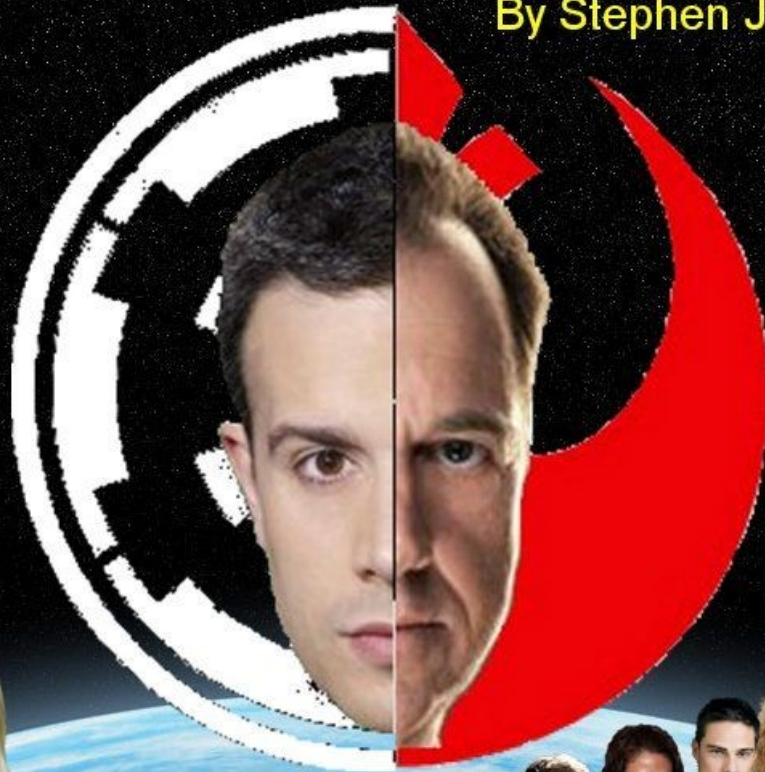


# STAR WARS

5-06: Production Line

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 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...

## PRODUCTION LINE

UNUSUAL STARSHIP ACTIVITY LEADS THE ALLIANCE TO BELIEVE THAT THE EMPIRE HAS ESTABLISHED A SECRET MILITARY BASE IN THE SECTOR. WHEN EVIDENCE OF ITS PURPOSE IS DISCOVERED THE OCCUPANTS OF THE *SILVER HAWK* ARE SENT TO DESTROY IT BEFORE IT CAN MAKE THE EMPIRE UNSTOPPABLE...

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

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# 1.

Mace Grayle, owner and captain of the light freighter the *Silver Hawk* and Major Vorn Larcus the third, commanding officer of the rebel unit assigned to the vessel walked across the main hangar of the Alliance headquarters station towards it. They were just approaching the access ramp when there was a sudden high-pitched shriek from inside. Glancing briefly at one another the pair rushed into the ship and into the lounge area. There they saw the other rebels of their group, two men and three women all stood looking at one another.

"Major look! Kara bit me!" one of the two shorter women said, holding out one hand towards Vorn while pointing at the taller woman, whose swollen stomach displayed her pregnancy. Sure enough the woman's hand bore clear teeth marks.

"Kara seriously?" Vorn asked, "You bit Jaysica?"

"Well she shouldn't have tried to steal my food boss." Kara responded as she unwrapped a candy bar, "What can I say? It's a pregnancy thing."

Then the largest of the male rebels held out his hand towards the final female team member, a girl still in her late teens.

"Okay Cass," he said, "pay up." And she groaned.

"What?" Mace asked as he looked at the girl as well.

"Err, could I have an advance on my allowance dad?" she asked.

"Twenty credits." The man added.

"Tharun why does my daughter owe you twenty credits exactly?" Mace asked him.

"We had a bet captain." Tharun replied.

"A bet about what?" Mace then asked, frowning as he turned to face Cass.

"We bet on what Kara's next craving would be." She replied.

"Yeah," Tharun added, "and I bet human flesh."

"Good bet." Kara commented as she took another bite of the candy bar.

"I was bitten for a bet?" Jaysica exclaimed.

"Err, I don't think that Kara actually knew about it." The final rebel commented.

"Tobis is right little lady." Tharun added, "This was a private agreement between myself and the kid."

"So can I have the money?" Cass asked.

"Ha!" Kara exclaimed, "Fatherhood getting expensive?"

"Just you wait." Mace responded as he reached into his pocket for some money.

"Oh I'm not worried." Kara said, "I've got the boss to pay for everything. It's his kid after all."

Vorn sighed.

"As entertaining as it is to hear about how my beautiful young wife has been indulging in cannibalism and my son-in-law has been gambling with someone who is underage there is actually work for us to do." He said as he sat down.

"Ooh goody." Kara said, sitting beside him and sliding right up to him, "Do tell boss."

"It's a simple surveillance mission." Vorn replied and there were groans from the rebels aside from Cass and Mace.

"What's wrong?" Cass asked, looking around.

"Kid," Tharun replied, "this may be your first mission-"

"Third." Cass interrupted him, "I helped steal TIE fighters and I helped you escape that alien space station with you. That's not even counting the ones where I just sat back and watched."

"Well you'll soon learn that simple surveillance missions have a nasty habit of turning into desperate fights for your life." Tharun told her.

"This one is actually quite simple." Mace said, "We're just following up on a report of unusual starship activity." And there were more groans.

"Oh what now?" Vorn asked.

"Boss," Kara said, "it was 'unusual starship activity' that landed us all aboard a star destroyer full of zombies."

"Err, I'm not sure they were really zombies." Tobis commented.

"No Kara," Jaysica added, "there's no such thing as zombies."

"Zombies would starve if they tried eating your brains." Kara muttered.

"Would everyone please stop talking about zombies?" Vorn asked loudly and when the others fell silent he went on, "Thank you. Now as I'm sure you're aware the Alliance likes to keep tabs on all Imperial military shipping and as part of this surveillance program they've found something odd." And he took out a mem-stik, "Where are the droids?" he asked.

"Oh, err, Harvey and Jeeves are in the workshop and I think Penny's in Jaysica's cabin." Tobis replied.

"Well we need Harvey for this." Vorn said.

"Right, err, I'll get him." Tobis said and he headed for the workshop, returning soon after with a gold coloured protocol droid and a red R5 astromech.

"Master Dorfus indicated that you required our presence Major Larcus Sir." The protocol droid said.

"Actually it's really just Harvey we need Jeeves." Vorn replied as he squeezed past Kara and walked up to the astromech droid, "Harvey, this has a holographic recording on it that I'd like everyone to see." He said and there was a bleep from the droid as a hatch in its cylindrical body opened up to expose a socket for the mem-stik. Vorn plugged it in and then returned to his seat as the astromech activated its holographic projector.

The image that floated in the air between the rebels showed an orbital dockyard filled with military ships. Most of these were combat ships, but there were also a number of support vessels and it was one of these that the image tracked as it left the dockyard and broke orbit.

"This ship has made this exact run once a week for at least fourteen weeks." Vorn explained as there was a flash of light from the hologram that heralded the ship's entry into hyperspace. The image then cut to another scene that began with a similar flash as the ship reverted back to realspace once more and then it approached another orbital facility filled with Imperial vessels.

"Doesn't look out of the ordinary." Tharun commented.

"And just by looking at those two events you wouldn't see it." Vorn said, "But keep watching because we've got the return journey as well." And as the hologram continued it showed the transport leaving the dockyard again and making the jump to hyperspace, concluding with its return to realspace near to the dockyards it had started from.

"Oh. I see." Tobis said.

"See what lad?" Tharun asked.

"Well, err the time stamps." Tobis replied.

"Time stamps?" Cass asked him.

"Ah, yes. In the bottom right corner. There are time stamps that show when the recordings were made." Tobis explained, "By comparing them we can see how long the trips through hyperspace took."

"I still don't get it." Tharun commented.

"Perhaps if Harvey were to show the entry and exit events together you may be able to Sergeant Verser sir." Jeeves said and there was a sudden burst of sound from Harvey, "You should do it because Master Dorfus is your owner." Jeeves said to the smaller droid and there was a single rude sounding noise as Harvey displayed the four images in a square.

"There you have it." Mace said, "By comparing the two jump durations we can see that the initial trip took four hours longer than the return one."

"I take it the vectors were checked?" Kara asked.

"They were." Vorn replied, "That ship was perfectly aligned at entry and exit, but still took three times as long in one direction than in the other."

"So it's meeting up with another ship somewhere to transfer cargo then is it?" Jaysica asked.

"That's what command thinks." Mace replied.

"And they want us to go and find out what this ship is right?" Cass then asked.

"No." Vorn answered, "We've no idea where along the jump the ship is exiting hyperspace so there's no way that we could determine where we'd have to jump to."

"Plus of course since we don't know what's out there we could be jumping into the middle of an Imperial fleet." Mace added.

"So how does the Alliance want us to risk death this time then boss?" Kara asked.

"Well in order to identify where that transport is going it would be helpful if we knew what it was carrying." Vorn said, "So that's what they want us to find out. We're to infiltrate the dockyards and watch what gets loaded onto it."

"Will we be planting a homing device to track it?" Cass asked eagerly.

