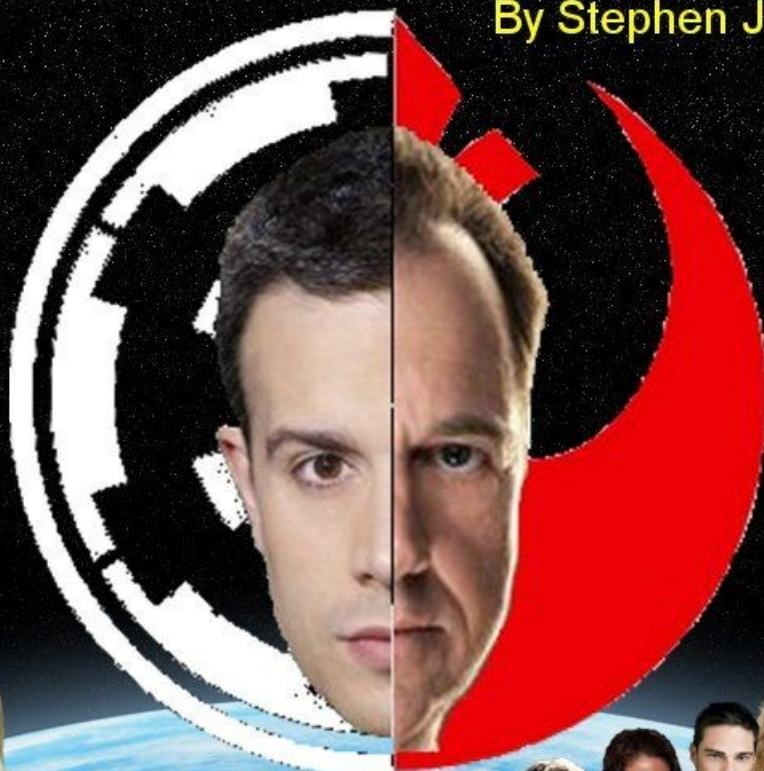


STAR WARS

1-12: Showdown

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...

SHOWDOWN

AN INFILTRATION GONE PROMPTS AN URGENT RESUCE MISSION. BUT THE CHANCE ARRIVAL OF VORN LARCUS' SON, ISB AGENT GARM LARCUS BRINGS THEM TOGETHER IN AN UNFORESEEN FATHER AND SON REUNION THAT HAS SEVERE CONSEQUENCES...

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

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1.

"There's one coming now." Tharun said as he studied the road ahead through his macrobinoculars, "Two occupants, just as expected."

"Right then, Jaysica get ready, everyone else out of sight." Vorn ordered, and most of his team of rebels moved away from the road. Only Jaysica, the smallest and least imposing member of the group remained where she was.

As the Allastran police speeder came closer she began to wave her arms in the air.

"Hey stop!" she called out, "I need your help!"

In response to her call the vehicle suddenly reduced its speed and the pair of lawmen sat inside jumped out, their hands on the blasters holstered at their hips.

"What's going on?" one of the men asked Jaysica.

"My friend's hurt," she replied, "she fell from a tree and I think her leg's injured."

The two lawmen relaxed following this, no longer believing a violent encounter likely and they both moved their hands away from their guns. One of them went to the rear of the landspeeder and removed a shoulder bag with a medical symbol on it.

"Right then," he said as he walked over to where his partner and Jaysica stood, "show us where your friend is."

"There's one right here." a voice came from behind a nearby tree, and Mace appeared from behind it holding a short but bulky looking blaster at his shoulder. While the lawmen now reached for their blasters again, Jaysica dived behind the landspeeder giving the smuggler a clear line of fire. He pulled the trigger of the deck-sweeper stunner and the energy blast from its flared barrel enveloped both policemen at once. Before either could get his weapon from his holster, they both fell to the ground unconscious.

"Quickly," Vorn said when he reappeared, "those of you going get ready, I want you ready to get moving in five minutes. Tobis get that speeder out of sight until we need it, Mace you're with me, we'll take the policemen."

Straight away the rebels acted on their leader's instructions. Tobis, the unit's engineer, got into the police landspeeder and drove it carefully between the trees to get it out of sight of passing traffic while Vorn and Mace grabbed hold of the policemen, dragged them clear of the road and began to remove their uniforms. While they did this Tharun, Kara and Jaysica all began to remove their own clothing.

As Vorn and Mace stripped the policemen they tossed their uniforms towards Tharun and Kara who put them on instead. In the mean time Jaysica having removed her jacket, boots, socks and trousers and now just wearing her underwear and a T-shirt began to rummage through the backpack she had left resting against a nearby tree.

Having completed removing the uniform from a police officer, Mace spotted that Tobis was now stood next to him looking directly at Jaysica as she searched her bag.

"Don't get too excited lad," he whispered into his engineer's ear, "she's not taking any more off."

"What? I, I wasn't..." Tobis began, but Mace interrupted him.

"Sure you weren't lad." he said.

"So how do I look?" Tharun called out and everyone looked in his direction.

"Ridiculous," Kara said, buttoning up her own stolen tunic, "When did the police round here start recruiting midgets?"

None of the rebels could help but smile at the sight of the big mercenary now clad in a police uniform that was clearly far too small for him. Both the sleeves of the tunic and the legs of the trousers were too short for him and only the fact that the policeman had been somewhat overweight allowed him to actually fasten up his new clothing.

"It'll be fine," Vorn said, "use your own boots. They look good enough if no one looks too hard, that'll cover up your legs and just roll up your sleeves to make it look like they're not supposed to come all the way down your arms."

Tharun nodded, and did as Vorn had suggested. In the meantime Jaysica had found what she was looking for, a set of bright orange overalls that when fastened. Would trap the wearer's arms inside them.

"Can someone give me a hand?" she said as she put her feet into the overalls and pulled them up. The other rebels, aside from Tobis, all clapped.

"Ha ha, very funny, now someone help me."

Tobis went over to Jaysica clutching a mem-stik in one hand that he gave to her.

"Fasten me up," she said without looking at Tobis.

"Aren't you forgetting something?" Vorn said to her.

"What?" Jaysica asked.

"Tool." Kara said.

"Hey, there's no need to be nasty." Jaysica replied.

"No, the tool that you need to escape with." Kara said.

"Oh yes," Jaysica said, "its still in my bag."

Tobis immediately looked in the backpack and found a small folded multi-purpose tool that he passed to Jaysica. She took it without saying a word to Tobis and folded her arms again.

"You know," Jaysica said to no one in particular, "just because I'm going along with this, I don't see why it has to be me that has to wear this thing again."

"Because you're the only one here small enough to fit inside it," Kara pointed out, "if you'd been put in one large enough for any of the rest of us when the local militia captured you, you'd have just fallen right out of it."

"So the reason that I'm being tied up," Jaysica said back as Tobis fastened the buckles down her back, "is that you're so fat you have to wear a man's clothes?" and she smirked.

Kara looked at Vorn.

"Can I gag her?" she asked, "I've got a roll of tape."

"No. Now you're all ready so get going."

Tharun and Kara helped Jaysica to the concealed landspeeder and put her on the back seat before they got into the front. Tharun winced as he sat in the driver's seat.

"This uniform's too tight." he said pressing a hand on his stomach.

"So you're too fat as well then?" Jaysica said from the back seat as Tharun began to drive off.

"Do you still have that tape?" Tharun asked Kara.

"Right here." she answered and she held up the reel.

"Good. Shut her up."

At the perimeter gate to the fortified Imperial Army base Tharun stopped the speeder and both he and Kara produced forged police identity cards with their own photographs on them.

"Lordis City police." Tharun said to the soldier that bent down to look at him.

"What's this about?" the guard asked, "And who's she?" he added when he saw Jaysica sat in the back seat bound and gagged.

