

STAR WARS

1-01: Raid at Allastra

By Stephen J Dutton



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 MAGE 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...

RAID AT ALLASTRA

THE WORLD OF ALLASTRA IS HOME TO THE EMPIRE'S PRIMARY COMMUNICATION ARRAY IN THE SECTOR. WHEN THE OCCUPANTS OF THE SILVER HAWK ARE ASSIGNED TO SABOTAGE THIS FACILITY THEY THINK THAT IT WILL BE JUST ANOTHER RAID. BUT NO PLAN SURVIVES CONTACT WITH THE ENEMY...

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

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1.

"Well we've just dropped out of hyperspace." announced Mace Grayle, captain of the YT-1300 class transport ship the *Silver Hawk*, "we should make planetfall in about half an hour."

Like Mace the trio sat in the communal area of the ship were all human: two male and one female. One of the men, clearly the oldest of the group, looked up at Mace as he too sat down with them. The other two continued with their card game.

"Has anyone seen Jaysica?" the older man asked.

"She was still asleep when I came here Vorn." the woman said, slapping a card down on the table with a grin, "But I think I heard her moving about a few minutes ago."

Right on cue another woman appeared, this time entering from the doorway that led to the various cabins where the *Silver Hawk's* occupants slept. Unlike everyone else present she was not fully dressed; holding a towel up over her body.

"Kara have you seen my solvent?" Jaysica asked.

"Solvent?" Kara said back, still without looking up from her card game, "What do you need that for?" and then she turned to look at Jaysica and her expression became puzzled, "Hang on," she said, "why are you stood like that?"

"Like what?" Jaysica said, "I don't know what you're talking about."

The three men sat with Kara all now stopped what they were doing and looked at Jaysica also.

"Well," said the man in combat fatigues with which Kara was playing cards, "I think that it's something to do with the fact that that towel you're wearing isn't wrapped all the way around you. You're just holding it up in front of you."

"Yes and she's not even doing that properly Tharun," Mace added to the card player, "have you noticed that she's got her hands clasped together way out in front of her while she's holding up her towel by clamping it under her armpits?"

"Why no captain, I hadn't spotted that," Tharun answered and then he tipped his head towards the older man who had so far remained silent and spoke to him, "What would you conclude from this Major Larcus sir?" he asked.

"Well, without further investigation," Major Vorn Larcus began, closing the book that he had been reading, "I would say that Miss Horbid here has managed to glue her hands together whilst completely naked and now needs to find a suitable chemical agent to separate them before we land and strike a blow against the Empire. What does everyone else think?"

"Oh I definitely agree sir," Kara responded and then both Mace and Tharun also nodded and indicated their agreement.

"And why do we think that she's done this?" Vorn asked loudly.

"Oh I know this one," Mace said, tapping his chin with his finger.

"It's because she's an accident prone oaf who scares the living daylights out of me every time she goes near the explosives that we trust her to handle." Kara interrupted.

"I was going to say that," Tharun said and then he added, "but I'll just have to do this instead," and he placed his cards on the table, "Game." he said.

"You bastard." Kara exclaimed, "Boss he's cheating."

"Hey guys." Jaysica called out from by the doorway, "I really need that solvent."

"Don't worry," Mace said to her, "there's some in the engine room."

"Thanks," Jaysica said, and she began to sidestep across the room, keeping her front towards the others so they would not see her exposed back.

"And for your information," she said as she stepped through the door that led to the engine room, "I am not accident prone." and then she leant back on the control that shut the door, which promptly slid shut with a hiss and trapped her towel. There was a shriek from beyond the door, then nothing. The towel remained where it was, caught between the door and its frame.

"So do you think she'll find the solvent?" Vorn said, looking at Mace.

"Well if she can't find it on her own then I'm sure that Tobis can help her," Mace answered, "he's in the engine room now."

All four people around the table looked at one another and smiled.

"Think he'll enjoy that when she walks in there naked?" Tharun said, casting his eyes about at the others.

"What Tobis?" Kara replied, "Unless she's got an instruction manual in six different languages and a toll free helpline for him to call I doubt he'd have a clue what to do with her." Everyone grinned, picturing the expression of their socially awkward engineer coming face to face with a naked Jaysica and at that moment there was another shriek from the direction of the engine room.

"I think she's found Tobis." Tharun said, still grinning, "Another game before we land?"

"Go on then," Kara answered, "but no cheating this time."

"Deal me in too." Mace said, "How about you major?"

"Go on then, I do enjoy a good game of cards on occasion."

"Excuse me," a voice called out from the other side of the room. It belonged to GV-3PO, Vorn's protocol droid, "but shouldn't someone check on miss Horbid in case she's injured?"

"She'll be fine Jeeves." Vorn replied, then he looked at Tharun, "Go on, deal." he said.

As Tharun dealt the cards the doorway to the engineering room slid open once more and Jaysica reappeared, this time having quickly grasped her towel with her separated hands and wrapped it around her. "Find the solvent then?" Kara called out as the younger woman rushed back towards her cabin without saying a word.

"You know I feel sorry for you having to share a room with her." Tharun said to Kara.

"Don't get me started," Kara said, "and I'm telling you, if she's glued any of my stuff to anything I'll glue her head to the deck."

"Not on my ship you won't." Mace told her.

"My favourite was when she split her pants on that razorwire fence," Vorn said, sorting his cards, "and the effect of her wearing an all black outfit for a night raid was somewhat spoiled by the fluorescent yellow underwear that an entire platoon of stormtroopers got a good look at."

"They were mine as well." Kara said.

"What the pants or the undies?" Tharun asked with a smirk.

Before Kara could respond there was the sound of footsteps from the doorway leading to the engine room and a young man in grease-covered overalls appeared.

"The coolant plant was leaking again," he said, "but it's all fixed now."

"Coolant plant, is that a nickname for your girlfriend Tobis?" Kara asked.

"Girlfriend?" Tobis replied.

"Yeah," Tharun said, "Jaysica."

"Oh Jaysica's not my girlfriend." Tobis said suddenly and everyone looked up from the card game.

"Now that was a very definitive reply." Tharun said.

"Yes, perhaps a little too eager." Mace added.

"Me thinks he does protest too much." Vorn said.

"We all know how you feel about her," Kara said, "and we all know what the problem is too. Don't we everyone?"

"What, that she barely has any idea that he exists and he won't come out and tell her how he feels?" Tharun responded, "Or that the combination of her clumsiness and his social ineptitude would produce offspring that would threaten life as we know it if they ever did get together?"

"Ineptitude?" Kara said, "Fancy word there."

"Thanks, I saw it in one of the major's books. So am I right?"

"Pretty much yes. On both counts." Kara said.

"I thought so."

"Is everything ready Tobis?" Vorn asked, changing the subject away from the teasing by the rebels under his command.

"Oh yes," Tobis answered, "so long as we keep out of visual range of any of the planet's defences the modifications I've made to our transponder should make us look like an Imperial transport ship on their sensors."

"I hope so." Mace said, "I'd hate to get shot down before we even land."

Tharun studied the base that was the rebels' target through his macrobinoculars. In particular he focused on the soldiers at the main gate of the perimeter fence.

