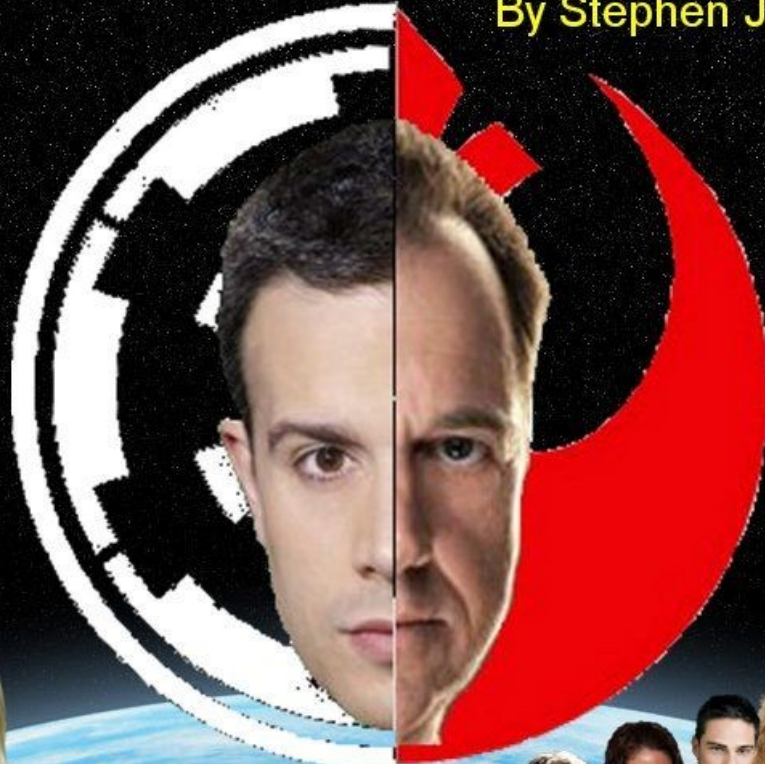


STAR WARS

7-02: Stealing Justice

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 GUERRILLA 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...

STEALING JUSTICE

FREED FROM CAPTIVITY, THE REBELS STILL NEED TO ESCAPE FROM IMPERIAL NAVAL HEADQUARTERS AND TO DO THIS THEY PLAN TO STEAL A STAR DESTROYER...

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

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1.

"The venator-class is considered a star destroyer," Lieutenant Owen Halowan said, "but according to the order of battle it's considered a heavy cruiser." Owen wore the uniform of an Imperial Navy officer just as he had done for a number of years while serving aboard the tector-class star destroyer *Horrific* under Admiral Hall. But in reality he had been a rebel agent for all that time, feeding information to the Alliance to Restore the Republic about fleet movements in the sector. Now though he was in the process of destroying his cover. Just a few hours earlier two rebel field teams had attempted to infiltrate the fleet headquarters space station orbiting the sector's capital world of Estran. All of the team based aboard the YT-2400 transport *Beauty Queen* commanded by Commander Dayle Kord had been captured as had all but one of Major Vorn Larcus III's team from the YT-1300 *Silver Hawk*. The only individual to escape capture had been the eighteen year old Cass Grayle whose adoptive father Mace, the captain and owner of the *Silver Hawk*, had hidden her behind an inspection panel. Meanwhile he and Captain Inra Vayne, the owner of the *Beauty Queen* had tried in vain to hold back the stormtroopers attacking the gunship that had been going to be the rebels' escape ship.

Upon hearing about the rebels' capture Owen had known that he had to do something to rescue them and with assistance from Cass, whose presence aboard the station was unknown to anyone but him at that point he had successfully broken them all out of detention. However, there remained the issue of how to escape from fleet headquarters. The Corellian gunship that the rebels had been planning to use would be one of the first places that the station's security force would look and it was for that reason that Owen had brought the released rebels to the station's dry dock instead, most of them now disguised as Imperial Navy gunners except for Vorn who wore stormtrooper armour instead and Cass who still wore a midshipman's uniform. Through a viewport that looked out over the enclosed docking bay that was large enough to house a battlecruiser more than twice the length of a venator-class ship there were six of the kilometre long capital ships arranged in a line.

"What are these even doing here?" Vorn asked, "The sector group only uses three of these as it is. We saw them docked outside on our way in."

"And after the fighting at Tarlen two of them were trashed." Owen replied, "But Fleet Admiral Vretan was able to track down these, along with several others as well as some old confederate ships drifting in space."

"These are those ships?" another rebel exclaimed, a tall woman who stood close beside Vorn. This was Lieutenant Kara Larcus, Vorn's unit medic and wife, "We were there."

"Pinching a hyperdrive." the former mercenary Tharun Verser added.

"Well even after some of the ships were plundered for parts to get the damaged vessels back in service it was decided to dismantle more so that there would be a reserve, only more carefully this time. That's why these ships were brought here. And the best part is that when they were supposed to be flown into a star to scuttle them after the Clone Wars a lot of other obsolete equipment was loaded aboard them first and it's all still there. If we steal one then we get everything inside it as well."

"Those ships require a crew of more than seven thousand." Dayle commented, "There are fourteen of us."

"Oh, ah, err." Tobis Dorfus, the *Silver Hawk's* engineer responded nervously, "That, that's only for sustained operations. If we, ah, if we just want to make one or two quick trips then we should be able to pilot one."

"Assuming that the ship is functional." Mace said.

"Tobis is right though." Sen Verid, Tobis's opposite number aboard the *Beauty Queen* said, "He and I can keep the engines running for a couple of jumps." and Mace smiled.

"Something amusing you Mace?" Inra asked when she saw this, "I'd have thought you'd be used to flying in an antique held together with string and good will."

"Oh I'm just impressed at the ability of our engineers to maintain machinery of that scale." Mace responded, in truth thinking how he knew that Sen frequently used unorthodox methods of keeping the *Beauty Queen* running when Inra was not around to see.

"Well let's not stand around here waiting to get caught." Dayle said, "Let's pick one of those ships and get aboard."

In one of the station's security control rooms a guard watched the video feed from an interrogation cell while his officer watched over his shoulder. The feed showed a pair of stormtroopers standing guard over a single prisoner sat at a table in his underwear. The prisoner was Vorn.

"What am I looking for sergeant?" the officer asked.

"Any minute now." the guard replied, "There!" and he pointed to the image of one of the two stormtroopers guarding the prisoner just as the hand he was suing to support the barrel of his rifle suddenly moved from right in front of the trigger grip to nearer to the muzzle. The officer frowned and reached forwards to activate

the intercom that would put him in contact with the stormtrooper.

"TK four two one report." he said but there was no response, "TK four two one respond." he repeated but again there was no reply.

"We could just have a bad transmitter." another of the guards commented.

"Well get someone down there to find out." the officer ordered, "And make sure they're well armed."

Four fleet troopers hurried towards the interrogation cell, blasters in hand and took up positions around the door. Then the leader opened the door and looked inside. But rather than a prisoner being guarded by a pair of stormtroopers he saw the partially clothed bodies of the two guards sprawled out on the floor while the prisoner had vanished along with both the guards' weapons and utility belts as well as what looked like enough pieces of their armour to cobble together a full set. Acting as quickly as he could, the leader of the team of fleet troopers took out his comlink and activated it.

"Control, we have a situation here." he transmitted.

"Call the detention section where the other rebels were taken." the officer ordered but when one of his men looked back at him he had a concerned look on his face.