"We caught her breaking into our parking lot." Tharun lied, "Our chief thinks that she's something to do with the rebels so he ordered us to bring her here and hand her over to you. Terrorism's not our jurisdiction."

The guard stepped back from the landspeeder and spoke into the comlink in his helmet. There was a slight delay while he waited for a response and then he leaned down again.

"Take her to the main entrance there." the guard said pointing towards a doorway on the large building ahead of them, "A security detail will take her from you there."

"Don't you want us to take her to you detention block?" Kara asked.

"No." the guard replied, "This is a high security facility, just go the door and don't wander about. If you do you will be shot." and with his warning given the guard stepped back again and the gate swung open.

Tharun drove through the gate and headed straight for the doorway indicated by the guard. As he brought the landspeeder to a halt a group of four stormtroopers appeared from inside the building. The elite troops did not come right up to the vehicle, instead they just watched as Tharun and Kara removed Jaysica from the back seat and brought her over to them. All the time they kept their weapons ready, though not pointed directly at any of the disguised rebels.

"We will take her from you." one of the anonymous stormtroopers said, and two others grabbed hold of Jaysica. Then the four troopers turned around and took their prisoner inside.

When Jaysica had disappeared from view, Tharun and Kara got back into the landspeeder and headed back to the gate.

Inside the Imperial base the four stormtroopers took Jaysica directly to a reception desk where a pair of female army troopers sat.

"Prisoner transfer." one of the stormtroopers said, "Suspected rebel caught by civilian police."

"Name?" one of the army trooper's asked.

"Unspecified." the same stormtrooper replied, "Prisoner was restrained and gagged before transfer."

The woman at the desk entered information into the computer terminal in front of her.

"Take her to the detention section." she said and the stormtroopers took Jaysica further into the base.

On the way to the detention section the stormtroopers took Jaysica through corridors filled with many different types of Imperial military personnel. Most of them ignored the stormtroopers and their prisoner, while others stared straight at her. Jaysica couldn't tell if they were wondering what she had done to be here or if they were instead thinking about what tortures would be inflicted on her when she was interrogated.

At the detention section itself, Jaysica was presented to an army officer at a control point.

"Is this the suspected rebel?" he asked.

"Yes sir." a stormtrooper answered. Jaysica guessed that it was the same stormtrooper that had spoken to Tharun and the receptionist, but given that they all looked alike and had moved about quite a lot on the way here, she couldn't be certain.

"Name?" the officer asked.

"Unknown."

"Remove her gag." the officer ordered, and one of the stormtroopers reached out and ripped the tape from over Jaysica's mouth.

"Ow!" she cried out as the adhesive of the tape attempted to remain stuck to her skin and she ran her tongue over her lips.

"Name." the officer repeated.

"Princess Palpatine," Jaysica responded, "he's my uncle."

The officer suddenly reached out and slapped her across the face.

"Ow!" she cried out again, "Torture's illegal you fascist." she said.

"So is treason you rebel scum." the officer responded, then he looked at the stormtrooper who had spoken to him, "Take her to cell dee three eighty." he said and the stormtroopers dragged Jaysica onwards.

At the doorway to the assigned cell a stormtrooper just shoved Jaysica inside before the door dropped shut behind her. Jaysica took a quick look around the cell. It was a small chamber, lacking in any furniture. There was only a raised surface along one wall that was just large enough for an average human to use as a bed. But it was what was above the 'bed' that Jaysica was interested in, that was where she saw a ventilation grill mounted into the ceiling. As was to be expected from a standard sized vent and in the Imperial military everything was standardised, it was large enough for her to fit through.

But first she had to get out of the overalls binding her.

"Excuse me sir." The soldier said as he walked up to the Imperial Security Bureau agent.

"What is it?" Garm Larcus replied. Normally posted on the sector capital world of Estran he had been despatched to Allastra to personally ensure that the new communications array would be up and running on schedule and he was anxious not to be dragged into any local issues that would delay him from getting back home.

"We have a suspected rebel prisoner sir. Local police just brought her in."

Garm sighed. In his experience most suspected rebels caught by local law enforcement were small time operatives at best. Most were nothing more than simple vandals that were no concern of his organisation. However, when the soldier handed Garm a datapad that showed an image of the prisoner on it his demeanour changed instantly.

"Take me to her." He said when he saw Jaysica's face on the datapad, "Now."

Walking towards the bed Jaysica carefully opened up the multitool she held concealed, unfolding the knife blade. All she needed to do was cut open the front of her overalls and then she could get her head and arms out and remove them. She turned the tool around in her hand and aligned the blade away from her body, having no wish to accidentally stab herself with it and then lifted up her arms as high as she could get it inside the overalls.

Then the tool slipped from her hand.

"Crap!" she exclaimed. Jaysica suddenly pressed her legs together and caught the tool between them as it began to slide down one of the legs of the overalls. She moved her free hand back down, attempting to reach the tool that was now pinned between her thighs. But in order to get her fingers anywhere near to the tool she had to slacken the pressure on the tool and it dropped from between her legs and onto the floor.

"Oh crap." she repeated, looking down at the blade that was supposed to have been her means of escape from both the overalls and the cell. Jaysica had spent an entire night trapped in these overalls before and she knew that without the bladed tool she had no chance of getting free. Somehow she had to get it back in her hands.

The obvious answer was to try and get it back up one of the legs of her overalls and Jaysica carefully lowered herself into a sitting position on the floor. Then she stretched out one of her feet and began to drag the tool towards her with her heel.

There was a sudden hiss as the cell door opened and Jaysica looked around to see a man in a pale uniform of an ISB officer standing in the doorway.

"Bring her," the ISB agent said and he walked away from the door, allowing a pair of soldiers to enter the cell and grab hold of Jaysica.

She kicked the tool into the corner of the cell before either of the soldiers could see it and she did not struggle as they dragged her to her feet and took her from the cell, following the path of the ISB agent.

They took Jaysica to an office with far more furniture than the cell they had thrown her in. Hopefully the ISB agent would just ask a few simple questions before sending her back to the cell while he decided how to proceed with the interrogation. All she had to do was not give away anything for now.

The ISB agent sat down behind a desk that the soldiers just stood Jaysica in front of before standing to attention either side of her.

"Dismissed," the agent said and the soldiers turned on the spot and marched out of the room, leaving her alone with him.

The agent activated the computer terminal on the desk and began to stare at its screen, intermittently typing something on the keyboard or manipulating the roller ball control set into the desk beside it. Not once did he even look at Jaysica.

This disturbed her and she stared directly at the agent. There was something familiar about the man, but she could not quite place where she had seen him before.

"You are Jaysica Horbid," the agent said, looking up at her at last, "you are twenty one standard years old and you have deserted from lawful Imperial custody twice."

Jaysica just looked back at him, amazed that he had been able to access information on her so quickly.

"Don't be so surprised," the agent said, "not only am I very good at my job, but I have been paying special attention to a particular member of your little group." and he turned the computer display around so that Jaysica could see what was on it, "Where is this man?" he asked.

There on the screen Jaysica saw an image of herself taken at a hotel that she had stayed in while undercover recently. In the image she wore just a shiny black swimsuit and she had her arm around a man's waist. The man was Vorn Larcus III, her unit leader and she realised where she had seen the ISB agent before. In an image that Vorn had shown her of his family.

"You're Garm," she said, "you're Vorn's son."

Garm Larcus got to his feet and strode towards Jaysica, standing right beside her.

"That traitor is no longer my father." he said snarling and jabbing his finger at her, "Now I'm going to give you some time to think about what you want to tell me about his location while I go and see if the special interrogation suite is ready for you." and with that he left the room.

Jaysica was terrified, she was not going to be sent back to her cell where she could recover the tool she needed to escape and complete her mission here. Instead Vorn's son would take her away and torture her. And he would probably enjoy it. Then she spotted the computer on the desk. It was still active, the image of her and Vorn still filling the display.

