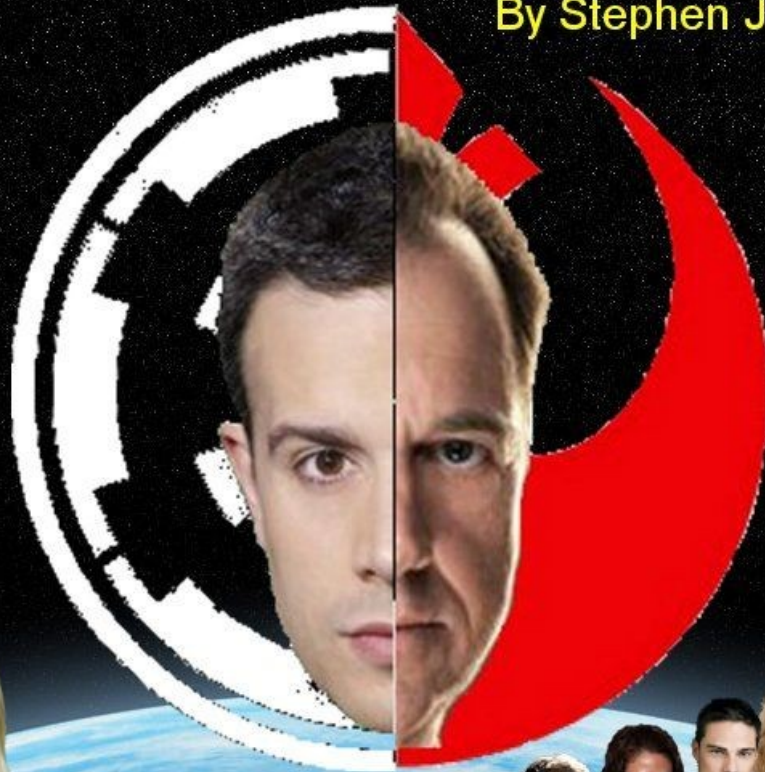


STAR WARS

5-05: Lost and Found

By Stephen J Dutton



14/14
14/14



Civil war turns father against son

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

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

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

LOST AND FOUND

WHEN VAY UDRA DISCOVERS HER DATAPAD MISSING IT LEADS HER AND GARM
LARCUS TO A REBEL AGENT THAT GARM BELIEVES CAN ENABLE HIM TO CAPTURE
HIS RENEGADE FATHER...

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

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1.

When Agent Garm Larcus of the Imperial Security Bureau opened the door to his office the first thing that struck him was the mess.

"Vay?" he said to the young woman clad in a black skin tight bodyglove who at that moment was hurling the cushions from the small couch positioned to the side of the office across the to the other side, "What's going on here?"

"I can't find my datapad." Vay replied without looking at him.

"So you decided to trash my office? I thought you were working with Intelligence today?"

"I was. I mean I am. But I know I had it with me when I came down to see if you wanted to go for lunch but now it's gone. I'm retracing my steps to try and find it." Vay said as she finished with the couch and stood up and stared at Garm.

"Well I've not been in here since early this morning." Garm said, "And no one else has access to this office when I'm out." Then he noticed a datapad lay on his desk that he had not put there, "Though I can see a datapad right out in the open when I have to. Even without those Force enhanced senses of yours." And he walked to his desk and picked up the datapad.

"Not that one." Vay told him, "That's just the one I use for work. I'm talking about the other one. Mine."

Garm frowned as he recalled the obsolete model he had seen her with from time to time. Though she had never actually looked at anything on it in his presence.

"That old thing? Does it even still work? To me it always looked a few hundred years out of date." He said.

"More than that." Vay replied.

"So get a replacement. You backed up the data didn't you?" and when he saw the expression on Vay's face he knew that the answer was 'no', "Oh Vay, that's' rule number one. Always back up your data."

Vay frowned at him.

"For that I'm leaving you to clean this up." She said as she took the other datapad with her and stormed out of the office.

"Wait Vay." Garm called out as he followed her, "I'm sorry. Look, let me help you. Now where else did you have it."

"Well I had it in the Intelligence section this morning." She replied as they walked along the corridor, "Then I came here to see you and went for lunch."

"Well then it sounds like our next stop is the canteen." Garm said, but Vay shook her head.

"It was packed full of COMPFforce goons." She said, "So I ate out. That place Hanasham's."

Garm sighed.

"Well if you've left it there that's the last you'll see of it."

"Garm I can't lose that datapad." Vay said.

"It was a piece of junk. What's so special about it?"

Vay paused, knowing that telling him the truth would reveal the fact that the fugitive jedi knight that she had obtained it from had been her father and that it contained a partial history of her family stretching back millennia.

"You talking about Hanasham's across the street?" a nearby ISB agent commented as he looked up from his desk.

"That's right. The cantina right opposite the main entrance." Vay replied.

"Then just go and ask then." The agent said, "The guy only hires honest staff. I've spoken to loads of people who left stuff there and got it back. I left a datapad there myself once and when I went back the next day the waitress came right up to me and told me she'd found it."

Garm and Vay looked at one another.

"Maybe you're in luck then." Garm said, "Let's go." And Vay smiled and turned to the other agent.

"Thanks." She said, "You've no idea how important this is."

"You're welcome." He replied and as Garm and Vay continued on their way he called out after Garm, "What if the director comes down here looking for you?" he asked.

"Tell him I'm following up a lead." Garm replied, not even bothering to turn around.

Hanasham's cantina was popular amongst employees of the Imperial capital building mainly because of its location immediately opposite the main entrance. In order to try and keep his customers happy the owner, Corayle Hanasham, maintained a strict humans-only policy when it came to both hiring and serving. Despite this meaning he turned away dozens of potential customers every day the number he instead got from the capital building more than made up for this and when Garm and Vay entered the cantina it could almost be

taken for an Imperial cafeteria given the number of Imperial service uniforms of all branches present.

"Okay so where were you sat?" Garm asked.

"Over there." Vay replied and she pointed to the row of seats around the serving area, picking out an area where three stormtroopers were sat, their helmets on the counter in front of them to reveal their identical faces.

"Wait." Garm said, "I want to see if they takes bites in unison."

Vay frowned and slapped his arm with the back of her hand before heading for the counter. Behind it was a waitress that to Garm looked so young she ought to have been in school at this time of day. On the front of her uniform she wore a name badge that simply read 'CASS'.

"Excuse me." Vay called out as Cass laid out three identical meals in front of the stormtroopers.

"Yes?" Cass replied.

"I was here earlier and I think I may have left my datapad behind." Vay said, "I was told that."

Then before Vay could continue Cass reached beneath her uniform's apron and produced the missing datapad.

"Is this it?" she asked.

"Yes it is." Vay replied, "Thanks. I was starting to worry that I'd never see it again."

"Well now that's done with you've got an office to clean up." Garm said.

"Where did I leave it?" Vay asked the waitress.

"Vay, leave it." Garm said.

"It was on the counter." Cass replied, "I found it there just after you'd left."

Deceit.

Fear.

Confused as she sensed the lie, Vay frowned.

"Yeah. We better get back." She said and then she let Garm lead the way back out into the street.

"That was lucky." Garm said as they waited for a gap in the traffic.

"Uh-huh." Vay replied.

"I thought you'd lost it."

"Uh-huh."

Garm frowned.

"Then what would you store all those videos of us making love on?" he said to test her.

"Uh-huh – wait. What?"

"Ah, so you are listening. What's wrong? You've got your precious antique datapad back so what's the problem now?"

"That waitress." Vay said, "She lied to me. She didn't find the datapad on the counter after I left like she said."

"So where did she find it?" Garm asked.

"That's just it. When she said it was on the counter I didn't sense anything, it was just when she said she found it after I left that she lied."

"Well maybe it was someone else that found it and passed it on to her and she was hoping you'd leave a tip as a thank you if you thought she'd found it." Garm suggested, but Vay shook her head.

"No." She said, "Garm, I think she stole it."

"But that makes no sense." Garm replied, "Why steal an old model like that only to return it?"

"I don't know. But I think we should take a closer look at that waitress."

"I've got a bad feeling about this Vay." Garm said as they returned to his office.

"Why?" she asked.

"Well for starters we're not just supposed to use the security search algorithms for personal use. Internal affairs looks down on that sort of thing." He replied.

"It's not personal though is it?" Vay said, "We're investigating a theft."

"Which technically is the jurisdiction of the local police. Not the Imperial Security Bureau."

"Just do it Garm. For me."

"Okay, okay. But lock the door,"

"Why?"

"Because you trashed my office so there's only one chair left and when someone walks in I don't want them seeing you sat in my lap."

Vay smiled and waved her hand towards the door. As she did so the coloured light that indicated the lock status switched from green to red.

"Okay, let's see what we've got." Garm said as he started up the security search program on his computer. At the same time Vay sat in his lap and wrapped her arms around him.

"I love you Garm."

"I know. Ah, here we go. Let's start with the cantina itself. The names of all the staff should be listed on tax

records.”

”What if he pays them in cash and she doesn’t declare it?” Vay asked.

”Well then we’ve got her on tax evasion.” Garm said, “But the cantina owner should have provided the government with her name for his employer’s taxes.”

”Her name badge said Cass.” Vay said.

