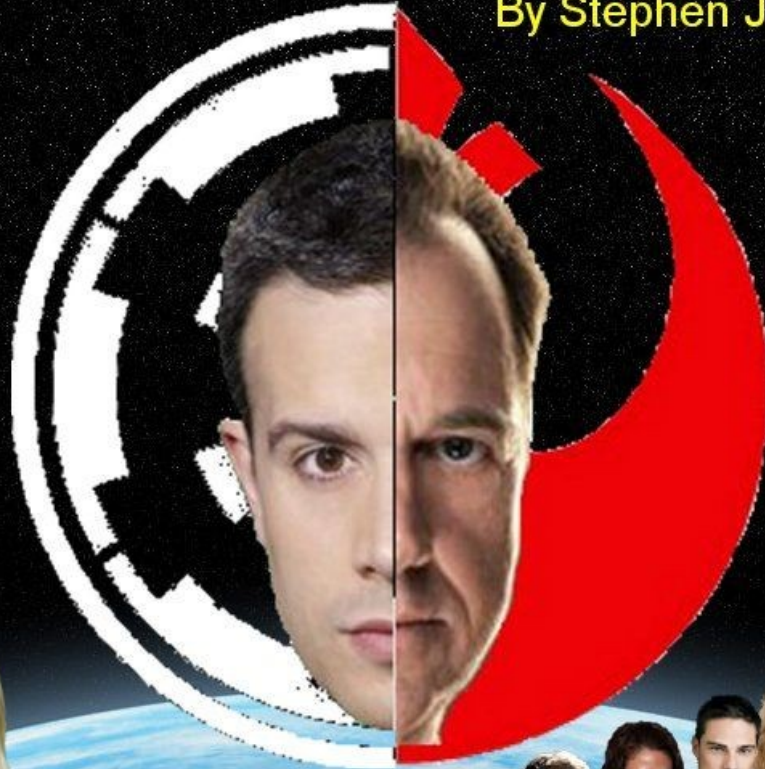


# STAR WARS

## 1-08: The Privateer Menace

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...

## **THE PRIVATEER MENACE**

THE FLEET OF THE REBEL ALLIANCE IS SUPPORTED BY PRIVATEERS, RAIDERS WHO TARGET IMPERIAL SHIPPING ON BEHALF OF THE REBELLION. BUT ALTHOUGH THESE CONTROVERSIAL RAIDERS BRING MUCH NEEDED SUPPLIES TO THE REBELLION, THEY DO NOT ALWAYS HOLD TO THE IDEALS OF THE ALLIANCE...

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

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# 1.

The YT-1300 class freighter the *Silver Hawk* dropped out of hyperspace at the edge of the system just where its captain had wanted it to.

"Right on target major," Captain Mace Grayle said to the Alliance officer sitting beside him. Then he looked at his sensors, "But no sign of our friends yet."

"Give them time," Major Vorn Larcus III replied, "they'll be here soon enough."

The mission that the occupants of the *Silver hawk* had been assigned was easy enough. They were to rendezvous with a corvette belonging to a privateer who operated in this system on behalf of the Alliance in order to transfer a particularly important cargo that their liaison officer had reported them capturing. The two officers continued to watch the ship's sensors for any sign of the vessel they were expecting until they were interrupted by one of the other rebels onboard the vessel

"I thought you two may want something to drink," Jaysica Horbid said and she held out a tray with three cups on it towards the two men, "Oh, we're out of hyperspace then," she added when she saw the stars outside of the cockpit's view port. Unfortunately as she looked up she took her eyes off the tray she was holding and banged it into the back of Mace's chair.

Jaysica gave out a yelp as the cups toppled to the floor and their contents splashed across the cockpit.

"Watch it!" Mace shouted as Jaysica put her hands to her face. Almost immediately there was a 'crack' and a flash and the cockpit's lights went out, "Get out!" Mace said to Jaysica.

"Hang on I'll just mop this up," she replied.

"Get out," Mace repeated, "Now!"

"Go back to the lounge Jaysica," Vorn added in a more conciliatory tone.

"It was just an accident..." Jaysica said as she turned to exit the cockpit. As she did so she almost bumped into the ship's engineer, Tobis Dorfus.

"Oh hello Jaysica." Tobis said but Jaysica just walked past him without replying.

"You can thank your girlfriend for the mood lighting in here," Mace said to his engineer.

"Oh she's not my girlfriend," Tobis replied and Mace and Vorn looked at each other and smiled, "But the lights are what I came to tell you about. They're out all over the ship and I don't know why. I've got Harvey looking at it now." Harvey was Tobis's astromech droid, an R5 unit with the irritable personality - common to such droids.

"Well as I said, the lights going out is Jaysica's fault," Mace said, "She spilt something and its gotten into the circuitry."

"Oh great." Tobis said, "That means that I'll have to pull every board in here and check it. I'll go get Harvey."

"And bring a glow rod as well would you?" Vorn called after him as he left the cockpit too.

"Well it looks like we're stuck waiting in the dark then," Mace said.

"Maybe not for long," Vorn said, leaning forwards in his chair, "What's that?" and he pointed at the sensor display.

"Looks like an escape pod beacon," Mace said before pausing.

"What?" Vorn asked.

"Nothing. Just thinking that maybe we could lock that Jaysica of yours in one of our escape pods to limit the damage she can do. No not an escape pod, I'm sure we've got a crate about her size somewhere."

"Never mind that," Vorn said, "What's an escape pod doing out here? We're well clear of shipping routes.

That's why we've arranged a covert meeting out here."

"That's a good question. What do you say we go find out while we're waiting?"

"Sounds good to me," Vorn said, "but we'd better be careful," then he activated the *Silver Hawk's* intercom,

"Kara can you hear me?" he said into it.

A moment later a woman's voice replied.

"Right here boss," Kara said, "Where ever here is, for all I know I'm talking into the oven thanks to the Klutz."

"Never mind that right now," Mace said, "get to the gun well and power it up. We've detected what looks like an escape pod beacon and we're going to check it out. We need you to keep watch for anything suspicious."

"Sure thing boss," Kara replied before she turned off her end of the intercom.

Mace powered up the *Silver Hawk's* sublight drive and steered the ship towards the source of the beacon, still many minutes travel from their current location.

By the time they reached the beacon's source they had already confirmed that it was an escape pod and as it came into visual range they saw that it had Imperial markings on it.

"This doesn't look good," Mace said, "Isn't that ship we're here to meet an ex-Imperial one?"

"Yes," Vorn answered, "It's a customs corvette. Right now privateers are the only ships we have conducting raids on the Empire, if they've been destroyed then that's another setback for us."

Not long before it had been determined that someone in the Alliance forces in that sector was leaking information to the Empire. This was a secret known only to a handful of people, including Mace and Vorn, but in response the commander of the rebel fleet battlegroup assigned to the sector had effectively suspended all of her operations until she was certain that her ships were not heading into an Imperial trap. Not being subject to the Alliance's command hierarchy privateers were still conducting raids, safe in the knowledge that the Empire could not predict their movements.

"I'll line us up for docking," Mace said, "Then we can see what's inside that thing."

Mace aligned the escape pod with the *Silver Hawk's* rooftop hatch while Vorn instructed the rebels under his commander to gather in the compartment beneath it.

"It sure would be nicer if we could actually see in here," Tharun Verser, the former mercenary said and he looked at Jaysica then turned away.

"It wasn't my fault," Jaysica protested.

"Right," Kara interrupted Jaysica, "The cups on the tray got so depressed they threw themselves off it."

Before Jaysica could respond there was a 'clunk' as the escape pod latched onto the *Silver Hawk*.

"Seal looks good." Tharun said as he checked the gauge beside the ladder leading up to the hatch.

