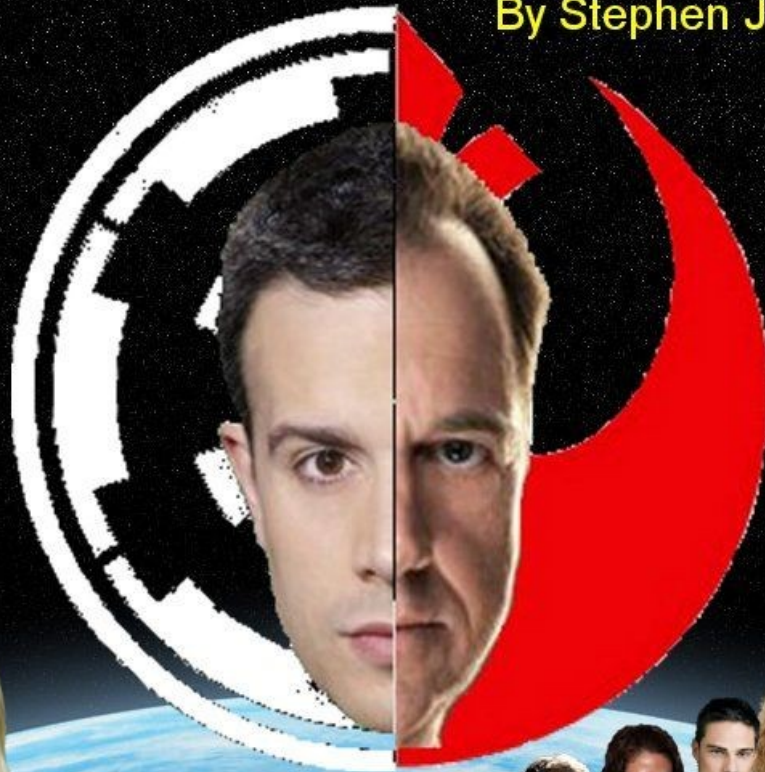


STAR WARS

7-01: A Friend in Need

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 MAGE GRAYLE, CAPTAIN OF THE FREIGHTER THE
SILVER HAWK TAKE THE FIGHT TO THE EMPIRE.

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

A FRIEND IN NEED

WITH ONLY CASS HAVING ESCAPED CAPTURE BY THE EMPIRE IT LOOKS AS IF THE
TEENAGE GIRL WILL HAVE TO FIND A WAY TO RESCUE THE OTHERS ON HER OWN.
BUT THE REBELS ARE NOT WITHOUT ALLIES EVEN AT THE HEART OF IMPERIAL
POWER IN THE SECTOR...

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

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1.

Except when engaging in combat operations, night shifts on the bridge of a star destroyer were typically slow and this was especially true when the ship was moored at fleet headquarters over the sector's capital world of Estran. Fleet headquarters consisted of a single massive orbital complex fixed in position by an orbital elevator that ran down to the surface of Estran. The complex was forty kilometres across at its widest point, large enough for half of the sector group to moor at once and given the protection it could provide to docked ships in the form of deflector shields, turbolasers, anti-starfighter laser cannons and the hundreds of TIE fighters and skipray blastboats housed in the hangars dotted around its structure there was no need for the crew of a docked ship to concern themselves with the possibility of an attack.

However, as Lieutenant Owen Halowan studied the automated status reports from across the ship he heard hushed conversation from further along the crew pit, combined with laughter.

"Something amusing you?" he asked as he walked up to the crewmen. Most were enlisted personnel but there was also a commissioned helmsman amongst the group and it was odd for officers and enlisted men to indulge in casual conversation. The whole group, including the helmsman who Owen outranked snapped to attention and stared straight ahead, "Well?" he asked, "What's so funny?"

"Report from space dock security sir." one of the comscan operators that was a part of Owen's department answered and Owen sighed. In all likelihood a member of the *Horrific's* crew had been detained for a breach of discipline and now it would be up to him to organise someone to go and fetch them from the detention section.

"Who's been arrested?" Owen asked and the men in front of him exchanged glances and smiled at one another knowingly. Owen frowned, "Tell me exactly what's going on." he said, "Now."

"Well it's the admiral sir." the helmsman answered.

"Admiral Hall?" Owen exclaimed. The tector-class star destroyer *Horrific* was Admiral Hall's personal flagship, the lead ship of his battle squadron and the admiral himself was well known for his demanding command style, "But he was supposed to be attending that party at Lord Desh's home. What's he been arrested for?"

"He hasn't sir." another of the enlisted men replied, "It would appear that the admiral along with Captains Naje, Celtis and Yay fell victim to a rebel plot to infiltrate fleet headquarters and were-" then he trailed off. "Incapacitated." another man added with a smile.

Owen frowned again. The three other officers named were all female, the captains of a line of older venator-class star destroyers used as carriers for fighter support rather than intentionally committed to front line action. The highly traditional Admiral Hall held a dim of females in the military and the only reason they had accompanied him to the party was for public relations purposes.

"Are they okay?" he said.

"Captains Naje and Celtis were found unconscious in their quarters, drugged but unharmed." the helmsman responded.

"And Captain Yay and the admiral himself?" Owen asked.

"Unharmed but-"

"But what?"

"But they were both found together." the comscan operator said, "In the admiral's personal quarters."

"In bed." another man added. Then he pointed to the display of the console they had been gathered around that Owen had not paid any attention to until now, "Look, security attached an image to the report."

"Oh now that's just-" Owen began until he noticed the image for himself and his eyes widened, "Good heavens." he exclaimed as he tilted his head sideways. Then a thought occurred to him, "So why hasn't a general alert been sounded?" he asked.

"Because the rebels have all been caught." the helmsman replied, "A dozen of them according to the report."

"I see. Carry on." Owen said, nodding and then he turned and walked away, apparently returning to the status reports he had been studying. However, in reality he was subtly plugging his comlink into his datapad so that he could access the ship's main computer wirelessly. Then he called up the security report that had amused the other crewmen so much.

As well as a description of how the rebels had attempted to disable the fleet headquarters by attacking its command and control centre and also the main communications suite as well as trying to steal a Corellian gunship that had been captured from pirates there were also numerous images. Some of which, especially the one that showed Admiral Hall and Captain Yay in a very compromising position looked to have been included for the sole purpose of embarrassing the high ranking officers who had been the unfortunate victims of the rebels' plan. But the image that caught Owen's attention was one taken by surveillance camera in the docking bay where the rebels had landed their stolen shuttle. As well as the security detail that had met the

rebels and allowed them to walk unopposed onto the station thanks to their appearing to be returning the drunken officers the image showed the rebels themselves carrying the incapacitated officers between them, along with three droids bringing up the rear. Owen zoomed in on the rebels and looked at each one in turn. Then something struck him as odd and he began to count them. There were two rebels carrying each officer between them and five others, all wearing the uniforms of Imperial officers themselves, making a total of thirteen. The helmsman had indicated that a dozen rebels had been arrested and while it was possible that this statement had been just an approximate expression it was also possible that the numbers did not tally for a reason and Owen studied the report further, scrolling through it until he found the number of rebels captured.