"Sir, they aren't responding."

"Stang." the officer hissed, rushing back to his own duty station and activating the command level intercom, "Security office dorn seven to command. I need to speak with Admiral Trent immediately. We have a breach."

A klaxon sounded and as the rebels made their way towards an access port to the dry dock Kara winced.

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

"Why?" the smaller woman behind her asked. This was Jaysica Horbid, the team's demolitions and security expert, "We're almost there."

"And almost isn't good enough." Brak Laeven, the communication expert from Dayle's team replied, "Look." and he pointed down the corridor to where the four segments of a heavily armoured blast door were closing to block it ahead of them.

"How do they know we're here?" Cass asked.

"Never mind that." Tharun said, "Just run!" and the rebels broke into a run, abandoning the idea of keeping together as they rushed for the ever smaller opening between the blast door segments.

"Oh please slow down." the gold coloured protocol droid following the rebels called out as it and the R5 astromech droid beside it struggled to match the speed of the rebels. On the other hand Jaysica's mouse droid raced on ahead, halting only when it reached the blast door and was unable to proceed thanks to the opening now being well above floor level.

"Penny!" Jaysica called out after having dived through the gap with Brak, Kara, Owen, Tobis and the final members of Dayle's team Coll Jurven and Marse Horkin. Quickly she reached an arm through the still narrowing gap and snatched up her droid, pulling it through to her just before the door slammed shut and effectively split the rebels into two separate groups.

"Major!" Jaysica called out, banging the palm of her hand on the blast door.

"He won't be able to hear you." Marse said, "It's too thick."

"Oh great. I knew this was going to go bad." Kara added.

"Wait." Owen said, taking out his comlink, "Cass still has a comlink." then he held the comlink to his mouth and activated it, "Cass do you read me?" he asked.

"Yes, yes I read you." Cass responded almost immediately, "Major Larcus and Commander Kord are right here. I'll pass you over."

"Lieutenant." Dayle's voice then said, "Would you recommend having Tobis's are-five unit try to get this door open?"

"No sir." Owen replied, "If the station is on full lock down then opening the door will trigger an alarm."

"So how do we make it to the dry dock?" Vorn asked.

"Hang on, let me think." Owen replied and there was a pause before he spoke again, "You should be able to find a storage locker somewhere around that has cutting tools in it." he said, "The system probably won't worry if you have to force the door. Just cut a hole through a bulkhead into the dry dock and jump towards the nearest ship."

"Jump?" Inra exclaimed, "What then? Flap our arms real hard?"

"The dry dock is in zero gravity." Mace pointed out.

"And now I know that." Inra said, annoyed at being corrected by him.

"Nerf herder." Mace muttered.

"So how do we make sure we get across the gap to the ship and don't just float right past it?" Cass asked.

Kara looked at Sen.

"Fire extinguishers?" she suggested and he nodded.

"Could work." he replied, shrugging.

"Awesome." Tharun commented, "I've always wanted to try making a fire extinguisher rocket pack." and Vorn winced.

"Concerned about the quality of your son-in-law major?" Mace asked.

"Enough." Dayle said, "We find a cutting torch and some fire extinguishers then we get into the dry dock and head for the star destroyer. Okay?" and the rebels around him nodded in agreement, "Good. Then I suggest we put our helmets back on for this and start looking"

Meanwhile on the other side of the blast door Owen looked at the rebels who had made it through the gap.

None of them still had their helmets, having dropped them in the rush to get through the blast door.

"And we better get to the destroyer ourselves." he said, "Follow me."

"Right." Coll commented.

"And let's hope we don't run into any trouble." Kara commented, "Most of our firepower is on the other side of that door. All we've got are these four pistols between the seven of us."

Fleet Admiral Vretan opened his eyes as someone held their finger down on the call button of the intercom outside his door and he looked at the chronometer by his bed.

"It's not even four in the morning." he called out, the intercom picking up his words.

"Sorry admiral." the officer that appeared on the display on top of the nearby table, "But we've got a security alert."

"Another? What's wrong now?"

"Sir the rebels we caught have escaped."

"Escaped? Oh I've got a very bad feeling about this." Admiral Vretan replied as he got out of bed and turned on the light, "Tell Admiral Trent I'll be in C and C in five minutes."

2.

Since guards for vessels docked at the space station were drawn from their own crews, the venator-class ships intended to be broken up for parts had none and the disguised rebels were able to sneak aboard unopposed, remaining alert for any signs of the work crews that Owen had said would be surveying them. The transition from space station to star destroyer was obvious, despite the design styles of late Republic and Imperial vessels being identical. Whereas the dry dock was kept clean by the army of utility droids aboard the space station as well as crewmen on punishment details, the Clone Wars vintage vessel had drifted in space for years and the grime that had built up on its surfaces had not been cleaned away. The dirt on the floor proved useful however, tracks left in it by technical teams indicating that the rebels were not alone.

"We need to find out how many there are and where they are." Marse said and Brak nodded in agreement. "Perhaps I should take Coll and we'll see who we can find." he suggested.

"Focus on the engine room." Owen said, "I'll take everyone else to the primary flight control bridge."

It was important for Owen to state which bridge he would take his team to. A venator-class vessel featured two bridges, one at the top of each of the towers towards the rear of the ship. Though physically identical it had been traditional that one of them was used for controlling the ship itself while the other was used as a traffic control centre, managing the comings and goings of the more than three hundred fighters that the ship was capable of carrying and launching into combat.

"Please tell me you know the way there." Kara said and Owen smiled.

"Of course I do." he replied, holding up his datapad, "You think I wouldn't have looked up the specs of this ship before bringing you here?"

"Then lead the way please." Kara said, smiling as she pointed along the corridor.

"Actually it's this way." Owen said as he walked towards a side corridor.

"What have we got?" Admiral Vretan asked as he entered fleet headquarters' command and control centre. From here the movements of almost two and a half thousand ships spread right across the sector could be monitored but right now the crew were more focused on what was going on right here at headquarters. Already gathered around a central holographic display unit was Admiral Trent, the station's commanding officer as well as several other officers in charge of stormtrooper or fleet trooper units.

"The two stormtroopers guarding Vorn Larcus were taken out and it appears that he escaped disguised as one of them." Admiral Trent replied.

"How?" Admiral Vretan said, "Vorn Larcus was alone and unarmed. He couldn't have taken out even one of those marines, let alone both."

"We think that there were more rebels still at large sir." one of the other officers said and the fleet admiral glared at him.

"You think?" he said.

"Sir we've done a head count on an image taken by the security recorder when the rebels infiltrated the station." Trent said, switching the display to project an image showing Admiral Hall of the *Horrific's* squadron being carried off a shuttle along with three female captains, all supported by rebels in Imperial uniforms.

Admiral Vretan guessed that Admiral Trent, who held a deep dislike for Admiral Hall had been planning to keep this image for his own amusement, "Now we arrested a dozen rebels." Admiral Trent continued, "But if you look here there is a thirteenth rebel in a midshipman's uniform. That's who we're looking for."

"Are you brain dead?" Admiral Vretan exclaimed and Admiral Trent looked back at him, stunned at the way he had just been addressed, "That child could no more take out a pair of stormtroopers than the former Lord Larcus could."

"Perhaps both working in concert-" another officer suggested before Admiral Vretan interrupted "Are still no match for two marines, neither of who was able to raise the alarm before apparently being overpowered by them." he snapped.