"No." Mace replied, "We'd never be certain that it wouldn't be discovered."

"And if it was then the Empire could just move their secret fleet to another location and we'd be back at square one." Tharun added.

"That ship leaves tomorrow." Vorn then said, "So we need to be ready to leave as soon as possible."

"And that means now." Mace said, "So everyone make sure you've got everything you need." Then he looked at Cass, "You can give me a hand in the cockpit." He said and he waved at her to follow him as he strode across the lounge towards the corridor that led to the cockpit.

Cass followed Mace while most of the other rebels headed for their cabins to check on their equipment. Meanwhile Kara and Vorn remained seated and when all of the other rebels were gone she kissed him.

"What did I do to deserve that?" he asked.

"Called me beautiful in front of everyone else." Kara replied, "Now help me up. Your baby is weighing me down."

The dockyard occupied an area more than ten kilometres square above the planet it orbited. In astronomical terms this was nothing, but as the *Silver Hawk* flew towards it, the structure filled the viewport while still so distant that none of the docked vessels could be identified.

"So how do we get to the transport ship?" Cass asked as she stared at the orbital dockyard. She was stood just behind the seats occupied by Mace and Vorn and leaning on them for support.

"We'll head for the commercial sector." Mace said, "Then we'll see about sneaking into the government one."

"Imperial uniforms will help." Vorn said.

"That means you and Jaysica." Mace then commented.

"I'll go let her know." Vorn said and he got up and squeezed past Cass who in turn sat in the co-pilot's seat as he left the cockpit.

"So what about me?" she asked.

"What about you?" Mace asked in response.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Stay right here." Mace told her.

"Stay here? But I want to help."

"And you will. By staying right here aboard the ship with the rest of us. We only have two Imperial uniforms, one is Jaysica's and the other one is the major's. So they'll check out the cargo and then get back here to us. We just get involved if something goes wrong."

"Like if they get caught?"

"Exactly. That would probably require all of us to play our part."

"Including me?" Cass asked.

"Including you. Just don't tell the major I said that okay? He's sceptical enough about having you around."

The *Silver Hawk* slid into a commercial docking bay unchallenged but there were a pair of customs agents waiting. Accompanied by Cass and Tobis, Mace walked down the access ramp to meet them.

"Registration." The senior agent said and Mace handed him a datapad.

"Captain Grayle." Mace said, "An this is my engineer Tobis Dorfus and my daughter Cass."

The agent looked up from the datapad.

"This lists only yourself and your engineer as the crew." He said.

"She's under eighteen. She's just a passenger." Mace replied.

"And are there any more passengers aboard?" the customs agent asked.

"Yes two." Mace answered.

"I want to see them." The agent said.

"Ah, err-" Tobis responded, but Mace then spoke up.

"Of course, come aboard." He said and he pointed up the ramp.

The lead agent then strode up the ramp and Mace turned to follow him.

"The lounge is to the right and the hold is to the left." He told the man.

"I take it that the passengers are in the lounge?"

"They are."

"Then that's where I'll start." The agent replied.

## 2.

Inside the ship Jaysica and Vorn were already disguised in their Imperial service uniforms. They were standing in a small corridor that linked the lounge and hold on the opposite side of the ship from the access ramp. With the hatches all open they clearly heard the exchange between Mace and the customs agent and now knowing that the customs agents were heading for the lounge they both headed into the hold. Here there was a second hatchway that brought them out of the hold at the top of the access ramp, allowing them to exit the ship while the customs agents were both talking to Kara and Tharun in the lounge. Outside the ship Jaysica and Vorn both darted to the nearest exit and slipped out into the corridor beyond.

"Okay we're clear." Vorn said, looking back into the docking bay to confirm that the Imperial agents were still out of sight, "Time to unpack Penny."

Jaysica smiled and removed her backpack. From this she took a small box shaped droid with a wheeled chassis that she set down on the deck as she activated it.

"Come on Penny." She said, "Follow us."

The commercial sector of the dockyard was crowded with the crews and passengers of hundreds of starships, but disguised as Imperial personnel the rebels found that people moved out of their way to let them pass. No one wanted to risk missing their flight or their ship being impounded because they were accused of assaulting Imperial servants. Therefore, although the way to the government section of the dockyard was not signposted the rebels were still able to get there in reasonable time.

The security checkpoint at the entrance to the government docks was a simple affair, with a single naval trooper visibly on guard. Vorn guessed however that there would be more out of sight if they were needed.

"Identification." The guard said and both Jaysica and Vorn held out the forged identity cards they had to go with their uniforms and the guard scanned them. This was just to record the details stored on the cards rather than confirm their identities, there were far too many members of the Imperial military in the sector to enable this checkpoint to have details on any other than those assigned to the docks themselves.

"You're not stationed here." The guard said.

"No." Vorn replied, "My adjutant and I have been sent up here to meet with the captain of the cruiser *Watchman*. It's a personal matter for our commander."

"Very well." The guard replied and he returned the identity cards and sat back down behind his desk. He did not even bother asking about Penny, mouse droids were generally ignored by Imperial troops and now proved to be no exception.

Vorn nodded at Jaysica and led the way into the government docks. Manufactured from the typical Imperial modular construction components without the same level of customisation as in the commercial sector, the corridors of the government docks were almost all identical to one another and the only way that the rebels could find their way to the cargo handling section was by accessing a computer terminal and downloading a map to Vorn's datapad. With this in their possession though it was not long before they heard the sounds of machinery from up ahead.

"This sounds hopeful." Vorn said, "I think those are loadlifters."

"Should I send Penny on ahead major? Jaysica asked.

"No, keep her close." Vorn replied, "So long as we don't do anything to make ourselves stand out we should be safe enough going in there ourselves."

Heading towards the noise the rebels found themselves stepping through a hatchway that was obviously not meant for anything much bigger than a human and onto a walkway system that ran over and around a massive chamber. Beneath them scores of bulky droids made their way between stacks of crates, all marked with codes that identified the ships that they were destined for.

"Okay now we need Penny." Vorn said to Jaysica, "She can interface with one of those loading droids and get it to identify the cargo we're interested in."

"How will she get down?" Jaysica asked as she looked around. Vorn did the same and saw that the only routes down from the walkway to the cargo area below were ladders, something impassable to a wheeled mouse droid like Penny.

"We'll just have to go down with her." Vorn replied, "You'll have to put her back in your bag."

Jaysica sighed.

"Sorry Penny." She said as she picked up the droid and stuffed it bag in her backpack.

The two rebels then headed for the closest ladder and descended to the deck below. Here they found themselves in sight of a loadlifter, but the only indication that the droid gave of being aware of their presence was when it walked around rather than over them.

"Okay that one will do." Vorn said, "Quick, before someone comes."

Without a word Jaysica unpacked her droid again and pointed to the loadlifter.

"There you go Penny. That one." She told it and the droid chirped before zooming off towards the much bigger loadlifter.

The Empire often used mouse droids to monitor and control simpler machines such as loadlifters and so the bigger droid featured a data port that Penny could plug directly into. Then using the data recorded by the rebel surveillance operation that had observed the Imperial ship at both ends of its mysterious mission the mouse droid instructed the loadlifter to proceed to the cargo intended for that vessel's next journey. Electronically the loadlifter signalled its understanding of the order and Penny then disconnected from it. Immediately the loadlifter turned and strode back past Jaysica and Vorn, heading towards the centre of the cargo area.

"Come on, it's working." Vorn said and they set off after the droid.

The loadlifter made its way through the stacks that to the rebels appeared anonymous other than for the cryptic code numbers applied to each. However, the droid had access to a database that allowed it to recall the location of any particular crate in relation to its current position and it quickly led the rebels to the cargo they were looking for.

This cargo consisted of numerous shipping containers that varied in size from equipment cases that could be carried by one or two people between them up to massive shipping containers that would require the joint efforts of several of the large loadlifters to get aboard the transport.

"It's all sealed." Vorn noted as he saw the security seals marked with the wheel-like emblem of the Galactic Empire placed over the openings of each container.

"I could probably cut through them." Jaysica commented, but Vorn shook his head.

"No." he told her, "We don't want to leave any indication that we've been here." then he looked upwards at one of the stacks, "Unless-" he began before trailing off.

"Unless what?" Jaysica asked.

"Well I doubt that anyone would notice if you were to slice through the seal on one of those cases up there." And he pointed to where some of the smaller sized containers had been stacked on top of a layer of much larger ones.

Jaysica looked up at the crates as well and frowned.

"How am I supposed to get up there?" she asked.

"Here, I'll give you a boost." Vorn replied, standing with his back against the stack and cupping his hands together in front of him.

Jaysica placed a foot in Vorn's hand and reached upwards to get a grip on the top of the stack before pulling herself up. Vorn let out a grunt of displeasure as she accidentally kicked him in the chest.

"Oops." She said as she sat on top of the containers and looked back down at him.

"That's alright." Vorn lied as he rubbed his chest, "Just get on with it before someone notices you up there."

"Okay." Jaysica replied and from her pocket she took out a compact multitool and then used its knife blade to slice through the security seal on one of the smaller containers.

"What's inside?" Vorn called out from below.

"Just a bunch of glass things." Jaysica responded, "Here, look." And she removed a hollow transparent sphere about the size of a hand grenade and held it out where Vorn could see it.