Twelve.

Five had been caught in a turbolift on their way to the command and control centre, five in the communications section and two aboard the gunship. But according to the image Owen had on his datapad there had been thirteen of them and given that there was no mention at all of any fatalities among the rebels there could be only one other solution.

There was still a rebel loose aboard the station.

Cass Grayle sat in total darkness behind the access panel on the bridge of the Corellian gunship that the rebels had attempted to steal, barely able to move because of the circuitry to one side of her and the panel itself to the other. Though vessels of this class were used by the Imperial Navy this particular example did not belong to the Imperial war machine. Instead it had been captured by the navy from pirates and brought back to fleet headquarters relatively intact and given that both its sublight ion drives and faster than light hyperdrive were intact the rebels had planned to use it as an escape ship, taking it so that the Alliance to Restore the Republic would be able to add it to their own fleet.

But something had obviously gone wrong. Someone aboard the space station had discovered the presence of the rebels not only aboard the station but also the gunship and when the Empire had sent forces to retake the gunship from Cass's adoptive father Mace and a hapan rebel woman call Inra Vayne, Cass had been told to hide in here. After that she had heard shouting and the sound of blaster fire but that had been an unknown length of time ago and now there was only silence coming from beyond the panel.

Taking a chance, Cass struck the inside of the panel with her elbow. Fortunately after Mace had put the panel back in place he had not secured it, so Cass was not trapped in the darkness and the panel fell loose before landing on the deck plates of the bridge with a clatter before she crawled out and looked around. The bridge was now deserted and there were several blaster marks on the wall surrounding the hatch that now lay on the deck where it had landed after the marines who had stormed the ship had blown it open. But of Mace and Inra themselves there were no signs.

On the one hand this was good news, the lack of any blood suggested that they had not been injured but had they been able to drive off the Imperial assault team then they would have brought Cass out from her hiding place before leaving. Taken together, this could only mean that they had been captured by the Empire.

Cass still had her disguise though, that of a junior officer in the Imperial Navy so she was confident that she could move about the space station unnoticed, but she had little idea how to go about rescuing the others or even how to get off the space station by herself. However, the eighteen year girl old had been keen to prove herself capable of joining the rebels and now that she had her chance Cass was not going to let it go to waste. Before joining with Mace and the rest of the rebel team he was part of, Cass had been a waitress at a diner frequented by Imperial personnel and she been able to steal datapads, copy the data they held so that it could be passed to the Alliance before returning the datapads to the owner as if the devices had been accidentally left at the diner where Cass had found them. This had required her to be able to move quietly without people noticing her and now it appeared that this skill could come in useful for locating her fellow rebels before figuring out how to rescue them.

Captain Mace Grayle gasped as he opened his eyes when he recovered from the stun blast from a stormtrooper's rifle that had incapacitated him to begin with. The first thing he became aware of after regaining consciousness was the discomfort in his arms that were raised above his head. But when he tried to lower them he found that they would not move.

"Awake captain?" a familiar voice said from beside Mace and he turned to see Tharun Verser, one of the rebels in the team assigned to his ship, the YT-1300 class freighter *Silver Hawk* beside him. Tharun had been stripped of the Imperial uniform he had been disguised in for the mission and was now dangling from the ceiling of the long narrow cell they had been placed in. Looking past Tharun as well as in the other direction Mace saw the rest of the two rebel teams were also here, hanging from the ceiling in their underwear.

"What happened?" Mace asked.

"We got captured." the woman on the other side of Tharun, Kara Larcus, replied.

"We were shot by those stormtroopers that came rushing after they blew the hatch." Inra added as she

looked up at her restraints and snarled.

"You don't say." Mace said. Then as he looked along the line of prisoners again he noticed that not all of the rebels who had taken part in the failed mission were present. Thankfully Cass was one of them but also missing was Major Vorn Larcus, the leader of the team assigned to the *Silver Hawk*, "Where's the major?" he asked, concerned that the reason Vorn was missing was because he had been killed when the rest of the team was captured.

"He wasn't brought here with the rest of your crew." one of the second rebel team involved in the mission replied. This was Brak Laeven, the communications specialist who flew with Inra's ship, the YT-2400 *Beauty Queen*.

"The boss is alive though." Kara added.

"How do we know that Kara?" another, much smaller woman called Jaysica Horbid asked. Jaysica was a demolition and security expert who had the unfortunate trait of being horrendously accident prone in anything not related to her speciality, "Maybe they took him away to execute him."

"Look," Kara said sternly, "I'm sure that all this is your fault somehow. So how about you just shut the kriff up with your comments about how the boss could be dead and I won't need to kick your ass okay?"

"Well you can't anyway." Jaysica said, "We're all tied up so – Ouch!" and she flinched as Kara lashed out to her side with a leg and kicked Jaysica in the shin.

"Will you all cut that out!" the angry command came from the group of rebels from the *Beauty Queen* and was delivered by their leader, Commander Dayle Kord. Dayle had been the ranking officer on the mission and technically retained command over the rebels even though they were currently incarcerated.

"So what are we supposed to do now?" Tharun asked, "Just hang around here waiting?"

"Oh that's bad." another of the *Beauty Queen's* crew said. This was Marse Horkin, a former Imperial Naval trooper.

"So tell us Marse," the *Beauty Queen's* engineer, Sen Verid, said, "how long will the Navy leave us here?"

"As long as they want." Marse replied.

"At least I took Lyssa's advice and wore clean underwear." Tharun said in reference to his wife who also happened to be Vorn's daughter.

"At least I took the boss's advice and wore underwear." Kara added, "It'd be draughty otherwise."

"Seriously?" Mace asked, looking around Tharun at Kara.

"Well sometimes it rides up in battle." Kara replied.

"Then perhaps you should find some that isn't so stupidly small." Jaysica commented.

"Oh like your drawer isn't stuffed full of things that can only be to entertain Tobis in the bedroom." Kara snapped back at her and Jaysica gasped, "Right Tobis?" Kara added, peering along the line at Tobis Dorfus, the *Silver Hawk's* engineer.

"What? Oh. Err." Tobis responded.

"Brings a whole new meaning to 'commando unit.'" Sen said, "Right Coll?" and he looked at the member of the *Beauty Queen's* crew that had just observed silently until now to see if he would react.

"Right." Coll replied.

"Well, wherever the major is I'm sure he'll be working on a plan to get us out of here." Mace added.

At that moment Major Vorn Larcus III was sat in a plain room that contained just two chairs and a table between them. Like the other rebels the Imperial Navy uniform he had worn as a disguise had been taken, leaving him in just his underwear but he was not restrained. However, a pair of stormtroopers standing either side of the only door in the room watched him closely.

Then the door slid open and a man in a military uniform entered. The badge on his chest indicated that he was a fleet admiral and Vorn recognised him as Fleet Admiral Praus Vretan, the highest ranking Imperial Navy officer in the sector who reported directly to Moff Horatian himself.

"Leave us." he told the stormtroopers who just looked at him, "I said leave us." he repeated sternly.

"Alone sir?" one asked in response.