"Well let's just hope Jaysica didn't fry that circuit too," Kara said.

"That's unlikely," said Tobis, "It's a local system that doesn't go anywhere near..."

"Never mind lover boy," Kara responded without giving Tobis time to finish, "Just get up the ladder and open the hatch."

Tobis climbed the ladder and opened the hatchway. There was a slight breeze as air rushed past him into the space between the *Silver Hawk* and the escape pod hatches where the vacuum of space had been preserved when the pod docked.

"See," Jaysica said to Kara, "The seal is fine," but Kara ignored her and instead watched as Tobis opened the escape pod's hatch.

"There's someone in here," he called out, "I think they're hurt."

"Let me see." Kara said and she climbed the ladder herself as quickly as she could.

The inside of the escape pod was cramped. It was designed for only two people and right now there were three inside it.

"Is he alive?" Tobis asked Kara as she checked the occupant's vital signs.

"Yes, for now at least," Kara replied, "but he needs medical attention. Help me get him out of here."

Kara and Tobis lowered the unconscious man down the ladders to where Tharun took hold of him and laid him down on the floor.

"This guy looks like he's taken a real good beating," Tharun said as Kara descended the ladders.

"I know," she replied, "I need more light in here," and she crouched down beside the man while Tharun held up a glow rod over her.

"I'll go see what I can do." Tobis said as he followed Kara down the ladder after sealing the top hatch again and he left the room.

"What can I do?" Jaysica asked.

"Get out of the way," Kara said.

"And try not to damage any more of the ship's systems," Tharun added without a hint of sarcasm.

"I'll go tell the major what's happened then," Jaysica said as she left the room also.

A glow rod hung from the ceiling illuminated the cockpit and Tobis was on his hands and knees removing one circuit board after another from under the floor and holding them up for Harvey to examine.

"Kara and Tharun..." Jaysica began.

"From the door," Mace interrupted, "You've done enough damage in here for one day."

"Oh come on," Jaysica said, "What else can I possibly break?" as she stepped into the cockpit whereupon there was a crunch as she stood on a circuit board, "It was an accident," she said.

"Out," Vorn said, "go wait in your cabin until we say otherwise and get Jeeves to update us on what's happening with our guest."

"Okay," Jaysica said sheepishly, "I'll be going now then."

Kara rummaged through her bag looking for one of her medpacs.

"Found one," she said upon finally finding one of the multipurpose treatment kits and she broke it open.

"So what's your diagnosis doc?" Tharun asked her.

"Like you said, he's been beaten up," Kara replied, "But I don't think that there's any permanent damage and no bones broken. But he's probably got a concussion so the first thing I need to do is wake him up while he still can be woken up. Then I'll see to the cuts and bruises." then she took a tiny vial from the medpac and loaded it into an injection gun. She placed the device to the man's neck and activated it.

The man's body jerked and with a gasp he opened his eyes.

"Stay still," Kara told him, "You're safe now, but take a moment to catch your breath. You've probably got a concussion."

"Is that why I can't see properly?" the man asked.

"What do you mean?" she asked him in return.

"Well it just looks really dark in here," he answered.

Kara and Tharun looked at one another.

"No that's not your eyes," Tharun said.

At that moment a golden coloured humanoid droid appeared in the doorway.

"Excuse me mistress Kara," the droid said, "But master Larcus would like an update on our guest."

"Well Jeeves," Kara began as she and Tharun helped the man to his feet, "you can tell the boss that he's awake and we're moving him into the lounge now."

Both Mace and Vorn came from the cockpit to see the man that had been brought aboard from the escape pod.

"So who are you anyway?" Vorn asked.

"Leon Corder," the man answered.

"Lieutenant Corder right? Alliance liaison officer." Vorn replied.

"No I'm not in the Navy." Leon said.

"I'm Major Larcus," Vorn told him, "and this is Captain Grayle. You should have been expecting us."

"Yes sir," Leon said, "I didn't realise. I thought you were just some free trader."

"That's alright," Vorn said, "Now what's happened to the ship you were assigned to? Has it been destroyed?"

"No sir, worse than that," Leon said, "The captain and crew thought that they could get a better price for the cargo they captured on the black market than handing it over to us. Plus there were some contraband items that we would destroy that they thought they could sell on as well."

"So they decided to go their own way then?" Mace said.

"I'm afraid so," Leon answered, "but they didn't want to give up the Alliance communications equipment that gave them access to our intelligence. So when I tried to disable it they jumped me. The last thing I remember is making it to the escape pod and ejecting from the ship."

"Did you disable the communications equipment lieutenant?" Vorn asked.

"No sir, I didn't. I'm sorry."

"If we signal the Alliance to tell them that the pirates will pick it up then," Mace said.

"Yes," Vorn replied, "but we have to warn them. We'll just have to go back and tell them in person. Then they can determine what to do about them, we can't have a pirate ship running around with our communications gear on it."

"And maybe we can get the lights fixed too." Mace said.

General Syres Kain, commander of all Alliance operations in the sector was not a happy man when Mace and Vorn brought Lieutenant Corder to him.

"As if our current situation isn't bad enough, now we have a bunch of pirates running around with access to our communications." he said, the anger evident in his voice.

"I'm sorry sir." Lieutenant Corder said before the general held up his hand for quiet.

"It's not your fault man," he said, "but we have to do something about this and quickly. It will take some time to change all our communications protocols and until then those pirates could use that equipment to target our shipping. Or worse yet they could be caught by the Empire and then they'd get their hands on it." then he looked directly at Lieutenant Corder, "Thank you lieutenant, you are dismissed."

Leon snapped to attention and saluted the general before turning around and heading out of his office.

"We need to send a ship after those pirates." General Kain then said to Mace and Vorn.

"The *Silver Hawk's* no match for a customs corvette general," Mace replied.

"I know," General Kain said and then he activated his desktop communications unit, "Commander Aphanar," he said, "could you come and see me in my office urgently please?"

"Yes general." a guttural sounding voice replied and a few minutes later the door opened and a female Mon Calamari entered.

"You asked to see me?" Commander Aphanar asked in the same guttural voice.

"Yes commander, please take a seat. A situation has arisen with one of our privateer vessels. It seems that they have decided to go back to their old ways of piracy and have taken their Alliance encoder with them."

"This is unacceptable General. It has always been the position of Admiral Ackbar that privateering is not a suitable strategy for the Alliance and this incident only goes to prove why."

"That may be commander," General Kain replied, "but we are not here to debate strategies put in place by the Alliance high command. I need one of your warships to seek out and destroy this privateer."

Commander Aphanar looked at Mace and Vorn. Like them she knew that an Imperial spy had penetrated the Alliance.

"But indications are that my fleet's movements are being leaked to the Empire. We could be walking into a trap." she protested.

"I'm not asking for an entire battlegroup commander," General Kain told her, "Just one ship. Give it written orders to set out with Major Larcus's unit and follow their instructions. That way there will be no data trail for the Empire to intercept."

"Very well General, I will issue the order in person to the ship's captain," Commander Aphanar said, "May I at least know the type of ship we are hunting? That way I may select a suitable vessel to destroy it."

"Of course commander, we need to destroy an Imperial customs corvette."

## 2.

"Hello handsome." a woman's voice came from behind Mace and Tobis as they checked over the *Silver Hawk* while it sat in the pressurised docking bay of the Alliance's sector headquarters.

"What?" Tobis said, turning to face the woman, "Err, I think, I mean, err."

"Don't worry," the woman said, "I wasn't talking to you."

Oh, thank you." Tobis said and he turned back to the ship.

"So how can I help you then?" Mace asked, "Or are you just here to confuse my engineer?"

"The name's Mallia, Mallia Mayan. Or Captain Mayan depending on your rank," the woman said and she held out her hand.

