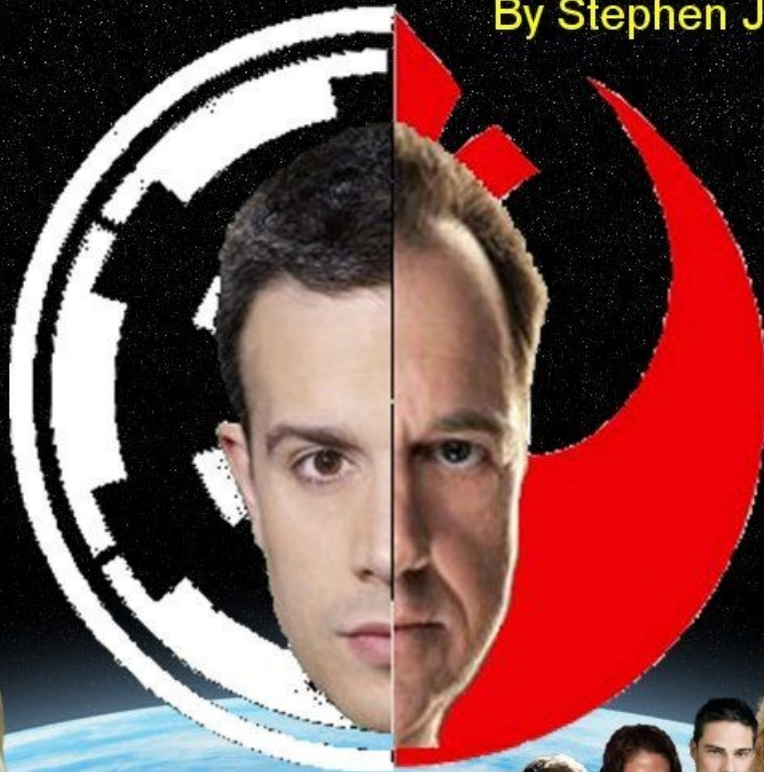


# STAR WARS

## 9-11: Blackout

By Stephen J Dutton



9/11  
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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...

## **BLACKOUT**

GOVERNOR MORLONI OF QUILLON POSSESSES DETAILED KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE DEFENCES OF THE SECTOR CAPITAL, ESTRAN AND THIS MAKES HIM A PRIORITY TARGET FOR THE ALLIANCE WHEN THE MOON IS INVADED. HOWEVER, THE GOVERNOR HAS SET IN MOTION PLANS TO COVER HIS ESCAPE AND VORN LARCUS AND HIS TEAM MUST TRAVEL TO A WORLD IN CHAOS TO TRY AND CATCH HIM...

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

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# 1.

Governor Morloni stood in his office looking out across the city. The moon Quillon on which the city was built was currently in eclipse behind the gas giant it orbited, as it frequently was and the streets were illuminated by the numerous lamp posts. However, in addition to these the city was currently lit up by the flashes of blaster fire and searchlights from airborne gunships. The attack on the city had been two-fold, an uprising that had begun in the main factory districts where indentured workers laboured to produce weapons for the Imperial war machine had been joined by an open attack on the orbital cargo handling platforms by an Alliance battlegroup. Now Alliance troops and armoured vehicles were being landed on the surface and the poorly equipped local rebels were being provided with more powerful weaponry.

"Governor the rebels are getting closer." an aide said as he burst into the office.

"Yes, I do have eyes lieutenant." Governor Morloni replied as he turned to face the man, "Now what is the word from Estran?"

"Sir naval command reports that it cannot send a relief force in time to prevent the city from falling. However, they have indicated that an evacuation vessel can be sent to collect you and return you to the sector capital." Governor Morloni smiled.

"Ah, they don't want me falling into rebel hands. Have they given orders for you to kill me if it looks like I'm going to be captured lieutenant?"

"No sir." the governor's aide replied.

"Really? I would have done. I know too much you see lieutenant. But that is not important right now. Are the preparations I ordered ready?"

"The device is ready governor, yes. But the other items have proven somewhat hard to come by. Colonel Steer has been forced to have some of them custom made."

The governor sighed.

"Well I suppose that can't be helped. Now shall we head down stairs? I'd hate to keep the colonel waiting when he finally gets back here." he said as he walked around his desk towards the door.

"Of course sir." his aide responded and the two men left the office.

In the hall outside they were joined by the pair of stormtroopers that had been assigned to provide Governor Morloni with protection and together the four men headed towards the turbolift that was reserved for the governor's personal use. This took them straight down the tower that was the governor's private residence as well as the hub of Imperial operations on Quillon and to a basement level. Exiting the turbolift here the men entered what appeared to be a workshop where most of the room was taken up by a sphere approximately two metres across. Surrounding this were several Imperial technicians as well as a number of technical service droids.

"Ah governor." one of the technicians said, smiling as the turbolift doors opened, "The device is ready and the others around the moon are all networked together. We can trigger them at any time."

"Very good. But are you certain that it will be effective?" Governor Morloni asked in reply.

"Of course governor. The building's shielding has been specifically reduced to remove any chance or absorption or worse yet, reflection. It wouldn't do to have all of the energy simply channelled up the tower while the rebels outside remain unaffected."

"But we will be caught up in the area of effect, yes?" Governor Morloni said.

"Yes sir. I'm afraid that there's just no way to prevent that. This was to be a last line of defence after all."

"And that it shall be." the governor said just as another turbolift opened to reveal several men in Imperial military units enter carrying long thin transit containers between them, "Ah Colonel Steer, you have what we need?" the governor asked.

"Yes sir." Colonel Steer replied, signalling for two of his men to put down the crate they were carrying and as soon as they placed it on the floor he opened it to reveal the weapons that were inside. However, the weapons contained inside were not the state of the art military technology that the Imperial military was usually equipped with. Instead they would not have looked out of place on a battlefield more than twenty thousand years earlier at the very dawn of the Old Republic.

"It's heavier than I expected." Governor Morloni said as he took a rifle from the crate and inspected it. Then he reached down and picked up a magazine to go with it. He was used to the energy cells used to power modern blasters so seeing the copper jacketed projectiles with their brass cases filled with propellant was somewhat unusual. However, he had no difficulty in inserting the magazine and then drawing back the cocking handle to chamber a round, "Excellent." he said before looking around at the technicians behind him. We have everything we need. You may trigger the device." he told them.

The first thing the others in the room did in response to the order was to take out chemical glow sticks and activate them. With the room already well lit these had little noticeable effect but it had been done in the

knowledge of what was about to come as one of the technicians stepped up to the device in the centre of the room, inserted a key into a socket built into it and then turned it sharply.

One of the AT-DPs guarding the governor's tower exploded as a laser blast from an Alliance repulsortank punched through its armour into the power cells that kept the fighting machine running. The second walker attempted to reposition itself to better fight off the advancing Alliance troops but its crew knew that they were heavily outnumbered now. Most of their supporting infantry had already been killed and the skies were filled with Alliance airspeeders.

"Forwards!" the Alliance commander shouted at his men, "Capture the governor and we can end this today." then he raised his blaster rifle and fired it towards a stormtrooper he saw darting between the wrecks of two troop carriers. He saw the white armoured trooper fall and he was about to advance with his men when all of a sudden something unexpected happened.