"Their security is worthless." the former mercenary said contemptuously, "The men on the gate aren't even checking the ID's being waved at them."

"They're not Imperial troops." Vorn reminded him, "Even if they do check Jaysica's ID they won't have access to the Imperial database to verify it."

"Where is our girl anyway?" Kara asked, "Shouldn't she be there by now?"

"She is, I can see her now." Mace answered her while he looked further down the road running past the base through his own macrobinoculars.

"Where?" Tharun said, and he swept his macrobinoculars along the road also, "Ah yes, there she is," he added, "she's getting off the bus now."

"Are you sure it's her?" Kara asked.

Mace and Tharun watched as the figure getting off the bus tripped over, scattering belongings over the pavement.

"It's her alright." Tharun commented, "She should be inside soon."

"Let's get moving then." Vorn said, "We need to be in position when the bomb goes off."

"Oh thank you so much." Jaysica said to the elderly woman who had stopped to help her pick up her dropped belongings. Fortunately the only items that had dropped from her grasp were perfectly innocent. She doubted that she would have been able to explain away why her backpack contained a blaster, mouse droid and several compact explosive charges.

"That's quite alright dear." the woman replied, "I saw your badge, and I think that you all do such a wonderful job protecting us from those awful rebels."

"My badge?" Jaysica said, and then she remembered the falsified identity card that was pinned to her jacket that claimed she was an adjutant in the Imperial Army, "Yes, I shouldn't really wear it in public for security, but I keep forgetting."

"Never mind dear," the woman said, "You take care now," and she walked away. Meanwhile Jaysica headed for the main entrance to the base.

She knew exactly what to do. She just had to walk up to the guards at the gate, show them her fake ID and walk inside. Her arrival had been timed to match the beginning of the morning shift, so there was a line of people making their way through the gate. Jaysica just joined the back of the line.

"New here?" the man in front of her in the line asked when he noticed Jaysica standing behind him.

"My first day." Jaysica replied, nodding.

"Then I guess that's why you don't know you don't have to stand in line with the rest of us," the man said.

"I don't?"

"No," he said, "Its just us local defence people who have to wait in line. The Empire's finest get to cut in. The local garrison commander doesn't like his people to be late."

"Right. I'll do that then, thanks." and Jaysica stepped out of then line and walked right to the gate.

"I've not seen you here before," the guard said when Jaysica held out her fake ID, "I'd remember someone as good looking as you."

"Its my first day." Jaysica replied, keeping with the same lie and trying to ignore the unwelcome flirting by a man who had breath that could probably drop a wookie at fifty metres.

"In you go." said the guard and he waved her through without bothering to study the ID closely, "and see you tomorrow," he said hopefully as she walked briskly past him.

Vorn had told her that getting onto the base would be easy. The Allastran Defence Force was solely responsible for perimeter security even though the means to actually check her identity was beyond their clearance level. Now that she was on the base she would not be stopped again when she entered the section controlled by the Imperial military itself.

The Imperial section was just a short distance away, its pre-fabricated structures standing out against the locally constructed buildings used by the ADF, Jaysica walked calmly towards it. The communications array that was Jaysica's primary target was obvious from outside the building, a massive tower that bristled with antennae and receiver dishes that handled communications for Imperial forces throughout the sector.

Without it, they would find it much harder to respond quickly to threats: threats like a series of co-ordinated raids by rebel forces.

She stopped suddenly when the main door opened in front of her. From out of the building came a group of figures clad in white armour. Imperial stormtroopers. This was something that Jaysica hadn't expected as this base was supposed to be manned by the Imperial Army, not the faceless legions of Emperor Palpatine's elite troops.

"Good morning," she said as they marched past her in double file but none of them even looked at her as they went by, Jaysica breathed a sigh of relief when they had gone on their way.

There was a security guard sat behind a desk when Jaysica entered the building, but he didn't even look up at her. Clearly Vorn had been correct when he had described the poor security here.

After today, Jaysica thought to herself, that will likely change.

As soon as she was past the inattentive security guard Jaysica found a quiet spot and crouched down. She took off her backpack, set it down on the floor and then she removed her jacket to reveal the Imperial Army uniform she wore underneath. It was just as fake as her identity card, but it would be good enough to stop anyone from asking why she was walking about in civilian clothes. She transferred the fake ID from her jacket to the uniform's tunic. Next Jaysica opened up her backpack and began to root through it.

The first thing she removed was her blaster. It was a compact weapon built more for concealment than stopping power, but it could still kill at close range. She tucked it into a pocket in her trousers. Then she pulled out her droid.

MSE-6-PNI, or 'Penny' as Jaysica liked to call it had once belonged to the Imperial Army before she stole it. As well as having the droid reprogrammed to obey her Jaysica had also customised it by adding a comlink and a spy camera. The tiny boxlike droid emitted a low whistle when Jaysica set it down on the floor.

“Come on Penny.” Jaysica whispered as she folded her jacket up and stuffed it into her now largely empty backpack, “Let’s go find this transmitter array,” and she walked off, followed by her droid.

While Jaysica travelled about the base above ground, Vorn led the rest of the rebel group and their droids beneath it. Though it was self sufficient for power, possessed wireless communications and had a massive reserve of water, the ADF base was still served by the public utility system for the area so as to not drain these resources unnecessarily. This meant that the system of maintenance tunnels that carried the various pipes and cables for these services also had to run beneath the base. Of course even with the lax security that the ADF was known for they were not so reckless as to allow an open tunnel to run beneath any of their bases. A heavy blast door blocked the tunnel at the point where the perimeter fence ran above it.

“How long will it take to get this open?” Vorn asked Tobis.

“Not long,” Tobis replied, “there’s a computer access port right next to it, so Harvey should be able to patch in directly and open it up.” and he indicated his astromech droid, R5-HV, or ‘Harvey’, “The alarm will sound of course.”

“That’s why we’re waiting for the explosions.” Vorn replied, “One more alarm won’t matter then.”

“So we just have to wait for the galaxy’s clumsiest saboteur then?” Kara interrupted, “I don’t know why she needs those explosives, she’s a walking disaster without them.”

“She’s not that bad.” Tobis said.

“No need to defend her lad.” Tharun said, “She’s not here for you to impress.”

2.

The transmitter array turned out to be rather easy to locate. Being the primary purpose of the Imperial section of the ADF base it occupied a rather large area, not only with the actual physical structure of the array, but there were also several large rooms dedicated to monitoring and handling all of the messages going through it.

But while she easily found the array, Jaysica was having less luck in finding somewhere to plant one of her explosive charges to disable it. A large enough charge anywhere would be enough to bring down the entire structure, but that would require all of the explosives that she had brought with her, and Jaysica needed to keep some for the secondary targets that would divert attention from her and the other rebels waiting just outside the base.

The room she was in was a huge circular chamber with concentric rings of control consoles around the array at its centre. What Jaysica wanted to do was get right up to the array and plant a charge inside it, but given that every technician sat in the room was facing towards the array she couldn't just walk right up to it and pull a bomb from her backpack. Instead she walked over to a vacant terminal as far from any of the occupied ones she could find and sat down. She placed her backpack beneath the console and began to press buttons. The button pressing was just for show as the console required a password to activate properly, so all she was doing was opening up data windows requesting the passwords and then closing them again to give the illusion that she was working. She was in fact rooting through her backpack beneath the console. The five explosive charges were already assembled and fitted with wireless detonators. All she needed to do was put them in place and detonate them by remote later on. When she felt the shape of one of them in her grasp she removed it from her backpack.

