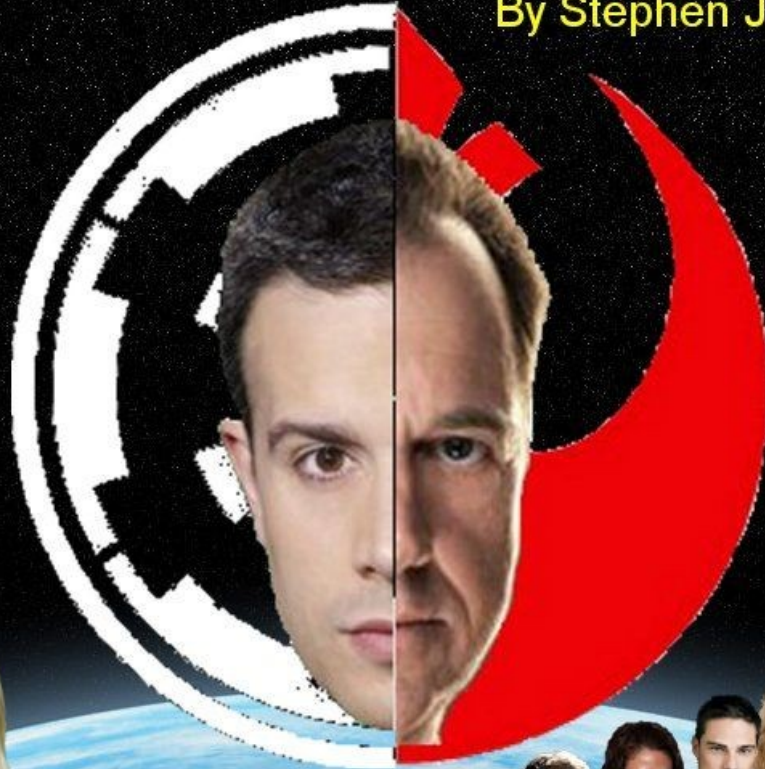


STAR WARS

1-06: Point of View

By Stephen J Dutton



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Civil war turns father against son

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

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

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

POINT OF VIEW

ACROSS THE GALAXY UNTOLD MILLIONS OF BEINGS SERVE THE GALACTIC EMPIRE. THEY DO NOT SEE THEMSELVES AS EVIL, RATHER THE AGENTS OF A LAWFUL GOVERNMENT THAT IS BRINGING ORDER AND JUSTICE TO ITS PEOPLE. THE TRUTH OFTEN DEPENDS ON YOUR POINT OF VIEW...

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

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1.

The last of the medical evacuation vehicles had left now. There were no more injured here, only the dead. Agent Garm Larcus crouched down when he saw something sparkle near his feet.

"Bag!" he called out and one of the local constabulary ran over and handed him a tiny plastic bag that he then lowered over the object and used it to pick it up. He then sealed the bag and wrote the location of the object on it.

"You can't come past here miss," he heard one of the constables saying and he looked around to see the armoured lawman holding his hand up to a young woman in a bodyglove standing on the other side of the tape marking out the area around the crime scene.

"I can go in there," the woman replied, "I am expected."

Then something odd happened. As Garm watched, the constable lifted the tape up above the head of the woman.

"You can go in miss, you are expected," he said. The woman calmly walked under the tape and past the constable, then she headed directly for Garm.

"That was clever," Garm said to her as he stood up.

"Vay. Vay Udra." the woman said and she held out her hand.

"Yes, I know who you are miss Udra," Garm said without taking her hand, "Now why has Moff Horatian sent his, what is it? Intern? Why has the sector Moff sent his 'intern' to the site of a terrorist attack?" he put extra emphasis on the word 'intern'.

Vay Udra was well known in political circles and as such had come to the attention of the Imperial Security Bureau. According to Moff Horatian who was the senior Imperial figure in the sector the twenty-year-old blonde was an intern sent by the Committee for the Preservation of the New Order, or COMPNOR, to learn about the arts of diplomacy. However, it was the opinion of most who knew of her, including the ISB, that despite the forty-five year age gap the Moff had and she enjoyed a more intimate relationship.

"Oh Gregor thought that I could use the experience of COMPNOR field operations and your supervisor recommended you," Vay replied.

"Really?" Garm said. He was not a popular agent, thanks primarily to the fact that his father Vorn Larcus was a known traitor, but also because there were rumours going around that he had killed a fellow agent when that agent had allowed a rebel team that included Vorn to escape. The rumour was true, but the only witnesses were stormtroopers and their unit commanders had declined to give the ISB's internal affairs division access to them. So now Garm was being assigned to minor cases such as this one and he was working alone.

"Well okay, I requested to work with you." Vay admitted, "I'm something of a fan of your work Agent Larcus."

"My work is dangerous. Run along little girl." Garm said sternly and he turned away from her.

"I can take care of myself. Don't you want me to tell Gregor how helpful you've been?" Vay said to him.

Garm stood still and thought for a moment. If the woman was going to be running off and telling the Moff tales about him then he may as well try make the pillow talk work to his advantage.

"Alright then," he said, "At shortly after eleven hundred hours this morning five masked beings entered this Imperial Forces Careers Office and triggered the weapon detectors at the door. Before they could be searched they produced blasters that had been concealed beneath their coats and opened fire on the staff and several candidates. The armed security guard didn't even get his weapon out of his holster before they killed him. From here they moved through the building and fired on everyone they encountered, including a group of younglings here from a local primary school attending a talk by one of the officers. The five beings then left, leaving behind several small explosives that detonated about five minutes later. The explosives were wrapped in what appears to have been bolts for increased lethality; additionally they blew out the windows and sent glass flying into the street also. End result we have eleven military personnel, twenty-six civilians dead, seven military and thirty-two civilians injured. Out of the civilians eleven dead and eight wounded are younglings."

"The press have already been told that it's the work of the Rebel Alliance have they?" Vay asked.

"Not my department." Garm said.

"You don't think it was them anyway do you? I sensed it as soon as I mentioned them. Is it because of your father?"

"My father has no bearing on my opinions!" Garm snapped, "I will investigate any leads, no matter where they take me."

"But you don't think it was the Alliance do you?" Vay asked again.

"No," Garm answered, "I think its some two credit local group. If my superiors thought any different I doubt they'd have sent me anyway."

"So where do we go next?" Vay asked.

Garm looked at his watch.

"Well I don't know about you," he said, "but I'm going back to the station house canteen. Its lunchtime and I'm hungry." and he began to walk towards his parked landspeeder, handing the bag of evidence to a forensics droid as he went.

Vay looked around at the scene of the attack and caught sight of one of the bodies. It was burned where it had been hit repeatedly by blaster fire at point blank range.

"Wait for me," she called out, "I could murder a burger."

"You're really going to eat all of that are you?" Garm asked when Vay put down her tray on the table. Most of the other women in the canteen had plates full of vegetables or tiny portions of carefully selected health food, but Vay had hers full of fried food, "How can you stay so thin and eat like that?" he added and he took a bite from his sandwich.

"I work out," Vay replied, "I have a strict exercise program that I stick to. It burns off the calories very efficiently."

"I'll bet." Garm replied, swallowing the mouthful of food, "Does the Moff enjoy it too?"

Vay ignored the suggestion.

"I'm sure that you'd enjoy a proper meal more than that sandwich," she said.

"Yes but bringing my own lunch in here is cheaper," Garm said.

"Still not quite over losing all that pay from your suspension?" Vay asked.

"My suspension is none of your business," Garm said, "It was purely a formality."

"Because your father's a traitor?"

"Yes," Garm replied and he took another bite of his sandwich.