Without warning all of the city's lights went out in unison and most of the sounds of battle abruptly ceased. From nearby there was a sudden crashing sound as the Alliance repulsortanks lost power and dropped to the ground where they were while the remaining AT-DP appeared to lose its balance and collapsed where it stood. At the same time every blaster ceased fire and the repulsorlift engines of the airspeeders overhead cut out. Looking up the commander watched in horror as all of the airspeeders now plummeted downwards, crashing into the ground and exploding. Then he noticed movement ahead of him and when he realised that it was another stormtrooper he aimed his rifle towards the enemy soldier only to find that the electronic optical sight mounted on top of the weapon was no longer functioning either and when he aimed using the emergency iron sights instead nothing happened when he pulled the trigger.

"What the kriff?" he exclaimed.

"Sir, everything's stopped working." one of his troops called out as the woman ran towards him, "Weapons, comlinks, repulsorlifts. Everything."

"I can see that." the Alliance commander replied, still at a loss to explain what had happened. Then he looked at the wreck of the AT-DP before he continued, "At least whatever's happened seems to have effected the Empire as well."

"But what do we do?" the female soldier asked.

"We fall back. We need to reassess what's happening before we risk storming a fortress unarmed."

"But sir, how do we tell the others?"

"Word of mouth. Tell everyone you can that we're pulling back to the city limits. Whatever the Empire just pulled here we can't do anything about it right now."

"Well I'd say that was a success." Governor Morloni said as he looked around the room that was now only lit by the chemical glow sticks, "Can we be sure that the others went off as well?"

"Hard to say governor." the lead technician replied, "Magnapulse warheads are not designed to be used in this manner, they are meant to be deployed from orbit. However, we can be confident that no advanced technology now functions anywhere on Quillon."

"Then I suggest we take our leave of this place." the governor said, "We have a shuttle to catch and the rendezvous sight is a long way to travel on foot." then he looked towards the cases of primitive slug throwing weapons, "Help yourself to guns by the way. These things may be archaic but with them we have the best weapons on the planet that still work."

In orbit around Quillon, Rear Admiral Aphanar saw the entire moon suddenly plunged into darkness.

"Admiral we've just lost contact with all of our units on the surface. Everything in the atmosphere as well."

one of the MC-80 class cruiser *Wave Rider's* comscan operators announced, "Sensors also indicate that every airspeeder and shuttle operating in the atmosphere has crashed."

"What's going on down there?" Admiral Aphanar demanded.

"Admiral there was a massive co-ordinated energy pulse from multiple sites around the moon right at the same moment as we lost contact."

"A magnapulse device." Admiral Aphanar said, "Are there any Imperial ships on our sensors?"

"No admiral. We have complete orbital control."

"Then it can't have been deployed from orbit. The weapon must have been triggered on the surface. Prepare a shuttle and load it with communication equipment. Send it down to our primary landing zone. I want to use a droid pilot though. We can't be certain that the Empire doesn't have anything else up its sleeve and I don't want to risk a living pilot but I need to speak to our commander on the ground and find out what the situation down there is."

## 2.

In the hangar of the ancient space station that served as the Alliance to Restore the Republic's headquarters in the sector Lieutenant Colonel Vorn Larcus III and his field team were assisting the crew of the YT-1300 class *Silver Hawk*, the vessel the team was assigned to, in carrying out repairs to damage inflicted on a recent mission when a dark skinned man in a general's uniform approached them.

"Colonel Larcus." General Kain called out.

"Yes sir, how can I help you?" Vorn replied, "I take you've not just come here to see how our repairs are going."

"Quite right." General Kain said, "Vorn, how much do you know about Quillon?"

"It's a moon in the Shadow Region isn't it? As part of a trade delegation from Estran that visited there back when I was a Member of Parliament. As I recall it was a rather unpleasant place. Barely habitable and overcrowded."

"It's just rebelled against the Empire though hasn't it boss?" Kara Larcus, the young woman standing beside Vorn added. In addition to being Vorn's team medic she was also his wife despite the massive gap in their ages, "We just sent a fleet to help them out."

"Admiral Aphanar currently has a task force in orbit around the moon, yes." General Kain said, "A division of troops was also landed with orders to detain the Imperial governor and return him here for questioning."

"What's so important about the governor on some backwater moon?" Kara asked.

"The governor of Quillon was a lead figure in the design of Estran's defence system." Vorn said, "I remember meeting him back then and then again when I visited Quillon. I don't think he remembered me though."

"Well I'm hoping that you'll remember him well enough to recognise him if you see him again." General Kain said, "It appears that as a last ditch means of defence Governor Morloni triggered a magnapulse device that disabled every piece of modern technology on Quillon in an instant. Our forces had no choice but to fall back to their landing zones. Admiral Aphanar was able to send down a shuttle to make contact after the magnapulse weapon had been triggered and she's doing her best to resupply what's left of the division but right now they're in no state to find the governor."

"Let me guess," Vorn said, "that's where I come in."

"Exactly. Colonel, I want you to take your team to Quillon and locate Governor Morloni. Take him into custody and then bring him back here. If we're going to take Estran itself then we need to know as much about its defences as we can."

"Yes general." Vorn responded, nodding in agreement. Then he looked towards the *Silver Hawk* where the other rebels were still hard at work repairing its engines, "Mace." he called out to the ship's owner, Mace Grayle, "Sorry but we're going to have to put this off again."

"Don't tell me." Mace responded from beneath the ship's hull, "We're being deployed again. All I can say is that I hope whatever ship the Alliance lends us flies better than that U-wing we got lumped with last week."

"What's the matter dad?" Mace's adopted teenage daughter Cass asked as her father frowned while sat at the controls of the ship provided to them by the Alliance for the mission.

"I hate U-wings." he replied.

"Why? Their faster and more manoeuvrable than the *Silver Hawk*." Cass pointed out.

"Maybe, but they just don't feel right. They're not a real transport and their not a real starfighter either." Mace said.

"Captain, the colonel wants to know if you've got the co-ordinates locked in." the former mercenary Tharun Verser asked as he climbed the ladder from the transport compartment below the cockpit. Ordinarily Tharun wore military style fatigues and obvious body armour. However, given the current state of events on Quillon it had been decided that a more low key outfit would be better and so he wore more casual clothing instead, though he still carried his military style blaster pistol openly on his hip.

"Yeah, the co-ordinates are locked in. We'll be there about ten minutes after launch."

"That's the thing about these U-wings." Tharun commented, "They're faster than the *Silver Hawk*." and Mace snarled at him.

"What? What did I say?" Tharun said, looking at Cass and she smiled at him.

"I think dad's just getting set in his ways." she said.

"Well that's a habit he'll have to break when Malia has the kid. Trust me, I know." Tharun said before he climbed back down into the transport compartment where he found the team's demolitions and security specialist, Jaysica dragging a heavy crate aboard, "Need a hand little lady?" he asked and she looked up and smiled.

"Would you?" she responded and Tharun began to clap. Then she scowled at him.

"What's the matter with everyone today?" Tharun said before he reached out with one hand and dragged the crate through the hatch. Then he exited the ship to join Vorn and Kara where they were stood outside with Tobis Dorfus, Mace's engineer and the team's three droids.

"Hey lad, I think your girlfriend could do with some help stowing that gear." Tharun told Tobis.

"Oh, err, perhaps I ought to go and help her then." the engineer replied.

"No I'll go and give her a hand." Kara said but Tharun put a hand on her shoulder.

"Sorry, I've already done that one. She didn't like it." he said.

"Damn you Tharun." Kara said, "Okay Tobis, go earn your points with Jaysica. I'm sure you can trade them for depraved sexual favours later."