"But fleet admiral, there is no-one else." Admiral Trent protested.

"This station has a crew numbering in the tens of thousands admiral." Admiral Vretan replied, "And that's not even including the crews of all the ships we have docked here. Now in the absence of information about the rebels' exact location I suggest we try and figure out who has been places they shouldn't have been."

"But that could take hours sir." Admiral Trent protested.

"The you and your men should get started right away." Admiral Vretan ordered, "Bring in more if you have to but you may want to make sure that all information is double checked. It's entirely possible that we could have a traitor in this very room."

"Ah, here we are." Dayle said when he saw the label reading 'DAMAGE CONTROL STATION' beside a door. Walking up to this he found that the lock down had not affected this particular door, presumably to ensure that anyone in the section could still gain access to the equipment it contained in the event of an emergency. Inside the room were shelves stocked with emergency equipment, portable fire extinguishers, emergency medical treatment kits, portable oxygen supplies and importantly heavy duty cutting equipment intended to allow rescue teams to gain access to damaged sections of the station.

"Perhaps we should grab everything we can." Vorn suggested to Dayle, "There's a lot of equipment that the Alliance could find useful in here and we still have that crate."

The crate Vorn referred to had been used by Cass and Owen to transport the gunners' uniforms that most of the rebels now wore and featured a built in repulsorlift unit, allowing it to be pushed along while it hovered in the air as if it was weightless.

"I agree." Dayle replied, nodding, "Sen, sort out cutting equipment. Vorn and I will get the extinguishers and everyone else can load up that crate with as many new toys as will fit."

"And don't be afraid to tip things out of packages to get them in." Vorn added as he put his short barrelled rifle into the holster on his hip and headed towards the rows of fire extinguishers on a nearby wall.

The rebels emerged from the storage room with Vorn's protocol droid, Jeeves, pushing the hovering crate along behind them while each rebel clutched a fire extinguisher filled with carbon dioxide.

"This is really heavy." Cass commented.

"Just don't grip the base when you discharge it." Tharun warned her, "You'll freeze the skin off your hands."

"I know. I had to learn all that to work at the diner." Cass pointed out, "Corayle thought it would be a good idea if his staff didn't."

"You there!" a stern voice suddenly called out and the rebels looked around to see an Imperial officer with a captain's badge on his chest striding towards them with a group of four fleet troopers, "Where are you going?"

"Dry dock." Dayle answered.

"With fire extinguishers and a cutting torch? And what's inside that crate?"

"Actually there's a really good explanation for why we've got this stuff." Sen said, setting down the torch he carried and carrying the fire extinguisher towards the officer and his men, "And you'll see it if you just look here." and he held up the extinguisher and pointed to a random point on the case. Frowning, the officer leant closer.

"I don't see anything." he said.

"What? You don't see those stars?" Sen asked.

"I've got a bad feeling about this." Mace muttered, setting down his extinguisher and moving his hand towards his blaster.

"What stars?" the officer said and all of a sudden Sen swung the fire extinguisher upwards, smashing it into the officer's head with enough force to send him toppling back into his men.

At the same time Mace drew his blaster and before the Imperial troops could react he had already fired two shots into one of them.

Another of the troopers tried to draw his blaster but Sen swung the extinguisher again, catching him on the side of his jaw and there was a sudden 'Crack!' as it broke. Then as the man fell Sen followed this up with a blow to his chest. While this was happening the remaining two troopers were trying to disentangle themselves from the officer while the other armed rebels drew their own blasters and fired. The volley of energy blasts struck the two fleet troopers, killing both instantly and as quickly as the fight had begun it was over. Five bodies now lay sprawled out on the floor in the open and Sen knelt down by the closest to recover the dead man's blaster and holster.

"Grab all their weapons and then get those bodies out of sight." Vorn ordered.

"Let's just hope that they weren't supposed to check in any time soon." Mace added.

The rebel team now led by Owen entered the bridge of the star destroyer to find it deserted and Kara hurried down into the crew pit and to one of the helm stations at the front of it.

"Well this is a bit bigger than I'm used to but everything looks in order." she said as she examined the controls.

"The ships were all brought here under their own power." Owen told her as he followed her down into the pit, "All the flight systems and engines ought to be in order. Anyway, what sort of ships are you used to flying?"

"Ah." Kara said and she smiled.

"Okay, now I've got a bad feeling about this. A star destroyer doesn't handle like a corvette you know." Owen said.

"I've never flown a corvette." Kara said.

"A transport?" Owen asked and Kara shook her head.

"Mace has let me behind the controls of the *Silver Hawk* a few times, but that's about it." she said and Owen frowned.

"So what can you fly?" he asked.

"She was a fighter pilot." Jaysica said, "But she got court-martialled for punching her squadron leader."

"Jarad Tarl's a nerf herder." Kara said, snarling.

"Oh great." Owen said, "From a snub fighter straight to a star destroyer. What could go wrong?"

"Well, err-" Tobis began.

"Rhetorical question Tobis." Kara called out.

Owen's face appeared on the display along with a summary of his service record.

"Lieutenant Owen Halowan of the *Horrific*." Admiral Trent said, "The security control office say that he told them that Admiral Hall sent him to question the prisoner. However, the admiral had not yet returned to duty at that point and Lieutenant Halowan seems to have vanished from his ship."

"I take it that a security alert was passed around to all the ships docked here?" Admiral Vretan asked and Admiral Trent nodded.

"It was. Including to the *Horrific* at the time that Lieutenant Halowan was on duty on the bridge to receive it." he said.

"He has also been identified by a technical crew we found bound in the workshop that the rebels' droids had been stored in." another officer added, "He and the girl tricked their way in and took the droids."

"And what about the vessel that the rebels were planning to use for their escape?" Admiral Vretan asked.

"Secured." an officer that the fleet admiral knew to be from the stormtrooper corps said, "As well as the turbolift tether connecting us to the surface."

"So the rebels will need to look for another escape route." Admiral Vretan said.

"We've deactivated the lieutenant's security code cylinders though sir." Admiral Trent said, "Wherever he is, Lieutenant Halowan won't be getting off the station."

Coll held up a hand for Brak to stop as he peered around a bulky piece of machinery that was part of one of the star destroyer's main ion thrusters. He had heard the technical team's conversation from some distance away and led Brak closer to investigate. But with only Coll being armed he opted to carry out the final part of his approach alone.

There were four imperial technicians sat around a fold away table who looked to be playing cards as they talked and ate. None of them looked to be armed but Coll still kept out of sight as he watched them rather than launching into an attack without knowing whether there were any more Imperials nearby. Keeping his blaster in one hand he held up four fingers of the other in Brak's direction and the other rebel nodded, understanding that Coll was telling him how many he could see and he nodded.

Brak then began to back away and Coll moved back to join him.

"That's the third group." Brak whispered, "We should get back and warn the others." and Coll nodded.

Turning around, Brak had taken just a few steps when another man in Imperial uniform appeared right in front of him and Coll. But unlike all of the groups they had encountered so far, this man was an officer and he glared at them.

"Who are you?" he demanded, "What are you doing down here?"

"What us?" Brak answered, trying to come up with a suitable explanation. Then he remembered that he and Coll were still wearing the uniform of Imperial gunners even though they had abandoned their helmets, "Gunnery team trill herf xesh one one four eight." he said, "We're inspecting the power conduits to the turbolaser batteries."

