded back at her.

"Good. Our target is at the rear of the outer ring so we'll split up here. Your best bet is the ventilation shafts."

"What about you?" Jenessa asked.

"The hangar reaches all the way around. We just need to keep out of sight as we follow it." Vorn replied and he looked around. Despite all the activity down on the surface the hangar was fairly quiet. Obviously all of the ground forces being deployed had already left the ship and now only a handful of maintenance droids were at work in the hangar.

"Okay, we'll let you know when we're in position." Jenessa said and then she turned away and beckoned for her team to follow her towards the nearest access point to the ship's ventilation system.

Meanwhile Vorn and his team stuck to the sides of the hangar as they carefully made their way around it. At three thousand metres in diameter and with the landing craft they had stowed away in located near to the door leading into space the rebels had a large distance to cover, almost four kilometres in total, before they reached the engineering section.

It was a sign of how few rakata there were aboard the ship that when Vorn's team reached the engineering section they found only droids working there when Vorn and Mace peered through the main entrance.

"Just droids." Vorn said.

"Good," Mace replied, "that makes this a lot easier. We can take them out and then put one back together just enough that it can reply to any communications from elsewhere on the ship."

"Then let's do this." Vorn said, "Take out the droids at console first before they can warn anyone else about us but check your targets, we can't afford to damage the equipment in there. No automatic fire and no grenades."

"Got it colonel." Tharun replied as he tucked the butt of his rifle into his shoulder and readied himself for action. Then when Vorn slapped him on the back he darted through the doorway and took aim.

The sound of Tharun's rifle firing made all of the droids on duty pause and look towards him as one of their number was blasted in half by the powerful weapon. Two of the droids reacted by trying to activate the intercoms built into their duty stations but before they could send out a call for help Vorn and Mace shot them both as they entered the room behind Tharun. The rebels split into two teams, each one making its way around the roughly circular room in opposite directions, firing at every droid they encountered. The machines were designed to operate and maintain the ship's reactor and engines, not defend them against attack and so when finding themselves under fire the droids' reaction was based entirely on the self preservation elements of their programming and they did their best to put as much distance between themselves and the rebels as they could. But their programming did not include ideas such as taking cover and so as they tried to flee they did so by the most obvious routes and remained out in the open, making them easy targets for the rebels.

"Is that it?" Mace called out when the last of the droids was disabled and when no-one said anything he turned towards the door and seeing that Cass was closest to it called out to her, "Cass, get that door shut."

"Tobis," Vorn said, "find the communications system and link the internal and external systems together."

Jaysica, find the master blast door controls. I don't want ten thousand battle droids marching through that door."

6.

Not only did Jenessa's team have further to go to reach their target but they had to do so by means of navigating the ventilation system that offered no indication of where they were other than what could be determined by peering through grills into the compartments outside. However, when they did eventually find the compartment they wanted they found it deserted and quickly they exited the vent.

"Emissi," Jenessa said as she looked at the ship's main communications antenna, "get patched into this thing. Everyone else with me. We need to make sure that no-one gets in here." and she darted towards the door. But as she ran Kay suddenly let out a gasp as she felt a sudden coldness come over her.

"Jenessa!" she exclaimed just as the rakata that she had sensed in the Force appeared in the doorway. For a moment the rakata and the four humans just stared at each other in surprise, none of them having expected the other to be there.

All of a sudden the rakata reached for the comlink clipped to its chest. But just as it wrapped its hand around the device Thracken dived into the alien and tackled it.

"No!" he yelled as he knocked the comlink out of the alien's hand and it bounced across the floor into the corner of the room as Thracken and the rakata wrestled with one another.

"Emissi get patched into the antenna." Jenessa ordered, "Kay help me." and she ran to assist Thracken. On the other hand Kay remained rooted to the spot, shivering. The rakata was able to push Thracken away just as Jenessa reached it and it tried to run before she grabbed hold of it by the arm only to be pushed back as the alien punched her in the face. However, in pushing Thracken away the rakata had pushed him up against the wall where a fire extinguisher was located and the man unhooked it before charging back towards the rakata and slamming the extinguisher into the side of the alien's head, just above its eye. The alien collapsed, clutching at its head where blood was pouring from the wound Thracken had inflicted but he was not done yet and he brought the extinguisher down on the rakata's skull repeatedly.

"Thracken, you can stop now." Jenessa said, laying hand on his shoulder, "It's dead."

"Dead?" Thracken commented and he looked down at the remains of the rakata's head and smiled, "Of course. I did it."

"Crazy old man." Emissi muttered.

"Kay what happened?" Jenessa asked, looking at Kay who was still stood exactly where she had been.

"The rakata." Kay replied, "As soon as I felt them all I could think of was how they put me into that Star Forge of theirs."

"Well it's okay now. Thracken saw to that." Jenessa said, glancing back down at the alien corpse. Then she turned to Emissi, "How long?" she asked.

"Already in." Emissi answered, "I can send a shutdown signal as soon as Lieutenant Colonel Larcus's lot give the go ahead."