"What? Oh, err, I wouldn't -"

"Just go lad." Tharun said. Then as Tobis hurried towards the U-wing he looked at Vorn and added, "Captain Grayle says we can be at Quillon in ten minutes."

"Excellent." Vorn replied, "Well, if everything's aboard now then I suggest we get going."

"Lieutenant Colonel Larcus sir," Vorn's gold coloured protocol droid, Jeeves, said, "What about myself, Harvey and Penny?" and the droid indicated the R5 astromech droid and mouse droid stood close by.

"You're staying here." Vorn replied, "I don't want to risk losing any of you to another magnapulse weapon if the Empire has one."

"Why thank you sir. It is most pleasing to know that you value us so much." Jeeves said.

"You're out of warranty." Kara commented, "We'd have to pay to get you replaced."

"Well really." Jeeves exclaimed.

The three droids then stood and watched as the rest of the rebels boarded the U-wing and it flew from the hangar. It was at that point that Tobis' astromech droid chirped.

"I wholeheartedly agree Harvey." Jeeves said, "Without us to help them their task is going to be much harder."

The hangar ceiling was taken up by row after row of TIE fighters of various types, all ready to be scrambled to protect the fleet headquarters in orbit around Estran but the single fighter that was instead mounted on a rack at floor level was something different altogether. Rather than the spherical cockpit module used on almost every class of TIE fighter this one possessed a bulkier cockpit that was more reminiscent of that mounted on a YT-series freighter and allowed for two occupants mounted at the front of the hexagonal fuselage. The fighter was a tri-wing design with a vertical tail mounted above the fuselage and two others that sloped downwards at the sides. A single pilot was strapping himself into this fighter while the ground crew performed final checks prior to take off.

"You understand your mission commander?" Fleet Admiral Vretan asked the pilot.

"Yes sir, I am to travel to Quillon and engage my cloaking device as soon as I exit hyperspace. I will enter orbit around the moon and wait there until a gap in the rebel formation allows me to enter the atmosphere unseen and make my way to the bunker at the location provided. There I will collect Governor Morloni and return him to Estran." the pilot replied and Admiral Vretan nodded.

"And if it appears that Governor Morloni has fallen into rebel hands or is about to?" he said.

"Then I am to use my weapons to terminate the governor." the pilot replied.

"Very good commander. Carry on." Admiral Vretan said, stepping back from the TIE/ph as the pilot sealed his cockpit and the ground crew disconnected the various hoses fitted to the ship.

"This is TIE phantom trill herf xesh one-one-three-eight. Requesting permission to take off." the pilot transmitted to the flight controllers.

"TIE phantom trill herf xesh one-one-three-eight you are cleared for launch. Good hunting." the controller responded and as the stealth fighter rose up and then accelerated out of the hangar into space Fleet Admiral Vretan saluted it.

### 3.

Cass gasped when the U-wing dropped out of hyperspace in close proximity to Quillon. All light from the system's star was being blocked here by the massive gas giant and following the triggering of the magnapulse device the moon itself was largely dark as well, with just a handful of surface lights where large fires burned or the Alliance had been able to deploy replacement equipment for its ground forces.

"I've never seen a world this dark. What happened?" she asked.

"That's what a magnapulse weapon does Cass." Mace replied, "It takes out all electronic equipment, even stuff that's been hardened against the more conventional EMP effects you'll get from large blasts. Think of it like being hit by an ion cannon but on a planetwide scale."

"I thought this was a moon."

"It's just an expression."

"Mace what does it look like from up there?" Vorn called out from the bottom of the ladder.

"Dark. The power's still out pretty much everywhere colonel." Mace replied.

"Okay set us down as close to the governor's residence as you can but remember that we get seen by too many people we could start a panic if they all try and reach us for help." Vorn ordered.

"Understood colonel. I'm taking us in." Mace said and he adjusted the U-wing's course to take it towards the co-ordinates given to him of Governor Morloni's residence. Flying over the darkened capital district of Quillon, the massive tower was barely visible in the darkness, the usual hazard warning lights on its roof to warn approaching aircraft of its presence having been extinguished by the magnapulse blast as well.

"Dad I don't like the look of this." Cass said as she looked at the display on the console in front of her.

"What's wrong?" Mace asked her.

"It looks like there's a riot going on." she told him and Mace glanced at the monitor himself.

Using the ship's light amplification sensors Cass had been studying the streets they were flying over and sure enough it appeared that there were numerous large scale disturbances taking place.

"They're probably after food." Mace said, "All electronic credit sticks will have been wiped and there won't be any distribution networks left to move even essential goods. The police will have lost all their command and control as well as a lot of their equipment as well. Until the Alliance can get troops here to impose order it's likely to be chaos down there."

"And we're going to be landing right in the middle of it." Cass said.

"Maybe not." Mace said, "Look carefully at the tower."

Looking straight ahead Cass noticed something sticking out of the side of the governor's residence but in the darkness she could not tell exactly what it was. To help with this she adjusted the angle of the light amplification sensor so that it pointed ahead of the U-wing and she saw that it was a flat platform that protruded from the tower where there was a large door set into it despite it being almost a hundred metres above the ground.

"A landing pad." she said and Mace nodded.

"Even if there's a shuttle in that hangar then we can still leave this ship outside and we're far enough above the ground that even if anyone does notice us touching down it'll take them a long time to get all the way up here." and he flew the U-wing towards the tower.

There was no power to open the hangar door when the U-wing set down on the landing pad and the door itself was far too heavy to lift by hand. Instead Vorn had Jaysica set a detonite charge on the door, rolling out the malleable explosive and shaping it into a ring more than a metre across. This blew a hole in the door that was large enough for the rebels to climb through into the hangar where they found an Imperial lambda-class shuttle, now as useless as every other piece of technology that had been on the moon when the magnapulse was triggered.

Tharun was first through the hole and he shone the glow rod he had mounted on the barrel of his heavy blaster rifle around.

"Clear." he called out and the other rebels followed him through the hole as well.

"So now what?" Kara asked as she entered the hangar behind the other rebels.

"The stairs I guess." Tharun replied, "I doubt the turbolifts will be working."

"We should also be on the lookout for any Imperial personnel who may still be here." Vorn added, "We're hunting the governor and they may know where he's gone."

"I suppose being left behind in this place could be a good motivator to talk to us." Mace commented.

The hangar's internal door had been open when the magnapulse was triggered and so the rebels were able to make their way straight out of the hangar where they were immediately confronted by a sign printed on the wall that pointed the way to the turbolifts and emergency stairs. Tharun remained at the front of the group,

keeping his rifle held against his shoulder as they advanced so that his glow rod illuminated the way ahead. The rebels were just reaching the emergency stairs when all of a sudden a figure in white leapt out from behind a corner and dived at Tharun. Instinctively Tharun fired his rifle and at such close range the powerful weapon cut right through his assailant before punching a fist sized dent in the wall behind him.

"Contact!" Tharun yelled as a second figure appeared in the beam of his glow rod and now he and the other rebels had the chance to recognise their attackers as Imperial stormtroopers only without their helmets. The second stormtrooper reached to try and grab hold of Tharun's rifle, his location right in front of Tharun meaning that none of the other rebels could get a clear shot at the stormtrooper. Tharun could not aim his rifle at the stormtrooper either while the man held onto the barrel of the weapon so instead he pulled it back towards him, dragging the stormtrooper who refused to let go of it along as well. Then he slammed his whole weight up against the stormtrooper to push him up against a wall.