Jaysica walked around the desk where she saw the front panel of the computer terminal beneath it. At the base of the terminal she saw the sockets for mem-stiks and she let go of the one that she still clutched in her hand. Like the multitool earlier, only this time purposely, she felt the mem-stik drop down the leg of the overalls and onto the floor and then she lowered herself down onto the floor also. Carefully Jaysica gripped the mem-stik between her big toes and pushed it into one of the sockets on the computer.

As soon as the computer recognised the presence of the mem-stik it provided power to the tiny device. As soon as it was activated the mem-stik began to execute the function programmed into by an expert data slicer assigned to this mission. Here within the Imperial base the mem-stik was already inside the facility's protective firewall and it was able to transfer its destructive code directly into the base's information network and then erase itself, removing all evidence that the program now on the network had originated from it. When the computer display showed that the mem-stik had completed it's programming Jaysica removed it again using her toes. She dropped the mem-stik on the floor and then kicked it under the desk out of sight. If anyone found it they would assume it had just been accidentally dropped.

"Your friend's done it," Geran Pay exclaimed when his computer informed him that his program had been activated, "we're in."

Geran was one of the Alliance's leading computer and security experts. When it had recently become apparent that the Empire had been able to place an agent within the local rebel forces the Alliance had sent him to uncover them.

"That's great," Vorn replied, "how long until you have the information you need?"

"I don't even know if its kept here," Geran answered, "But it makes sense that any reports from their spy would come through here so I'm just copying everything they have and I'll sort through it later."

"We could have done that." Mace said, "How come you and your goons had to come along just to sit and watch a progress bar?"

"Because the virus may need some manipulation still," Geran said, "and since I wrote it I'm the best one to modify it."

There was the sound of footsteps approaching the *Silver Hawk's* lounge area and Geran closed his computer as Tobis entered the compartment wiping grease from his hands. The engineer looked at the trio of officers sat around the closed computer.

"W-What's happening?" he asked nervously.

"Your girlfriend's done her job." Mace told him, "It looks like she'll be back here soon."

"Jaysica's not my girlfriend." Tobis said before he headed out of the compartment in the direction of the bathroom.

“Are his denials always that lame?” Geran asked after Tobis had.

Both Mace and Vorn nodded.

“Well I guess he’s not the spy then.” Geran said, “He’d never be able to keep it a secret.”

2.

Jaysica sat in the corner of the office waiting for Garm to return and take her to be tortured. Her only hope lay with her companions and the chance that they would be able to get here and find her in time. But that relied on their being ready to infiltrate the base as soon as they got the signal and it had not been thought likely that she would have been able to upload the virus so rapidly. The she saw the vent. Unlike the cell where she had been held briefly, the air vent in the office was at floor level. Jaysica used the wall behind her to push herself back to her feet and walked over to take a closer look at it. Just as Jaysica had expected the vent cover was secured with a screw at each corner. Each of these screws had a simple straight slot in its head, so all Jaysica needed was something that she could force into the slot to turn the screws. And she needed to be able to do this before Garm returned and without the use of her hands too. She saw what she needed on the desk. There in a small container full of pens was a short metal ruler about a centimetre in width. Jaysica bent over the desk and grasped it between her teeth. Then she returned to the vent, crouched down and inserted the end of the ruler into the slot in one of the screws.

“What do you mean you’ve got him?” Director Helieos said when Garm placed the call to Estran. Corvin Helieos was the most senior member of the ISB in the sector and Garm had been in close contact with him ever since Moff Horatian had picked him for his own staff as a security advisor.

“Well its not him just yet sir.” Garm replied, “But its one of his people, I know it. He can’t be far behind.”

“This is excellent news Larcus. Capture your father and you’ll put a stop to all of the talk behind your back about your loyalty. Not to mention it’ll be a feather in the cap of the ISB. That spy Intelligence has placed in the Alliance hasn’t being coming up with much recently. With this we could really make headway in bringing the military around to our camp. Where is the prisoner now anyway?”

“In an office the locals lent me.” Garm said, “I’m leaving her to sweat for a while before I drag her up to the interrogation section and hand her over to the boys there.”

“Excellent. Keep me informed.” Director Helieos replied and he hung up.

At that moment there was a knock on the door of the office that Garm was using while he made Jaysica wait to be interrogated.

“Enter.” Garm called out and a young woman in an Imperial Army uniform entered the room.

“I’m sorry to interrupt you sir, but something’s come up in the detention section.” She said nervously, “We think it has to do with the woman prisoner.”

A few minutes later Garm burst from the turbolift into the detention section ahead of the woman soldier.

“What’s going on?” he demanded.

“The droid,” the officer in charge of the cells said pointing to a mindless ASP-7 droid, “was cleaning the empty cells when it found this.” And he held up something made of metal and plastic and handed it to Garm. Garm took the object and looked at it more closely. The item was clearly a folding multitool, opening it up Garm saw that it featured the pliers, blades and files that were typical of such widely available tools. Such an item should never be left in the possession of a prisoner; they were far too useful in escape attempts.

“And this was found in her cell?” Garm asked holding up the opened out tool and looking at the ASP-7.

“Affirmative.” The droid responded.

Garm rushed around the control console to stand behind the detention block officer.

“Call up the security feed from when the prisoner was brought in.” he snapped and the officer replayed the security feed from when the stormtroopers brought Jaysica into the detention section.

“No.” Garm said, “I need to see further back. Who brought her here to the base?”

“That’ll take a moment.” The officer said as he began to access the base’s exterior security recordings. He stopped when the display on his console showed a still image of a local police landspeeder with three people standing beside it. One of the three was Jaysica while the other two wore police uniforms.

“Zoom in on her.” Garm said and he pointed at what looked like a female police officer.

As the detention block officer adjusted the image Garm pulled out his datapad and accessed his files on his father’s rebel unit. He selected an image of Vorn taken by a hotel security camera with his arms around two women, one of whom was Jaysica. He held the datapad beside the image on the console and compared the other woman with the one wearing the police uniform. Instantly he saw that they were the same person.

“It’s a setup!” he yelled, “Those two people in police uniforms are rebels. The girl’s a plant!” and he ran back to the turbolift.

Garm had his blaster drawn when he burst back into the officer where he had left Jaysica, as did the two guards who had followed him from the detention section.

"Damn it!" Garm yelled when he looked around the office and saw no sign of Jaysica, only a vent cover lying on the floor beside a gaping hole in the wall, "Well what are you waiting for?" he yelled at the guards, "Sound the alert. We have an intruder."

"Ooh that doesn't look good." Geran said out loud even though he thought he was alone.

"What's not good?" Tharun asked as he and Kara having just got back to the *Silver Hawk* headed straight to the kitchen for something to eat and drink.

Geran looked up, placing a hand on the top of his computer display ready to close it if anyone got near enough to see what was shown.

"Oh, my program lets me know what the Imperials on the base are up to," Geran replied, keeping his hand on the display, "and it seems that they have just sounded an intruder alert."

"They must have found out about Jaysica then." Kara said and she looked at Tharun, "You go tell the boss." Tharun grabbed a piece of fruit from a nearby bowl.

"But I'm eating." He said and he took a large bite and began to chew.

"Well I don't care if they catch her." Kara said.

"Catch who?" Tobis said as he walked in.

"Oh it looks like the Empire's on to your girlfriend." Kara said.

Tobis opened his eyes wide and his jaw dropped. He spun around and rushed from the lounge towards the *Silver Hawk's* cockpit.

"He really is bad at hiding how he feels about her isn't he?" Geran said as he watch Tobis vanish.

"Yes." Kara replied while Tharun just nodded while he chewed.

"Does she know?" Geran asked.

"No." Kara said as Tharun now shook his head.