”Yes, I saw that. Though I wouldn’t consider it conclusive proof of identity. But there is a C. Jungan listed here as an employee along with a citizen identification number.”

”So is it her?” Vay asked.

”Well according to the number she’s only seventeen, so that fits with the girl we saw. I’ll do a check on who it was issued to. Ah, yes here it is Cass Jungan. Looks like she dropped out of school a couple of years ago. She’s registered as living in sector five with her parents-“ and then Garm stopped suddenly.

”What’s wrong?” Vay asked, turning her head towards the display.

”Her parents are dead.” Garm replied.

”Where does it say that?” Vay asked.

”It doesn’t but I recognise the names. They were rebels. An agent called Kivar infiltrated their cell and led us to them all.”

”Kivar. I’ve heard that name before.” Vay said, “Does he still work for the ISB?”

”No. He’s dead as well.” Garm replied.

”So the rebels caught up with him?”

”Not quite.”

”Ah. He’s the guy you shot. The one that let your father escape.” Vay said and Garm frowned, “Never mind that.” She then said, kissing Garm’s forehead, “Just tell me more about that waitress.”

”There is no more. According to this she should still be living at the same address as she was before her parents were arrested. But there’s no way she could afford that.”

”Well there are plenty of places that take cash for rent.” Vay pointed out.

”Yes and they tend to be just the sort of slum that an unqualified teenage waitress on her own would be able to afford.” Garm added, “I think that we ought to wait and see where she goes when she finishes work.”

2.

"Thanks for the leftovers Corayle." Cass said to her employer, hugging him before collecting her belongings. "Oh you know it's not trouble Cass." He replied, "You take care now, it's getting dark out there."

"I'll be fine." Cass replied, "I'll see you tomorrow at eleven."

"See you then Cass." Corayle said, waving as he watched her leave and then heading back to the kitchen. Meanwhile Cass walking down the steps from the cantina and turned at the bottom, unaware of the two figures watching her from the steps of the capital building.

"Where's she going?" Garm said as Cass ducked behind the cantina.

"Maybe she's not finished. She could be taking out the trash." Vay said.

"She had her coat on and a backpack." Garm said then he added, "Ah." When Cass reappeared on a bicycle and pedalled away from them, "A bike. How quaint." He commented. Then he got to his feet and looked down at Vay, "Come on," he told her, "we can still catch her if we hurry."

They headed for the parking lot where Garm had left his speeder and then set off after Cass, slowing at each junction as they attempted to relocate her.

"How difficult can it be to find a damned kid on a bike?" Garm said as he halted at another junction. The traffic signals were on go and there was a sudden blaring sound from the vehicle behind them. The driver then moved to overtake Garm but as he drew level and leant over to yell obscenities at him he saw the top of the ISB uniform and suddenly looked dead ahead and proceeded on his way.

"There!" Vay yelled, pointing to where Cass was weaving in and out of traffic as it waited at another junction up ahead.

"Okay we've got her." Garm said, "Now let's see how well ISB tailing procedures work when you're following pedal powered transport."

The relatively low speed at which Cass could travel on her bicycle meant that it was inevitable that Garm's landspeeder would end up overtaking her and when this happened the only option was for him to select a side road that he could use to circle back around behind her. Using this technique was risky. If Cass suddenly left the road and entered a building while she was out of sight then Garm and Vay would lose her. Fortunately for them however Cass' journey took her out of the bustling city centre and into one of the more run down residential sectors where block after block of low quality apartments all built to the same pattern lined the streets. Few individuals here could afford transportation of their own and even fewer people from elsewhere would bring their own vehicles here so the streets were fairly quiet. Now able to pull over to the side of the road whenever he wanted to, Garm did just that with each turning so that he and Vay could watch which turning Cass took next. Then Garm would once again drive the speeder after her and pull over when she came back into view. This of course ran the risk that Cass would see the landspeeder if she turned around, but with her mind focused on what was ahead of her she failed to notice that she was being followed right up to the point where she finally dismounted and, pushing her bicycle alongside her she walked up to one of the apartment blocks and went inside.

"Okay this is it." Garm said and he accelerated, driving right up to the front of the building and parking outside the entrance. He and Vay got out of the speeder and approached the door. As they did so they noticed that there was a lock and intercom system fitted to it.

"There aren't any labels." Vay said, "How do we know which button to press to get the building manager?" Garm smiled and just pulled the door open.

"The kid didn't use a key or pause while someone else let her in." he said, "I doubt that's worked in years." Then he held the door open for Vay to enter ahead of him.

"What a dreary place to live." She said as they found themselves in a lobby that was strewn with rubbish, both loose and in bags.

"Huh." Garm responded, "Putting her in prison would probably be a step up." The he spotted the notice taped to the turbolift that read 'OUT OF ORDER', "Speaking of which." He said, "Looks like we're taking the stairs." Vay frowned.

"First a bicycle and now the stairs? Does this waitress have access to any technology that doesn't predate hyperdrives? Internal combustion drives even."

"Now, now Vay. This may actually work to our advantage."

"How?" Vay asked and Garm walked over to the door labelled 'STAIRS' and opened it, "See." He then said, pointing to the stairs themselves.

"What am I looking for?" Vay asked as she approached and stood beside him, "Oh the scuffmarks right?"

"Exactly. If she'd taken the turbolift we'd have had to check every floor to find out which one she got out at. But that bicycle's left us a nice little trail to follow."

Vay looked up the stairwell.

"Well let's just hope she ran out of steps before she ran out of dirt on the wheels." She said and they proceeded to climb the stairs.

The trail of dirt marks on the edge of the stairs led them to the floor Cass' apartment was located on and from there more marks in the grime encrusted floor led right to her front door, clearly marked with the number 614. This was a standard mass produce design that would slide upwards to allow entry. This was a mechanism that made it quite secure since breaking it down would require some to rip the edges of the door out of the runners either side.

"I guess we try knocking." Garm said.

When Cass returned home each day she carried out the same actions in the same order. Firstly she would place her bicycle in the corner where she had laid out a plastic sheet to keep the floor clean and then she would unpack any leftovers given to her by Corayle and put those she was going to eat right away on the table while the rest would go in the fridge. After this she would change out of her uniform and hang it up ready for the next day and it was just as she was finishing off this task that she heard a knock at her front door.

"One minute." She called out, knowing that the lightweight construction of the walls would allow whoever was outside to hear her and then she headed for the door. As was her habit she peered through the spy hole set into the door, but the corridor outside appeared empty. Cass frowned, suspecting a practical joke but then there was another knock and she guessed that whoever was standing outside must be stood out of the viewing angle of the spy hole.

"Who's there?" she asked.

"ISB." Garm replied sternly, "Open up."

Cass gasped.

Fear.

Outside Vay smiled as she felt Cass' reaction even without being able to see her and she pulled her lightsaber from its pouch, holding it up close to her chest but not yet activating it.

"Err, hang on a minute." Cass called out through the door as she backed away and tried to think of a way out. There was the fire escape of course, but she doubted that she would be able to outrun an Imperial agent that way.

In the corridor Garm drew his blaster, looked at Vay and nodded.

"Do it." He said and there was a 'snap-hiss' as she activated her lightsaber. Then she spun around and with two quick vertical strokes sliced a pair of long cuts down the sides of the door before stepping back and shutting off her lightsaber as Garm leapt into position. With most of the door now hanging loose Garm simply delivered a single strong kick to the centre that tore it away and sent it crashing to floor inside the apartment, "Don't move!" he yelled as he aimed his blaster at the clearly terrified Cass and he and Vay burst into her apartment.

"What do you want?" Cass cried out, "I haven't done anything wrong."

"Then you won't mind if I take a look around ill you?" Garm said as he returned his blaster to its holster,

Watch her." He then said to Vay as he began to look around the apartment.

The first thing to catch his attention was an obsolete desktop computer. Connected to this was a docking port for a datapad that looked a lot newer than the computer.

"Where is the datapad for this?" he asked.

"I don't have one." Cass replied, "That was here when I moved in."

"Oh really." Garm said, "Because I'm familiar with how places like this work. Anything left behind when a tenant moves out gets taken by the building management and sold. Let's see what else I can find shall we?" and then he walked towards the bedroom.

"Hey, you can't go in there! That's private!" Cass exclaimed.

"I don't think he does private." Vay commented as Garm stepped into the smaller room. Initially he saw nothing of interest as he looked around and was about to start looking through some of the drawers when he noticed the pictures pinned to the wall beside the bed. One of these showed a younger Cass smiling as she stood with a man and a woman and a young boy while the second showed Cass as she appeared now with a different man and woman. A man who Garm recognised immediately and he tore the image from the wall and tucked it into his pocket before storming out of the bedroom.

"Cass Jungan." He said, "In the name of the Galactic Empire you are under arrest."

"On what charge?" Cass asked as Garm grabbed hold of her and used a set of binders to lock her wrists behind her back.

"Treason." He replied.

Returning to the capital building Garm took Cass to the ISB's interrogation section and then headed to his office while Vay went to the Intelligence offices to explain why she had not returned after walking out to find her lost datapad. When she then went to meet Garm in his office she found him cleaning up some of the

mess she had made earlier.

"I think I'm in trouble." She said.

"You bet you are." Garm replied, "I shouldn't be the one picking all this up."

"Is there anything I can do to make it up to you?"