"Toss it down here." He told her and he caught the sphere as she let go of it.

Holding it in his hands Vorn could tell that it was not made of glass, but a polymer material and on closer inspection he saw that where the two equally sized halves joined together there was writing in an alien language. Vorn was about to tell Jaysica to search more of the containers when he heard the sound of someone approaching.

"Quick!" he hissed, "Get back down here." And he began to stuff the sphere into his pocket. However, Jaysica was already lowering herself over the edge of the stack and without Vorn there to help her down she lost her footing and squealed as she fell backwards. Looking up, Vorn had just enough time to gasp before she landed on top of him and the pair of them collapsed in a heap on the floor.

"What's going on here?" a stern sounding voice called out as Jaysica and Vorn attempted to untangle themselves from one another. Vorn pushed Jaysica upwards, freeing his face from her chest and grinned as he looked up at a man in a lieutenant's uniform who was flanked by a pair of enlisted men.

"Ah." He said, sliding out from under Jaysica and then getting to his feet, "You caught us."

"Just tell me what you think you're doing here." The lieutenant demanded as Vorn got to his feet. The Vorn looked back at the young officer and scowled.

"That's what is going on here major!" he snapped and he pointed to the rank badge he wore that matched his actual Alliance rank. Then as the lieutenant stared at him dumbfounded Vorn strode towards him and placed a hand on his shoulder, guiding him away from his men, "Look lieutenant," he said softly, "this young lady wants a promotion. I brought her here so she could convince me why she should get it."

"Oh." The lieutenant replied, unsure of how to proceed. On the one hand he had just caught Vorn in a compromising situation, but on the other he had just challenged a superior officer and even if his own

subordinates backed him, making an enemy of a superior was never a good idea, "Of course sir. I fully understand."

"Good." Vorn replied and he looked round at Jaysica, "Corporal pick up your bag and let's get going. I think we can discuss this further back in the hangar."

"Yes major." She replied, picking up her bag and the two rebels then calmly walked away with Penny following behind them. Aware that the lieutenant was watching them leave, Vorn placed an arm around Jaysica and then kissed her on the cheek.

"Best not mention that to Kara hey?" he whispered into her ear.

"They're back!" Cass called out as she rushed from the cockpit to the lounge where the others waited, all of who reacted by leaping to their feet and rushing towards the access ramp.

Except that was for Kara who struggled to pull herself up.

"Hey kid! A little help here." She said to Cass as she ran past and the girl stopped to help her up.

"So what's the transport shipping major?" Mace asked as Jaysica and Vorn came up the access ramp.

"These amongst other things." Vorn replied as he held up the sphere.

"So what's that then?" Mace asked, taking the sphere, "And what's this writing?"

"I think they could explain what the Empire's up to." Vorn told him.

"Care to let your loyal minions in on it boss?" Kara said to him.

"Not yet." Vorn said, "We need to get that back to headquarters so that they can take a look at it. But if it's what I think it is then I've got a very bad feeling about what it means."

It was then that Penny darted up the access ramp and into the ship. As soon as the droid was aboard it let out a sudden chirping sound.

"Oh don't be so ridiculous Penny." Jeeves said, "Why would Major Larcus have been kissing Miss Horbid?" and Kara glared at both Jaysica and Vorn.

"Oh I've already got a very bad feeling about this." Jaysica said.



### 3.

Doctor Lona Na served as the chief medical officer for the Alliance in the sector. A kaminoan, like so many of his species he had a background in life sciences that had easily translated into treating the sick and injured and most of Vorn's team were surprised when he entered the office of General Syres Kain, the Alliance's sector commander. Only Vorn himself knew why the doctor was there.

"Ah doctor, so glad you could join us." The general said, "Have you had the chance to take a look at Major Larcus' discovery?"

"I was there as well." Jaysica muttered, but she averted her gaze when the general glared at her.

"Indeed I have general." Lona replied.

"And?" General Kain asked.

"Major Larcus is correct. The writing on the sphere is kaminoan. The item originated on my home planet."

"So what's it for?" Mace asked.

"It is a cellular growth container." The doctor replied, "Designed to contain a biological sample and a nutrient solution to promote cellular growth."

"So what's it for?" Tharun said, repeating Mace's question in an attempt to get a simpler answer. However, before the doctor responded Tobis spoke up as well.

"Err, why bring something like that all this way?" he asked, "I mean, well, err, it's just that something like that could be made here couldn't it? Ah, well, cheaper?"

"You are correct." Lona answered and then he turned to General Kain, "General," he said, "the only logical reason to bring something like this all the way from Kamino is if it was part of a much larger shipment of more specialised equipment."

"Oh no." Kara said, "Now I've got a bad feeling about where this is going."

"Why?" Cass asked.

"What do kaminoans do kid?" Tharun asked her quietly.

"I've no idea. I dropped out of school remember." She answered.

"General it is my opinion that the Empire has established a cloning facility within the sector and that they are currently in the process of equipping it." Lona said.

"That's what I was afraid of." Vorn said.

"But doesn't it take ten years to produce viable clone troops?" Jaysica asked.

"Correct." Lona responded, "But we cannot be certain how long the facility has been running. We may just have stumbled upon a re-supply or expansion program."

"In any case, we need to deal with it before we end up being up to our necks in stormtroopers." Tharun added, "The Empire's got too many of those damned meat puppets as it is."

"There's also the risk that the Empire could be attempting to apply kaminoan expertise to alternative methods of clone creation." Vorn said, "Spaarti cloning perhaps."

"Major," Lona said, bending his long neck so that he faced Vorn without having to turn his body, "Though the use of spaarti cloning cylinders may produce adult clones in a very short time it has been shown that the methods used by my people are far superior."

"I think that's it's obvious that we need to locate this facility and destroy it." General Kain said.

"That's going to be easier said than done general." Lona said, "Such a facility could easily be concealed on many worlds in this sector."

"Oh, err, it's not on a planet." Tobis said and the other rebels in the room looked at him, "It's, well, it's a space station." He then added.

"You think that the transport ship we've seen is going there directly sergeant?" General Kain asked him.

"Ah, well, yes sir." Tobis replied, "You see, it's, it's just that I grew up on freighters like the one we've been watching and, well, the time taken to transfer the cargo from one ship to another would be longer than just unloading it into a proper docking bay. So you see, well, ah, there isn't enough time for them to do it in the time we've seen them take."

"How do you know they're not just chucking it into space to be picked up later?" Kara asked.

"Lieutenant," Lona said, "that would be a very bad idea. The delicate nature of the cloning process means that exposure of the equipment to the heightened levels of radiation in space would produce genetic deviation in the end products." And Vorn and the general exchanged brief glances when the kaminoan referred to the sentient creatures produced as 'products'.

"Then I think our mission is clear." Vorn then said, "We need to gain access to the navigation logs of that transport and determine the location of the cloning facility. Then we go there and destroy it."

"General, destroying an entire cloning facility without full knowledge of its operation could prove difficult for such a small force." Lona said, "Perhaps I should accompany them and instruct them on how best to carry out their mission."

"Agreed." General Kain said as he got to his feet, "Major Larcus, you are to locate this cloning facility and do your best to gain access to and destroy it. If in the opinion of yourself or Doctor Na this is not an option then you are report its location to us so that a larger strike may be organised. Understood?"

"Yes general." Vorn replied.

"Good. Then good luck and may the Force be with you."

"So anybody got any bright ideas about how we figure out where this cloning facility is then?" Tharun said as accompanied by Doctor Na and his medical droid the team returned to the *Silver Hawk*.

"I thought that we were going to access the navigation logs of the transport." Cass responded.

"Well, err, it's not quite that easy." Tobis replied.

"We need to find a way to get aboard the ship first." Mace added.

"Which isn't going to be easy when one of us isn't human." Kara then said, looking towards Lona.

"Or indeed clearly pregnant." The doctor hit back, "The Empire is not known for allowing those in your condition to continue to serve in its armed forces lieutenant."

"Tobis how much do you know about that transport?" Vorn asked.

"Well, err, quite a lot I suppose." Tobis replied, "Providing that it's not modified in any significant way."

"So you can tell us about its propulsion and sensors then?" Vorn asked.

"Well, err, I suppose so." Tobis replied.

"Excellent." Vorn said and then he looked at Tharun, "Come on, we're going to see someone about a ship."

"A ship? But we've already got one haven't we?" Jaysica asked.

"But not the right sort." Vorn replied, "We need a rather specific one." Then he looked at Tobis, "While we're gone I want you to start profiling that transport. I want to know every technical detail about it by the time we get back."

"You want me to come as well boss?" Kara then asked.

"I don't think that would be a good idea." Vorn responded.

"Why, where are you going?" Cass then asked.

"To see my wife." Tharun answered.

Lyssa Verser looked up from her desk and smiled when Tharun entered the room.

"Tharun!" she exclaimed and she got up to embrace him, "So what brings you here?" she then asked.

"Err." Tharun said and he looked around at the doorway as Vorn appeared.

"Oh. Hello daddy." Lyssa said.

"Hello my dear." Vorn replied.

"So what do you want daddy?" Lyssa then said as she returned to her seat.

"We need a ship." Vorn told her.