Vay pulled out a credit stick and placed it on the table,

"Have it on me." she said, "Go on, my allowance is far more than I can spend."

"If I want to buy a lunch I'll pay for it myself," Garm said.

Vay looked him straight in the eyes.

"That sandwich isn't what you want," she said, "You'd much rather have something else."

Garm looked down at his sandwich and he felt that he really would rather have something better than it, and then he put it down and picked up the credit stick.

"I'd much rather have something else," he said and he headed for the canteen counter.

On his way he walked past another table full of ISB investigators.

"Does the Moff know you're dining with his bit on the side?" one of them asked and the others all grinned,

"More to the point does your wife know?" Garm ignored him and carried on his way leaving the laughing agents behind him.

"What was that about?" Vay asked when Garm returned to their table.

"What was what about?" he asked back.

"Those other agents." she said.

"Oh that's nothing," he said and he began to eat the meal that he had just bought with the money on Vay's credit stick.

"Didn't seem like nothing to me," Vay said and she turned to look at the other agents. They were still looking in Garm and Vay's direction and one of them smiled at her when she looked at him.

The smiling agent suddenly screamed and jumped up as the cup that contained his hot beverage toppled over on the table and spilt its contents in his lap. As the man grabbed a cloth and began to wipe his uniform Vay turned back towards Garm, smiling.

After lunch Garm led Vay back to his office where the initial results of the forensic examination of the morning's attack on the recruiting office were coming in.

"Sit down," Garm said as he sat himself down and began to read the reports from the analysis droids. But instead of sitting in the seat on the other side of Garm's desk Vay sat down, crossed her legs, placed her hands on her knees and closed her eyes.

Garm looked at her.

"Taking an after lunch nap?" he said, "I thought you were here to work not sleep on my floor."

"I'm not sleeping, I'm contemplating," Vay said, "I'm focusing on all the hate and suffering in the galaxy and how I can use it make me a stronger person."

"Oh good grief." Garm said. He turned back to the computer screen in front of him. It appeared that this woman believed that she could somehow channel all the universe's wickedness away. He'd met people like her before, normally when he was breaking up their unlawful demonstrations with a stun baton. Though Vay was the first that he had ever seen eat meat and look and smell like she actually bathed.

"We're in luck," Garm said, smiling as he continued to read the report.

"Luck can be bad as well as good." Vay remarked, still keeping her eyes closed.

"Well this is very good for us but bad for the terrorists," Garm said, "they've used commercial explosives for their bombs."

"But all commercial explosives have molecular tags built into them," Vay said, "The analysis droids will be able to tell you who bought it, when and how much."

"Exactly," Garm said, "they've already pulled the information for us," and he plugged his datapad into his desktop computer and copied the report across to it, "Come on then," he said to Vay as he stood up, "time to get up and go. Or can you levitate us there with the power of positive thinking?"

"Maybe one day," she replied, "but I think we'd be better off using your speeder today."

2.

The owners of Detrick Demolition Supplies had set up their business well outside of the city and it was an hour's drive from the COMPNOR headquarters in Garm's landspeeder. There were only a handful of office buildings at the business site, the rest of the massive land area being taken up by a mazelike network of open air trenches and storage bunkers filled with explosives of one sort or another. When they walked into the reception they were lead directly to the owner's office by a nervous looking member of staff.

"We take safety very seriously here," Gorva Detrick said to Garm after shaking his hand and checking the identification that he presented to back up his ISB uniform, "the open air storage limits the potential damage should an explosion occur, the energy of a blast would be channelled upwards rather than to adjacent storage silos."

"Why haven't I seen any armed guards here?" Vay asked.

"Too risky." Gorva answered, "A blaster bolt contains enough energy to trigger a critical reaction in any of the explosives we keep here. The electromagnetic pulse from a stunner could still trigger some of the detonators we keep in stock also. Given the amount of time that it would take a thief to load up a vehicle with explosives we could have professional law enforcement here to deal with them when they tried to leave."

"How many employees do you have mister Detrick?" Vay then asked.

"Just over fifty." he answered.

"And how many customers are here at present?"

"About thirty."

"The inventory you have registered shows enough explosives to bring down a quarter of Estran City. That's up to seven million dead," Vay said, "Just to save fewer than a hundred here."

"That's not fair." Gorva said, frowning.

"It's a fact." Vay said, "Facts are neither fair nor unfair, they are just facts."

"Who are you exactly?" Gorva asked Vay, "I know he's ISB but I didn't see a badge from you."

"Who she is is none of your concern. We aren't here to discuss generalities anyway," Garm interrupted, "We are here because of a specific batch of explosives used in a crime that have been traced to this location."

"Not possible." Gorva said, still frowning at Vay, "We register the details of all explosives we sell so you should have the buyers details already."

"I never said you sold it," Garm replied, "and I'll thank you to look at me while I'm talking to you. Thank you. Now I said we traced explosives to this location, they have never been reported as either sold or missing."

"Then they are still here," Gorva said, "we keep perfect records."

Garm pulled out his datapad.

"Hydroblast mark four commercial grade. Batch number jenth zerek six four four two," he read off, "You bought it nine months ago, but even though you've bought and sold another five lots since then you still appear to have that particular batch on your premises."

Gorva turned to his computer and entered the make and serial number.

"Here we are." he said, "Silo sixteen, with the rest of that type of explosives. I'll have someone take you there now."

"It would be better if you took us," Garm said, "and shut down your terminal so that no one else can see what we're looking for before we get there."

Gorva shut down his computer and led Garm and Vay from the office. He then proceeded to lead them from the administration building and into the network of trenches. In spite of being open to the elements, each storage area - what Gorva called 'silos' - was fitted with a blast gate that could be shut to stop a blast from being channelled into the trenches. As he led them towards silo sixteen they walked past several other members of staff and customers all of whom either did their best to avoid eye contact with Garm entirely or looked at him nervously before looking away. Wearing an ISB uniform had that effect on many people so Garm though nothing of it.

"Here we are." Gorva said and he pointed into a silo.

"After you," Garm said and he let Gorva go in first.

"As you can see we have over a hundred crates of Hydroblast mark four on site at the moment, but you are free to search through them." he said.

"Of course we are." Garm said. He and Vay began to read serial numbers off the crates, looking for the one bearing the number they were after.

"Ah perhaps this lady can help us," Gorva suddenly said as a large woman walked into the silo with a customer, "Jurissa is the section manager for this silo. Jurissa these people are looking for a batch of explosives we've apparently had in here for several months."

Instead of replying to her employer, Jurissa just turned on the spot and ran.

"Not good?" Vay said, looking at Garm.

"Not good," Garm said and he ran after the fleeing woman, "You stay there!" he shouted back at Vay.

The woman that Garm was chasing had the advantage of knowing the layout of the trench network, but she was somewhat out of shape and was unable to put enough distance between herself and Garm to escape him.

"I told you to stay put," he yelled when he caught sight of Vay rushing up from behind him.

"You looked like you needed help," she replied as she overtook him.

Jurissa ran from the trench network and into the open area of the parking lot. In addition to the staff's speeders there were numerous speeder trucks parked here and by ducking between them she disappeared before either Garm or Vay could reach the parking lot themselves.

"Where now?" Vay asked as they both looked around the parking lot for any sign of their target.

"I'll try asking someone," Garm said, "It's an old investigator's trick," and he walked over to a pair of men standing watching a droid load a pallet of explosives into their truck, "Hey, have either of you seen a woman come past here?" he asked.

"Aside from your girlfriend over there?" one of them asked.

Garm pointed to his uniform.