"Yes alone. I'm in no danger from one rebel spy. Now get out before I demand your section leader explain your refusal to obey a simple order."

"Yes sir." the stormtrooper said before both of them exited the room and Praus closed the door behind them.

"Hello Praus." Vorn said, "Not worried about me taking you hostage then?"

"Hello Vorn." the admiral replied and he sat down opposite Vorn, "That camera behind you is active. At the first sign of trouble those two marines will be back through that hatch without me needing to say a word and they'll come in firing. On stun I hope given how close together we'd likely be."

"I like what you've done with the place." Vorn said, looking around at their surroundings.

"Yes, I had some people in to paint over the last lot of grey with this new lot of grey." Admiral Vretan said and he reached into his trouser pocket and produced a small flask, opened it and took a drink before passing it to Vorn.

"Thanks." Vorn said as he took the flask and drank from it himself. The possibility of it containing some drug

designed to make interrogation easier did not concern him. If that was the Empire's plan then the admiral could easily have ordered Vorn restrained while it was administered, "Corellian?" he asked and Praus smiled as Vorn returned the flask to him.

"Only the best on a fleet admiral's salary." Admiral Vretan said, "Admittedly not quite the same quality as you used to serve at functions while you were in Parliament."

"Times change Praus. Nowadays I rarely get anything that good. The Alliance has better things to concentrate on procuring."

"Why did you do it Vorn?" the admiral said suddenly, leaning forwards across the table.

"What? Drug Admiral Hall? Because he's a pompous nerf herder who deserved it." Vorn replied.

"Oh I know that." Admiral Vretan said, "Oh and sticking him and Louisa Yay in the same bed together has been a source of great amusement to everyone by the way."

"You're welcome." Vorn said.

"What I meant was why did you defect to the rebels in the first place? Why become a traitor?" Admiral Vretan asked.

"A traitor to what Praus? A planetary government that was organising the killing of its own people to get them to accept greater Imperial control? Or an Empire that allowed it?"

"If you had any proof of that going on then there are ways to present it legally." Admiral Vretan replied.

"What ways?" Vorn said, "Take it to Parliament? I was in Parliament Praus and when I presented the testimony I had been given I was expelled and labelled a traitor before even joining the Alliance. Or maybe to the Imperial Senate? When exactly will the next session of Congress be held Praus?"

"You could have brought it to me Vorn." Admiral Vretan said.

"Could I indeed? Well in that case that's what I'm doing now. One of the men you captured with me was an eye witness. He'll be able to tell you how his mercenary company was hired by the government of Estran to take out bases supposedly controlled by troops who had defected to the Alliance. But after they carried out their mission the government told the public that the bases were attacked by Alliance troops and sent more soldiers to take out the mercenaries."

"And I suppose you're also going to claim that the Empire is run by a shadowy secret society that's been guiding the Republic and now the Empire for a thousand years, right?" Admiral Vretan responded sarcastically.

Vorn smiled.

"So what happens now Praus?" he asked, "I doubt you'll be keeping me here indefinitely to continue this little chat."

"No. My marines captured all three of your teams." Admiral Vretan replied and Vorn's heart sank. Until then he had hoped that at least one of the other two teams would still be at large to work on a rescue plan, "The others are being held somewhere secure until I decide that it's time to inform the Imperial Security Bureau."

"Ask for Agent Garm Larcus." Vorn said, "It'll be nice to see my son again."

"You may joke now Vorn but the ISB is going to have its work cut out with the twelve of you." the admiral replied and Vorn had to suppress a smile. Praus Vretan had just stated that his men had captured twelve rebels and that meant that there was still one of the raiding team at large. Now it seemed that there was still hope of escape after all.

2.

Cass moved cautiously through the corridors of the space station. There were far too few people around at this time to make blending into a crowd possible and instead she tried to avoid contact with those that were. As well as the possibility that someone would realise that she was not supposed to be aboard the station, Cass was also concerned that someone would approach her under the impression that she was a genuine midshipman and expect her to have the knowledge of such a person. Despite being well practised at moving about stealthily she had little knowledge of naval matters and knew that her status as an imposter would be quickly revealed if anyone spoke to her. Especially if they began to give her orders.

She had taken a small equipment case from the gunship that a member of an Imperial technical crew had left behind and was using it to store any items she came across that looked as though they could be useful. The main problem she faced was that she did not even have the basics of a plan to rescue the others, nor did she know where they were being held and for now she was just wandering around in the hope that she would come across some clue.

She was just making her way down a corridor between two docking ports for massive capital ships when she heard the sound of armoured feet marching in unison and she knew exactly what that meant. There was a patrol of stormtroopers approaching. She was just about to turn around and head back the way she had come when a hatch beside her opened and someone reached out from the compartment inside it, grabbing her arm with one hand and clamping the other over her mouth as she was dragged through the hatch.

"Quiet!" the man hissed as he pushed her up against the wall of the tiny compartment on the other side and closed the door. Then he snatched the tool case from her and tipped the contents onto a nearby workbench. As he began to search through the contents of the case Cass studied him. He wore the uniform of an officer and his rank badge suggested that he was a lieutenant, but unusually for a posting aboard a space station he wore a sidearm, a standard issue DH-17 blaster pistol holstered at his hip.

"What's going on?" Cass asked, wondering whether to try drawing the sporting blaster pistol she had concealed under her tunic. Cautiously she reached for the clasps at the top of her tunic and released them. But just as she was about to slide her hand towards the shoulder holster she wore the Imperial officer suddenly spun towards her and reached out, grabbing her wrist and pulling her closer.

"So what do we have here then?" he asked as he pushed his own hand into her tunic and removed the blaster, "Ah, a sporting blaster in a padded holster to conceal it." he said. Then holding the weapon right in front of her face he added, "Young lady drawing this is going to get you shot." then he placed it on the workbench and looked at the other items he had taken from her, "And exactly what you hoped to achieve with four glow rods, two datapads, a mem-stick and hydrospanner is beyond me."

"I'm on a maintenance crew and I was just-" Cass began.

"No you're not." the officer interrupted, "You're one of the rebels captured raiding the station. So far you've been lucky enough to escape detection but sooner or later someone is going to take a good look at the security footage and notice you right there with the others. So we need to get out of here before they do."

"We? Who are you?" Cass asked.

"Lieutenant Owen Halowan." Owen replied, "Alliance Intelligence."

"Alliance?" Cass exclaimed, "As in the Rebel Alliance?"

"No the agoraphobic alliance. That's why we're hiding in the closet. Yes the Rebel Alliance. Now how about you explain to me who you are and exactly what's going on here?"

Cass shrugged.

"I don't know. None of us do. But my name is Cass Grayle and we were sent to do as much damage to the Imperial Navy's headquarters as we could but the others got caught. Now I'm trying to find a way to break them out." she said.

"Well you aren't going to be able to manage it with these odds and ends and a blaster that only fires six shots before needing to be reloaded." Owen said, "On the other hand if you stick close to me and do exactly as I say we may have a chance to set your friends free and get out of here safely."

Cass folded her arms.

"So what do we do?" she asked.

"First we'll need fresh disguises." Owen said and Cass frowned.