"That old freighter not good enough for your fancy woman then?" Lyssa asked and Vorn frowned.

"Come on now. Mom's not that bad." Tharun responded with a smirk.

"You know how Kara feels about you calling her that." Vorn commented.

"Like the way you used to feel about her calling you 'boss'?" Lyssa responded.

"Ah yes." Vorn answered, then he leant on Lyssa's desk and looked down at her, "Lyssa sweetheart, we need an Imperial ship to get us close to a target. Can you find us anything?" and Lyssa turned to her computer terminal.

"We have three small Imperial transport ships." Lyssa replied, "Two scout ships and a shuttle."

"Lambda-class?" Tharun asked.

"Yes, that's right." Lyssa said.

"That would be just what we need." Vorn said, "Where is it?"

"It's a piece of junk." Kara said as they looked at the captured Imperial shuttle.

"It did get somewhat damaged during the mission that it was captured in." Lyssa commented, looking down at her datapad, "But it says here that our engineers have certified it as space worthy."

"Are you sure they didn't say it was worthy of being ejected into space?" Kara asked.

"I'm sorry mother, but this is the best I can do." Lyssa replied without looking around to see the stern expression on Kara's face. Likewise, Kara did not notice the wide grin on Tharun's.

"Tobis what do you think?" Mace asked his engineer.

"Ah." He replied as he approached the shuttle and he frowned.

"Tobis can fix it." Jaysica said.

"Can you?" Cass then asked.

"Err. No."

"What?" Jaysica responded, "But you can fix anything."

"The little lady has a point lad. I've never known you fail." Tharun added.

"Ah, well, it's just that I don't think it needs fixing. Not any of the drive systems anyway." Tobis said.

"I told you it would work." Lyssa added, "Now do you want this ship or not?"

"We'll take it." Vorn said and he glanced at the chronometer on his wrist, "And I think that we ought to be taking it now. Everyone load your gear onboard and I'll explain my plan en route."

Tharun kissed Lyssa before he headed on board the shuttle with the other rebels, while Kara halted part way and turned to blow a kiss towards Lyssa.

Inside the shuttle was a mess. There had obviously been a firefight in the passenger compartment and many of the seats were either damaged or missing.

"So where's the priority seating for pregnant women?" Kara asked.

"Back on the *Silver Hawk*." Tharun replied as he found an intact seat to sit down in.

"Boss!" Kara called out, but Vorn just shook his head.

"There are more seats over there." He told her, "Go sit in one of them." And then as Kara took a seat he headed for the cockpit, accompanied by Cass, Mace and Tobis.

The cockpit had fared better than the rear portion of the ship, but although all six of the seats were intact the dried blood splattered across the viewport suggested that the fighting had reached here as well.

"Well the controls are intact." Mace commented as he sat down in one of the front pair of seats, those intended for the pilot and co-pilot. Cass was about to sit behind him when Vorn tapped her on the shoulder and instead pointed her to the co-pilot's seat.

"Really?" she asked.

"You're in the system operator's seat." Vorn replied, "Tobis is best there. And this one next to it is the gunner's station. Quite frankly I'd rather have you in the co-pilots seat than the one giving you control of the laser cannons."

Smiling Cass sat beside Mace while Tobis and Vorn sat behind them.

"So what's our status?" Vorn then asked, looking at Mace and Tobis.

"Avionics are fine." Mace replied, "We look to have full control."

"Oh, err, all other diagnostics read okay as well." Tobis said before adding, "Well, err, that is unless the diagnostic system is damaged."

"I think we'll just have to take our chances." Vorn said and he turned to Mace, "Take us out captain." He ordered.

The shuttle's repulsorlift engines produced a high pitched whining sound as they powered up and in the rear passenger compartment the other rebels looked around.

"Oh I've got a bad feeling about that sound." Jaysica said as she gripped the arms of her seat tightly. Then from across the room Harvey produced a short series of sharp sounds.

"Harvey indicates that the sound is an indication of poor repulsor alignment but that the odds of a catastrophic drive failure are less than one in-" Jeeves translated before Kara interrupted the protocol droid.

"Hey Jeeves!" she snapped, raising her voice to be heard over the sound of the engines, "How about you don't tell the odds of dying in a massive fireball?"

"As you wish Lieutenant Larcus mistress." Jeeves replied.

"Lieutenant," Lona then said from a seat close to Kara's, "your distress may be indicative of a hormonal unbalance. Perhaps if-"

"I'm fine doc." Kara responded before he could finish his sentence and then there was a sudden lurch as the shuttle accelerated out of the docking bay. With neither Harvey or Penny secured, both wheeled droids rolled uncontrollably towards the back of the compartment, emitting high-pitched squeals until they struck the bulkhead.

"Penny!" Jaysica exclaimed as she reached for her harness release.

"I wouldn't do that little lady." Tharun warned her, "If the ship did that when we launched, just think about what it'll do when we jump to light speed." And sure enough there was another sudden lurch even more violent than the first as the shuttle entered hyperspace and Kara suddenly leant forwards and vomited.

"Course laid in major, just like you programmed." Mace said, turning to face Vorn when the ship was in hyperspace and the automated systems took over, "So how about you explain your plan to us now? We've probably only got about fifteen minutes until we reach the dockyards."

"We won't actually be going back to the dockyards." Vorn replied, "We'll drop out of hyperspace just beyond the planet's gravity well and hold there. Then when the transport leaves we'll intercept it."

"You plan to take it by force?" Mace asked.

"No." Vorn replied, shaking his head, "We can't be sure what the security arrangements are inside. My plan is to use the landing gear to clamp onto the hull of the transport where they won't notice us." Then he looked at Tobis, "I'll leave it to you to decide on the best place for that." He said before turning back towards Mace, "Then when they jump to hyperspace we just go along for the ride. When we drop back to realspace we'll

detach and run silent. Hopefully the Empire won't notice us until we're ready to approach the cloning facility and board it. Now if you'll all excuse me I'll just go and brief the others." And he unstrapped himself and left the cockpit with both Mace and Tobis watching him leave.

"So is that a good plan dad?" Cass asked and both men stared at her.

"I've heard worse ideas." Mace said.

"Err, when?" Tobis asked.

"Boss are you out of your kriffing mind?" Kara's voice suddenly exclaimed from the rear of the shuttle.

"Ah," Mace said with a smile, "I think that the major has just briefed his troops."

Vorn remained in the passenger compartment, sitting beside Kara for the duration of the journey. Just as he had intended the shuttle dropped out of hyperspace just beyond the gravity well that disrupted hyperspace travel with the dockyard lying ahead of it. The rebels had arrived just in time and after only a few minutes Mace pointed towards the dockyard when a brief flash of light indicated the launch of the transport.

"That's it I think." He said, "Tobis get ready with the landing gear."

"What about me?" Cass asked.

"Watch and learn." Mace replied, "This is going to take skill and perfect timing. Two things every good pilot needs."

The transport headed towards the shuttle and Mace powered up the engines, accelerating in its approximate direction.

"Are we just going to hit them head on?" Cass asked as the bright flare created by the transport's engines solidified into the shape of the ship itself.

"Not quite." Mace told her, "But its going to be close." And all of a sudden the transport flew past so close that Cass was certain that she saw details of some of its compartments through the viewports.

"Okay hang on." Mace announced as he turned the shuttle on its axis without changing its heading, "Tobis get us ready to dock." He then added as he dropped in directly behind the transport, "We're in their ion wake. They won't see us here right?"

"Err, probably not." Tobis replied.

"Okay so now what?" Cass asked as there was the sound of the shuttle's wings lifting up into the landing position and the landing gear lowering.

"Now we get as close as we can without cooking the hull and then I pull up." Mace replied. Then he glanced over his shoulder at Tobis again, "You know where we need to dock?" he asked and the engineer nodded, "Good. Just point it out."

Mace then pulled back on the controls just as the shuttle closed with the transport and instead of the other ship's stern filling the viewport the rebels instead found themselves looking along its upper hull.

"Err, right there." Tobis said, pointing past Mace to a flat part of the hull just in front of the main ion drives, "We should be able to clamp on."

"Okay I'm going in." Mace said, angling the shuttle down slightly.

The transport grew even bigger in the viewport and Cass found herself subconsciously holding her breath as they drew closer.

The moment the two ships came into contact was marked by a dull 'clump' and the shuttle shook briefly as its landing gear compressed to absorb the force of the impact.

"Now Tobis!" Mace snapped, but Tobis had anticipated the order and he activated the magnetic clamps built into the shuttle's landing gear, sealing them to the transport.

"Err, we're secure." He said, "I think."

From outside the shuttle there was a sudden flash of light and the stars stretched out to form the bright tunnel-like view of hyperspace. At the same time the ship lurched once more as the transport to which it was attached activated its hyperdrive.

"And just in time too." Mace said. Then looking at Tobis he added, "So you're certain that they won't notice us here?"

"No. Err, that is no they shouldn't." Tobis replied, "To the crew it should just look like their engines are running slightly hot."

"Okay Cass go tell the others." Mace said, "We can't be sure how long we'll be in hyperspace so Tobis and I need to stay here and be ready to detach when we drop out."

"Sure dad." Cass replied as she got up and headed out of the cockpit. Walking into the passenger compartment she found Lona and his droid standing around Kara who had her head tilted backwards while the doctor shone a light into her eyes.