"Then she must be an idiot."

"She is." Kara said and Tharun nodded again.

Then there was the sound of rapid footfalls on the deck plating as Tobis returned followed by Mace and Vorn.

"What's going on?" Vorn asked as he and Mace ran over to the table where Geran had set up his computer.

"Oh nothing much." Geran said, "The base just went on alert that's all."

"This says intruder alert." Mace said, pointing to the computer screen.

"They know about Jaysica then." Vorn said.

"It does look that way." Geran said.

"We have to go and rescue her." Tobis said.

"Let's not be too hasty about this." Geran said, "We don't have all the data yet."

"Hang on a minute," Kara said stepping forwards, "are you suggesting we just leave her there?"

"You were saying you didn't care if she was caught a moment ago." Geran replied, "And you called her an idiot."

"Well she is." Kara responded, "But I know her. Why are you so eager to leave her there?"

"We wouldn't leave her there long," Geran said, "just long enough for me to finish copying all of their data."

"What's so important about the data?" Tharun asked, "What's so important that I just handed over a team mate to the Empire without knowing exactly why?"

"It's classified." Vorn said and he looked at the computer screen again.

"Oh that's bantha crap boss." Kara said.

"It was missions like this that got my old outfit killed." Tharun said, "Ones where stuff was kept from us."

"Mace we have to help Jaysica." Tobis said, "What's happening."

"There's a spy in the Alliance." Mace said.

"Oh great." Geran exclaimed, "Major, do any of your people understand the concept of classified information?"

"Shut up." Vorn said to Geran. Then he turned to his team, "Mace is right. I'm sorry that we've kept this information from you, but we were under orders."

"How long has this been going on?" Tharun asked.

"Since the attack on the safe world." Mace said, "We think the defecting frigate crew were given away by whoever it is as well."

"So he's not just another slicer then is he?" Kara said, indicating Geran.

"No." Vorn said, "He's been sent by Alliance command to find the spy."

"I'm supposed to be undercover." Geran said to Vorn, "How about you give them my bank details while you're telling them everything else as well?"

"We're going after Jaysica." Vorn said to Geran, "And you're going to help us."

"Like hell I am. I'm not part of your unit."

"This is my ship," Mace said, "and it's a long walk back to headquarters."

"Fine. I'm in. But I've got a very bad feeling about this."

Jaysica moved slowly along the air duct, pushing herself along with her feet. Periodically she would reach another vent and would look out into whatever room lay beyond. She was looking for somewhere that looked like it held tools she could use to free herself. But it appeared that the level that she was on was made up almost entirely of offices.

Suddenly she heard voices from close up ahead and she recognised one of them as Garm Larcus. Jaysica pushed herself to the vent that the sound was coming through and stopped to listen.

"She can't have gotten far." He said to someone else in an army officer's uniform, "She was bound when I left her, she must still be on this level somewhere."

"That may be so Agent Larcus," the officer replied, "but we know that she planned to be able to escape from her restraints so I'm making sure that we have the entire building sealed before I risk letting her get past us because we rushed to deploy to this level only."

"Then give me a glow rod and I'll go into the ducts after her myself." Garm snapped.

"That would be unwise." The officer said, "There is little room in the ventilation system and though we do not believe that she has a blaster she could still conceivably overpower you and take yours, further complicating matters."

Jaysica almost laughed out loud. The army officer was acting as though everything she had done had been according to some grand plan instead of the farce that it had become. Still trapped in the restraining overalls even one of the Emperor's youth movement could have apprehended her, never mind a trained man like Garm. Fortunately the army officer appeared to have higher authority when it came to base security matters and so he was directing the search operation. This gave Jaysica more scope to free herself and be ready for the others to arrive and pick her up.

She waited for the two men to walk away from the vent and then continued to push herself along in her hunt for a means of escape.

All of the remaining rebels were now clustered around Geran and his computer.

"This is the function we need." He said as he sent a command to the Imperial computer network, now vulnerable thanks to the invasive program unleashed by Jaysica inside its protective firewall, "It will grant us landing access to one of the more remote pads."

"So we'll just take the *Silver Hawk* in there will we?" Tharun asked.

"That's the idea." Geran said, "But you'll have to come up with a convincing transponder signal that makes them think we're a contracted Imperial supply ship." He added, looking at Tobis.

"I'll get right on it." Tobis replied and he left the room immediately.

"What do we do when we set down?" Mace asked.

"Well I was sort of hoping that you would be able to figure that out for yourselves." Geran replied, "What with you being the highly trained field operations unit and all. I'm just work with computers, remember?"

"We'll be just fine." Vorn said, "Won't we?" and he looked at the other rebels.

"Hey, its us." Tharun said.

"I may be able to give you some support," Geran added, "issuing false orders and manipulating their systems and such. But the more I do the more likely it will become that the Empire'll figure out we've gotten into their network. Then it's just a matter of time before they find the virus and purge it from their system."

Vorn shook his head.

"We need to avoid that." He said, "Having access to their network could be of greater value in the future.

We'll just have to do this the old fashioned way."

"What?" Kara interrupted, "Blunder about shooting everything that moves?"

"You have to admit that it works." Vorn replied.

3.

Jaysica reached a point in the duct where it split into three possible routes, all at right angles to one another. The route opposite curved downwards and from here Jaysica had no idea how far down the drop went. That left her with going left or right.

Jaysica chose right at random and she began to slide herself towards the duct to that side. She had just got her head into the duct when she found herself jammed. She wriggled about to try and free herself she realised that she had not turned sharply enough and that her shoulder was wedged at the corner where the duct dropped. As she wriggled again and tried to slide herself back in the direction that she had come from, but it was far more difficult to back up than to crawl forwards.

Jaysica pushed as hard as she could against the wall of the duct and she felt her head slide past the corner and she slid further along the duct. But she slid along the duct directly opposite to the way she had come from, right towards the drop.

For a moment Jaysica just lay there. She was now on her back and she could feel that her head and shoulders were over the edge of the drop.

"Uh oh." She said to herself and she tried to pull herself back from the drop. But again she found moving backwards difficult and instead she felt her body shift further towards the drop and she froze. She lay unmoving in the duct as she tried to figure out a way of getting away from the drop. Then she noticed something. She seemed to be moving. Just slightly, but she was definitely moving.

Jaysica realised that the duct did not just go from being level to a sheer drop. Instead there was a slight incline before the bend in the duct that she was now lying on and her own body weight was dragging her further down it every second.

"Oh no." she said, "No, no, no!"

Her body suddenly reached a critical point and Jaysica felt herself tip over and fall head first down the duct. She did the only thing she knew that she could do.

She screamed.

Jaysica did not see the grill at the bottom of the duct; there was no way that she could. But she felt the impact as she hit it headfirst and smashed through it into the room at the bottom of the duct. She expected to land on the solid floor below but instead was brought to a sudden halt when the grill that had been bent out of shape by her passage through it became caught on the waistband of her coveralls.

Jaysica laughed as she dangled upside down from the duct. She may have just narrowly avoided landing on her head following the drop, but she was now stuck here upside down. Then she heard the unmistakable sound of a droid at work and she tried to look around to see where she was.

There were piles of clothes on the floor all around her and Jaysica realised that she had landed in the base laundry. She smiled as she realised what good fortune this was. All she had to do was steal a uniform and she could disguise herself as one of the base personnel.

Then she remembered that she would have to get out her overalls before she could think about putting on a uniform and that she also had to find a way down from the vent.

As Jaysica looked around she saw the droid that she had heard. Not surprisingly it was a standard ASP-7 droid. These machines were crude even by the standards of labour droids, able to communicate only with 'Affirmative' or Negative'. But they had no curiosity, which was why the droid had continued with its work while Jaysica dangled from a hole in the ceiling.

"Droid come here." Jaysica said.