And promptly dropped it.

To provide the charges with a limited fragmentation effect, Jaysica had packed the detonite explosive into empty fizzy-glug cans, so when she dropped the charge it landed on the floor with a dull 'thump' and began to roll away from her. Jaysica didn't dare go running after it as such a move would only draw attention to her, but the rolling charge was a problem. Fortunately the fizzy-glug can did disguise it somewhat, but anyone that looked closely could not fail to spot the detonator and wires attached to the end of it.

"Pick that up!" a voice suddenly boomed out across the room. Jaysica turned in her seat to see an Imperial Army captain staring directly at her. She realised that a lot of the technicians in the room were now looking at her also, "I said pick it up! Now!" the captain yelled again.

Jaysica had nothing to lose now, and she got up and went after the disguised explosive charge. Fortunately the captain appeared to have focused attention towards her and away from the bomb and he was too far away to have seen what it really was from his own position.

"Everyone else back to work." the captain added, and the technicians turned their attention back to their consoles.

Jaysica saw her chance and, after picking up the bomb, rather than return to the console where she had concealed her backpack she moved closer to the array assembly in the centre of the room. On her way there she subtly took her comlink from her pocket.

"Penny, signal if you can hear me." she said into it softly. The mouse droid, which was not in the room with Jaysica, sent a series of beeps.

"Good, now are you in position?"

Again Penny beeped.

"Well I'm in position now as well," Jaysica said as she reached the array, "so cut the power now, remember just for thirty seconds."

Immediately the lights went out as the mouse droid located the power feed to the room and disabled it temporarily and there were shouts of surprise and frustration as consoles went dead and the windowless room was plunged into darkness.

Jaysica moved quickly, crouching down by the array and reaching out to where she had seen an access panel. Feeling the panel beneath her fingers, she pulled it open and pushed the explosive inside before closing the panel again. Then she stood back up just as the lights came back on again.

"Report!" the captain shouted, "Does anyone know what just happened?" but there were no answers from the technicians and so he started a furious conference with some of the senior technicians around him.

Smiling, Jaysica calmly walked back to where her backpack was hidden, picked it up and slipped out of the room while they were distracted.

"Penny?" Jaysica said when she almost trod on a mouse droid in the corridor and in return the droid chirped. Jaysica looked around to ensure that they were alone before she spoke again "Good. The main one's in place so lets go find somewhere for the rest."

The transmitter was the only target that Jaysica had been given specific instructions to destroy: the other targets for her explosives had been left up to her. The only requirements were that they were to be sufficiently distracting to allow the rest of her team to enter the base, join up with her and acquire as much intelligence as possible from the communication logs kept, then escape.

With this mission in mind, Jaysica decided that she needed to find targets that would create significant secondary explosions. Even with the fragmentary effects of the fizzy-glug cans the charges she had with her would only do damage to a small area on their own.

Ideally Jaysica would have sought out a TIE fighter hangar. A single charge planted at the end of a TIE fighter rack would have brought down them all and created a chain of explosions from them, but this base was not an air base and it lacked any facilities for high altitude or space capable craft other than a simple open-air landing platform it did not even have any refuelling equipment, so instead Jaysica sought out the next best thing and headed for the base's ground vehicle parking facility.

The facility consisted of several rows of squat buildings, each containing not only several vehicles, but also maintenance and refuelling equipment. The doors to these buildings were all wide open so all Jaysica had to do to see what was in them was to walk right past.

The first building contained numerous small support vehicles intended for non-combat duties. These would of course all contain the highly volatile fuel cells, but they would be of limited size and any secondary blast would be little bigger than the one created by her charges anyway so she kept on moving. Penny raced on ahead of Jaysica, stopping suddenly outside one of the garages and emitting several shrill whistles. Jaysica dashed to catch up and looked inside the garage that her droid had led her to.

"Good girl," Jaysica said softly so as not to be overheard by any of the people working inside. There in front of her was a full platoon of tracked artillery vehicles, each loaded with numerous concussion missiles. An explosive placed on one of these could take out most of the row of garages.

A team of ADF technicians was working on one of the tracked launchers, so Jaysica carefully made her way around the far side of the garage's interior, trying to decide which vehicle would be the best one to plant a charge on. Her preference was to find a location next to one of the warheads, but the missiles themselves would not be exposed until the launcher was put into the launching and reloading position. At the moment they were in the transit position that they were stored in. Then Jaysica found what she needed.

At the back of the garage was a vehicle different to the others. It had the same tracked chassis, but instead of a missile launching system this one mounted the specialised crane used for reloading the other vehicles in the field. Already fitted to this crane was a set of the packages that held the concussion missiles and they were exposed.

Taking a charge from her backpack, Jaysica reached between the missiles and wedged the explosive between two of them. From that position she knew that the initial explosion would be sufficient to trigger the fuel and warheads of all of the concussion missiles on the crane, which would in turn trigger every missile warhead in the garage. Jaysica made a mental note to be well clear of the garages before triggering her explosives. Smiling, Jaysica took a step backwards and bumped into a rack of tools.

"Hey, what's going on over there?" one of the ADF techs called out as the work crew turned to look at the source of the sudden clattering of tools.

"Penny," Jaysica whispered to her droid, "head for the door and let them see you, they'll think that you made the noise."

Penny emitted a rude sounding noise.

"Penny go now, they're heading this way." Jaysica whispered as she took a glance around the reloading vehicle and saw the ADF men coming towards her. Penny shot off towards the doorway.

"Its just a droid," one of the techs said when they saw Penny whiz past them.

"What was that doing here?" another said.

"Probably spying on us. Come on, let's get back to work."

Behind the reloading vehicle Jaysica breathed a sigh of relief as the techs returned to the vehicle they had been working on. At least most of them did. The first man to have called out remained where he was, looking towards the vehicle she was hiding behind.

"I'm going to take a look at what it's done," he said.

Nervously, Jaysica reached into her pocket and put her hand on her blaster.

"There's someone else back there," the ADF tech shouted and the others moved back towards him once more. Jaysica decide she would just have to try and bluff her way out.

"Its alright," she said, stepping out from behind the vehicle, "I was trying to catch a faulty droid, I saw it come in here and I followed it."

"Then why not say something?" the tech asked.

"Because you were busy," Jaysica answered, "and I didn't want to disturb you."

"Well your droid's gone now, and it looks to have made a real mess, so how about you get after it before it causes anymore trouble."

"Yes of course," Jaysica said, and she headed past the techs towards the door.

"Look at this mess," the tech said to one of his fellows as they looked at the tools now scattered across the floor, "you better get this cleaned up, they all need accounting for."

"Damn droids," the other tech said, he slammed his fist against the reloading vehicle in frustration. Then there was a clattering sound and a fizzy-glug can rolled out from between the missiles it carried. The techs looked at the can as it rolled across the floor in front of them and clearly saw the explosives and detonator it contained.

"Hey you!" the first tech shouted at Jaysica as she neared the door, "Stop right there!"