"ISB," he said, "It means I checked my sense of humour in when my shift started."

"Okay what did she look like?" the other man asked him.

"Big and ugly," Garm said, "Like someone shaved a wookiee."

Both men shook their heads.

"Thanks anyway," Garm said and he went back to Vay who he found just staring across the parking lot,

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Concentrating," she replied. Then she added, "She's there!" and she ran off through the parked vehicles.

"Vay wait for me!" Garm shouted after the young woman, drawing his blaster and setting off after her.

Vay ran too quickly for Garm and he soon found himself moving through the parked vehicles alone, trying to figure out where either she or the woman they were after had gone to. Then he heard a woman scream.

"Oh no. Vay," he said to himself, "I've got a bad feeling about this," and he ran in the direction of the scream.

He expected to find Vay's body beside one of the trucks, probably with her head smashed open against it.

But instead he turned a corner to find Vay kneeling on top of Jurissa, pinning her arm behind her back as she lay face down on the ground.

"How did you do that?" Garm asked.

"I told you I can take care of myself," she replied, "now do you have binders?"

"No."

"Then take hold of her while I get mine out," Vay said and she let Garm take hold of Jurissa's arm.

"I'm surprised they're not pink and fluffy," Garm said as Vay restrained Jurissa with a set of binders taken from a belt pouch.

With Jurissa in custody Garm and Vay took her back to silo sixteen where they found Gorva still waiting for them.

"Now where's the crate we're looking for?" Garm asked but Jurissa just glared at him without speaking.

Vay suddenly looked across the silo and walked towards a stack of crates at the far side.

"Down here," she said, "there's another crate hidden behind these."

"Get a droid," Garm said looking at Gorva, "I want to see inside that crate."

A loading droid was summoned to move the crates that were stacked in front of the one hidden behind them.

"What's the serial number?" Garm asked as he pulled out his datapad again.

"Jenth zerek six four four two." Vay read out loud.

"Just the one we're looking for." Garm said, "Now let's get it opened up."

Gorva released the latches and opened up the crate.

"There you are you see," he said, "It's full."

"But full of what?" Vay asked as she picked up one of the finger-sized packages laid out in the crate. First she sniffed it then she took a bite.

"Yuk!" she said and she spat it out, "Year old cookie doe."

Garm took out his comlink.

"Agent Larcus to base," he said, "I need a full search squad to Detrick Demolitions Supplies immediately.

One suspect in custody," and he deactivated the comlink when a voice confirmed that the team was on its way.

When the ISB search squad arrived Garm and Vay left Jurissa in their custody and headed for his speeder.

"So where are we going now?" Vay asked him.

"To search her residence," Garm said, "I want to get there before any co-conspirators get wind of her arrest and clean the place up. Detrick gave me her address and I've got her key."

"Are you investigating the attack this morning?" a woman's voice suddenly called out across the parking lot.
"Keep walking." Garm said to Vay when he saw the woman running towards her.
"Who is she?" Vay asked.
"Don't you watch the news?"
"Not really."
"Well she's some reporter called Neema Gorord," Garm told her, "She's doing a lot about the rebellion at the moment. She probably followed the search team here. I'm surprised they didn't arrest her for it."
Neema reached Garm and Vay just as they were about to get into Garm's landspeeder.
"Agent Larcus isn't it?" Neema asked, holding up a recording rod, "Vorn's son?"
"No comment." Garm said.
"Was the attack this morning the work of your father?"
"No comment." Garm said again.
Then Neema turned towards Vay.
"You're the Moff's intern aren't you?" she asked, "What is Gregor Horatian's involvement in this investigation? Why won't he agree to an interview about the fight against the rebellion in the sector?"
"There's no story here," Garm said, "Now unless you want to be arrested for impeding an investigation I suggest you get out of our way."
"So you are here on an investigation then?" Neema said.
"He said there's no story here," Vay said, looking Neema straight in the eyes, "You should delete what you've just recorded." and she got into the landspeeder with Garm who promptly drove off.
As Neema watched the speeder grow small in the distance her comlink chimed.
"Neema what's happening?" her editor asked.
"There's no story here," she replied, "I'm deleting what I've just recorded."

3.

Garm got Jurissa's key out to gain access to the building where her apartment was located, but as it turned out the dilapidated building's entry system was not operational and the two Imperial agents were able to just walk straight in.

"Here, we'll take the stairs." Garm said.

"But there's a turbolift." Vay pointed out.

"If you want to take the chance on the thing breaking down with you inside it be my guest. I'll come back and get you next week. The apartment's only on the third floor."

Without saying anything more Vay followed Garm into the stairwell.

"Oh very tasteful," Vay said as they picked their way through the garbage that was piled on the stairs, "If I get bitten by a dianoga I'm telling Gregor it was your fault."

"I'll take my chances." Garm said. He continued up the stairs.

On reaching the third floor, Garm slipped his blaster from its holster before he stepped out into the hallway.

Vay copied him, drawing a compact sidearm from a pouch on her belt. In the hallway they saw the door to Jurissa's apartment just down the hall. From somewhere on the floor they could hear the sound of an animal.

"Do you think that thing's in the apartment we want?" Vay asked.

"I don't know." Garm replied.

"I'm shooting it if it is," Vay said.

"Sounds like a good idea to me." Garm replied and he held the key to Jurissa's apartment against the sensor.

The door slid open immediately and both Garm and Vay aimed their weapons into the apartment.

"ISB," Garm called out as he stepped inside, "Anyone in this apartment should make their presence known now."

Vay followed him and put her blaster away as she stepped through the doorway.

"There's no one else here," she said and she shut the door behind her.

"I'll check that for myself," Garm said and he moved from room to room, verifying that there was no one else here.

Unlike the communal areas of the building that Garm and Vay had seen Jurissa's apartment was relatively tidy, though there were quite a large number of boxes stacked in one of the rooms.

"I wonder what's in these then?" Garm said looking at the boxes.

"They're not sealed." Vay pointed out.

"The we should be able to at least look at the ones on the top," Garm said and without moving the box itself he opened up one of the ones that lay on the top of the stack. From inside he pulled a handful of paper.

"These all look to be the same," he said and he handed one of the sheets to Vay.

The papers were propaganda leaflets. Each one denounced the rule of the Empire on Estran and called for the world to assert its independence of all interplanetary government.

"Well we've got a treason charge right here." Garm said and he put the papers back in the box.

"Aren't you going to search the rest of the boxes?" Vay asked him.

"No," he replied, "they all look to be the same to me. The others are probably full of more of the same crap so I'll leave it to a search team later. For now I want to find out who else is in on this."

"I saw a computer in the other room," Vay said.

"Yes I saw it too, that's where I'll start. You check her home communicator. Copy its memory."

Before activating Jurissa's home computer Garm plugged his datapad into the side of it. If she had placed any security lockouts on the computer then his datapad should be able to bypass them. As it happened Jurissa had installed no such safeguards and Garm had free access to all her files.

"She's definitely not Alliance," Garm called out to Vay, "They always make some effort to secure their computers."

"I've copied the memory from the communicator," Vay said in return, holding up her datapad, "What have you got?"

"The template for those leaflets," Garm said, "and a whole bunch of messages that she's been exchanging with someone that she thought she'd deleted but are still on her main drive."

"Another member of the terrorist cell?"

"Looks like it. The user identity in her contact book is from an online message operator rather than an access provider that we can get names and addresses from. We'll have to get technical services to put a watch on it and log the locations from which the message box is accessed."

"You don't think that the Jurissa woman will tell us who this being is then?" Vay asked.