"Mace Grayle, also captain." Mace replied and he took her hand.

"A mutual associate suggested that I come and see you," Mallia said, "big eyes, doesn't like fishing stories. You must know her."

"Yes I know her." Mace replied, "Come aboard, the major's in the cockpit."

Mallia followed Mace into the ship and to the cockpit where as he had said Vorn was waiting.

"Captain Mayan, meet Major Larcus." Mace said.

"I take it that Commander Aphanar has told you about the mission." Vorn said as Mace and Mallia both sat down.

"She filled me in briefly," Mallia said, "there's a rogue privateer vessel running around out there with our comms gear aboard and we need to put it out of action before our supporting them comes back to bite our asses. Right?"

"Yes that's it." Mace said, nodding.

"But what I don't get is how we're supposed to catch that ship." Mallia said, "My Corellian corvette outguns a customs ship easily, but we're not as fast as she is and she's got endless space to run in."

"That's why we're taking the *Silver Hawk* as well," Vorn said, "this pirate likes to impersonate a genuine customs ship and then steals from ships that slow down to be searched."

"That's a good strategy," Mallia admitted, "cuts down on the likelihood of accidentally blowing up your target before you get your hands on their cargo."

"Exactly." Mace said, "So since they don't know that this ship is an Alliance vessel we're hoping that we can get them to stop us and then while we're docked you can swoop in and disable them."

"I take it you're thinking about a micro jump yes?" Mallia asked.

"That's right," Vorn said, "We'll send a data burst with our exact location for you to feed into your nav computer and jump through hyperspace directly to us. Hopefully you'll catch them with their shields down and stationary."

"Sounds good to me," Mallia said, "so where do we jump to first?"

"We'll send the jump co-ordinates to you after we've arrived here," Vorn said, "that way they can't be leaked before hand."

"Who would leak them? And who to?" Mallia asked.

Mace and Vorn just looked at each other.

"That's classified." Vorn said, "You are not to discuss it."

"Oh, very well then, I'll be waiting for your signal," and she got up to leave. As she was about to exit the cockpit there was a chirping from floor level and she looked down to see a mouse droid there, "Oh look there's a note stuck to your droid," she said and she bent down and plucked a small square of paper from the droid and read out what was written on it, "It says 'I need the bathroom. Can I come out of my cabin? Signed J'," then she looked at Mace and Vorn, "Wow you guys are strict. I don't make my crew ask permission to pee." and then she left.

"So what do you think of her?" Mace asked,

"I like her." Vorn said.

"Same here," Mace replied, "but I saw her first."

"Don't worry," Vorn said, "I don't like her that much. Now I'll go tell Jaysica she can come out of her cabin."

The Corellian corvette Renegade drifted away from its moorings just as the *Silver Hawk* left the docking bay.

"Renegade to Hawk," Captain Mayan signalled, "We are ready to receive jump co-ordinates."

"Confirm that Renegade," Vorn replied, "We are sending now," and he transmitted the jump data in an encrypted packet to the corvette. There was a brief delay before Mallia signalled again.

"Confirmed we have the data *Silver Hawk*," she sent, "Estimate jump in two minutes."

"Roger that Renegade," Vorn said, "Good hunting."

The two ships then accelerated away from the Alliance headquarters until they cleared its gravity well and with a flash they jumped into hyperspace.

The courses that the two Alliance ships took were slightly different. The Renegade's course was calculated to bring it out of hyperspace just beyond the outer ring of debris common to most star systems. Meanwhile the *Silver Hawk* would enter the system itself and locate the pirate ship before calling in the Renegade to destroy it. The finding of the pirate ship presented the occupants of the *Silver Hawk* with their first problem.

"So how do we find them boss?" Kara asked when Vorn gathered the entire crew together in the communal area of the ship, "It'll take weeks to scan the entire system with this ship's sensors alone."

"Plus if we look too much like we're trying to find them they'll probably get suspicious." Tharun added and both he and Kara nodded in mutual agreement.

"Believe it or not those points have actually been considered by beings who actually hold commissions." Vorn replied.

"I had a commission." Kara said.

"Had' being the operative word," Mace said, "You lost it remember?"

"She didn't lose it, it was taken off her for punching her superior." Jaysica added.

"Can we shut her back in her cabin again?" Kara asked.

"You mean our cabin." Jaysica pointed out.

"Oh, yeah." Kara replied, "Can we find somewhere else to shut her?"

"No." Vorn shouted, "Now I'm a major, Mace is a captain and the rest of you do as you're told."

From the far side of the communal area Harvey emitted several low-pitched bleeps.

"No Harvey," Jeeves said in return, "the major doesn't sound very happy at all."

"Now here's the plan," Vorn said, "You may have noticed that we have several crates in the cargo hold," and the other rebels indicated that they had, "Well most of them are empty. The rest have starship parts in them."

Vorn continued, "We are going to visit the various settlements in the system pretending to be down on our luck traders and claim that they all contain high quality hyperdrive components that we are looking to sell. We'll be asking more than people are willing to pay after seeing our samples so we won't be getting any takers but word should get around about our valuable cargo."

"I see what's coming." Tharun interrupted, "Eventually the pirates will come to try and take it. Hyperdrive components will fetch a good price on the black market."

"Exactly." Vorn said, "Now we'll be signalling the Renegade as soon we've docked with the pirate ship, so all we need to do is keep them from either undocking or destroying us before the Renegade gets here."

"How long is that likely to take?" Jaysica asked.

"It shouldn't be too long at all," Tobis said, "I'm guessing they'll be at the outer edge of the system yes?"

"That's right," Mace said.

"Then it should only be a couple of minutes from when we transmit the call," Tobis said, "That's no time at all really."

The first outpost that the *Silver Hawk* visited was an asteroid mining colony where Mace headed directly towards the local cantina.

"So," he said to the barman after ordering a drink, "how many people around here need parts for their ship?" The barman snorted.

"This is a mining outpost, not a shipyard." he said, "The only starships here belong to the company that runs this place and they only buy from approved contractors."

"So no one buy parts on the side then? Maybe for selling to traders?"

"You're the first trader to turn up here in a year," the barman told him, "The last one left without making a sale too."

"Can you suggest somewhere that I should try instead?"

"Yeah, Triss station. It's the space station that takes in all of the raw minerals that are mined in the belt. They refine them and ship them out all over the sector. There are a lot of traders there so you're bound to find someone who's after what you've got. It's a better bet than the inner worlds anyway."

"Really? Why is that?"

"Because Imperial customs has sent a ship to the system and it's hanging around nearer the centre. They're coming down heavy on ships and seizing cargoes at the slightest excuse."

At the mention of a customs ship Mace's interest was aroused. It sounded a lot like the favoured tactic of the pirate vessel that the rebels were looking for.

"Hasn't anyone complained about that?" he asked.

"From what I've heard the customs service is giving people the cold shoulder," the barman replied, "they're even denying having sent a ship here."

"Supposing I could make it to the inner worlds without running into customs, would they buy my parts?"



"Probably yes. Right now a lot of traders are avoiding the area so the inner worlds are desperate for certain goods right now. But I'd say that you're better safe than sorry and should head for the station instead. Let someone else take the risk with customs."

Mace tilted his head back and downed the rest of his drink.

"Well thanks anyway," Mace said, "I'll look up that space station you mentioned," and then he headed out of the cantina.

Back at the ship he reported what he had heard about the newly arrived customs vessel causing problems for shipping near to the system's inner planets to the other rebels when they were safely back on board and out of earshot of the locals.

"Sounds like our pirate ship," Vorn agreed, "But I don't think that we should head straight there."

"How come?" Jaysica asked.

"Because we've just been publicly warned off," Mace said, "The sensible thing to do is head for the space station. Besides, if it's as important as the bartender claimed then I wouldn't be surprised if the pirates make their way nearer to it sooner or later."