"I'm fine for kriff's sake." Kara said.

"You were sick when we jumped to hyperspace again Kara." Vorn told her, "Let the doctor examine you. Just in case."

"Oh like we could just call this mission off." Kara said.

"So who's for an update?" Cass then asked out loud.

"Go on kid. Give us the bad news." Tharun said, checking his heavy blaster rifle.

"Well you may have noticed that we've jumped into hyperspace but dad and Tobis don't know how long we'll be here. Basically I think they want everyone ready fro when we drop back to realspace."

"I need to go." Vorn said to Kara, squeezing her hand briefly before he got up and walked into the cockpit.

"Are you okay?" Cass then asked Kara.

"Am I doc?" Kara in turn asked Lona.

"I have found no evidence of anything other than the expected chemical imbalances." He answered and he stepped back from Kara.

"See the doc says I'm fine. Go tell the boss that." Kara told Cass who smiled and returned to the cockpit where she found that Vorn had once again sat in the gunner's position and left the co-pilot's seat free for her.

## 4.

"Err, the transport's power output is fluctuating." Tobis announced after about half an hour in hyperspace, "I think that the ship is about to-" and then the view of hyperspace rapidly shifted back to the distinct points of light from the stars of realspace and the occupants of the shuttle felt themselves being pressed forwards in their safety harnesses. From the back of the shuttle there was a loud electronic squeal as Harvey rolled uncontrollably backwards towards the front of the ship and into the cockpit until colliding with the main flight console. The little droid then let out a forlorn sounding tone and toppled over.

"Perhaps we should have warned everyone to hang on." Mace commented as Tobis released his harness and got up to help his droid back into an upright position. In return the droid produced an appreciative chirp as its owner returned to his seat.

"Tobis cut us loose." Vorn instructed and as Tobis deactivated the docking clamps the freighter outside seemed to drift off. In fact it was the shuttle that had been left drifting while the freighter that had brought them here continued moving under power, "Keep everything that's not needed shut down." Vorn added, "You find out where we are and what else is here while I go and get ready for the next stage." And as he returned to the passenger compartment again Mace and Tobis both turned their attention to the shuttle's passive sensors.

"So where are we?" Cass asked as she stared out of the viewport in front of her.

"Tobis?" Mace said, glancing over his shoulder.

"Oh, err. I don't know." Tobis replied, "Err, we're definitely in interstellar space though but the navicomputer hasn't managed to determine exactly where yet."

"But doesn't that mean that we can't jump to hyperspace?" Cass then asked worriedly, "What if we're seen?" "We can make an emergency jump of just a half light year or so." Mace replied, "That won't take us through any gravity wells. But I don't think anyone's looking for us anyway."

"Err, no." Tobis added, "I'm not picking up any active sensor sweeps."

"See?" Mace said to Cass, "Whatever the Empire's got out here they're so paranoid about anyone finding it they aren't making any more emissions that necessary."

Cass frowned and looked out of the viewport.

"I don't know," she said as she folded her arms, "I've still got a bad feeling about this."

Vorn then reappeared wearing his Imperial uniform.

"So what do we have?" he asked.

"Kriff all." Cass said and both Mace and Vorn scowled at her.

"Cass, language." Mace said.

"What? Kriff? But Kara said it just before." Cass protested and Mace turned to Vorn.

"Major is there any chance you could persuade your wife to stop swearing around my little girl?" he asked.

"Probably not." Vorn replied.

"Err." Tobis commented.

"Found something?" Vorn asked.

"I think so." Tobis replied, "It's over there somewhere." And he pointed out of the viewport.

"What is it?" Mace asked him as he tried to see for himself. Seeing nothing he reached for his kit bag and took out a pair of macrobinoculars and used them to try and get a better look.

"Oh, err, it's nothing." Tobis said, "But the transport just disappeared over there."

"A cloaked ship?" Vorn said, "If the Empire's deployed a ship with a cloaking device to the sector then-"

"It's not a cloaked ship major." Mace interrupted, "A cloaked ship would be invisible." Then he passed the macrobinoculars to Vorn and added, "Here take a look for yourself. These are in night vision mode."

With the macrobinoculars set to night vision the tiny amount of light from the distant stars was enough to allow Vorn to see as clearly as if he were standing on a typical inhabited world in the middle of the day and through these he saw the massive space station that had been built out here billions of kilometres from anywhere. The modular construction of the station confirmed to Vorn that it was of Imperial manufacture, but from this far away he could determine anything other than the most basic of details.

"A space station." he said.

"Pretty much exactly what we expected." Mace replied.

"How far?" Vorn asked and he glanced at Tobis.

"Err, I can't tell." Tobis answered."

"Why not?" Cass then asked.

"Because there's nothing to use for scale." Mace told her, "If there was then we could figure out how big it was and from that calculate the distance. Without that the only way to determine how far away we are is use our active sensors."

"And that would give away our position to them." Vorn added.  
"I'd say that we're drifting closer to them." Mace commented.  
"That, err, that makes sense." Tobis added, "It, it'll be the momentum from us dropping out of hyperspace that—" and then he stopped talking mid sentence.  
"Is there more to that?" Cass asked him.  
"What? Oh, err, maybe. But I've just picked up an small energy pulse from that space station." Tobis replied.  
"Have they seen us?" Cass asked.  
"Err, no. Or at least I don't think so." Tobis said, "I, I think it's a signal sent on a narrow beam carrier by the transport to the station and reflected back."  
"Why would that happen?" Cass then asked.  
"Even narrow beam transmissions diffuse with distance." Vorn told her, "So the portion that missed the receiver will have bounced off the hull of the station and has reached us here."  
"A clearance code maybe?" Mace suggested.  
"Possibly." Vorn replied and then he looked at Tobis and added, "Can you tell what it is?"  
Tobis shook his head.  
"No, but, err, Harvey may be able to." And then he looked around to where his astromech droid had moved to the rear of the cockpit, "Err, Harvey, plug and see what you can make of this."  
The droid rolled back to the front of the cockpit and plugged itself into the computer port located there. Then after a few moments the signal data on Tobis' monitor changed from a long string of ones and zeros to a shorter alphanumeric code.  
"Err, this definitely looks like a clearance code." Tobis said.  
"Then we've got a way in." Vorn said, "We'll wait til we get a bit closer and then power up all our systems. Hopefully they'll think we've just dropped out of hyperspace and that we're one of their support ships."  
"Err, I can force an energy pulse through the hyperdrive." Tobis suggested, "Not enough to trigger it, but it ought to look like a hyperspace event to their sensors."  
"Good idea." Vorn said and he handed the macrobinoculars back to Mace, "Let me just go get my own. I want to get a better look at this place before we reveal ourselves." And then he briefly disappeared into the passenger compartment before reappearing with his own set of macrobinoculars in his hands.  
"I think I see windows major." Mace said as he studied the station as well and when Vorn looked through his own macrobinoculars he too saw numerous points of light and he focused on one of the larger ones.  
"Mace I see people." He said.  
"Where?" Mace asked.  
"Large viewport. Upper structure to the right."  
"Okay got it. Yeah I see one of them now. Wait, there's another." Mace said and then he added, "Is that—" "A kaminoan?" Vorn interrupted him to ask as he too saw the tall, slender alien towering over a human sized companion.  
"Looks like one to me."  
"Exactly." Mace replied.  
"Yes it does." Vorn said, "And it doesn't look like a prisoner. I think that the Empire has brought in specialists from Kamino to get this place up and running. This could work for us."  
"How?" Cass asked.  
"Because we can pretend that Doctor Na has been sent to inspect the facilities." Mace said, "The Empire may even give us a guided tour. Though by 'us' I mean Jaysica and the major."  
Vorn lowered his macrobinoculars.  
"Okay this is it. Power everything up and get us aboard. I'll take Jaysica, the doctor and our droids aboard to check it out. The rest of you stay hidden in here until we call for you. Okay?"  
"Understood major." Mace replied and then he looked around at Tobis, "Okay then, lets see if this plan of yours to fake a hyperspace exit is any good."

Designed to be the command centre of a major facility the space station's control room looked empty with only four technicians and a single duty officer present, but these were all the staff that was needed to monitor the station's operations and surroundings.

"Contact." One of the technicians announced, "Single vessel exiting hyperspace in sector fourteen."

"There's nothing scheduled." The duty officer replied, "Confirm their identity and standby defences."

"Vessel looks like a lambda-class shuttle commander." Another of the technicians answered.

"Incoming signal." The third then added and looking around at his superior he added, "It's our clearance code sir."

The officer breathed a sigh of relief.

"That's fortunate." He commented, "Okay, let them land and inform the docking bay that we appear to have guests."

"Shall I inform the director?" one of the technicians asked.

"Why?" the officer responded, "That alien's too obsessed with playing with his tissue samples."

"Major they're opening the door for us." Mace's voice called out over the intercom and there was a groaning sound as the shuttle's wings folded into the landing position once more.

Tharun winced.

"How are you going to explain the state of this ship major?" he asked.

"I'm hoping it won't come up." Vorn replied.

"Just tell them Jaysica did it." Kara commented.

"Hey! That's not fair." Jaysica then protested.