"She may not know," Garm replied, "Or they may have figured out that she's been caught and moved themselves to locations she didn't know about. But we can at least run a search algorithm on all of the

messages that Jurissa didn't know she still had to pull out whatever we can get. There could be a list of targets that we can boost security at. Now let's get another search team over here and call it a day. I doubt there'll be any more information for us until tomorrow morning from the search teams and I want Jurissa to have to spend a night in a cell before we question her."

When Garm woke up he was alone in his bed, his wife had clearly woken up earlier and got up without waking him. Putting on a robe he headed downstairs.

"Jennay? Are you downstairs?" he shouted out from the stairs.

"In the kitchen," his wife answered him.

As Garm neared the bottom of the stairs he heard the sound of his wife talking and he assumed that their daughter must have woken up early also, but then he heard a different voice. It was Vay's voice and when he reached the kitchen door he found the young woman sat at the table with his wife.

"What's she doing here?" he asked.

"She came to the door just after I'd got up," Jennay said, "and she asked to come in and wait for you. She's been telling me all about how she's been assisting you."

"Not giving away anything classified I hope," Garm said as he headed for the fridge.

"Of course not," Jennay said, "I know better than to ask about anything like that."

"Good," Garm said. Then he looked at Vay, "Wait here while I go and get ready. Then we'll head to the office and see what's waiting for us."

"So tell me," Garm said to Vay in the speeder on the way from his home to the ISB station house, "How did you convince my wife to let you into my home? And more to the point what did you think you were doing turning up there in the first place?"

"I wanted to see where you lived," Vay said, "I found it interesting."

"Why? What are you really here for?"

"I'm here to help you. The Moff thought it would be a good idea."

"Well thanks to his good idea I'm probably going to have to explain whether strange women in bodygloves are going to start turning up on our doorstep every morning."

"Don't worry," Vay said, "I'm sure that I satisfied her that our relationship is purely professional. Now can I ask you a question?"

"Go ahead."

"I saw some photographs in your house," Vay said, "Family ones."

"What about them?" Garm said. Given his father's well-known actions he did not like discussing his family.

"I saw pictures of you with another woman about your age. Is she your sister?"

"Yes."

"Where is she?"

"Gone," Garm answered, "She left with our father."

"But you don't think it was her choice do you?"

"What makes you say that?"

"Two things, firstly the fact that you keep pictures of her that aren't hidden away and also the way you react when I mentioned her. You don't have the same hatred for her as for your father."

Garm scowled.

"Don't worry about being angry at your father," Vay said, "Anger's a very useful emotion. Some powerful people would have done far better if they'd realised that."

"Who told you that? A therapist?"

"No, just someone who's taught me a lot."

At the ISB station house Vay headed straight for the turbolifts while Garm checked them in.

"You're here early," the guard said as he logged them as present.

Garm threw a glance over his shoulder at Vay.

"I think that the Moff threw her out of bed early," he said, "She turned up on my doorstep and I couldn't leave her at home with my wife."

Then Garm joined Vay by the turbolifts and they headed for his office.

"Well," Garm said when he reviewed his messages, "It looks like the technical boys got some results from the contacts list. There was a rash of messages exchanged between them all last night. We have a list of addresses."

"Where? Do we need to take pesticides with us like we should have yesterday?"

"No," Garm said, "In fact the information isn't much good to us at all. It looks like Jurissa was the stupid one of the group. The rest are all using public computer terminals. I'll get the tech boys to see if they can pull camera footage from any of them for us so we can get some faces, but I think we need to have a word with Jurissa herself."

"Oh good," Vay said, "I was hoping I'd get to see an interrogation."

"Yes well just remember one thing," Garm said.

"What?"

"I ask the questions and she answers them. You keep your mouth shut and let me do my job."

Two masked guards brought Jurissa into the interrogation room.

"Sit," one of them ordered her as they shoved her into the chair that was the only furniture in the otherwise grey featureless room, then they secured her hands to the chair.

"She's all yours sir," the guard told Garm, "Just let us know when you're done with her," and then they left the room.

"So Jurissa," Garm began in a friendly tone, "How about we have a nice little conversation?"

Jurissa said nothing, instead she just snorted.

"Now that's not very nice is it? Here I am just trying to get to know you a bit better and you don't want to talk to me. I mean its not like I'd think you were in a hurry to go back to your cell just yet given that the droids haven't cleaned up the mess you made in it last night. Still I suppose I could just leave you here instead and then you can sit in whatever filth you create."

For a moment Jurissa looked up at Garm and he thought she was about to hurl some insult at him, but instead she looked downwards again.

"This is treason Jurissa," he said and he held one of her leaflets under her face, "Co-operate with me or there's no way avoiding execution. Especially when we've also got you for helping to murder all those people yesterday. Younglings too. Come to think of it maybe I'll get the judge to go easy on you and commute your sentence. Then you can find how youngling killers are treated in labour camps. When they run short of meat it'll be your limbs and organs on the menu. They may even kill you before they cook you."

"I'm no traitor," Jurissa said, "I'm not helping you find anyone. I'll be a martyr."

"You'll be forgotten," Garm said he walked to the door and opened it, "Send it in," he said before he stepped clear.

There was a soft throbbing sound and a moment later a spherical black and silver droid hovered in through the doorway.

"Now Jurissa," Garm said, "when you decide that you've had enough just give me some names of you co-conspirators. Until then do try and keeping the screaming to a minimum," and he stood away from the torture droid.

4.

"Does that happen often?" Vay asked as she and Garm headed back to his office.

"What? That a suspect breaks as soon as they get a look at the torture droid and just start babbling before it's even touched them?"

"Yes, I thought rebels were generally tougher than that."

"They are," Garm said, "but as I've said she's not part of the Alliance, just some other fool that wants to overthrow the legitimate government and put themselves in power. All in the name of freedom of course. It's amazing how many beings think freedom is them being the ones telling everyone what to do instead of someone who actually knows how to run an effective government on behalf of the people."

"It's just unfortunate she didn't know much more than a few names we can't verify yet," Vay said.

"It's not uncommon," Garm said, "Especially when dealing with someone like her. I don't think the rest of her group trusted her much. Hardly surprising since she used her home computer to send and receive messages and print out their pamphlets. She was just a way for them to get explosives."

"Rather a lot of them."

"Yes, unfortunately for mister Detrick. I doubt his licence will be renewed when I report just how much stock has walked off his site in the last year."

They reached Garm's office and headed inside. This time instead of sitting on the floor Vay took the seat across the desk from Garm.

"That's better," he commented, "I'll have you housebroken by the end of the day," and he turned on his computer, "and this looks interesting too," he said when he checked his messages.

"What is it?" Vay asked, leaning around to see what was on the screen.

"Still captures from security cameras at a computer cantina by the starport," Garm said, "It's not very good quality and it's from a difficult angle but we've still got a picture to go with one of the anonymous messaging accounts. See," and he pointed at the picture. Sure enough it showed someone sat at a computer terminal at the time according to Jurissa's home computer that one of the other terrorists communicated with her. The camera was behind the hunched figure and there was no reflection on the screen in front of him to enhance, but it still gave them an approximate facial shape to start from.

After Vay had had chance to see the image Garm plugged his datapad into the desktop computer and copied the file pertaining to the interrogation of Jurissa.

"This is the clever part," Garm told Vay, "I'm going to run that picture through facial recognition software and compare the results to our list of names."

"Here we go," said Garm when the computer had processed the image provided to him, "We have a name. Haran Kreyno. It says here he's a cargo hand at the starport, tells the droid where to put boxes and stuff."

"The starport?" Vay responded, "Wasn't that where the message was sent from?"