"Yes, but we can't go home and do that yet. We've got work to do." Garm said and he headed back to his desk where he picked up a file containing sheets of flimsiplast.

"What's in there?" Vay asked, "You haven't said a word about this since you dragged that girl out of her apartment."

"Just you wait." Garm replied, "That girl may just be exactly the break I've been looking for." And he marched out of the office with Vay in tow.

They headed directly for the interrogation section, a set of rooms that were specifically designed for holding prisoners while they could be persuaded or coerced into providing information.

"Which one's she in?" Garm asked the custody officer.

"Number two." The man replied.

"And no one's spoken to her since I brought her in here?"

"No sir. She's been all alone for two and a half hours now."

"Okay, we're going in." Garm said.

"Do you want a droid?" the custody officer asked and he glanced towards a recess in the wall where several spherical black droids were located and Garm paused to think.

Don't let him do that Vay.

The warning in Vay's mind came from within the Force and she instantly recognised it as the spirit of one of her ancestors, Lara Udra, a Jedi knight from thousands of years ago who now seemed to be trying to convince Vay to change her ways. However, Lara's wish for her to prevent Garm from using an interrogation droid on Cass was unnecessary as Garm had already made up his mind.

"No. I think I can manage without one for now." He said and he opened the door to the interrogation room.

Inside the room was almost bare, with completely blank metal walls and little furniture. There was a small table with two chairs behind it that Garm and Vay headed for when the door closed again behind them. Cass meanwhile was sat in a third chair on the opposite side of the table, one that was fixed in place to the floor and included metal restraints that bound her wrists and ankles to it.

"What took so long?" Cass asked as she watched the two agents sit down, "I've been shouting for ages. I need to use the refresher."

"Interrogation cells are sound proofed." Garm said as he laid out his datapad and the file of flimsiplast on the table in front of him, omitting to mention the concealed cameras and microphones that meant every word she had said would have been recorded.

"So the staff outside don't need to put up with all the screaming." Vay added.

"So can I use the refresher please?" Cass asked, wriggling in the chair.

"That's an issue for the custody officer." Garm said, "I will pass on your request when we are finished."

"How long will that take?" Cass asked.

"That rather depends on you." Garm told her and from the file he took one of the photographs he had taken from her apartment wall, the one that showed the younger version of her, "Who are these people?" he asked.

"My parents and my kid brother." Cass replied, "But I don't-"

"Yes your parents. Father Sate Jungan, convicted of treason and executed by hanging," Garm said as he read from his datapad and Cass gasped at the news of her father's death. Then Garm went on, "and Lynn Jungan, also convicted of treason and sentenced to life imprisonment. Took her own life two days after arrival at the labour colony she was sent to."

This stunned Cass. Although she had come to accept the likelihood that her parents were dead the actual news of it, delivered in such a casual manner was a blow.

"And not forgetting Ben Jungan." Garm added, "Made a ward of the courts and passed to COMPNOR to be placed with a suitable family. One was apparently found somewhere in the core. The notes don't say where, but they never do. It's for the good of the child."

Then Garm looked up and stared at Cass as he slid some more pictures from the file. Each of these was a close up of an individual's face and as Garm laid them out he recited the names he had memorised, "Kara Bilstran. Tobis Dorfus. Tharun Verser. Jaysica Horbid. Vorn Larcus the third. Do you know any of these people Cass?" and Cass shook her head rapidly, "What about a man called Mace Grayle?" Garm then asked and when she shook her head again Garm smiled and produced the second picture that he had taken from her wall before laying it out next to the others, "Oh really. Because I know that this man is Mace Grayle and that's you in the image with him. I don't know who the woman is yet but I can assure you that I will soon and it would be a lot easier if you just told me where I can find them all."

"Even if I knew I wouldn't tell you." Cass hissed, "Now untie me and let me go. I've not done anything wrong." Garm glanced at Vay, who shook her head gently to indicate that she sensed no attempt at deception.

"Really?" Garm then said as he looked back at Cass, "So the team that's going through your apartment as we speak won't be finding anything on that computer of yours then? Or maybe some incriminating data held elsewhere?" but Cass just scowled back at him, "Okay." He then continued, "maybe you don't know where these people are, after all why should they trust a mere child with their location? But I'm willing to bet that you've got some way of getting in touch with them. So tell me how you do it and maybe I can convince the Justice Division that you are the victim of their manipulation. Then perhaps you can avoid the same fate that befell your parents."

Then before Cass could respond the door opened to reveal another ISB agent. Garm got up and walked over to the newcomer.

"What?" he asked quietly.

"The field team has emptied the apartment sir. Their initial report has already been transferred to your office."

"Excellent." Garm said and he turned back towards the table, "Vay we're done for now. The field team's done and their report is in. Who knows, we may not even need her to bring this to a satisfactory conclusion."

"So what are we doing with her now?" Vay asked as she got to her feet and Garm looked at Cass.

"Leave her here to reconsider her co-operation." He said, "She may still be able to give us something."

"And if she can't?" Vay then asked.

"Then if she's lucky she spends the rest of her life in a labour camp." Garm answered as he and Vay left the room.

"Hey! You said I could use the refresher when you finished." Cass called out after him.

"Actually I said I would pass on your request." Garm responded and then he closed the door before turning to the custody officer who was still sat at his desk, "Same procedure." He said, "No one goes in or out."

"Agent Larcus!" a voice called out from across the room and Garm and Vay looked around to see another ISB agent stood looking at them with his arms folded across his chest. Garm immediately recognised the man as one of the interrogation specialists and he was surprised to see him still in the building at this time in the evening, "I hear you've got some fresh meat in there." The man said, glancing towards the room where Cass was locked, "How about you let a professional in there to get the information?"

Stop him Vay.

"Feel the need to beat up a little girl?" Vay answered before Garm could say anything and the interrogator frowned.

"Well she seems to be too tough for him." he responded, looking at Garm.

Without speaking Garm walked up to the man and poked his chest.

"You and the rest of your butchers can stay the hell out of this okay? If I need enhanced interrogation I'll use a droid. At least I know they don't enjoy pulling out people's fingernails. Got it?" and he glared right into the interrogator's eyes.

"Yeah. I understand." The man replied and Garm then looked back to the custody officer.

"Remember, no-one in and no-one out. For any reason." He said.

"Yes sir." The custody officer replied before Garm pushed past the interrogator and headed for his office.

3.

"Gods damned Interrogation!" Garm snapped the moment his office door closed behind him and Vay and he marched over to his chair and sat down. Meanwhile Vay picked up the couch cushions from the floor where she had thrown them earlier on and put them back on the couch. Then she lay back on it, looking at Garm. "So what's in the report then?" she asked and Garm opened up the computer file that had recently arrived on his computer.

"Not much." He replied, "The team found no other datapads and no weapons. However, they did say that there were a large number of unused mem-stiks and there was a program on her computer for cloning drives. Initially I'd say she takes the datapads home with her and clones them before returning them. The data stored on them can then be placed on a mem-stik and passed on to the rebellion. Probably a dead drop."

"But no way to find your father?" Vay asked and Garm shook his head.

"No. But I'm certain she knows him. Did you pick up anything in that room?" he replied.

"Fear." Vay answered, "She's afraid of something, but whether its what's going to happen to her or what might happen when she finally breaks I don't know."

Garm leant back in his chair and stared at the report on the display in front of him.

"So will you use an interrogation droid?" Vay said and Garm glared at her.

"On a child? No. And I'm definitely not handing her over to Interrogation, no matter how eager any of them may be to prove themselves by extracting information from her."

"Then what-"

"I don't know." Garm said before Vay could finish her question and he went back to staring at the display.

"You know Garm," Vay then said, "there are other people who are experts at getting information. People who don't use torture."

"You mean Imperial Intelligence?" Garm asked and Vay smiled and nodded, "Vay I need answers quickly. Intelligence may pride itself on being oh so civilised in getting information but by the time they get any we could have died of old age and my father's people will have figured out that something's happened to her. Once that happens they'll just cut their links to her and they'll have got away again." Then he glanced down at his desk where the file of hard copy images had been placed and he noticed that one of them was protruding, "Jaysica Horbid." He said to himself as he took the image from the file.

"What about her?" Vay asked, getting up from the couch and walking over to Garm.

"We met her sister remember?" Garm said.

"Yes I remember. The closest we came to capturing your father's entire unit."

"Jaynie Horbid told us where to find them." Garm said.

"But she was setting us up wasn't she?" Vay asked.

"That's what Intelligence claimed, but you never sensed a thing from her and frankly I trust you more than any of those ubiqtorate spooks."

"Garm, what are you planning?" Vay asked.

"What if we could get Intelligence to tell us where they're holding Jaynie Horbid and we put Cass Jungan in the same cell with her? Give them enough time to get acquainted and then just let Cass go. Tell her that because she's a minor Justice has decided to just give her a warning."

"So far I'm not seeing how this gets us anything but a suspected rebel set free." Vay said.

"What if at the same time as we tell Cass we're letting her go we tell Jaynie that she's going to be transferred to be executed?" Garm continued and Vay smiled as she realised what he was planning.

"Then Cass will likely rush off and tell your father all about it and his team will attempt a rescue." She said.

