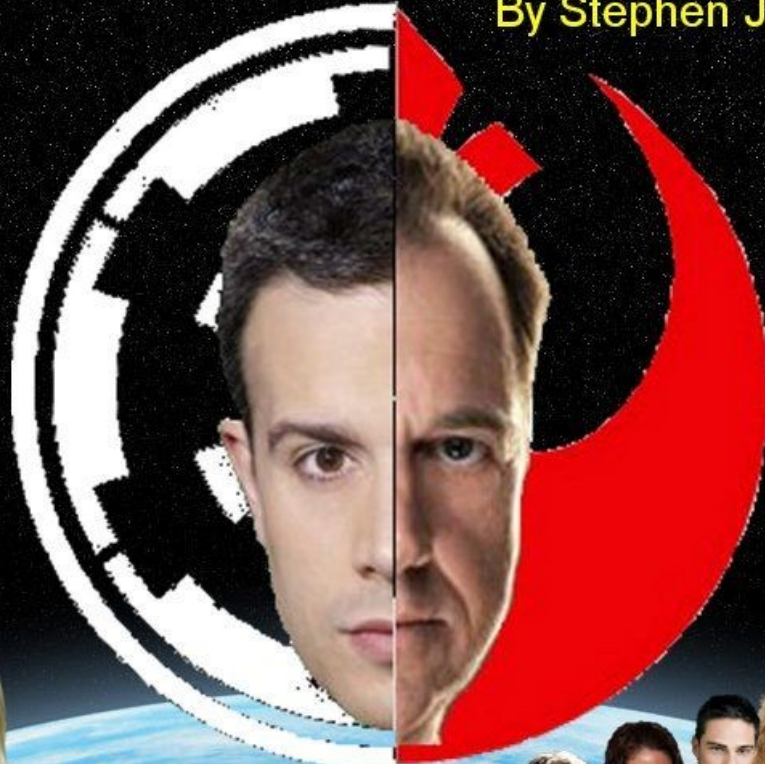


# STAR WARS

## 5-07: The Defector

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...

## THE DEFECTOR

THE OCCUPANTS OF THE *SILVER HAWK* ARE SENT TO ASSIST A SENIOR IMPERIAL  
OFFICER DEFECT TO THE ALLIANCE. BUT WHEN THE EMPIRE BEGINS TO SUSPECT  
THE OFFICER'S LOYALTY, COUNTERMEASURES ARE TAKEN...

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

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# 1.

A sudden and brief flash of light heralded the arrival of the YT-1300 class light freighter *Silver Hawk*. Used by the Alliance to Restore the Republic, more commonly known as the Rebel Alliance the ship had for more than two years carried a four member field team in addition to its two crew but more recently had added a seventh occupant. However, at the moment that the ship arrived in this remote star system only three of these were aboard.

"Okay Cass cut back on the power." Mace Grayle, the owner of the *Silver Hawk* told the teenage girl currently sat in the pilot's seat, "We're not in a hurry to get anywhere so there's no point in burning fuel."

"Like this right dad?" the girl replied and the sound of the ship's ion drives reduced in volume.

"That's it." Mace said and then he turned to the woman sat behind him, "What do you think Kara? Is she a chip off the old block or what?"

Kara frowned.

"I prefer starfighters myself." She said and then she rubbed her stomach, clearly swollen from pregnancy, "Not that I think I'd fit in one at the moment."

"Dad taught me to fly a TIE fighter." Cass commented.

"Keep your eyes on what you're doing." Mace said, "And you had less than an hour in that fighter."

"Right dad. So how long do we need to wait here anyway?"

"As long as it takes for the others to get here." Mace answered.

"I should have gone with them." Kara said, "I don't think that the boss is safe without me to protect him."

"I don't think you'd be able to remain inconspicuous in your condition." Mace commented.

"Major Larcus has got Tharun hasn't he?" Cass then asked.

"Sure." Kara replied, "And Tobis. But those two will have their hands full watching forty thousand or more Imperial navy crew. I'm worried about the danger he's in from the klutz."

Major Vorn Larcus the third led his party towards the docking port. In the service of the Alliance he had infiltrated numerous Imperial dockyards and starships, but this time there was very little subterfuge required. This time he and his people were authorised to be here.

Wearing stolen Imperial uniforms the four rebels, three men and a young woman simply walked up to the docking port and presented falsified identity cards to one of the guards who then checked these against a list of personnel authorised to have access to the star destroyer docked there.

"Go on through major." The guard said as he handed back the identity cards, "The admiral is expecting you."

Vorn was about to thank the guard when he remembered that it was unusual for Imperial officers to acknowledge junior enlisted personnel in such a way and so he instead just took his card back and put it away.

"Thank you." The young woman in his team said as she accepted her card. The rest of Vorn's team were all dressed as enlisted personnel so her friendly demeanour did not concern Vorn and he simply walked through the hatchway with the rest of his team following him.

Inside the star destroyer Vorn stopped and looked at his datapad.

"So which way major?" the larger of the two men accompanying Vorn, a man called Tharun Verser asked.

"I'm just checking sergeant." Vorn replied and he looked up from the datapad to try and get his bearings.

"Err-" the other man began.

"Tobis knows where we need to go." The young woman then said excitedly.

"Oh, err, actually I don't." Tobis replied, "But there's someone over there that I think may be waiting for us."

And he nodded in the direction of an officer who was standing by a bulkhead with and holding up a sheet of flimsiplast upon which the word 'LARCUS' had been written.

"Isn't having your name written there a bit dangerous?" the female rebel asked.

"I wouldn't worry too much about it Jaysica." Vorn replied, "There must be hundreds of thousands of people with that name in the sector." And then he approached the man, "I'm Major Larcus." He said and the officer snapped to attention.

"Admiral Rosten sends his compliments major. If you'd like to come with me I'll take you to his office."

Vorn smiled.

"Of course ensign. Lead the way." And then he looked at the rest of his team and smiled again, "Come along. We mustn't keep the admiral waiting must we?"

As the rebels followed the Imperial ensign away from the docking port another group of people approached the entrance to the star destroyer. Once more there were four of them but their uniforms were not those of the Imperial Navy or any other regular military group. Instead all four were clearly members of COMPForce,

the military wing of the Committee for the Preservation of the New Order. As soon as they saw them the newcomers, the guards quickly stood up and straightened their uniforms.

"COMPForce Observer Mowden." The first of them announced to the guards, holding out a datapad that bore the credentials of all four men, "We will be boarding this vessel."

"Of course." The guard who had only just allowed the rebel team to pass replied. No one had informed him of any such personnel boarding the ship, but it was widely known that getting in the way of COMPForce observers was the fastest way to ruin a career. They were nothing more than spies sent to ensure that the actions of the military were politically sound.

The guards all stood aside as the COMPForce observers passed by, watching until they were out of sight. Then one of the guards took a comlink from his pocket and activated it.

"This is hatch Besh. Pass the word, there are observers aboard." He transmitted. Then he looked to his comrades, "I've got a very bad feeling about this." He said to them.

The ensign led the four rebels towards the rear of the star destroyer, to an office located about half way up the tower that housed the powerful vessel's main control systems. Halting, he pressed a button beside the door.

"Yes?" a voice responded through the intercom.

"Admiral, it's Ensign Freer. I have your guest and his party." And then the door slid open.

The ensign entered the office and stood beside the door as the rebels followed him in and found themselves facing a man in the uniform of an Imperial Admiral.

"That will be all ensign." The admiral said.

"Of course sir. May I get you—"

"No ensign. We are not to be disturbed." The admiral interrupted and then the ensign clicked his heels together and left the room.

As the door slid shut Vorn reached into his tunic and produced a palm sized device that he held up.

"There's no need for that here." The admiral told him, "I had my security people sweep my office for surveillance devices only yesterday."

"I've found it pays to be cautious admiral." Vorn replied, "You never know who may be listening in." then, satisfied that his surveillance detector had not found anything suspicious he put it away again and then held out his hand to the admiral, "The name's Larcus. Major Vorn Larcus." He said.

"Admiral Nattanian Rosten." The admiral replied, "I was told to expect you. Do please make yourselves at home. All of you."

"Don't mind if I do." Tharun replied as he sat down on a nearby couch.

"Who's that?" Jaysica then asked, staring at a framed image on the wall behind the admiral. In it a man who looked similar to the admiral himself but wearing an older Republic Judicial Fleet uniform stood behind a desk identical to that the admiral was now stood behind, leaning on it.

"Oh that's my father." Admiral Rosten answered, looking at the image himself, "He served the Republic loyally for decades. If he'd have known what it would become then I certain he'd do everything he could to stop it."