"Somebody shoot him!" Tharun yelled as the two men continued to wrestle over possession of Tharun's rifle.

"We need him alive." Vorn called out as Mace and Tobis dashed forwards to help Tharun and each of them was able to grab hold of one of the stormtrooper's arms. At the same time as the two younger rebels were wrestling with the stormtrooper Vorn flipped his rifle's selector switch to 'stun' and took aim at the soldier's exposed head and fired. In an instant the stormtrooper went limp in Mace and Tobis' grasp and they lowered him to the floor while Tharun checked for any more of them around the corner.

"Clear." he announced.

"Well this guy's still alive." Kara commented when she crouched down beside the stormtrooper Vorn had just shot and examined him.

"Why weren't they wearing their helmets?" Cass asked as she looked down at the body of the other stormtrooper.

"Oh, err, the magnapulse." Tobis responded, "Err, a stormtrooper's helmet includes a lot of, err, electronics that help them see."

"Without it those things are a liability even when you're not in somewhere as dark as this place." Mace added.

"They don't seem as scary without their helmets and blasters." Jaysica commented and Kara smiled.

"On this we can agree." she said, "The Empire relies way too much on its fancy toys. Take them away and their just a bunch of thugs waited to get smacked down."

"Speaking of which colonel," Mace began, "how far are you willing to go to get answers out of this guy?" and he glanced at the stunned stormtroopers.

"You mean am I willing to let you and Tharun beat them out of him?" Vorn replied, "No I'm not. But take a look around. Hopefully there'll be some Imperial uniforms around here somewhere we can make use of. When that stormtrooper comes to I want him to think he's been rescued. Understood?"

Mace smiled and nodded.

"Yeah, I get it." he said.

"Wake up trooper! What's your operating number?"

The stormtrooper's eyes flickered open as Mace slapped his face again. The rebel officer now wore a black Imperial officer's uniform that bore a colonel's rank markings and code cylinders. Meanwhile behind him stood Tobis in a lieutenant's uniform. The stormtrooper had seen both men for only a few seconds before he was stunned and even then in only poor light so it was hoped that he would not recognise either of them.

"What happened?" the stormtrooper asked.

"I said what's your operating number trooper?" Mace snapped, ignoring the question.

"TK-five-six-one-four sir." the stormtrooper said as he recovered his senses further.

"Well TK-five-six-one-four we're the governor's rescue party. We've been sent to take him back to Estran. The one slight problem is that the governor is not where he is supposed to be and with the rebels moving back into the city now we'd really like to know where he went."

"I didn't see him leave." the stormtrooper replied, "My squad was responding to the rebel incursion when the magnapulse was detonated and all our equipment stopped working. Our commanding officer told us to scatter and go to ground. TK-nine-four-oh-six and I came back here but the governor had already left."

"Left you say, he went of his own accord?" Mace said and the stormtrooper nodded.

"He was supposed to have been evacuated to the pick up point to meet you." he said and Tobis glance nervously at Mace, concerned that their lack of knowledge about any existing evacuation could give them away..

"What pick up point?" Mace asked, "We were instructed to land on the platform upstairs."

The stormtrooper frowned.

"You're not a rescue team." he said, "They'd know about the evacuation protocol." then his eyes widened as he stared at Tobis, "I know you! You're the rebel who-" and then he was abruptly cut off as Vorn stepped around the corner and shot him again, his blaster rifle still set to stun.

"An intelligent stormtrooper." he said, "Who could have expected that?"



"Here you Kara." Mace said, drawing the military issue DH-17 blaster pistol he had borrowed from her and handing it back, "You can have this back."

"Sure you don't want to make it a permanent swap?" she replied as she handed over his more compact but powerful DL-44 and its holster.

"No." Mace said simply, hooking the holster to his belt.

"Okay so where to now boss?" Kara asked and Vorn paused to think.

"Where would the Empire move the governor to?" Cass said.

"Somewhere secure that they could control access to." Mace replied.

"Fortified." Tharun added, "With a landing pad suitable for a shuttle as well."

"Are there any air bases near here?" Jaysica suggested.

"No, a military base would be too obvious." Vorn said, "The use of the magnapulse had to have been planned well in advance and right now all of the Empire's military bases are just as vulnerable as everywhere else on the planet."

"That's right." Tharun agreed, "No minefields, power fences or blaster emplacements to keep folk out."

"So we're looking for somewhere with good old fashioned walls." Kara said and then when she saw Vorn smile at this she smile as well, "That's it. The boss has got a plan."

"More of an idea than a plan really." Vorn replied.

"So tell us." Kara said, "You know I only like to beg in private."

"Quillon isn't naturally habitable at all." Vorn said, "As far as I know it was only settled about a thousand years ago to gain easy access to the gases in the planet we're orbiting and the companies that funded the settlement did the cheapest job of terraforming that they could. But they did at least make sure that the monitoring stations they built were made to withstand the rather extreme weather conditions that the moon was known for back then. My group visited one of these when we came here from Estran. It was a simple bunker designed to be left to operate unmanned except for the occasional visit by an engineering team so it had everything needed to sustain life but nothing that wasn't absolutely necessary. Of course the engineering teams back then would have had so much ground to cover that the best mode of travel would have been by airspeeder or shuttle."

"So it would need a landing pad." Jaysica commented and Vorn nodded.

"Precisely."

"So where's the nearest one of these bunkers?" Tharun asked.

"The one I was shown around was about twenty kilometres from here." Vorn replied.

"That's just about walking distance." Kara said.

"Oh, err, it would have to be." Tobis added, "There won't, err, there won't be any vehicles operating after the magnapulse."

"Given how long it's been since the pulse the governor could already be there by now if that's the one he's heading for." Mace pointed out.

"But we've still got a working ship." Cass said, "Can't we just fly there?"

"We could but the second we set down the governor and his cronies would leave kid." Tharun responded.

"Tharun's right." Vorn said, "If we're going to go to this bunker then we can't risk alerting the governor to our approach by flying there. It's located in an urban area now so he'd have plenty of opportunity to slip out quietly and blend in with the local population while we were still coming in to land."

"Does that mean that we have to walk all that way?" Jaysica asked.

"Some of it yes." Vorn replied, "But I think we can risk a flyby to see whether there's some place close by that we can put down."

"And if there isn't?" Cass asked.

"Then you take over from me piloting the ship and circle while we go in to investigate." Mace told her.

"Just try not to crash our ride home kid." Tharun added.

## 4.

It had taken several jumps through hyperspace to reach Quillon without being detected and as soon as the TIE/ph emerged into realspace on the outskirts of the system its pilot engaged its stealth system, rendering it invisible to sensors as well as visual observation. Cloaking devices came with many drawbacks beyond their extreme cost and one of these was the inability of a cloaked ship to make use of its own sensors so instead the pilot, one of the sector's most elite, guided his craft towards Quillon by eye. As he neared the moon he saw the fleet of Alliance capital ships and fighter patrols in space around it. The fighter's cloaking device would do nothing to conceal the effect the craft had on the air around it if it entered the atmosphere while cloaked and so the only way to do this without being seen was to wait until there was a gap in the Alliance fleet's coverage of the world above where Governor Morloni was to be picked up from. Right now there was no such gap, however and so the pilot placed his ship in orbit about his target's location and watched the Alliance ships sending down supplies to their troops on the ground as fast as they were able to.