"The hell you are." the officer said, "Wait right there." and he reached for his comlink. But in that moment of distraction Brak reached out and grabbed hold of the officer by his tunic and pulled him forwards so that he struck his head on a pipe that stuck out diagonally from the wall beside him and there was a hollow 'Clang!' "Boring conversation anyway." Brak said as he reached down and scooped up the comlink from where it fell. Unfortunately the officer was not carrying a sidearm or Brak would have taken that as well and there was no time to go through the officer's pockets properly. Then he looked at Coll, "Let's go." he said, "We need to get to the bridge."

"Right." Coll replied and as he ran past the officer he took the opportunity to kick him in the head.

3.

Dayle and Vorn led their group back to the viewport where Owen had first shown them the venator-class vessels in the dry dock and Sen set the case containing the cutting torch down on the floor along with his fire extinguisher and began to unpack the torch.

"Give me a hand with this captain." he said, glancing at Inra and Mace saw her scowl at the idea of carrying out the manual labour she paid Sen to do.

"I've got it." Mace said instead, putting down his extinguisher as well and taking one of the cutter components from Sen, "I've helped Tobis with gear like this."

Then the R5 unit that belonged to Tobis, known to the rebels as 'Harvey', let out a string of chirping sounds.

"Major Larcus sir." Jeeves said, "Harvey is asking how we are to make the trip across to the star destroyer. His own fire extinguisher is unsuitable for steering or propulsion in zero gravity."

"By hanging onto one of us." Tharun suggested.

"That's probably the only way." Vorn agreed as he removed his helmet. Then he frowned.

"What's wrong?" Dayle asked.

"Shush." Vorn responded as he listened and again he heard the sound of marching feet, "Cover!" he hissed and he pressed himself up against the nearest bulkhead, drawing and raising his rifle just as a squad of fleet troopers came marching around the corner and Vorn fired his rifle on automatic.

"We're doomed!" Jeeves called out as the droid scurried out of the line of fire.

Both the rebels and the Imperial troops scattered as two of the fleet troopers were cut down instantly. Behind Vorn, Tharun unslung the second rifle that they had available to them and opened fire as well and this suppressive fire was enough to force the Imperial squad to retreat to positions of relative safety while the rebels prepared to cover Sen and Mace as they hurried to assemble the torch.

"We're pretty exposed here major." Tharun warned as blaster bolts began flying back down the corridor towards them and both Mace and Sen threw themselves to the floor.

"I know." Vorn replied. Then he looked at Harvey, "Harvey, can you give us a screen?" he asked and the droid letting out a whistle as it rolled forwards and unleashed a blast of freezing cold gas from its internal fire extinguisher. The carbon dioxide cloud spread out to fill the corridor, preventing either side from advancing down it or even seeing as far as the other. Tharun and Vorn switched to semi automatic fire at this point, moving their weapons back and forth to cover the entire width of the corridor.

"I thought stormtroopers could see through clouds like that." Cass called out.

"They can." Dayle replied, "Assuming that they know how to use the MAFTAS system in their helmets."

"Which I don't." Vorn added, "But fortunately we're facing fleet security not real stormtroopers so the odds are even. We just need to keep them back while we cut through the bulkhead."

Dayle looked around them. Aside from the corridor still filled with thick carbon dioxide vapour there were two other approaches to the rebels' position. One of those he knew led to the blast door in the direction of the dry dock and there was no chance that anyone was going to be coming at them from that way. But the other corridor was one that the rebels had not explored and it was quite possible that the Imperials on the far side of the cloud could summon reinforcements to outflank them from that direction.

"Does anyone have a copy of the layout of this section?" he asked.

"We were relying on Lieutenant Halowan to guide us." Cass replied.

"Oh great." Dayle replied.

"Commander Kord sir." Jeeves said, "Perhaps if we could locate a computer access port then Harvey could update his files and acquire the information we require."

"No time." Dayle said, "Inra, with me. We need to make sure no one tries to get around us."

"We've got company all right." Brak said as he and Coll rushed onto the bridge, "We saw at least forty Imperial technicians in the engine room."

"Are the drives intact?" Jaysica asked.

"They looked it." Brak replied, "But I'm used to machines a little smaller than a star destroyer."

"Yeah, well a fancy stereo isn't going to get us out of this." Kara commented.

"The problem is that there are likely more teams spread throughout the ship." Owen added, "More than we can deal with before someone raises the alarm."

"Oh, err, perhaps we should check out the hangar." Tobis suggested, "If this ship is filled with supplies then, err, maybe we can find something there to help us."

"Good idea. Take her with you." Kara said and she looked at Jaysica.

"You better take this as well." Owen added and he removed his sidearm from its holster and handed it to Tobis, "We'll still have three to defend the bridge with if it comes to it."

Tobis nodded and took the weapon before Jaysica linked arms with him.

"Come on Tobis." she said, "I can hardly wait to see what we can find." and the pair left the bridge, Penny rolling after them and squealing.

"So what's our situation here then?" Brak asked.

"Flight systems seem fine." Owen replied, "Though the engines will need engaging from the engine room."

"We even have weapons capability." Marse added, "Assuming we can crew them of course."

"No torpedoes though." Kara commented, "The Empire wasn't dumb enough to store multi-megaton munitions in the tubes of a ship they planned to scuttle."

"Right now we've done all we can to bring the ship on line without anyone noticing." Owen went on, "But when we really start to turn things on then someone is going to notice. So we're waiting for the others to make it here before we continue."

"Admiral we have reports of rebel activity from near the dry dock section." one of the command and control staff called out.

"Near to? Not inside?" Admiral Trent asked.

"No sir. The rebels are caught between a squad of security troopers and the blast door to the dry dock."

"Send reinforcements." Fleet Admiral Vretan ordered, "We can't allow the rebels into the dry dock."

"But surely they'll be contained in there." Admiral Trent said, "We control the hangar doors and the transports in there lack the weapons to-

"There are star destroyers in that dry dock admiral." Admiral Vretan interrupted, "Venator-class perhaps, but lethal capital ships still."

"But there are only a handful of rebels. They wouldn't have the audacity to try and steal a star destroyer."

Admiral Trent said and Admiral Vretan shook his head and sighed.

"Admiral, I suggest you get more experience of facing rebels before making any assumptions about what ridiculous schemes they will attempt." he told the station's commander, "Reinforce those men and stop those rebels before they get into the dry dock."

"Ready." Sen said as the last piece of the cutter was fixed in place and he placed the safety goggles that had been inside the same case as the torch over his eyes.

"Go." Mace said, slapping him on the shoulder and stepping back to join the others in holding back the Imperials. Sen immediately placed the nozzle of the torch against the bulkhead and activated it, producing a bright flash of light and a wave of heat from the short ranged plasma beam. The cutter was quite capable of slicing through the bulkhead, but the sheer thickness of it combined with the size of the hole that was required to fit not only the rebels but also their equipment through meant that it took time to create.

Meanwhile the rebels around him continued to fire into the now thinning cloud of carbon dioxide randomly to keep back the enemy troops.

"How long?" Vorn called out.

"As long as it takes." Sen replied.

"We're running out of cover here." Tharun added, "How about Harvey gives them another blast from his extinguisher?" and Harvey whistled in reply.

"I am sorry Sergeant Verser," Jeeves said, "but Harvey indicates that his internal fire extinguisher was depleted when he used it to create the cloud in the first place."

"Then what about one of those?" Cass asked and she pointed to the fire extinguishers currently scattered around the floor of the corridor and Mace and Vorn looked at one another and smiled.