"So that's why you're looking to defect?" Vorn asked as he sat down in a seat beside the admiral's desk, "To honour your father's memory?"

"Mainly yes." The admiral replied as he too sat down, "But frankly I've been disgusted by some of the reports I've started to see from other sectors. Civilians slaughtered and enslaved. The casual disregard for sentient life, particularly if it isn't human. No more I say. I've taken my last order from Palpatine's Galactic Empire."

"Well I'm sure we'll be able to help you with that." Vorn said and then he looked round to where a caf maker sat on a small table, "Is it alright to have one of those?" he asked, "I haven't had anything since we arrived on the planet below."

"Of course. Help yourselves." The admiral said, "But I'll pass. I'm trying to give it up."

"I'll get them." Jaysica said suddenly.

"Oh, err, perhaps," Tobis began, but the young woman had already made her way to the machine and was setting it to produce beverages.

"None for me." Tharun said.

"What do you mean?" Jaysica replied, "You were complaining about being thirsty all the way from the surface."

"Err, Jaysica, perhaps I should—" Tobis said and Jaysica turned around.

"Do you think I can't—" she began. But as she turned her elbow caught the side of the machine and knocked it off the table, spilling hot water and concentrated caf powder across the floor. Jaysica squealed and leapt back to avoid the spill, knocking into Tobis and the pair of them fell to the floor as well.

"Are they alright?" Admiral Rosten asked in surprise.

"Normally admiral, yes." Tharun replied.

"Well aren't you going to help them up?" the admiral then asked him.

"It's generally best not to get too heavily involved." Vorn told Rosten as Jaysica and Tobis picked themselves up.

"Oh I'm sorry." Jaysica said as she looked at the mess surrounding the broken machine, "But I'm sure Tobis can fix it. He can fix anything."

"Err." Tobis said as he too looked at the damage with much less certainty in his ability to fix it.

"So admiral," Vorn said, ignoring the broken caf maker and mess that Jaysica had made, "are your orders still to take this ship to the Spire Worlds?"

"I doubt it." Admiral Rosten responded, "My orders were never to go to the Spire Worlds. The *Primarch* is supposed to be patrolling the Trade Corridor. But that would mean we'd never be more than a few minutes from other Navy units. I wanted us somewhere out of the way for what we're planning."

"Excuse me." Jaysica said, raising her hand nervously, "But what exactly is being planned? I thought that we were just here to help you escape."

Rosten and Vorn exchanged glances before the admiral looked directly at Jaysica with a wide smile on his face.

"Young lady." He announced, "It's not just me that will be joining the Alliance. It is our intention to bring them this ship as well."

## 2.

"My name is Captain Tollis and I am responsible for the operations aboard this ship." The officer told the four COMPForce observers who he had been able to intercept as they made their way towards the admiral's office.

The observers looked to Mowden as he glared at the captain.

"Admiral Rosten gives the orders on this ship captain." Mowden pointed out, "He is the one we will speak with."

"Yes you're right. The admiral does give the orders on this ship and he has given orders that he is not to be disturbed." Captain Tollis replied without thinking and it was only after he had spoken that he realised that he had just challenged the observers' authority and just potentially killed his career.

"Of course." Mowden said, bowing his head slightly and Tollis breathed a sigh of relief, "In that case could you show us to our quarters?" the observer then asked.

"Right this way gentlemen." The captain replied, "I'll see what can be arranged for you." And then he guided the unwelcome guests towards the cabins set aside for the occasional passengers that the star destroyer received.

Admiral Rosten released a security lockout on a datapad and then handed it to Tobis.

"It's all in there." He said, "Where to rig the safety systems to make it appear that the ship is in danger and justify an evacuation. Plus how to slave the flight controls to enable us to operate her for long enough to allow us to get away."

The other rebels looked in Tobis' direction as the engineer read through the information on the datapad.

"So will it work lad?" Tharun asked from the couch as he sipped water from a bottle that Admiral Rosten had given him following the destruction of the caf maker. Several such bottles stood on the admiral's desk just in case anyone else wanted one.

"Err. I think so." Tobis replied, continuing to look through the information.

"I didn't realise that you were an engineer admiral." Vorn said.

"Oh I didn't come up with that." Admiral Rosten replied, "Being an admiral has its benefits Major Larcus. I've been able to, ahh, well let's just say that I know who my friends are and I've made certain that they're kept close."

"I see." Vorn replied.

"I don't." Jaysica added.

"What the admiral is saying little lady," Tharun said, "is that he's not the only one aboard this ship that'll be coming with us. Is that right admiral?"

"How many more are we talking about admiral?" Vorn then asked.

"About a dozen, but just two more officers." The admiral answered, "My chief engineer, Lieutenant Commander Brostat and my medical officer, Doctor Hillis. The rest are enlisted men that I've made sure remained posted here. There are quite a lot of others aboard that I think are sympathetic to the rebellion, but I can't be one hundred percent certain so I've kept them out of this."

"Good idea." Vorn said, "If even one of them turned on you then all of this would be for nothing."

"Err, well, I thought that I'd be the one sabotaging the systems." Tobis commented and Vorn looked at the admiral.

"You still will be." Admiral Rosten said, "I asked for an engineering specialist specifically so that the commander didn't need to do it himself and risk exposure."

"Plausible deniability?" Tharun commented.

"Sounds like it to me." Vorn agreed.

"Major there are more than forty-five thousand crew and troops aboard this ship and it only takes one of them to walk in at the wrong time for this to go wrong. If your man is captured then he's just a rebel saboteur. But if my own engineer is sabotaging the ship then there's an entire regiment of stormtroopers, plus hundreds of fleet security personnel aboard who'll be combing the ship for more traitors."

"Well I've got a bad feeling about this." Jaysica commented as she approached the desk and picked up one of the water bottles. Then as she began to try and remove the top she added, "It's putting Tobis in a lot of danger."

"I'm guessing that's why we're here little lady." Tharun told her and he looked at Vorn.

"That's right." He replied, "Jaysica, you can assist Tobis in sabotaging the ship the way it's been described in that datapad, while Tharun will act as a lookout and bodyguard to the pair of you."

"If you don't mind me asking major, what will you be doing while all this is going on?" Tharun asked and a slight smile appeared on Vorn's face.

"The admiral will be showing me around the ship of course. I am his guest after all." He answered. Then before anyone else could say anything Jaysica succeeded in opening the bottle of water, but she as gripping it so tightly that as soon as the seal was broken she crushed it and propelled the water out in a sudden spurt. As Jaysica squealed in surprise the jet of liquid splashed across the admiral's desk, soaking the computer terminal sat on top of it. The water then ran down inside the terminal until it reached the power supply and there was a sudden flash and a sharp 'crack!' as the power to the terminal shorted out and the screen went black.

"Oops." Jaysica said as she set down the now empty bottle and stepped away, Admiral Rosten glaring at her. "Perhaps you should all go and check out our quarters while the admiral and I finish up here." Vorn suggested.

"That sounds like a good idea." Admiral Rosten agreed, still staring at Jaysica, "There's a whole star destroyer out there you've not spilt anything over."

"It was an-" Jaysica began before Tharun got to his feet and clamped his hand over her mouth.

"We'll be right on our way." He said, "Just as soon as you can direct us there."

"Oh, err, I think its right here." Tobis said, holding up the datapad the admiral had given him.

"It is." Admiral Rosten said, "I thought it prudent to provide you with a floor plan of the ship. People may get suspicious if people in Imperial uniform need to keep asking the way to get anywhere."

"Go on then lad." Tharun said to Tobis, "Lead the way." And he released his grip on Jaysica.

"I was only going to say that it was-" Jaysica began muttering as the trio left the office.

"Yeah, we all know what you were going to say." Tharun interrupted.

When the door slid shut after the three rebels Admiral Rosten turned to Vorn.

"Is she always like that?" he asked.

"Unfortunately yes." Vorn replied, "You get used to it eventually. You get used to it and you maintain a large supply of spare parts." Then as both men grinned he added, "So are you looking forward to retirement?"

"Retirement? I doubt I'll get much time to relax when I'm spending all my time being debriefed by your intelligence people. What about you?"

"What about me?" Vorn asked.

"Are you looking forward to this? And what about your people? Have you told them yet?"

"One of them." Vorn replied, "Not any of the three you've met. A man called Mace Grayle. He's the captain of the ship we'll be meeting up with and when this mission is complete and the *Primarch* is added to our fleet he'll be my first officer."

Admiral Rosten handed Vorn another datapad, a more compact model than the one he had given to Tobis.

"Here." He said with a smile, "This contains a full plan of your new command. Feel free to get acquainted with it. I'd show you around myself but I think I better get something done about the mess in here."

"Of course." Vorn replied as he got to his feet and took the datapad. Then he briefly stood at attention and saluted, "Admiral." He said.