Despite being disguised to blend in with the crowds of people filling the streets as they attempted to obtain needed supplies while the power remained out, Governor Morloni and his party were targeted for attack several times. These were not specifically directed at the governor, however. Instead gangs of criminals were taking advantage of law enforcement being paralysed by the magnapulse to establish dominance in the streets they now considered theirs and the Imperial party appeared to have plenty worth stealing. Unfortunately for the criminals the basic unpowered melee weapons that they were armed with after their blasters failed along with everyone else's following the magnapulse were no match for the slug throwers the governor and his party carried. Despite being armed with weapons capable of firing sustained bursts of projectiles, the governor's troops limited their fire against the gangs to individual aimed shots. This was done for two reasons, firstly the primary drawback of slug throwing weapons was their need for bulky ammunition and the group could only carry a limited amount on foot so it had to be preserved. More importantly though was the need to remain anonymous. Local law did not prohibit the possession of semi-automatic pistols or rifles but fully automatic weapons, whether blasters or slug throwers were prohibited so demonstrating that they had such weapons would immediately draw attention to the group.

"Target up ahead!" the stormtrooper at the front of the group shouted out, dropping to his knees and pointing his rifle towards the terraforming monitoring station they had been heading for.

"Any signs of activity?" Colonel Steer asked as he moved forwards and joined the soldier.

"I'm not sure sir, ordinarily I'd-" the stormtrooper began.

"Yes, yes, I know. You're not used to battlefield operations without your armour." the colonel interrupted, "Fortunately I have these." and he produced a primitive set of binoculars that worked purely on magnifying images through shaped lenses rather than the electronic optics of modern macrobinoculars. Holding these up to his eyes Colonel Steer saw that the bunker was still intact and secure, with no indications that anyone was already inside.

"Well colonel, are we clear to proceed?" Governor Morloni asked as he walked up behind the two men, flanked by a pair of shotgun wielding stormtroopers who, like the soldier crouching beside Colonel Steer were not wearing their typical white plastoid body armour.

"All clear governor. If my men did their job properly then there'll be provisions and more ammunition inside." the colonel replied, lowering his binoculars.

"Then lead the way colonel." the governor ordered and Colonel Steer nodded before he and the crouching stormtrooper darted down the road to the bunker's street entrance. The heavy door was sealed by a purely mechanical lock and then opened using a crank located beside it, a precaution taken against total power failures by the engineers who had originally designed the bunker a thousand years earlier. There was no crank present with the door but Colonel Steer had been sure to bring a suitable one along with him and after unlocking the door he placed this in the socket and with the stormtrooper standing watch he started to turn it, smiling as the door slid sideways.

"We're in." he called out and then the rest of the governor's party ran towards the bunker as well, rushing through the door into the darkened interior. Inside the party activated more chemical lights as the door was closed behind them and the light from these illuminated the contents of the room they were standing in. Its original purpose had been a control room of some kind but now the computers were as lifeless as every other piece of advanced technology that had been on Quillon at the time of the magnapulse's detonation and it had been pressed into service as storeroom for the supplies that Colonel Steer's men had been able to deliver here.

"I'll post some men on the roof." Colonel Steer said, "They'll be able to alert us when the rescue ship gets here. They'll also be able to let us know if anyone else starts to take too much of an interest in us."

"I don't see any signs of anyone down there." Kara said from the U-wing's co-pilot seat. As a former fighter pilot she was the most highly skilled starship gunner that the team had and so she occupied the co-pilot's seat to operate the vessel's forward firing laser cannons should they be needed. For now though she was concentrating on using the U-wing's optical sensors to survey the ground below, "Wait no, I see someone now. Make that four someones lying on the roof as if they're trying to avoid being seen from the ground." "Give us the feed." Vorn called out from the transport compartment and he and the other rebels gathered around a monitor as Kara sent the camera feed to it.

"One sentry covering each direction." Vorn said.

"They're armed." Tharun commented and he pointed to the rifles each of the rooftop sentries appeared to be holding.

"But won't their blasters have been fried by the magnapulse?" Jaysica asked.

"Could they have been shielded in some way?" Cass suggested.

"Oh, err, no." Tobis answered, "A, err, a magnapulse can circumvent any shielding. Physical or err, electronic."

"So why point useless blasters at people?" Cass asked.

"They aren't pointing them at anyone though." Jaysica responded, "They've got them hidden."

"Which doesn't make sense." Kara added from the cockpit, "Even a non-functional blaster can be used to scare someone if you're sure you don't have to fire it but keeping them hidden removes even that deterrent use."

"They aren't blasters." Tharun said, "They're slugthrowers."

"Slug throwers? Who uses slug throwers nowadays?" Cass said.

"Someone who planned to make all modern technology on the moon useless." Vorn said, "Governor Morloni made sure that he's not been left helpless. Those weapons may lag tens of thousands of years behind ours but they're still deadly in the right hands and they give his men an advantage over most of the other beings on the moon."

"Too bad for them that we've got blasters then." Jaysica said.

"We still need to get down there without them noticing us little lady." Tharun reminded her, "Depending on what sort of slug throwers they've got this could get pretty nasty. If we set down on their own landing pad then Governor Morloni won't even need to make a run for it. One automatic slug thrower with a belt feed on the roof would cut us to pieces while we were disembarking."

"Then if there aren't any viable landing sites within a kilometre we go with plan besh and Cass takes the controls and drops us off before circling." Vorn said.

"That's how we're going to have to go colonel." Mace announced, "There isn't anywhere we can set down safely and leave the ship around here. Cass get up to the cockpit and take over from me."

Although there was nowhere safe to properly land the U-wing, there were plenty of places to touch down temporarily and as Cass brought the craft down to ground level Tharun was already opening the side hatch so that the other rebels could disembark.

"Go! Go! Go!" he yelled as he leapt out first and broke into a run to get clear of the U-wing and into cover.

Then other rebels followed him and as Mace jumped out of the U-wing behind all of the others he shouted to Cass.

"Dust off!"

Hearing this, Cass pulled back on the control column and the U-wing rose back into the air before any of the local inhabitants could come to investigate the sound of a functional aircraft.

"Okay the bunker is that way." Vorn said, pointing, "We need to get there without being seen so I want all lights out. There's not point in advertising the fact that we've got functional technology. Now let's go."

Moving in pairs, Tharun with Mace, Vorn with Kara and Tobis with Jaysica, the six rebels headed towards the bunker with one pair moving while the other two kept watch for anyone taking an interest in them. Although they had extinguished their glow rods and displayed no obviously functional electronic devices they were all obviously armed with blasters and combined with the U-wing that had landed briefly before taking off again, this was enough to keep the locals away from them.

Despite the magnapulse weapon inflicting no structural damage directly, the side-effects of the blast had left behind significant damage where vehicles had been sent out of control and crashed and the evidence of this littered the streets in the form of wrecked vehicles and damaged structures. In addition to this there were signs of looting and violence as the locals attempted to obtain supplies or in some cases took advantage of the total failure of security systems to steal luxury goods.

"What a bunch of nerf herders." Kara commented as she and Vorn stopped outside a store with a smashed in front window.

"What makes you say that?" Jaysica asked as she looked at the store and the goods scattered on the pavement outside, "That stuff looks expensive."

"Oh, err, it's all electronic." Tobis pointed out.

"The magnapulse turned it all to junk little lady." Tharun added.

"If we could remember why we're here." Vorn said.

"What do we do if we encounter any looters boss?" Kara asked.

