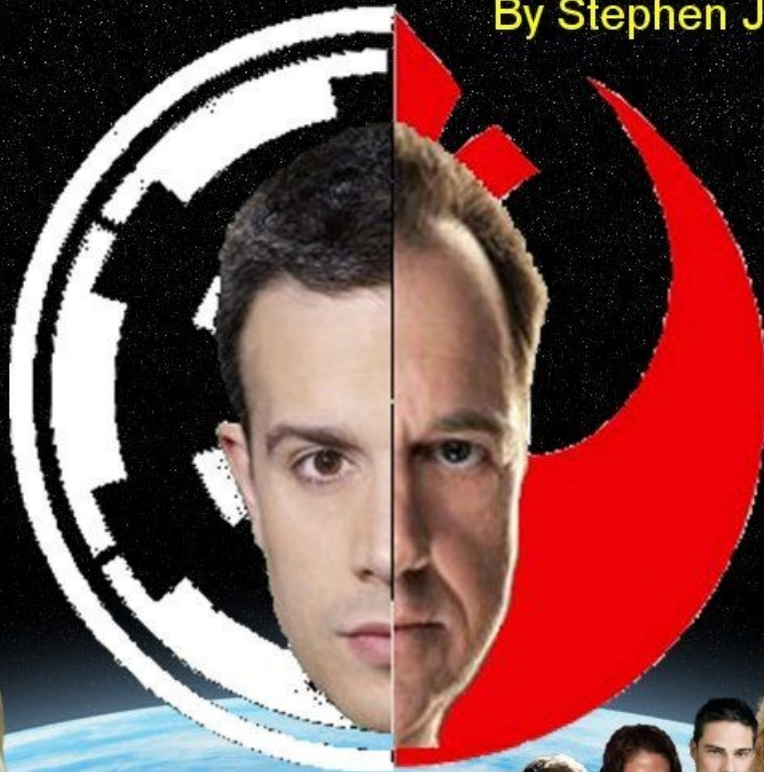


STAR WARS

7-05: Prisoner Exchange

By Stephen J Dutton



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Civil war turns father against son

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

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

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

PRISONER EXCHANGE

AN ATTACK ON AN ESTRANIAN DEFENCE FORCE OUTPOST RESULTS IN THE CAPTURE OF GARM LARCUS. SUSPECTING REBEL INVOLVEMENT VAY UDRA REACHES OUT TO THE ALLIANCE WITH AN OFFER SHE HOPES THEY WON'T REFUSE...

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

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1.

When the airspeeder touched down at the remote defence force tracking station two people in the uniforms of the Imperial Security Bureau got out and walked across the landing pad. Despite the presence of the two ISB agents this was not an Imperial facility. Instead it belonged to the Estranian Defence Force and so all of the personnel assigned to the outpost wore local uniforms instead of the typical grey Imperial ones.

"Lieutenant Cook?" the male agent asked and the military officer waiting for them nodded, "I'm Agent Garm Larcus and this is Agent Vay Udra. ISB. I understand you have a prisoner for us?"

"That's right. Thanks for coming so quickly" Cook answered, "If you'll come with me I'll take you to him."

"Lead the way." Garm said and he and Vay began to follow Cook into the main outpost building.

The tracking station lacked the more advanced sensors of an Imperial facility but given that Estran was the capital world of the sector and defended by squadrons of Imperial warships as well as several battle groups of army troops as well as stormtroopers it was understandable the the local government had opted to cut corners on their own defence expenditure.

"So how did you catch him?" Vay asked as they walked down a flight of steps that led to an underground level.

"He tripped a motion sensor out by one of the secondary arrays." Cook replied, "It happens quite often but normally it's just some animal looking for somewhere warm to sleep and attracted by the heat of the equipment." then he smiled, "At least it means we get fresh meat every now and again instead of just packaged stuff."

"Just stick to the facts please lieutenant." Garm said.

"Of course. Well we sent out a patrol and they found this guy there trying to get inside the array." Cook said and at that point they reached an area where the pipe-lined passageway they had been following opened out into an area where there was a simple fold away table set out that had a defence force soldier sat behind it. As soon as he saw the officer and ISB agents approaching the trooper jumped to his feet and snapped to attention, "He claimed to be alone but I believe that there may be more." Cook said, "So I requested permission to conduct a full search of the area. He had a datapad with him that we believe he was going to use to access the array's control computer and was armed only with this." and he picked up a bag from the table that he handed to Garm. Opening it up Garm looked inside and then removed a blaster rifle.

"An E-eleven." he said, "Standard Imperial issue."