"Whereupon we capture them all." Garm finished. Then after a moment's pause he looked Vay in the eyes, "Of course I'll need the co-operation of Intelligence." He said, "Which means I could do with help from someone who knows them."

Vay winced.

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

Gayal Tharr, the sector's chief of Imperial Intelligence was just about to leave for the night when she found Vay at her office door.

"What do you want?" she asked, frowning, "If it's about your deciding not to bother returning to your post after lunch then I'm not interested."

"No it's not that." Vay replied, "Garm asked me to come here."

"Ah, Garm Larcus. So that's where you went. I should have just told your supervisor to try checking his office. Rest assured that I'll be raising his behaviour with-

"He wants your help." Vay blurted out suddenly and Gayal just stared at her for a moment. Then she returned to her desk and sat down and leant back in her chair with a smile on her face.

"Oh this is going to be good." She said, "Go on."

"Its about that woman Jaynie Horbid. The one you arrested about six months ago for helping Garm's father escape."

"A traitor." Gayal said, "Forgive me but I don't remember them all. They all sort of blur together after a while."

"Well Garm, I mean we need her."

"You need her? What for exactly?"

"We have a girl in custody that we think is in contact with Garm's father. We want to put them in a cell together and after letting them get to know one another give her the impression that Jaynie Horbid is scheduled for termination and turn her loose. That will draw in Garm's father and his team so we can capture them." Vay explained.

"That's actually not a bad idea." Gayal said, "Risky, but not by much. At worst you end up no worse off than you started." Then she leant forwards again and after turning on her computer accessed the Intelligence database, "Ah, here we go. Jaynie Horbid is still alive and in our custody. She's been held in the holding facility in sector five. It's fully automated so she won't have seen another living being since her incarceration. My guess is that she'll be quite talkative to anyone you put in a cell with her." Then she tapped at the keyboard again before adding, "There, all done. The facility is expecting her to be shipped to them and will put her in the same cell as Miss Horbid. If you have any further requirements then you can come to me and ask. Will that do?"

Vay smiled.

"Yes thanks." And she turned to leave.

"Oh and Miss Udra?" Gayal called out after her.

"Yes?"

"Remember that you do not decide your own assignments. I expect you to be at your correct workstation tomorrow. I doubt the moff will appreciate having to hear about you failing to appear again."

The pair of stern-faced women who came into the interrogation room where Cass was being held did not speak as they released her from the chair. The only thing they told her to do was to remove her clothes and instead put on the rather simple grey dress that they tossed to her. When she had done this they strapped the elements of a magna harness around her body and activated the fields to pin her arms to her sides before removing her from the room.

They took her via turbolift to a parking lot where an unmarked repulsorvan waited. The back of this contained another plain chair into which Cass was pushed before the magna harness also pinned her legs together and held her completely immobile.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked, but instead of answering the two women got out of the vehicle and slammed the rear doors shut, plunging Cass into darkness before she felt it start to move.

Cass had no idea of how far or for how long the repulsorvan travelled, but when the doors finally opened again there was a bright light shining directly into her eyes and she blinked before she felt the force holding her legs together vanish.

"The prisoner will disembark." An electronically filtered voice called out.

"Hello?" Cass called out.

"The prisoner will disembark." The voice repeated and Cass struggled to her feet, feeling unbalanced without the use of her arms. Then she walked to the very back of the truck and was finally able to see where she was. The room looked to have been designed by the same person that had designed the interrogation cell where she had spent several hours, with plain metal plated walls and no sign of any human comforts. The only figures that Cass could see were a pair of spindly droids marked with the Imperial symbol on their chests and as Cass stood at the back of the van one of them suddenly reached out and dragged her from it.

"Hey!" she exclaimed, "I was getting out."

The second droid promptly fixed a metal collar around Cass' throat that featured several tiny probes that stuck into her skin. Then before she could speak further she felt a sudden jolt of electricity coursing through her and she doubled over.

"Orders will not be repeated. Punishment will be instant." One of the droids stated and as Cass straightened up the other one spoke.

"You are prisoner four six four nine. Repeat."

Cass paused and all of a sudden she felt another shock as powerful as the first.

"Four six four nine." She gasped.

"Your cell has been assigned." The first droid then said and Cass found herself being pushed towards a nearby door.

The building that the droids escorted her through was eerily quiet and Cass did not see another single living being, either prisoner or guard. Instead every duty station she saw was operated by another droid identical to

the ones either side of her. The droids communicated with one another as they proceeded, but they did so in binary code and Cass had no idea of what they were saying to one another. This continued until they reached another door that looked the same as every other one in the building and the droids paused. There was a buzzing sound and the door slid open to reveal another plain looking room beyond, but within this room was the only other human being Cass had seen so far. About the same size as Cass this woman was stood with her back to the door and wore a dress identical to the one Cass wore, complete with a shock collar and magna harness that was not active for the time being.

"Four two three seven remain still. Do not speak." One of the droids said as Cass was dragged into the cell. They stood her right beside the other woman and it was then that Cass saw that there was a line painted on the floor here.

"Four six four nine you will stand here whenever the buzzer sounds. You will not speak or move away without permission or until it sounds again." A droid explained and then Cass felt them let go of her and heard them walking back to the door. The door slid shut again and moments later the buzzer sounded again and Cass felt the magna harness release her arms.

Immediately the other woman turned and threw her arms around Cass.

"Whoa!" Cass exclaimed.

"I'm sorry. It's just I haven't seen another person in – in – How long have I been here?" the woman said as she let go of Cass.

"Well when were you brought here?" Cass asked.

"Twenty-three four."

"Wow. That was over six months ago." Cass replied, "My name's Cass by the way." and she smiled.

The other woman smiled back nervously and for a moment Cass thought she recognised her, but could not put a name to the face or remember where she had seen it.

"Jaynie. And you have no idea how happy I am to see you Cass. I thought I was going to spend the rest of my life in here alone."

"Why are you here by the way?" Cass then asked and Jaynie frowned.

"Because of my worthless nerf-herding sister, that's why." Jaynie replied angrily, "She decided to join the kriffing rebellion and the Empire accused me of helping her. If I ever see her again I'm going to kill her. I swear I am." Then she hung her head, "Only that's never going to happen is it?" she said as she looked up again, "Because neither of us is ever getting out of here." And then she slumped down onto the floor and held her head in her hands as she sobbed.

Cass sat down beside Jaynie and put an arm around her.

"The Empire thinks I know rebels as well." She said, "What can you tell me about your sister?" she then added, worried that she knew why Jaynie looked so familiar.

"She's never been anything but trouble." Jaynie replied, "Even when we were kids. She was always breaking stuff. When she got drafted into the militia I thought I was rid of her. By the time she'd completed her service I'd have been away at university but she got herself arrested and joined the rebellion when she escaped."

"What's her name?" Cass asked, now even more concerned.

"Jaysica." Jaynie said, snarling and Cass' heart skipped a beat as she realised that this woman was the sister of one of the rebels she had got to know so well, "Why?"

"Oh I don't know." Cass lied, "I just thought that maybe you'd feel better if you talked about it."

"Huh." Jaynie snorted, "Well what about you? Who does the Empire think you know?"

"It was my parents." Cass said, lying again. She felt sorry for Jaynie, but she was scared of what the woman may do if she discovered that she was friends with Jaysica.

4.

Mace Grayle had walked from the monorail terminal to the apartment building with a bag of items that he and the rest of his unit thought Cass could use. Mainly this consisted of foods that they knew the girl would not be able to afford by herself, but there were also several items of clothing that they had acquired in her size as well as some extra cash.

Knowing that both the building's front door security system and turbolift were out of order he simply went inside and climbed the stairs to the sixth floor. Exiting the stairwell he turned down the corridor where Cass' apartment was located and then he suddenly froze when he saw her front door torn open and tape marking it as crime scene strung across it.

"Cass!" he exclaimed as he dropped the bag and rushed to the open doorway and looked into the apartment, worried that Cass had been hurt. Ripping the tape from the doorway he entered the apartment and despite the mess that had been left behind he was relieved to see that there was no signs of blood or the scorch marks left behind by blasterfire.

Mace turned and rushed back out of the apartment, scooping up the bag as he headed back for the stairs and ran down them as quickly as he could. On the first floor he went directly to the apartment where Cass had told him the building superintendent lived and banged his fist on the door until it slid open.

"What the kriff do you want?" the tired looking man who answered it asked. Then he blinked and after looking directly at Mace he added, "Hey, who the hell are you?"

"Where's the girl from six fourteen?" Mace demanded, "Tell me what happened to her."

"Six fourteen? Oh her. The cops came and took her away."

"The cops?" Mace repeated.

"Yeah. ISB as well I think and let me tell you it's caused me nothing but trouble. You think my residents want them poking about the building? Some of them ran off the moment the first cop speeder showed up and I'm expecting more to run tonight. How am I supposed to make my quota if people leave without paying their rent? Who is she to you anyway?"

"Just a friend." Mace replied.

"A friend?" the superintendent commented as he looked Mace up and down, noting that he was at least twenty years older than Cass, "Oh like that is it? Well if you're interested I know of some other people here with daughters that they'll-" but he never got to finish his sentence as Mace head butted him and as he staggered backwards followed this up with a punch to the face and then a knee to his groin.