"Major." Admiral Rosten replied, returning the salute and then Vorn strode out of the office. The admiral then turned to the desk-mounted intercom. Thankfully the device had avoided the water spilled by Jaysica and he activated, "Bridge, this is the admiral." He said, "I need a cleaning droid and a computer tech in my office."

"Yes admiral." A voice replied, "But admiral there's something that Captain Tollis wanted you to know as well." "What?"

"Well sir, its just that four COMPForce observers have come aboard the ship. The captain is assigning them quarters now."

"Thank you ensign." The admiral replied, "I'll deal with them later on." And then he shut off the intercom and sighed. Then he leant forwards, supporting himself on his desk in the same pose as in the image of his father on the wall behind him, "First that one woman disaster zone and now COMPNOR is putting its spies on my ship." He said to himself, "I think I picked the wrong week to quit drinking caf."

On Imperial warships, or even Alliance ones for that matter most enlisted personnel could expect only to share a compact room with other enlisted crewmembers. Indeed, given the limited amount of space aboard the *Silver Hawk* that was how Vorn's team lived as well. But here aboard the *Primarch* the rebels had each been assigned a room of their own. That was not to say that the accommodation was luxurious, the décor was as dull as could be expected of a warship but still it was clean and more importantly offered the rebel's complete privacy.

Bearing this in mind Tharun was reluctant to venture to either Jaysica's or Tobis' cabins when he left his for a look around, just in case he found the pair of them together in the midst of a romantic encounter.

Therefore he was alone when he walked around a corner and suddenly found himself confronted by an officer in a captain's uniform and force members of COMPForce. Tharun's natural instinct was to reach towards his sidearm, but he resisted the urge just long enough for Captain Tollis to come to a halt and turn to the other men with him.



"Here you are." He said, "These cabins will be yours. Now if you don't mind I need to be on the bridge when we leave spacedock."

"Of course captain." Mowden replied, "I will probably inspect the bridge for myself later on. But for now please ensure that the admiral is made aware of our presence. We will need to speak with him."

"I'll see that it's done." Captain Tollis said, nodding briefly and then walked past Tharun without giving the disguised rebel a second glance. Watching the captain leave Tharun then turned back towards the four COMPForce men as they each entered cabins. Then as soon as they were out of sight he spun around and hurried back towards the cabins that had been assigned to the rebels. Rushing up to the door of the one assigned to Tobis he banged on the door with his fist.

"Open up lad! It's important!" he called out and then he banged on the door again.

The door to Tobis' cabin remained closed but the adjacent one, the door to Jaysica's cabin slid open to reveal Tobis smoothing down his hair.

"Oh, err-" he said.

"There you are." Tharun said, stepping closer so that he caught sight of Jaysica sat on her bed and fastening her uniform, "Sorry to interrupt lad, but we've got a problem. A big problem."

"What's wrong?" Jaysica asked from on her bed.

"COMPForce." Tharun replied, "I just saw a bunch of their goons being shown to guest cabins like ours."

"But, but err, well this ship has a regiment of stormtroopers aboard. Why would they need COMPForce assault troopers?" Tobis asked and Tharun shook his head.

"Didn't look like assault troopers lad. Not enough of them for starters." He replied, "They had that pompous look to them that I've only ever seen on ISB and intel thugs."

"Well should we tell the major?" Jaysica asked.

"No." Tharun said, "I think that we should keep this our little secret little lady. What the major doesn't know won't hurt him."

"Err, but what if-" Tobis began.

"Of course we should kriffing tell him!" Tharun snapped, "Now come on. You two can break in the bed later."

"Where are they?" Admiral Rosten asked as he entered the bridge and walked up to Captain Tollis.

"I left them in guest quarters on deck fifteen sir."

"Fifteen?" the admiral responded, realising just how close that put them to Vorn's rebel team.

"Yes sir. Is that a problem?"

"Captain, COMPForce observers are always a problem. How many of the crew know about them?"

"Probably all of them." Captain Tollis answered.

"And who have they had contact with so far?" the admiral then asked.

"I'm not sure. I got to them as quickly as I could, but-"

"We're cleared to depart spacedock." One of the crewmen in the nearby pit then called out.

"Very good." Admiral Rosten replied, "Take us out, captain."

"Yes sir." The captain replied and then still looking out of the viewports to the front of the bridge he began to call out orders, "Secure all hatches! Helm, release docking clamps and engage manoeuvring thrusters. Lay in a course away from the planet." Then he looked at Admiral Rosten, "Destination?" he asked.

"One moment." The admiral replied as he spotted Vorn walking onto the bridge, the guards barely registering his presence and he walked up to Vorn, "Anywhere specific major?" he asked quietly.

"Somewhere close to the Fretis system." Vorn replied.

"Luscus? It's two parsecs from Fretis." The admiral suggested and Vorn nodded.

"Should do." Vorn replied and Admiral Rosten turned back towards Captain Tollis.

"We're headed for Luscus captain. Head there via Allastra and Bytan."

"Of course admiral." Captain Tollis replied and he looked down into the nearest crew pit, "Navigation I want a jump to Allastra plotted by the time we're out of the gravity well."

"Yes captain, I'm pulling the numbers now." The ship's astrogator replied.

"They're a damn good crew." Admiral Rosten whispered to Vorn, "It's a pity to leave them behind." Then he noticed another figure appear at the rear of the bridge, "Uh-oh." He said.

"What?" Vorn asked and he turned around in time to see Mowden approaching them both, "Oh, I see."

"Just keep quiet." Admiral Rosten said, "I'll deal with this."

"Admiral Nattaniel Rosten." Mowden announced, "My name is Mowden and I have been assigned to your vessel to learn about your command practices."

"Of course you have." Admiral Rosten replied, taking note of the glances that many of his crewmen were exchanging. Even the stormtroopers positioned either side of the entrance appeared to react. Everyone knew that Mowden and his associates were spies sent to ensure the loyalty of the crew, "Would you like to watch our departure from the front of the bridge? You'll get a better view from up there."

"I'm more interested in you admiral." Mowden replied and then he noticed Vorn and frowned, "I thought I was fully briefed on the command crew of this ship." He said, "But I don't recognise your face from any of the



personnel files.”

“My name is Major Larcus. I’m here for the same reason as you are Mister Mowden.” Vorn replied.

“Oh really? And what would that be?” Mowden asked in return.

“Why to learn from the admiral of course. My company is due to be deployed to this ship on its next tour. I wanted to see how the admiral runs his vessel so we can work with him more efficiently.” Vorn explained.

“I invited him here.” Admiral Rosten then said, “I thought it would improve the running of my ship to get to know him before his transfer.”

“Perhaps you should write that down.” Vorn suggested.

“I think I can remember it.” Mowden replied with an evil grin. Then he added, “Perhaps I will observe our departure after all.” And he walked towards the viewports, halting beside Captain Tollis.

“You never said anything about him being aboard.” Vorn whispered as he and the admiral watched Mowden.

“They arrived right after you did. I didn’t find out until after we were done speaking. Apparently there are four of them.”

“Well we can’t just have them wandering about at random. They could ruin everything.” Vorn replied.

“You think I don’t know that? Look, don’t worry. While they’re busy watching us I’ll make sure that I’ve got someone busy watching them. I doubt there’ll be any shortage of volunteers.”

“You better be right. Because I’ve got a very bad feel about this.”

### 3.

"Well?" one of Mowden's fellow observers asked when he entered the office they had requisitioned for the mission.

"We're heading for Allastra." Mowden replied, "Not Estran as we should be."

"Is it possible that the admiral has received new orders?" another asked.

"Possibly." Mowden replied, "But there is something else."

"What?" the second observer asked.

"Vorn Larcus the third is aboard." Mowden replied.

"He's here?" the final observer exclaimed, "But how?"

"At the admiral's personal invitation it would seem." Mowden said, "It seems that our information was correct. Admiral Rosten is a traitor."

"Then we should arrest him." one of the others said.

"No. We have no proof." A third responded.

"We need none. Our suspicion is proof enough." The second replied.

"But proof will lead us to his co-conspirators." The third pointed out, "Unless you believe that the admiral is the only traitor aboard?"

"Jeset is correct." Mowden said, "We need to know whose loyalty we can count on. Only then can we arrest both the so-called Major Larcus and the treasonous admiral."

"Where the hell have you been?" Vorn asked when he finally found the rest of his team.

"Looking for you major." Tharun replied, "Look, we've got a problem."

"COMPForce observers?" Vorn asked.

"How did you know?" Jaysica asked.

"I ran into one on the bridge." Vorn told her.

"Oh, err, did he recognise you?" Tobis asked.