"Then we head for the station," Vorn said, "I wouldn't be surprised if the pirates have someone there feeding them information about ships heading for the inner worlds. So keep an eye open for anyone sniffing around us. Especially if they don't actually come up to us and speak with us directly. Everyone got that?"

Triss station did not orbit any of the planets in the star system; instead it had been set up in a solar orbit just inside that of the asteroid belt. It was equipped to handle ships of various sizes, with docking bays for smaller ships like the *Silver Hawk* and larger anchoring points for bigger ships.

As soon as they came within visual range of the station its flight controllers signalled them.

"Attention unidentified craft. State you cargo and destination."

"I'll handle this," Vorn said to Mace, "you just keep our approach normal."

"Got it," Mace said, "Fly casual right?"

Vorn activated the *Silver Hawk's* communications array.

"Triss station this is the freighter *Grey Ghost*," he said using one of the false ship registries that the Alliance had constructed for the *Silver Hawk*, "We have a cargo of starship parts and would like to dock with you."

There was a moment's pause from the station controllers before they responded.

"*Grey Ghost* shut down your engines, we will tractor you in."

"Well at least we know they are civilised," Vorn said, "they even have valet parking."

The landing system of Triss station was fully automated. After Mace shut down the *Silver Hawk's* ion drive the light freighter was drawn inside the space station by a tractor beam and after that towards a specific landing pad within the massive docking bay.

"*Grey Ghost*, extend your landing gear now," an automated message instructed. Mace lowered his ship's undercarriage.

"You know this could be a problem if we have to leave in a hurry," he said to Vorn, "this tractor beam will stop us dead in our tracks."

"Don't worry about it," Vorn replied, "it's not as if we're about to start shooting the place up. In fact I think it's best if we leave our weapons here."

The *Silver Hawk* then came to a halt with a judder as the tractor beam deposited the ship in the chosen landing spot, releasing the ship barely above the deck and allowing it to drop.

"Come on then," Mace said, "let's go see if the locals are friendly."

As it happened there was a party of station staff waiting for the *Silver Hawk's* occupants as soon as the entry ramp was lowered. One of them looked like an administrator of some kind, she was slimly built and had a datapad in her hand while the other two looked more like hired muscle. From the way they stood it looked as though they were not expecting trouble.

"Good afternoon sirs," the administrator said as Mace and Vorn strode down the ramp, "I am dock officer Gall and I am required to collect certain information from you. Firstly who is the master of this vessel?"

"I am," Mace said, "Mace Grey. Grey as in the colour and my ship's name."

"Very good mister Grey, now what is your reason for visiting our humble station?"

"Trade."

"And what is your cargo?"

"Hyperdrive components. Brand new, not factory rebuilds."

"Thank you, and finally how many are in your party and what species are they?"

"Six, all human. Just about anyway," and Mace grinned.

"No jokes thank you mister Grey," Gall said and Mace's grin disappeared, "I am authorising you to stay for a maximum of ninety-six hours. If you wish to stay longer you will have to put in a request with station administration via any terminal. The docking fee is one hundred and fifty credits payable now."

Gall held out her hand and Mace produced a credit stick that he handed to her. She plugged the electronic currency device into her datapad and processed the payment.

"Thank you mister Grey," she said as she gave back the credit stick, "and enjoy your stay."

Mace took the credit stick and Gall and her two guards immediately turned and walked away.

"That could have gone worse," Vorn said.

"Much worse," Mace agreed, "her sense of humour could have shown up and she'd have had to get one of her guards to shoot it."

"Come on," Vorn said, "let's get our samples unloaded and see who shows an interest."

Initially there were a number of merchants and starship mechanics that showed an interest in the sample components that the rebels showed off to them. But when they found out how much they were asking for their interest petered out. One or two accused them of over-inflating their prices and tried to haggle, but not knowing that the rebels were specifically avoiding a sale they failed to get the price dropped. After that the merchants and mechanics that came near were less interested in buying starship parts than they were in exchanging information with either Kara or Jaysica.

"How about we try and work out a better deal over a nice quiet drink?" a starship mechanic said to Jaysica.

"Getting me drunk isn't going to do you any good," she replied, "my boss sets the prices. Here look at this quality," and she held out the hyperdrive motivator that she was holding in its open box.

"Oh I know quality when I see it," the mechanic replied, "and I definitely see it here."

"Look, are you going to buy anything from me or are you just wasting my time?" Jaysica said and she waved her arms for emphasis. An action that unfortunately caused the engine part to fall out of it.

"Arrgh! My foot!" the mechanic yelled as the heavy metal component landed on his foot with a 'thump' and he lifted his foot off the deck and grabbed it.

"Oh I'm so sorry." Jaysica said and she leant forwards to help him and there was a 'crack' as they butted heads, sending the mechanic sprawling on the deck.

The mechanic got back to his feet, rubbing his head as he did and then limped away.

"I heard a scream," Tharun said as he ran down the *Silver Hawk's* ramp to find Jaysica also rubbing her forehead, "what's happening?"

"Oh nothing," Jaysica replied, "but I think that I just cost us a sale."

"That's what you're trying to do isn't it?" Tharun said.

"Oh yes, you're right." Jaysica said and she smiled. Then she bent down to pick up the hyperdrive motivator and handed it to Tharun, "Here you go." She said, "it's your turn now, I've got a headache."

### 3.

Mitch Corellia had just got back to his seat with a pair of drinks when he saw his friend Jervas Doyl enter the cantina.

"Jervas!" he shouted out over the music, "Over here man." And Jervas began to walk towards him. "What happened to you?" Mitch asked as he saw the other man limping towards him.

"Is one of those for me?" Jervas asked as he sat down and saw the two drinks.

"Yes, I was expecting you." Mitch replied and he slid one of the glasses across the table between them.

"Good because I could do with it." And Jervas lifted up the drink and downed it in one.

"Does this have anything to do with the way you're walking?" Mitch asked him.

"Yes it does and it's not just my foot either, I wouldn't be surprised if my skull was split. That girl had a hard head."

"What girl?" Mitch asked.

"The one in the docking bay. Her ship just brought in a shipment of hyperdrive parts. Good ones too."

"I'm guessing it wasn't the parts you were hoping to negotiate for though." Mitch said.

"No, they're good but they're expensive. The price they're asking they'll only be able to sell them to the big shots on the inner worlds. I figured a night with the girl would be cheaper."

"By how much?"

"I never got to find out. She dropped one of her engine parts on my foot and then head butted me when she bent down to apologise. I got out of there before she did any permanent damage."

"I happen to know someone in the market for engine parts right now and he's not fussy about price if the quality's right." Mitch said, "So how about you tell me about what these people are selling and I'll let you have a cut of my finder's fee. At least this way you didn't get beaten up by a little girl for nothing."

Later on, Mitch headed back to his quarters and activated the communicator he kept there. It took a few moments for the device to connect with the recipient before a hologram of a male human in the uniform of an Imperial customs officer appeared in the room with him.

"What is it Mitch?" the man said.

"I have information for you Captain Shaliak sir," Mitch replied, "I think that there's a juicy target about to come your way in the next few days."

"I'm listening, tell me more," Shaliak said.

"Hyperdrive components. Expensive ones. Buyers here can't afford them so the people with them will have to head further in system where you can intercept them."

"Sounds interesting. What about the ship?"

"Nothing special, I took a quick look on my way past the bay. Its just an old YT thirteen hundred."

"I'll need transponder data." Shaliak said, "When can you get it to me?"

"First things first captain, what's my cut?"

"The usual, two percent."

"I want three. This is a good cargo and without me you get nothing."

Captain Shaliak frowned as he considered the demand put upon him by the informant.