"You worthless sack of poodoo." Mace said, snarling then he turned and leaving the bleeding man curled up in a ball on the floor he ran for the front door of the building. As he burst out he pulled his comlink from his pocket and activated it, "Major, Cass is in trouble." He said into the device, "Big trouble."

Garm sighed when he opened the door to his office the next morning and was reminded that he had not finished cleaning up the mess that Vay had made the previous day. Tiptoeing through it he made his way to his desk and sat down to check the messages that had come in for him.

As expected one of these originated from the Imperial Intelligence detention facility in sector five of the capital city and had been forwarded to him by Vay. The bulk of the message was made up of audio recordings along with an automatically generated transcript file but there was also a short message from Vay accompanying it.

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GARM,  
GAYAL DOESN'T WANT ME ANYWHERE NEAR THIS CASE BUT AT LEAST I AS ABLE TO CONVINC  
SUPERVISOR TO LET ME SEND YOU THIS WITHOUT ANY EDITING.  
LOVE VAY
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Garm smiled at the thought of the means that Vay would have used to 'convince' her supervisor to allow her to send him the communication and opened the transcript file first. Being a simple text document it was easier to search for any keywords that could help him in his pursuit of his father. There was always the possibility, no matter how slim, that Cass and Jaynie would have spoken about details that would allow him to proceed without their help at all. But after searching by the names of the rebels he was looking for he found only a mention of Jaysica Horbid and that had been by Jaynie rather than Cass who had not mentioned any direct connection with the rebellion at all.

Fortunately however, this was exactly what Garm needed. Now Cass knew that Jaynie was her friend's sister and could hopefully be counted on to pass along information regarding her captivity. Activating his desktop communicator, Garm put in a call to Gayal Tharr.

"What?" Gayal's voice said as the connection was made.

"It's Agent Larcus, I've just taken a look at the transcripts from sector five and I think that we can proceed to the next stage."

"Excellent. I'll send someone out there now to arrange the release." Gayal replied.

"And I'll organise a strike force to—"

"No need Agent Larcus." Gayal interrupted, "IntSec is quite capable of handling this. I had a team put together last night."

Garm was well aware that Imperial Intelligence had its own internal security branch known as IntSec and he was also aware that within Intelligence they were regarded as something of a joke. Though whether that reputation was deserved was another matter. What worried Garm however was not that Gayal wanted to use IntSec, but that she had made arrangements to do so already and without consulting him. To Garm it appeared that she was attempting to grab the glory of his father's capture for Imperial Intelligence.

"This is not an Intelligence operation Miss Tharr." Garm pointed out.

"It's not ISB either." Gayal replied, "Now I've got a team ready to go. If you want to go along and observe as well that's just fine. But I see no need to waste time while you go through the procedure of organising an alternative force."

Garm frowned, relieved that he had opted for an audio only transmission so that she could not see the look on his face.

"Very well then." Garm said, "Just let me know where and when to meet your men."

"They're in the briefing room on level two already." Gayal said, "But just remember Agent Larcus, they have their own chain of command and you're not part of it. You'll be there just as an observer." And then the line went dead.

"I've got a bad feeling about this." Garm then said to himself.

With the only features of the cell being the door, the line on the floor and a simple hole to one side that served as a latrine, Cass and Jaynie had spent the night huddled together in a corner and it was only when the buzzer sounded that they awoke.

"Quickly!" Jaynie snapped, "We have to be in place when the droids arrived." And as she rushed for the line she dragged Cass along with her.

"What do they want?" Cass asked.

"It's probably just breakfast." Jaynie replied, "Remember don't speak unless they speak to you first."

With both Cass and Jaynie standing on the line and facing away from the door there was a hissing sound as it opened. This was then followed by the sound of footsteps. But they were not the sharp sounds of metal on metal from a droid entering with food for the prisoners; it was the softer sound of boot heels and moments later there was the sound of someone breathing.

"Four six four nine." A woman's voice said.

"Yes?" Cass asked when she realised that the voice was addressing her.

"The justice department has decided that due to the available evidence and your young age no further action will be taken against you. I am here to process your release. Turn around."

At first Cass just looked over her shoulder, but she turned when she realised that the droid standing in the doorway was holding the clothes that she had been wearing when she had been arrested the previous evening. The uniformed woman stepped aside and pointed Cass towards the door. Then as Cass started to walk towards it Jaynie also turned to face the woman.

"But what about me?" she asked, "I haven't done—" but before she could finish the droid by the door triggered her collar and she collapsed as she felt the electric shock.

"Your termination had been scheduled." The woman said, looking down at Jaynie, "You will be transferred to the prison at Krivan City at thirteen hundred hours tomorrow where you will be hanged."

"What?" Jaynie exclaimed, "But you can't! I'm innocent!" And then the droid triggered her collar once more.

As Jaynie lay on the floor screaming Cass was led from the room and handed her clothes which she was relieved to see had been cleaned overnight.

"Get changed." The woman agent told her, "Then you are free to go."

"What about Jaynie?" Cass asked, "Are you really going to execute her?"

"I am not here to discuss any cases. Now hurry up or I'll just have you ejected onto the street as you are."

As it turned out although Cass' captors were serious about releasing her they had no intention of providing her with transport home and with no money she found herself having to walk all the way home. All the way there she thought about Jaynie, apparently doomed to be executed in a day and she thought about what she could do to prevent it.

The answer it seemed was nothing, she had no weapons and even if she did have there was no way she could break into a fortified Imperial prison, overcome all the security droids and then escape with Jaynie. To do that would need a rescue team with combat experience and a knowledge of Imperial tactics. Then Cass

suddenly came to a halt and smiled. She may lack the weapons and experience to stage a rescue, but she knew of people who had both. Then she began to run, wanting to get home as fast as she could. A new door had been fitted to her apartment when she finally got back and inside she found that her belongings were now simply lay wherever the Imperial agents who had returned them had chosen to dump them. Amongst these Cass found the tin that she stored her money in and was relieved to find that the contents were as she had left them. Taking this money she then grabbed her bicycle and began to push it from the apartment building. As soon as she was outside she headed for the nearest monorail terminal.

Odras Balve was a dangerous man. He had acquired the level of power and influence he wielded in the underworld by killing anyone who got in his way, whether they were rival criminals or government investigators. However, when Mace Grayle and Vorn Larcus had wanted to set up a method for Cass to get in contact with them he had been the only choice. Mace owed Odras a lot of money, so much that it would be unlikely that he would ever be out of debt in fact. This meant that the pair were in regular contact and messages from Cass could be passed onto the rebels if it was made worth Odras' while. Though Odras could be counted on to do as he was paid to, the rebels had given Cass one simple warning about dealing with him. Never accept the offer of credit.

Normally Cass would contact Odras by means of a video link. But on this occasion she felt that the message was too urgent for her to wait for a response and so she instead decided that the time had come for her to go and deliver her message to him in person. From the communication address provided she knew that he resided some distance from the capital, but although an airspeeder or sub orbital flight would be far quicker both modes of transport were more costly and often required documents that Cass did not have. Therefore the monorail was her only choice and so with a long distance ticket purchased she loaded her bicycle aboard the monorail car and took a seat.

When she disembarked from the monorail Cass did not like the look of her surroundings. The buildings were generally run down and the streets looked as though they had not been cleaned in a long time. Even the slums where she had lived for the past couple of years had a more welcoming feel than this place did and Cass looked around nervously as she searched for a functional public information terminal.

When she finally found one she entered Odras' communication address and ran a search to give her a physical location. This pointed her to a cantina located not far from the local docking bays and Cass set off on her bicycle.

The cantina itself looked very much the same as the rest of the buildings in the area and Cass began to worry about being here.

"Get a hold of yourself." She said to herself as she looked at the cantina from across the street, "You came hundreds of kilometres to be here, you can't chicken out now."

Then she took a deep breath and crossed the street before heading into the cantina.

Inside the building was packed with customers and Cass struggled to make her way towards the bar with her bicycle.

"Hey watch out!" one man yelled at her as she accidentally knocked into him.

"Sorry." She replied as she continued on her way, avoiding making eye contact with him or anyone else.

When she reached the bar the man behind glared at her as she rested her bicycle up against the bar, apologising to the alien on the stool next to her. In return it made some statement that Cass could not even identify any words in.

"He doesn't like you." The barman told her. Then he added, "What do you want?"

"I need to speak with Odras Balve." She replied and the barman scowled.

"Mister Balve doesn't talk to children." He said sternly.

"But he knows me." Cass said and she placed some of the money she had left on the bar, "Look, I can pay." She added.

"You better have more than that." The barman said and he pushed all but a couple of coins back towards her.

Then he took the rest and set a bottle of beer down on the bar in front of her.

"Err, I'm not old enough." Cass commented as the barman turned away.

"Do I look like I check IDs?" the barman asked, "Now stay put and have your drink while I go get Mister Balve."

Cass stared at the open bottle, remembering her last encounter with alcohol that had made her feel very unwell and she was just considering whether to try it again when a small group of beings emerged from a door behind the bar. One of these was a massive wookiee that towered over the other two, while the second was the barman. However, it was the third of these that attracted Cass' attention. This man was Odras Balve.

"Get in here!" he hissed at Cass, walking up to her and dragging her from the bar.

"But my bike-" she began.

"Take care of that." Odras told the barman as he pulled Cass into his office and then his wookiee bodyguard closed the door behind them, "Now what the kriff are you doing here?" he demanded.