"If he did he showed no signs of it." Vorn answered, "But we need to move quicker. Tobis do you have that datapad Admiral Rosten gave you?"

"Ah. Err, it's back in my cabin."

"Well take Jaysica with you and go get it. Then find out where the admiral recommends you sabotage the communications system. We can't risk those observers contacting anyone off the ship." Vorn told him, "But remember, I'd rather that the crew weren't aware of the damage. If possible just put a switch in there so we can take a look at all messages and decide whether or not to let them through."

"That sounds like a lot of work." Tharun commented, "Forty odd thousand people could be sending a lot of messages."

"Better that than ending up stood in front of a firing squad." Vorn said.

"True. But what will we be doing major?" Tharun asked.

"The admiral is arranging for some of his people to keep an eye on these observers. Frankly I'd like to know as much about them as possible myself." Vorn answered. Then he looked at Tobis, "Can you get it done before we reached Allastra?"

"Err, I'm not sure." Tobis replied, "It's only going to be a few minutes before we get there."

"Then you'd better hurry hadn't you?" Vorn said.

"Err." Tobis said.

"You heard the major lad." Tharun said, "Get a move on the pair of you."

"I'm looking for a Lieutenant Commander Brostat." Vorn said to the first engineering crewman he encountered when he and Tharun arrived in the engineering section of the star destroyer.

"Over there." The man replied, pointing towards a narrow hatchway, "He's inspecting the hyperdrive."

"While its in use?" Vorn then asked and the crewman nodded.

"The commander likes to keep an eye on things for himself. He doesn't trust droids to pick up on variations before they turn into faults."

Vorn was about to thank the crewman as he would aboard an Alliance ship, but then he remembered the difference in Imperial protocol and instead settled with a brief nod of acknowledgement before walking towards the hatch.

A sign printed above the hatch in black and yellow showed a simple drawing of a human head wearing ear defenders surrounded by a triangle and a rack beside the hatch held numerous sets of ear defenders with built in comlinks that used throat mounted microphones.

"I guess we help ourselves." Tharun said as he took two sets and handed one to Vorn.

"Just remember," Vorn said, "these things probably broadcast to everyone within range."  
"Yeah I know the drill major. Don't say anything we don't want showing up in an intelligence scandoc."  
"Exactly." Vorn said and then he opened the hatch.  
Beyond it was a small compartment that was completely empty, its only feature a second hatchway on the far wall that was marked with a warning label similar to the one on the hatch that the rebels had just come through, only this one was red instead of yellow. Opening this second hatchway it became clear that the tiny chamber functioned in the same way as an airlock, only instead of protecting against loss of pressure this one protected the main engineering room from the excessive levels of sound produced within the hyperdrive inspection chamber. Here dozens of massive inductor coils acted like speakers to produce a constant barrage of sound that even the ear defenders worn by those present could not keep out entirely. However, they did reduce the level to one that was merely annoying rather than physically dangerous.  
"So where's the lieutenant commander?" Tharun asked, his voice being picked up perfectly by the microphone strapped around his throat and Vorn was about to reply when another voice cut in.  
"I'm by the main accelerator focus trooper. And would you mind explaining why security is in here?"  
"It's my fault commander." Vorn replied as he approached Brostat and the small cluster of enlisted men surrounding him, "I wanted to come and speak with you personally."  
"I take it that you're Major Larcus." Brostat replied and Tharun and Vorn exchanged nervous glances, "Oh don't worry major, these men are loyal to our cause and will coming with us. That's why we're in here, the Empire can't put any listening devices here and I've made sure that we're alerted to anyone activating a new set of headphones. Now how can I help you?"  
"Do you know about the COMPForce observers who've come aboard?" Vorn asked.  
"Of course we do. The entire ship knows." Brostat replied, "In fact we were just discussing them."  
"See?" one of the crewmen exclaimed, "Those observers are trouble. We should call this off before we've go too far."  
"You've already gone too far." Tharun commented, "The second we came aboard you were committed."  
"Oh I've got a bad feeling about this." The crewman responded.  
"I want to find out why those observers are here." Vorn said, "For that I'm going to need your help. What sort of surveillance equipment are you carrying?"  
"Not much." Brostat replied, "This is a warship, not an intelligence vessel. I think that the stormtroopers keep some gear on hand in the garrison stores but the regular crew don't have access to that."  
"And we've no time to set up an infiltration of the stormtroopers." Tharun commented. Then he noticed that Vorn was looking past everyone else and grinning, "What?" Tharun asked him.  
"There." Vorn replied, pointing to one of the inductors that was producing the noise around them.  
"I don't see it." Brostat said, "It's just an inductor."  
"He means the droids." Tharun said, referring to the group of tiny box shaped mouse droids that were clustered around it. A ship the size of a star destroyer carried hundreds of such droids and to the crew they were often nothing more than something they needed to avoid tripping over as they went about their tasks. As had just been demonstrated so well people tended to ignore their existence.  
"Exactly." Vorn said, "Lieutenant commander, how long would it take to rig some of those droids to carry a surveillance camera that pass on the feed via a standard comlink?"  
"Well they already have built in holoimagers." Brostat answered, "But getting all that data into a comlink signal is going to take some doing."  
"We don't need a holographic image, just flat video will do." Vorn told him.  
"Yeah, we've got a droid rigged up like that back on our ship." Tharun added.  
"Should be easy enough." Brostat said, "We carry droid comlinks in stores and there's plenty of spare room inside the casing. How many do you need?"  
"At least four." Vorn replied, "One for each of the observers. But I'd rather have at least twice that many if it's possible."

Though there were many locations spread around the ship from where a signal could be sent, they all ended up being sent through a single large antenna array located at the very top of the ship's control tower. The antenna itself could easily have been disabled by attacking it physically, but to do that would make the sabotage obvious and the rebels specifically wanted it to remain unnoticed by the crew for as long as possible. For this reason the sabotage would be carried out in the software of the computer system that controlled the antenna array.

The datapad provided by admiral Rosten gave Jaysica and Tobis a complete list of security codes that would give them access to any part of the ship, including the antenna array but first the two rebels had to sneak past a room filled with the technicians who maintained the shipboard communications.

"Oh, this looks difficult." Jaysica commented as she and Tobis stared in through the open doorway. There were half a dozen crewmen present, including an officer and all of them were between the rebels and the hatch that led into the antenna access shaft.

"Err, can you distract them?" Tobis asked Jaysica and he held up a mem-stik, "I've got the code on this. All I need to do is insert it into the antenna control computer and then we'll err, well, I mean I hope we'll have control over it via the main network."

"What sort of distraction?" Jaysica asked.

"Oh, err, I don't know." Tobis replied.

Jaysica sighed.

"Kara would know what to do." She said, "She's good at this." And a brief hint of a smile appeared on Tobis' face, "What?" Jaysica asked.

"Oh, err, I was just thinking how Kara, well she always tries to make, you know, advances to men to distract them. But right now, well, right now I doubt anyone would take her seriously." And then Jaysica smiled as well.

"Yeah, I don't see any of them going for Kara the Hutt."

"Kara the Hutt?" Tobis asked.

"I heard Tharun say it to Lyssa."

"What? Err, the major's daughter?"

"Do you know another Lyssa that Tharun's married to?" Jaysica asked.

"No. But, ah, this doesn't help us much."

"Maybe it does." Jaysica replied and she took a deep breath, "Wish me luck." She then said and she walked into the room and headed for the officer.

The man wore the rank badge of a lieutenant and he was stood behind the row of enlisted men with a drink in his hand. As she got closer Jaysica could see the vapour rising from this as he looked towards her.

"What do you want?" the lieutenant asked, "And don't you salute?"

"Oops. Sorry." Jaysica said, saluting and out of the corner of her eye she noticed Tobis slip into the room and walk along the wall of instrument panels and looking at his datapad as if he was checking the status of the systems.

"That's better. Now what do you want?" the lieutenant then asked as he returned the salute and sipped at his drink.

"Could I have a private word please?" Jaysica asked and the officer frowned.

"Can't you see how busy we are? Spit it out woman."

"Oh well, okay, here goes." Jaysica replied and she took another deep breath, "I know you probably don't know who I am but I've noticed you around and I was wondering if maybe you'd like to grab a caf with me when you finish your shift." And then as Jaysica looked at him and just smiled all of the enlisted men turned their heads in amazement.

"I – I – " the lieutenant stammered, startled by the statement and Jaysica reached out to take hold of his arm, but as she did so she accidentally knocked the mug he was holding backwards and much of its contents promptly poured out over his tunic and down his trousers.

As Jaysica gasped and stepped backwards, bringing her hands up to her mouth the lieutenant cried out in pain as the hot fluid burned him through his uniform and his men just looked on in amazement.