"Oh crap." Jaysica said to herself and she broke into a run.

3.

"Do you hear that?" Mace said while the rebels sat in the tunnel waiting for the explosions Jaysica was supposed to create. He was certain that he had just heard something coming from above.

Harvey the astromech droid let out a series of chirps.

"Yes Harvey I do believe that you are correct," Jeeves said, "the base alarm system seems to have been triggered."

"Has the bomb gone off?" Kara said.

"I didn't hear an explosion." Vorn said.

"Perhaps we're too deep underground," Tobis commented.

"Could be lad," Tharun said, "those charges your girlfriend had aren't going to create much noise, but she was supposed to stick them to things that would make a much bigger bang that we would hear."

"She's not my girlfriend." Tobis replied.

Followed by Penny, Jaysica ran between two of the large garages. She had ducked out of sight as soon as she got out of the building that housed the artillery vehicles. The alarm had been sounded, but she still hoped that she would be able to put enough distance between her and the technical crew that could identify her that she could plant her remaining charges somewhere else and then trigger them.

She headed back towards the Imperial section, reasoning that if she could get in there then she could lose herself among a building complex that was full of people in Imperial uniforms. But when the entrance to the Imperial military building came into view Jaysica saw that a squad of stormtroopers had taken up a position outside it and were stopping everyone going in or out. Unlike the ADF guards on the gate, these troops would not simply wave her past and would have access to the database that would expose her ID as a fake. She would have to find a different way in.

Before any of the stormtroopers looked in her direction, Jaysica ran around the Imperial structure and out of their line of sight. She stuck close to the wall of the building and kept moving, on the lookout for a way inside. There were numerous doors of course, but they were all intended for emergency use as exits rather than as ways in. Even if Jaysica was able to find a way of opening one from the outside it would automatically sound an alarm and give away her position.

The solution came in the form of a window that was being replaced. The menial task had been entrusted to a trio of ASP-7 droids. The skeletal humanoid machines were some of the most primitive droids in the galaxy. Capable of only answering 'Affirmative' or 'Negative' to any questions asked of them, unless someone specifically showed them an image of her and asked if they had seen her they would not raise the alarm.

"Stop what you're doing," she said to the droids.

"Affirmative," the three said in unison, and they all stood motionless.

Jaysica picked up Penny and climbed through the glassless window into the office inside.

"Continue," she then said to the ASP-7 droids.

"Affirmative," they said once more, and they continued with their task as if nothing had happened.

Before she opened the office door, Jaysica pressed her ear up against it and listened. She could hear voices on the other side, so if she were to leave the office by this door they may become suspicious of her. Jaysica looked around, this was the only door and if she climbed back out of the window there was no guarantee that she would be able to find another way into the building. She would just have to make her own way out.

Jaysica reached into her pocket and produced a hand held multitool on which she extended the screwdriver head, pulled a chair up beneath the ventilation grill, stood on top of it and removed the vent cover.

"Stay in here," she said to Penny when she had climbed up into the air vent, "Give me three minutes then go out through the door. No one will pay any attention to you and we'll meet up later."

Penny chirped in reply as Jaysica began to crawl along the vent.

"What do we have?" captain Mazus of the Imperial army asked his subordinate.

"Not much sir, and ADF technical crew discovered a saboteur, but she gave them the slip."

"Any idea how this saboteur got onto the base?"

"She was last seen wearing one of our uniforms sir, it could be that she got in through the main gate. I've got people checking the security recordings now."

"One of our uniforms? You mean ADF?"

"No sir, Imperial military. That's why I ordered stormtroopers to block entry to this section, I thought that she may get in and try to blend in."

"Good idea lieutenant, but did it occur to you that there could be other ways in?"

"But the other doors only open from the inside sir, and they are all alarmed."

Captain Mazus pointed from the office window.

"What about that?" he asked and the lieutenant looked out to where captain Mazus was pointing at three droids inserting a pane of glass into a frame, "Lock down this facility lieutenant, and then order a full room by room search. Call in ADF troops for extra manpower if you have to, because I think our saboteur slipped past your stormtroopers already."

Jaysica moved carefully through the vent system. She kept her rate of movement low and had removed her shoes to avoid making too much noise. Even with the sound of base alarms going, if she banged against the vent wall too hard the sound would give her away in an instant. As far as she was concerned she still had three charges left to plant and while she may not be able to do as much damage as she could have done with the bomb she attempted to plant in the garage, she could still cause enough mayhem to distract the Imperial forces here.

At each grill she encountered, Jaysica paused to look through it in case there was a suitable target outside. Eight times she did this, but on each occasion there was nothing significant to be seen.

As she approached the ninth grill, Jaysica heard voices and she stopped short to try and hear what they were saying.

"How long is this going to last?" she heard a male voice say.

"Dunno," another said apparently in response to the first before continuing with, "for all I know its another drill."

This conversation seemed relevant to her predicament, so Jaysica carefully made her way closer to the grill so that she could hear better.

"A drill, great. Just as my shift was ending too." the first voice said.

"You're wrong," a new voice added to the conversation, "there are ADF people in here helping security conduct a search. The boss wouldn't let any of the local boys in just for a drill."

It was at that moment that Jaysica thought she heard a creaking from above her.

"Hey what was that?" the second voice said, "Did that come from the vent?"

Jaysica froze, she hadn't struck the sides of the vent hard enough to make a sound that the men could have heard, but she could not think of what else may have caused it.

"Hey look at the ceiling, where the vent's screwed to it," the first voice said.

"Is that dust?" a new voice said, "It looks like the vents coming loose."

"Oh no, I've got a bad feeling about this," Jaysica whispered to herself, and she tried to back up down the vent. But before she could get even a metre, there was a groaning sound all around her, followed by a 'snap' as the vent dropped down in front of her.

Jaysica squealed as she slid forwards and out of the vent, landing in a heap on the floor. She looked around quickly and found herself in what looked to be a locker room. All around her were Imperial soldiers, some in uniform, others only partially dressed. All of them had looks of surprise on their faces.

"Hello boys," she said, trying to think of some way of explaining herself, "I'm fine. How are you?"

"Grab her!" one of the soldiers yelled, and Jaysica scabbled towards the door.

She made it just ahead of the soldiers, opened it and ran out into the corridor where she came face to face with a group of armed ADF troops.

"What are you doing in there?" one of them demanded on seeing a woman run from the men's locker room.

"Leaving," Jaysica said, and she ran off down the corridor.

"Set for stun," she heard someone order, and from the corner of her eye she noticed a bright blue flash before everything went black.

Keeping their weapons raised, the ADF troops advanced on the unconscious Jaysica while an assortment of Imperial Army personnel looked on.

"Cover me," one said as he crouched down beside her and reached into her backpack, "It's her all right," he said as he took one of the explosive filled fizzy-glug cans from it and held it up for everyone to see.

"This is sergeant Panas," one of the ADF troopers said into his comlink headset, "we've found the saboteur in corridor one-one-three-eight. She is stunned."

"This is captain Mazus," came the reply, "restrain her and take her to the detention block. I'll deal with her there when she wakes up."

Panas broke the link and nodded to his men.

"You heard the officer," he said, "get her packaged up."