"And brand new it looks like." Vay added.

"It does, yes." Garm agreed and he glanced at the trooper behind the table who was armed with an identical type of weapon. But unlike the example Garm was holding the soldier's appeared much older and somewhat battered, unsurprising since it had probably been passed onto the Estranian Defence Force as surplus by the Imperial military, "Okay let's see him." Garm added, lowering the blaster and Cook nodded at the trooper behind it. The trooper then walked over to a nearby door and unlocked it, stepping aside as it slid open to reveal a man sat bound to a chair and hooded.

"We don't have a proper detention section here." Cook said, "So we had to improvise instead."

"Leave us." Garm told Cook and he stepped back through the door before Garm closed it again, "Well?" he asked, looking at Vay and she stared at the hooded prisoner and focused on his thoughts.

Fear.

"He's afraid." she said, relaying what she had sensed in the Force.

"I don't doubt it." Garm replied and he walked up to the prisoner and pulled the hood from his head to reveal his heavily tattooed appearance. In response the man just snarled at both Garm and Vay.

"Looks friendly though, doesn't he?" Vay said sarcastically.

"Oh very." Garm replied, "He looks like he's desperate to be our friend. Which is good given that we're all that's between him and a gallows right now."

"For petty vandalism?" the man said, "I doubt it."

"Petty vandalism?" Garm said, glancing at Vay, "You tried to sabotage an EDF communications antenna."

"Yeah, Estranian Defence Force. Not Imperial. You don't even have jurisdiction." the man said.

"Actually we have jurisdiction over any crimes we choose to investigate." Vay replied.

"But particularly terrorist related offences." Garm added and he held up the blaster rifle, "This isn't a petty crook's weapon. In fact it looks brand new and that opens up a whole lot of issues beyond the illegal possession of a military weapon. The simple fact that this is brand new and not something that looks like it was stolen from a reserve supply or taken from a trooper means you've got a good source of supply. And to me that just screams 'Rebel Alliance'. How about you?" and Garm looked at Vay.

"Oh yes, definitely." she agreed, "By tapping into that array the rebels could monitor military communication traffic. Even Imperial signals."

"I think it's time we-" Garm began before the sound of a klaxon interrupted him, "Oh I've got a bad feeling about this." he said, "Vay, go check it out. I'll keep an eye on this nerf herder."

Vay opened the door and ran from the room. In the space outside she found Cook and the trooper listening to what was being said by someone on the other end of Cook's comlink.

"Ah, Agent Udra." Cook said when he noticed her, "We're under attack. A force of unknown origin has started firing mortars at us."

"Take me back to the surface." Vay said, "I want to see this."

Cook and Vay hurried back up to the surface level of the outpost. Up here the sound of the klaxon was louder and it was joined by intermittent explosions as mortar shells detonated all around the outpost. Soldiers stationed at the tracking station were rushing to defend it, taking up positions in pre-prepared strong points that gave them commanding fields of fire. But without access to longer ranged indirect firing weapons they could not return fire against the mortars.

"Lieutenant I need a squad of men." Vay said to Cook.

"But you're not a-" Cook began and all of a sudden Vay glared at him, the way in which her eyes gazed into his sending a shiver down his spine.

Careful Vay.

The message came from within the Force itself and Vay recognised it as coming from a distant relative of hers, Lara Udra who had been a member of the Jedi Order approximately four thousand years earlier. Now, much to Vay's annoyance, the long dead jedi seemed intent on trying to persuade her to mend her ways.

"Not now." Vay hissed.

"I'm sorry." Cook replied, believing that Vay's words were intended for him and he turned around, "You there!" he called out to a squad of troopers hurrying from the armoury, "You will accompany Agent Udra." he told them and they looked at Vay, obviously confused as to why they should be taking orders from this young woman, "Follow her orders as if they were my own."

"Yes sir." the squad leader replied, saluting.

"We're going to take out those mortars." Vay said and she pointed in the direction that the mortar rounds were coming from, "Now follow me and maintain communications silence."

2.

Vay led the squad of troopers out to the perimeter of the base. Using her Force enhanced senses she was able to predict where the mortar bombs were likely to fall and while the troopers following her regularly threw themselves to the ground in anticipation of a round landing nearby she simply strode forwards, heading out past the perimeter of the base and into the countryside beyond it as if she was just going out for a stroll. She drew the blaster she carried on her hip as she advanced just in case whoever was attacking the base had laid any ambushes for the soldiers stationed there. Of course she would have likely been able to sense the presence of any living attackers but there was always the possibility that battle droids could be involved in the attack and so Vay knew she had to be ready for anything. She also carried a lightsaber in a pouch on her belt but given that she was in the company of local defence force troops who knew nothing of her abilities she decided against revealing that secret by drawing the instantly recognisable weapon.