Seeing his opportunity, Tobis made a dash for the hatchway and opened it using the code on the datapad.

"Oh I'm so sorry." Jaysica exclaimed at last, "It was an accident. It didn't hurt did it?"

"Didn't hurt?" the lieutenant bellowed, obviously still in pain, "It's boiling hot you worthless nerf herder! Now get the hell away from me."

"Wait perhaps if I-" Jaysica said as she tried to grab the mug again but the lieutenant pulled it away and it slipped from his grip, flying from his hand and landing on the nearby console where what was left of its contents spilled out and there were sudden sparks and the smell of smoke.

"Somebody get this idiot out of here!" the lieutenant yelled, "Call security if you have to."

"Oh, err, I've got her sir." Tobis said as he emerged from the shaft just in time.

"Good man. Get on with it." The lieutenant said and Tobis took hold of Jaysica and led her from the room.

However, just as they left Jaysica's face appeared around the doorframe and she looked at the lieutenant.

"Are you going to call me?" she asked before her face vanished again as she and Tobis rushed away.

As they hurried through the corridors of the star destroyer, anxious to get as far away from the communications room as possible Tobis took out his comlink and activated it.

"Err, major. Are you there?" he transmitted.

Initially there was no reply, but just as Tobis was about to try again Tharun's voice responded instead.

"The major's a bit busy at the moment lad. What's your status?" he asked.

"Oh, err, well the program is up and running. It should affect all incoming and outbound signals." Tobis explained.

"Great. We'll see you in your quarters as soon as we're done here."

## 4.

In space close to Estran, the capital world of the sector Admiral Hall walked onto the bridge of his tector-class star destroyer, the *Horrific* and made his way up to the forward viewports. From here he could see the trio of older venator-class star destroyers flying in close formation. These were the *Firebrand*, *Ferocious* and *Falchion*. The admiral did not like the idea of having to rely on these ships to support his own, but whereas the venators possessed massive hangar decks and carried hundreds of fighters and other smaller craft each, the admiral's own ship carried none and for a mission that was likely to require both fighter support and the additional firepower of these ships that were now officially regarded as heavy cruisers rather than full star destroyers they were the ideal support craft.

"Lieutenant Halowan give me Captain Naje's line." He ordered and a moment later the holographic images of three women in the uniforms of naval captains appeared beside him.

"Yes admiral?" one of these asked. This was Captain Sayla Naje, the commanding officer of the *Firebrand* as well as the overall commander of the entire attack line.

"Captain we're about to jump to Luscus." The admiral told her, "When we arrive you are to deploy recon craft, but keep your own ships close to mine."

"Of course admiral." Captain Naje replied, but the admiral noticed that another of the women and reacted by frowning.

"You have a problem with my orders Captain Yay?" he asked.

"Why not deploy us around the system? We can use our own active sensors to sweep it far better than TIE scouts. Then we can execute micro jumps to link up when we need to."

"No captain." Admiral Hall responded, "We will keep our capital ships positioned to provide mutual support when our target arrives."

"Admiral, you still haven't told us what our target is." The final officer commented.

"Of course." The admiral replied, "Our target is the *Primarch*. Admiral Rosten has been named as a traitor."

In one of the crew pits Lieutenant Halowan looked up when he heard this and he began to tap at his datapad. Then he approached the crewman at the communications console.

"I want you to send a test signal to confirm our subspace antenna is functional." He told the man, "Here is the signal data to send." And he transferred what he had just typed into his datapad to the computer of the *Horrific*.

"Of course sir." The crewman replied, completely unaware that the message was configured to send a secondary signal on an unused frequency in parallel with the test message.

In the Fretis system the *Silver Hawk* still waited to hear from Vorn aboard the *Primarch*. However, while the three rebels left aboard the light freighter relaxed in the lounge area a gold coloured protocol droid came rushing in from the cockpit.

"Oh Captain Grayle sir!" the droid exclaimed, "There's a signal coming in."

"Is it from the boss Jeeves?" Kara asked.

"Oh no Lieutenant Larcus miss." the droid replied, "Harvey indicates that it is from our own sector headquarters."

"Oh I've got a bad feeling about this." Mace said as he leapt to his feet and rushed past Jeeves towards the cockpit, Cass following close behind him. Meanwhile Kara struggled to get up from behind the table.

"Hey Jeeves, how about a little help here?" she asked.

"Why of course mistress. I am here to serve you." Jeeves replied and the droid held out a hand and did its best to pull Kara up from her seat.

By the time Kara reached the cockpit she found both Cass and Mace already sat in the front two seats with the R5 astormech droid Harvey positioned just behind them.

"What's wrong?" Kara asked as she sat down heavily in one of the free seats.

"I think the others are in trouble." Cass replied worriedly.

"Trouble? But why?" Kara responded

"Headquarters had heard from one of our agents in the Imperial sector group." Mace said, "They say that a significant force of ships has just been deployed to the Luscus system."

"Luscus? But that's right next to us." Kara said.

"Exactly." Mace replied, "But there's more. Our agent says that those ships have been tasked with intercepting the *Primarch*. My guess is that the *Primarch*'s heading for Luscus and when she drops out of hyperspace she'll find a taskforce waiting for her."

"So what are we going to do dad?" Cass asked and Mace sighed as he considered this question.

"Okay we're heading for Luscus." He said as he began to set the *Silver Hawk's* hyperdrive for a jump to the neighbouring system, "If we can get there before that taskforce, then maybe we can warn the *Primarch* to jump away when she arrives."

"Sounds like a long shot to me." Kara said.

"Do you have a better idea?" Mace asked her.

"No. Just stating the obvious."

The short jump through hyperspace to Luscus took only a few minutes for the *Silver Hawk* to make and as soon as the ship entered the system Mace began to hunt for any signs of Imperial activity.

"Okay it looks clear." He said, "If there is anyone out there then they're not doing anything to attract attention by running active systems."

"So what do we do now then?" Kara asked, "If we just sit out here and that taskforce gets here before the *Primarch* then they'll easily spot us."

Mace studied the sensor readings again to determine the layout of the star system.

"There's a ringed gas giant about six hundred million kilometres away." He said, "If we land on it's innermost moon at a point facing the rings then we can use our passive sensors to watch for any ships dropping out of hyperspace."

"But what if they come out on the other side of the moon or behind the planet?" Cass asked.

"Then hopefully the rings will reflect enough of the energy towards us that we'll be able to pick it up." Mace replied, "Now get ready, I'm taking us down."

The *Primarch* dropped out of hyperspace in the Allastra system just long enough to confirm its position, verify that its orders had not been updated and then plot the jump to Bytan in the Shadow Worlds region of the sector. During that time a few of the crew noticed that the communication system appeared somewhat sluggish, but given that all of the signals sent seemed to be properly acknowledged they thought nothing more of it before the ship jumped back into hyperspace and its communications were cut off once more. Sat in his cabin Tobis knew exactly why the communications system was running slowly. The portable computer in front of him was plugged into the *Primarch's* computer network and he was looking at a full list of messages as the door slid open behind him.

"Well?" Vorn asked him.

"Oh, err, the divert seems to have functioned perfectly major." Tobis replied.

"And what did you find?" Vorn then asked as he walked up behind Tobis and peered over his shoulder at the computer.

"Err, well, most of its all what you'd expect. Automatic status reports and navigational checks."

"But?"

"Ah, well, err, there is this." Tobis said and he called up a brief message that possessed a COMPNOR identification, "This was received by the ship as soon as we entered the system." He added.

MESSAGE RECEIVED. MILITARY TO BE ALERTED. USE ONBOARD MARINE  
CONTINGENT IF NECESSARY.

"That's it?" Vorn asked.

"Err, yes sir. Sorry." Tobis said, smiling nervously.

"No need to apologise." Vorn replied, "I take it that the signal was intended for those COMPForce observers?" and Tobis nodded.

"It was. I haven't let it reach them though."

"Good. They must have sent it before we made the first jump and I'd say that they're on to us."

"They know we're here?" Tobis asked.

"I'm not sure I'd go that far." Vorn responded, "But I'd say that they know there's a plan to hand the ship, or at least a portion of its crew to the Alliance." Then he paused briefly and added, "Can we modify it?"

"Err. Yes. I think so." Tobis said, "Just edit it here."

"Good." Vorn said as he reached down to the keyboard and made an adjustment to the message, "There."

He said as he stood up again, "Let them see that instead." And Tobis read the new message.

MESSAGE RECEIVED. MILITARY TO BE ALERTED. TAKE NO ACTION UNTIL  
INSTRUCTED.

And then Tobis allowed it to reach the original recipient.

"Right," Vorn then said, "now what are those observers up to?"

