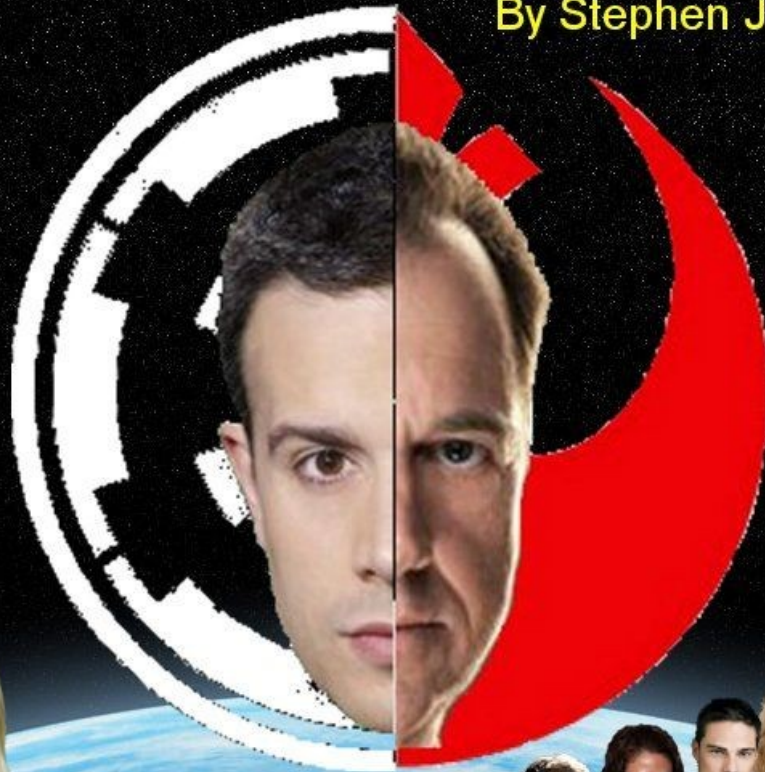


STAR WARS

4-10: Mistaken Identity

By Stephen J Dutton



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Civil war turns father against son

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

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

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

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

WHEN BOUNTY HUNTER MARSHAS DECKEN LOCATES A REBEL FIELD TEAM HE INFORMS THE EMPIRE. BELIEVING IT TO BE HIS OWN FATHER'S TEAM, ISB AGENT GARM LARCUS COMES TO INVESTIGATE. BUT ARE THE REBELS REALLY THE ONES THAT HE HOPES TO CAPTURE?...

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

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1.

Marshas Decken stuck to the shadows as he trailed his target. The man was a gunrunner and Marshas had been on his trail for months now, having followed him here to the space station Fort Verren. The bounty on him was considerable, so the last thing Marshas wanted was for him to realise that he was being trailed and abort his deal. To be certain that the man was who Marshas was hunting the bounty hunter wanted to catch him in the act of handing the weapons over to a buyer.

The man turned off the main walkway and headed into one of the space station's internal travel nodes from where he could catch a monorail to almost any part of the station and so Marshas picked up his pace. He entered the travel node himself just in time to see which platform his target headed for and Marshas followed him. The platform was crowded with beings waiting to get on the monorail and Marshas had to force his way through the crowd to get to the front of the platform, positioning himself so that by looking in the direction that the monorail would arrive from he was also looking towards his target.

A high-pitched wailing heralded the arrival of the monorail and the vehicle came to a halt with a set of doors right in front of Marshas. There was a delay as the doors on the far side of the monorail opened first to allow passengers to disembark, but they soon slid shut once more and the doors on the boarding side platform opened instead.

Marshas leapt into the monorail car and rather than taking a seat he crossed the inside of the car and stood beside the door on the other side. Looking further down the car he spotted his target take a seat before the monorail began to move off.

At each station Marshas watched to see if his target got up, but he remained seated until the very last stop on the outer edge of the station. This concerned Marshas, all that was out here was docking bays and this far from the station core there were few people to use as cover and it would be harder to remain out of sight. However, the man ducked into a starport cantina and Marshas smiled as he realised that the only reason for him to have come here rather than going to a cantina in the core was if he was coming here to meet his buyer. Marshas followed him inside and took a seat at the bar from which he could watch his target.

The man sat alone for a short time before a pair of humans came and approached him. One man had a distinct military look to him and though he had tried to conceal it Marshas noticed the familiar bulge of a blaster beneath his jacket. Instinctively Marshas had moved towards his own weapon.

His target left the cantina with these two men and Marshas followed them all from a discrete distance. They made their way to a private hangar and entered. Marshas could not follow through the same door, but he had studied the layout of the station and he knew that all of the docking bays were connected by an overhead walkway. Seeing that the hatchway to the adjacent hangar was open Marshas dashed inside and from there scaled the ladder to the walkway. The hatch between the two hangars was operated manually and Marshas opened it just enough that he could see through into the hangar his target had gone into.

There he saw a battered looking YT-1300 transport ship and a group of seven individuals, all of them human standing beside its access ramp. Just behind them was a gold coloured 3PO protocol droid.

"You'll get your weapons when I get my money." Marshas heard his target say.

"We've already given you your money." One of the others replied, an older looking man who appeared to be the group's leader.

"No, you gave me some money but it wasn't enough."

"You named your price and the Alliance met it." The older man replied and at the mention of the word 'Alliance' Marshas' ears pricked up, "Now where are our weapons?"

"I named a price for the goods, not the delivery. If you'd just met me on Allastra then I wouldn't have had to incur the expense of-"

"Oh this is bantha poodoo major." The military looking man said, "I say we just beat the location of the weapons out of him and we take them for ourselves."

"Now that's the sort of attitude that can cause a man to increase his prices." Marshas' target said, "Or maybe refuse service all together."

The older man held up his hands.

"We can get you more money." He said, "But you have to realise that it may take some time. Someone has to bring it here after all."

Then I suggest you tell them to get here quick. Because I'm leaving here in two days." And then Marshas' target turned on the spot and strode out of the hangar.

"Well well." Marshas muttered to himself, "Looks like I've just stumbled on an entire rebel field team. I wonder what the bounty is on them?"

Returning to his own ship, a silver Nubian space yacht located in a hangar closer to the central core of Fort Verren.

"Okay Ford," he announced to the R4 astromech droid that greeted him as he entered, "we need to put in a call to Agent Larcus on Estran. I'm going to need help bringing in what I've found and I think he's just the man to ask for help."

Vay Udra smiled when she woke up and she rolled over to face the man lay next her still sleeping. Gently she stroked his hair, being careful not to wake him.

Be careful of your feeling for him Vay. If you push him too hard you may drive him away.

The message from within the Force itself came from a distant relation of Vay who had lived almost four thousand years ago.

"Oh shut up." Vay said in response, "You didn't want me to be with him at all."

I didn't want you to use your abilities to manipulate him into your bed.

Vay snorted.

"He enjoyed it. He enjoys it every time." She said.

"Who are you talking to?"

Vay gasped as she recognised the high-pitched voice and clutching the bed sheets to her chest she looked towards the end of the bed where she saw Garm's young daughter Cayla standing, clutching a stuffed toy kowikian monkey lizard while she stared at her. Vay was furious with herself for not noticing the young girl.

"Err Garm." she said, reaching out and shaking him awake.

"Vay?" he asked, "Did we fall asleep? What time is it?"

"Its seven o'clock daddy." Cayla answered and Garm's eyes widened.

"Cayla?" he exclaimed as he sat up, "What are you doing in here?"

"I want my breakfast." The girl told him and then she looked at Vay, "Why is she where mommy slept?"

This is the sort of thing that happens when you don't listen to my advice.

Vay frowned.

"Cayla go downstairs." Garm said, "I'll be down in a minute to get you your breakfast." And the young girl turned around and left without saying another word.

"You should get a lock for that door." Vay said.

"Oh stang." Was all Garm said in reply, leaning forwards and holding his head in his hands, "I really didn't want her finding out about us yet."

"Garm are you ashamed of me?"

"Of course not. But Jennay's been dead only a few months. I-

Before Garm could finish the comlink sat on the table beside his bed began to sound.

"I think you better get that." Vay said and Garm rolled over to pick up the comlink.