"I need to get a message to Mace. It's urgent." Cass explained.

"Oh urgent is it? And does this have anything to do with why Mace was here last night asking if I'd heard from you? Apparently he and his friends are rather keen to track you down. And that young lady makes you a valuable commodity."

"I should go." Cass said and she turned to leave but found her way blocked by the wookiee, who roared as he looked down at her.

"You stay right here until I say otherwise." Odras said, "Now tell me what's going on and I'll decide how expensive it's going to be and trust me it will be expensive for someone."

"It's about Jaysica's sister Jaynie. The Empire has her and they're going to execute her tomorrow if we can't stop them." Cass told him.

"Oh really? And how exactly did you come about this piece of information? I doubt the Empire includes children on their on their distribution list for execution notices. Except for SAGroup of course."

"They arrested me." Cass said, "I shared a cell with her until they let me go."

"They let you go?" Odras exclaimed as he leapt to his feet, "Then you came right here? Damn you you'll bring the Empire down on my head." And he stormed to the door leading back to the bar, opened it and waved to someone. A few seconds later a woman appeared in the doorway, "Get this kid out of here." Odras told her, looking at Cass, "Stash her somewhere safe and burn all her clothes. She may be tagged."

"Understood Mister Balve." The woman said.

"Go out the back." Odras added and the wookiee bodyguard then pulled Cass towards a door located on the far side of Odras' office.

5.

Vorn Larcus the third walked up the access ramp of the light freighter the *Silver Hawk* and headed into the lounge where the other members of his rebel field team and the ship's crew were waiting for him.

"Well Lord Desh hasn't heard anything about a teenage girl being arrested." He announced, "The Empire may have used the local cops to help secure the area around Cass' apartment but they sure didn't let them know what they were doing there."

"So combined with neither Odras or Jenessa having heard anything before she got dragged off we've got no idea why she was taken or where she was taken to." Mace commented.

"This is my fault." Vorn said as he sat down beside Kara and she placed an arm around him, "I should have just evacuated her when we first found her. Leaving her here was a mistake."

"But not yours boss." Kara replied as she wrapped an arm around him and leant her head on his shoulder.

"Yeah she was pretty insistent about being an active part of the Alliance." Mace pointed out.

"Which isn't something that either General Kain or Colonel Sallir would have tolerated." Tharun pointed out as he sipped at a drink.

"So I suppose we'll be trying to find out where the Empire's taken her then?" Jaysica asked but before Vorn could answer a gold coloured protocol droid came shuffling from the direction of the cockpit.

"Oh Major Larcus sir, thank goodness you are back." The droid called out.

"What is it Jeeves?" Vorn asked.

"Mister Odras Balve is calling for Captain Grayle and yourself sir." The droid answered, "He seems rather impatient even for him."

"Err, doesn't he have a lot customers in the Imperial military?" Tobis asked, "Maybe someone's leaked the location of Cass to him." and all of the rebels leapt to their feet and rushed to the cockpit, pushing past Jeeves as they went.

"Well really Harvey." Jeeves said to the R5 astromech droid that remained in the lounge with him, "You'd think that at least one of them would say 'Excuse me'." But the astromech just made a rude sounding noise in reply.

In the cockpit Mace and Vorn sat in the front two seats and looked at the display showing Odras' face.

"Ah Mace my good friend." Odras said, "I'm so glad to speak with you again so soon."

"You can dispense with the pleasantries Balve." Mace replied, "What have you heard?"

"Heard? You expect a professional like me to deal with mere rumours? I have your precious little waitress herself."

"Oh you piece of-" Kara exclaimed before Vorn interrupted her.

"Where is she?" he asked.

"Somewhere safe." Odras answered.

"Hand her over Balve." Mace said sternly.

"Why of course, I wouldn't have it any other way." Odras said and then he grinned.

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

"Though I will need to be suitably compensated for my time and effort." Odras said.

"Oh here it comes." Tharun said.

"How much?" Mace asked.

"Let's say ten thousand for such a prompt service." Odras answered and Mace looked at Vorn who in return shook his head.

"I've got four with me. I know I could get the rest if we had the time to get back to headquarters though." He said softly.

"I've got less than a grand." Mace added.

"I tell you what," Odras said as the microphone picked up this exchange, "for five thousand credits you can have the message that the waitress wanted you to have so urgently she risked bringing the Empire down on my operation and she can stay here with me and work off the other five. Plus fees and interest naturally."

"No chance." Mace replied angrily.

"Then we are at something of an impasse." Odras said, "Unless of course you'd like to simply add the outstanding amount to your account Mace. I won't even charge you the usual fee for such an adjustment."

"Mace you-" Vorn began but Mace cut him off.

"Deal." He snapped, "So where is she Balve?"

On the display the image of Odras smiled again.

"Meet me outside bay twelve." He said, "You can bring as many of your friends and whatever weapons you want. I'll be bringing plenty of both." And then the screen went blank.

Bay twelve was located on the edge of the cluster of docking bays Odras had set up his headquarters close to and when the rebels got there they found it empty.

"So she's obviously not aboard a ship here." Tharun commented as he swung his heavy blaster rifle around, using its scope to get a better view of the rooftops.

"No but she is close by." Odras' voice called out from by the entrance to the docking bay and the rebels all turned to see him standing there surrounded by an assortment of armed thugs including his wookiee bodyguard. Instinctively the rebels brought up their weapons and Odras' thugs did the same, "Wait!" Odras yelled.

"Have you men lower their weapons." Vorn ordered as he aimed his rifle directly at Odras.

"You first I think." Odras replied, "After all if you shoot me then you'll never get what you want."

Vorn sighed and lowered his rifle.

"Do as he says." He said and the rebels all lowered their weapons.

"Very good." Odras said and he waved at his men to do the same. Then he saw Kara standing beside Vorn and noticed her bulging stomach, "Well, well so it is true." He said and looking at Vorn he added,

"Congratulations. So now I know why Mace was so reluctant to turn her over to me when she was yours."

And both Kara and Vorn scowled at him. Then Odras turned his attention back to Mace, "So you have your down payment?" he asked.

Mace reached under his jacket and took out a small bag stuffed with the five thousand credits in cash the rebels had been able to gather together and he tossed it to Odras, who caught it one-handed.

"Five thousand. You can count it." Mace said.

"That's okay I trust you." Odras replied as he stuffed the bag into his jacket and when his hand reappeared it held a key card that he tossed back at the rebels, "Your friend is there." He said before he turned and walked out of the docking bay.

As his men followed him the rebels scabbled to recover the card from where it had landed and they saw that it bore the name of a nearby hotel and the room number.

"Come on let's go." Mace said.

"But what about our weapons?" Jaysica asked, holding up her carbine, "They stand out don't you think?"

"Nobody cares around here little lady." Tharun said.

"My guess is that the hotel owner is one of Odras' customers." Mace then added, "Now let's get moving."

Although a few heads turned as the heavily armed rebels walked into the hotel and headed for the turbolifts there were no alarms or calls for someone to contact the authorities and the rebels' progress up to the room indicated by the key card was unimpeded. In fact the entire floor that the room was on appeared deserted.

"Do we knock?" Jaysica asked.

"No." Mace replied as he leant his long barrelled rifle up against the wall beside the door and drew his heavy blaster pistol, "Remember Cass could be in here." He said as he adjusted the setting on the pistol, "So set for stun all of you." Then as the others also adjusted their weapons he inserted the key card into the lock and when the door slid open he burst into the room, "Cass!" he yelled as he saw her at the other end of the room.

Wearing just a robe her arms and legs were taped to a chair while another piece of tape had been used to gag her. Mace rushed across the room and tore the tape from her mouth, allowing her to spit out the cloth that had been wedged in behind it.

"Ow." She said, "That really hurt."

"Did they hurt you?" Mace asked as he began to tear away the tape binding her to the chair. Then before waiting for a reply he looked around and added, "Kara get over here and check her out."

"Hey I'm okay." Cass the replied, "In fact this chair is far more comfortable than the last two I was tied to."

"Where are your clothes?" Jaysica asked as she looked around.

"Burned I think. That Odras guy reckoned they could have been bugged by the Empire."

"Look, I love for us to catch up here but just in case the Empire is keeping tabs on Cass I'd rather we got back to the *Silver Hawk* and she can fill us all in there." Vorn said.

Then as Mace helped Cass to her feet she threw her arms around him.

"I knew you'd come for me." She said.

Returning to the *Silver Hawk*, Cass was given some of Jaysica's clothes to wear before she told them of how she had been arrested, imprisoned and then released and also how she had heard Jaynie being told that she was to be executed.

"Major we have to go and rescue her." Jaysica said to Vorn.

"It's not that simple." Mace said.

"It was when it was Cass we were dealing with." Jaysica protested.

"That's not what I mean." Mace replied.

"But they're going to kill her." Jaysica said.

"Better her than me." Kara commented and then she looked at Vorn, "I'll be in my bunk." She said to him.

"Kara stay put." Vorn replied and he grabbed hold of her before she could stand up.

"Major you're not really thinking about going through with this are you?" Tharun asked, "She is a collaborator after all."

"But she's my sister." Jaysica said, "So I'm going to try and rescue her whatever you say and Tobis is as well aren't you?" and she looked around at Tobis.