While Tobis and Vorn were monitoring the communications, Jaysica and Tharun were making their way through the corridors of the star destroyer towards the section where the vessel's stormtrooper contingent was housed. The stormtroopers occupied a section of the ship that was isolated from the rest, including separate barracks, mess halls, training facilities and an armoury dedicated to their own needs. This meant that what could have been a serious impediment to the rebel plan, a large force of troops that could be guaranteed to oppose giving the ship to the Alliance instead became an opportunity.

The plan was to deal with as many of the stormtroopers in one go by planting explosives at key points and manipulating the environmental systems to increase the level of oxygen in the air so that the resulting fire would wipe them out before any rescue could be mounted.

"That really freaks me out sometimes." Tharun whispered as the two rebels walked past a group of stormtroopers standing just outside their barracks. Though most wore their distinctive white armour, none of them had their helmets on.

"What does?" Jaysica asked.

"The way half of them have the same face." Tharun replied, "People shouldn't be like droids fresh off a production line."

"It does kind of make it difficult to tell if you've already met one of them doesn't it?" Jaysica asked in reply and then she stopped and looked at the datapad showing the layout of this section of the ship, "Okay, this is it." She said, "We can access environmental and damage controls from behind this panel." And Tharun stepped back and kept watch as Jaysica removed the panel to expose the systems behind it.

The datapad also included a diagram that showed how to adjust the oxygen sensor so that it gave an artificially low reading. The ship's automated systems would then compensate for this by altering the mix until the desired reading was reached, meaning that the level would in fact end up being dangerously high. This adjustment required only a simple turning of a dial, but it still left a flaw. The life support systems were regarded as a mundane part of the operation of a star destroyer and left to droids as far as possible, meaning that the adjustment would be discovered by the first droid to come along and plug itself into this station. Therefore, to complete the sabotage Jaysica also had to disable the access port. Now if a droid attempted to plug in it would not be able to connect with the system here. This fault would of course then be logged for repair, but with the chief engineer on their side, the rebels could count on it not being seen to before the time came to seize the ship.

"Okay that's done." Jaysica said, "Now all I need to do is get this cover back-" and then the metal cover slipped from her grasp and dropped to the deck, landing on her foot and causing her to cry out in pain.

"What's going on down there?" one of the stormtroopers called out and Tharun looked around to see the group they had just passed now looking towards them.

"Her grip just slipped that's all." Tharun replied as he picked up the panel and put it back in place while Jaysica stood rubbing her foot, "See, we're all fine now. How are you?"

"Fleet security doesn't carry out maintenance. Who are you? What's your operating number?" the stormtrooper demanded as he advanced towards the rebels and Tharun walked to meet him half way.

"Look pal, I'm not even supposed to be on duty. Let alone be doing this." Tharun said softly as he showed his fake ID card to the stormtrooper.

"Then what are-"

"Because I'm hoping that by helping the little lady out with all this poodoo then with the time she saves she'll get to show me how grateful she is. Privately. Get it?"

"Ahh." The stormtrooper replied, "Yes I see. But take a little more care perhaps? I doubt that you'll get very far if the young lady is in a bacta tank."

"Cheers." Tharun said before he turned to head back to Jaysica.

"What did you tell him?" she asked.

"Stuff most of those plastic coated copies have absolutely no experience of." Tharun replied.

"Huh?"

"Never mind. It was a boring conversation anyway. Now let's get a move on and plant that bomb before the oxygen level gets high enough to turn any spark into an inferno."

None of the COMPForce observers seemed to have noticed that their movements were being shadowed by mouse droids and Tobis and Vorn were quickly able to build up an accurate picture of how they were working.

One of them remained on the bridge at all times, paying particular attention to what was going on in the crew pits. A second one looked to be keeping tabs on Admiral Rosten himself, typically this was Mowden but occasionally the duty was being passed onto one of his subordinates.

That left just two observers. One of them would always be found either in his cabin or alternatively around the section of the ship where the crew spent their off duty hours, most likely monitoring them for any anti-Imperial sentiment or gossip. The last one appeared to simply prowl the corridors of the ship and although



there did not seem to be a set pattern to his movements he did spend more time in sections that related to key systems such as engineering or the hangar decks.

"They're making certain that everyone knows they're about." Vorn said, "And the fact that there's always one close to the admiral is going to make thing difficult."

It was then that the ship shuddered slightly.

"Err, we just dropped back out of hyperspace." Tobis commented.

"Quick, check the communications again." Vorn told him, "Look and see if there are any more messages for the observers."

Tobis opened up the link into the *Primarch's* communications again and watched as a handful of messages were listed, all of them appearing to be automated attempts to confirm the ship's location and status.

"Err, there doesn't look to be anything here major." He said.

"Okay. Keep an eye on it though. Let all that basic stuff through but hold onto anything for either the observers or the stormtroopers. Understood?"

"Yes sir." Tobis replied and then when Vorn headed for the door he added, "Err, where are you going major?"

"To see the admiral." Vorn replied, "Hopefully I'll be able to get past that observer hanging around him."

## 5.

Mace yawned as he waited in the *Silver Hawk's* darkened cockpit. All of a sudden there was a bleeping sound from the console in front of him and he sat upright.

"Cass! Kara! Get in here. We've got company." He called out without bothering to use the intercom and soon after the other two appeared in the doorway.

"What is it?" Kara asked as she sat in the co-pilot's seat before Cass could get to it.

"Something big just dropped out of hyperspace." Mace answered, "Could be a star destroyer."

"Is it the ship we're waiting for?" Cass asked.

"It could be." Mace began, but then he suddenly added, "No, wait there are four ships."

"So it's not the boss then." Kara commented.

"No it isn't. I'd say that the ships sent to stop Admiral Rosten from defecting have arrived." Mace said and then he frowned, "Oh this just gets better." He said, "Looks like they're launching fighters."

The ship shuddered again just as Vorn approached the admiral's quarters, signifying that the *Primarch* had just jumped back into hyperspace. Vorn knew that although the Spire Worlds were not as well charted as other regions of the sector a ship like the *Primarch* would be able to reach Luscus in well under an hour, meaning that there was little time left to put their plan into operation.

The door to the admiral's quarters slid open before Vorn could reach them and the admiral himself emerged.

"Ah, Major Larcus." He said, "I thought I'd head for the bridge to oversee this final jump."

"A good idea." Vorn replied, "But we've noticed that—"

"Perhaps I might accompany you admiral." Mowden then called out as he appeared from around a corner, "I'm so glad I caught you."

"Yes, hiding around that corner until the admiral left his quarters must have been so tiring." Vorn commented and Mowden scowled. Admiral Rosten coughed, trying to let Vorn know that his behaviour was not how an Imperial officer would be expected to act in the presence of one of COMPNOR's spies.

"Sorry admiral." Vorn said, "Perhaps you'd like to lead the way? It is your flagship after all."

"Thank you major." Admiral Rosten replied and without bothering to say anything to Mowden he turned and headed for the bridge.

As expected there was a second observer already on the bridge and Vorn noticed the mouse droid lurking nearby.

"Ah admiral," Captain Tollis said when saw admiral Rosten approaching, "We've just initiated the final stage of our jump. We should be at Luscus within the hour."

"Excellent captain. Anything more to report?" the admiral asked in return.

"No sir. All systems seem to be functioning perfectly."

Vorn slipped towards the side of the bridge, away from the stormtrooper guards at the rear and also the two observers and took out his comlink.

"Sergeant Verser report. How are we doing?" he transmitted.

"Primary adjustments made major." Tharun replied, "And the little lady has made sure that our secondaries are in place just in case we need to give anyone a little extra incentive. I was just on my way up to the admiral's quarters to meet you."

"Excellent." Vorn said, "I'm on the bridge. I'll—"

"Problem major?" Mowden asked loudly as he reached out and snatched the comlinks from Vorn's grasp and Vorn spun around to face the man who had been able to sneak up on him while he was distracted, "Arrest this man!"

"What is the meaning of this?" Admiral Rosten demanded as the two stormtroopers to the rear of the bridge advanced on Vorn.

"Admiral this man is a rebel spy." Mowden said, "But you already knew that didn't you?"

"What are you talking about?" Captain Tollis asked.

"The admiral is a traitor. He's planning to deliver this ship into a rebel ambush." Mowden replied, "If he gets his way then every one of you will be killed."

"Actually you're only half right there." Admiral Rosten said, "Major Larcus is here to help me defect to the Alliance and we'll be taking this ship with us." Then he looked around the bridge, "Anyone who wants to join us is free to do so."

Mowden grinned.

"See? A confession of treason. Take them both away." He said and the two stormtroopers then split their attention between Vorn and the admiral.