"Agent Larcus." He said, "Go ahead."

"Garm I didn't wake you did I?" the voice of his superior in the Imperial Security Bureau, Director Helios said.

"No sir." Garm replied, glancing towards Vay, "My daughter had already woken me."

"Well we just got a call in from a bounty hunter called Marshas Decken. From the sound of it he's located your father's rebel unit on Fort Verren. I want you to head out there and take a look. Admiral Hall has agreed to provide you with a fast ship and you may as well take the moff's hot blonde with you."

Garm grinned at Vay. She was the 'hot blonde' that Director Helios was referring to, her cover was as an intern in the moff's office but most people assumed that he was having an affair with her and using the intern position as an excuse to keep her close. Then his face fell.

"Director I can't." he said, "Normally I'd leave Cayla with Jennay's parent's but they're off planet with their son. There's no one else to leave her with."

"Well figure something out." Director Helios said, "Because if you're not on that ship in two hours I'm sending someone else. Helios out."

"So what are you going to do?" Vay asked and for a moment Garm did not reply. But then a smile appeared on his face.

"I need to put in a call to Admiral Hall." He said, "I've got an idea."

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

"Wow! Are we really going in that?" Cayla asked, standing between the shuttle's pilot and co-pilot as they steered the craft towards the naval vessel Admiral Hall had provided.

"Yes we are." Garm replied from a seat behind the shuttle crew, "Now sit down and let the pilots fly us there."

"It's huge." Cayla said, ignoring her father's instruction.

"Not really." The shuttle's co-pilot said, "Venator-class ships are smaller than a lot of other types. If you look over there you'll see Admiral Sayer's flagship. Its more than twice as long as the Falchion."

"The fal-she what?" Cayla asked.

"The *Falchion*." Garm said, "It's the name of the ship. Now don't you want to sit down?"

"No."

"How did you get the admiral to agree to this?" Vay whispered to Garm.

"Actually it was rather easy." Garm replied, "He said he thought that Captain Yay would be delighted to look after her while we take care of business on Fort Verren."

"Captain Yay they're here. All three of them."

Captain Louisa Yay, commanding officer of the *Falchion* turned to face the junior officer.

"Good. Show them in, I want to speak to find out who the admiral thinks is so important that he's diverted a ship of the line to act as a taxi."

"Of course captain. But it's just that—"

"I gave you an order lieutenant." She snapped, "Now show them in."

"Yes captain." The lieutenant replied and he marched towards the main doors at the rear of the bridge.

Before he got there Cayla came rushing into the bridge with Garm running after her.

"Cayla get back here." He said.

"Wow this place is amazing." Cayla called out, her eye wide as she looked around at the crewmembers hard at work while their captain was close by.

"What's the meaning of this?" Captain Yay demanded, "Who is this child and why is she on the bridge of my ship?"

"I'm sorry captain." Garm replied, taking Cayla by the hand and walking towards the captain, "This is my daughter Cayla. Admiral Hall gave permission for her to accompany me to Fort Verron. He assured me that you'd take personal care of her while I was on the station?"

Anger.

Even from the doorway at the back of the bridge Yay could pick up on the captain's feelings.

"I seriously doubt that the admiral would—" Captain Yay began before one of the pit crew interrupted her.

"Incoming communiqué from the admiral ma'am." He announced, "Transferring it to your datapad now."

"Stay right there the pair of you." She said to Garm and Cayla and she looked at the display of her datapad.

Rage.

Captain Yay's eyes narrowed as she read the orders that Admiral Hall had sent to her, timed precisely to arrive just after Garm and Cayla.

"Well it seems that as well as turning my ship into a glorified taxi I am now to be a glorified babysitter as well." She said.

2.

"So where's the station?" Garm asked. The *Falchion* had just dropped out of hyperspace and he was stood looking out of the main bridge viewports. Beside him Cayla stood holding Vay's hand and her stuffed kowikian monkey lizard.

"Agent Larcus," Captain Yay began, "the reason Fort Verren is not in sight is because it is six hundred thousand kilometres away. Unlike some fleet officer who would have just dropped out of hyperspace next to the station and alerted the rebels to our presence I thought you might prefer to approach undetected. A shuttle will carry you the rest of the way while I remain here and monitor the situation. Don't worry, if there is any trouble my ship is only a micro jump away."

"Very well." Garm replied, "I'll need some of your people."

"Of course. Admiral Hall was clear about that as well. Take as many marines as you like."

"Actually I'd rather not go with stormtroopers. Unless you have any non-clones regular fleet troopers will be of more use. Since we're not going with a shock and awe approach I'd like to head in covertly and a squad of identical faces would stand out. A non-standard shuttle would be appreciated as well if you have one."

"I'll see what I can do." Captain Yay told him and as she headed towards the rear of the bridge Garm knelt down in front of Cayla.

"Now I'm headed off for a while. You stay here and be good for the captain." He said to her.

"But I want to come with you." Cayla replied and Garm shook his head.

"That's not possible. But the captain will take good care of you I promise."

"But she's always angry and shouting." Cayla said.

"Well yes she is." Garm admitted, "But if you're good I'm sure she won't shout at you."

Captain Yay returned and stood beside Garm.

"A team will be waiting for you." She said, "We have your shuttle as well, an old transport we seized from a smuggler two days ago and haven't handed over for scrapping yet."

"Excellent. Thank you captain." Garm said and he kissed his daughter goodbye before he and Vay headed for the exit.

"What's wrong?" Vay asked softly as they walked side-by-side.

"Nothing." Garm replied.

"Yes there is. I can sense your fear. Is it Cayla?"

"I just get the weird feeling I shouldn't leave her here. Like I'm not going to see her again."

As it happened the *Falchion* carried a significant contingent of stormtrooper marines who were not from any of the major clone lines and it was a squad of these that accompanied Garm to the space station. He found it odd to look at them, even without the armour that made them appear identical the mannerisms of these elite troops were uniform and when they moved they appeared to do so in unison. But what surprised Garm most was that two of the squad were female. He had heard of female stormtroopers of course and he had seen the infamous 'femtrooper' images that were common across known space. But these two women displayed the same stoic appearance as their male colleagues.

Sat beside him in the transport Vay smiled and whispered in his ear.

"Not what you were expecting?"

"Not quite." Garm replied, shaking his head, "It just makes me wonder how many women stormtroopers I've served with."

"Stand by for docking." The pilot suddenly called out from the cockpit and as one the stormtroopers got to their feet and gave their weapons one last check.

"Don't do that." Garm told them as he and Vay stood up as well.

"I don't understand sir." The squad leader replied.

"What's your name?" Garm asked him in response.

"Four four six five-"

"No, not your identification number. Your name." Garm said and he looked along the line of stormtroopers, all in civilian clothing but still standing to attention, "We're operating covertly here people. I can't be calling out ID numbers if we want to maintain our cover. Now what is your name squad leader?"

"Err. Montiford sir."

Garm frowned.

"Given or family?"

"Only name sir. Family names weren't used on my homeworld."

"Well then Monti, I want you and your men – err troops to refer to one another by name only. Understood?"

"Understood Agent Larcus."

"Garm." Garm said and then there was a dull 'thud' as the transport made contact with one of Fort Verren's externally mounted docking ports.

The stormtroopers turned to face the hatch and marched out. Garm sighed as he saw their movements still synchronised.

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

"Don't panic." Vay replied, "I'm sure Montiford has your back."

"Stormtroopers should not be called Montiford. They should have shorter names."

"Like 'Garm'?" Vay suggested.

"Maybe. Or Krent, or Brug."

"I knew a Brug once." Vay replied, "Lovely lady. Wrestled gundarks for a living."

"Well perhaps we should get after them anyway." Garm said and he followed the stormtroopers out of the shuttle.

Garm was relieved to see that although the squad had spread out around the docking port they had avoided adopting an obviously military stance and none were actually holding their weapons. However, Garm did notice that all of them had their holsters undone and were stood in stances that would have made drawing them easy.

The docking port was located along an arm of the station that served as a commercial storage district and large numbers of both droids and organic beings moved about. Amongst these Garm picked out a group of uniformed men approaching.

"Customs." He said and he made his way past his stormtrooper unit so that he was the first one to be reached by the customs agents.