"Affirmative." The droid replied and it stopped what it was doing and walked over to Jaysica, standing in front of her.

"Good, now get me down from here." Jaysica said.

"Affirmative the droid replied and it reached up to where Jaysica was caught on the vent.

Jaysica squealed as the droid pulled her free of the vent and she felt herself dropping to the floor. There was a clatter as the droid also fell, Jaysica's legs knocking it down. Fortunately the drop was not too far and though slightly dazed by the impact, Jaysica soon recovered her senses.

"Undo the zip." She said, but the droid did not respond. "Droid, undo my zip." She repeated but again there was no response from the droid. Jaysica looked around and she saw that the ASP-7 droid was lay in a heap beside her on the floor, its head at an awkward angle. Apparently the force of Jaysica's fall had ripped some of its control lines out of their sockets, disabling the droid.

"Oh crap." Jaysica said to herself as she realised that she was going to have to come up with a new idea for getting free. After a couple of false starts she got back to her feet and headed for the door.

Garm was growing impatient. He had tried to point out that whatever Jaysica had been sent here to do she had yet to do it, but he had been ignored. He had no formal authority over military personnel so he had been forced to take a back seat while the base's own security forces went through their anti-intruder procedures. From what Garm could tell they had never had a problem with intruders at this facility. If they had, then he was confident that they would be more concerned with capturing the rebel Jaysica Horbid before she could cause any damage instead of just sealing off avenues of escape.

He watched the information coming in as security captain Larman's men reported themselves in position. Though he did not agree with the captain's strategy he did have to admit that his men were establishing an efficient cordon. It was just too bad that Jaysica was inside it along with her target, whatever it may be. Then an idea struck him. It seemed that Jaysica had planned to escape from her cell and the idea that she would just walk out of the door was laughable. Even if she could override the locking mechanism she would walk right into an armed security detail. This left only the air vent and that was also how she had escaped from the office she had been left in.

"Captain Larman." Garm said into his comlink, "I think that the intruder intends to use the ventilation system to reach her target. Tell your men to start their search with areas easily accessible this way."

Geran sat behind Mace and Vorn in the *Silver Hawk's* cockpit as they flew towards the fortified Imperial base, his computer perched on his lap.

"That should do it." The slicer said, "I've written us into their resupply schedule and made sure that we'll get given landing clearance at a reserve pad."

"What happens when they come to unload us?" Mace asked, keeping his eyes on the sky ahead of the ship, "They're bound to notice we're not Imperial personnel."

"The unloading will be done by droids and they won't start until their dock master gives them the go ahead."

Geran answered him, "I've checked all of this out. All we need to do is distract him long enough to incapacitate him and we'll have the docking bay to ourselves. I've been able to hack into their camera feeds too. As soon as we ask for landing permission their feed will go dead."

"Sounds good to me." Vorn said, then he turned to Mace, "We're in your hands now Mace." And Mace just grinned.

It was not long before the base came into view and its air traffic controllers challenged the *Silver Hawk*.

"*Black Spectre. Black Spectre.*" The controller signalled, using the false identity being broadcast by the transponder that Tobis had modified, "Please state your cargo and destination."

"Well your man certainly pulled off falsifying the transponder." Geran said to Vorn.

"He's Mace's man actually." Vorn corrected him, "I just get the use of his skills with the ship. But you're right, he is good."

Mace activated the ship's communications system to respond to the controller.

"This is *Black Spectre.*" He signalled, "We are carrying parts and technical crew for antenna construction."

"Hold for clearance *Black Spectre.*" The controller replied and there was a pause.

"They're not buying this." Mace said.

"We'll be fine." Vorn reassured him, "Just fly casual."

"*Black Spectre* you are cleared to land." The controller suddenly signalled, "Make your approach to bay thirteen."

"See," Geran said, "I told you it would work."

"Now its up to Kara." Vorn said.

Captain Larman had finally given his men orders to begin sweeping the base and much to Garm's relief he had taken the ISB agent's advice and was concentrating on areas where there was easy access to the ventilation system. Within a few minutes of the search beginning Garm received a call on his comlink.

"Squad leader trill herf xesh one one three eight reporting sir." A stormtrooper signalled to him, "My squad is in the laundry, the vent here has been forced open from the inside and the intruder has disabled the duty droid."

"I'm on my way down to you." Garm replied, "Are you in contact with central security? What do the surveillance cameras show?"

"There are no cameras in here sir," The stormtrooper told him, "and security central reports all feeds are now dead."

"She must have sabotaged them." Garm said, "Check out the systems on that level for signs of tampering. I'll get some more men and be with you as soon as I can." And Garm shut off his comlink and ran in the direction of the turbolifts.

"How do I look boss?" Kara asked.

The *Silver Hawk* had just set down in the docking bay and its occupants were preparing to meet with the dock master. In order to lull him into a false sense of security long enough for them to get close to him it had

been decided that it would be best if someone in an imperial uniform greeted him. Unfortunately the only such uniform aboard was one that had been issued to Jaysica, who was by far the smallest member of the group. Kara had just about been able to squeeze into it, but it was clearly too tight for her.

"Like a wookiee in an ewok costume." Mace suggested.

"I still think my idea was better." Tharun said.

"You are not getting naked." Vorn said to the former mercenary then he looked at Kara, "You'll do fine." He said.

"Thanks boss." She replied before she walked down the *Silver Hawk's* access ramp to meet the dock master.

"What if this doesn't work?" Tobis asked.

"Then I can be naked in sixty seconds." Tharun replied.

The dock master was already at the bottom of the ramp by the time Kara reached him. He was a middle-aged man with a miserable look on his face.

"What sort of uniform do you call that?" he snapped, "You're a disgrace."

"My commanding officer seems to like it." Kara replied.

"Well this is my docking bay and I expect you to be professional. Now what's your operating number?"

"Come here and I'll whisper it to you." Kara said and she leant closer to the ill-tempered officer. Instinctively the officer stepped closer to Kara, close enough for her to bring her knee up sharply between his legs. She grabbed him as he collapsed with a surprised gasp, clutching at himself and groaning. At the same time Mace, Tharun, Tobis and Vorn all came rushing down the ramp.

"Nice move lass." Tharun said as he looked at the dock master.

"Hey," Kara replied, "when all else fails knee them in the -"

"We get the message." Mace said.

"Take him into the ship." Vorn said, indicating the incapacitated officer, "Lock him up somewhere and get Geran to keep an eye on him while we search for Jaysica."

"Mind if change first?" Kara asked, "I can hardly breathe in this."

"If you must." Vorn replied.

Jaysica had thought that her capture was inevitable when the squad of stormtroopers had come rushing towards her. However in their hurry to get wherever it was they were going they had run past the room she had ducked inside without pausing to search it. Risking a glance from the doorway she saw that the stormtroopers were not searching any of the rooms along this section of corridor at all. Taking advantage of this, Jaysica slipped out of the room after the squad had gone past and headed the way they had come from. She stopped when she came to a door that was marked 'EMERGENCY ACCESS – ALL LEVELS' and hit the door control with her elbow. Beyond the door she had hoped to find a staircase that she could sue to get out of the basement level, but instead she found herself looking at a ladder. Unable to use her arms, she knew there was no way she could use this.

"Oh no." She said before turning around and heading back into the basement corridor.

Kara ran through the lounge area after changing from the too tight Imperial uniform.

"You might need these." Geran called out and Kara stopped and looked at him.

The slicer was holding up the rank cylinders that he had removed from the dock master's tunic when he had assisted Kara in locking him in a crate in the cargo hold. Kara held out her hands as Geran tossed her the cylinders that would allow them to access certain sealed areas of the base.

"I'll be on the comm." he said, "I'll let you know what base security's up to as I get the data."

"Thanks." She said before turning around again.