"I've got it." Jaysica said, smiling and all of a sudden the blast door sealing off engineering slid open.

"What did you just do?" Kara exclaimed as she hurriedly picked up her carbine just in case there were any droids or rakata outside.

"Just what I was asked to." Jaysica replied, "I opened all the doors leading from our position and the communications antenna to the nearest escape pods and locked all of the others down."

"In other words," Mace said, frowning, "the rakata on the bridge will now know something's wrong."

"What's happening?" the rakata captain demanded when the blast door at the back of the bridge suddenly slammed shut.

"I don't know my lord." one of the bridge crew responded, "But blast doors all over the ship are closing."

"Show me." the captain said as he strode to the other rakata's console and looked at the display. There he saw that most of his ship's blast doors had indeed just been sealed without him giving the command. But there were two distinct sections where they had remained open. One of these was in the core, just a few levels above the bridge while the other was in the outer ring, "It's the rebels!" he exclaimed, "They aren't hiding on the planet, they're up here with us. Quickly, muster the battle droids. Send them to main engineering and the communications antenna. Tell them to cut through the blast doors if they have to but make sure they get to those locations, that's where the rebels are."

There was a rolling sound from outside engineering and Tharun's eyes widened when he saw three destroyer droids speed around the corner and unfold themselves before their shields activated and they started firing.

"Destroyers!" he yelled as he ducked back through the doorway just in time to avoid being hit.

"Tobis we need that link." Mace said as he took cover, preparing to shoot at the first destroyer droid to appear in the doorway even though he knew that his weapon was unlikely to penetrate its shield.

"Communication link completed captain." Tobis said, "Any, ah, any signal sent on one will be duplicated on the, err, other."

A barrage of blaster fire came through the doorway from the destroyers as they advanced and the rebels threw themselves to the floor to avoid being hit. Mace and Tharun returned fire as soon as they saw the first of the three droids appear but it came to a halt and its shield enveloped it before they had chance to shoot and both shots were absorbed harmlessly. This droid continued to fire bursts into engineering as the other two droids advanced and each time one of the rebels attempted to fire on one of them while their shields were down the stationary droid shot first and forced them to take cover without firing. Of course the burst of blaster fire from the destroyer droid had to hit something and a wall mounted console exploded in a shower of sparks and triggered a wailing klaxon.

"Jenessa are you set?" Vorn asked, speaking into his comlink.

"All set." she replied, "Sending the signal now."

Emissi fed the shutdown command into the communication antenna and with it the instruction to broadcast the command as widely as possible. Spreading out at the speed of light, the effect of this was almost instantaneous as every battle droid deployed from the dreadnought suddenly became inactive. On the surface of the planet guards watching over rebel captives suddenly collapsed while vehicles suddenly became uncontrolled and crashed into one another. Meanwhile aboard the dreadnought all of the active droids froze and then fell over and this included not only the three destroyer droids attacking Vorn's team in engineering but also the super battle droids guarding the bridge.

"The droids, someone's taken them off line." the rakata captain said when he saw the bridge guards collapse. Then he turned towards the rakata attempting to force open the blast door that was keeping them all trapped in the bridge, "How long until that door is open?" he asked. But before the rakata by the door could give him an answer another of the bridge crew called out.

"Sir, there seems to be a problem with the main reactor."

"I've got a bad feeling about this." Cass said as the klaxon continued to sound.

"Tobis, what's going on?" Vorn asked.

"Oh, err, that destroyer droid took out the flow regulator valves." the engineer replied.

"So what does that mean lad?" Tharun asked.

"It means that the fuel for the main reactor is being pumped in at maximum rate and there's no way of shutting it off." Mace told him.

"It means the ship's going to blow." Kara added.

"Jenessa," Vorn said into his comlink, "get to the nearest escape pod as quickly as you can."

"What about the power?" she replied, "Aren't you going to shut it down before anyone can come here and undo what we did?"

"That's not going to be a problem." Vorn told her, "It's a long story but very soon there isn't going to be a ship."

"Would this long story include the name 'Jaysica' by any chance?" Jenessa said.

"Hey! That's not fair." Jaysica protested, "It wasn't my fault."

"You opened the kriffing door." Kara said loudly.

"Never mind that now." Vorn said, "We all need to be out of here before the reactor blows."

Running from the engineering section and communications antenna compartment, the two groups of rebels just had to follow the path laid out by the blast doors Jaysica had left open for them until they reached clusters of escape pods and climbed inside. As soon as they were aboard the escape pods the rebels ejected them from the dreadnought and the two tiny craft hurtled away from the doomed vessel. The automatic systems aboard the escape pods determined that the planet below was habitable as soon as they launched and both pods angled towards it.

All of a sudden there was a brilliant flash of light and the pods shook as they were bombarded with debris.

Vorn peered out of one of the escape pod's viewports and he saw that where the Lucrehulk-class dreadnought had been now there was only a cloud of debris left over after the reactor core lost containment and the superheated matter it held came flooding out.

"Oh well," Vorn said, "it looks like I won't be presenting another ship to the Alliance today after all."