"Declare your purpose citizen." The leader custom agent barked, glaring at Garm.

"Business." Garm replied and the agent's express became a scowl.

"Those weapons are military grade." He said, glancing at the stormtroopers' holstered rifles, "Private military activity is forbidden here. What is your business?"

"None of yours." Garm said.

Anger.

As the agent's face began to turn bright red Garm took out his ISB identity card, looked around to see if they were being watched and handed it to the man.

"Official business." Garm said and the customs agent took the card and swiped it through his datapad.

"Ah, of course. I'm sorry sir." He said, "I was not informed of your arrival."

"That's because we wanted to keep our presence here restricted until the timing is correct."

"Of course sir. Please carry on and-"

"Thank you." Garm said, interrupting, "We'll be in touch if we need anything."

"So where to?" Vay asked as the customs agents walked away.

"We need to locate the bounty hunter Marshas Decken." Garm replied.

"How?" Vay asked, "We can't exactly put out a public notification on the station's datanet."

"Fortunately he came here aboard his own ship rather than booking commercial passage." Garm replied and he held out his datapad, "His message included the hangar reference for his ship." Then he looked at the stormtrooper squad leader, "Monti, follow us." Then after a moment's pause he added, "And try not to march in time. Got it?"

"Understood." The squad leader answered.

Captain Yay frowned as she heard the slurping sound again. The only method of stopping the incessant complaining of being thirsty from Cayla had been for the girl to be given a packet of fruit juice. But now she seemed to be consuming it rather loudly.

A crewmember approached with a datapad, stood at attention, saluted and handed it to the captain. The datapad contained nothing but a status report but it still required that the captain sign off on it. Captain Yay skimmed through the report, searching for anything out of the ordinary. But as her attention was focused on the datapad she took her attention away from Cayla for too long.

After sucking another mouthful of juice from the packet Cayla exhaled down the straw and noticed that the packet inflated when she did so. Then she blew down it deliberately and smiled as she saw the packet grow larger. Blowing with all her might Cayla inflated the packet as much as she could and then calmly placed it on the deck.

The sudden 'bang!' as Cayla brought her foot down on the inflated packet caused Captain Yay to spin around on the spot. But as it turned out the packet had not been entirely empty and just as she faced Cayla Captain Yay was sprayed with the remaining juice.

"It wasn't me." Cayla said as Captain Yay glared at her, fruit juice dripping from her face.

"Rather fancy for a bounty hunter's vessel." Garm commented as he and Vay stood and looked at Marshas' space yacht. The hull of the dart-like ship was a gleaming silver and Garm could see himself reflected in it.

"Its from Naboo isn't it?" Vay asked, "I heard things like this were quite fashionable there."
"Marshas is from there as well." Garm replied, "I suppose it makes sense that he'd have a ship from his homeworld."
"Great isn't she?" Marshas suddenly called out from the ship's hatchway and he walked across the hangar towards Garm, holding out his hand in greeting, "A little piece of home." He added.
"Good to see you again Marshas." Garm said, "But what brings you out here? I thought you tended to stick to the Trade Corridor and the Heart. The Mining Belt's a bit out of your way isn't it?"
"Yes well I heard about those terrorists murdering your wife after we broke up their little operation so I decided I ought to look for opportunities elsewhere in the sector before they came after me as well."
Vay glanced at Garm, wondering how we would react to the mention of his wife's murder. But he remained calm.
"Where can we talk?" he asked Marshas, "That ship of yours doesn't look big enough for all of us."
"Not if we include your stormtroopers." Marshas said and he looked past Garm and Vay to the squad behind them.
"How can you tell?" Vay asked.
"Easy." Marshas replied, "It's the way they're all stood. They're obviously used to having their posture determined by wearing rigid armour day in day out. Nice work on finding women though."
"Well we do try our best." Garm said.
"Of course they still stand out less than she does." Marshas added and he looked at Vay. "Come with me. There's a cantina nearby that does private rooms. We can use one of them." Marshas said and then he looked back at his ship, "Ford!" he called out, "Look after the ship."

Most of the drinks sat untouched on the table in the middle of the room. The stormtroopers were on duty and so they would not consume alcohol but the drinks had been purchased anyway for appearance sake.
"Do you have any images or other recordings?" Garm asked Marshas, but the bounty hunter just shook his head.
"I'm afraid not." He replied, "The rebels have been keeping a low profile. I only stumbled on them by chance yesterday. I counted six and one of them referred to their leader by the rank 'major'."
Vay looked at Garm.
"Your father's rank." She said and he just nodded.
"Well it seems they've had a bit of a falling out with the guy they were here to buy guns from." Marshas said.
"Were?" Garm said, noticing the use of the past tense.
"Their ship left just after I called you." Marshas explained and as Garm and Vay sighed and looked at one another he went on, "Though I'm certain its coming back. I spotted two of the group still on the station a couple of hours later. My guess is that they're making sure their arms dealer doesn't run off with the weapons and the money they've already shelled out before the others can get back with the rest."
"Then the operation's still a go." Garm said and he looked at Montiford, "We need to isolate these two rebels and detain them." He said.
"And if they're supposed to let the other know if the coast is clear before they return?" Marshas asked and Garm smiled.
"That's the beautiful thing." He said, "If my father's team doesn't know that their fellow traitors have been captured they'll come back here expecting to complete their deal. But if they do happen to find out we've arrested them-"
"They'll come back to stage a rescue." Vay interrupted.
"Exactly." Garm said, smiling broadly, "My father and his people are so predictable."

3.

"How long will my daddy be?" Cayla asked, looking up at Captain Yay who now wore a clean uniform.
"As long as it takes for him to finish his work. She replied without bothering to look down at the child.
"How long is that?"
"I don't know." Captain Yay said and then one of the pit crew called out.
"Contact captain. Single vessel about a hundred thousand kilometres out."
"Identify it." Captain Yay ordered.
"Light transport of some sort. I'm getting a transponder." The comscan operator said and a moment later he added, "Captain the ship is red flagged."
"Move us into attack position." Captain Yay ordered, "Have the alert fighters launch and detain that ship. We'll tractor it in."
"Yes captain." The helmsman replied and the star field outside the viewports shifted as the star destroyer turned towards the newly arrived vessel.
"Where are we going?" Cayla asked.
"To intercept another ship." Captain Yay answered.
"Why?"
"Because it's on a list of ships the Empire wants captured."
"Why?"
"Because its crew have broken the law."
"Why?"
Captain Yay's face began to turn a similar shade of red as her hair.

Coll Transel put his meal down on the table outside the cantina and then sat down.
"So how much longer are we supposed to wait here lieutenant?" he asked the woman sat opposite him.
"Well I can't see Major Niel getting back here today. Shyla Nerin's going to want someone to explain how come we handed over several thousand credits to some guy without a guarantee of delivery."
"I told you I had a bad feeling about this Krista." Coll added as he chewed.
"Yes I recall. I also recall you volunteering to stay here with me while the others went back to HQ for more money. If you were so worried then why not go back with them?"
"What? And miss out on this gourmet poodoo?" Coll asked, holding up a spoonful of food. Then he noticed Krista looking right past him, "What's wrong?" he asked without looking around himself.
"Across the concourse." Krista replied, "I count three standing by the electronics store."
Coll glanced over his shoulder briefly.
"Oh yeah I see them. All about the same height with short haircuts and standing like they're used to wearing armour all day." He said, "Don't see those guys out of their shells that often. Think they're here for us?"
"Who else?" Krista asked, "But I'll bet they're not alone. Stormtroopers don't do covert surveillance. Someone's pulling their strings."
"So who's the puppeteer?" Coll said as he looked around.
"Let's not stick around to find out." Krista replied and she stood up and picked up her belongings, "Let's duck out the back."
The two rebels made their way back into the cantina and headed towards the refresher stations. As they headed down the short passageway to them they did not notice Marshas Decken sat at a table with one of the female stormtroopers.
"They're on the move." He said softly into his comlink, "Out the back."
"Just as expected." Garm's voice replied, "Montiford be ready. Vay and I will join you shortly."