While the ADF troops all slung their rifles and picked up Jaysica they failed to spot the mouse droid at the end of the corridor that had halted as soon as it had come around the corner and was now observing them.

When Jaysica awoke she found that after she had been stunned someone had taken her fake uniform from her and replaced it with a set of bright orange overalls. As well as clearly marking her out as a prisoner, the overalls also served to restrain her arms. There were no sleeves or armholes in the overalls, so her arms

were instead trapped inside them. This had to have been done by members of the ADF; the Imperial Army just used magnetically sealed binders when they wanted to restrain a prisoner.

Jaysica wriggled, moving her arms within the overalls attempting to either find a fastener that she could undo or alternatively get her fingers up to her neck where she hoped that she would be able to loosen the overalls and get free. But after a few minutes of struggling she realised that she was stuck like this until someone else let her out, the overalls were fastened by a set of thick straps behind her that she could feel when she lay on her back, but remained out of reach.

Jaysica crawled into a corner and turned her attention to her surroundings and she saw that aside from the door and a chair fixed to the floor in the centre of the room it was featureless.

It was at that moment that the door opened with a hiss. Cowering helplessly in the corner, Jaysica feared that she would at any moment see the spherical shape of an interrogation droid come hovering towards her, but instead a trio of men strode into her cell. The first of them wore the uniform of an Imperial Army captain, while the other two wore enlisted men's uniforms.

"Get her into the chair," the captain said flatly, and the two enlisted men walked over to Jaysica and dragged her from the corner to the chair.

After lifting the helpless woman into they began to strap her down, first securing her ankles then fastening a thicker strap over her body and finally wrapping a padded collar around her neck.

"And the muzzle," the captain ordered, and one of the other troopers pushed a plastic tube into Jaysica's mouth that held it open and strapped it into place.

As concerned as she had been before the Imperial soldiers entered her cell, Jaysica was now even more frightened. She had expected them to try and get information from her, but by rendering her unable to speak they acted as though they had something in mind that relied on her not being able to call out.

"I'm terrible sorry about this," the captain said, leaning over Jaysica and bringing his face close enough to hers that she could smell his last meal on his breath, "but we've found that prisoners tend to struggle against their restraints and injure themselves. The muzzle is simply to stop you from swallowing your tongue when I give you this." He produced a medical injector from his tunic, it was loaded with a vial of light blue liquid, "This will stop you struggling," he explained, "it's a paralysing agent that will block the voluntary parts of your nervous system. You'll still be able to blink and breathe, but that's about it." and he jabbed the muzzle of the injector against Jaysica's neck.

Jaysica let out a muffled scream as the drug contained inside the injector was forced painfully through her skin into her tissue, but before the scream was complete she began to feel the drug take effect.

It began with numbness in her toes that spread up her legs and into her body, and before long she found that she had lost all sensation. She tried to move, but the drug had done what the officer had said it would do and she was unable to even twitch her fingers or toes.

There we go," the captain said, "now someone will be back to give you another injection and place a feeding tube in you tomorrow, so until then you just stay here and relax." Along with the two enlisted men he left the cell. Jaysica tried to watch them as they left, but they walked out of her field of view and her head refused to turn.

"Any special instructions sir?" the lieutenant in charge of the detention block asked captain Mazus when he had left Jaysica's cell.

"No," Mazus replied, "Just leave her in there for now, but send a medic in tomorrow to keep her medication up to date and fit her for intravenous feeding. After three or four days of paralysis and lying in her own filth that rebel scum will be at breaking point. Then I'll go back in and talk to her."

The lieutenant nodded as captain Mazus turned to leave, stepping over a mouse droid as he entered the turbolift.

4.

The rebel group was still waiting by the underground blast door when all of their comlink came to life suddenly. A series of rapid electronic chirping and squeals came from all of the devices.

"Shut them off quick!" Mace said, concerned that someone had transmitted the signal to reveal their position, and the rebels all reached for their comlinks.

"Pardon me captain Grayle," Jeeves interrupted, "but I believe that the transmission came from Penny."

"Penny?" Kara repeated, "Why would Jaysica's droid be signalling us?"

"I was unable to ascertain that information from the brief amount I heard, but if one of you could contact her directly then perhaps she would repeat what she just sent," Jeeves replied.

The rebels looked at Vorn.

"What do you think boss? We were supposed to maintain a communication blackout down here," Tharun said.

"But Jaysica could be in trouble," Tobis commented.

"Yes, she could." Vorn agreed, and he turned his comlink back on, "Penny repeat that transmission." he said and then he held the comlink towards Jeeves.

There was another series of chirps and squeals from the comlink as Jaysica's mouse droid sent its message once more.

"Well, did you get it that time?" Vorn asked Jeeves.

"Oh yes major Larcus," the protocol droid responded, "I am fluent in over six million forms of communication..."

"Just tell me what Penny said." Vorn interrupted.

"She says that miss Horbid has been captured by the Empire major Larcus sir," Jeeves said, "and she is being held in the Imperial detention block."

"Oh great," Tharun said, holding his head in his hands, "now what do we do?"

"We can't leave her there," Tobis said.

"Everyone be quiet," Vorn said, then he pulled his comlink back from Jeeves, "Penny, what about the explosives?" he asked, and he held the comlink out for Jeeves to hear the reply, "Well?" he asked when another burst of chirping and squealing was sent by Penny.

"She says that miss Horbid was able to plant the primary charge major Larcus, but that she was discovered when attempting to plant the secondary ones." Jeeves told him.

"Penny, is the primary charge still in place?" Vorn said into his comlink, and there was a short chirping. Vorn looked at Jeeves.

"Penny doesn't know major Larcus." Jeeves said.

"So what now?" Mace asked.

"We're going in after her now." Vorn said, "The longer we wait the less likely it is that the bomb on the transmitter will be there," then he turned to Harvey, "Harvey get into position." he ordered as the R5 unit rolled to the computer access port beside the blast door and plugged in.

"Penny," Vorn spoke into his comlink, "send the signal to trigger the charges now."

In the room with the transmitter array structure at its centre, the air was suddenly filled with fire and flying debris as the explosive hidden inside detonated at the coded signal from Penny's built in comlink.

The sound of the explosion carried throughout the building and the alarm that had been silenced when Jaysica was caught now sounded automatically when the base's warning systems detected the fire in the communications centre.

Throughout the building, Imperial personnel began to head for the emergency exits. One in particular stood up to leave without noticing that an additional warning light had lit up on his security console to indicate that the underground access to the public utility tunnels had just opened.

"Quickly, everyone inside," Vorn said when the blast door separated, "Not you two." he added to the droids. Then when everyone was through the gap he spoke to Harvey once more, "Close it up, quick, before anyone notices it."

Harvey, who had remained at the computer port outside the blast door squeaked and the door segments slid back together once more.

"Don't worry Harvey," Jeeves said, "I'm sure they'll be fine, they are quite resourceful you know. For humans."

On the other side of the blast door the rebels headed further under the base.

"Are we headed anywhere in particular boss?" Kara asked.

"The Imperial section," Vorn answered, "When we get there we'll split up, you and Tharun will rescue Jaysica while the rest of us recover the communication logs."

"Sir? Sir, we have to leave," the lieutenant said to captain Mazus.