Standing just outside the bridge, no one noticed the arrival of Tharun who had hurried up his pace when the signal from Vorn had been suddenly cut off. Taking out his comlink he signalled to Jaysica and Tobis.

"The major's been made." He said softly, aware that if Vorn's comlink was still active then Mowden would be able to hear every word. However, Tharun felt he had no other choice, "Blow the primary now."

"But, err, isn't it too-" Tobis responded before Tharun cut him off.

"Just do it. Do it now!" he hissed and a moment later there was a dull rumbling sound followed by klaxons.

"Captain we have a fire!" one of the bridge crew called out.

"Where?" Captain Tollis demanded.

"Looks like the marine barracks and the surrounding sections."

"What? How can it have spread so far?" the captain demanded.

"I don't know sir." The crewman replied, "But blast doors have dropped to seal off that entire section. It looks like almost our entire marine contingent is trapped."

"You did this!" Mowden yelled at Vorn.

"Of course I did." Vorn replied and then he addressed the rest of the bridge crew, "Most of the stormtroopers are gone. Now is your chance. Join us and be free."

"Never mind arresting them." Mowden said to the two stormtroopers, "Just shoot them!" and the stormtroopers both raised their weapons.

There was a flash of red and Vorn flinched at the sound of a blaster shot, but he suddenly found the stormtrooper who had been stood close to him toppling forwards into him with a hole in the back of his armour and looking towards the entrance of the bridge he saw Tharun standing there with his blaster pistol in his hand.

Seeing his chance admiral Rosten lunged towards the second stormtrooper and attempted to wrestle his blaster from him.

"No!" Captain Tollis yelled as he then dived into the admiral, knocking him aside just long enough for the stormtrooper to take aim and shot the admiral in the chest. Scooping up the dead stormtrooper's rifle Vorn opened fire on the surviving one at the same time as Tharun did and catching him in a cross fire they cut him down. It was then that the handful of fleet troopers present on the bridge opened fire.

But it was not Tharun and Vorn who were their targets.

As Captain Tollis scrambled to get clear of Admiral Rosten's body and reached out for the rifle dropped by the second stormtrooper a pair of blaster shots struck him, one at the base of his spine and the second one the back of his neck. Without making a sound he collapsed in a heap. Another trooper aimed for the COMPFORCE observer who had been on the bridge since before the Primarch had jumped to hyperspace and shot him in the chest, sending the man tumbling back into one of the crew pits.

Only then did one of the troopers attempt to target either of the rebels, drawing his blaster and taking aim at Tharun.

"Look out!" Vorn yelled and as Tharun dived behind a bulkhead the trooper was suddenly caught in the middle of a barrage of blasterfire as all of the others along with Vorn opened fire on him first, "Everyone hold your fire!" Vorn then called out as he realised that there were no more threats left on the bridge and with the rifle still in his hands he walked up to Mowden who appeared completely stunned by what had just transpired and was just staring at Vorn open mouthed, "I think I'll be taking that back." Vorn said and he snatched his comlink from the man's grip. Then he looked down at Admiral Rosten's body, "He was a good man." He said and then he slammed the butt of his rifle into Mowden's stomach, forcing the man to double over in pain, "Someone secure him." Vorn ordered and as the nearest two fleet troopers holstered their blasters and rushed to take hold of Mowden Vorn looked around the bridge, "My name is Major Vorn Larcus the third of the armed forces of the Alliance to Restore the Republic and standing by the doorway is my associate Sergeant Tharun Verser. The late Admiral Nattaniel Rosten invited us along with our other friends aboard to co-operate in bring this ship to the Alliance. He told us that he thought many of you had doubts about continuing to serve the Empire and from what's just happened I can see that is true. So join with me now and we'll carry out the admiral's wishes together. What do you say?"

For a while there was just stunned silence until it was broken by Mowden.

"You'll all hang! Follow him and you'll all hang, you have my word on it." He croaked.

"Major we still have a fire in the stormtrooper barracks." An officer then called out from the crew pits.

"Is it contained?" Vorn asked.

"Yes sir." One of the crewmen replied, "Blast doors are still holding. Shall I have damage control parties attempt to gain entry?"

"No." Vorn replied, "We started that fire to get rid of the stormtroopers. If there are any survivors then opening the doors for damage control teams will just let them out. Keep the section sealed and just leave the fire to burn itself out."

"There are still more stormtroopers in other parts of the ship sir." One of the fleet troopers clutching Mowden pointed out.

"Then after you've taken him to the brig I need you to form parties to hunt them down. If they surrender then disarm and secure them, but I'm authorising you to use lethal force if you have to. The same goes for those other two COMPForce observers out there." Vorn told him.

"Yes sir." The trooper replied and he and his comrade began to drag Mowden from the bridge.

"You'll never get away with this!" Mowden screamed.

"What are your orders regarding the rest of the crew sir?" another officer asked and Vorn considered this for a moment.

"Hopefully most of them will join us." He said, "But I suppose there's only one way to find out. Give me ship wide."

"You're on now sir." A crewman replied and Vorn took a deep breath.

"Attention all hands." He began, "Admiral Rosten has been killed while attempting to defect to the Alliance. Captain Tollis is also dead, having been killed by crewmen loyal to the admiral. I am Major Vorn Larcus of the Alliance and I am now in command of this vessel. I urge all of you to join us in honouring the admiral's last wishes. Most of the marine contingent has been dealt with and groups will shortly be formed to hunt down the survivors. Stay at your posts and do not attempt to engage them yourselves. Report any sightings of stormtroopers or COMPForce personnel to the bridge immediately. Thank you and may the Force be with us." Then he nodded at the crewman who shut off the intercom. Turning to Tharun he added, "So, do you think that will work?"

## 6.

In the engineering room Lieutenant Commander Brostat looked around at his men who simply stared at him after hearing the shock announcement.

"What do we do sir?" one of them asked.

"What do you mean 'what do we do'?" Brostat responded, "We're engineers aren't we? So get back to work and make sure these engines stay operational. And somebody get the doors sealed. I don't want any of those remaining stormtroopers finding their way in here." And then he stood and watched as his men scurried about, "I've got to hand it to you major," he muttered to himself, "I never expected this."

Meanwhile in one of the mess halls crewmen looked at one another nervously as each of them tried to determine how the others would react. No one wanted to make the first move just in case they were the only one to pick a particular side. Then finally a voice spoke up.

"What are you all waiting for?" the COMPForce observer called out, "We need to retake the bridge immediately. Now who's with me?"

at first there was still silence. Then one crewman got to his feet, a massive man who's rolled up sleeves exposed numerous tattoos on each arm and he approached the observer.

"I guess we all know what needs to be done." He said.

"Good man." the observer replied, "Now we need-" but he was cut off suddenly as the crewman head butted him and he staggered back. Then many of the other crewmen in the room let out an almighty cheer as the tattooed man reached out for a nearby empty chair and swung it at the observer.

Vorn and Tharun watched as the former Imperial bridge crew continued to work. The two rebels had the dead stormtroopers' blaster rifles slung over their shoulders but it appeared that if anything Admiral Rosten had underestimated the amount of support there was for the Alliance aboard his vessel and the threat of force had not been needed to keep any of the bridge crew in line. Vorn smiled.

"Didn't expect it to go this well huh major?" Tharun asked softly.

"No." Vorn replied, "I expected us to have to trick most of the crew into abandoning ship before we headed for Fretis." Then he sighed, "Though I didn't expect to lose Admiral Rosten either."

"I guess the Alliance will just have to find someone else to command this ship then." Tharun commented.

"Actually no." Vorn said, turning to Tharun, "Sergeant, the admiral was never going to retain command of the *Primarch*. He was going to retire and take up a position with our strategic planning department."

"Then who-" Tharun began and his eyes widened, "The Alliance wants you to command her don't they?" he asked and Vorn grinned.

"You've got to admit it'll make things a lot easier." He said, "Kara can stay aboard while she has the baby and Mace won't have to worry about Cass as much aboard this ship than he will aboard the *Silver Hawk*."

"Captain Grayle knew about this?"

"Of course. He'll be my first officer. I'm hoping I can persuade you to join us as well." Vorn said and now it was Tharun's turn to smile.

"You really think you need to ask? I'd never hear the last of it from your daughter if I turned down a posting to a ship this big." He said.

"Company!" a voice then called out from the doorway and both Tharun and Vorn unslung their rifles as they looked towards the fleet trooper who had just issued the warning.

"Wait don't shoot!" a familiar voice called out from the corridor, "We're friends." And then Jaysica and Tobis appeared with their hands in the air.

"Let them through. They're with us." Vorn instructed and the guards relaxed. Then as Jaysica and Tobis approached him Vorn called out to them, "How are things going out there?" he asked.