"I've got it." Mace said, picking one of the extinguishers up, gripping it in both hands and then rolling it towards the cloud.

"Okay sergeant." Vorn said, "Together. Short bursts until we hit it."

"Understood." Tharun replied and then both he and Vorn switched their rifle to fire short bursts and aimed for the still rolling fire extinguisher. Just as it entered the cloud both men opened fire, adjusting their aim between the bursts until all of a sudden there was a loud 'Bang!' and a 'Whoosh!' as the fire extinguisher was hit and burst open, releasing the entire contents at once.

"So now who goes without?" Sen asked as he continued cutting.

"It was Cass's idea to do that." Mace said and as Cass's face fell he added, "So I'll share with her." and she smiled again.

"Got it!" Sen exclaimed, leaping to his feet and delivering a single kick to the bulkhead in front of him that sent the circular section he had just cut loose flying into the dry dock. This dropped down initially as the artificial gravity from the corridor continued to influence it through the hole before the weightlessness of the dry dock took over.

"Commander Kord!" Vorn shouted but there was no reply.

"Cass go get them." Mace said and Cass nodded before running off down the corridor after Dayle and Inra. She found the other two rebels a short distance away, positioned where equipment built into the walls of the

corridor provided them with cover just in case anyone came towards them from the other direction.

"Sen's finished." Cass told them, "There's a hole into the dry dock."

"At last." Inra said, "Then let's get out of here." and she and Dayle rushed back towards the other rebels with Cass. As they reached the junction where Sen had cut the hole into the viewport they found Vorn moving into position, the stormtrooper's helmet on his head once again and with a fire extinguisher in one hand and his other arm wrapped around Jeeves.

"I am not really sure about this Major Larcus sir." the droid said, "The distance is-"

"Never mind that Jeeves, just hang on." Vorn replied as he stepped through the hole and both he and Jeeves dropped from view.

"Did he just fall to his death?" Inra asked before there was the sound of a fire extinguisher being discharged and Vorn and Jeeves reappeared, drifting towards the nearest star destroyer.

"Well that looks like it works." Dayle said and he looked at Harvey as he picked up another of the fire extinguishers, "Get over here. I'll take you with me." he told the droid.

One at a time the rebels leapt through the hole, using the fire extinguishers to direct themselves towards the nearest star destroyer until only Mace, Tharun and Cass remained.

"I take it you've seen how slow everyone is moving?" Mace asked and Tharun nodded.

"We need something to keep that lot off our backs while we drift." he replied, pointing towards the cloud that once again was starting to thin, "Blaster packs?"

"I've got one spare." Mace replied.

"I've got one as well." Cass added, "What are you going to do with them?"

"Make a grenade." Tharun told her "Pass them all over here." and both Cass and Mace threw their spare ammunition to the former mercenary. Tharun then combined these with two spare blaster power packs from the stormtrooper utility belt he was wearing. Taking a medpac that he had removed from the emergency store he opened it up to get at the reel of tape it contained to secure the power packs together before using his thumbnail to unscrew the overload dowel from each power pack in turn, disconnecting the internal short circuit protection.

"Go." he said, sticking another piece of tape to one of the small metal dowels.

Mace then holstered his blaster and grabbed hold of Cass and a fire extinguisher, hurrying to the hole with them both before leaping into the dry dock.

Tharun began to back towards the hole as well, picking up the final fire extinguisher along the way. Then when he was right beside the hole he pressed the dowel down onto the contacts of one of the blaster power packs, holding it in place with the tape before he hurled it into the cloud. Then without pausing to see what would happen he stepped back through the hole.

The bundle of blaster power packs flew into the cloud and hit the floor. Normally the power packs were protected by internal circuitry against over heating and the short circuiting of their terminals but with the dowels removed this was no longer the case and the short circuited power pack was now heating up rapidly. In turn this heat was being conducted into the other unprotected power packs and causing them to heat up as well and with no way of releasing this heat an overload was inevitable.

"They've stopped firing." the leader of the Imperial troops on the other side of the cloud said, "Advance." and the squad emerged from cover to advance cautiously down the corridor. Unfortunately for them this meant that they were caught out in the open when the overload occurred. Had the cloud still been denser then it was possible that the lack of oxygen would have limited the damage done by the improvised explosive device, but instead the explosion sent not only fragments of the power pack casings flying down the corridor but also created a ball of flame that burned everything it touched and the fleet troopers screamed as they were caught up in all of this.

Meanwhile in the weightless environment of the dry dock the rebels continued to drift towards the nearest star destroyer.

"Look!" Kara yelled as she looked out of one of the bridge viewports into the dry dock, "Here they come."

"There's an emergency hatch at the top of this tower." Owen said, "Two levels up."

"Got it." Kara replied rushing from the bridge until she reached a ladder that led upwards and she started to climb.

The hatch was well signposted and she located it easily, climbing up onto the top of the star destroyer's control tower. Then she waved one of her hands while holding onto the hull of the star destroyer with the other, knowing that to let go entirely would risk her floating away in the zero gravity conditions around her.

"Boss! Over here!" she shouted, guessing that the man in the stormtrooper armour and clutching Jeeves was her husband.

Vorn released another blast of his fire extinguisher to adjust his course towards Kara and then let go of the extinguisher entirely, letting it drift away while he unwound a length of syntherope from his utility belt that he hurled towards Kara.

"I've got it!" she shouted as she caught hold of the end of the line and secured it to the star destroyer's hull,

tying it around a protruding heat sink. Now physically connected to the star destroyer and with Jeeves holding onto him still, Vorn pulled himself in, "Boss!" Kara exclaimed as he touch down, wrapping her arms around him and kissing his faceplate while narrowly avoiding floating away from the star destroyer's hull. "Well it's nice to feel wanted." Vorn replied, "Now let's get Jeeves inside and help the others." "Oh it feels so good to be back on a solid surface." Jeeves said as Kara and Vorn helped the droid down through the hatch, "If the maker had wished me to fly then I am certain that he would have given me a repulsorlift system."

Kara and Vorn ignored this, too busy preparing to help the other rebels still floating towards them. Vorn disconnected the syntherope line from his utility belt entirely, giving them a line that was secured to the hull of the star destroyer at one end and loose at the other. Then with Kara holding onto the base of the line with one hand and the other holding onto Vorn he threw the line towards Dayle and Harvey.

4.

"We have men down near the dry dock." the stormtrooper signalled as his squad charged along the corridor and witnessed the aftermath of the explosion, "No signs of the rebels yet. Wait. Strike that." he added as he saw the cutting torch and hole and rushed towards them, peering out into the dry dock, "Rebels have penetrated the dry dock. I say again, rebels have penetrated the dry dock. They are in zero gee and heading for one of the star destroyers. I can see some of them on top of a control tower now."

"Squad leader can you intercept them?" Admiral Vretan's voice asked in response.

"Negative sir. Enemy is already out of effective range. Request that blast doors be released to allow my men to reach the ship."

"Confirmed squad leader, opening blast door."

"Status?" Dayle asked as the rebels that had been caught on the wrong side of the blast door finally made it to the bridge of the star destroyer.

"The ship is flyable." Owen replied, "But we still need to reactivate the engines fully and there are still Imperial personnel aboard."

"How many?" Vorn asked as he removed his helmet.

"We don't know." Owen admitted.

"And where are Jaysica and Tobis?" Cass added.