"Not now," Mazus replied, and he pulled a blaster pistol from his desk drawer and checked that it was loaded.

"But the fire..."

"The fire is not important lieutenant, those charges cannot inflict significant damage by themselves and there was nothing in the communication antenna to change that."

"Charges? What charges?"

"The charges that the rebel saboteur still had three of when she was caught. Obviously she had already planted one of them. Now, we know that she came in here alone, so there are probably more rebels on their way, and I'm not abandoning this place while we're under attack. So get in contact with the stormtrooper commander and get him to order his men back in here. Now."

"Okay, this should be it," Vorn said, pointing to a door at the side of the tunnel, "Tobis, get it open."

Tobis stepped up to the door, prised open the control panel beside it and began to probe the circuitry behind it.

"Get ready everyone," Vorn said, "we can't be sure what's on the other side," and the other rebels all readied their weapons.

"Got it," Tobis exclaimed, and the door rose swiftly to reveal an empty corridor on the other side.

"This is it." Vorn said when he looked down the corridor and saw that the structure was built from the standard prefabrication components use in all Imperial facilities.

Tharun was first through the door, the former mercenary moved quickly, always keeping his blaster rifle at his shoulder.

"Do you know where we're going?" Kara asked from behind Vorn as they followed Tharun down the corridor.

"Not a clue," Vorn admitted, "but being an Imperial base there's bound to be a floor plan in the computer that Tobis can access."

From ahead of them, there was a sudden chirping sound.

"Droid!" Tharun called out, and he dropped to knees, ready to fire.

"Wait," Tobis said, "I think its Penny."

Sure enough a small boxlike mouse droid appeared at a junction and headed directly for them. It halted right in front of the rebels and chirped once more.

"Penny, is that you?" Tobis asked, and the droid gave out another chirp.

"Penny, listen to me," Vorn said, "we need you to guide us to a computer so we can access a map of this place, but keep us clear of any Imperials."

The droid remained stationary for a moment, and then it took off back around the corner with the rebels right behind it.

As instructed, Penny led the rebels to a computer terminal that had been deserted by its operator when the alarm had rung. In their hurry to leave, the operator had left the terminal logged on to the network.

"This should be easy enough," Tobis said as he sat down without needing to be told to, and he opened up a floor plan file, "Yes, here it is." he added and he plugged his datapad into the terminal and copied the file to it. Then with a simple statement of, "Got it." he unplugged his datapad and stood up.

"Good," Vorn said, "now Tharun and Kara, get Penny to show you the way to the detention block and get Jaysica out of here. We'll head for the data storage archive and grab all the comms logs that we can."

While Penny lead Tharun and Kara in one direction, Tobis pointed the remaining rebels down another corridor towards the data storage archive and they set off in their different directions.

Captain Mazus was not impressed when he found the central security console abandoned, though at least the operator had locked access to it when he left his post, Mazus had passed several other consoles that had been left access and had to slow his pace to not only lock them, but also make note of the personnel responsible.

Fumbling in his breast pocket, Mazus removed his rank cylinder, inserted it into the console's security port and the terminal came back to life before he could get the cylinder back in his pocket. Then he called up the security log.

There were three violations listed for the past hour. The first was the alarm raised by the ADF when the rebel saboteur was discovered in the parking garage, the second when the bomb detonated in the communication centre and disabled the transmitter array, while the third was less than a minute later when the blast door that gave access to the public utility tunnels was over-ridden and opened.

"They're here," said Mazus to the guards behind him. Then he activated his comlink, "Lieutenant Dhasal, where are you right now?" he asked.

"I'm at the main entrance now sir," his lieutenant replied, "I have a squad of stormtroopers here ready to begin a sweep."

"Good," Mazus said, "because I've found evidence that the rebels have infiltrated using the utility system. Take you men down into the basement and begin there."

"Yes sir," lieutenant Dhasal replied, and Mazus broke the link. Then he activated the base's internal communication system and linked to the detention block.

"Detention block." a voice said when the connection was made.

"You're still there. Good." Mazus said, "This is captain Mazus, how many men do you have?"

"Yes, I recognise your voice sir, I have four of my men here. The fire was not in our section so we remained here while it was dealt with."

"Excellent." Mazus said, wishing that more of the base personnel had acted like this instead of running for the nearest exit at the first sign of trouble, "Be aware that there are likely to be rebel infiltrators in the facility that may attempt to rescue the saboteur. I will be there shortly to join you," and he broke the link.

In the detention block Tharun shut down the communicator shortly after the other ended was disconnected and then he turned around towards Kara.

"Hey flygirl," he said, "Company's coming, have you found her yet?"

"Not yet," Kara replied, those guards may have run at the first sign of smoke, but they remembered to secure their terminals. If Tobis was here maybe he could hack these things quicker."

Then Penny chirped and rolled down a corridor lined with cells before coming to a halt next to one and letting out an excited squeal.

"Looks like that's the one," Tharun said, "now lets grab Jaysica and get out of here before those troops turn up."

Both Tharun and Kara retched when the cell door opened.

"Great work, what an amazing new smell you've discovered," Tharun told Penny as he stepped into the cell.

Kara darted around him and went straight to the chair in which Jaysica was secured.

"What's up with her?" Tharun asked, puzzled. He could tell from the doorway that there was something wrong by the way Jaysica sat limply.

"I think she's been drugged," Kara said, "a paralysing muscle relaxant. That's what the smell is, she can't control any of her bodily functions."

Tharun rushed to Kara's side while she opened up her bag and removed a medical kit.

"What's that you're giving her?" he asked.

"A stimulant," Kara replied, "it should speed up her recovery from whatever she's been given, but we'll still have to carry her out of here."

"Great. At least she's small," Tharun said and he began to undo the straps holding Jaysica down and removed her gag. The he lifted her over his shoulder and winced, "The smell's even worse at this end," he said, gagging.

5.

The men in the data archive had remained at their posts, well aware that they were responsible for protecting a great deal of sensitive information. Instead they began to shunt all the information forwarded to the archive within the last few minutes into specially tagged files for easy recovery later. After all, this was the data most likely to be needed if it was lost on the main servers if they were damaged.

Surrounded by the consoles at his control post, the Imperial technician nearest to the doorway didn't even look up as the door slid open. Had he done so it may have saved his life. Instead, he fell dead as Mace fired his blaster into him as soon as he stepped through. Vorn fired a second bolt from his lightweight rifle. Though the weapon was not meant for combat, the blast was powerful enough to kill the un-armoured technician who was reaching for the alarm when he was shot.

"Nobody move!" Vorn shouted as the remaining imperial technicians just looked on in horror at the bodies of their two comrades, "Get that door shut." he added to Tobis.

"Hello, captain Mazus?"

Mazus raised his comlink when he heard Dhasal's call.

"What is it lieutenant?" he asked.

"I'm in the basement now sir. There's a terminal here that was left active when the evacuation started."

"Yes, I've seen several like that. Make a note of whoever left it open, we'll deal with them later."

"Yes sir, but I thought you should know that the last file accessed was a floor plan, and the terminal history indicates that it was copied to an external device."

"Then the rebels have a map." Mazus said, "Aside from the rebel prisoner, the only thing they could want here is the data archive. Take your men there now, I'm just getting into the turbolift to take me to the detention block."