"What's wrong with what we're wearing?" she asked.

Owen sighed.

"Not for us laser brain. Your friends were arrested in Imperial uniforms so those uniforms have now been taken from them. We need fresh ones for them." Owen said, "Plus we need to recover your droids before maintenance can download their memories for intelligence purposes. After that we can break your friends out and escape."

"What are we doing here?" Cass whispered as she and Owen approached one of the station's docking ports. "Believe it or not," Owen replied, "I don't actually know the layout of fleet headquarters by heart. On the other hand I've been serving on the *Horrific* for several years now, so I know where we can find what we need." "And what about them?" Cass asked, looking at the two fleet troopers standing guard at the docking port. "Just leave them to me." Owen answered and he continued to walk right up to the guards. Then without even being asked he inserted his code cylinder into a security scanner, "Lieutenant Halowan returning." he announced.

"What about her?" one of the guards asked, looking at Cass.

"The midshipman is with me." Owen answered, "She's coming aboard to collect some equipment."

"Sir, I'll need to see—"

"Are you questioning my authority crewman?" Owen snapped before the guard could finish.

"No sir."

"Good, then you'll let her through or I'll be speaking with the admiral about your future assignments."

"Yes sir." the guard said and both stepped aside to allow Cass and Owen to board the star destroyer.

"So this is a star destroyer then?" Cass said as she looked around, "Doesn't seem any different to the space station."

"That's because the Empire uses common components for pretty much everything it builds." Owen explained, "Even the Death Star used standard construction modules. It saves money and given the cost of a Tector-class ship every credit helps."

"So where are we going now?" Cass asked.

"Laundry." Owen answered, "There won't be anyone there other than a few droids at this time."

"But won't they remember you?" Cass pointed out.

"Of course they will. But a lot of what we need to do is going to be traceable back to me. That's why I'll be coming with you back to headquarters when we're done. Ah, here's the turbolift. This will take us straight to the laundry."

Just as Owen had said there were only droids in the laundry at this time of night, preparing uniforms for the crew to wear the next day and Owen made his way directly to the racks of those already cleaned and pressed.

"What about these?" Cass suggested, removing an officer's uniform from the rack.

"No." Owen replied, "No officers."

"Why not?" Cass asked.

"Because we'd need rank badges and code cylinders for them and I want to keep this simple." Owen explained, "We need gunners' uniforms."

"Gunnings?" Cass responded, frowning in confusion.

"Yes gunners. Their uniforms are plain and they wear enclosed helmets that we can pick up from maintenance. Ah, here we are." Owen said and then he began to remove uniforms from the racks, "Give me a hand, we need to get the right sizes. We'll need boots as well but we can get those more easily from supply than full uniforms."

The two rebels loaded their stolen uniforms into a laundry cart and simply pushed it out of the star destroyer's laundry unchallenged by any of the droids present and from there Owen guided them to the nearby supply section where he simply used his authority as a lieutenant to requisition a dozen sets of boots that he hoped would be the correct size for the captive rebels. Then came the helmets and thanks to the complicated target acquisition and tracking systems built into them there were a number of these in the maintenance section for repair and as was the case in the laundry Owen just removed them from a rack without concerning himself with the droids watching him. Providing his plan worked to schedule he and the other rebels would be long gone before any decided to copy the droids' memories to obtain an image of who had taken the helmets. The helmets they removed were not functional, but that was not an issue at this time and they were just loaded into the cart with the other stolen items. The problem was that pushing a laundry cart around the space station would attract far too much attention for Owen's liking and so he quickly located an alternative.

"Help me with this." he said as he opened up a bulky repulsor crate marked with naval emblems and began to empty it of its contents.

"This looks heavy." Cass commented.

"It is." Owen replied, "But it's got a built in repulsorlift unit so it'll act as if it's weightless while you're pushing it."

"Me?" Cass exclaimed, "Why me? You're bigger."

"I'm also a lieutenant and lieutenants in the Imperial Navy don't push crates around when there are midshipmen available to do it for them instead."

Cass frowned.

"I've got a bad feeling about this." she said as she put the last of the helmets inside the crate.

"What? About a crate?"

"No. About how much of this plan will be left to me because you're pretending to have a higher rank than I do."

"Nothing pretend about it young lady." Owen replied, "The Imperial Navy has me listed as a lieutenant and so does the Alliance."

"Well it's still not fair." Cass said as Owen sealed the crate.

"Look on the bright side. As soon as we find those droids of yours one of them can take over. Midshipmen still outrank machines." he told her and she smiled.

"Oh yeah." she said and then she tried to push the crate, straining against its weight.

"You need to activate the repulsorlift." Owen pointed out.

"Gee thanks." Cass replied.

3.

Owen walked ahead of Cass as she pushed the crate along, appearing like an officer who cared nothing for the subordinate following behind him and trying to keep up while actually doing the harder task. The two fleet troopers remained silent as they passed through the docking port again and Owen just presented his code cylinder so that his passing could be recorded, once more leaving a trail that would prevent him from returning to his position aboard the *Horrific*.

To locate the three rebel droids Owen simply went up to the first communication terminal he found and placed a call to the station's maintenance section. Unlike the *Horrific's* maintenance section this was manned around the clock and it was a human voice that responded.

"Maintenance." it said.

"This is Lieutenant Halowan of the *Horrific*." Owen said, "I believe you've had three captured droids brought in. What's their status?"

"Hang on." the technician replied and there was a pause as he checked his system, "Yeah, I've got it right here lieutenant. One three-pee-oh protocol droid, one are-five and a customised mouse droid. They've all been deactivated and sent for reprocessing."

Cass's eyes widened.

"Reprocessing?" She hissed and Owen held up his hand for quiet.

"But have they been reprocessed yet?" he asked.

"At this time of night? No. They'll have to wait at least until the morning shift comes on. They're a low priority. Beside there's a note here that Intel may want them."

"Thank you." Owen said, "Oh, just one more question. Where are they being stored?"

"Workshop four. Dorn sector."

"Excellent." Owen replied and he disconnected the comm channel and turned to Cass, "Come on." he told her, "We've just joined naval intelligence."

"We have?" Cass responded. Then she smiled, "Hey, I think I've done that job."

"Good. Then both of us should be naturals at it." Owen said.

Now knowing where the droids were being kept, it was easy for the two rebels to proceed directly through the station towards the workshop. Unlike when Cass had been moving on her own, uncertain of whether the station's security force was looking for her or not, Owen moved confidently along the corridors where he needed no reason to try and conceal himself from any of the handful of Imperial personnel they encountered and when they reached the workshop he just proceeded straight inside.

"Can I help you sir?" one of the three technicians on duty asked.

"We're from intelligence." Owen replied, "We're here to see those three rebel droids that were brought in."

"Oh right." the technician answered, "Follow me." and he led the rebels deeper into the workshop.

The workshop was actually a collection of smaller work and storage areas that allowed different jobs being undertaken by different people to be kept separate from one another at the same time as permitting easy movement from one to another. Most of these areas were empty but Cass and Owen counted half a dozen technicians on duty working on equipment that needed to be fixed quickly and about twice that many droids assisting them.