"Give them a couple of minutes to get to know the klutz first though." Kara then added, seemingly oblivious to Jaysica's objection.

The shuttle then shook slightly as Mace switched from the ion drive to the repulsorlifts needed to carry out the docking and then a hollow 'clunk' informed the rebels that they had docked.

"Okay major," Mace said over the intercom, "we're down. Looks like you've got a welcoming party. Three of them."

"Well in that case," Vorn commented, "let's go and say hello."

There was a hiss of escaping gas as the shuttle's access ramp began to open. It made it part way before the sound of the motor became more tortuous and then the end of the ramp suddenly dropped to the deck, producing a loud noise that echoed around the docking bay and made the Imperial naval officer and pair of fleet troopers flinch visibly.

"What's wrong with your ship?" the officer asked as Vorn led Jaysica and Lona down the ramp, followed by their droids.

"What's right with it lieutenant? Vorn commented and then looking right at the officer he added, "Would you believe that our regular ship was actually in worse condition? We got stuck with this one because there were no others in what can laughably in this case be called flight ready."

"Oh, right." The lieutenant replied and then he remembered why he was there, "What is the purpose of your visit?" he asked.

"Surprise inspection." Vorn said.

"There's nothing on the schedule about an inspection." The lieutenant replied.

"Wouldn't be much of a surprise if it was." Jaysica muttered and one of the fleet trooper smirked.

"I am here on the orders of the Prime Minister of Kamino." Lona suddenly said, "He is concerned about the operational status of this facility given it's requirements."

"Ah. Well I'm afraid that I can't help you with that." The lieutenant said to Vorn, "Only the kaminoans know anything about how this place is supposed to operate."

"Then I suggest that you take us to them." Lona responded, "And you should direct your replies to me lieutenant, not my aides."

"Of course. This way please."

The lieutenant led the rebels from the docking bay and almost immediately the kaminoan influence on the station's construction became clear. Whereas the walls of the docking bay had been the typical sombre grey of Imperial modular construction the interior corridors were primarily polished white.

"What's with the colour?" Jaysica asked.

"Colours." Lona corrected her.

"I only see white." Jaysica replied.

"Our eyes are superior." Lona told her, "Where you see only blank walls I see bright patterns in the ultraviolet part of the spectrum that indicate our location and the direction of many of the station's vital locations."

"The main cloning facility is this way." The lieutenant said, turning down a side passageway, "That's where we'll find doctor Ku."

"Doctor Ku?" Vorn asked.

"The kaminoan in charge of all this." The lieutenant replied, "Doctor Darmo Ku. Ah, here we are." And he opened a large door at the end of the passageway.

Jaysica gasped as soon as she saw what lay within. A glass covered walkway stretched out ahead of the rebels that ran through the middle of a vast chamber. To each side were row after row of what at first glance looked like bizarre glass trees. In reality each of these was a stack of incubation chambers, consisting of transparent globes arranged in rings around a central core and then stacked above one another. Labour droids could be seen moving between some of these structures, adding more of the incubation chambers and connecting up the life support and monitoring systems to the cores under the watchful eyes of a number of kaminoans.

"You may leave us now lieutenant." Lona said, "I will be able to find doctor Ku from here."



"Certainly." The lieutenant replied and he and his men turned and marched back through the doorway behind them. As soon as they were gone Penny let out a protracted whistle.

"Oh I quite agree Penny." Jeeves replied, "Machines to make people. Something is just not right about this."

"You are in error." Lona's 2-1B medical droid then responded, "These chambers only provide places for the clones to develop. No people are made here. Besides, none of the chambers yet have clones in them. They are just-

"There's no need to explain Bal." Lona told the droid, "Now let's go and find this Doctor Ku. I think that we will find him this way."

"How do you know?" Jaysica asked.

"Because so far there are no clones developing in any of those growth chambers." Lona told her, "Which means that the director of this facility will still be selecting the exact genetic material and template to use. We need to head for the genetics lab and the signs point this way."

"What signs?" Jaysica asked and then before answering her own question with, "Oh yeah, the ultraviolet."

"Indeed." Lona said as he walked onwards.

Continuing through the cloning facility the rebels encountered only a handful of fleet troopers and labour droids, none of whom paid them much attention. It was only when they encountered any of the kaminoan cloners themselves that they felt themselves being watched.

"Major it's really spooky when they do that." Jaysica whispered.

"Do what?" Vorn asked in response.

"Bending their necks to watch us. It's as if they don't think we belong here."

"You don't." Lona told her, "Kaminoans take the art of cloning very seriously and having outsiders involved is only likely to reduce the quality of the end product." And Vorn noticed that he had described the people who came into being from cloning as if they were no different to any other mass produced item.

Lona halted outside a door and opened it to reveal a room that was a hybrid of office and laboratory. As soon as the door opened a voice called out from inside.

"Why am I being disturbed?"

As the rebels entered the room they saw that the voice had come from another kaminoan, one that possessed the characteristic fin running over the top of its head that marked the individual out as male.

"I am very busy." The voice added, "I have given instructions that-

"Doctor Ku, we are here on the orders of the Prime Minister." Lona announced.

"The Prime Minister?" Doctor Ku said, raising his hand from his work, "Why has he sent you?"

"He desires to know your status." Lona replied.

"It is all in my reports." Doctor Ku said.

"But reports can be mis-read." Lona said, "Therefore he has sent me."

"Well you can tell the Prime Minister that we are finally back on schedule, though the involvement of these humans is slowing things down immensely. I would prefer to replace them with cloned troops who are more manageable."

"Are you saying that your people are the only ones who can operate this facility?" Vorn asked.

"That is exactly what I am saying." Doctor Ku answered.

"I think we've heard everything we need." Vorn then said to Lona, "Perhaps we should inspect the rest of the facility."

"I agree." Lona replied and then he looked back at Doctor Ku, "Do please continue with your work doctor. We will show ourselves out."

The other kaminoan did not respond to this, instead turning his attention back to the computer in front of him as the rebels left his office. Once outside in the corridor Vorn looked around to make certain that they were alone before he spoke.

"Okay I think it's obvious what we need to do." He said.

"What?" Jaysica asked.

"I believe that the major intends to target the kaminoan staff." Lona said, "Doctor Ku told us that they are the only ones with the expertise to make this facility operational and then to run it."

Vorn nodded.

"If we just take out the equipment then the Empire could just ship in more from Kamino. Whereas without its staff this place is just a big collection of climate controlled glass tubes." He explained.

"Major, I would still recommend inflicting as much damage to the equipment as possible." Lona said, "Except what we can make use of."

"We can make use of?" Jaysica asked, "What do you mean by that? The Alliance isn't going to start cloning people is it?"

"No." Lona replied, "But many pieces of equipment here could be modified for alternative uses in medicine or other life sciences. Much of its is expensive and hard to come by."

Vorn looked at Lona's droid briefly.

"Can Bal identify this equipment?" he asked, turning back to the kaminoan.

"Yes he can." Lona replied.

"Then that's what he needs to do." Vorn replied, "Penny should go with him to record everything we need. In the meantime doctor I'd like you to show Jaysica where best to place charges to destroy everything we can't use."

"Of course major and what about you?" Lona asked.

"Jeeves and I are going to head for the control section of this station." Vorn answered, "We need to figure out how to disable the docking bay surveillance so we can get the others out of the shuttle unnoticed and uniforms so that they can move about. When you're done head back to the shuttle and we'll meet up there."

## 5.

Vorn was thankful that Jeeves had a perfect recollection of the path they had taken to get to the heart of the kaminoan designed cloning facility since without the protocol droid he was certain that he would have found himself wandering at random as he searched for the control section. But under Jeeves' guidance Vorn was able to return to the entrance to the docking bay and from there make his way to the parts of the station that shared the bay's easily recognisable human architecture.

The first thing that Vorn noticed about the station's human crewmembers was their very relaxed attitude to their duty. Being assigned to a remote and half completed space station far away from the nearest cantina or gambling den had obviously taken its toll on their morale and most of them appeared bored and sluggish. However when they noticed Vorn in his major's uniform, a rank apparently superior to the vast majority of the current crew they snapped to attention and did their best to suddenly look busy. This included the main control room itself where the duty officer appeared startled by Vorn's entrance.

"Sir!" he snapped as he suddenly stood to attention.

"As you were." Vorn replied, knowing that the lieutenant was highly unlikely to follow that order precisely since prior to standing at attention he had been slouched over the shoulder of one of his men while they listened to another listing various sexual conquests he claimed to have made. Including a certain young blonde woman who was rarely seen wearing anything other than a black bodyglove. Apparently it was this liaison that had caused the sector moff himself to transfer the crewman to what they considered a dead end duty station. Vorn had grinned upon hearing this, guessing who the young lady being described was and that she would be unlikely to have considered the crewman as a sexual partner.

"Is there anything I can help you with sir?" the lieutenant asked.

"I'm here to check on your security procedures." Vorn replied as he looked at the unmanned duty stations that dominated the room, "Doctor Na isn't well versed in such things, but I am."

"We don't handle that here sir." The lieutenant replied.

"Then where should I be?" Vorn asked.

"We have a dedicated security office sir. Two sections over on this level."

"Very good." Vorn said, "Oh and lieutenant?"