"Two and a half," he responded, "and I'll let you have first pick of the crew's personal effects."

"You'll have the ship's registry by the end of the day captain." Mitch said, then he shut down the communicator.

Captain Lazarus Shaliak stepped down from the holopad.

"Two and a half percent?" his first officer said, "That was never part of the bargain. Neither was giving him first pick of the rest of the stuff."

"I know," Lazarus answered, "and I think that its time that we replaced our friend Mitch. That's thing about friends, they're like clones; you can always make more."

The first officer smiled.

"I'm going to get some rack time," Lazarus said to his first officer, "let me know when the data arrives from Mitch. Meanwhile make sure that we're ready to move out."

It was decided that it would be best for everyone to get a good nights rest before the *Silver Hawk* left Triss Station and it was just after breakfast that Mace signalled the flight control office for permission to depart. It was granted immediately and the rebels felt their ship shudder as it was plucked from its landing spot. The docking bay tractor beam gently propelled them through the atmosphere shield of the bay door and out into space.

"*Grey Ghost* you are clear to engage ion drive." The flight controller signalled and Mace activated his ship's sublight engines.

"So where to now major?" he asked.

"Head deeper in system," Vorn replied, "we need to stick with the flight plan we've let slip to the natives."

"Gotcha, I'll head for the nearest of the inner worlds at a nice steady pace."

"Keep our sensors in active mode too," Vorn said, "the emissions will help the pirates pick us up and hopefully we'll get more warning about their approach too."

"What if there's another load of pirates out here we don't know about?" Mace asked.

"Good point, I better get Kara on the guns just in case." Answered Vorn and he activated the intercom, "Kara we need you on the turret just in case. Use the targeting system to keep watch on what's happening, but don't engage any targets until either Mace or I say so. Got it?"

Vorn waited a moment before he heard Kara's voice reply.

"Got it boss," she said, "guns will be up and running in five minutes."

"Now we wait." Vorn said.

The comscan station operator saw the blip on his display and turned slightly towards Lazaras.

"I think I have them captain." He called out.

"Don't think, be sure. Is it them or not?" Lazaras replied and both he and the first officer walked over to the comscan station and stood behind its operator.

"It definitely a Corellian light freighter sir, looks like they're coasting."

"Are they damaged?" the first officer asked.

"I don't think so," the comscan officer replied, "their energy emissions are all normal and I'm detecting no signs of communication."

"They're just saving fuel," Lazaras said, "it means they're not in a hurry. So we know they have a non-perishable cargo."

"Like hyperdrive parts?" the first officer asked with a smile.

"Exactly." Lazaras replied.

"I'm reading they're transponder now sir," the comscan operator said, "The ship is the *Grey Ghost*."

"That's our target," Lazarus said. He too smiled now and he headed back to his command station and sat down, "Helm, lay in an intercept course, standard cruising speed. Comscan go to passive tracking only, let's not make our presence too obvious to them."

"There was definitely something there," Mace said, "it was just an energy emission, but it was an active sensor sweep across our hull I'm sure."

"So someone knows we're here then." Vorn said.

"Yes but if they're still watching us they're using passive sensors only."

Vorn got up from the co-pilot's seat.

"Keep watching," he said, "I'll go and make sure that everyone's ready." And he headed out of the cockpit for the communal area of the ship.

"Ah good you're all here," he said when he found Jaysica, Tharun and Tobis all seated around the table, "we think that we've found the pirates. Or rather that they've found us."

"They're here already?" Jaysica said.

"No not yet," Vorn told her, "but we were scanned by someone who doesn't want us seeing them coming, so it's a fair bet that it's our pirate ship."

Tharun looked at Tobis and Jaysica.

"No zombies on this one then?" He said.

"What about assassin droids?" Jaysica responded, "I crushed one under a door remember."

"Then I shot the others." Tobis added quietly.

"Enough," Vorn snapped, "There are no zombies or assassin droids heading for us. Got it?"

The three rebels nodded.

"So what do you need us to do?" Tharun asked.

"Just act like it's a regular customs inspection. Keep weapons out of sight, but make sure that you know where they are. Hopefully we won't get boarded, but if we do then we'll have some angry pirates to deal with when the Renegade turns up and starts blasting their ship."

At that moment the intercom crackled to life.

"Hey major," Mace's voice called out over it, "a ship just came into our active sensor range. Looks like a customs corvette from the transponder signal they're sending."

Vorn walked over to the intercom panel.

"Have they signalled us yet?" he asked.

"No, not yet. But they're on an intercept course."

"Veer off," Vorn said, "Make it look like we're hoping to slip by them unnoticed, but don't make it look like we're running away. Remember we're merchants who don't want to be stopped and taxed, not smugglers. Can you do that?"

"Hey, its me. I've been an honest trader and an almost honest smuggler. I'll make it look good for them. But not so good they lose us."

"Excellent, I'll be with you in a moment," Vorn said and he shut off the intercom before turning back to the other rebels in the room, "You heard him," he said, "everyone get ready for company." And then he headed back to the cockpit.

As he left he heard Tharun say, "Don't forget, you need a head shot for a zombie."

"Sir the target vessel has come about," the comscan operator said, "and she has shut off her active sensors."

"Trying to avoid us," Lazaras said to himself, then he looked towards the helmsman, "Adjust our course to match them and increase speed, but don't go to full power just yet."

"Shall I signal them yet sir?" the comscan operator asked.

"No, wait until we're in weapons range," Lazaras responded and then he activated his intercom, "Gun crews to your stations," he ordered, "Standard procedure, do not engage unless directly ordered to. Boarding party assemble by portside docking port with full weaponry."

"Do you want me to join the boarding party?" the first officer asked.

"Yes, you know what we're after. I'll keep an eye on things here."

"They're still with us major," Mace said as Vorn took the co-pilot's seat once more, "But they've still made no attempt to contact us."

"Give them time," Vorn replied, looking at the sensor display for himself, "They'll signal us in their own time."

At that moment Tobis entered the cockpit and sat behind Mace and Vorn.

"Everything's ready," he said, "so I thought I'd come and see what was happening."

Vorn was about to reply when the ships communication system came to life.

"Freighter identified as *Grey Ghost*, this Imperial customs. Decelerate and prepare for boarding. This is a random spot check, your compliance is mandatory." Then there was nothing.

"Well?" Mace asked, looking at Vorn.

"Do as they say, slow down and let them close." He answered, then he activated the communication system himself, "This is *Grey Ghost* to Imperial customs ship, we are complying with your instructions." And he waited for a reply.

When there was no response from the approaching corvette Vorn looked at Mace.

"That's odd," he said, "I would have expected them to respond to that."

"Err, I don't think they heard you," Tobis interrupted, "look at their emissions." And the other two rebels looked at the display Tobis was pointing at. There they clearly saw that the energy emissions from the customs corvette had shifted from a minimal output to high emissions spread across a wide spectrum.

"They're jamming us," Vorn said, "That's not normal for customs."

"Kind of gives away the fact that these are our pirates doesn't it?" Mace replied.

"Err," Tobis interrupted again, "how are we meant to signal the Renegade now?"

Mace and Vorn just looked at one another.

"We need to get them to shut off the jamming," Vorn said, "we'll have to let them dock and ask them to shut it off so we can signal our destination to inform them of our delay."

"What if they won't?" Mace asked.

"Then we'll have to knock out the jamming ourselves."

"Err, aren't there a lot of people on that corvette?" Tobis asked, "Nearly eighty in fact."

"We'll have to go outside," Mace said, "Kara and I can suit up and knock out their broadcast antenna."

"You'll need an explosive charge." Vorn pointed out.

Tobis got up.

"I'll go and let Jaysica know." He said with a smile.

"And get Harvey and Jeeves up here," Vorn called after him, "we'll have them send the signal as soon as the jamming stops."