"Ah, this looks like them." Owen said when the technician reached a work area that held the three droids. Both the protocol droid and astromech had been fitted with restraining bolts as was standard practice in Imperial facilities and all three had been shut down.

"Yeah, this is them. So what do you need to know?" the technician asked.

"Firstly whether they're functional." Owen replied and he walked up to the gold coloured protocol droid, reached around to the back of its head and pressed the prominent activation button located there.

Immediately the droid came to life.

"I say." it exclaimed, "Where are we?" then when it looked around and saw Cass it added, "Oh Miss Cass. Thank the maker you are functional." and both Cass's and Owen's eyes widened.

"What the kriff is going on here?" the technician exclaimed, "You're not from intelligence. You're rebels!" but before he could do anything further Owen drew his blaster and shot the technician at point blank range. Panicking, Cass drew her sporting blaster as Owen darted past her, moving quickly through the workshop and firing on the technicians who reacted by taking hold of whatever came to hand to try to wield as a weapon.

Hearing a sound from behind her, Cass spun around to see another Imperial technician advancing towards her wielding a power pry bar and instinctively she fired at the man. But despite the lessons the teenager had been given in how to shoot Cass's shot still missed by a narrow margin. However, the blaster bolt did clip the pry bar close enough to the technician's hand that the intense heat of the packet of plasma forced him to

drop it, clutching his hand and letting out a yelp.

Cass froze, uncertain of what to do now that she was facing an unarmed man but she kept her blaster pointing towards the technician and so when he looked up from his hand again he found himself staring down the barrel of the weapon and he raised his hands.

"I surrender." he called out.

Cass kept her blaster trained on him, not knowing what to do next. But the technician's call had been heard by the other Imperial personnel left and they too threw away their improvised weapons and raised their hands.

"Very good." Owen said, glancing at Cass. Then he turned his attention back to the technicians, "Okay all of you over there in that empty bay." and he waved his blaster towards an empty work bay. Obediently the technicians moved into it.

"You too." Cass told the man whose surrender had provoked the others to follow suit and he nodded before joining his comrades.

"Okay get some tape or something to secure this lot." Owen told her.

"Miss Cass, might I enquire what is going on?" the protocol droid, "And where is Major Larcus?"

"The others were all captured Jeeves." Cass replied as she rummaged through the tools, smiling as she found several packets of plastic cable ties and a reel of tape.

"And we almost joined them thanks to you calling out her name." Owen added. Then as Cass brought him the ties he looked back at their prisoners, "Secure them. I'll keep you covered." he told her.

Cass quickly bound the Imperial technicians with the ties and taped their mouths shut. Then both she and Owen deactivated all of the Imperial droids before returning to where the rebel droids were lined up.

"Jeeves are you damaged?" Cass asked.

"I do not believe so Miss Cass." Jeeves answered, "Though I have been fitted with a restraining bolt."

"Do you know how to remove one of those?" Owen asked Cass and she nodded.

"Tobis taught me." she said and she looked around, smiling when she saw the tool she needed hanging on the wall nearby. Hurrying to the tool and bringing it back to Jeeves she pressed it against the restraining bolt on the droid's chest and removed it.

"Okay, now do the others and bring them back on line." Owen told her and Cass crouched down in front of the R5 astromech droid.

"Here you go Harvey." she said, detaching the restraining bolt from its body and reactivating the droid. In response Harvey let out a prolonged and vulgar sounding tone.

"Now Harvey," Jeeves said sternly, "Miss Cass and her friend have come here at what I can only assume is great personal risk to help us."

"Too right." Cass commented as she picked up the mouse droid that had been left on a bench and removed the restraining bolt from its side before setting it down on the floor and switching it on, "Penny are you okay?" she asked and the tiny box-shaped droid chirped, "Seems like they're all okay." she said to Owen.

"Good, because I get the feeling that finding the others and breaking them out isn't going to be as easy as just calling someone up and asking where they are." he replied, "I suggest we get your astromech to work." and Harvey let out another rude sound.

"What did he just say?" Cass asked, looking at Jeeves.

"Harvey says that he is the property of Tobis Dorfus and does not take orders from anyone else." Jeeves answered.

"Then tell him that if he doesn't help us Tobis will probably be executed for treason." Cass said and Harvey let out a shrill tone before rolling between her and Owen and up to a nearby computer port. Plugging into this the droid began to navigate the Imperial computer network, searching for information relating to the other rebels. All of a sudden Harvey let out a series of excited sounding chirps and whistles.

"Harvey says he has found them." Jeeves translated.

"Great." Owen said, "Where are they?"

"Harvey indicates that they have been split up." Jeeves said, "Major Larcus has been placed in an interrogation cell while the others are being held in a maximum security unit. Their arrest has been noted in the station's log but they have yet to be formally processed and their detention has not been relayed to the surface yet."

"Then we get Major Larcus first." Owen said, "If he's being interrogated then he could crack and tell them about you Cass. And if that happens then station security will tear this place apart looking for you." then Harvey let out another chirp.

"Harvey says that he has obtained the locations of the holding cells and plotted a route that will keep interaction with station security to a minimum." Jeeves announced.

"Then we ought to be going." Owen said and he looked down at Harvey, "Can he rig the door here so it won't open after we leave? Disable the intercom as well."

"What for?" Cass asked in response.

"Because I don't want them being able to get free and warn anyone about us before we're at least ten

parsecs from here." Owen said, looking at the captive technicians.

"I think so." Cass replied before Harvey chirped again and the lights went out. Then a tiny light built into Harvey's head lit up.

"Harvey indicates that he has deactivated all workshop systems." Jeeves said, "The door has sufficient residual power to perform one close cycle sir."

"Good." Owen said, "Now get to work and start pushing that crate." and he pointed to the hovering crate filled with uniforms.

Harvey now led the way through the corridors of the space station with Cass and Owen following him and Jeeves bringing up the rear with the crate while Penny darted around them. Their initial target was not the interrogation cell itself but the security office that would be monitoring the cell constantly. The purpose of this was two-fold. Most importantly Cass and Owen did not want to be monitored when they set Vorn free but also by gaining access to the security office they could gain intelligence on the security measures in place to protect the interrogation cell.

"We should send Penny in to take a look around." Cass suggested as they neared the security officer, keeping her voice low now that they were encountering stormtroopers and other station security personnel with greater frequency as they neared the security section.

"Why?" Owen asked.

"Because Jaysica modified her with a camera and comlink to send the pictures back to her. All we need is a datapad and comlink on the right frequency."

"What is the frequency?" Owen said and Cass's face fell.

"Oh. I don't know." she said, "Jeeves, do you know the frequency?"

"I am afraid that Mistress Horbid has never shared that information with me Miss Cass." Jeeves replied.

"Well that's plan aurek out of the viewport then." Cass said, "Unless Harvey or Penny know the frequency."

"Never mind." Owen said, "A camera will only show whatever's in its narrow field of view. But if we send Penny in then you can go in after her and take a proper look around."

"I don't get it." Cass said.