Tharun made sure that he stayed in shape, but even so the weight of Jayscia over his shoulder was slowing him down as he and Kara approached the turbolift door.

"It looks like it already on its way," Kara said when she saw the changing display over the turbolift door.

Tharun set Jaysica down, leaning her up against the control console where he had impersonated the missing guard minutes earlier.

"Do you have any tape?" he asked Kara.

"Yes, plenty."

"Good, give me a reel and get her back down that corridor." Tharun said, indicating Jaysica.

Kara handed a reel of medical tape to Tharun, and while she dragged the paralysed Jayscia back down the corridor filled with cells, Tharun plucked a grenade from his webbing and went to the turbolift door.

He set the grenade down on the floor so that the lever was resting against the door and then he pulled a long length of tape from the reel. He stretched the tap out across the width of the door at just above floor level so that it pressed the grenade against the door then, after checking that the grenade was secure, he carefully removed the safety pin. With this done Tharun got up and ran after Kara.

"What did you do?" Kara asked.

At first Tharun did not answer. Instead he pushed both women up against the wall and crouched down so that he had his back to the turbolift so that he was between it and his comrades, letting his armour shield them as well as him.

"Fire in the hole!" he said as he clamped his hands over his ears and opened his mouth.

"Oh no." Kara said and she did the same.

The turbolift chimed as it reached the detention block level and captain Mazus got ready to step out as the door slid open but before he could take a single step forwards he heard a 'ping' from near the floor. He looked down to see the grenade that had been compressed against the turbolift shaft door with tape. When the door had opened it had allowed the lever to fly off into the turbolift car and engage its timer.

"Gren..." he began to yell before the device detonated.

"Let's move." Tharun said over the sound of the fire alarm that the grenade detonation has triggered, and he got back to his feet and lifted Jayscia over his shoulder again.

"You blew up the turbolift." Kara said, "How do we get out of here now?"

"Penny," Tharun called out, and the mouse droid appeared from around a corner where it had taken cover as soon as it saw Tharun produce his grenade. The droid chirped.

"We need another way out," Tharun said, "lead us to the stairs," and the mouse droid set off again.

"Say again," Vorn said into his comlink, "I didn't catch that. There's a lot of noise in the background."

"I said we're on our way back down to the tunnels," Kara said, "the noise is the alarm that Tharun triggered with his grenade."

"Grenade?" Vorn said, "Oh never mind, just keep going. I think Tobis is almost done here so we should be along soon as well."

As he put away his comlink, Vorn looked towards Mace. The pair were standing guard over the remaining Imperial technicians who had given up when they realised their own lack of armament gave them little other choice.

"They've got Jaysica," Vorn said, "and they're on their way out of here. We should be going soon too."

Mace nodded in agreement.

"Hey Tobis!" he shouted, "How much longer?"

"This is the last set of drives." Tobis shouted back as he ripped a set of computer drives from their storage rack and stuffed them into a bag.

"Right then," Vorn said, and he turned around and fired his blaster at the control consoles, destroying them and the communication systems they included, "Let's go!" he snapped, and the trio of rebels all headed for the door.

Vorn shut the door behind him as he ran through behind Mace and Tobis, then he aimed his lightweight rifle at the control panel and shot a blaster bolt into it. There was a shower of sparks as the circuitry controlling the door mechanism was destroyed, trapping the Imperial technicians inside.

"That should stop them raising the alarm quickly," he said, "now let's get moving."

"Other way!" Mace snapped as he saw an Imperial officer followed by several stormtroopers appear around the corner head of him. The smuggler quickly fired off a shot at one of the stormtroopers, and the trooper fell backwards.

"Good idea." Vorn said, and he headed in the opposite direction.

Vorn dived into the first side corridor he encountered, followed closely by Tobis and Mace. Mace paused to fire another shot back down the corridor, missed the Imperial troops following them, then he ducked back as the stormtroopers returned fire.

"Tobis, we need a way out of here." Vorn said urgently.

"I know." Tobis replied, and he scrolled over the map on his datapad.

"Quickly." Mace added, firing down the corridor once more.

"I know!" Tobis snapped, then he added, "Got it!" and he held out his datapad to Vorn.

"You're kidding." Vorn said, "The garbage chute?"

"It drops us down two levels, straight into the basement," Tobis said.

"That sounds better than where we are right now," Mace said, "I can't hold these guys off for much longer."

"Do it." Vorn said, and Tobis aimed his blaster pistol at a point low on the wall opposite him.

"It's just behind there," the engineer said and he fired into the wall repeatedly until the panel gave way.

Beyond it there was the darkness of the garbage chute that dropped down into the basement. Tobis jumped in.

"Here goes." Vorn said, and he followed Tobis into the hole. Mace fired a final shot towards the stormtroopers, dropping another of them before he too dived into the hole.

Tobis had chosen their access point to the garbage chute well, instead of dropping vertically it went down at an angle here, and the three rebels were able to slide down it safely until they reached the bottom.

Tobis cried out as he dropped from the chute into the room at the bottom, landing on a pile of garbage. A moment later he heard another voice crying out and he rolled aside before Vorn could land on top of him.

Vorn himself slid down the stack of garbage to clear the way for Mace right behind him.

As Mace also climbed down from the pile of garbage, the three rebels took the time to study their surroundings. In this room garbage from all over the Imperial structure was gathered together, while several droids sorted through the piles and loaded them into containers for disposal or incineration.

"Well it's better than where we came from." Mace said as he stood up.

"Right, let's move." Vorn said, picking a food wrapper from his collar, "Which way Tobis?"

"Down here," Tobis replied, pointing towards one of the doors from the room.

Still carrying Jaysica over his shoulder, Tharun was breathing heavily when he and Kara reached the blast door that joined the tunnels beneath the base to the public utility ones. Kara gave three bangs on the door with the butt of her pistol. Moments later, the segments of the blast door separated and Kara and Tharun stepped through.

"Oh master Verser," Jeeves said, "I was so worried about you all, and Harvey and I still haven't heard from major Larcus or captain Grayle."

"They should be on their way." Tharun said, gasping for breath.

Kara pulled out her comlink.

"Boss are you there?" she said into the device.

At first there was no reply, but just as Kara was about to try signalling again, Vorn replied.

"I'm here," he said.

"Where's here?" Kara said, "We're already at the blast door."

"Give us five minutes, we had to take a different route back. It got a little hot on our preferred route. Get back to the ship and start her up, we'll meet you there."

"And be careful," Mace's voice suddenly called out from the comlink, "that's my ship remember."

"Don't worry," Kara said, "I am a qualified pilot," and she broke the link before Mace could say anything else, "Let's go," she said to Tharun.

"Excuse me miss Bilstran," Jeeves said to Kara as she began to run down the tunnel, "But what about Harvey and I?"

"Harvey better stay to open the door again for the others," Kara said, "but you and Penny may as well come along with us."

Mace had landed the *Silver Hawk* as near to a way into the utility tunnels as he could, and it was just a short run from the tunnel entrance to the ship's entry ramp. As soon as she left the tunnel and ran into the daylight, Kara used her comlink to send the command to unlock the ramp and ran straight into the ship. She was in the cockpit beginning the pre-flight sequence by the time that Tharun made it to the ramp, still carrying Jaysica.