The stormtrooper squad leader and one of his men had been positioned in the passageway to the rear of the cantina where the emergency exit was located and when the door slid open they were waiting for the rebels who emerged.
"Don't move you rebel scum!" Montiford snapped as he aimed his blaster rifle at Coll's chest.
"I knew I should have let you go first." Coll said to Krista and they both leapt back into the cantina as a blaster bolt struck the doorframe behind them.
"Going somewhere?" Marshas called out as both he and the stormtrooper pointed their weapons at Coll and Krista.
"Didn't we just leave this party?" Krista commented and simultaneously she ducked and pulled her blaster pistol from her bag. Marshas swung his aim from Coll to Krista but was too late to stop her from firing, the blaster bolt striking the stormtrooper beside him and she collapsed into Marshas, knocking him flat.

"Out! Out! Out!" Krista yelled and both she and Coll burst out through the emergency exit into the passageway again with blasters in hand and firing. The sudden barrage of blaster fire forced the two waiting stormtroopers to dive for cover before returning fire. But as they attempted to take aim there was a 'whoof' sound and the passageway in front of them began to fill with thick white smoke.

"Smoke grenade!" Montiford exclaimed, coughing and both he and the other stormtrooper stumbled through the cloud to the door to the cantina and closed it behind.

"What the hell happened?" Marshas demanded as he dragged himself out from under the female stormtrooper's body.

"They used a smoke grenade to cover their escape sir." Montiford replied.

"Stang." Marshas exclaimed and he took out his comlink, "Garm they're gone." He signalled and he looked down at the body, "And we've a man down."

"Who were they?" Garm replied.

"Err, I'm not sure. One male and one female, about the same height and both dark haired. Hers was long, his short."

"Okay that sounds like Kara Bilstran and Tobis Dorfus." Garm said, giving the names of two of the rebels his father was known to work with.

"Well they're headed for the coreward turbolift cluster." Marshas said.

"Great." Garm replied, "We're in position to cut them off there."

As Garm put his comlink away he noticed that Vay was smiling.

"Looking forwards to settling your score with Kara?" he asked.

"Oh we'll never be even." She replied, "But I'm still looking forwards to getting some measure of revenge." Revenge is not the way. Revenge springs from hatred and anger. You should turn your back on such feelings Vay.

Vay frowned, unable to tell Lara's spirit what she thought to that statement out loud.

I can sense your thoughts remember? If we didn't think you could be saved then I wouldn't be here.

Garm led the way through the crowd near the turbolifts.

"Move!" he yelled, "Get out of the way!" However, initially many people just assumed that he was in a hurry to reach the turbolifts and continued on their way regardless.

Vay opted for a more obvious method of clearing a path and coming to a halt she drew her compact hold out blaster, pointed it upwards and fired.

"Move!" she shouted as upon hearing the shot the crowd looked around.

Seeing the small group of people all carrying blasters openly the crowd panicked and there were screams as people began to flee away from the Imperial agents and their stormtrooper escort.

Amongst the crowd however, Garm spotted a pair of figures that persisted in heading towards the turbolifts in front of them. He was behind them and the only recognisable feature of them was their hair. Both had dark hair, the woman's far longer than the man's.

"There they are!" Garm yelled and he aimed his blaster, "ISB! Stop or I fire!"

Without turning one of the rebels simply pointed a blaster in Garm's direction and fired. But fortunately the shot went wide, striking a wall behind him. But the shot increased the panic in the crowd and as more people ran between Garm and the rebels he was forced to lower his weapon.

As Garm was still pushing his way through the crowd he saw the rebels reach the closest turbolift and dive through the doorway as soon as it opened.

"No!" Garm yelled, reaching out his hand for the turbolift's exterior control panel just as the door dropped shut again, "No!" he yelled again, slamming his fists into the door and knowing that his prey had escaped him. Then he spun around, "We need to get to station operations." He said, "We need all long range communications shut off until further notice. If those two reach a transmitter they'll warn my father and the others."

Coll and Krista concealed their blasters again before the turbolift door opened again. They had selected a nearby floor, not wanting to be inside the turbolift car long enough for the Imperial agents chasing them to contact Fort Verren's operations centre and have them override the turbolift controls and trap them inside.

"Let's move!" Krista snapped, dragging Coll from the turbolift.

They emerged into a passageway that was not as crowded as the floor they had just escaped from but there were still people here who looked around to see what was going on when the two rebels suddenly burst out of the turbolift.

"Move casual." Krista said, letting go of Coll.

"Right, casual. Care to tell me where we're going?"

"I figured we pay Lurnan a little visit." Krista replied.

"Lurnan?" Coll replied in surprise, "Why go to that money grabbing little nerf herder?"

"Because he's hiding sixty tonnes of small arms hidden somewhere on this station so I figure he can hide us until the major gets back."

"Assuming we can pay." Coll said.

"Hey its in his best interests to keep us from getting caught. If the Empire gets hold of us they may connect us to him. Now come on specialist, move like you've got a purpose."

"Yes ma'am lieutenant."

A pair of fleet troopers dragged the captain of the seized vessel onto the bridge and positioned him standing in front of Captain Yay at the front of the bridge. The prisoner was a member of the near human etti species. Known for their business acumen, the etti craved luxury above all and it was not uncommon for them to be found smuggling such luxuries to avoid the taxes normally incurred. Cayla peered out from behind the captain.

"Ah, so you thought you could escape us did you?" Captain Yay asked, sneering at the prisoner. Then she glanced at the datapad that held what information she had on him and his vessel, "Mister Char," She said, "I see you've led the Empire a merry chase across this sector. Three sectors in fact. Too bad you encountered the *Falchion*. Too bad for you."

"You've got nothing on me." Char replied, "This is discrimination. If I wasn't an etti I wouldn't be—"

"Oh don't give me that poodoo." Captain Yay said, scowling, "Your ship has been positively identified and you're wanted in more than thirty systems."

"So they sent a nursery ship after me?" Char said, noticing Cayla, "Or maybe that worthless little youngling is—"

Then, before anyone could do anything to stop her Cayla darted out from behind Captain Yay and ran up to Char where she delivered a sudden sharp kick to his shin. The man howled, lifting his foot off the deck and clutching at it as he hopped backwards. But he hopped too far and toppled over into the crew pit where he landed on top of several startled crewmen.

There was a stunned silence on the bridge, with all eyes on the captain waiting to see how she would react. But her reaction was not quite what any of them expected and as they watched Captain Louisa Yay did something none of them had seen her do before.

She smiled.

"Take him to the brig." Captain Yay said to the nearby fleet troopers, pointing down into the crew pit when the crewmen there had now restrained Char. Then she held out her hand towards Cayla, "Come on Cayla, we're going to the hangar bay."

"Why?" Cayla asked as she took the captain's hand.

"Because Mister Char's crew are down there and I'd like them to meet you."

A bleeping sound woke Lurnan and he immediately reached for the blaster he kept beside his bunk.

Checking the power pack he headed to see who had triggered the alarm. Standing on the raised walkway just outside his rented cabin he looked along the wider passageway it crossed over. Most of the lights in the passageway were out, Lurnan had seen to that himself to make it easier for him to conceal himself. But in the darkness he saw two points of lights, each casting out a beam in front of them and Lurnan lined up his blaster.

"Are you sure he's down here lieutenant?" Lurnan heard Coll ask and he frowned. He knew that the rebels had left two of their number on the station to make sure he did not leave while the others were away, but he had not considered the possibility that they would attempt to make their presence so obvious. There was only one possibility that he could think of, the rebels intended to steal the weapons rather than pay for them. "Of course I'm sure." Krista replied, "That guy's like a squib, always finding some hole to crawl into with their haul."

The flash of blaster fire briefly lit up the passageway as clear as day before it slammed into the bulkhead above the rebels.

"Who the hell is shooting at us now?" Coll exclaimed as he and Krista dived for cover.

"Get out of here!" Lurnan shouted.

"Lurnan you nerf herder its us!" Krista yelled, "Hold your fire!"

Lurnan fired a second shot, this one striking the deck plate between the rebels.

"I said get out of here." He repeated, "What, you think I'm stupid? You try to steal my guns and—"

"We're not trying to steal anything." Krista interrupted, "We just need a place to lay low until the others get back."

Lurnan paused.