"What?" he replied, "Oh, err, well of course."

"Whipped." Tharun commented.

"So whipped." Kara agreed.

"Jaysica I want you to go and check the likely routes from the holding facility to the prison where they'll be carrying out the execution." Vorn said, "I'll be explaining my plan to the others."

A wide smile appeared on Jaysica's face and she got up and ran towards the cockpit. Watching her leave Vorn waited until she appeared to be out of earshot and then looked at the rest of the team.

"It's a trap." He said.

"Oh so much a trap." Mace said.

"What?" Cass asked, "But how do you know?"

"Because the Empire hasn't already put you and Jaysica's sister up against a wall and shot you kiddo." Tharun replied.

"I'm sorry Cass but Tharun's right." Mace added, "The Empire wouldn't just let you go after a few hours. They'd hold onto you until you broke and then kill you. They wanted you to get away so you'd come to us."

"But the agents who-" Cass began.

"One of them was probably my son." Vorn said.

"And junior is obsessed with capturing the boss." Kara then said.

"Err, does this mean that we're not going?" Tobis asked.

"Yes." Kara replied.

"No." Mace responded to this.

"But-" Kara began.

"Kara, Jaysica is our friend." Vorn interrupted and Kara frowned.

"He's got you there mom." Tharun said and Kara's frown deepened as he reminded her that technically his marriage to Vorn's daughter and her marriage to Vorn made her his mother-in-law despite her being more than a decade younger than him.

"Five of us will hit the prison transport." Vorn said.

"Five?" Cass asked.

"I want Kara to stay here." Vorn replied.

"I'm fine with that by the way." Kara said.

"But that still leaves six of us." Cass said, "Oh wait, you can't be thinking of leaving me-"

"Yes we are." Mace interrupted, "No way am I putting you in harm's way. You can stay here with Kara and keep an eye on the ship."

"Actually we'll need the *Silver Hawk* on standby to pick us up," Vorn said, "If this is a trap-"

"Which we've already decided it is." Tharun said.

"We're going to need an evacuation the moment it's sprung." Vorn finished.

"Oh, err, what about Jaysica?" Tobis asked, "What if, well, what if she won't leave?"

"Then we either drag her back aboard or we stun her and carry her." Tharun replied.

"Oh. Right." Tobis said.

The buzzer sounded in Jaynie's cell, but she did not get to her feet and move to stand on the painted line. Instead she remained huddled in the corner and shook her head as the cell door slid open and a pair of the guard droids entered.

"Four two three seven will stand on the line." One of them announced.

"No!" Jaynie yelled, "You can't do this. I haven't done anything wrong."

"Four two three seven will stand on the line." The droid repeated and then Jaynie screamed as her collar was triggered.

"I won't! You can't make me!" she called out.

"Four two three seven will be removed by force." The droid said and all of a sudden Jaynie felt the magna harness pin her arms to her side and her legs together.

"No!" she cried out as the droids advanced and lifted her from the floor. She tried to struggle free, but without the use of any of her limbs it was hopeless.

The droids then carried her between them out of the cell and to a nearby room where two Imperial intelligence security agents waited.

"No you can't do this!" Jaynie cried out again and one of the agents winced.

"Can't you do something to shut her up?" he asked.

"Confirmed, a muzzle can be provided." A droid answered.

"Then do it." The agent said and Jaynie's protests were suddenly silenced as the droids gagged her, "Now come on." The agent then said, "The van's waiting outside."

6.

From the roof of a building that overlooked the Imperial Intelligence holding facility Mace, Tharun and Vorn observed it through their macrobinoculars.

"That'll be the transport." Tharun said as a repulsorvan pulled up outside the entrance.

"Are they going inside?" Jaysica asked from behind them.

"No." Vorn replied, "They look to be staying put."

"But why would they do that?" Jaysica then asked.

"Because they're bringing her out." Tharun replied as he saw Jaynie being brought out of the building.

"Let me see." Jaysica exclaimed and she snatched Tharun's macrobinoculars from his grip. Looking through them she saw her sister held fast in a magna harness and with her face below her nose obscured by a large muzzle.

"They're showing her off to us." Mace commented.

"Yes they are." Vorn replied and he looked up into the sky. Spying two specks in the distance he examined them more closely through his macrobinoculars, "Ah, there we are. Two airborne cargo carriers. I'll wager that each one's carrying Imperial troops instead of cargo."

"Then why not just bring in the Silver Hawk to shoot them down?" Jaysica asked.

"Because Kara can't fly the ship and shoot its laser cannon at the same time." Mace pointed out.

"But I thought that Cass-" Jaysica began before Mace interrupted her.

"Look, I may have given her a few flying lessons but she's no combat pilot." He said.

"They're moving out." Vorn said suddenly as he lowered his macrobinoculars back towards the replusorvan and saw it begin to move.

"Okay let's get going." Mace said, "We need to keep up with them."

From the cockpit of one of the cargo carriers Garm looked down to where the repulsorvan was making its way to the prison where Jaynie believed she would be put to death. From this altitude the vehicle would normally have been a tiny invisible spec, but an infrared strobe had been mounted to the roof of the repulsorvan and Garm along with the crews of the carriers had been issued with goggles sensitive to such emissions. Therefore he could keep track of the repulsorvan easily.

All of a sudden the regular flashing ceased and Garm searched for it.

"What happened?" he demanded.

"Its just tree cover." The pilot replied, "This area's thick with it. Don't worry though, if the rebels try anything here it won't do them any good."

Garm frowned, not as sure as the Imperial Intelligence man.

As soon as the repulsorvan entered the wooded area the rebels in their stolen cargo skiff accelerated. Being an open-topped vehicle the skiff allowed all the rebels to direct their weapons towards the van as they closed in. Only Mace did not take aim, he was stood at the back of the skiff at its control column.

"Closer!" Tharun called out as he lined up his rifle on one of the repulsorvan's drive units.

"If I get much closer we'll be sitting in the back of that thing." Mace replied and then there was a sudden flash of light as Tharun opened fire.

The Blastech A280 was regarded as one of the most powerful blaster rifles in the galaxy and when the high-energy bolt struck the drive unit it blew it apart. Immediately the repulsorvan rocked and there were sparks as one corner began to drag along the road.

"Tobis how are we doing?" Vorn asked.

"Oh, err, their transmissions are jammed major." He replied as he looked up from the crude device he had wired into the skiff's own communicator.

"Hopefully that will buy us some time then." Vorn said just before Tharun fired again and a second of the repulsorvan's drive units exploded. Now the damaged vehicle collapsed on one side entirely and then just dropped to the ground as the driver gave up trying to keep it moving.

"Go!" Vorn shouted and as soon as Mace brought the skiff to a halt he jumped down from it and rushed towards the front of the repulsorvan with his rifle tucked into his shoulder. As soon as he saw the two crewmen through the windows of the repulsorvan's cab he opened fire, firing a short burst towards them. But the repulsorvan was armoured against small arms fire and although the side window was left distorted and blackened from the intense heat it remained intact.

"Allow me major." Tharun said from just behind him and he aimed his heavier rifle for the same spot that Vorn had targeted. Tharun had his rifle set to fully automatic now and when he pulled the trigger he held it back. The already damaged window blocked the first two shot before it exploded inwards and the nearest man

screamed as the molten transparisteel sprayed over him. Then his screams were silenced as Tharun kept firing and both he and his comrade were hit.

Meanwhile Tobis and Jaysica also jumped down from the skiff. But they headed for the back of the repulsorvan, where the door to its transport compartment could be found. Tobis fired his carbine at the lock and it exploded in a shower of sparks. Jaysica then grabbed hold of some of the exposed wires and squealed as she found out how hot they still were. She blew on her fingers and shook them, then took hold of the now slightly cooled wires and began pressing exposed ends together until she found the correct pair to release the doors.

"Jaynie!" she called out as the doors swung open, but her jaw dropped and her eyes widened when she saw what was within the back of the replusorvan. As expected her sister sat in a chair fixed to the floor, still bound and gagged, but either side of her stood three assassin droids.

"Oh kriff." She said.

"The rebels are making their move." The pilot of the cargo carrier said as he saw the flashes of blasterfire from beneath the trees.

"Then take us in." Garm told him.

"Already going." The pilot replied and he activated the intercom, "All troops standby to disembark." He said.

"Jaysica get down!" Tobis called out and he dived into her, knocking her over just in time to prevent the burst of fire from one of the droids' built in blasters from taking her head off.

The first of the assassin droids jumped out of the back of the repulsorvan and Mace gasped when he saw the armoured killing machine. Without hesitating he accelerated, taking the skiff directly forwards and ramming it into the droid as well as another that chose that moment to emerge from the repulsorvan beside it.

Mace then leapt of the skiff as the remaining assassin droids opened fire in unison and the lightweight vehicle was ripped apart.

"Run!" he yelled as he grabbed hold of both Jaysica and Tobis and pulled them back to their feet.

"What's happening?" Vorn asked as he and Tharun turned around to face the commotion. But before anyone could warn them about the assassin droids one of the deadly machines that Mace had run over tore its way out from under the wreck of the skiff and stood in front of them.

"Oh kriff." Tharun exclaimed as he opened fire on the droid. It rocked under the impacts and one of its arms was blown off. But the droid still had a second arm with weapons built into it and it raised this and returned fire.