"Well, err, we heard shooting major." Tobis replied.

"Yes, but we didn't see any of it." Jaysica then added.

"Major we're about to drop out of hyperspace." The helmsman then called out.

"Excellent." Vorn replied, "With any luck we'll just be able to jump to Fretis and then we can get this ship to the Alliance." Then he looked around again and added, "And a few thousand new recruits as well."

Another alert sounded in the cockpit of the *Silver Hawk* and Kara checked the console. There had been a few incidents in the past hour of Imperial scout craft coming near enough to the moon that Mace had considered the possibility of their being spotted and just in case they were forced to make a hasty retreat he had left her in control of the ship while he took up a position in the turret, ready to provide covering fire if needed.

"Is it another patrol?" Cass asked.

"No, not this time." Kara said with a smile, "Star destroyer. Just dropped out of hyperspace about a hundred million kilometres from here." Then she activated the intercom, "Hey captain! The boss is here!" she called out, despite the closeness of the microphone.

"How are the Imperials reacting?" Mace asked.

"Too soon to tell." Kara replied, "But there aren't any of them near us right now."

"Then take us up. We need to get to that star destroyer before the Empire does."

"Major I've got multiple contacts on our scopes." The *Primarch's* comscan operator called out.

"It could be outlaw traffic." A nearby officer suggested, "We could have stumbled on a nest of pirates."

"Negative, I've picking up Imperial ident codes." The comscan operator replied. Then he suddenly added,

"Wait. I've got another ship closing fast on our position. She's hailing us sir."

"Can you identify it?" Vorn asked.

"Looks like a light freighter sir. YT thirteen hundred class. Ident reads *Grey Ghost*."

"Oh, err, that's one of the fake identifications I set up for the *Silver Hawk*." Tobis said.

"Put them through crewman." Vorn ordered and then he continued with, "Hello *Silver Hawk*, this is the Alliance vessel *Primarch* calling you-"

"Can it boss!" Kara exclaimed, "You've got half a damned squadron bearing down on you. You need to get the kriff out of here right now." And then there were a series of flashes in space as a tector-class star destroyer accompanied by three venators dropped out of hyperspace just a few thousand kilometres away from the *Primarch*.

"Major! Four star destroyers in close proximity. One tector, the *Horrific* and three venators, *Firebrand*, *Ferocious* and *Falchion*. They've raised shields and are launching fighters." Someone called out from the crew pits.

"Raise shields!" Vorn yelled, "Sound battle stations. We need to hold those star destroyers off long enough to get that freighter aboard."

Admiral Hall grinned as he looked towards the *Primarch* from the bridge of the *Horrific*.

"We're in attack position admiral. All weapons locked on." One of his officers told him.

"Has the *Primarch* attempted to make contact yet?" the admiral asked.

"No sir." Lieutenant Halowan replied.

"Then open fire." The admiral ordered.

The *Primarch's* shields came up just a fraction too late to stop the first turbolaser blasts and a huge section of the forward hull was engulfed in flame.

"Bring us about!" Vorn ordered, "Turbolasers are to engage those venators while the ion cannons hit that tector."

Mace swung the *Silver Hawk's* laser cannon around to fire on a pair of TIE fighters that were also heading towards the *Primarch* and a stream of bright red energy blasts shot a wing assembly from one and sent it spinning into the other.

"Wow did you see that?" Cass exclaimed, "Dad got two with one shot."

"Don't get cocky until you can do it." Kara replied as she then spun the *Silver Hawk* to avoid a chunk of debris that looked to have been blown off the front of the *Primarch*, "Boss if you can hear me," she then transmitted to the star destroyer in front of them, "you better open up the shields or we're all going to be a lot thinner when we hit them."

"Drop the particle shields." Vorn ordered, "Then get them back up as soon as that ship is inside the hangar."

"Yes sir, lowering shields."

"Lowering shields in battle?" Tharun commented, "I've got a very bad feeling about this."

"Captain Yay! The enemy vessel has lowered its particle shields. They appear to be recovering another vessel."

Captain Yay whirled around.

"I don't care why they're doing it. Fire torpedoes."

"Yes captain, obtaining lock."

"No you idiot. They'll have them back up by then, just fire the damned torpedoes!"

The *Silver Hawk* sped into the *Primarch's* hangar and then came to a sudden halt as Kara applied full reverse thrust. Then Kara spotted a flashing light and a figure waving the ship towards a landing platform that had a row of lambda-class shuttles lined up on it and she manoeuvred the *Silver Hawk* towards it. "Okay that's it. We're in." she told Mace. "Great." He replied, "You and Cass stay here while I get the jump data up to the major."

Four globes of light shot from the bow of the *Falchion* and towards the *Primarch*. Guided by nothing more than their own momentum the projectiles were nevertheless on target and the first two slammed into the upper hull of the star destroyer before its particle shields could be raised again. The twin blasts blew out not only the *Primarch's* particle shield emitters on its upper side but also the energy shields as well, leaving the ship defenceless and facing the combined firepower of four other star destroyers. "Major! We've lost shields." An officer called out as the ship rocked under the continued barrage. "What's our engine status?" Vorn asked. "Only half power available to ion drives sir." A crewman responded. "Then we can't run and we can't fight." Vorn said. "But major, surely you're not thinking about surrendering? You'll think of something." Jaysica responded. "Not this time." Vorn said and he turned to the crew pit, "Give me ship wide again." He said and when the crewman nodded he continued, "This is the bridge. All hands abandon ship, use whatever you can to escape and scatter. Lie low until the Alliance can get a rescue ship to you." Then he looked to the crew pit again, "Get me Lieutenant Commander Brostat in engineering." "He's on now sir." "Major? What's going on?" Brostat's voice asked. "We can't escape those star destroyers." Vorn replied, "But I need you to provide us with cover for our escape. How long will it take for you to rig the reactor fuel injectors to lock them open?" "About two minutes." Brostat replied. "Then do it and then get to whatever escape craft you can." Vorn said, "Hopefully the Alliance can get a ship to you soon and then I'll see you again." "Understood major. Engineering out." Then Vorn looked around the bridge of the star destroyer for one last time. "Okay everyone," he said, "its time for us to be leaving as well."

"Admiral the *Primarch* has ceased fire and I'm monitoring escape pod launches." Admiral Hall smiled.

"Order all ships to cease fire. Then tell Captain Naje's line to move in closer and deploy assault shuttles. I want zero-gee troopers to take that ship's major areas before we deploy a full marine force to secure it completely."

"What about the escape pods Admiral?" Lieutenant Halowan asked.

"Ignore them lieutenant." The admiral replied.

"But sir, not all of the *Primarch's* crew will necessarily have taken part in—"

"Oh yes lieutenant, I'm sure that every pod we recover will be filled with crewmen protesting how they refused to join in Admiral Rosten's treason. But frankly I don't want have to waste anyone's time figuring out who did what. Leave them here to rot."

"Major over here!" Mace yelled when he saw Vorn appear in the hangar with Jaysica, Tharun and Tobis and several other people in Imperial uniforms with him and he waved to them.

"Mace!" Vorn called out in reply as the rebels rushed towards the *Silver Hawk*, "How much room aboard?"

"Just enough for all of you I think." Mace replied as he took a quick head count, "I was about to come up to you on the bridge when you gave the order to abandon ship. Then I got some of the crew aboard while others started taking the shuttles."

"Good, now let's get going. This ship is about to be blown to bits." Vorn said and together they rushed up the *Silver Hawk's* access ramp.

The inside of the ship was crowded with members of the *Primarch's* crew, both officers and enlisted men from various different departments and Vorn and Mace had to squeeze between them to reach the cockpit. "Okay Kara take us out." Mace said and without a word Kara powered up the *Silver Hawk's* engines and flew it out of the *Primarch's* hangar. All around them space was filled with an assortment of small craft also fleeing the crippled ship. Most of these were simple escape pods, but there were also several shuttles and there was a flash of light as one leapt to hyperspace, eager to escape the battlefield.

"They stopped shooting." Cass commented as she noticed the lack of weapons fire from the other star destroyers.



"Why bother continuing?" Kara asked, "They know the ship can't fight back and they probably want to try and take her back."

"Oh they won't be doing that I think." Vorn said and he grinned, "How far away are we?"

"Coming up on half a million boss." Kara replied.

"Good. That should be far enough." Vorn said and all of a sudden there was a brilliant flash of light from the direction of the *Primarch* that triggered the protective coating of the *Silver Hawk's* cockpit canopy, darkening it to prevent the occupant's from being blinded.

"What happened?" Cass exclaimed.

"I had the chief engineer set the reactor to overload." Vorn replied, "We may not have her, but at least the Empire doesn't any more either."