"Yes sir?"

"What about the laundry?"

"I'm sorry sir?"

"The laundry. You do have one don't you?"

"Of course sir. Level two, section six."

"Good." Vorn said, nodding, "Carry on lieutenant." And then as he left the room he heard the crewmen get back to their previous conversation.

Finding the security office exactly where the control centre duty officer had told him it was Vorn simply went straight in and within he found a pair of fleet troopers who appeared as distracted from their duty as everyone else he had encountered so far. What was different about this pair however was that they did not bother getting to their feet when Vorn appeared.

"Can we help you sir?" one of them asked as he glared at Vorn.

"I'm here to make certain that this station is secure." Vorn replied.

"Secure against what exactly sir?" the other trooper asked, "With respect there isn't much to keep an eye on. No one knows we're out here."

"So in all the time since this station was built you've not had a single security breach then?" Vorn asked.

"Only minor incidents as a result of crewmembers violating regulations sir." The first trooper answered.

"I see. So what about these?" Vorn then asked and he pointed to a rack of blaster rifles along one wall.

"We've never needed them sir. But they're kept operational if that's what you mean."

"Show me." Vorn said and one of the troopers frowned briefly before getting out of his seat and approaching the rack of weapons. He produced the key to unlock them and then handed one to Vorn. Accepting the rifle Vorn inspected it carefully and reached out and took a power cell from the rack as well, loading the weapon and flicking the fire selector between safe, semi-automatic, burst and fully automatic several times as if to test it's action.

"As you see sir they're in good working order." The trooper beside Vorn said while he unfolded the rifle's stock.

"So it would seem." Vorn replied and all of a sudden he swung the butt of the rifle upwards and struck the trooper under his chin, knocking him backwards. Then he spun around and as the second trooper reached for his sidearm Vorn fired a short burst into his torso. Then turning back towards the first trooper he fired another burst from point blank range into him, "Here, take this." Vorn then said to Jeeves as he handed the

rifle to the droid.

"Really sir, you know I am unable to operate such a weapon." The droid responded, "It goes against my programming."

"I know that." Vorn said as he rummaged through his pockets and took out his comlink, "But I can't take it with me in case I'm spotted with it so you may as well hang onto it. Here, take this as well."

"Am I to take that you are planning on leaving me here Major Larcus sir?" Jeeves then asked.

"That's right." Vorn replied, "I need you to stay here and make sure that these two aren't found."

"But what if someone comes in?"

"Lock the door." Vorn said and then just as he was leaving he turned around and added, "And hope they don't have blasters."

The tinted coating of the shuttle's viewport meant that the rebels hiding within could sit in the cockpit and observe the docking bay without fear of being noticed. However, the only activity outside was the force of loadlifters emptying the transport that had brought the rebels here and depositing the cargo containers onto several flat bed cargo carriers that then took it away. At least was until a pair of figures appeared in the main doorway, one human and the other kaminoan.

"Hey, the klutz and the doc are back!" Kara exclaimed, reaching out and shaking Tharun awake.

"Huh? What?" he replied.

"I'll go let them in." Tobis said, but as he began to get to his feet Mace stopped him.

"Wait, let them open the ramp themselves." He said, "We don't know if anyone's watching the ship. If we open the door from the inside they'll know that someone's in here."

"Oh, yeah. Right." Tobis said, "But, err, I'll just go and wait by the ramp okay?" and then he slipped out of the cockpit. Behind him Cass watched and smiled.

"He really likes Jaysica doesn't he?" she said and everyone glared at her, "What? Everyone should have someone to be with. Kara has Vorn-"

"That's the major or Major Larcus to you." Mace interrupted.

"Yes okay and Tharun's got Lyssa so I just think it's nice that those two have one another as well."

"No mention of the captain there." Tharun commented.

"That's because he won't tell me when he's going to ask Malia to marry him." Cass said and then looking directly at Mace she added, "I want a mom as well."

Then Mace found Kara and Tharun both staring at him as well.

"What?" he asked, "We'll get married when we're good and ready."

"So you are planning it then?" Kara asked and Mace frowned.

"I'm going to go and see if Tobis needs a hand." He said and he got up and left the cockpit.

"You want them to get married kid?" Kara said to Cass, "Just take a leaf out of Tharun's book and get them both good and drunk."

"That's how come you got married?" Cass then said to Tharun.

"I think I'll just check on the others." He replied before he too left the cockpit.

As Tharun entered the passenger compartment not only had Jaysica and Lona come aboard the ship but Vorn was also making his way up the boarding ramp with a kit bag over his shoulder.

"You got the uniforms then?" Mace asked him.

"Yes and Jeeves is holding down the security office." Vorn replied, "But I don't want to leave him there too long." then he looked around, "Where are the other droids?" he asked.

"Oh, err, Harvey's in the cockpit still." Tobis said.

"And we left Bal and Penny securing medical supplies." Jaysica added.

"Good." Vorn said as he set down the bag and began to hand out uniforms, "We need to split into four teams of two." He then said, "Kara and I will head back to the security office and see what chaos we can cause from there. Mace, I want you to take Cass and take the main control centre. Don't worry its only lightly manned and I didn't see any weapons when I was there." And Mace nodded in agreement as Vorn turned to Jaysica and Lona, "You two make sure that the charges are set and then join up with your droids and get back here with everything you can steal okay?"

"Of course major." Lona replied.

"I guess that just leaves me and Tobis." Tharun commented.

"Yes it does." Vorn said, "I want the pair of you to hunt down the kaminoan cloning staff. They're the key to this facility and without them it's useless."

"You okay with that?" Tharun asked, looking at Lona.

"Why shouldn't I be?" the kaminoan asked, "Those people may be of my species but they are still my enemies sergeant. Do you have any qualms about killing other humans?" and Tharun smiled.

"No I don't." he said.

"Okay, I'll just go and take these uniforms to Cass and Kara." Vorn said, " Wish me luck."

"Why?" Jaysica asked.

"You'll see." Vorn said and he then vanished into the cockpit and a moment later there was a sudden yell from Kara.

"You had to get me a man's sized uniform to fit my stomach?" she cried out.

"Oh I've got a bad feeling about that." Mace said.

## 6.

"Somebody's coming, stay close behind me." Vorn whispered as he and Kara made their way towards the security office.

"What? Does your big fat wife embarrass you?" she replied and Vorn frowned briefly.

"Look, when we get to the security office you can take the uniform off if you want."

"Oh you'd like that wouldn't you? Well let me tell you, it's going to take some major grovelling on your part to see me undress again." Kara hissed and then both rebels remained silent as a group of Imperial navy personnel walked past talking amongst themselves.

"Have I reminded you that you're beautiful and I love you?" Vorn then said as the Imperial crewmen went out of earshot.

"Stang." Kara commented, "Okay you're forgiven. But no lap dance in the security office. We've got a job to do you know."

"I'll try and control myself. Look, we're here." Vorn said and he tapped on the door to the security office.

"Try harder." Kara said and while she banged her fist on the door Vorn held out his hand.

"Give me your comlink." He told her and when she handed over the device he activated it, "Jeeves are you there?"

"Oh Major Larcus sir, thank the maker it's you. There is someone trying to get in."

"I know. It's us. Open the door quickly." Vorn said and the door suddenly slid upwards.

"Oh I am so relieved to see you sir. Jeeves said as Kara and Vorn darted into the room, "And you of course Lieutenant Larcus miss."

"Yeah right." Kara replied, "Now out of the way, I need to sit down. Jackboots aren't good for pregnant feet."

Tharun and Tobis stood on the walkway and looked at the tree like stacks of cloning tanks and at the figures moving in between them.

"Okay lad," Tharun said as he set his bag down on the walkway and opened it up, "I reckon that this gives us a pretty good field of fire." And he handed a carbine to Tobis while taking his own heavy blaster rifle from the bag for himself.

"Right. Err, so what should I do?" Tobis asked.

"I'll take out these cloners. You just make sure that con one tries to sneak up on us. Can you manage that?"

"Err, yes." Tobis replied.

"Good." Tharun said and he suddenly took aim at the first kaminoan to come into his field of fire and shot him.

"Sir, I'm getting reports of weapons discharges in the cloning centre." One of the duty technicians in the control centre told the officer.

"But that's impossible." The lieutenant replied, "What's security doing?"

"Nothing sir." The technician replied, "I can't raise the security office at all."

The lieutenant barely reacted when a man and young woman then entered the control centre wearing lieutenant's uniforms themselves, but then he realised that he did not recognise either of them.

"Who are you?" he demanded as the young woman closed the door behind her, "And what the hell are you doing here."

"My name's Grayle." Mace replied and then as he produced his heavy blaster pistol from behind his back he added, "And I'm here to relieve you of command." And he shot the lieutenant before the man could react. Mace fired a second shot, taking out one of the technicians before another one dived into him and attempted to wrest the blaster from his hand. At the same time the final technician made a rush for the door and just as Cass pulled her slender sporting blaster pistol from under her tunic he barged into her. Cass squealed and there was the sound of a blaster discharged, accompanied by the smell of burning flesh and cloth.

"Cass!" Mace exclaimed and he looked around to see the Imperial technician collapse in a heap. The sight of his comrade dropping dead also distracted Mace's opponent, but Mace recovered his sense sooner and with a single punch he knocked the man away before shooting him, "Cass are you okay?" he then called out, rushing to her side.