"How many mouse droids have we passed on our way here from maintenance?" Owen asked and Cass just frowned, "See? People ignore mouse droids. Right up until you need one that is. So we send yours into the control room first and then you go in after it, ask the staff if they've seen it and then if you can look around for it. Odds are they'll have noticed that a mouse droid came in but paid no attention to where it went. Can you do that?"

"Sure." Cass replied, "Sounds similar to what I used to do at the diner."

"The diner?"

"Where I worked before dad adopted me." Cass said, "I watched the Imperials who came in for the chance to steal datapads from them. Then I copied them and returned them the next day."

"Very clever." Owen said, "Let's hope you're not too out of practice at being sneaky then."

4.

"Hello?" Cass said as she entered the security office and looked around.

"Who are you?" an officer at one of the control stations asked, scowling at Cass.

"Midshipman Grayle sir." she replied, "Has a mouse droid come in here?"

"I think I saw one come in a minute or so ago." one of the duty staff replied, "I didn't see where it went though."

"That could be it." Cass said, "It's faulty and the commander sent me after it."

"Well find it quickly then." the security officer said, still scowling, "I don't want a defective droid running around in here. But I'm not helping you, my men and I have work of our own to do."

"Oh don't worry." Cass said, "I know how to keep out of the way."

The officer ignored this, turning back to his console and Cass began to move about the office, making her way between the free standing duty stations and acting as if she was searching in the all the small spaces where a mouse droid could hide itself when in fact she was studying the various displays of the duty stations. Then she saw a display that showed an image of a cell with a man sat in a chair in his underwear while a pair of stormtroopers stood guard and she recognised the man as Vorn. Suppressing a smile, Cass then made her way to where she already knew Penny was hidden and reached down and picked up the droid.

"There you are you naughty girl." she said and the officer glared at her.

"It's a kriffing droid." he said, "Now get out of here. This is a restricted area you know."

"That's okay. I've got what I came for." Cass replied and she calmly walked out of the security office, setting Penny down again as soon as they were back in the corridor outside.

"Well?" Owen asked when they returned to him and the other droids.

"I saw the cell they're holding the major in." she replied, "He's not being interrogated but there are two stormtroopers in there with him."

"What are they doing?" Owen said and Cass shrugged.

"Nothing, just standing there." she told him and he smiled.

"That's good." he said, "If your astromech can slice into the camera feed then maybe we can set it on a looped playback. That would give us the opportunity to get into the cell and free Major Larcus without the security office knowing what's happening."

"But what if they try and contact the stormtroopers guarding him?" Cass asked.

"Why would they?" Owen replied, "We've still got several hours before the next shift change and if they aren't already in there then there won't be any interrogators awake at this hour. Though depriving someone of sleep is good for getting answers out of them it doesn't work so well for those asking the questions. We've got plenty of time before anyone goes near that cell."

Cass and Owen stood back while Harvey plugged into a computer access port close to the interrogation cell, both of them standing as if they were looking at their datapads to monitor what the astromech droid was doing. The idea was that if anyone happened to come past they would look like a maintenance team even though both Cass and Owen were in officers' uniforms.

"Harvey indicates that he has found the security feed from the interrogation cell." Jeeves translated as Harvey chirped.

"Good." Owen replied, "Can he fix it into a loop?" and Harvey let out a string of bleeps.

"He can. Though without direct access to either the camera or display buffer to verify the start and end points of the loop it may contain a noticeable skip as it resets." Jeeves said.

"Nobody seemed to moving about much in the footage I saw." Cass commented.

"Keep the loop short." Owen said, "That'll give anyone in the frame as little time as possible to move away from their position at the start."

Harvey let out another chirp.

"The loop is in place Lieutenant Halowan sir." Jeeves said.

"Okay, let's head for the cell. It should take a few minutes to get there and if no alarms have sounded by then I think we can assume that the loop hasn't been spotted." Owen said and Cass nodded before they set off.

The interrogation cell was one of a set that lined both sides of a corridor with another located at the far end. Meanwhile located at the entrance to this corridor was another security control station manned by a single bored looking guard at the free standing duty station itself as well as two others stood either side of the entrance to the corridor.

"Give me your blaster." Owen whispered to Cass as they peered around a corner towards the control station.

"Why?" Cass asked, "I can help you."

"Not with this you can't." Owen replied, "But I'm going to need two blasters for this."

Cass sighed and looked around as she undid her tunic to remove the target pistol from under her shoulder to make sure that she was not seen with the unauthorised weapon. Owen then stuffed the blaster inside his own tunic, holding his datapad over it to conceal the bulge it created.

"Now stay here." Owen told her, "And if anything goes wrong just get out of here by any means you can."

"We'll I obviously won't be shooting my way out." she commented with a frown.

Ignoring this Owen walked up to the security post and stared at the guard.

"Lieutenant Halowan from the *Horrific* to speak with the prisoner in cell fourteen sergeant." he said sternly.

"I don't see an authorisation here sir." the guard replied, looking at his console.

"This is my authorisation sergeant." Owen said and he pointed at the rank badge on his chest, "Look, Admiral Hall asked me to come here and make sure that the prisoner is aware that the admiral is going to be taking a personal interest in seeing him suffer. Off the record of course."

The guard cracked a smile.

"Oh yes, I heard how he set the admiral up." he said, "Go on in sir. I can look the other way for ten minutes or so." and he reached down and turned off the security monitor for Vorn's cell.

"Excellent work sergeant." Owen said and he started to walk down the corridor of interrogation cells, stopping when he reached number fourteen.

The cell door slid open to reveal Vorn, still seated at the table and he glanced up at the newcomer. Both stormtroopers also briefly looked in Owen's direction as he entered the cell and walked towards the table, keeping the sporting blaster concealed under the datapad. Silently and watched by Vorn, Owen continued to walk up to the table where he set down the datapad now that the stormtroopers would be unable to see what he was doing.

"You know if you're going to try and get information you may at least want to try asking questions." Vorn said to Owen, still thinking he was a genuine Imperial officer.

Without speaking Owen slid the sporting blaster from under his tunic, holding it in his left hand and Vorn frowned when he saw this. Then Owen placed his other hand on the butt of the blaster pistol holstered on his leg and looked at Vorn briefly before he started to circle the table, keeping the sporting blaster out of sight of the stormtroopers. Vorn on the other hand kept a close eye on Owen and could not help but notice that he was holding the weapon by its barrel as if he was about to offer it out. The reason for this became obvious as Owen walked around behind Vorn, holding the sporting blaster behind his back.

"Are you ready?" he said without looking at Vorn.

"I think so." Vorn replied.

"Then let's begin." Owen said.

Vorn suddenly leapt out of his chair and grabbed hold of the sporting blaster's grip, at which point Owen released it. As Vorn jumped up the two stormtroopers turned towards him and so were too slow to notice that Owen had drawn his blaster pistol before he fired, shooting one of the stormtroopers in the head. Then as the other armoured soldier raised his rifle to return fire Vorn held out the sporting blaster pistol and fired a blast into his chest. From this range even the relatively weak target weapon was powerful enough to punch through the stormtrooper's chest plate, killing him instantly. Owen then turned to face Vorn.