"Think he believes us?" Coll whispered.

"Well he's not shooting at us is he?" Krista replied and then she stood up, "Look Lurnan the Empire's here. We ran into a group of their agents on the concourse."

"Then what are you doing here?" Lurnan snapped, "You'll lead them right to me. Get out of here."
"We're smarter than that." Krista told him, "We lost them at the turbolifts. Look we just need a place to hide and we figured you could help us."
"We'll pay." Coll offered and Krista glared at him, aware that what little money they had would not be enough to buy anything from Lurnan, especially if it put him at risk.
"What the hell are you playing at?" she whispered, "We can't pay."
"No but the major will be able to when he gets back. You know what he's like, Lurnan's burned us once so he'll make sure to bring a bit extra just in case he tries it again."
Krista sighed, knowing that Coll was correct.
"A thousand credits." She called out, "Come on Lurnan, you know that's a good deal."
For a moment there was just silence in the passageway.
"Okay then, a thousand credits. But you give me your blasters."
"No chance." Coll said softly.
"Agreed." Krista said.
"And if I even suspect you're planning something you're both dead." Lurnan added.
"This deal is getting worse all the time." Coll muttered.

4.

"Kara Bilstran and Tobis Dorfus." Garm said as holographic images of the two rebels he believed he was chasing appeared beside him. With his presence on Fort Verren now known to the rebels Garm had changed back into his ISB uniform before giving this briefing. Sat in rows in front of him were assorted station law enforcement officers. The only Imperial personnel were a handful of customs agents, including the one who had challenged Garm on his arrival. Added to this were a trio of sector rangers, the Empire's interstellar civilian law enforcement body and more than a dozen local security guards, "Both these individuals are extremely dangerous." Garm went on, "Believe me when I tell you that they will not hesitate to kill any one of you to avoid capture so I recommend that if you do locate them you stay clear and call us in." and he glanced towards the back of the room where Vay was stood with the stormtrooper squad. Like Garm the stormtroopers had changed out of civilian dress and now were anonymous armoured figures once more. "We've not been aware of any rebel activity within three parsecs of the station." One of the sector rangers said, "Why are they here now?"

"We have reason to believe that it's an arms buy." Garm answered, "An independent investigator has-" and at this point there were groans from the station staff.

"Kriffing bounty hunters." One of the guards said.

"Indeed." The customs agent who Garm had already encountered said, "Anyone who believed contraband was being smuggled aboard should have reported it to my department. Maybe then we wouldn't be in this situation. Rest assured I'll be filing a formal complaint with-"

"I'm sure you will file a complaint." Vay interrupted, walking from the back of the room to stand beside Garm, "In fact I'll even help you do it. I'll take your complaint back to Moff Horatian himself and then maybe he'll send a team to investigate how come Imperial Customs, the sector rangers and station security all allowed a shipment of military grade weapons to be smuggled aboard this station and yet a single bounty hunter not only uncovered this but also the attempted transfer of those arms to the rebel alliance. I'm certain he'll be only too pleased to send more agents here to find out how that happened." Then she took out a datapad and activated it, "So who's name shall I put on this report?" she asked.

There was no response from the audience, instead just an awkward silence broken only by the shuffling of feet and the occasional cough as they glanced nervously at one another. Vay just smiled.

"I thought so." She said, putting the datapad away again before looking at Garm, "Sorry for the interruption. Please continue."

Garm took a deep breath and then went on with his briefing.

"Now we don't think that they intend to be on the station for long, they're only here until the arms can be transferred, so we don't believe they've established a hideout. That leaves them with only one place to go." And Garm changed the holographic projection to instead show an image of Lurnan, "This is the man who managed to bypass your security entirely."

Anger.

Vay grinned as she felt the reaction from the audience and she sensed that Garm had deliberately insulted them.

"We know that the rebels made contact with him before we arrived and therefore it can be reasoned that they will approach him for assistance in evading us until their vessel returns."

"So do you know where he is?" a sector ranger asked.

"Not as of yet no." Garm replied, "But I've got a good man on it."

Most of the people who came to this part of Fort Verren did so because they had nowhere else to go, either they could not afford to leave or stay in a better part of the station or else they wanted to keep out of the way of the authorities. It was typical of the places Marshas hunted his bounties in, ignored by station authorities criminals had filled the void. To find Lurnan Marshas considered the reasons for him coming here. Station authorities had not been looking for him so he could quite easily have obtained lodgings elsewhere if he had wanted to, therefore something else must have forced him here. The answer was the weapons he was intending to sell Marshas reasoned. These would take up considerable room and could not be stored in a reputable storage facility just in case anyone realised what they were. Therefore Lurnan must have brought his merchandise with him and this would help Marshas track him.

"I need to rent somewhere with enough room to store my cargo." He said to one of the locals, a muscular thug who seemed to be occupying his time simply by observing activity at one of the cantinas.

"So?"

"So I was hoping you may know someone who has space to rent." Marshas replied and he slid a handful of coins across the table.

The thug grinned as he took the money.

"I take that you need direct space access?" he asked, "So that your cargo can be unloaded far from the prying eyes of Imperial customs?" and Marshas nodded, "Then Garat's your man. He's the only one with large units that aren't already filled with dross like them." And he nodded towards a group of individuals in ragged clothing who were passing the cantina, "Level four." He added.

"Thank you my friend." Marshas replied and he got up to leave.

The name was of only limited value, what really mattered to Marshas was the location. Now he knew where he should be looking for Lurnan. Marshas made his way down to level four of the station and headed towards the hull. As he got close something caught his eye, one of the side passages was in darkness. Even in this part of the station the environmental systems were in good repair, which meant that the lighting failure could only be a result of sabotage. Marshas looked around to make certain that he was not being watched and only then did he head for the passage. He paused at the mouth of the darkened passage and glanced around the corner. Unsurprisingly he could see nothing but he was reluctant to use his glow rod, knowing that it would give him away. Placing a hand on his blaster Marshas was about to head into the passageway when a thought occurred to him. The darkness of the passageway suggested that Lurnan was using it as a security device, allowing him to observe anyone approaching by the light given off by their own illumination devices. But unless he was willing to sit watching the passageway permanently he would need a way of being warned about an approach. He knelt down and inspected the section of the passageway that was partially illuminated by the light spilling in from behind him.

At first nothing stood out, but then Marshas noticed a pair of thin wires that ran out from beneath the closest deck plate and made their way into the wall through a hole punched in a ventilation grill. Locating a sensor beneath the deck plate made little sense and at first Marshas considered the possibility that it was some form of booby trap, an under floor explosive that Lurnan could trigger remotely. But then he remembered what was already beneath the deck plate.

"Oh very clever." He muttered to himself, "Using feedback from the AG system to detect unwanted guests." Knowing that finding a way around such a trap would take more technical knowledge than he had Marshas got back to his feet and headed back towards the more civilised parts of the station.

"I want proof, not leads." Garm said when Marshas returned and reported to him and Vay.

"Proof would require me to have laid my eyes on one of them." The bounty hunter responded, "And if I'd done that then I'd have them here for you now." Then as Garm just stared at him he added, "Hey it's me. Have I ever let you down before?"

"That's true." Vay said.

Garm still won't find what he's looking for.

Vay frowned. That was cryptic even for Lara.

"Something wrong?" Garm asked.

"What? No I'm fine." Vay replied, "Look Garm, Marshas has found them. I've got a good feeling about this."

"Okay so what about the alarm you mentioned. Do you think we can disable it?" Garm asked Marshas.

"Easily." He replied, "It's not designed to keep out the authorities, just rival criminals and other low life."

Lurnan's tapped into the artificial gravity system. Anything going down that passageway will cause a fluctuation in the field that will produce feedback within the local generator. He'll have hooked that up to an amplifier and be using it to drive a speaker."

"Ingenious." Garm said, "So if we just engineer a brief failure of the AG system we'll be able to bypass it."

"What if there's a secondary alarm?" Vay asked.

"I considered that." Marshas replied, "He could have photo receptors positioned further down the passageway where the light level is lower."

"Well that's no problem." Garm said, "We'll be sending stormtroopers in ahead of us and their helmets' MAFTAS will enable them to see in there as clear as day."