Jett Carm, the pirate first officer grinned as he watched his troops prepare for the boarding operation. In the little more than a year since they had deserted from the real Imperial Customs Service they had lost none of their professionalism. Their weapons were kept clean and serviceable, ready for when they made strikes such as the one they were preparing for now.

"All troops ready for operation sir." One of the boarding party said to Jett and he saluted.

"Very good trooper," Jett replied, "Have the men stand at ease until we dock."

On the bridge of the corvette Lazaras watched as the shape of the freighter he believed to be called the *Grey Ghost* grew larger through his view port.

"Helm, bring us in beneath them," he said, "and align our portside docking port with their ramp."

"Aye sir." The helmsman responded as he adjusted the corvette's heading ever so slightly.

The freighter made no attempt to evade the corvette as it was manoeuvred into position. Then, when the main entry ramp of the freighter was directly above the corvette's docking port the helmsman brought the ship to a relative halt to the freighter.

"In position now captain." He said.

"Excellent," Lazaras said and he activated the intercom, "We are in position mister Carm, you may begin boarding procedures now."

## 4.

There was a muffled 'clump' as the customs corvette extended a docking clamp that locked in place around the exterior of the *Silver hawk's* entry ramp.

"Is everyone ready?" Vorn asked and the other rebels all indicated that they were, "Good," Vorn said before he turned to Mace, "Then I suppose that we should let them in before they decide to just cut a hole in our hull."

Mace stepped forwards and hit the control that lowered the ramp. There was a brief breeze as air rushed from inside the *Silver Hawk* into the docking tube that had previously been in vacuum. Mace then stepped back and looked down the ramp at the hatchway of the corvette as it swung open and a man in an Imperial officer's uniform appeared.

From behind the man more men in Imperial uniforms and blast helmets ran around him and up the ramp into the *Silver Hawk*. All of them were armed and had their weapons drawn.

"All clear sir." One of the troopers called back to Jett who then walked up the ramp after them.

"Who is the master of this vessel?" the officer demanded.

"I am," Mace replied, "Mace Grayle."

"And are you the licensed keeper of this vessel also?" Jett added.

"Yes."

Jett held out his hand, "I need to see your licence and manifest." He said and Mace handed him a datapad.

"Is this your entire crew?" Jett asked as he looked up from the datapad and at the six human occupants of the *Silver Hawk*, looking each one up and down.

"Yes, apart from our droids." Mace answered.

"Wait here a moment." Jett said and he marched back down the ramp and through the hatch into the corvette. Once there he activated the intercom to the bridge.

"What is it?" Lazarus asked.

"Its just as we were told captain," Jett told him, "the manifest says that they have a hold full of hyperdrive spares. Plus I think that some of the crew would fetch a good price on the slave market. There's a good strong labourer type and a pair of young women. Of course if we take the crew as slaves we can sell the ship as well."

"Good thinking," Lazarus said, "Go and tell the ship's captain that we are impounding his vessel and placing his crew under arrest for a licensing violation."

Jett shut off the intercom and returned to the *Silver Hawk*.

"Excuse me," Vorn said when the first officer reappeared, but as he stepped towards Jett one of the troopers around him raised his blaster and Vorn stopped where he was.

"What is it?" Jett asked.

"I was wondering if you wouldn't mind shutting off your jamming signal," Vorn said, "we are on a tight schedule and we'd like to contact the beings waiting for us to tell them about the delay."

"Well you're going to be delayed a lot longer than you think," Jett replied, "You're all under arrest and this vessel is being seized by the Empire."

"Oh dear," Vorn said, "that is a pity." And he nodded at Mace.

Before any of the pirate boarding party could react Mace reached upwards to where a panel in the ceiling had been loosened. He slid the sheet of plastic aside and pulled a bulky looking blaster with a flared barrel from the space above it.

"Deck sweeper!" one of the pirates yelled and the entire boarding party swung their weapons around towards Mace. But before any of them could fire Mace fired of his own weapon and there was a bright blue flash. The blast from his weapon did not appear as a narrow, focused bolt but instead the blue energy pulse spread out from the barrel and enveloped most of the pirates in its nerve-scrambling field of effect. Overcome by the stun blast, the pirates in the path of the blast lost consciousness and fell to the floor, their weapons clattering across the deck plates as they did so.

One of the two remaining pirates raised his weapon and took aim at Mace before he could get off another shot with his deck sweeper stunner. But in doing so he took his attention off the other rebels and was prevented from firing when Tharun slammed a fist into the pirate's throat. The former mercenary grabbed hold of the pirate's blaster as it dropped from his grip and swung it towards his only remaining foe, he squeezed the trigger as a bright red bolt of energy punched into the man's chest and he died instantly.

"Mace, Kara, go suit up," Vorn said, "everyone else with me. We need to hold their docking port to prevent them from breaking free of us."

Kara and Mace headed straight for the *Silver hawk's* topside hatch. The room beneath it doubled as an airlock when using this route in and out of the ship and it was in here that their vacuum suits and sidearms

had been left, along with an explosive charge the Jaysica had prepared for them. The vacuum suits were relatively simple environmental suits. Instead of a bulky pressurised garment they gripped the body of the wearer to prevent decompression. This meant that they maintained a fixed internal volume as the wearer moved and it was not necessary to go through a lengthy decompression procedure while suiting up. While they changed into their vacuum suits the remaining rebels prepared to board the corvette. It was not enough that they prevent the crew of the pirate vessel from seizing the *Silver Hawk*, they also had to keep it here long enough for Captain Mayan and the *Renegade* to arrive and that meant making sure that the pirates did not simply disengage from the *Silver Hawk* and fly away.

Tharun and Tobis retrieved their own weapons from where they had been hidden, locations chosen for their proximity to the entry ramp. Meanwhile Jaysica and Vorn chose to arm themselves with weapons taken from the fallen pirates. Their own blasters were compact weapons that were meant to be easily concealed, while those of their opponents were full sized with better stopping power and far greater ammunition capacity.

"Fire in the hole." Tharun said from the ramp and he plucked a grenade from his webbing and hurled it down through the open hatchway into the corvette before pressing himself against the bulkhead beside him.

There was a dull 'boom' as the explosive detonated. Without waiting Tharun charged down the ramp with his blaster rifle at his shoulder. He burst through the hatchway into the chamber where boarding parties would prepare and swept his rifle around, searching for a target.

"Clear." He called out and the other rebels followed him into the corvette.

"Right this is good," Vorn said, "if we can hold this room then the pirates can't disengage. Now we need to seal these other doors before the pirates figure out what's happening and decide to use a grenade of their own on us."

Tharun took aim at the control panel for one of the exits leading further into the corvette and fired a short burst and the panel exploded. Likewise Vorn aimed his stolen weapon at the control panel for the other door and fired, destroying it with a single shot.

"Well that should hold them for a while at least." Tharun said.

Lazaras briefly gave his bridge crew a puzzled look when he heard the distant explosion.

"What the hell was that?" he asked out loud, and then he turned to the comscan operator, "Get me Lieutenant Carm. I want to know what's going on down there now."

The comscan operator activated the ship's intercom on the crew's comlink frequency and attempted to raise the first officer. But there was no reply and after several failed attempts he gave up.

"I can't raise him sir." The crewman said.

"Damn it! I need to know what's happening!" Lazaras exclaimed and he turned to the guard standing at the back of the bridge, "Get down there now," he ordered, "bring the lieutenant to me if you have to, but I want his report."

The guard nodded at his captain before rushing from the bridge.

Mace was first out of the *Silver Hawk's* topside hatch followed shortly after by Kara. Standing on top of the light freighter most of the pirate's corvette was hidden by the hull of their own ship, with just its command tower sticking up. Using the many surface irregularities of the *Silver Hawk* as handholds the pair clambered over the hull of the ship towards the corvette.