"Mind telling me what's going on here?" Vorn asked.

"My name's Owen Halowan. I'm here with Cass Grayle to rescue you." Owen replied.

"Cass? Cass is okay?" Vorn asked.

"And ready to charge in shooting when I found her I think." Owen said and then he looked at the two dead stormtroopers, "Now I think we need to do something about your outfit."

"Agreed." Vorn replied and both men then crouched down beside the corpses and began stripping off bits of armour to create a full suit.

Looking up from his duty station, the sergeant frowned when he saw not only Owen but also what appeared to be one of the marine guards assigned to watch over Vorn leaving the interrogation cell. Owen no longer wore his tunic either, instead he had it folded over his arm.

"Why aren't you at your post?" he asked.

"The admiral wants a personal report." Owen replied, "From someone who's been with the prisoner. Just keep all this quiet would you? The admiral's annoyed enough as it is and I could really do without dealing with him that way for an entire patrol."

The sergeant frowned and Owen sighed. Then he reached into his pocket and withdrew several banknotes. Placing them on the console he just smiled and watched as the sergeant's expression changed as he reached out to subtly take the bribe.

"Thanks. He'll be back within the hour." Owen said before he and the disguised Vorn turned to leave.

"Uh-oh. I've got a bad feeling about this." Cass said as she saw Owen walking towards her with a stormtrooper, fearing that he had been uncovered and arrested. But then she noticed that he was still armed and she smiled as she realised who it was inside the stormtrooper armour, "Major!" she exclaimed as the two men reached her and she wrapped her arms around him.

"Hey, careful." Vorn replied, "Someone may see."

"Sorry." Cass replied, "I'm just glad to see you. Even if I can't actually see you."

"And I'm glad to see you as well. Especially since you had the good sense to let Owen here do the dangerous part." and Cass frowned.

"Sorry to break it to you," Owen said as he opened up the crate of uniforms so that he could put the blaster rifle and utility belt taken from the other stormtrooper inside, "But we're not out of danger yet." then he gave Cass her blaster back, "It's been fired once." he told her, "But we've extra ammunition from that other trooper if you need it."

"Thanks." Cass said as she returned the weapon to its hidden holster.

"Well if we're one here I suggest we go and rescue the others." Vorn said, "If I know them they'll be sick of hanging around waiting for us by now."

5.

Still suspended from the ceiling by chains, Kara looked at Jaysica.

"Are you seriously using our predicament as an excuse to exercise?" she asked as she watch Jaysica try to lift herself up again.

"I'm trying to reach my hair." Jaysica replied.

"Yeah, because good grooming is important while being held captive." Sen commented, prompting a smile from several of the other rebel prisoners.

"I have a clasp in my hair still." Jaysica said, "I can feel it. The guards missed it."

"Seriously?" Mace asked.

"Hey Tobis," Tharun added, "did you know your girlfriend was holding out on us?"

"Oh, err, no." Tobis said just as Jaysica was finally able to lift herself up high enough that by tilting her head she could run her fingers through her hair and she smiled as she recovered a hair clasp. Bringing both hands together as she lowered herself down Jaysica then began to bend the clasp into a more usable shape.

"Now if I can just get this in here right I can short out the lock." she said as she tried to insert the end of the clasp into the key hole of the binders holding her. But when the other rebels saw that she was attempting to pick the lock of the cuff around the same wrist as the hand in which she was holding the clasp they tried to stop her.

"Jaysica no." Mace said, "If you release that one then-"

"Got it!" Jaysica exclaimed as the cuff snapped open. But as it did she dropped at that side and the hair clasp flew from her hand, landing across the cell. Meanwhile Jaysica yelped as her fall was arrested by the single cuff now holding up her other arm and her entire weight was now placed on it, leaving her swinging slowly from side to side.

"Oh nice work klutz." Kara said, "Our one chance to get out of here and you blew it."

"Hey I had everything under control." Jaysica protested,

"Yeah." Tharun commented, "Right up until your plan succeeded. That's when it got away from you."

"Well can anyone reach my hair clasp?" Jaysica asked.

"Hah!" Kara exclaimed.

"Oh sure." Inra added, "If I can just stretch my legs about half a metre I can grab it between my toes."

"You can't all leave me like this." Jaysica said, "It hurts."

"Err, if you're able to swing towards me you could get your legs around me." Tobis suggested.

"Not passing up an opportunity hey lad?" Tharun commented.

"Wait, I'll see if I can do it." Jaysica replied and she tried swinging her body from side to side, hoping to get close enough to Tobis that she would be able to grab hold of him.

"Ready?" Vorn asked.

"Ready." Owen replied, removing the blaster rifle from the crate.

"Ready." Cass added as she drew hers sporting pistol.

"She'd be better off with my sidearm." Owen commented.

"She knows how to use that target piece, not a military issue weapon." Vorn said.

"I'm learning." Cass pointed out.

"Learning isn't enough." Vorn said, "Stick to what you know and don't hesitate to just keep your head down if things start to go bad." then he looked down at Harvey, "So six?" he asked and the droid that was plugged into a computer access port chirped.

"Harvey indicates that the security feed shows two guards at the control station and four more in pairs at the entrance to each of the two sets of cells. All are naval troopers rather than stormtroopers." Jeeves replied.

"And he can kill the feed?" Vorn added.

"He can." Jeeves said as Harvey replied.

"Then we take the pair at the control station first." Vorn said to Owen, "Followed by those guarding the cells. Cass, you just shoot at whatever you feel you can hit." and she nodded, "Okay let's go." Vorn said and Owen opened the door into the detention section.

"What's going on here?" one of the two guards at the central duty station asked when he saw what looked like two officers and a stormtrooper entering the room. He could see that Owen was carrying a rifle in addition to his sidearm but could not make out Cass's pistol given that Vorn was in front of her.

"Prisoner transfer. We're taking the rebels in cell nine." Owen replied and the guard frowned.

"I've not been told about this. Where are you transferring them to?" he demanded.

"Back home." Vorn replied and he raised his rifle and fired. The blast threw the guard backwards and before any of the others could react Owen had already taken aim and fired at the second guard at the duty station.

Meanwhile Cass pointed her blaster at one of the other guards and fired twice. Both shots missed, taking chunks out of the wall beside the man as he drew his own weapon. Both Owen and Vorn then turned towards one of the pairs of guards, switching their rifles to fully automatic and they opened fire. Instinctively all four guards ducked, one of them returning fire wildly and Vorn ceased fire as he ducked. Meanwhile Owen's fire struck the guard Cass had attempted to aim at and he swung his rifle around towards the one next to him, his finger still holding back on the trigger and spraying blaster bolts through the air. Vorn leant around the duty station and fired again. The blast struck a guard in his shoulder and as he cried out and fell to the floor Vorn finished him off.

Cass made another attempt to shoot one of the remaining guards but missed again. However, her action did distract the guard and made him turn his attention towards her while Owen took the opportunity to line up his rifle for another shot.

"Just one left." Vorn called out, firing another burst from his rifle as the guard ducked back into the corridor of cells.