"There's another option." Marshas said and Garm and Vay waited for him to explain, "Lurnan's rented storage space has its own docking port. Now Lurnan's ship isn't there right now, that would attract too much attention. So that means that the external door is also available."

Garm smiled.

"Then that's the way we go in." he said, "We'll put half the stormtroopers in the passageway to act as a blocking force while the rest will come with us and go in through the external hatch."

"So we'll have them surrounded." Vay said, "Very clever."

"Don't you just hate awkward silences like this?" Coll whispered to Krista. Their host had barely spoken to them since he had allowed them into his hideout, despite several attempts by Coll to engage him in conversation.

"It's the staring I don't like." Krista replied as she noticed Lurnan once again glancing towards her and obviously focusing on her legs and chest.

"Perhaps you'd prefer it in a cell?" Lurnan suddenly called out, having overheard the conversation.

"Hey look," Coll said, "we're not-" but then he was interrupted by a dull 'clang' from the direction of the outer hull, "What the kriff?" he said.

"There's someone at the airlock!" Lurnan exclaimed as he leapt to his feet and drew his blaster. But as the two rebels also stood up he turned and aimed the weapon at them, "I swear if this is your friends-"

"Its not I promise." Krista replied, "Look, just give us our blasters back and we'll help you."

"No chance." Lurnan said and he strode to the hatchway that led from the compact living quarters to the cargo hold.

Coll and Krista followed him and just as they entered the neighbouring chamber there were sparks from the large outer cargo hatch that were followed by a sudden flash and an explosion as the door was blown in.

"Stormtroopers!" Coll yelled as the first figure in familiar white armour burst into the hold.

Lurnan opened fire, but the lead stormtrooper had been expecting to be fired on and he rolled across the floor to avoid being hit. Meanwhile the following stormtroopers used the distraction caused by their comrade to locate the source of the blaster fire and targeted it.

"Get back!" Krista snapped and she grabbed hold of Lurnan and dragged him back through the hatchway behind them just before a blaster bolt shot past where he had been stood.

Coll screamed as a blaster shot clipped him and he fell back through the hatch, clutching at his leg.

"Coll!" Krista exclaimed.

"I'll live." He gasped in return, "But I can't stand."

"Here." Krista said and she helped him up and wrapped his arm around her shoulders. Then as they both turned to face Lurnan they found him once again aiming his weapon at them.

"You led them here!" he yelled.

"Have you stopped to consider that maybe you led them to us?" Krista asked, "They didn't show up until after we met you."

Before Lurnan could answer there was the sound of armoured footfalls as the stormtroopers charged towards the hatch.

"Can we just get out of here?" Coll asked.

"Good idea." Krista said and she kicked the hatch shut and then looked back at Lurnan, "After you." She said.

Lurnan rushed to the door leading to the walkway outside. But the moment he opened it there was a shout from in the darkness.

"Drop your weapons!"

"It's a trap!" Krista exclaimed, "Lurnan get back." And the arms dealer slammed the hatch shut once more.

"Great, now what?" Coll asked, "We're trapped in here."

"No we aren't." Lurnan said and he fired his blaster at a nearby vent, blasting a large hole in it, "Get in." he said.

The rebels crawled through the hole and came to a sudden halt when they saw what was hidden inside the vent.

"You stashed the guns in here." Coll said as he gazed at the long row of assorted blasters.

"That's right." Lurnan replied as he followed them into the ventilation shaft, "I left the shipping crates in the hold as a distraction, the weapons themselves are all in here."

"So how about we put some of them to use?" Krista said.

Garm, Vay and Marshas followed the stormtroopers out of the shuttle and into the hold.

"Well this is one arms shipment the rebels won't be getting hold of." Garm said and he strode up the nearest shipping container. Then he frowned as he noticed that one of the sealing clasps was undone.

"What's wrong?" Vay asked.

"Call it a hunch." Garm replied and he holstered his blaster before undoing the rest of the clasps. Then he threw open the container and all three of them looked inside.

"There aren't any weapons." Vay exclaimed, "He was scamming them."

"I don't think so." Garm replied and he pulled out his comlink, intending to issue a warning to the stormtroopers. However, before he could speak there was the sound of weapons fire from the far side of the hold and the stormtrooper at the front of the charge was flung backwards, "Vay go!" Garm snapped.

Without saying a word Vay ran across the hold, jumping up onto the shipping containers and then leaping effortlessly from one to another.

"What the hell is that little girl going to do?" Marshas asked, amazed.

"That's no ordinary little girl." Garm replied and a moment later there was a 'snap-hiss' and a flash of red as Vay ignited the lightsaber she carried in an elongated pouch at her belt.

"What the-" Marshas gasped, his mouth wide open.

"You understand that this is classified." Garm said, "I wouldn't go telling anyone about it if I were you."

"Don't worry." Marshas said, "I don't want to be on the receiving end of that."

"Holy kriff!" Krista exclaimed and her jaw dropped as Vay landed between her and the stormtroopers. Beside her Lurnan fired a burst from a repeating blaster, but the bolts from the powerful weapon were intercepted by Vay's lightsaber blade and every one was deflected harmlessly away.

"What's happening?" Coll demanded from the other door, firing bursts from a rifle towards the stormtroopers in the passageway.

"It's a kriffing sith!" Krista yelled and she tried to take aim at Vay. But before her rifle was lined up the young woman bounded forwards with her lightsaber blade held pointing out in front of her. Lurnan tried to track Vay's movements, but she moved too quickly and with a single stroke of her lightsaber she sliced his repeating blaster in two. Open mouthed he stared at her just as she swung the lightsaber back again and cut through his neck.

Krista turned to face her, but Vay lashed out with a foot and kicked the rifle from Krista's grasp.

"Coll!" Krista yelled as Vay reached out for her.

Coll turned, pointing his rifle towards the hatch to the hold but he froze when he saw Vay holding Krista in front of her and her lightsaber to the rebel woman's throat.

"Go ahead." Vay hissed, "I don't have a good feeling about your chances."

Vay this isn't the jedi way.

Vay ignored Lara's advice and instead just watched as Coll slowly lowered his weapon, place it on the deck and then stood up and raised his hands. Behind him a pair of stormtroopers entered through the hatch and restrained him.

It was then that Vay looked at the two rebels properly and she realised that they were not the two members of Garm's father's field team that they had expected to find.

Told you.

5.

Garm, Vay and Marshas watched as the stormtroopers took the rebels into custody while a newly arrived group of station security unloaded the weapons from inside the vent.

Frustration.

Anger.

"Garm just because they aren't-" Vay began but Garm just held up his hand for silence.

"I don't want to hear it Vay." He replied, "I came all the way out here and it turns out that it's not even his unit."

"I hope you don't think I tried to mislead you." Marshas said, "From the descriptions I thought that-

"I know." Garm replied, "And I know that technically this is a victory for us. We've seized the weapons before they reached the rebellion and we've captured two of their operatives. But I really thought we'd finally caught up with my father."

"Well at least we've got these two." Vay said, "And with any luck we'll soon have the rest of their team."

"I've never been much of a believer in luck. At least not the good sort." Marshas commented.

Garm had never been assigned to the ISB's interrogation branch and he had little regard for many of those in it. He considered beating answers out of a prisoner to be far too unreliable. Droids were far superior than humans at determining whether an answer given under torture was true or intended only to end the subject's suffering. But neither Fort Verren nor the *Falchion* were equipped with interrogator droids. Imperial Intelligence used alternative methods to get answers out of their prisoners, applying psychological rather than physical coercion. However their methods required both training and time that Garm did not have. For all he knew the other rebels were already on their way back to Fort Verren and he needed to be ready for them. However, Garm did have one thing going for him.

He had Vay.

Fear.

Vay sensed it before she and Garm even entered the room where the two rebels had been taken. The rebels had both been secured to metal chairs while a pair of stormtroopers stood motionless behind each of them and Garm smiled at them as he stood just inside the doorway.

"Well this is a step up from where we found you." He said.

"Oh yeah." Coll replied sarcastically, "It's making me rethink my life."

Garm glanced at one of the stormtroopers behind the man and nodded. Immediately the stormtrooper brought his rifle butt down on Coll's injured leg and the man let out a scream of pain.