Before she could reach the ramp Kara was stopped again, this time by Vorn's golden coloured protocol droid.

"What is it Jeeves?" Kara asked, "I'm in a hurry."

"Oh mistress Bilstran do take care." The droid exclaimed, "The odds of successfully infiltrating an Imperial facility such as this-" but he stopped when Kara paced her hand over the droid's mouthpiece.

"Hey. Its me." She said before finally running down the ramp.

Jeeves watched as Kara joined the other rebels in the docking bay, then turned around as he heard the approach of another droid. Harvey, Tobis's R5 astromech droid rolled up beside and chirped.

"Why Harvey, I do believe you are correct." Jeeves said, "But they never listen to us droids."

4.

With Kara now accompanying them, the five rebels formed up by the exit from the docking bay. A row of ASP-7 droids stood beside the large doorway without taking any action to stop them, such a thing was far beyond the level of programming that the machines' possessed.

"Get ready." Vorn said, "Tobis, open it up."

Tobis slammed his palm on the button to open the doors and they slid apart with a hiss. As soon as there was a gap wide enough to fit through Tharun dove into the corridor outside and checked that the way was clear, his blaster rifle pointed where he looked.

"Clear." He said as the remaining rebels followed him out.

"Which way?" Mace said. The docking bay exit was in a side wall of a corridor that stretched out in both directions.

Vorn listed his comlink to his mouth.

"Geran?" he said into the device, "We could do with some directions."

"Security believes your young lady friend to be in the bottom most basement level." The slicer replied, "But thanks to my interference they've lost all camera feeds so they can't confirm it."

"I don't suppose you still have the feed?" Vorn asked hopefully. Having access to that information would give his team a great advantage over a security force operating blindly.

"Sorry major. If I'd had more time to come up with something then maybe I could have restricted the signals to me, but as it was all I could come with at such short notice was to disable the cameras entirely. In fact I think that the Empire thinks that your friend did it."

"Jaysica causing mayhem," Kara commented sarcastically, "who'd have thought it?"

"So which way to the basement?" Tharun asked out loud so that Geran would hear it via Vorn's comlink.

"There's an emergency access shaft down the corridor to your right." Geran replied, "Fifth door, just past the turbolifts."

"Right, let's move." Vorn said.

The turbolifts seemed to offer Jaysica her only way off the basement level. But if she just got into one of them and pushed a button she risked the door opening onto a level where someone was waiting. What she needed was a way to conceal herself inside the confines of the turbolift car. That was why she returned to the laundry.

While she had dangled from the vent shaft she had seen a row of simple carts used to transport dirty laundry down to this level for cleaning. Each one was large enough for her to hide in. Jaysica stood beside the carts and looked at what they contained. Two of them were empty so she would not be able to hide herself inside them at all. Most of the rest held Imperial uniforms of one form or another. Excellent disguises if only she could put one on but for now of little use to her, the bright colour of her overalls would stand out against the dull greys of the clothing they contained. However there was another cart that appeared to contain items of personal clothing belonging to base personnel in a variety of bright colours. That cart would do just nicely. Jaysica gave the cart a shove with her side. Floating on a replusorlift field, there was no friction between the floor and the base of the cart so it began to glide gently towards the door. Only the resistance of the air slowed it down and necessitated her giving it another shove to get it going again.

She guided the cart to the turbolift cluster and called for a car before hiding where she could see the turbolifts, but would not be visible to someone inside when the doors opened. After a few moments there was a 'ding' and the door to one of the turbolifts slid open. Jaysica waited a few moments more to allow anyone inside to reveal themselves before she ran towards the open door. She gave the cart another shove to push it inside the turbolift and followed it inside. She looked at the turbolift control panel and was disappointed to see that while it listed level numbers it did not give their functions. She would just have to try floors at random.

Pressing one of the buttons with her nose, Jaysica then clambered into the cart. Or at least she tried to. She lost her balance as she tried to lift her leg over the side of it and toppled in headfirst. Her cry of alarm being muffled as her face was buried in someone's dirty laundry.

"Eew!" she exclaimed as she lifted her head up, "How often do you change these?" she added to no one in particular. Then, as the turbolift began to move she wriggled beneath the clothing in the cart.

Had she waited a minute longer she would have heard the doorway to the emergency ladder shaft open as the rest of her team reached the basement.

Tharun was first out of the shaft and the former mercenary repeated his procedure of checking in all directions for any signs of hostile troops before giving the all clear.

"So which way now?" he then asked. Again they were in a corridor that went off in two directions. Vorn reached for his comlink, intending to ask Geran for directions once more. But he was interrupted by the sound of armoured boots on the floor.

"Stormtroopers!" Mace yelled. The smuggler stepped in front of the other rebel, positioning himself between them and the white-armoured Imperial troops that had just appeared from around a corner. He raised the bulky deck-sweeper that had earlier subdued the policemen and fired.

Though it was only a stun weapon the blast was powerful enough that the armour the stormtroopers wore could not fully protect them and all but one collapsed to the floor. The last remaining stormtrooper activated his helmet's internal comlink and began to shout a warning before a burst of fire from Tharun's blaster rifle cut him down.

"Okay everyone." Vorn said loudly, "The Empire knows we're here. Now lets grab their guns and keep moving."

"Rebel troops have entered the base! Rebel troops have-"
The transmission was cut off suddenly.

"Who was that?" Garm demanded, pulling out his own comlink, "What's happening?"

"Intruder's in the basement levels sir." The voice of one of the central security staff replied over the link, "We've lost contact with the unit on your floor."

"She let them in." Garm hissed, "That's why she headed down here. What's happening with those cameras?"
"We're working on it sir. The problem looks to be software, we're trying to install a patch now."

"Oh no." Geran said as he watched the data being fed to him from the Imperial computer network and he grabbed his comlink, "Major!" he shouted into it.

"What is it?" Vorn replied.

"Trouble." Geran said hurriedly, "The Imperials just got their surveillance cameras back on line. They can see you!"

"Agent Larcus we have the cameras back online!" an excited voice called from Garm's comlink.

Garm fumbled with the device for a moment as he pulled his datapad from his pocket and slotted the comlink into it.

"I'm online now," he said, "patch the feed to me directly."

"Yes sir."

Garm looked at his datapad as its display was split into numerous sections, each one showing the feed from a different camera. One of them caught his eye immediately and he tapped it with his finger so that it filled the entire display screen. There he saw a group of five humans rushing down a corridor he knew to be on his level. At the front of the group was a large man in military style clothing and armour. He raised his weapon, pointing it straight at the camera and then the screen went black as he destroyed it with a single shot. Garm wound the feed back to before the camera was destroyed and froze the image. Then he tapped the image over the face of one of the rebels pictured and it zoomed in to that location.

"I knew you wouldn't be far behind her." Garm said, smiling as he looked into the eyes of his father.

"You know blowing up cameras makes it more difficult for me to tell you where the Imperial troops are."

Geran signalled as Tharun shot another camera to pieces.

"That may be so," Vorn replied over the comlink, "but at least this way if we double back they won't be able to see us any more. Now have you found Jaysica yet?"

"No. She's not in an area covered by any of the cameras."

"Then it's a fair bet that the Empire doesn't have her yet then." Garm said, "We're heading back to you now. See what you can do about finding her in the mean time."

"We're just leaving?" Tobis said suddenly, "We can't just abandon her."

"We can't stay here now that the Empire can track us." Mace pointed out, "Jaysica's smart enough to figure out that we're here and meet up with us there."

"Did you just use the words 'Jaysica' and 'smart' in the same sentence?" Kara snapped.

"Not now!" Vorn shouted.

Jaysica decide that she'd waited long enough to determine that there was no one in the corridor outside the now stationary turbolift car and she sat up from beneath the clothing on top of her and took in a deep breath of air that hadn't passed through dirty laundry first. She stood up and was able to step out of the cart without falling flat on her face this time. She crept towards the open door, still listening out for any sign of people in the corridor.