"The hangar." Kara answered, "Unless the klutz has got them killed already."

Jaysica and Tobis peered out from underneath the heavy starfighter, an obsolete Incom ARC-170 that was one of many lined up in the launch area of the hangar bay. Owen had been correct when he said that the venator-class ships had been packed full of equipment to be destroyed in the scuttling, so full in fact that the standard fighter berths in the hangar had been insufficient and the central launching area had been used as overflow storage for even more of the craft. But it was not just fighters in the hangar. There were troop transports, AT-TE and lighter AT-RT walkers as well as the droids used to maintain and rearm all of these. But what captured the attention of the two rebels was the unit of Imperial technicians currently inspecting some of the crated supplies.

"What are we going to do Tobis?" Jaysica asked quietly.

"I, err, I don't know." he replied, "Perhaps we should just go back and tell the others." But before Jaysica could reply Penny let out a whistle that made the Imperial technicians turn towards them.

"Who's there?" one called out.

"Let's go." Tobis said softly and he and Jaysica got to their feet and began to try and creep away. Something that proved easy until Jaysica rested her hand on the fuselage of a Z-95 headhunter and applied just enough pressure to cause the open canopy to drop shut.

"You there!" the technician shouted and the two rebels turned around, expecting to be challenged about their presence in the hangar. But unexpectedly the technician staring at them smiled, "It's about time you got here. We requested ordnance support twenty minutes ago. Now get over here."

Jaysica and Tobis glanced at one another, initially confused. But then both realised that they were still dressed as Imperial gunners and the training of gunners in handling heavy ordnance made it only natural that they would be despatched to answer a call for support relating to explosives.

"Of course." Jaysica replied and she stepped forwards, "But the work order got screwed up. It took us ages to get here and you'll have to explain what it is you want. Right Tobis?"

"What? Oh, err, yes." Tobis said.

"Then get over here." the technician said. Then he frowned at Jaysica, "Aren't you a little short for the gunnery corps?" he asked. But Jaysica ignored him.

The two rebels were shown to an open crate that was clearly labelled as containing concussion missiles meant for the headhunters. But there was discolouration around the warheads of some of these.

"What do you think?" the technician asked, "Are these safe to move?"

Obviously the technical team was concerned that the internal workings of the missiles had become corroded during the years spent drifting in space, presumably due to poor handling during the loading procedure. But something looked odd about the discolouration to Jaysica and she leant in for a closer look. Then she reached out.

"Careful!" the technician snapped, "You could trigger it."

"I've never triggered one before." Jaysica replied.

"Obviously." the technician said, "You'd be dead if you had." but Jaysica then prodded one of the missiles where it was discoloured and wiped the tip of her finger across the missile's casing. This caused some of the

discoloured patch to come away on her fingertips and Jaysica studied it more closely, confirming what she had suspected.

"It's mould." she said, "Someone probably dropped some crumbs in here while they were packing these missiles and the mould grew."

"So they're safe then?" the technician asked.

"Oh perfectly." Jaysica replied, "But I suggest you and your men inspect all of these other crates as well just in case any of the others are in worse condition."

"Aren't you going to help?" the technician asked.

"Oh, err, no." Tobis said, "We, ah, we have to report this in to our superior."

"We need to find Penny first." Jaysica added.

"Who's Penny?" the technician asked.

"My droid. I mean the mouse droid I've been issued with. I've become rather attached to her. I mean it." Jaysica answered.

"Okay, get on with it." the technician said and the two rebels backed away. Jaysica spotted Penny almost immediately and waved the little droid towards her before all three hurried from the hangar.

"The Empire's going to figure out that we're here pretty quickly." Vorn said to Dayle, who nodded in return.

"Yes, we need to figure out a way of keeping them off the ship." he said.

"And getting rid of those already aboard." Vorn added.

"I've already sealed the airlocks but it won't take long for cutting equipment to be brought up." Owen replied.

"Well the best way to keep people off the ship is to launch it." Mace said.

"That still leaves us with the issue of the Imperial personnel already aboard." Vorn said.

"Who appear to be technical crew, not troopers." Dayle pointed out.

"But according to Brak there are a lot of them." Inra said.

"Are you talking about the Imperial technical crews?" Jaysica asked as she and Tobis returned to the bridge, Penny darting ahead of them, "Because Tobis and I ran into more in the hangar."

"Ah Tobis." Vorn said, "We need you, Sen and Harvey to go down to engineering to reactivate the ship's engines."

"Coll you go with them as well." Dayle said, "Make sure they stay safe. Understood?"

"Right." Coll replied.

"You that's all I've ever heard him say I think." Kara commented and looking at Coll she added, "Do you know any more words?"

"Yep." he said.

"Such as?" Kara asked.

"Yep." Coll repeated.

"Oh I walked right into that one didn't I?" Kara said, shaking her head,

"Yep." Coll said again.

"Just get out of here all three of you." Dayle ordered, "We need those engines."

"We'll need weapons as well." Marse added.

"He's right commander." Owen said, "We can't open the dry dock's space doors from here so we'll have to smash through them."

"Smash through?" Jaysica said, "But is that even possible?"

"Sure it is." Vorn said, "The forwards turbolasers on a ship like this pack a real punch. A couple of volleys from one will fracture the doors enough that we'll be able to smash right through."

"Your team sure knows these old ships Mace." Inra commented.

"Young lady I was the navigator of a ship like this during the Clone Wars." Vorn said.

"Okay, so we smash our way through the doors and out into space." Dayle said, "But then what? By that time every Imperial crewman aboard will know something's wrong."

"Oh they'll know something's wrong as soon as we fire up the engines." Vorn replied,

"The blast doors can be sealed to protect the bridge and engineering though." Owen said.

"Still leaves a large portion of the ship that they'll be running loose in." Mace said.

"Perhaps if we ask nice enough they'll leave." Kara muttered and Vorn smiled.

"That's it." he said, "We use the public address system to announce our seizure of the ship. The Imperials won't have any idea how many of us there are aboard so maybe we can trick them into abandoning ship.

They'll have from the moment we leave the station until we reach the jump zone to get off. After that any left will be coming with us for the ride."

"I take it you're planning an intermediate jump followed by a second one to headquarters?" Dayle asked and Vorn nodded.

"Don't want the Empire tracking our exit vector." he answered.

"But won't the Empire try and stop us?" Cass asked.

"Anything that can catch this ship moving flat out won't be able to do any serious damage to it." Mace told

her.

"At least not one on one." Dayle added.

"Don't worry Cass." Vorn said, "Our window of vulnerability will be very small."

"In that case I ought to be getting to one of the forward turbolasers." Marse said, "But I'll need help."

"Yes I know. The guns have a crew of three." Vorn responded.

"Then I guess it's me and you little lady." Tharun said, looking at Jaysica.

"Me?" Jaysica replied, surprised.

"Yes you." Tharun said, "The officers will be needed right here to pilot the ship so that just leaves you or Cass."

"I could-" Cass began.

"No." Vorn interrupted, "You stay here with us."

"Get going." Dayle ordered, "Check in when you're ready and we'll have Sen and Tobis turn the engines on then."

The stormtroopers rushed down the boarding tube towards the outer air lock door of the star destroyer but were forced to halt when they reached it and found it sealed from the inside.

"We're at the air lock to the *Justice* now." the squad leader transmitted to the station's control centre, "But the door is sealed."

"Understood squad leader." Admiral Trent replied, "Be advised that we are unable to contact any of the work crews inside either."