"It was indeed," Garm said, "So I think that we ought to head out there and speak with mister Kreyno."

"Why not go to his home and wait for him to get back?" Vay asked.

"Because after Jurissa's arrest the others in her cell may be staying at safe houses instead. But they're less likely to be skipping work, which could arouse suspicion from their co-workers. We're far more likely to find him at his place of work."

"He's not here," the loading foreman said when Garm asked for Haran Kreyno, "he didn't show up for work this morning."

The foreman was a gruff looking member of one of the reptilian Nikto species. There were quite a lot of these humanoid aliens working in and around the starport

"Have you contacted him to find out why not?" Garm asked.

"Why should I?" the foreman replied, "He didn't show so he doesn't get paid. There are plenty of others willing to work if he won't. The law says I have to give humans preference, not that I have to hold positions open for those that don't show up."

"Well thanks anyway," Garm said and then he turned to Vay, "Come on, we're done here. Let's head back to the office," and he led her back to the landspeeder.

"Why are we leaving?" Vay asked, "Couldn't you tell how scared he was?"

"Of course he was scared," Garm said, "I'm ISB. Anyone who isn't scared of me, especially an alien, is someone I really need to investigate. Besides I think he told me more than he realises. Or at least his boots did."

"His boots?"

"Yes, didn't you notice them? The lower part of each one looked like they'd been heavily cleaned recently, while the higher parts were filthy. As if someone wanted to get blood off them after they'd trodden in it. I think we've just found another member of the cell."

Back in the foreman's office one of the starport workers entered through a side door.

"What was all that about?" he asked the foreman.

"It was the ISB," the foreman replied, "They have your name. Jurissa must have talked."

Garm did not want to leave the starport foreman unobserved. But he knew that the Nikto had seen his face and there was a risk that if he was spotted the alien would not go anywhere near any of the other members of his cell. So Garm remained near the starport just long enough for another pair of ISB agents to arrive and take over surveillance.

"The Moff's little pet isn't allowed to stay out late is she?" one of the agents asked him after Garm explained the situation. It was the same man that had mocked him at lunch the day before, "Well never mind because there are some real agents on the case now."

Garm ignored him and instead got into his speeder with Vay.

Vay sat on the floor of Garm's office again when they returned to it while he reviewed the information he now had.

"I think I'm right about that alien," he said, "I've just got some security footage that the tech boys pulled from what was left of the surveillance system at the recruiting office."

Vay said nothing.

"Really Garm, that's so interesting. Maybe I should get up off the floor and take a look myself since I'm supposed to be learning from you." Garm muttered to himself. It occurred to him that he could give her an order but at the same time he had never asked for her to be hanging around him anyway. So instead he continued to review the new data.

"Well what's in the footage?" Vay asked, still keeping her eyes shut.

"Not much detail," he answered, "but there's one good shot of the back of terrorists and one of them is definitely wearing boots like the foreman had on."

"Can you make out their faces?"

"No the footage is too corrupted to reliably build up a contour pattern from their masks that we can compare to facial images on file. But it's better than nothing, at least now we can extrapolate things like height and weight by comparing them to our friendly foreman."

"So do we have any more suspects?" Vay asked.

"Well, I've pulled the foreman's name, its Kraktu, but so far he and Haran are our only leads. Hopefully the surveillance team will find out more for us, but I doubt we'll hear from them before tomorrow. Come on, I'll drive you home."

The apartment block that Vay guided Garm to was in a very exclusive area of the city and it was clear that she had funding from more than just a COMPNOR study fund. Garm guessed that Moff Horatian was paying for her to have somewhere to his tastes that they could be alone together.

"Would you like to come up for a while?" Vay asked him.

"No," Garm replied without hesitating, "My wife and daughter will be waiting for me."

"Okay then," Vay said, "In that case I'll see you tomorrow. Bright and early."

Garm did not like the sound of that.

The next morning Garm heard voices as he came downstairs again and for a moment he thought that Vay had turned up at his house again. But then he heard the sound of his daughter's voice talking with his wife and he relaxed. When he walked into the kitchen he found that he had relaxed a little too soon.

"Good morning," Vay said to him before either of his family greeted him, "Your wife said it was alright if I made you all breakfast."

"Look daddy, TIE fighters," his daughter said excitedly and she held up her plate on which were several pancakes baked in the shape of Imperial fighters. One of them looked like it had taken a turbolaser hit where she had already begun to eat it.

"You never said anything about your new partner being able to cook," Jennay said between mouthfuls of her own breakfast.

"I didn't know," Garm said, "and anyway I don't have time to sit down and eat right now, I want to get to the office to follow up on yesterday's work. So whenever you're ready Vay." He collected his keys and headed for his landspeeder.

The guard at the station house smiled at Garm when he signed in.

"She turn up at your place again?" he asked.

"I can't figure it out," Garm said, "My wife didn't even comment about it last night. I don't have a clue how she fast talked her way in but Jennay doesn't seem to care."

"Just accept it and count yourself lucky," the guard said before Garm headed for the turbolift.

In his office Garm checked his messages as he always did.

"That's odd," he said.

"What's odd"? Vay asked from her spot on the floor.

"There's nothing here form the surveillance team," he said.

"Maybe they didn't see anything interesting." Vay suggested.

"No, that's not it. They should have at least logged the fact that Kraktu left the starport and where he went.

There's no way that a labour foreman would have stayed there all night and spoken with no-one," then Garm activated his desk communicator, "Hello duty office," he said, "this is agent Larcus. I'm trying to track down agents Durrot and Passet. What is their current assignment?"

"They are assigned to you agent Larcus," the duty monitoring officer responded after a brief pause while he checked his system, "They have been since sixteen hundred hours yesterday."

"Thank you," Garm said as he hung up and looked at Vay who had just stood up, "This isn't good," he said, "If they'd been pulled off surveillance then the duty officer would know about it. But they stayed at their posts they would have reported in hours ago."

"So what other possibilities are there?" Vay asked.

"It could just be a communication problem." Garm said, "Comlinks can fail, but it would need both of them and their vehicle to lose communications and I doubt that they'd withhold information just to undermine me. I've got a bad feeling about this."

The landspeeder driven by the two agents tasked to keep watch on the suspected members of the terrorist cell was like all ISB vehicles equipped with a tracking device. So all that Garm had to do was access their vehicle's tracker and key the location into his own landspeeder's auto navigation system and it led Vay and he directly to that location.

The landspeeder was parked beneath a wide overhead highway and as Garm drove close it seemed to be abandoned.

"Is it normal for agents to leave their vehicle empty during surveillance?" Vay asked as Garm brought his speeder to a halt.

"Not really," he replied, "One of them may get out if a suspect goes somewhere that a speeder can't follow, but the other should stay with the vehicle just in case. We'd better check this out." and followed by Vay Garm got out of his speeder and headed for the one belonging to the other agents.

Sure enough there was no one sat inside the vehicle, but the dashboard was stained with blood on both driver and passengers sides.

"It looks like you can trust your feelings." Vay said when she saw the blood.

Garm didn't reply. Instead he reached inside and released the access to the cargo compartment at the rear of the vehicle. It opened with a quiet 'click'. Immediately Vay clamped a hand over her nose and mouth.

"That doesn't smell good," she said.

"No it doesn't," Garm replied as he walked to the open compartment, "It smells like a pair of corpses that have been left in a speeder overnight."

Vay walked towards Garm but he shut the storage compartment before she got there.

"There's no need for you to look," he said, "They're well past any help."

5.

"Their throats were cut?" Garm's divisional commander said when Garm told him of the deaths of the two agents.

"It looks that way sir," Garm said, "though I've not had a medical report yet."