There was 'ding' sound as Jaysica leant out of the turbolift and looked each way down the corridor and she jumped forwards just as the door slid shut and the turbolift was called top another floor.

"There better be something sharp on this level." Jaysica said to herself as she began to walk down the corridor, keeping close to the wall.

"Agent Larcus," Captain Larman's voice called out from the comlink, "I suggest you check out the signal from camera dorn four. It's the infiltrator."

Garm tapped on the screen of his datapad to call up the image being sent by the camera Captain Larman had told him to look at. There he saw Jaysica making her way down a corridor and he was surprised to see that she was still bound by the bright orange overalls that she had been wearing when had left her in the office.

"Why didn't her friends untie her?" Garm said to himself, "And how could she have let them into the base like that?" Garm paused for a moment then he signalled back to Captain Larman, "Where is that camera located?" he asked.

"Level four." Captain Larman answered, "near the turbolift cluster on the south side."

"The other rebels are on the south side also," Garm said, "I'm heading that way now. What else is on that side of the base?"

"Mainly storage Agent Larcus. Plus some docking bays for supply ships."

Suddenly things made more sense to Garm.

"What ships are docked there now?" he asked.

There was a pause as Captain Larman looked up the information that Garm requested then he replied, "Just one. A supply ship that docked about fifteen minutes ago."

"Was it cleared properly?"

"Yes sir, it was a listed flight. Though the dock master hasn't reported in yet. We were going to check on him but –"

"The rebels are there." Garm interrupted, "They used the supply ship to breach the base defences to retrieve their colleague. Whatever their plan was, I think its gone wrong for them."

5.

Jaysica skidded to a halt as she drew level with a window and she looked through it. The window did not look out onto an area outside the building, but instead into another room inside the base. In this case the room was a large chamber that was much taller than the corridor that Jaysica was in at that moment. Since the corridor was at a higher level than the floor of the room beyond the window Jaysica found herself looking down into it. Right at the familiar shape of the *Silver Hawk*.

Her friends were here to rescue her.

"Oh yes!" she called out loud even though there was no one around to hear, "Thank you guys. Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

Then something occurred to Jaysica.

"So how do I get down there?" she said to herself.

"No." Garm broadcast as he strode towards the turbolift cluster ahead, "Ignore the fugitive, she's not the real threat at all. We need to locate the other rebels. I want them alive. Now what is the situation regarding their ship?"

"We have a team on the way there now." Captain Larman replied, "They should have it secured at any moment."

The army squad found the doors to docking bay thirteen still open from when the rebels had made their exit and the ASP-7s still lined up awaiting orders. One of the soldiers ran up to the droids.

"Are there any rebels here?" he said to the droids.

"Negative." The droids responded in unison.

With this information the soldiers turned back towards the doorway, not noticing the droids in the *Silver Hawk's* cockpit.

"Lieutenant Pay!" Jeeves called out as the droid moved as quickly as possible into the lounge area, "There are Imperial soldiers inside the docking bay!"

"What?" Geran shouted back as he leapt to his feet, "imperial troops? How many of them are there? Are they coming this way?" and he plucked his compact hold out blaster from its holster and checked it was loaded.

"Oh no sir." Jeeves replied, "But they appear to have set up an ambush for Major Larcus and the others. You have to do something about them. There appears to be a full squad of them."

"Like what? I'm not a combat soldier. I've got this one tiny blaster against an entire squad." And he held up his gun for Jeeves to see. At the same time Harvey rolled into the lounge behind the protocol droid and chirped.

"What did he say?" Geran asked Jeeves.

"Harvey was just pointing out that this ship is equipped with a laser cannon." Jeeves replied.

"A laser cannon? Will it work while we're landed?"

Jeeves looked down at Harvey as the astromech droid chirped again.

"Harvey says it will sir. The engines may not be active, there should be enough power in the capacitors to operate the cannon for two or three shots."

"That could be enough." Geran said, putting his blaster away, "I'll get to the turret. Harvey I want you to get the ship ready, the others may want to leave pretty quickly. Even if they don't it would be nice to have some extra power for the gun."

Geran rushed from the lounge, followed by Harvey and headed for the *Silver Hawk's* gun well while the astromech droid headed instead for the cockpit. With the ship on the ground its artificial gravity had been shut down and Geran struggled to climb into the gunner's seat that was aligned at a right angle to the rest of the ship. Though not overly familiar with starship weapon controls he was able to bring the cannon on line with a minimum of fuss. As soon as he did a warning light appeared on the targeting display to tell him that he had only limited power available to him.

"I better make this count." He said to himself and he swung the turret around to face the Imperial troops.

The only warning that the soldiers in the docking bay had that they were about to come under attack was the whirring sound as the *Silver Hawk's* laser cannon swivelled around to face them.

"Run!" one of the soldiers yelled a moment before the cannon fired.

The targeting systems of the laser cannon were not designed for shooting at infantry, but at a range of only a few metres and against troops taken by surprise its accuracy was good enough. The first blast vaporised two of the soldiers entirely, while another three died as the shot superheated the air around them. The second

shot took out the neat row of ASP-7 droids and the soldiers who were trying to move around and behind them to get close enough to the *Silver Hawk* to be under the minimum range of its roof mounted weapon. With only two soldiers remaining, neither of whom had any idea of how many rebels they faced they opted to flee. Running as quickly as they could, they headed for the large doors leading into the corridor, where they were caught by the third blast from the laser cannon.

"Well that's it," Geran said into the intercom, "the capacitors are dry. How close are we to having the engines on line?"

There was a chirping sound from Harvey followed by the sound of Jeeves' voice.

"Harvey says that we will be ready for lift off in two minutes sir. And well done on taking out those soldiers."

"It was nothing." Geran said, knowing just how lucky he had really been.

"What the hell was that?" Vorn said when they heard the explosions as they exited the access shaft, "It sounded like it was coming from the docking bay."

"It was." Tharun said.

"It sounded like a laser cannon." Tobis added.

"What the hell is that slicer doing with my ship?" Mace said and the rebels broke into a run.

Instinctively Jaysica had ducked down below the level of the window when the *Silver Hawk's* laser cannon had fired. But now that the shooting seemed to have stopped she got back to her feet and looked down into the docking bay again as she breathed a sigh of relief when she saw the *Silver Hawk* was still intact and undamaged.

"Oh yes!" she suddenly shouted out loud as she then saw the familiar faces of her fellow rebels rushing into the docking bay, "Hey guys! I'm up here!" she screamed and she banged her shoulder against the glass of the window.

As they ran towards the *Silver Hawk's* access ramp the rebels heard a faint banging sound and a muffled cry from above. Tobis was the first to look up and see Jaysica staring down at them.

"It's Jaysica!" he yelled out, "Look!"

"Is she still wearing those dam overalls?" Kara said.

"Looks like it." Tharun said.

"She dropped the tool didn't she?" Mace added.

"Never mind that now." Vorn said, "We need to go get her." And he looked up at Jaysica and shouted back at her, "The access shaft!" he yelled, "We'll meet you there!" and he waved in the direction of the access shaft and its ladders before the rebels ran back out of the docking bay.

Jaysica heard Vorn shouting and just about understood the word 'shaft'. That added with his waving told her where he wanted her to be and she ran back down the corridor the way she had come.

Outside the docking bay Vorn rushed ahead of the rest of the rebels.

"Wait here." He ordered, "Cover me." And they crouched down, two facing in each direction with their stolen rifles at the ready.

When Vorn reached the access shaft he found that the door was still open from when they had left it only a few minutes earlier.

"Jaysica are you up there?" he shouted

"I'm here." Jaysica shouted back down, "But I can't climb down."

Vorn stepped into the shaft and looked up at Jaysica.