"Ignore them." Vorn replied, "We can't afford to get sidetracked."

The local inhabitants continued to keep their distance from the rebels and Mace and Tharun were the first to reach the street where the bunker was located, coming to a halt just behind the corner while they waited for the others to catch up. Mace chanced a quick glance around the corner towards the bunker but saw no obvious signs of life. However, he knew that there were sentries positioned on the roof and so he pulled his head back around the corner before he could be noticed.

"See anything captain?" Tharun asked but Mace shook his head.

"They're keeping a low profile." he said just as Vorn and Kara arrived, "Ah colonel, it looks like the governor's people are staying hidden."

"I seem to remember an entrance on this side." Vorn replied and Mace nodded.

"Yes, I saw it. Though how we'd open it I can't say." he said.

"That'll be a job for the klutz." Kara commented.

"Stop calling me that." Jaysica said as she and Tobis arrived just in time for her to hear Kara insulting her.

Then she looked at Vorn, "What does she expect me to do?"

"We need to get inside the bunker." Vorn told her, "We'll need more breaching charges."

"Charges? As in plural?" Kara commented and Vorn nodded.

"There'll be other ways in." he pointed out, "We need to storm the building through as many as we can at the same time. Kara I want you and Tharun to circle around the structure and gather as much information about its external configuration as possible."

"You want pictures boss?" Kara asked as she pulled a recording rod from her pocket.

"That's why I chose you." Vorn answered, "We especially need to know about any potential escape route and also if you happen to see any of the sentries. We're still not sure exactly what type of weapons they're carrying."

"Ready lieutenant?" Tharun asked and Kara nodded.

"Lead the way." she replied and Tharun started to head back the way the rebels had come.

"Yes colonel?" Governor Morloni said, looking up from the printed book he was reading by the light of a chemical glow stick when Colonel Steer knocked on the open door to the room.

"We may have a problem governor." the colonel said.

"Really? What?"

"The lookouts have spotted an aircraft circling us. It's too far away for them to identify but whoever's flying it is operating without running lights so they definitely don't want to be seen." Colonel Steer told the governor, "It could your rescue ship, but--"

"The rescue ship knows our location." Governor Morloni interrupted, "Therefore, it must be a rebel vessel."

"Yes governor. There could be a rebel strike force moving into place as we speak."

"In which colonel I suggest you put the men on alert. If the rebels wish to capture me they'll have to try and break in. When that happens we will fall back to our escape route."

## 5.

When Tharun reached another junction where a street led directly to the terraforming monitoring station. Kara followed Mace as closely as she could manage and when he came to a halt she stopped beside him.

"There's no door here." he said, peering cautiously around the corner.

"Okay, but if there's a lookout up there then we need to make sure our blasters aren't seen." Kara said, knowing that the open display of modern weapons would give them away to the lookouts immediately.

"We'll pull back." Tharun said, "I reckon we can loop around to the east and keep out of sight before we come in for a closer look again." and Kara nodded.

The two rebels retreated away from the old terraforming monitoring station, darting down narrow side streets until they found another road that led up to the target building and when Tharun peered around the corner towards it he instantly pulled back again.

"Lookout on the roof." he said.

"Hang on." Kara replied as she activated her recording rod and then she held the device around the corner so that it could capture footage of the terraforming monitoring station. When she had about a minute of footage she stopped recording and plugged the recording rod into her datapad before playing it back. By using her datapad rather than relying on the tiny display built into the back of the recording rod, Kara was able to zoom in on the figure that was just about visible crouching on the roof of the terraforming monitoring station and then zoom in further on the weapon he held.

"Looks like a rifle." Tharun said.

"Think it's full auto?" Kara asked.

"Can't tell from this recording." Tharun answered, "If it's just something that was grabbed from a sporting goods store then no. But the governor's men could have had some military spec rifles specially made for them before all this started."

"The boss will want to assume it is." Kara said, "Now what about this door?" and she adjusted the position of the image on the datapad so that it was centred on the door into the structure.

"Looks the same as the first one." Tharun commented.

"Agreed." Kara said, disconnecting the recording rod from her datapad before putting both of them away again, "Now let's see what else we can find shall we?"

Once again Kara and Tharun pulled back from their target so that they could remain unseen as they continued to circle around it until they found another route towards it so that they could continue with their scouting mission. This time the route towards the bunker turned out to be a narrow alleyway between two buildings that with the lack of street lighting was in near total darkness and enabled the pair to get within a few metres of it.

"I think the landing pad's on the other side of that wall." Tharun said softly, not wanting his voice to carry as far as any guards who may have been on the other side of the wall.

Kara nodded in agreement and pointed towards the large gate set into the wall just a little off to the side from the rebels' point of view.

"I'm guessing that's to allow surface vehicles to enter." she said and Tharun nodded then as well.

"Yeah, I bet this place was pretty stormy before the terraforming was carried out. The planetary engineers would have needed somewhere sheltered to keep their vehicles. You can bet that the entire area inside will be covered by a sniper at least. Or an automatic weapon if they've got any."

"Probably not a very good way in then. Perhaps we should keep looking." Kara said and Tharun smiled.

"Well I'd hate to go back to my father in law with anything less than a complete picture so I'm with you mom. Shall I lead?" he said and Kara scowled as he reminded her that thanks to his being married to Vorn's daughter she was his mother in law.

"Just go." she said, "And quit the mom poodoo."

Continuing to loop around the terraforming monitoring station, Kara and Tharun found one more external door and on close inspection a guard was visible on the roof above it, doing his best to stay out of sight. With this information in hand, the two rebels then completed their circuit of the structure and joined up with the other rebels who had remained in place, periodically peering around the corner and using macrobinoculars to observe their target.

"We found three more ways in boss. Including a vehicle gate at the landing pad." Kara said and she held out her recording rod, "I got pictures."

"What about guards?" Mace asked, "We've spotted a couple of them with rifles of some kind."

"We saw one as well." Tharun replied, "He had a rifle as well."

"That goes along with what we saw from the air." Vorn said, nodding, "I think it's safe to assume that there

are still four guards on duty on the roof.”

“Getting close is going to be difficult.” Mace commented.

“Oh, err, not if we go through the landing pad gate.” Tobis said, “The, err, the pad itself means that, err, the guards can’t see the street on that side.”

“Tobis is right.” Jaysica said, smiling, “They wouldn’t see us until we were through the gate.”

“At which point they’d shoot us from the roof.” Tharun said.

“Maybe not.” Vorn said, smiling, “Tharun did you bring those smoke grenades you normally carry with you?”

“Of course.” Tharun replied and he took his backpack from his back and from a large side pocket he took two smoke grenades, “I’ve got one white and one red if it matters.”

“Not really, no.” Vorn said.

“You’re thinking that we can use the smoke to cover our advance?” Mace asked but Vorn shook his head.

“No. If they have automatic weapons then firing at random into the cloud would still be enough to keep us back.”

“So what’s your genius plan then boss?” Kara asked.

“We go in through the three personnel doors.” Vorn told the other rebels, “We’ll go in two waves, two doors in the first and the third later.”

“How do we stop the guards spotting us if they decide to take a peek over the side of the roof?” Kara said.

“If my plan works they’ll all be focused on the landing pad while the first wave is moving into position.” Vorn explained, “Jaysica needs to prepare charges for each door. Kara you take one and Tharun will take another. Jaysica will keep two others for herself for use as part of the first stage of our assault as well as our second wave of entry. We’ll approach the bunker from the direction of the landing pad. We won’t be going in that way but I want the governor’s men to think we are.”