"Bastards!" Krista yelled, straining at the binders holding her down.

"Tell me when your friends are coming back." Garm snapped, staring at Krista, "Tell me now and he needn't get hurt again.

"Tell this nerf herder nothing." Coll hissed and Garm nodded to the stormtrooper again, triggering another blow that was delivered to his jaw this time.

"So you need these anonymous thugs to do your dirty work for you then?" Krista said, snarling.

"Not really, no." Garm replied, "Not when I've got her." And he looked at Vay.

Vay don't do it.

Smiling Vay stepped forwards and took hold of Coll's chin, lifting his head so she could look him in his eyes. Swiftly she moved her head to one side just as Coll spat a mix of phlegm and blood towards her.

"That was a waste of effort." She said, "I knew you were going to do it before you did. Now how about you tell me your name."

"Darth Vader." Coll said, "Now get me out of this kriffing chair."

Vay took a deep breath and closed her eyes.

Vay no!

"I said tell me your name." She said as she opened her eyes again and as well as speaking the words she pushed them into Coll's mind through the Force. The man's eye's widened and he began to shudder as he struggled to overcome the urge to answer the question.

"Fight it!" Krista yelled before a stormtrooper struck her.

"Tell me." Vay said sternly and Coll's resistance broke down.

"Coll!" he snapped, "My name's Coll."

"And hers?"

"Krista."

Vay stepped back and looked at Garm.

"Very well done." He said and then he looked back at the two prisoners, "So now you know how futile resistance is why don't you both do yourselves a favour and tell me how we can find your friends."

"We don't know." Krista said, "You're wasting your time."

Deception.

Vay sensed the lie and when Garm glanced towards her she shook her head slightly.

"Shoot his other leg." Garm said and without saying a word one of the stormtroopers behind Coll paced the muzzle of his rifle against the rebel's thigh.

"No!" Coll exclaimed, but a moment later there was a flash accompanied by the smell of burning flesh and Coll howled.

Agony.

Vay flinched as his pain echoed through the Force.

Serves you right. End this now.

"Want to try that again?" Garm said to Krista, "After all it's not like we're going to touch you. Not while he's still breathing anyway."

"I'd hurry if I were you." Vay added, "That leg wound needs medical attention. Maybe enough of the nerve can be saved to make a prosthetic possible." Then she focused her mind on Krista's, "Tell us." She said, projecting the urge to answer into the rebel woman.

"So let me check this." Captain Yay said as she reviewed the information on the datapad that had been handed to her, "A YT-1300 transport. Could be operating under one of several different transponders. That doesn't narrow it down by much."

"It doesn't need to." The holographic image of Garm replied, "All I want you to do is be ready to stop it from leaving. The rebels will be approaching from the direction of the Trade Corridor so I need you to back away from the station some more, the last thing we need now is for them get spooked by your ship."

"Understood Agent Larcus." Captain Yay said, "I'll pull the Falchion back another four million kilometres and wait for your signal." The image of Garm nodded and then faded away. Captain Yay looked out of the forward viewports and passed the datapad back to the crewman who had given it to her. The crewman was about to walk away when Captain Yay spoke sternly, "Salute." She said. And the crewman stood at attention and saluted her, "Not me." The captain added. The crewman sighed and then gave another salute. Stood beside the captain and wearing an Imperial navy cap Cayla returned the salute.

Fort Verren appeared in the viewport of the *Lucky Thirteen* when the ship dropped out of hyperspace.

"Any word from Coll or Krista?" Major Kyle Niel asked. As the commanding officer of the rebel team assigned to the ship he had been reluctant to leave any of his people behind, but the situation had demanded that the team be split up.

"No sign of their comlink." The man sat beside him replied, "But we are still almost a million kilometres away, we're well out of range."

"Very well Dayle," Kyle said, "Take us in. I'll go let the others know we've arrived." And as Dayle flew the ship towards the station Kyle got up and left the cockpit. Walking the short distance to the ship's lounge he found a large man and a shorter woman waiting. The woman was Lyan Mollot, the *Lucky Thirteen's* engineer while the man was Rasten Fraydo, a former Imperial commando who was now part of Kyle's field team. Both had felt the change in the ship's movement when it reverted back to realspace and were checking their blasters, "Expecting trouble?" he asked.

"We'll be handing over a load of cash to a criminal major." Rasten answered.

"Rasten doesn't think we can trust him." Lyan added.

"Of course we can't." Kyle replied, "That's why I left Coll and Krista behind to keep an eye on him."

"Has there been any word from them?" Lyan asked.

"Not yet. But Captain Krower brought us out of hyperspace too far away for their comlinks to be able to reach us anyway. We'll try contacting them after we've docked."

6.

"YT-1300 on approach sir." The station's comscan operator said, "Life form detectors indicate four beings aboard, most likely human or similar."

"Its them." Vay said.

"You're certain?" Garm asked and she nodded.

"How the hell can she know that?" Fort Verren's chief of security asked, his arms folded as he glared at them.

"She has a knack for these things." Garm replied, "Tell your men to be ready." Then he turned towards the station's space traffic controllers, "Direct that ship towards bay twelve. We'll isolate them there. Then get me the *Falchion*."

"Copy that control." Dayle said when the flight controller gave him his docking instructions, "I have the bay twelve beacon locked and I'm heading in now."

The *Lucky Thirteen* headed towards the docking bay and the outer doors opened, replaced by a barrier shield that held in the atmosphere but still allowed a larger object such as the *Lucky Thirteen* to pass through unimpeded. The ship settled down on the deck, its inhabitants unaware that concealed cameras had been hastily installed to monitor their arrival. The ship's engine's powered down gradually and only then did the access ramp open with a hiss.

"I don't like it major." Rasten said as the rebels left their ship, "Coll and Krista should have made contact."

"Not necessarily." Lyan said, "The station is more than eight thousand metres across. If they're on the far side then that's a lot of superstructure for a signal to get through."

"Exactly." Kyle added, "Until we've proof otherwise we'll assume that they're just out of range and we'll head for the rendezvous point. If they don't show then we'll start to worry. Agreed?"

"Agreed." Rasten replied, "But I've got a very bad feeling about this."

"Stang!" Dayle exclaimed suddenly, rummaging through his pockets, "I forgot my cigarras."

"It's a filthy habit anyway captain." Lyan said.

"Not as bad as pointing that out to your superior." Dayle replied and then he looked at Kyle, "I'll catch up with you okay?"

"Fine. But be quick. I don't like the idea of walking around here with all this cash and I want as many of us on hand to protect it as possible." Kyle told him. Dayle just smiled before he turned and ran back up the ramp leaving the other rebels to go on without him.

From the command post set up in a nearby chamber Garm watched the camera footage closely.

"What's he doing?" he asked out loud as he saw Dayle head back inside the ship.

"This whole thing could be ruined if you can't catch them all together." Marshas commented from beside him and then a signal from one of the customs agents interrupted them.

"There are rebels heading for us now." He said quietly, "But there are only three of them."

"We know that." Garm responded, "The fourth has gone back into their ship. Hold your position."

"They're almost on top of us. If we don't act soon they'll be on the concourse and we'll have lost containment."

"That doesn't matter for now." Garm said, "Just make sure that—"

"We're going in."

The area outside the hangar was littered with equipment for replenishing the life support systems of docked vessels and the assorted pumps and storage tanks created numerous places for someone to hide.

Therefore, despite being rather close to the force of station security troops led by an Imperial customs agent the rebels were still startled by their sudden appearance.

"Remain where you are!" the customs agent yelled, "You are all under arrest. Put your weapons down and—"

"It's a trap!" Rasten snapped and from beneath his long coat he produced a rifle that he held at his hip and fired. The blaster was set to fully automatic and his rapid reaction took the security guards by surprise. The customs agent was the first to fall, a pair of blaster bolts striking his chest as Rasten swept the rifle across the passageway ahead while behind him the security guards dived for cover as two of them joined the customs agent.

"Nerf herder!" Garm snapped when he saw the image of the custom agent and his unit moving in too soon and he activated his comlink, "Move in! All units go, go, go."