"Request cutting equipment." the squad leader said.

"Understood. Equipment and reinforcements are on their way. ETA six minutes."

5.

Having already been there and familiar with where the Imperial technical teams were currently carrying out their surveys, Coll led Sen and Tobis to engineering. At which point Tobis pointed out a chamber that overlooked the main engineering room and the massive ion drive units it housed.

"Err, I think that's the control room." he said.

"Looks like it to me as well." Sen replied, wiping his brow, "What do you reckon? Five minute walk tops?" and Tobis nodded, "Then lead the way sergeant." Sen added.

The estimate of five minutes to get from the lower level of the engineering section up to the monitoring and control room overlooking it was accurate and the trio of rebels were soon positioned outside with blasters in their hands, ready to storm the chamber while Harvey stayed further back out of harm's way if it did come to a firefight.

"Oh, err-" Tobis said just as Coll was about to open the door to the control room and Sen glared at him.

"What?" he hissed.

"Well, err, maybe we should set our weapons to stun. You know, just in case we hit something important."

Tobis replied and Sen grinned.

"Maybe we should." he replied, adjusting his weapon at the same time as Tobis. Coll then followed suit and hit the control to open the door. As the door slid open with a sudden 'hiss' the three rebels rushed through, prepared to face an Imperial technical team. But the control room was deserted and all of the consoles and displays dark.

"Harvey, get in here and reactivate these consoles." Tobis called out and his astromech droid rolled into the control room, chirping as it proceeded to the closest computer access port and plugged in. Meanwhile Coll sealed the door behind the droid and stood guard while both Sen and Tobis began to inspect the consoles. One by one these came to life as Harvey directed power to them and soon the room was fully lit up.

"Okay this looks good." Sen said, "We should call this in."

"Oh, err, yeah. Right." Tobis replied as he searched for the intercom on the panel in front of him. Finding it he opened a channel to the bridge, "Err, hello?" he transmitted.

"Tobis, it's Vorn." Vorn's voice replied, "I take it you're ready in engineering?" and Tobis looked up at Sen who nodded.

"Err, yes major. We, ah, we can bring the engines on line whenever you want." Tobis said.

"Good. Await instructions." Vorn said and the channel went dead.

"Well then." Sen said, sitting down and lifting his feet up onto the console in front of him, "I guess we wait for instructions."

The sound of running feet preceded the arrival of the reinforcements sent with then specialist cutting equipment needed to burn through the heavily armoured starship hatch and without waiting for instructions the crew started setting up the cutting torch.

Marse was the first to enter the turbolaser turret and took the master gunner's position.

"Sergeant Verser, can you take that position there?" he asked as Tharun followed him in, "You can run the target acquisition system from there."

"What about me?" Jaysica asked as she appeared in the hatchway, stumbling on the rim of the hatch and having to steady herself on Tharun.

"Juts one spot left little lady." Tharun said.

"Right." Jaysica replied, "What do I do?"

"Just let me know if any of the readouts start going red." Marse replied.

"What readouts?" Jaysica asked.

"They'll come on when we've got power." Marse told her before activating the intercom, "Commander Kord this is Marse. We're all set."

"Tobis do it now." Vorn ordered over the intercom and all of a sudden all of the instruments on the bridge came to life. Then he looked at Dayle, "Well if the Empire didn't already know that we're here they do now." he said.

"Okay we've got helm control." Mace called out, "Standing by to-"

"Hey!" Inra snapped, "How come you get to drive?"

"Okay fine, you do it." Mace replied and Inra smiled, "Thank you." she said. Then looking at her console she added, "Engaging repulsorlifts for manoeuvring."

The star destroyer started to vibrate as its repulsorlift engines started up and there was a groaning sound but

it was clear to see through the viewports at the front of the bridge that the kilometre long warship was not moving.

"I've got a very bad feeling about this." Cass said.

"Moorings are still engaged." Owen said as he studied the system readouts.

"You didn't disengage the moorings?" Kara exclaimed, glaring at Inra.

"Where's the control?" she asked and both Kara and Mace began to hunt for it.

"Here." Mace said, pressing a button but the star destroyer remained in place still.

"Dock control have overridden the moorings." Owen said, "We can't break free on repulsorlifts or thrusters."

"We can if we use the ion drive." Mace pointed out.

"Are you insane?" Kara snapped, "You can't fire the ion drives inside here." then she looked up out of the crew pit at where Dayle and Vorn stood, "Boss this ship accelerates at three thousand gees. Even at one percent power that still slams us into an intact hangar door at thirty gees."

"I know." Vorn said, "We need that door taking out before we start."

"Marse, take out that door." Dayle said.

"Understood commander." Marse replied and he pressed his face to the manual targeting viewer. Fortunately the design of the turret pre-dated the all enclosing helmets worn by Imperial gunners that included elements of the targeting system in them and he could operate the turbolaser manually, "I need the auto-target finder shutting off." he said as he lined the sight up on the dry dock's outer doors.

"Got it." Tharun replied, jabbing at his console.

"Firing!" Marse yelled and there was the sudden pulse of heat and sound as he discharged the turbolaser.

"We just got a massive heat spike." Jaysica warned.

"You think?" Tharun commented before Marse fired again and again, adjusting his aim between each shot.

The three powerful energy blasts slammed into the dry dock door, punching holes more than the height of a tall man through them where they hit. These were far from big enough for even a starfighter to fit through, let alone a star destroyer, but the significant damage was the stress fractures that the multiple hits created in the remainder of the door.

A brief rush of escaping air accompanied the formation of the holes leading from the fully pressurised dry dock to the vacuum of space but this soon ceased as the magnetic field intended to maintain pressure while the doors were open engaged automatically in response to the loss of pressure.

"We're through!" the leader of the cutting team yelled just as his men were completing the task of cutting through the hatch and they leapt out of the way for the soldiers behind them to get past.

"We've got a red light on an outer air lock door." Owen warned, "Sealing inner door and raising shields."

"Firing ion drive now." Mace added before Inra could and he pushed forwards on the controls in front of him.

Immediately the star destroyer's main sublight engines fired and the dry dock was filled with flames.

Even operating on minimum power the thrust of the star destroyer's ion drives was enough to rip away the moorings that had been holding it in place and as the ship moved off the flames swept into the boarding tube, incinerating the Imperial troops who had been about to storm the ship.

Meanwhile the direct back blast of the ion drives tore through the structure of the dry dock behind the star destroyer, ripping it apart. The damage from this spread along the wall of the dry dock, quickly reaching the other venator-class ships moored there and as flaming shrapnel punched through their unshielded hulls they too began to burn.

All of this destruction was just a by product of the engines firing however, the intent had been to propel the rebel controlled star destroyer *Justice* out of the dry dock and it achieved this convincingly. The star destroyer lurched forwards, a motion barely felt by its occupants thanks to its own internal artificial gravity field, and shot towards the already damaged dry dock door. The shielded prow of the star destroyer smashed through the weakened structure, sending debris flying out into space as the rest of the ship itself tore its way out.

"Sir the dry dock!" one of the command centre staff exclaimed as the main holographic display showed the entire dry dock and the other venator-class ships still docked there burning furiously while the escaping rebels piloted the *Justice* away from Estran.

"Scramble everything we've got!" Admiral Trent yelled, "Arm all weapons. Don't let that ship get away.