"So what do you think happened?" his superior asked.

"I think that they were spotted by the terrorists sir. They were both out of uniform and in an unmarked speeder, but if I'm right about the starport foreman..."

"That's the alien yes?" his superior interrupted.

"Yes sir, the Nikto," Garm replied, "If I'm right about him he could have had his associates sweep the area and look for anyone looking out of place. Like two men in a speeder watching the starport loading docks."

"So where is your case at now agent Larcus?"

"I have two suspects with names and faces for both. I've already issued descriptions to local law enforcement with orders to report any sightings but not to approach them. In the meantime I'm checking up on their activities, we already know the message system address for one of them and I've got the technical department looking out for it being accessed. As soon as they let me know where, I'll be off."

"And what about the young lady whose been hanging around you these past few days?"

"She's in my office now." Garm said, "Hopefully she's looking over the results of the background checks I've had run on both suspects. But there's a chance that she's just sitting on my floor meditating."

Garm's superior looked him in the eyes.

"You're kidding." he said.

"I wish I was sir." Garm replied, "The Moff's, err, 'intern' is apparently quite fond of it."

"Well just remember that she does have the Moff's ear, if not more than just his ear and that if you make him mad then I'm not sticking my neck out for you."

"No sir. Is that all?"

"Yes, get back to work."

Garm returned to his office and was pleased to find Vay sat at his desk reviewing the files he had asked her to.

"Find anything?" he asked.

"Maybe." Vay replied.

"Come on then let's have a look." Garm said and he leaned over her shoulder and looked at the computer.

"Kreyno had a travel pass that he used regularly." Vay said.

"Lots of people have travel passes." Garm said.

"Yes I know. But Kreyno lived ten minutes walk from the starport where he works. He would have to walk past his workplace to get to the nearest monorail station. Plus we know that he accessed his messages from the cantina just outside the starport too."

"So where did he keep going?" Garm asked.

"Here." Vay said and she pulled up a map of the city and pointed to a monorail station in the middle of a residential area.

"That's not far from your place," Garm said, "Somehow I doubt that a common labourer like Kreyno has friends there. He'd stand right out to any peace officer who came by."

"Exactly," Vay replied, "but there's an empty building about three minutes walk from the station. It's being renovated. He could quite easily duck inside that before he was noticed."

"What about Kraktu?"

"He's covered his movements better," Vay said, "He uses the monorail to travel between his home and work and he uses his credit stick to pay so it's all recorded. But there are gaps in some of his homeward journeys."

"What do you mean gaps?"

"I mean that if he's always paying by credit stick then there should be a homeward journey for every time he goes to work. But sometimes it looks like he doesn't go home."

"Because for some reason he's using cash to pay for his travel?" Garm suggested.

"That's what I thought," Vay answered and I compared the times that he didn't pay with his credit stick with the times that Kreyno used his travel pass and they matched up exactly. I think that they both went to the same place together."

Garm smiled.

"Well done." he told Vay and she smiled back at him, "Now lets go take a look at this building shall we?"

The building Vay had guessed was the meeting place for the terrorist cell was a hive of activity when Garm and she arrived to investigate it. There was a tiny prefabricated office building beside the main gate that looked like a site management office.

"What can I do for you?" the man sat inside asked.

Garm held out his datapad with images of Kraktu and Kreyano displayed on it.

"Have you seen either of these two beings?" he asked.

The man took the datapad and looked at it.

"No, I don't think so," he replied and he gave back the datapad, "but the locals don't come here much. It's too dirty for them."

"They aren't local," Vay said, "We suspect that they travel here at night."

"Ah," the man said, "Then its no good asking me. I just keep an eye on the construction droids during the day. There are a couple of other techs on the site but they get in and leave at the same time as I do."

"This site is active round the clock then?" Garm asked.

"No. We have to shut down at night because of noise restrictions. So there's just a watchman then."

"Organic or droid?" Vay asked.

"Organic." the man replied.

"Mind if we take a look around?" Garm asked.

The man got up from his chair and took a pair of brightly coloured hard hats from the wall.

"Here you are," he said, "Its compulsory to wear these on site. Do you want me to show you around?"

"No thank you," Garm answered as he took the helmets and gave one to Vay, "We'll be fine," then he turned towards the door, "Oh wait a minute there is one more thing," he said looking back at the man, "how are the droids here programmed to interact with living beings?"

"They don't," the man replied, "All orders have to be given via encoded datapads. They just treat people as obstacles to move around."

"I'll need one of those datapads," Garm said, holding out his hand. The man hesitated before remembering that the ISB did not need to ask before they took anything and he handed over a datapad.

"Thanks," Garm said, "We'll return this stuff before we leave." He and Vay left the office.

As they walked across the site towards the building that had construction droids swarming over it like insects on some massive beast he handed the datapad to Vay.

"Take this young padawan," he said.

"Why did you just call me that?" Vay asked, coming to a halt.

"What?"

"Padawan."

"It was just a figure of speech. It was a term used by the warlocks that tried to overthrow the Old Republic government at the end of the Clone Wars to describe their apprentices," Garm said. After his jibes about Vay's relationship with the Moff he was surprised that such a trivial off hand comment would get to her.

Vay took the datapad.

"So what do you want me to do with this?" she asked as she studied it.

"Just check the order logs for each droid we encounter. See if there are any times stamped after hours," Garm told her, "Now come on we don't have all day to stand around."

Inside the building Garm led Vay down stairs to the basement levels. When the building was completed they would be parking garages and machine rooms, but for now they were just collections of random spaces containing nothing but dust and components for use in the construction project.

There were only a handful of droids on the level that Garm decided to start with and Vay dutifully went up to each one to access its orders while Garm took a look around.

"None of them have been active outside of work hours," Vay said as she returned to Garm. The ISB agent was crouched down beside a pile of rubble at the edge of what would eventually be a residential parking zone, poking at it with a stick, "Have you found anything?" she asked him.

"I think I have." he said as he reached down into the mess at his feet and picked up a piece of brightly coloured paper that he held out towards Vay.

"Hydroblast mark four," Vay said as she read the writing on the paper, "This was wrapped around the explosives the terrorists used for their bombs."

"Indeed it was," Garm said as he stood up, "This project doesn't need explosives so there's no reason for that to be here."

"So what now?" Vay asked, "We still don't know if the terrorists are coming back here."

"Not yet no," Garm said and he looked upwards at the ceiling.

"What are you looking for?" Vay asked as he walked around examining the ceiling elsewhere in the half finished parking garage.

"Something like this," Garm said and he pointed up at a grill set in the ceiling.

"An air duct?"

"An air duct with a lock on it," Garm said, "There are only droids and a handful of construction staff around, so why lock an empty vent?"

Vay grinned.

"Because its not empty." she said.

"Good work my young padawan." Garm replied and Vay frowned at him.

It was getting dark by the time the man from the construction site office and the other workers left. About half an hour before they had ordered all of the droids into one of the building's lower levels and shut them down. So now the construction site that had been a hive of activity was silent. The only thing moving was the watchman who had arrived shortly before the day workers departed for the night. In the shadows of a side street opposite Garm and Vay sat in his speeder watching what was going on.

"What if we're seen?" Vay whispered.

"What do you mean?" Garm replied.

"What do we do to blend in? Do we make out or something?"

Garm grinned.

"No. There will be no making out." he said, "Keep your datapad to hand, if someone looks like they're taking an interest in us we'll just look to them like we're checking it for directions."

"If we were looking for directions wouldn't you just ask the first person that came by?"

"No."

Why not?"

"Because I'm a man."

"Oh right."

Then Garm spotted something.