"Back to the ship!" Kyle yelled as he drew his blaster. But before he could take a single step there was a clattering sound from above and he looked up to see a squad of stormtroopers rushing along an overhead walkway to take up firing positions above the rebels. Kyle aimed his blaster upwards and fired - only missing one of the stormtroopers by a narrow margin. Rasten swung his rifle upwards and fired again, concentrating on a single stormtrooper who toppled over the walkway's safety rail and plummeted to the deck with a 'crash'. Lyan squealed as the stormtroopers opened fire and a close shot singed her hair. "I'm hit! I'm hit!" she exclaimed. "You're fine!" Rasten yelled as he kept on firing, forcing the stormtroopers to cease for a moment as the ducked back out of his field of fire, "Now keep going!"

Accompanied by Marshas and Vay, Garm was just about to leave the command post when he looked at the technician sat with the surveillance equipment. "Seal it." He said.

Lyan was just approaching the entrance to the hangar when the door suddenly came down in front of her and unable to stop in time she slid into it. Unhurt, she promptly reached out for the control panel beside the door but the only response from the system was a curt electronic tone and the door remained shut.

"We're locked out!" she shouted.

"Then get it open." Kyle said as he took cover behind a large fluid pump.

"And make it quick." Rasten added as he too took cover while he reloaded his rifle.

Immediately Lyan produced a pocket multitool and after ripping the control away from the wall she began to probe the circuitry behind it. Meanwhile Kyle took out his comlink.

"Dayle, we're under attack." He signalled, "A unit of stormtroopers has us pinned down and the door to the ship is sealed."

"Hang on major. I'll see if I can get it open from this side." Dayle replied.

Inside the hangar Dayle ran from the *Lucky Thirteen* to the closed hangar door and attempted to open it. But just as when Lyan had tried to open it from the other side he was rewarded only with failure. From the far side of the door he could hear the muffled sound of blasterfire and in desperation he reached out for the control panel again, just as Lyan tried bypassing the lock.

"Ow! Stang!" Dayle exclaimed, leaping backwards as a sudden electrical discharged arced towards him.

Then he took out his comlink and activated it, "Can't get to you." He said, "And someone tell Lyan she almost took my hand off with that last try."

"Captain." Lyan replied, "In the ship there's a fusion cutter. Maybe you can cut through."

"I'm on it." Dayle replied and he headed back to the ship.

Vay, help them to escape.

Vay did not welcome Lara's latest suggestion as she headed towards the hangar with Garm and Marshas. You should go with them.

Vay frowned and as they approached the end of the passageway leading to the hangar she suddenly ran on ahead.

"Vay no wait!" Garm called out after her but he was too late to stop her from leaping into the air and then somersaulting down the passageway.

Seeing the twirling bodyglove-clad Vay heading towards them Lyan gasped.

"Oh god." She said.

"Guess again." Rasten said and he aimed his blaster.

"Vay look out!" Garm shouted from the end of the passageway, but he need not have bothered. Before the rebel soldier could open fire Vay landed right in front of him, drew her lightsaber and with a single stroke she sliced his arms off below the elbow.

"Bitch!" Lyan shouted as Rasten staggered back, his mouth wide open and gazing down at the deck where his arms had landed. She fired once, but Vay pivoted around and easily deflected the shot away from her. The next shot that sounded out came from behind Vay as Garm opened fire. His shot struck Lyan just behind her ear and her head jerked sideways before she fell dead to the deck.

"Lyan no!" Kyle called out and then he ducked back behind the pump as all of the blaster fire in the passageway was concentrated on his position. He took out his comlink and then for just a moment he hesitated before he signalled Dayle, "Get out of here." He said simply.

"Are you kidding me?" Dayle's voice responded, "I've got the cutter."

"Dayle, Lyan's dead. They've got Rasten and I'll never make it to the door. Go, don't let them take the ship." And then Kyle dropped his comlink to the floor and stood up and took aim with his blaster.

Firing towards Garm and Marshas he forced both men to dive aside, the shot passing harmlessly between them. But then a shot from the walkway overhead struck his thigh and Kyle collapsed, his blaster falling from his grasp and sliding out of sight. However, Lyan's weapon had fallen nearby and Kyle dragged himself across the deck towards it, oblivious to the numerous shouted calls for him to surrender. He reached out his hand as the blaster came within reach, but just as he touched it a foot came down on the weapon.

"I wouldn't if I were you." Vay said as Kyle looked up at her.

"But you're not me." Kyle gasped and he tried to pull the blaster free.

The last thing he saw was the flash of crimson as she brought her lightsaber down.

That was unnecessary.

"That depends on your point of view." Vay muttered, "Some would call it a mercy."

Dayle acted as quickly as he could to get the *Lucky Thirteen's* engines online. He was not worried about the station's flight controllers sealing the hangar's exterior door – he could inflict a lot of damage if he tried using his ship's engine's to burn through, what concerned him more was that despite his having used the fusion cutter to weld the interior door shut the Imperial troops in the passageway outside the hangar seemed to be cutting through it rather rapidly, a bright red spot moving around the door in a circular path.

Sure enough a large section of the door soon dropped into the hangar with a loud 'clang' that Dayle heard clearly even inside the cockpit of the *Lucky Thirteen*. Vay stepped through the breach and stared at the transport ship while stormtroopers followed her into the hangar and began to spread out. Garm and Marshas came after the stormtroopers and stood beside Vay, watching as the *Lucky Thirteen* lifted off the deck and slid out through the atmospheric shield into space.

"He got away." Marshas said as he watched the ship leaving.

"Not yet he hasn't." Garm replied and he took out his comlink, "*Falchion* this is Agent Larcus. Now."

Dayle turned the *Lucky Thirteen* to face away from Fort Verren and transferred all the available power to the engines. But as the ship accelerated away from the station there was a massive flash and his cockpit viewport was filled with the shape of a kilometre long venator-class star destroyer hanging in space in front of him.

"Holy kriff!" Dayle exclaimed as he steered sharply to avoid ploughing right into the massive warship.

"Open fire." Captain Yay ordered as she saw the rebel ship swoop low over the dorsal hangar of her own vessel.

The *Lucky Thirteen* shuddered as a laser blast ripped through its rear section. Immediately the sound of alarms filled the cockpit and quick glance at the console told Dayle that the hyperdrive had been disabled and the reactor was becoming unstable. The only weapon that the *Lucky Thirteen* carried was a single laser cannon in a turret that Dayle could not control while flying the ship. Even if he could his one cannon was no match for the arsenal of weapons carried by the obsolete twenty-year old star destroyer he was facing and without a hyperdrive he was unable to escape.

'Don't let them take the ship.'

Remembering Kyle's final order to him, Dayle brought the *Lucky Thirteen* around and headed directly towards the star destroyer, aiming for its operations bridge.

Instinctively most of the crew on the bridge of the *Falchion* recoiled as they saw the freighter zooming towards them, its pilot performing a series of rolls that kept it from being shot down by the star destroyer's guns. Cayla squealed and hid close behind the legs of captain Yay who was the only individual not to react at all. Instead she watched the ship rushing towards her and then suddenly vanish in a brilliant flare of light as it ploughed into the bridge shields.

"Fool." She muttered, "You'll never take out a star destroyer that way."

"I'll see to it that the money reaches your account as soon as possible." Garm told Marshas as they disembarked from the shuttle aboard the *Falchion*, "For Lurnan and the standing bounty on rebels."

Marshas grinned.

"That's good of you. I know some agents would try and claim the credit themselves." he replied.

"Some. Not me. I'd rather-" Garm began and then he noticed Vay staring across the hangar, a puzzled look on her face, "What's wrong?" he asked.

"Over there." She answered, pointing to where a group of prisoners was being led to another shuttle that would transfer them to Fort Verren and into civilian custody. Every one of them seemed to be limping as if they had been kicked hard in their leg, "What happened to them?"

“Daddy!” Cayla’s voice suddenly called out across the landing bay and Garm turned to see his daughter approaching with Captain Yay. Cayla now sported a navy issue cap while her precious stuffed kowikian monkey lizard had somehow acquired a complete scaled down navy uniform.

“I hope she wasn’t any trouble.” Garm said to the captain.

“Oh none at all.” She answered, “In fact I’d say she’s the makings of a fine officer in her.”