"The transmitter we're looking for is right there." Mace said when they got to the edge of the *Silver Hawk's* hull and he pointed to a collection of antennae that stuck up from behind the corvette's control tower.

"So how do you think we should get over there?" Kara asked, "There aren't many places to grab hold of on their hull."

"That's what I brought this for." Mace said and he held up a reel of syntherope and began to unravel a length of the thin but strong cable. Then he folded back the end of it and tied it to form a lasso.

"Oh I've got a bad feeling about this." Kara said as Mace began to stand up straight.

"Just keep hold of me," he replied, "I don't want to go flying off into space after this line."

Keeping one hand firmly grasping onto the hull of the *Silver Hawk*, Kara used her free hand to hold onto one of Mace's ankles.

"Here goes." Mace said and he began to twirl the lasso above his head before he hurled it towards the antenna array of the corvette.

He missed.

The guard from the bridge slowed down just in time to stop himself from running right into the closed door to the staging area and he slammed his hand down on the control panel to open it. However, rather than sliding upwards immediately as he would have expected there was nothing but a 'clunk' sound and the door remained shut. The guard then turned around and ran back down the corridor behind him, heading for the second door to the staging area. He reached that door less than a minute later only to find that it too was



closed and so he reached out for the control panel to this door only to be rewarded with nothing more than another 'clunk'.

He then ran to the nearest intercom to signal the bridge.

"Captain Shallak sir," the guard began, breathing heavily, "I can't get to Lieutenant Carm. Both doors to the staging area are jammed.

On the bridge Lazaras shut off the intercom without replying to the guard before activating it again set to broadcast his voice over the entire ship.

"Intruder alert!" he said loudly, "All hands to repel boarders." Then he shut off the intercom and stood up, "I'm heading down there to deal with this myself." He said and he left the bridge.

Hand over hand; Mace pulled the syntherope lasso back towards him.

"Well I'm not used to this sort of thing," he said, "I've never even been to a Bantha rodeo."

Then he began to twirl the lasso around his head once more before hurling it at his target and missing it again.

"You're rubbish at this," Kara said, "Let me have a go."

"Alright then." Mace said and he held the syntherope down to her, "We'll swap."

Kara took hold of the syntherope and steadied herself while Mace told hold of the *Silver Hawk's* hull and then grabbed Kara.

"Hey!" she said, "Mind where you're putting your hands. I almost jumped into space."

"That was your fault, you moved." Mace replied and he grabbed her belt, "Now lets see how good you are at this."

Kara smiled and she began to twirl the lasso.

On the bridge of the pirate corvette one of the crewmen looked up from his control panel briefly before looking back down again. Then with his eyes wide open he looked back up again.

"What the hell is going on out there?" he called out and he pointed out of the port side view ports to where a pair of figures in vacuum suits were clinging to the top of the freighter docked with the corvette swinging a rope above their heads.

"Nothing good I'll wager," the comscan operator said as the other crewmen on the bridge all looked out of the view port at the pair of figures.

"Uh, Kara we have an audience," Mace said when he saw the faces peering at them from the bridge of the corvette, "could you hurry this up please?"

Kara said nothing; instead she hurled the lasso at the antenna array. The loop of syntherope sailed across the gap between the upper hull of the *Silver Hawk* and the array before striking one of the taller antennae.

Kara took hold of the syntherope that was still moving towards the array and tugged on it. This pulled the lasso at the end of the line back towards her where upon it became wrapped around another of the antennae. She tugged the line again and pulled it tight.

"See," she said, looking down at Mace and grinning at him, "That was easy. Now let's tie off this end and get over there."

"Smartass." Mace replied.

"Smart and firm."

"I know."

## 5.

The hammering began at one of the doors that the rebels had jammed and was then joined by more from behind the other door.

"Looks like they've figured out something's wrong major." Tharun said as the rebels dragged what furniture they could into an improvised barricade. The grenade had destroyed the intercom speaker in the staging area, so the rebels had not heard Captain Shallak's broadcast to his crew.

"They probably heard your grenade." Jaysica said.

"Would you rather we'd charged down here into a room full of armed pirates?" Tharun asked her.

"Not really." She replied and she took cover behind their barricade.

"Everyone know the drill?" Vorn asked.

"The doors open and we start shooting," Tharun replied, "and if they throw anything in here we duck and hope it can't penetrate this." And he tapped the barricade they had built.

Having been the one to successfully lasso the antenna, Kara went first across the syntherope line that now stretched between the rebels and the antenna array they wanted to get to. In the zero gravity of space she had no need to rest her feet on anything and she instead allowed her legs to float behind her. She pulled herself along the line until one of the antennae was within reach and she pulled herself onto the hull of the corvette and stood up straight once more.

"Okay, I'm across," she said to Mace, "now its your turn."

Mace nodded at her across the gap before he too began to pull himself across the gap. Upon reaching the far side he too grabbed hold of an antennae and used it help him stand on the corvette's hull.

"Okay then," he said, "let's get this charge set." And he produced a small block of plastic explosive from one of the pockets on his vacuum suit. A narrow black tube stuck out from the block at an angle.

"This looks like the antenna that Tobis described." Kara said and she tapped her hand on a particular antenna.

"Then I'll put the charge there then." Mace responded and he pressed the explosive charge against the base of the antenna so that the tube sticking out of it was pointed directly away from the corvette's hull.

"How long?" Mace asked.

Kara glanced back towards the *Silver Hawk*.

"I'd give it about five minutes for us to get back to the Hawk." she said.

"Five it is then." Mace said and he reached down for the dial on the end of the tube.

"Hold it!" Kara said suddenly, putting her hand down on Mace's shoulder. Mace looked up at Kara and she pointed across the hull of the corvette. Mace turned to see what she was pointing at and saw a pirate in a vacuum suit clambering out of the hatch above the starboard side staging area.

"We can't leave the charge here for them to diffuse." Mace said and he drew his heavy blaster pistol. Kara pulled her own weapon from its holster and both rebels fired at the pirate.

Had he had just a few more seconds to get out of the hatchway he would have had a chance, but instead the unfortunate man was caught as he was unable to dodge away from the blaster fire and both shots struck him in the chest. He was too far away for either Kara or Mace to see the man's face or hear his scream as he died, but they did see the brief plume of red vapour as blood pumped from the wound and boiled away in the vacuum of space before the heat from the blaster bolts sealed them.

The pirate's corpse floated way from the corvette as the man following behind him shoved it out of his way.

This pirate was more careful than the first and he held his blaster up above him and fired several shots in rapid succession towards the rebels beside the antennae array. The blindly fired shots were not accurate enough to hit either of them, but it forced them both to take cover and gave the pirate enough time to get out of the hatch and onto the outside surface of the corvette's hull.

Unlike Kara and Mace the pirate also had a set of magnetic boots built into his suit and the man was able to stand unaided on the metal hull and provide covering fire while three more suited pirates followed him out of the hatch.

The hammering had stopped a couple of minutes earlier and since then the only sounds inside the port side staging area had been the rebels breathing.

Suddenly there was a grinding sound from one of the doors and a stream of sparks flew across the room as the pirate's outside the door began to cut through it. A moment later there was another grinding and another stream of sparks at the second door as the pirates there also began to make use of cutting equipment brought to them.

"I don't like the look of this," Tharun said, "they could come in through either doorway."

"Well let's just hope that Kara and Mace get done soon." Vorn said.

Mace chanced another look over the hull past the antennae to the pirates now making their way across the hull of their ship. Another volley of blaster bolts flew over his head as the pirates saw him and snapped off several quick shots. Again their accuracy was not good enough for Mace to be hit by any of their shots, but it forced him to duck back down without firing back.