"Now that doesn't look normal," he said as the night watchman unlocked the front gate and then went inside the building.

"What do we do?" asked Vay.

"We go," Garm answered.

"What leave?"

"No we go inside while the watchman's not looking. That way when whoever he's just opened the gate for turns up, we're already inside to see what they do."

Garm and Vay got out of the speeder and quickly made their way to the unlocked gate. Garm took a quick look around to check and see if they were being watched or if there was any sort of warning device on the gate to tell the guard that it had been opened. When he found nothing he opened the gate just far enough for him to get through and beckoned Vay through after him.

"Stick to the ground that's already been walked on," Garm said as he shut the gate behind him, "and we'll head down to the parking level we checked out earlier."

The pair dashed around the side of the incomplete building to where the ramp that led down towards the parking level was located. Once there they came face to face with an army of construction droids.

"Be careful," Garm warned Vay, "they're all shut down for now, but if we disturb them they could reactivate and then we've no hope of keeping our presence here secret."

They picked their way past the droids lined up on the ramp until they reached the car park level below. Garm grabbed Vay and dragged her behind a low wall.

"What..?" Vay began before Garm signalled for quiet and pointed. Vay turned her head and saw the night watchman standing on a ladder set up beneath the locked grill. He had removed the lock and was stood with his head and shoulders inside the vent that it covered. A moment later he reappeared fully with a large bag in his hands and he descended the ladder. A folding table had been placed near the ladder and he then began to remove the contents of the bag and place them on the table. Vay took a pair of macrobinoculars from her belt and directed them at the night watchman.

"Can't you see well enough from here?" Garm asked.

"They have a built in holorecorder," Vay told him.

"Built in?" Garm repeated, "Those are expensive. A gift from the Moff? Does he like home movies then?"

"Actually they were given to me on Coruscant," Vay said, "by the man who helped raise me, and before you ask yes he is rich. In fact he's a Lord."

The night watchman finished unpacking the bag and left the parking level via the stairs. When he disappeared Vay got up and ran to the table where she pointed her macrobinoculars at the items there and then ran back to Garm.

"What's there?" he asked.

"Uniforms," Vay said, "Imperial ones."

"Oh I've got a bad feeling about this." Garm said.

6.

Garm and Vay waited behind the wall until they heard the sound of people coming down the stairs. Looking over the wall they saw Kraktu and Kryeno emerge from the stairwell. A third being, a human in an Imperial customs uniform, closely followed them.

"Get a good image of him," Garm whispered to Vay, "We'll run it through the computer tomorrow."

"We're not going to arrest him?" Vay asked.

"Hopefully yes," Garm replied, "We don't know how many beings are going to turn up to this thing, but there are already four and it'll be difficult to keep them all under control until help gets here. There's a fair chance that some of them could get away."

As it happened there were quite a few more beings yet to arrive. Over the next twenty minutes another seven arrived. As each one entered Vay recorded their image in her macrobinoculars.

"What are we waiting for?" one of the terrorists said.

"Guris is still outside," another said.

"Well, go get him then," Kraktu said.

"Guris is waiting for someone," another terrorist said. The way the others all immediately turned towards him when he spoke was significant to Garm.

"I think he's their leader," he whispered to Vay, "Make sure you get as much footage of him as you can," and Vay nodded.

"Who?" another terrorist demanded, "Have you found another useful idiot as a replacement for Jurissa already?"

"No," the terrorist leader replied, "We'll be having a very special guest tonight."

"Who?" the previous terrorist said again.

"Me," a man's voice called from the stairwell and when Vay swung her macrobinoculars towards the doorway she saw the night watchman entering in the company of a massive cloaked figure, almost two metres tall. The figure lowered his hood to reveal a light skinned human with a shaven head. The terrorist cell leader smiled before speaking again.

"I am proud to introduce you all to mister Foran Fallir. The esteemed leader of the People's Liberation Army of Estran," he said.

"Comrades," Foran began, holding his arms apart as a gesture of friendship, "your actions have not gone unnoticed by the central committee."

"There's no need to thank us," Kraktu interrupted.

"I wasn't about to," Foran replied, his expression changing to a frown, "What you did was stupid and poorly conceived."

The terrorists were clearly shocked at being admonished by the newcomer.

"What I think comrade Fallir means to say is..." the cell leader began.

"I mean you have just squandered your resources," Foran said before he could finish, "You killed only a small number and it has cost our organisation one of its best sources of explosives. And at least one of you is now known to the ISB." at this point he looked directly at Kreyno.

Kreyno looked around at his fellow terrorists for support, his mouth hanging open. But none of them would make eye contact with him. Suddenly Foran turned around and looked directly at where Garm and Vay were hiding.

"Someone's there!" he shouted and from beneath his cloak he produced a blaster carbine.

Both Garm and Vay drew their own blasters just as Foran opened fire, sending a burst of energy blasts over their heads.

"Imperial Security Bureau!" Garm yelled out over the noise of the blaster fire, "Everyone here is under arrest. Lay down your weapons."

"Don't listen," Foran called out to the members of the terrorist cell, "There are only two of them."

"How does he know that?" Vay whispered.

"I've no idea," Garm said and he briefly raised himself up from behind the wall he and Vay were using for cover and fired two shots in rapid succession from his blaster pistol towards the group of terrorists. Before he ducked back down he saw one of them fall. The others however were drawing their own weapons.

More blaster bolts passed over their heads while others struck the wall, blowing chunks of it loose.

"This wall won't last much longer," Garm said to Vay, "We need to move now. Follow me," and he got up and ran. As he ran he pointed his pistol towards the terrorists and fired it repeatedly, striking two more of them. Shocked by Garm's unexpected appearance the terrorists paused their shooting and turned their weapons towards him. Just in time for Vay to appear from behind the wall and fire her own weapon at them.

"There's the other one," Kraktu shouted. Then he let out a brief cry as Vay put a blaster bolt into his neck.

Garm had now reached the base of the ramp and he took cover behind the far more solid main wall of the parking level. Supporting his blaster with both hands he fired it repeatedly at the terrorists to cover Vay. "Run!" he shouted to Vay who was still behind the low wall.

Vay ran towards Garm as fast as she could. She presented a clear target to the terrorists, but at that moment they were more concerned about the fire coming from Garm that they too were seeking cover. With no vehicles in the parking level yet there was precious little protection to be found and another of the terrorists, the one in the uniform of a customs officer, was struck down while still in the open.

Instead of looking for something to hide behind Kreyno instead just dived to the floor to present a smaller target to the ISB agent and he was the only one to fire at Vay before she reached Garm. His blaster bolt caught her near the base of her spin and she gave out a yelp as she fell.

"Vay!" Garm called out and he ceased firing and looked at the young woman lying on the floor. Miraculously the shot had not killed her. In fact it appeared that she was totally unharmed, there was not the smell of burnt flesh that Garm knew to associate with a fresh blaster wound and she leapt back to her feet and ran to the ramp before she could be fired on again.

"How the hell did you do that?" Garm asked, amazed that she was unharmed.

"Its my bodyglove," Vay said, "Its designed to deflect the energy of blaster bolts. It won't do much against a clean strike but a glancing hit like that barely even stings. I don't wear this just to show off my figure you know."

"Well just try not to get shot again," Garm said as the terrorist began to fire at them once more he pulled out his comlink, "Agent Larcus to control," he said hurriedly, "Urgent assistance required. Multiple armed assailants. Construction site on Kraver Street North, basement level." then he put the communication device back in his pocket before leaning around the wall to fire at the terrorists again.

Vay did likewise, though she kept her rate of fire much lower. Her compact blaster had only a few shots in its powerpack and she was in no hurry to use them all up.