“Smoke grenades over the gate colonel?” Tharun said and Vorn nodded.

“Yes, plus a charge just big enough to put a small hole in the gate that Tobis and Jaysica can shoot through.” he said, “Then while everyone inside is thinking that we’re coming in that way Mace and Tharun will make their way around to one of the other doors while Kara and I go in the opposite direction. We’ll go in at the same time and as soon as we do Tobis and Jaysica need to circle around to that last door and blow their way in through it. Any questions?”

“Yeah boss.” Kara said, “What do we do when the klutz kriffs this all up for us?”

When an Alliance frigate repositioned itself in orbit around Quillon it opened up a gap in the blockade that the pilot of the TIE/ph estimated was just big enough to allow his craft to slip through and enter the atmosphere unnoticed. Transferring power to the fighter’s engines, the pilot flew straight towards Quillon and deactivated the cloaking device just before entering the atmosphere rather than risk overloading it during entry into the atmosphere where it would attempt to absorb the massive amount of heat being generated. Even though the fighter was no longer invisible to sensors or even a basic visual search the pilot did not activate any of his own active sensors, knowing that doing this would alert the Alliance fleet to his presence just as much as entering the atmosphere while their ships had a line of sight to him would. The Alliance ships would still most likely detect the thermal flare as the TIE phantom entered the atmosphere but by the time they responded the pilot knew that he would have cleared the upper layer of the atmosphere and able to reactivate his cloaking device. Then it would just be a short trip down to his target.

Cass sighed as she sat at the controls of the U-wing, still circling around the terraforming monitoring station and hoping that the distance and altitude at which she was flying was enough to prevent the Imperial lookouts from paying too much attention to her. Unfortunately she knew, the lack of any other craft in the air thanks to every airspeeder on the moon having been destroyed by the magnapulse meant that it was not possible for Cass to conceal herself among other air traffic.

Given this lack of other air traffic, Cass had been paying only scant attention to the U-wing’s sensors until out of the corner of her eye she noticed something on the infra red detectors. Somewhere high above her there was a massive thermal signature that could only be coming from an object entering the atmosphere and, given that the Alliance fleet would make sure that no rogue celestial bodies could come crashing down on the moon by chance, it could only be a starship.

For a moment Cass considered the possibility that the orbiting rebel fleet was sending more troops to assist Vorn’s field team but then it occurred to her that she would have been notified if this was happening, but if it was not an Alliance ship entering the atmosphere then the only other possibility was that it was an Imperial ship that had somehow managed to slip past the Alliance blockade of the moon. Cass continued to pay close attention to the U-wing’s sensors, waiting for the mysterious vessel to complete its atmospheric entry so that she could identify it properly. However, rather than being clearly revealed to the U-wing’s sensors there was no trace of a vessel at all. For a moment Cass thought she saw a brief electromagnetic pulse that could have been created by a ship engaging its repulsorlifts but this too vanished without a trace before she could use it to identify the new arrival.

"I've got a very bad feeling about this." she said to herself before she reached out to activate the U-wing's communications, "Dad, are you there?" she signalled, "Something really weird just happened up here and I think we've got company."

## 6.

The rebels had just arrived outside the vehicle gate in the wall around the terraforming station's landing pad when Mace's comlink activated.

"Dad are you there? Something really weird just happened up here and think we've got company." Cass's voice said.

"Cass what's wrong?" Mace replied, keeping his voice low as Jaysica pressed an explosive charge to the gate beside him.

"Dad I just picked up something that looked like a ship entering the atmosphere but when the heat cleared there was nothing there. I thought I'd picked up a ship activating its repulsorlifts for a split second but that was it." Cass explained.

"I don't like the sound of that boss." Kara said when she overheard this.

"Neither do I." Mace agreed, "Cass knows how to read sensors and the sensors aboard that ship were working fine."

"So what could cause that?" Jaysica asked, looking up from the charge she was setting.

"Just keep your mind on that bomb, okay? I don't want to get blown up high enough that the last person to see me will be Cass while she's still circling up there." Kara told her and Jaysica scowled at her.

"Err." Tobis said and the other rebels looked at him.

"What do you know lad?" Tharun asked.

"Oh, err, it could be a ship with a, err, cloaking device." Tobis said and the rest of the team stared at him.

"A cloaking device? Are you insane?" Kara hissed, anxious not to make too much noise just in case she was heard from the other side of the wall.

"Does the Empire have any ships with cloaking devices in the sector?" Jaysica asked nervously.

"I don't know." Vorn replied, "But if they do then it would make sense for them to send one to rescue Governor Morloni. They must know how important he is to us."

"A TIE phantom?" Mace suggested and Vorn nodded. Then Mace raised his comlink back to his mouth, "Cass this is important." he said, "There could be a cloaked Imperial ship up there. You need to raise your shields and contact Rear Admiral Aphanar. Tell her we suspect the Empire has sent a cloaked vessel to rescue the governor. She needs to redeploy her ships to find it. Under no circumstances are you to attempt to engage that ship though. You're not a combat pilot."

"Okay dad. But what about you?" Cass responded.

"Don't worry about us. We'll be just fine. We're going in now." Mace told her before shutting off his comlink and looking at Vorn, "Shall we get on with this then?" he asked.

"I think so. Jaysica if you'd like to set the first charge." Vorn said.

Tharun produced one of his smoke grenades and waited while Jaysica spread a thin ring of detonite to the vehicle gate, adding a simple timed detonator to it.

"Okay, ten seconds." she said as she started the timer running and stepped back. Tharun pulled the pin from his grenade and counted down the seconds until he reached five, at which point he hurled it over the wall and three seconds later there was a 'pop' as it went off and a thick cloud of white smoke began to fill the landing pad area. Two seconds after this the charge that Jaysica had set went off and blew a hole half a metre across in the gate. This was too small for a person to get through easily but the smoke on the other side of the wall concealed its size, only permitting the Imperial sentries on the roof to know that someone had used an explosive device to breach the gate.

"Now." Vorn said and he and Kara started to run around the wall in one direction while Mace and Tharun went in the other. At the same time Tobis and Jaysica fired their blasters through the hole in the gate to add to the illusion that the rebels were launching their attack from that direction.

In response to the explosion and firing from the direction of the landing pad the four sentries posted on the roof of the terraforming monitoring station all rushed to that side and aimed their weapons downwards.

However, the smoke grenade meant that they could not see the true extent of the damage to the gate or where the blaster fire was coming from. Therefore, rather than aiming their rifles at specific targets they all set them to fire automatically and let loose short bursts at random, reasoning that they could at least hold back any rebels attempting to get close to the structure itself.

The firing of the slug throwers was highly audible from the street and it was obvious to the rebels now circling around to the smaller doors that the distraction phase of the plan was having the desired effect. Reaching their target door first, Mace and Tharun came to a halt while Tharun applied his charge to the door's lock and Mace waited for a signal from Vorn.

The explosion and gunfire were also heard inside the bunker and the Imperial troops there grabbed their



weapons and checked that they were ready to use.

"Stay where you are." Colonel Steer ordered when two of his men began to head towards the door that led the landing pad, "If the sentries can't hold them back we'll hold them here instead."

"Colonel what's happening?" Governor Morloni exclaimed as he appeared in the doorway to the room he had adopted as his private quarters.

"The rebels have found us governor. I suggest you stand by the escape hatch." Colonel Steer replied and Governor Morloni nodded.