"No!" Fleet Admiral Vretan snapped, countermanning the order, "It's too late. Have damage control teams report to the dry dock. We need to get that fire contained before those star destroyers can go critical. Then get me in touch with every ship we already have out there. Maybe they can intercept the *Justice* before those damned rebels can escape with her."

"It looks like the fleet headquarters is issuing an alert about us to the other naval assets in the system."

Owen announced from the comscan station.

"Let me see." Brak replied, hurrying to Owen's side and looking at the display. Sure enough he saw that the space station they were flying away from was broadcasting to the various Imperial Navy ships patrolling elsewhere in the system.

"We need to block that signal." Vorn said.

"Don't worry major." Brak replied, "I think I've got it handled." and he called up an index of the star destroyer's data library and began to hurriedly search through it, "Ah, here we are." he said, "This ought to do nicely.

Now what was that somebody was saying about how a decent stereo wasn't going to be able to help us?"

and he pressed a button on the console in front of him. As soon as he did so the star destroyer's public address system began to blare out loud music and Vorn smiled as he recognised the tune.

"All Stars Burn As One." he said.

"The anthem of the Galactic Republic." Dayle added.

"We're also broadcasting this on all channels." Brak added, "Hopefully it will limit the Imperial fleet headquarters' ability to issue orders."

6.

"Where is that noise coming from?" Admiral Trent demanded as the communication channel was flooded with the anthem of the Republic, a tune outlawed by the Empire.

"My guess would be the *Justice*." Fleet Admiral Vretan replied. Then he turned to the comscan operators, "Can you cut through that to get to our ships?" he asked.

"It may be possible to try sir." one of them replied.

"Try? There is no try. Either do or do not." the fleet admiral told him.

"Yes sir." the comscan operator said as he looked for a clear channel amongst the broadcast, "Got it! He exclaimed, "There's a free channel at the upper end of the spectrum. Some of our ships may be able to pick it up."

"Some?" Admiral Trent exclaimed.

"Some is better than none." Fleet Admiral Vretan said, "Give me the channel."

"Channel open sir."

"This is Fleet Admiral Vretan at fleet headquarters. The venator-class star destroyer *Justice* has been seized by rebel forces. All units are ordered to intercept the ship. Retake it if possible but you are authorised to destroy the ship to prevent it from escaping. Vretan out." then Fleet Admiral Vretan closed the channel and looked around, "Now we wait." he said.

"Err, Major Larcus?" Tobis voice, the sound of the anthem of the Republic making it difficult to hear the soft spoken engineer."

"Yes Tobis, what is it?" Vorn replied.

"Err, well, we've got company sir." Tobis told Vorn as the three rebels in the engineering control room looked at the door as there was the sound of hammering from the other side as some of the Imperial personnel aboard tried to force their way inside, "The door is keeping them out for now."

On the bridge Dayle and Vorn exchanged glances.

"Time for your announcement I think Vorn." Dayle said.

"My announcement? You're the ranking officer." Vorn replied.

"Maybe, but you're famous." Dayle pointed out.

"He's got you there boss." Kara commented from in the crew pit and Vorn sighed.

"Very well." he said as he descended into the crew pit to join Brak and Owen at the comscan station, "Give me ship wide. Oh and kill that music inside, I want people to be able to hear me clearly."

"You've got it now sir." Owen replied at the same time as the rendition of All Stars Burn As One ceased.

"Attention all Imperial personnel aboard." Vorn said clearly, using his finest public speaking voice, "My name is Vorn Larcus the third and this vessel is now under the control of forces loyal to the Alliance To Restore The Republic. You have two choices open to you, you can either surrender to the superior Alliance forces aboard and become prisoners of war or make your way to an escape pod and evacuate before we enter hyperspace. In the name of the Alliance To Restore The Republic, may the Force be with you." and then Vorn signalled for the channel to be closed off.

"What exactly are these 'superior alliance forces' then boss?" Kara asked and Cass drew the slender target pistol she still had in the shoulder holster.

"This I think." she said.

Then an alarm sounded.

"Oh my, this is it." Jeeves exclaimed, "We're all doomed."

"No we're not." Owen responded, "That was an escape pod launching. Looks like the major's speech did the trick and – Oh."

"Oh?" Dayle repeated, "What's 'Oh'?"

"As in 'Oh I've got bad feeling about this.'" Cass said.

"And you'd be right to." Owen said, "We've got Imperial cruisers approaching dead ahead. Looks like a standard attack line consisting of four arquitens-class light cruisers."

"How far away?" Vorn asked.

"Too far to try and board us." Owen replied.

"But close enough to try for a missile lock and shoot us down before we can jump to hyperspace." Brak added.

"This is where having torpedoes in the tubes would have come in useful." Kara said.

"But they don't know that we don't have any." Vorn said, "Lieutenant Halowan, can you get a lock on those ships?"

"I think so." Owen replied.

"Good. Then while you're doing that I'll run the numbers for a jump into hyperspace." Vorn replied and he hurried to the navigation console and sat down. The data in the navigation computer had not been updated for more than two decades but Vorn was not planning a lengthy initial jump. He would instead jump the ship into interstellar space far from any Imperial patrols where he would have far more time to plot a jump that would take them close enough to the Alliance's headquarters in the sector to be able to contact them and let them know to expect the venator-class ship. Simply jumping straight to the headquarters risked being misidentified as an Imperial ship and being fired upon by several vessels far more powerful than the *Justice*. "Enemy cruisers are breaking formation." Owen announced, "Moving to surround us."

"Excellent." Dayle said, "They're trying to make it harder to target them all. Are any of them close enough for Marse to try hitting with the turbolaser?"

"No commander. Enemy vessels still out of turbolaser range." Owen replied before a klaxon sounded.

"What's that?" Cass asked, scared.

"One of those Imperial ships has a missile lock on us." Dayle replied.

"Missile launch detected." Owen called out, "Closing fast. Impact in thirty seconds."

"Evasive!" Dayle called out.

"Too late, missile has acquired us." Owen warned, "Impact in twenty-five seconds." then came a second klaxon, "Second missile launch detected. Impact in forty seconds." Owen said.

"Vorn." Dayle called out.

"Almost there." Vorn replied.

"Hurry boss." Kara added.

"Impact in twenty seconds." Owen said.

"Almost there." Vorn repeated as he continued to draw numbers from the navigation computer relating to objects with mass great enough to block travel through hyperspace, of which there were a great many circling at the edge of most star systems.

"Impact in ten seconds." Owen called out.

"Dad I can see it." Cass said, looking out of the viewport to where the flare of a missile engine was visible.

"Then don't look." Mace told her.

"Five seconds." Owen said.

"Brace for impact." Dayle ordered.

"Now!" Vorn yelled and Mace pushed the hyperdrive initiator lever, causing the stars outside the ship to blur into bright streaks as the star destroyer vanished into hyperspace.

Fleet Admiral Vretan sighed and bowed his head when the display showed the *Justice* escape just moments before the first of the two concussion missiles passed through the space where it had been. An impact by either of the missiles could have inflicted severe damage on the star destroyer, damage that given its tiny rebel crew would have prevented its escape. Now though the rebels had got away with a warship that was capable of challenging even the biggest Imperial Navy vessel in the sector if properly crewed and outfitted with modern starfighters.

"The moff needs to be told about this." he said, lifting his head again, "Prepare my shuttle. I will accept personal responsibility for losing them and apologise to Moff Horatian." then without a further word he turned around and strode out of the command centre, leaving several shocked looking naval officers behind him.