"We can't stay here." He said to Kara.

"But if we set the charge and leave then the pirates will be able to disarm it," Kara replied, "Plus we'll be caught out in the open while we cross back to the *Silver Hawk*."

Mace looked at the charge that was still pressed against the antennae and then over to his ship. Then he looked at Kara and smiled.

"I've got an idea." He told her, "Cover me."

Kara bobbed up and fired in the general direction of the pirates. One blast was lucky enough to strike one of the pirates in the helmet and he suddenly stopped moving as the bolt tore away not only half the helmet but also some of his skull. The man remained standing where he was, his magnetic boots holding him to the hull of the corvette and preventing him from drifting into space. Seeing the death of their comrade the other pirates ducked and returned fire, their shots passing harmlessly over the heads of the two rebels.

Meanwhile Mace grasped the synthrope lasso and untied the knot. Then he threaded the end of the cable through a metal loop built into his vacuum suit and tied it tightly in place. Then he reached for the detonator of the explosive charge and adjusted its setting.

"Are you crazy?" Kara yelled when she saw what Mace had just set the timer to, even though the microphone in her suit would have picked up a whisper, "Twenty seconds? We can't get back to the ship in that amount of time."

"Yes we can," Mace said, "now take my hand."

"Oh no," Kara said as she holstered her weapon and grabbed hold of Mace's hand, "I've got a really bad feeling about this."

Mace removed the safety pin from the detonator and looked at Kara.

"Now!" he shouted and both he and Kara leapt up and ran across the hull of the corvette before jumping into space, keeping hold of one another's hands all the time.

As soon as the blaster fire from the rebels ceased the pirates got up again and began to make their way towards the antenna array as quickly as they could. Then they saw the two rebels flying off into space. Almost as one they aimed their blasters and prepared to fire.

The explosive charge set against the antenna detonated before the pirates could fire. There was a brief ball of flame as the chemicals within the charge were triggered and the jamming antenna was torn away from the corvette. A moment later sparks from another damaged system ignited a jet of gas from a system damaged by the explosion and there was a second explosion, silent in the vacuum of space. Unlike the first one, this fire kept on burning as the ruptured gas line continued to feed fuel into it.

In the cockpit of the *Silver Hawk* Jeeves saw the flash of the explosions and then that the jamming signal from the corvette had ceased.

"Now Harvey," the protocol droid exclaimed, "send for Captain Mayan and the *Renegade*. Quickly Harvey, quickly."

Behind him the R5 unit chirped as it interfaced with the *Silver Hawk's* communications system and broadcast the ship's location on the specified frequency. The astromech droid chirped again to signal that it had carried out the task.

"Oh well done Harvey," Jeeves said before he was interrupted a 'thump' as something hit the *Silver Hawk's* cockpit canopy. Jeeves looked around to see Kara and Mace sprawled across the outside of the cockpit.

"Oh my." Jeeves said.

## 6.

"Signal received captain!" the comscan operator of the *Renegade* called out to Mallia Mayan when the transmission from the *Silver Hawk* was received.

"Transfer jump co-ordinates to navigation," Mallia ordered, "and all hand prepare for hyperspace." The comscan operator transferred the data to the ship's astrogator who keyed it into the navigation computer.

"Co-ordinates entered captain," the woman said, "ready for jump."

"Execute jump." Mallia ordered and the star field outside the Corellian corvette's bridge view port blurred into the tunnel like haze of hyperspace.

"They're nearly through," Vorn said as the slots being cut into the two doors came close to forming complete loops, "everyone get ready."

Then his comlink chimed and he pulled it from his pocket.

"Jamming's offline boss," Kara's voice said excitedly, "Mace and I are back onboard and awaiting your arrival. The *Renegade* should be here any moment." Then the link was shut off.

"You heard her," Vorn said, "let's get out of here before this place starts to get crowded."

Jaysica, Tharun and Vorn ran straight back up the ramp into the *Silver Hawk*. Meanwhile Tobis instead headed for the control panel that operated the docked seal between the two ships and deactivated it. There was a roaring and a sudden rush of air as the two ships, no longer locked together began to drift apart ever so slightly and their atmospheres began to escape into space.

Tobis ran as fast as he could, the pressure of the escaping atmosphere was pushing the two ships even further apart, though it was still a matter of a handful of millimetres and more air was rushing out into space.

"Move it lad!" Tharun yelled from the ramp and he held out his hand to Tobis.

The engineer grabbed hold of Tharun's hand and the bigger man pulled him onto the *Silver Hawk's* entry ramp. Then at the top of the ramp Vorn brought his fist down on the ramp control and it lifted up and sealed with a 'thunk' sound.

"We're clear." Vorn said into the intercom, "Let's go."

The *Silver Hawk* then shuddered as Mace powered up the ship's ion drive and flew it away from the corvette.

"Report." Lazarus snapped as he stormed back onto the bridge and sat down in his chair.

"The docking port is sealed again captain and we are no longer venting atmosphere," one of his crew replied.

"What about the freighter?" Lazarus asked.

"Heading away from us at full power sir," the comscan operator replied.

"Helm bring us about and lay in a pursuit course," Lazarus ordered, "Gun crews prepare to fire turbolasers."

As the customs corvette swung around in space there was a brilliant flash of light outside as a Corellian corvette dropped out of hyperspace in close proximity.

"Shields up!" Lazarus yelled, "It's a trap! Prepare to retreat."

Though they were both referred to as corvettes the two ships were vastly different craft. The customs corvette was a lightweight gunship built for speed and agility. On the other hand the Corellian corvette was a far more solidly built vessel with much better armour protection and a vastly superior power plant with which to supply both its shields and weapons. The only edge that the customs corvette had was in speed and its crew began to work to put as much distance between themselves and the new arrival as they could.

"They're running captain," the *Renegade's* comscan operator said.

Mallia activated her intercom.

"Gun crews target their engines," she said, "and fire at will."

The first blast from the *Renegade* struck the fleeing pirate ship's ion drives just as Mallia had intended and its engines began to splutter.

There were more flashes of turbolaser fire as the *Renegade's* other gun crews finished the job and the customs corvette was reduced to coasting on its current course.

"Return fire!" Lazarus bellowed as the lights on the bridge went out again, "If we can't run then we've no choice but to fight."

Mallia flinched as the pirate vessel returned fire on the *Renegade*. But though the pirates' fire was accurate the strength of their turbolasers was no match for protection granted to the *Renegade* by its shields and the attack did no damage.

"Finish them." Mallia ordered.

Every display that Lazaras looked at was flashing red as one system after another was disabled by the warship now circling them like a predator playing with its food. There were more flashes of turbolaser fire from the Corellian corvette and Lazaras saw one of his ships forward booms vanish in a massive explosion. Aside from the comscan operator and Lazaras Shallak himself all of the bridge crew were dead.

"We're finished captain," the comscan operator said as he wiped the blood of one of the dead bridge crewmen from his face, "we must abandon ship. We've drifted as far as the nearest of the inner worlds, we'll enter the atmosphere in about a minute. We can use the heat of re-entry to cover our escape."

"We're not leaving without this." Lazaras said and he pulled the suitcase sized Alliance communications module from behind the comscan station, "Its far too valuable."

"There isn't enough room sir," the comscan operator protested, "the escape pod is big enough for just the two of us."

"Yes you're right," Lazaras replied, "one of us would have to stay here." And he took a deep breath, "But it is traditional for the captain to go down with his ship."

The comscan operator looked at Lazaras in bewilderment.

"You don't mean..." he began.

"Yes I do," Lazaras said, "I resign," and he swung the communication module at the crewman and struck him across the side of his head, "Congratulations captain." He said and he ran towards the waiting escape pod with the communications module in his arms.