"I'll dump her in your cabin," he called out as he moved as quickly as he could through the corridors of the ship.

"Don't do that," Kara shouted from the cockpit, "she stinks, dump her in the bathroom. Just make sure that she's on her side and we'll sort her out later," Tharun headed for the bathroom instead.

By the time that the remaining rebels, led by Mace, emerged from the tunnel the engines of the ship were powering up. Kara saw them through the transparent cockpit canopy and ran to the entry ramp.

"Get a move on!" she shouted, "The sensors indicate something launching from nearby!"

"I'll fly," Mace said, "you get on the gun," and he ran straight past Kara towards the cockpit. Kara was about to head for the gunwell when Vorn and Tobis ran up the ramp with Harvey close behind them. Kara sniffed.

"Where've you been?" she asked, "You smell almost as bad as Jaysica."

"We'll tell you later," Vorn said, and he headed after Mace.

Vorn felt the deck shift as Mace engaged the *Silver Hawk's* repulsorlift engines and the ship rose up from the ground just before he made it to the cockpit.

"What was that Kara said about a launch?" he asked as he sat down beside Mace.

"Haven't looked yet," Mace said, "I just want to get us out of the atmosphere as quickly as possible."

Vorn looked at the sensor display for himself. At present the *Silver Hawk's* detection array was in a passive mode, able to detect only whatever energy emissions were given off by other objects. But even in this restricted operating method the display showed a pair of thermal signatures moving from an ADF airbase to the north towards their position.

"We've got two bogies, looks like local military," Vorn said.

"Oh great, I can't plot a hyperspace jump while I'm flying in atmosphere, I'll need Harvey."

Vorn activated the ship's internal communications and set them for a public broadcast.

"Tobis, get up here with Harvey, we need him to help with jump calculations," he said, and then he turned back to the sensor display, "Those two signals are getting closer," he said, "they're still just cruising at the moment, but at this rate they'll have us in visual range in under three minutes and our fake transponder won't us any good then."

"I know," Mace said and then he too activated the ship's internal communications, "Are you ready yet Kara?"

In the ship's gun well, Kara had just strapped herself into the gunner's chair and activated the weapon's targeting system.

"Ready to go," she replied, "the cannon's fully charged."

"Wait for my command," Mace said, then he was interrupted by Tobis arriving in the cockpit with Harvey,

"Plug him in, we need a jump out of here quickly."

"Where to?" Tobis asked.

"There's a cruiser waiting for us just outside of the system," Vorn said, "the co-ordinates should be in the computer, so just have Harvey plot the fastest way there."

Tobis nodded at Harvey, and the astromech whistled as it plugged itself into the ship's computer, accessed the destination data and began to plot a hyperspace jump there.

Suddenly an alarm sounded.

"Missile targeting!" Mace yelled, "Those ships must have seen us!" and then he activated the comm. again, "Now Kara," he said.

Kara grinned. She had already turned the *Silver Hawk's* laser cannon to point towards the two approaching craft and identified them as atmospheric fighters, a common vehicle in local forces unable to afford or denied access to true starfighters. The lead fighter looked to be lining up for a missile shot.

"Silly boy," Kara said to herself, "we're too close, you should use your guns," and she fired the laser cannon. She watched the stream of bright red bolts streak out across the darkening sky towards the lead fighter. Having identified the *Silver Hawk* as a freighter, the fighter's pilot had let himself get too complacent and he had held the same course for too long. His vessel flew straight into the stream of powerful energy bolts and burst apart as they shredded its hull and ignited the fuel cells. There was no grav chute to indicate that the pilot had been able to bale out.

The second pilot banked away, expecting Kara to maintain her barrage of fire and sweep it over him, but instead she released the trigger and watched how this enemy was moving. The fighter was gaining altitude, apparently trying to cut the *Silver Hawk* off from leaving the atmosphere. With his more powerful repulsorlift engines, he was far faster than the freighter, but in his rush to gain the higher altitude and then be able to sweep down on the *Silver Hawk* he left the belly of his fighter exposed for a moment.

That moment cost him dearly.

Kara fired again and the laser fire ripped through the fighter's portside wing and tore it away from the fuselage. With its lift surfaces no longer balanced, the fighter tumbled and went into a spin. Kara continued to track the out of control fighter, just in case the pilot was good enough to shift the power of his replusorlift engines to compensate for the lost wing. The damage would slow the fighter greatly, but it would still be able to engage the *Silver Hawk* at long range with a missile.

But the possibility of this happening ended when there was a brief flash from near the nose of the fighter as the explosives laid around its cockpit canopy triggered, blasting the canopy free moments before another flash as the pilot's ejection seat followed it. Kara kept watching just long enough to see the man's grav chute deploy.

Kara smiled again, as the unit's medic she rarely had the chance to practice any of the skills she learnt as a fighter pilot and this brought back memories. Then her mind snapped back to the present and she activated the comm.

"Sky's clear." she said, "Can we go home now?"

Mace looked around as the sky outside turned black and was filled with stars.

"Well?" he asked.

Harvey whistled. Looking at the datapad he had plugged into the little droid, Tobis interpreted.

"We're good to go as soon as we get away from the planet's gravity well," he said.

Mace just smiled as he accelerated the *Silver Hawk* deeper into space. Beside him, Vorn sat back in his chair, satisfied that there was nothing in orbit to stop them now. A minute later Mace activated the hyperdrive as the stars outside twisted and merged as the *Silver Hawk* made the jump.

The trip through hyperspace lasted only a few seconds before the stars of real space reappeared through the cockpit canopy and ahead of them the rebels saw the familiar bumpy shape of a Mon Calamari cruiser.

Vorn was the first down the ramp on hangar deck, with the computer drives taken from the Imperial base in a bag over his shoulder.

"We're off for a drink," Kara said, pointing to herself and Tharun, "Are you guys coming too?"

"I think we should go and get cleaned up first." Mace said and Tobis nodded in agreement.

"And I need to drop these drives off before I can do that," Vorn added, "so I suppose we'll see you both later."

"Sure thing boss." Kara said, and she and Tharun headed off across the hangar.

"Kara," Tharun said slowly, "Do you get the feeling we've forgotten something?"

Alone on the floor of the *Silver Hawk's* bathroom, Jaysica squirmed where the others had left her. Though relieved that her gag had been removed, she was still unable to get free of the restraining overalls.

"Hello?" she called out, "Is anyone there? I could do with some help here."

The senior Imperial Security Bureau agent reviewed the images on his screen one by one. He looked up only when one of his subordinates entered his office.

"Take a seat Garm," he said to the newly arrived agent, and he sat down, "I have something here that should interest you," the senior agent explained, "a chance to correct a blemish on your record that we both know has held you back here."

The agent said nothing; instead he just looked directly at the display as his superior rotated it around for him to see clearly.

"Vorn Larcus the third, former member of the Estranian Parliament who escaped before we could detain him. The man whose treason has cost you so much."

The agent grinned.

“He has been found?” he asked.

“Not exactly, but we know that he was on Allastra recently, so that seems like a good place for you to start the hunt for your father.”