"Jump down." he said as he slung his rifle over his shoulder and stretched out his arms, "I'll catch you."

"I can't." Jaysica replied.

"Do it. Quickly."

"Okay then." Jaysica said and she stepped over the edge of the shaft.

As Jaysica fell from the level above Vorn pushed her to one side so that she landed on the floor instead of dropping down to the next level.

"That wasn't much of a catch sir." She said as Vorn picked her up.

"It stopped your fall didn't it?" he said as he dragged her out into the corridor, "Now move!"

Jaysica ran towards the other rebels with Vorn right behind her. As they ran there was a 'ding' and the doors to one of the turbolifts slid open just after Vorn passed it.

"Hold it right there!" Garm yelled as he stepped out and pointed his blaster at Vorn.

Vorn ground to a halt at the sound of his son's voice, a voice he had not heard in such a long time and he turned around to look him in the face while Jaysica continued to run.

"Would you really shoot me?" he asked, "I'm your father Garm. Whatever's happened you must remember that."

Behind Garm a squad of stormtroopers exited the turbolift car and formed up, pointing their weapons down the corridor at the rebels. But with Garm and Vorn between them neither side could risk shooting in case they hit their own man.

"You can't do it can you?" Vorn said, "There's still that much good in you that you can't shoot your own father." And he turned around.

"Stop where you are!" Garm yelled, but Vorn took another step and then another.

"Vorn!" Kara screamed as Garm fired. The blaster bolt from his son's pistol hit Vorn between the shoulders and he toppled forwards, "No!" she screamed and she fired at Garm. Her shot struck the ISB agent in his shoulder and he dropped his weapon and fell to the floor clutching at the wound.

With the way between them now clear the stormtroopers and rebels all opened fire.

"There's too many of them!" Mace shouted, "We need to get out of here!"

"No!" shouted Kara, "Not without Vorn!" and she kept on firing.

"We have to go Kara." Tharun said, putting his hand on her shoulder.

"I'm not leaving him." She replied.

"Jaysica, Tobis, get back to the ship and get her ready for take off." Mace ordered, "Tharun, help me with her."

Tobis and Jaysica ran for the *Silver Hawk's* access ramp while Mace and Tharun pulled the blaster from Kara's hands and dragged her back towards the ship.

"Let go of me!" she shouted as she kicked and tried to break their grip.

The stormtroopers followed the rebels to the docking bay. Jaysica had run straight aboard while Tobis had stopped at the base of the ramp and was pointing his blaster towards the door. When the stormtroopers appeared he fired the weapon on full auto, forcing them to duck back while Mace and Tharun had the time to drag Kara to the ramp.

"I thought I told you to get the ship ready." Mace said as Tobis came aboard behind them.

"It's already done." Geran, who was waiting at the top of the ramp said, "I had the droids do it. Hey, where's the major?"

"He's not coming." Tharun said.

"He's dead." Kara added as she slumped onto the floor and wept.

Mace rushed to the cockpit, leaving Geran, Tharun and Tobis with Kara. He didn't know exactly where Jaysica had disappeared off to but he knew she was aboard; Tobis would never have shut the ramp while she was still outside.

"Nice work little guy." Mace said to Harvey when he saw that all of the *Silver Hawk's* systems were indeed online and he leapt into the pilot's seat. Glancing through the viewport he saw the stormtroopers that had pursued them here filing into the docking bay and spreading out. Mace sent power to the *Silver Hawk's* replusorlift engines and felt the ship rise up off the ground. As blaster bolts bounced off the ship's hull he backed it out of the docking bay and then headed for space.

Kara couldn't hear anything but the sounds of the ship itself when she got out of the shower and went back to her cabin. The door was open and the light was off. In the dimness inside she spotted Jaysica sat on the floor leaning on the bunk.

"No one untied you." Kara said when she turned on the light and saw that Jaysica was still wearing the restraining orange overalls.

"Again." Jaysica said softly and she shrugged, "But it doesn't seem to matter."

Kara got closer and it looked like Jaysica had been crying, her eyes were red. Kara just sat beside her and wrapped an arm around her. Jaysica slid closer.

"You all tease me," she said.

"Is that what this is about?" Kara said, "I didn't know they'd left you tied up."

"No, that's not it. I never actually asked anyone to untie me. I just came straight here when we got back."

"Then why did you just say that?"

"Because it's true, you tease me. People always do, they always have. Acting like I do things on purpose." Kara said nothing.

"Except Vorn," Jaysica continued, "he never did. Well hardly ever, but he was normally very nice to me and now I've got him killed."

"That's ridiculous," Kara said.

"What do you think will happen to us now?" Jaysica asked, "Now that the major's dead?"

"I don't know." Kara said, "I suppose Mace will get command and we'll carry on, either just the five of us or with someone else as a replacement for the boss."

"What if we get a new commanding officer that doesn't want me on the team?" Jaysica asked, "It took ages for the major to select me after I joined the rebellion."

"We were a joke." Kara answered.

"What?"

"The boss didn't pick us, we were assigned to him as a joke." Kara explained, "He told me once. I'd punched my last commanding officer and you – well you know, so neither of us was high on the list for field units. We only got assigned to the boss because someone who handed out assignments didn't like him either and thought it would be funny."

Jaysica drew away from Kara and looked at her.

"So he didn't really like us at all?" she said, "But I thought -"

"Of course he liked us." Kara interrupted, "Me more than you obviously."

"There you go again. Teasing me."

"I'm sorry. But he did like us and I think that he got a perverse pleasure knowing how much that annoyed whoever it was that assigned us to him."

"Are we interrupting?" Mace's voice called out from the doorway and both Jaysica and Kara looked up to see him standing there with Tharun and Tobis behind him.

"Come on in." Kara said, "Misery loves company and all."

The trio of men walked into the cabin and sat on the floor with the two women. Tharun placed five glasses on the floor between them all in a row.

"I've been saving this for a special occasion." Mace said as he poured a measure of Ergesh Rum into each,

"I figure now's as good a time as any."

"Where's Geran?" Jaysica asked.

"He's doing something with his computer." Tharun told her, "This gathering's just for us." And he took a glass.

"I can't drink like this." Jaysica said, wriggling her arms inside the overalls.

"I thought of that." Mace said and he produced a straw that he put into one of the glasses.

"We could just untie her." Tobis suggested.

"She's just fine." Kara said and she picked up the glass with the straw and held it close to Jaysica's mouth.

Satisfied that everyone present had a drink, Mace raised his own glass.

"This is for you Major Vorn Larcus the third." He said, "Wherever you may be now."

"I came as soon as I could." Director Helieos said to Garm, "I believe that congratulations are in order."

"It was a close thing." Garm said as he stood up to greet his superior, his arm in a sling from the injury inflicted by the blaster bolt.

"Yes, I heard there was extensive nerve damage," Director Helieos said.

"I was just about to go and see if the doctor had any news yet." Garm replied.

"I'll come with you."

The ISB director accompanied Garm to the medical unit, opening doors for the injured agent and smiling all the time.

"Do you have a prognosis yet?" he asked the doctor when they entered the medical unit.

"I do." The doctor responded, looking down at his datapad, "There was significant damage from the blaster bolt striking near to the spine, but I believe that we have repaired all of that successfully."

"So what happens now?" Garm asked.

"It's just a matter of time." the doctor replied, "We just have to wait for things to heal by themselves."

Garm and Director Helieos turned around as the doctor walked away.

"You did well Agent Larcus." The director said, "No one could possibly doubt your loyalties. Not now that you've done this."

"No, not now I've done this." Garm repeated flatly. He did not look at Director Helieos; instead he gazed into the bacta tank in front of them both. Inside the tank of healing fluid floated Vorn Larcus III. Readouts beside the tank indicating that he was in a critical state, but still alive.