Cass nodded furiously and Mace looked down at the body by her feet.

"You had to." Mace said, "It was him or you. Okay?" and Cass nodded again, "Okay then. Now let's see what we can do to stir things up a bit." And he headed for the nearest duty station.

"Okay that's the last one." Jaysica said as she slid out from under the incubation unit and Lona helped her to her feet.

"Then we must find the droids and get out of here." Lona replied, but as they turned to leave they found themselves facing Doctor Ku.

"What is going on here?" he demanded.

"We are putting an end to this." Lona replied, "I will not let you tarnish our people's history any further."

"What are you talking about? Kamino has never been stronger. We are the source of the Empire's power to bring order. Without us the Separatists would have overrun known space by now." And from his pocket he took a comlink and activated it, "Security alert! There are saboteurs aboard." And then there was a flash of red as Jaysica drew her hold out blaster and shot him dead.

"You there! What's going on?" the station's captain yelled at a fleet trooper as he ran past in the corridor. The captain had been rudely awoken by the commotion outside his quarters as people ran back and forth yelling, but so far he had been unable to contact either the control centre or security office.

"I don't know sir." The trooper replied, "Some people are saying we've been boarded, but we can't get any response from control."

"Gather what men you can." The captain ordered, "Then meet me at the main armoury. If there are intruders then I intend to hunt them down and kill them all."

"Boss we've got company." Kara called out, "Looks like half a dozen goons in black."

"Are there any blast doors between us?" Vorn asked and Kara shook her head. Vorn then grabbed the rifle that he had left with Jeeves and rushed to the doorway.

"Got another of those?" Kara asked.

"Help yourself." Vorn replied, then he added, "Jeeves keep an eye on those monitors and let us know if any more of them show up."

Firing a burst from his carbine, Tobis cut down the two troopers who attempted to storm the walkway.

"Err, that was the third lot." He commented.

"Okay lad, they've obviously figured out where we are." Tharun replied, "Time to move, we're done here anyway." Then as they began to run he too out his comlink, "Major, we're finished." He transmitted and there was a pause before the comlink produced the sound of blasterfire then accompanied by Vorn's voice.

"Good. Head for the control centre and join up with Mace. Kara and I are pinned down. We can hold out but we're going to need an extraction."

"Copy that major. Help is on its way."

"What took you so long?" Mace asked when Tharun and Tobis finally appeared outside the control centre.

"Its those kaminoan corridors captain." Tharun replied, "They all look alike."

"Okay." Mace said, "But we need to move."

"What about this place?" Cass asked, "Shouldn't we do something about it to stop the crew using it again?"

"Sergeant Verser, would you please do the honours?" Mace said to Tharun and the former mercenary grinned.

"Fire in the hole." He said as he took a grenade from his bag.

He waited until Cass and Mace were in the corridor as well before pulling out the pin and tossing the grenade in through the open doorway. Then before it detonated he slammed his hand down on the door controls to close it and there was a dull 'crump' from the other side.

"Job done." He said with a smile.

"Job done indeed." Mace agreed, "Now let's go help your in-laws."

By the best estimates of the men that the captain had rallied to him there were only two rebels in the security office, but given that they had access to the weapons kept there they were able to keep his larger force pinned down even if they could not break out.

"Corporal! Have you been able to figure out what else is happening?" the captain yelled as another trooper appeared around a corner behind his men and rushed towards them.

"It looks like they've hit the cloning facility sir." The corporal replied, "It looks like they looted some of the stores and killed as many of the kaminoans as they could."

"Kriff!" the captain snapped, "They may be aliens, but we needed them. Are there any left?"

"No one seems to know. Communications are still down. I think there were a couple of them in the barracks and there doesn't seem to have been any trouble there yet."

"Then take a squad and search both the barracks and the cloning centre. I need to know what we've lost."

"Yes sir." The corporal replied and he rushed off once more.

The captain was just turning back towards the security office when there was the sound of more footsteps and as he looked behind him again he saw a new group of figures in Imperial uniforms appear, two officers and two enlisted men by the looks of it. But just as he was about to call out to them when he noticed the

weapons that they were carrying. Not one of the four was armed with an Imperial issue pistol or rifle and he was just about to call out a warning to his men when the biggest of the newcomers raised his heavy rifle and opened fire.

"That's Tharun!" Kara exclaimed, "I'd recognise the sound of that portable cannon of his anywhere."

"Stay back!" Vorn snapped and he leapt out of the doorway and sprayed blaster shots down the corridor towards the Imperial troops that had been keeping them trapped.

Suddenly finding themselves caught between two groups of rebels the station's captain and his men stood little chance. Seeing that the newly arrived rebels had greater firepower some tried to retreat towards the security office only to be cut down by Vorn.

"Stay down!" the captain yelled as he tried to restore some semblance of order and he reached out to grab hold of one of his men as he turned to flee. But in doing so he just made both himself and the fleeing man easy prey for Tharun and his next burst struck them both.

"Major!" Mace yelled out as he shot the last of the troopers he could see, "Can you get to us?"

"Yes! We're on our way." Vorn called out in response, "What's your status?"

"We're all fine. But I haven't heard from Jaysica or Doctor Na in a while." Mace replied.

Jaysica struggled with the weight of the bag over her shoulder as she and Lona headed back to the docking bay where their shuttle waited. Behind her neither the doctor nor his surgical droid seemed to be having anywhere near as much difficulty and she was starting to wonder if she had made the mistake of picking the heaviest bag.

"Halt! Who's there?" a voice called out from the docking bay and Jaysica spotted an Imperial fleet trooper standing in the doorway to the docking bay.

"Don't shoot!" she called out.

"Who are you?" the trooper demanded, his blaster aimed towards her.

"My name's Horbid." Jaysica replied, "Intruders have attacked the cloning centre and killed most of the staff there. I've been ordered to escort Doctor Na to safety aboard his ship."

"Okay move it." The trooper replied, "There are rebels all over the place. At least a full company."

Jaysica smiled in what the trooper took to be a grateful way, but in fact it was because he had just demonstrated how little idea the station's crew had of what was going on. Accompanied by Lona and their droids she then continued into the docking bay and it was only then that she saw the trooper who had challenged them was just one of a much larger force that had set up just inside the docking bay and that their weaponry including a light repeating blaster that would rip apart anyone that tried to storm the entrance. Without speaking the pair of rebels returned to their shuttle and headed right for the cockpit, from where they could see the Imperial troopers.

"Major." Jaysica said into her comlink, "I think we've got a problem."

"What's wrong?" Vorn's voice replied, "We're on our way back to you now so if you just wait then—"

"No major, it's a trap." Jaysica interrupted, "There are fleet troopers here with a light repeating blaster. They'll kill you."

"Stang." Vorn exclaimed, "Does it look like there's a way around them?"

"I don't think so." Jaysica replied, then unseen by Vorn a smile appeared on her face and she added, "I've got an idea." She said and she shut off the comlink.

"Corporal, what is your plan?" Lona asked.

"We've got laser cannons on this thing haven't we?" Jaysica replied.

In the docking bay outside the troopers noticed the sound of the shuttle's engines powering up, but thought nothing of it. They just assumed that Doctor Na had decided to flee the station while it was under attack. However, some of them did notice as the shuttle rose off the decks with its access ramp still lowered and turned in place to face towards them. Or more accurately, aligning itself so that they were directly in front of its wing mounted laser cannons.

In the cockpit Jaysica sat in the gunner's seat while Harvey piloted the shuttle by directly plugging into the flight computer.

"That's it!" Jaysica exclaimed and she fired the cannons. She was not a skilled gunner, but at such short range she could not miss the troopers by much and even a near miss was enough to heat the air around them that they were roasted by the passing energy blasts. Jaysica then paused and looked out of the viewport, searching for any signs of life, "Okay major," she then transmitted using her comlink, "the coast is clear now."

The rest of the rebels rushed aboard the shuttle and Tharun sealed the access ramp as soon as the last of them was inside. Mace, Tobis and Vorn rushed to the cockpit where they found Jaysica waiting for them.

"Okay, take us out." Vorn told Mace as they sat down in the front two seats.



"Yes sir." Mace replied, taking hold of the control column. Meanwhile Harvey let out an abrupt burst of sound and disconnected from the computer.

The shuttle shot out of the docking bay and as soon as it was clear its wings dropped down into the flight position. Then Vorn turned to look at Jaysica.

"Okay corporal," he said, "if you'd like to finish off why we came here." And she smiled as she adjusted the channel setting on her comlink.

In the cloning facility back aboard the station, the corporal sent to search for survivors and his men had found nothing but corpses. Now they were surveying the damage, which so far did not seem to be too bad.

"Over here!" a trooper called out and the corporal rushed to see what he had found.

"What is it?" he asked.

"It looks like there's something stuck to this. Behind the pipes." The trooper said and the corporal bent down for a closer look. There he saw a grey substance pressed up against a flow valve and pressed into that was a small black rod with a green light on it.

"Something over here as well!" another trooper called out.

"And over here!"

The corporal's eyes widened as he realised what he was looking at.

"Oh I've got a very bad feeling about this." He said just before the green light turned red.