"All set." Vorn signalled when Kara had stuck her charge to the lock on the door in front of her.

"All set here too colonel." Mace responded.

"Okay on my mark." Vorn said, "Three. Two. One. Mark." and at that moment both Kara and Tharun triggered their charges, blowing the locks off the doors and sending the doors themselves flying into the bunker. The dual explosions from two different directions were enough to startle the Imperial troops inside who had been expecting an attack to come from another direction altogether and the rebels were all inside before they could react. The rebels' aim was to capture the governor rather than kill him and they could not take the chance that he would hit accidentally by a lethal shot from a blaster and so they had their weapons set to stun as they began firing almost indiscriminately, targeting anything that moved before the Imperial troops could return fire.

When they however, did the sound of slug throwers filled the interior of the building with the din of chemically propelled bullets being fired at supersonic speeds. The Imperial troops had their weapons set to automatic, seeking to hold back the rebels even if they could not hit them. However, the troops were inexperienced with their slug throwers and constant use of automatic fire meant that they rapidly emptied their magazines, something that was much less of an issue with blasters that could easily hold enough energy for a hundred shots in a single power cell. Their repeated breaks in firing allowed the rebels to advance further into the bunker, stunning the Imperial troops while they were still in the process of reloading.

There then came another explosion as Tobis and Jaysica blew open the final doorway and burst into the bunker. With rebels already attacking from two other directions this door was being watched by only one Imperial soldier and before he had chance to recover from the shock of the explosion he was hit by a stun blast fired by Tobis.

The two young rebels then ran down the short corridor towards the sounds of shooting coming from ahead of them and both fired their carbines together as another guard appeared to investigate the explosion. Both shots struck the man and he fell to the floor unconscious. When they reached the doorway that the guard had just appeared through they saw that they had reached the large central room of the bunker where the fighting was taking place and that their position meant that the few remaining Imperial troops were now cornered.

"Over there!" Vorn shouted when he saw Governor Morloni through a nearby doorway. The governor was in the process of lifting open a hatch set into the floor and moments later he climbed down through it.

"Fall back!" Colonel Steer yelled when he too saw that the governor making his escape but as he turned to flee Tharun shot him in the back and he fell to the floor. Seeing an opportunity Vorn got up and ran towards the hatchway he could see through the open doorway.

"He's getting away!" he yelled as he ran and across the room Tobis and Jaysica ran towards the hatch as well while the other rebels moved towards it more slowly as they laid down covering fire. Vorn reached the hatch first and pointed his rifle and its attached glow rod down through it as he looked to see where it led. Below the hatch there was a ladder that led down into what was obviously some sort of drain that looked large enough for a human being to walk along with ease. There was no sign of Governor Morloni though and it was clear that he had not decided to wait for his men when he fled without them. Holding his rifle in one hand Vorn began to climb down the ladder into the drain. Behind him Jaysica was the next to reach the hatch and she too began to climb through it. However, just as she took hold of the ladder she stood on a spent bullet casing and when the tiny metal cylinder flew out from beneath her foot it caused her to lose her balance and she squealed as she toppled through the hatch. Reaching out to try and steady herself, Jaysica accidentally pulled the hatch shut behind her and the handle bent under her weight before snapped off and sent her plummeting down into the drain below.

Vorn was directly beneath Jaysica when she fell and she knocked him from the ladder as well before both rebels landed in a heap at the bottom. Had Governor Morloni been waiting in the tunnel there then they have been helpless to prevent him from shooting them both but fortunately the light being given off by his chemical glow stick indicated that he was already on the move.

"We need to get after him." Vorn said as he and Jaysica picked themselves up.

"What about the others?" Jaysica asked and Vorn looked upwards where he could hear the other rebels attempting to force open the hatch that was now jammed shut.

"I think we're on our own." he told her, "Come on, let's go."

The two rebels then set off after Governor Morloni, following the glow from his light.

Flashes of light from the terraforming monitoring station told the pilot of the cloaked TIE fighter that it was under attack and he flew his fighter closer to see if the landing pad was still secure. However, by the time he got close enough to see what was happening clearly he saw that the landing pad was obscured by smoke and thus not a safe place to set down while the building entrances appeared to have been blown open. All this suggested that rescuing Governor Morloni was no longer a viable option and the pilot now had only course of action left open to him, he had to kill the governor to prevent him from falling into the hands of the Alliance. In preparation for this the Imperial pilot chose to emulate Cass and he started to circle the terraforming monitoring station, though since he did not fear detection he did so at a much closer distance. His plan was that if he saw the rebels bringing Governor Morloni out of the bunker he would disengage his cloaking device and carry out a strafing run before reactivating his cloaking device to cover his escape. However, as he waited the pilot suddenly saw a light appear several hundred metres away at ground level. This was obviously being produced by a chemical glow stick and the pilot turned towards this for a closer look. When he focused his fighter's image amplification system onto the source of the light he immediately recognised Governor Morloni and he smiled as he realised that he may have the opportunity to rescue him after all.

"Hold on governor." he said to himself, "Help is on the way."

When Vorn and Jaysica emerged from the rain they could see the light Governor Morloni held moving not too far ahead of them. Jaysica immediately fired a shot from her carbine but the energy pulse missed the governor and when he saw the sudden flash of blue he dropped his light and turned around, raising his own slug throwing rifle.

"Down!" Vorn yelled and both rebels threw themselves to the ground just as Governor Morloni opened fire and a stream of bullets passed over their heads.

Just as his troops had done in the bunker Governor Morloni rapidly found his weapon empty and he began to search frantically for an extra magazine, trying to remember whether he had brought one with him. The break in the gunfire enabled the two rebels to get back to their feet and both aimed their blasters at the governor.

"Drop your weapon." Vorn shouted, "There's no way out."

Just then there was the sound of a powerful repulsorlift engine from overhead but the skies remained empty. Or at least they did until a shimmering blue light revealed the TIE phantom as it de-cloaked and hovered just above ground level as the pilot lowered the boarding lift below his craft while keeping its weapons pointed towards Vorn and Jaysica as they took cover.

"It would seem that you spoke too soon you rebel scum." Governor Morloni shouted back at Vorn and he tossed his rifle away as he calmly strode towards the waiting TIE fighter.

It was then that a bright searchlight shone down out of the sky as Cass directed the light mounted on the U-wing's hull downwards, picking out the TIE phantom. The U-wing was not alone, however and the sound of engines grew as a pair of Alliance A-wings came hurtling out of the sky. Seeing these craft approaching Governor Morloni broke into a run, seeking to reach the TIE phantom before the A-wings could attack.

However, he was no match in speed for one of the galaxy's fastest starfighters and laser blasts erupted from the noses of both Alliance fighters. These were directed at the TIE phantom as it hovered helplessly with its shields lowered and the first laser blast to hit the stealth fighter blew one of its wings off and sent it spinning into the ground where it exploded as the two A-wings swooped over it and started to climb back into the sky. The force of the explosion was enough to hurl Governor Morloni off his feet. As he started to get back up again he heard the sound of running feet and he looked around to see Vorn and Jaysica rushing towards him with their weapons raised. The two rebels came to a halt close in front of him at the same time as Cass brought the U-wing in to hover above them with its searchlight illuminating the area.

"Well governor it appears your ride has suffered an accident." Vorn said, smiling, "Perhaps we can offer you a lift instead." and then there was a flash of blue as Vorn shot Governor Morloni with his rifle still set to stun.