"We'll take him from both sides together." Owen replied and keeping low he began to make his way around the duty station. But before he could get into a position to fire from, something came flying out of the corridor and landed with a 'Thunk!' on the floor. Looking down Owen saw that it was a blaster.

"I surrender. Don't shoot." the guard called out.

"So come on out with your hands in the air." Vorn said, rising to his feet and waiting as the guard reappeared, his hands above his head.

"Okay Cass find a cell for our friend here." Vorn said, "But take his helmet and belt. We may need them."

"I'll go get the droids." Owen added and Vorn nodded.

"And I'll get our people out." he said, plucking a security key from the belt of dead guard.

Vorn then made his way down one of the corridors filled with cells, hunting for the one that held his fellow rebels. But the cell he wanted was not on this corridor and he hurried to the next, Cass joining him.

"How do I look?" she asked as she fastened the guard's belt, including the blaster holster around her waist.

"Like someone playing dress up." Vorn replied, "Midshipmen don't tend to carry weapons." Then he halted, "Here we are. Cell nine." and he opened the cell door.

Inside Vorn found the other rebels all still hanging from the ceiling, with Jaysica swinging back and forth as she tried to get closer to Tobis. Without speaking, Vorn moved to help her but at the approach of someone in stormtrooper armour Jaysica screamed and lashed out with her foot. The kick struck Vorn and he fell backwards, landing in the corridor.

"What's wrong?" Cass asked as she rushed forwards to help him.

"Cass?" Mace called out from inside the cell, "Is that you?"

"Dad! Yes, it's me." Cass replied as she appeared in the doorway.

"Then who's that?" Mace asked, looking down at the 'stormtrooper'.

"Me." Vorn replied as he removed his helmet.

"Boss!" Kara called out, "I knew you'd come for me. Now let me down so I can kick the klutz's ass for assaulting an officer."

"It's not my fault." Jaysica protested, still swinging to and fro.

"Oh never mind that now." Vorn said as Cass helped him up, "We're here to rescue you."

"I told you all." Kara said as Vorn walked to a control panel set into the wall and used it to lower the rebels to the floor. Then using the key taken from the dead guard he went along the line unlocking their binders.

"Excellent work." Dayle said, rubbing his wrists, "How did you manage to escape?"

"I was rescued." Vorn replied.

"What? By that kid?" Inra asked as the rest of the team from the *Beauty Queen* looked at Cass and Mace smiled.

"That's my girl." he said.

"Major Larcus." Owen then called out as he came rushing along the corridor to the cell door, "The droids are at the control point with the uniforms and I've gathered up the weapons from the other guards."

"Owen, meet my team." Vorn said, "Captain Mace Grayle owns the Silver Hawk and Tobis Dorfus is his engineer. Then there's Sergeant Tharun Verser, Corporal Jaysica Horbid and Lieutenant Kara Larcus."

"Larcus?" Owen commented, "A relation?"

"My wife." Vorn answered.

"Really?" Owen said as he noted the vast age difference.

"Yes really." Kara replied before she embraced Vorn and kissed him.

"And this is Commander Dayle Kord from the *Beauty Queen*." Vorn added.

"My ship. A YT-2400. State of the art." Inra said, "The name's Inra by the way and this is Sen my engineer."

"And my team are Lieutenant Brak Laeven, Marse Horkin and Coll Jurven." Dayle added.

"And I'm Lieutenant Owen Halowan." Owen replied, "Alliance Intelligence. Until not long ago I was on deep cover aboard the Horrific. I fed information from there to the Alliance, but when I heard about you I knew I had to do something."

"This could blow your cover lieutenant." Dayle said, "You shouldn't have risked it."
"Oh my cover's blown for sure sir." Owen replied, "I'll be coming back with you."
"And we're very grateful too." Kara said, "But what was that I heard about uniforms?"
"We took gunners' uniforms from a star destroyer." Cass said, smiling.
"Including the helmets." Owen added, "They should let us get out of here without risking anyone recognising you. Come on, the droids are unpacking them now."
"What's our weapons status major?" Tharun asked as he donned one of the gunners' uniforms.
"We've two rifles, Cass's target pistol and seven blaster pistols if you include Owen's." Vorn replied, "So we'll have to share."
"Ten guns for fourteen people isn't too bad." Mace said.
"Hopefully we won't need any to get where we're going." Owen replied.
"And where exactly is that?" Sen asked, "Because so far no-one's told us a kriffing thing. Right Coll?"
"Right." Coll responded.
"There are disused ships docked at the station." Owen said.
"So back to that gunship?" Inra asked.
"No. That's too obvious an escape route." Owen replied, "Station security are bound to figure out something's wrong sooner or later and if we're still aboard when they do the ship you were trying to steal is going to be the first place they look. There are better options in the dry dock."
"Oh, err, dry dock?" Tobis asked, "Are they, err, well, serviceable?"
"They're fine." Owen answered, "Or at least flyable."
"Great." Jaysica said excitedly, "Let's go." and she pulled one of the gunners' helmets on over her head, "Wait," she added, "I can't see a think in this."
Kara sighed.
"I've got this." she said, walking up to Jaysica and turning the helmet through one hundred and eighty degrees so that it faced the correct way.

With Owen and Cass taking the lead owing to their officers' uniforms with the rebels disguised as gunners forming three columns behind them and marching in step followed by the droids and then finally by Vorn who had remained disguised as a stormtrooper. Taken together they looked like a gunnery crew heading to a duty station along with their supervisors and this allowed them to head for the dry docks ignored by those they encountered in the space station's corridors. As their name suggested the dry docks of the fleet headquarters were enclosed spaces that allowed capital ships to be repaired in a pressurised environment, with massive armoured space doors as well as magnetic fields to hold the atmosphere inside. The docks had to be large enough to accommodate the biggest capital ship available to the Navy's sector group, the two-thousand two-hundred metre long Allegiance-class battlecruiser *Pride of the Empire* and it was capable of taking more than one such vessel. But with this ship fully functional and deployed on operational duties there was enough room for a host of smaller ships instead.

But that was not to say that the vessels inside the dry dock were so small that the rebels would struggle to fit inside one.
"You have got to be kidding me." Kara said as she looked through a viewport into the dry dock while she and the other disguised rebels removed their helmets.
"What's the Navy even doing with those?" Dayle asked.
"Planning on breaking them up for parts." Owen answered, "Fleet Admiral Vretan wants a stockpile maintaining just in case."
"But they're flyable?" Vorn asked.
"Oh yes." Owen answered, "They were brought here from a Kurrad Industries facility last week and so far all that's been done is to send engineering crews aboard to survey them and determine the most efficient way of breaking them up."
"But we're supposed to just fly one out without anyone noticing?" Mace asked.
"Oh they'll notice." Tharun said.
"What's the matter Mace?" Inra asked, "I know those ships are newer than that thirteen-hundred you fly about in but even you must move with the times occasionally."
"Oh, err, actually the *Silver Hawk* is less than-" Tobis began before Inra interrupted.
"Nobody cares." she said, glaring at him.
"Boss, I've got a really bad feeling about this." Kara said.
"Let's just do this shall we?" Vorn asked.
"But can we really steal a star destroyer?" Cass responded.