"Get to the trees!" Vorn ordered as the rebels scattered. Tharun's attack had damaged the droid's targeting system it seemed and it now appeared to be unable to track moving targets in real time, the blasts it fired falling short each time. However, behind it the other droids were smashing their way out of the repulsorvan. Making it to the tree line the rebels took cover as the assassin droid behind kept on firing and its shots tore up the undergrowth. Then from the open ground further ahead of them they heard the sound of replusorlift engines as the two cargo carriers came in to land.

"Okay we're leaving." Vorn said.

"But what about Jaynie?" Jaysica asked, "We can't leave her."

"Watch us little lady." Tharun responded as he fired a quick burst at the already damaged assassin droid.

"Jaysica we've got assassin droids behind us and Imperial troops ahead of us. We can't stay." Mace added and Jaysica just stared at him, open-mouthed. Meanwhile Vorn took out his comlink and activated it.

"Kara we're ready." He transmitted, "Be advised there are two targets on the ground."

"Copy that boss." Kara's voice replied, "We're coming in."

"Shall I take the controls?" Cass asked from the co-pilot's seat beside Kara.

"What for?" Kara responded.

"Well so you can get to the turret. How else will you shoot it?"

"No offence kid but you're not a professional pilot." And then when Cass opened her mouth to speak again Kara added, "Don't worry I don't need the laser cannon to take out those transports."

From circling at high altitude Kara angled the *Silver Hawk's* nose down sharply and dived towards where the ship's sensors told her the cargo carriers had touched down.

"Hang on kid." She aid to Cass, "We're going down."

Garm accompanied the IntSec troops out of the converted cargo carriers and almost immediately dived for cover as bursts of blasterfire erupted from the trees between him and the road. The fire was not directed at himself or any of the troops accompanying him it seemed, instead it appeared to be intended just to keep them pinned down.

"Foolish." Garm said to himself as he pictured the assassin droids closing in from the other side of the rebel position. Then he heard a roaring sound from overhead and he looked up.

The *Silver Hawk* swooped down out of the sky at a dangerously steep angle. Using the ship's atmospheric repulsorlift drives for providing thrust Kara triggered the manoeuvring thrusters intended for use in space just before she ploughed it right into the ground. The force of these brought the *Silver Hawk's* nose up enough that it made a frighteningly low pass over the cargo carriers. But more significant was the exhaust from the thrusters. Enveloping the two landed aircraft the flames ignited everything they touched and as the *Silver Hawk* headed skywards once it left behind it two flaming wrecks that exploded as the flames reached their fuel cells.

"Whoa!" Cass exclaimed, "Where did you learn to do that?"

"What that? Oh it was my first time." Kara replied, "Now go open the ramp for the others, I'm taking us back around."

Dazed and stunned by both the *Silver Hawk's* low overhead pass and the explosion of their transports, the Imperial troops could not organise themselves as the freighter returned and this time hovered low over the ground near to the trees.

"Come on!" Cass shouted from the access ramp as it lowered and the rebels emerged from the woods and rushed towards the ship. Tharun moved more slowly, backing towards the ship as he fired his rifle back into the trees to hold back the assassin droids that had by this time got free of the repulsorvan.

"Hurry up!" Vorn shouted as he reached the access ramp and turned round as well. Then he opened fired in the direction of the droids to give Tharun the chance to get aboard as well.

"Where's your sister?" Cass asked Jaysica as Tobis helped her up the ramp, but the young woman just pushed past Cass and ran to her cabin with tears running down her face.

By the time Garm and the IntSec troops got back to their feet the *Silver Hawk* was gone. With his blaster in his hand Garm headed for the repulsorvan, the IntSec squad leaders calling out for their men to follow him. He found all six of the assassin droids stood motionless beside the vehicle. When the *Silver Hawk* had departed their programming had left them with no further instructions and so they had returned here instead. All six were damaged to some extent, but the worst seemed to have had a limb blown off. Garm then heard a muffled whimpering coming from the back of the repulsorvan and when he looked inside he saw Jaynie still sat in the chair inside.

"Trooper just finish her off." He heard one of the IntSec squad leaders order.

"No!" Garm snapped and he stepped between them, "There hasn't been a termination order issued for her. Take her back to the holding facility until we can decide what to do with her."

Upon his return to the capital building Garm as on his way back to his office when an older man in an ISB uniform met him. This was Director Helios, the man in overall charge of all ISB operations in the sector.

"Ah Garm," he said, "I just heard about your op. Sorry to hear it failed."

"Yes sir, my father's unit split up and kept their freighter in reserve." Garm replied.

"Still, it was technically an Intelligence led raid so at least its them that comes off looking bad in all this." The director said, "We supplied the information and if I recall correctly they turned down your offer of COMPForce or stormtrooper support."

"That's correct sir." Garm said, not sharing the director's pleasure at making Imperial Intelligence look bad.

"But I've more news for you." Director Helios went on, "The analysis of that girl's computer came back and it proves that she was cloning datapads. In fact the cloned memory of one is still there and our technical boys have decrypted it."

"Decrypted it?" Garm asked, wondering why that would be necessary.

"Yes indeed. You see its one that the girl stole from an Intelligence agent so I thought it may be useful to find out what else they're up to. The data has been forwarded to your office and I'd like you to take a quick look at it."

"Very well director." Garm replied, annoyed that the man wanted to use him to further the ISB's agenda against Imperial Intelligence rather than the rebellion.

True to the director's word the decrypted contents of a datapad were waiting in Garm's messaging system when he reached his office, with each file converted into basic text. Garm browsed through the list of file subject headers and stopped when he reached one that was entitled 'PLAE attack'. The People's Liberation Army of Estran was an ultra-violent terrorist organisation that had existed for centuries and sought to establish Estran as an independent world under their control. But it was not just the title that was significant, it was the date. The date of the file was almost a year earlier, the day that the PLAE had murdered Garm's wife and in a bomb attack that also left Garm and Vay close to death.

Garm opened the file.

As Garm had feared the file contained a description of the bomb attack that had taken Jennay from him, though fortunately the process of decryption and converting to text had stripped out any images that had been contained within the original. What confused Garm was why this attack in particular had attracted the attention of Imperial Intelligence. Despite being a massive personal loss to him it had been relatively small scale by the standards of the PLAE, an attempt to take revenge on him for disrupting their operations that had gone wrong. Then as he read on Garm found out why Imperial Intelligence had compiled a report into the attack.

According to the report the two terrorists responsible for the bomb had been arrested by Imperial Intelligence and been turned for use as informants in exchange for their lives. But the arrest had taken place before the explosion rather than after it and the evidence available at that time had shown that they had recently been in possession of explosives.

Everything pointed to one theory – that Imperial Intelligence had known about the bomb before it went off.

“You know she wants to join us.” Mace said to Vorn as the pair stood at the bottom of the access ramp of the *Silver Hawk* in the main hangar of the Alliance’s headquarters for the sector, “And you did say that you’d find a place for her if she was compromised.”

“Yes I know.” Vorn replied, “But I shouldn’t have. She’s still only seventeen and you know that the Alliance won’t consider humans under eighteen for field teams. Quite frankly I think that she’d be better off going to school. She’ll be eighteen in a few months and then she can apply for the military and field assignment.”

“Assuming that there are any slots open.” Mace replied, “Besides, she specifically wants to join our unit and we’re full. Kara may be taking leave soon to have the baby, but I don’t see her staying away from the action for long. Do you?”

“No I don’t.” Vorn replied, shaking his head, “As much as I’d like her to stay somewhere safe that’s just not the Kara I fell in love with.”

“Then my solution is the only one left open.” Mace said and Vorn frowned.

“I still don’t like it.”

“Well to put it bluntly major that doesn’t matter. The *Silver Hawk* is my ship after all and if Cass agrees to this then the Alliance can’t stop me bringing her aboard.”

Vorn sighed.

“Just go and get it over with.” He said before he turned and walked away.

Mace walked up the *Silver Hawk*’s access ramp and stepped into the lounge where he found Cass making herself a drink.

“Cass we need to talk.” He said to her, sitting on the edge of the table.

“Is it about signing me up for your unit?” she asked and she noticed the datapad in Mace’s hand, “Are those my papers?”

“No Cass, you can’t join the Alliance military. You’re still too young.” Mace told her.

“But I’ll be eighteen in a few months!” Cass protested, “Please you can’t send me away Mace.”

“I don’t want to.” Mace replied and he held out the datapad, “I’m afraid that this is all I could come up with.”

He added, “This will let you stay aboard the *Silver Hawk* with us if you want.”

Cass looked at the datapad and then at Mace again.

“Is this for real?” she asked.

“It is. Providing you agree of course. Support Services have okayed it.” Mace told her and then she threw her arms around him and hugged him. Then she looked up at him.

“So do I get to keep that blaster you got me on Hayatan?” she asked.

“If you want. If I can live with Jaysica having access to a blaster then you shouldn’t be a problem.”

“And can I get a tattoo?”

“No.”

“What about inviting boys to the ship?”

“Oh hell no.”

“Well can I borrow the *Silver Hawk* from you when you’re not using it?”

“Oh I’ve got a bad feeling about this.” Mace then said.

“I love you dad.” Cass responded as she hugged him again.

“I know.”