Concealed behind a crate Foran had not fired on the ISB agents since his initial burst had started the fire fight.

"What are you waiting for?" the cell leader crouched beside him asked as he ejected a spent powerpack from his blaster and inserted another one.

"There's something odd about one of those agents," Foran said, "I have a strange feeling about them."

"Really?" the cell leader replied, "So what are you going to do about it?"

"Leave," Foran said, "I can't be caught. I know too much about our organisation," and he got up and ran.

"Where's he going?" Vay said as she saw Foran get up from behind the crate and head for the doorway to the stairwell.

"Nowhere," Garm said and he aimed his weapon at the doorway and fired. The first two bolts passed harmlessly through the open doorway before the third struck the control panel and it exploded in a shower of sparks. Short-circuited by the energy blasts, the door control activated and dropped the door down before Foran could escape. He promptly turned around and ran for the nearest cover, a pile of debris behind which the night watchman was cowering.

"How did you know that the door would close?" Vay asked.

"I didn't," Garm said, "I just got lucky. But now the only way out is past us."

"I've got a bad feeling about that." Vay said and she fired another shot from her blaster, killing another of the terrorists. With her powerpack now expended she ejected it and reached for another.

"Give up now!" Garm shouted towards the terrorists, "There's no way out and more Imperial forces are on their way."

"Learn to count boy!" Foran shouted back, "You and you lady friend are out numbered three to one. How about you just turn around and leave before you get hurt?"

Garm and Vay replied by firing again. Foran reached over to the night watchman and grabbed his datapad. "I'll take that," he said and he began to access its functions.

From behind them Garm and Vay heard the sound of droids coming online.

"What did that guy tell us about the droids?" Garm said.

"What, you mean about how they don't respond to living beings? They just treat them as obstacles?"

"Exactly," Garm said, "So what do you think they'd do if someone ordered them to demolish that obstacle?"

"Oh no," Vay said and she turned around just as the nearest construction droid swung at her with a clawed arm and sliced open her bodyglove across her stomach. Vay winced as the claw drew blood, but the wound was only light and she placed her blaster against the droid's head and blew it off.

"The rubble," Garm said and he pointed towards the pile of rubble in which he had found the explosive wrapper earlier in the day. Then he and Vay broke cover and ran, firing as they moved.

Foran ran at the same time. He stuck to the shadows at the side of the parking level and made his way towards the hoard of droids now beginning to come down the ramp.

When Garm and Vay reached the pile of rubble and dived behind it they noticed that the blaster fire from the terrorists had ceased.

"What's happened?" Vay said, "Are they all out of ammunition?"

"I doubt it," Garm said and he looked over the top of the pile.

There he saw the construction droids spreading out across the parking level and a large number of them appeared to be heading for the remaining terrorists. Kreyno got up to run as the front rank of them drew near him but as he turned one of the droids grasped him by the back of his neck and lifted him up off the floor and slammed his head into the ceiling. Then it dropped his limp and lifeless body and continued to advance "Hey Foran!" the cell leader called out, "What are you playing at? Call them off."

Foran tapped a few commands into the datapad and the droids heading for him turned around and headed off in a different direction, then he ran for the ramp. When he got there he aimed his blaster rifle at the remains of the droid destroyed by Vay and fired at it, severing its arm at the elbow. Then he picked up the hand that still had Vay's blood on it and ran up the ramp.

"He's getting away." Vay said, "Shouldn't we go after him?"

"Under normal circumstances yes," Garm replied, "but the army of droids coming towards us makes me say no this time," he fired at the advancing droids instead of the terrorists who were now also shooting at the droids.

The sound of a powerful replusorlift engine suddenly came from up the ramp and Garm's comlink chimed.

"Agent Larcus what is your situation?" a voice said.

"Pinned down in the underground parking level on the west side of the building. The construction droids have been activated and have gone rogue. In need of urgent backup."

"Confirmed sir," the voice replied, "Disembarking now. ETA sixty seconds." then the channel went dead.

Garm took a look at the advancing droids.

"Run," he said to Vay.

"Where?" she asked.

"Just away from them," he responded, pointing at the droids. Vay nodded in agreement and the pair got up and ran, halting only when they got to wall at the far side of the parking level.

"Now what?" Vay asked.

Before Garm could answer there was shouting from the ramp.

"Open fire!" someone yelled and multiple streams of blaster bolts tore through the ranks of construction droids. The machines ignored their losses and continued to advance towards not only Garm and Vay but also the surviving terrorists who had also fled as far from the droids as the area of the parking level would allow. Then the armoured forms of COMPForce assault troopers, the elite combat unit of COMPNOR, appeared with their weapons in their hands firing at the droids.

"ISB!" Garm yelled out and he held up his blaster where the approaching troopers could see it. The last thing he wanted now was to be shot by his own side when they were on the point of rescue. Vay copied him and as a squad of COMPForce troopers reached them Garm held out his identification.

"Status report sergeant," Garm said to the squad leader.

The COMPForce trooper snapped to attention.

"Droids disabled sir," he said, "and four suspects in custody."

"Excellent," Garm said, then he remembered that Foran had fled before the COMPForce unit had arrived,

"What about the being that fled?" he asked, "Human male. Tall with pale skin and no hair."

"No sign of anyone matching that description sir, he must have escaped before we got here."

"Oh well," Garm said as he looked towards the terrorists who were being dragged towards the ramp, "With his associates in custody we'll get him soon enough."

7.

When Moff Gregor Horatian entered his office he was not particularly surprised to discover that Vay Udra had entered unchallenged before he got there. She was sat on top of his desk with her legs folded beneath her and her hands resting on her knees. She had her back to the door.

"I take it that you've something to report then," Moff Horatian said as he walked around his desk and sat down in his chair. He was now looking at Vay in the face and he could see that she had her eyes closed.

"Yes, I've done what you asked," Vay said, still keeping her eyes shut.

"And?" the Moff asked.

"He's loyal," Vay said, "and very talented too. Though the other ISB agents don't like him."

"That doesn't matter," Moff Horatian said, "So do you think he'll make a good choice as a member of my personal staff? He's Loyal to the Empire above everything is he?"

"Oh no," Vay replied, "He'll put his wife and child above the Empire every time."

"So we can manipulate him by threatening them if we need to?"

"I wouldn't try that. He's far more likely to turn on you instead. But if you just offer him the position I'm sure he'll take it and do an excellent job too."

"So you'd be happy working with him then?"

"Oh yes," Vay said with a smile, "I like him a lot."

The hospital emergency department was always busy at this time of night and it was rare that the doctor got five minutes to himself. It was only when he sat down in his office chair that he realised that he was not alone.

"What are you doing here?" he asked the imposing figure who had been behind the door.

"I need you to take a look at this." Foran said and he dumped the droid's arm on the doctor's desk.

"I'm not a mechanic," the doctor said.

"Not the arm, the blood on it."

The doctor picked up the mechanical limb and looked at the claw that it ended in. There he could make out blood that was beginning to dry. He picked up a thin strip of polymer and scraped it over the blood so that some of the liquid rubbed off on it, then he slid the tiny strip into a slot in his desktop computer.

"What am I looking for?" he asked.

"Run a midi-clorian count." Foran told him.

"A midi-clorian count?"

"Just do it."

The doctor shrugged and selected the test that Foran had requested from a list.

"I don't believe it." the doctor said.

"What is it?" Foran asked.

"Its just over nine thousand," the doctor replied and he leant back in his chair, "You've just found yourself a jedi."

"No, not a jedi," Foran told him, "someone potentially far more useful than that."