The terrain around the tracking station was largely open but uneven and it was from over one of the many low hills that Vay finally saw a volley of mortar rounds be launched and she signalled for the troopers behind her to take cover.

"This is it." she said softly, "We'll move up to the crest of that hill and hold there while we see what's on the other side. Then I'll take half the squad with me while the rest of you stay in position and engage the enemy on my signal."

"And what will you be doing with the rest of my men?" the squad leader asked.

"Moving to cut off their retreat." Vay replied, "I doubt they'll have considered the possibility of us coming out to hunt them down so at the first sign of trouble they'll try and withdraw. That's something I intend to prevent." Upon reaching the crest of the hill from behind which the mortars were being fired Vay peered over it. She had already sensed the presence of several lifeforms and now she saw them. About a dozen beings of various species including humans dressed in identical combat fatigues were loading one mortar bomb after another into four mortar tubes while beyond them lay a stationary repulsortruck that looked large enough for them all to have arrived in along with their weapons. The mortars looked to be professionally produced military weapons rather than the cruder versions often manufactured by terrorist groups that lacked access to heavy weaponry and this again pointed towards the group being well connected. Their style of dress was significant as well, signifying that they were a trained military unit rather than a group of irregular fighters. "Okay this is it." Vay said as she slid back behind the hill and addressed the squad, "At the first sign of trouble I reckon they'll all try and jump in that truck and get out of here. So my team will attack the truck itself and that will be the signal for the other team to engage the terrorists themselves."

"What about prisoners?" the squad leader asked.

"We already have one." Vay replied, "Shoot to kill."

Vay then took half of the squad and left the rest with their squad leader to keep watch on the mortar position. Moving quickly and taking advantage of the uneven ground Vay's team had soon positioned itself to the side of the mortar crews from where they could get a clear line of fire on the repulsortruck and Vay crouched down and lined up her blaster pistol on the front of the vehicle.

"Okay get ready." she said and around her the defence force troopers unfolded the stocks of their blaster rifles and brought them up to their shoulders, "Now." Vay added quietly and in unison her team opened fire. The sudden volley of blaster fire from such an unexpected direction took the mortar crews entirely by surprise and they ceased fire as they dived for cover to avoid the shrapnel spread by the exploding repulsortruck. At the same time the troopers that Vay had left behind emerged from over the hill to engage the gunners directly. Just as Vay had predicted, whoever had sent the mortar teams had not foreseen the possibility that the troops defending the tracking station would send out a force to counter attack them and so no provision had been made to protect them. Instead, each of the gunners was reduced to drawing the assortment of handheld blasters they were armed with to return fire. Unlike the prisoner being held back at the tracking station or the mortars they had been using to attack it these were not modern military grade weapons, instead they were a mix of out of date military pistols and weapons intended more for target shooting or personal protection. Against the blaster rifles carried by the defence force troopers this left them not only exposed to a crossfire but also massively out gunned and one by one they fell until there were only four left and lacking any sort of vehicle to carry them away they turned and ran.

"Come on!" Vay exclaimed as she emerged from cover, "Let's finish them." and she charged headlong towards the fleeing gunners, firing a shot from her blaster pistol that took one of them, a duros, off his feet. Two more of the gunners were shot by the defence force troopers before the final one left alive threw her blaster to the ground and raised her hands.

"I surrender." she called out, looking at Vay.

"I don't care." Vay replied.

Vay no!

But Vay ignored the plea from Lara and promptly shot the woman in the chest. They she looked towards the defence force squad leader as he and his team walked into the open from beyond the top of the hill.

"Call this in." she ordered him, "Tell Lieutenant Cook that we'll need a forensics team out here to examine these mortars. Weapons like that don't grow on trees."

The squad leader took out his comlink and activated it. But before he could say anything the device instead picked up a transmission coming from the tracking station.

"Perimeter breached! I say again perimeter breached! They're heading for the prisoner."

Vay's eyes widened in horror.

"Garm!" she exclaimed and without pausing to give any further orders to the defence force troopers she started running back towards the tracking station.

Garm heard the muffled sound of firing, distinct from that of the explosions that had now ceased and he realised that the bombardment was just a part of the attackers' plan. Most likely a distraction to draw out some of the defending troops and in that respect it had been successful.

"I've got a bad feeling about this." he said to himself and the prisoner stared at him, smiling.

"Looks like I'll be leaving soon." he said, "That's the thing about my associates, we don't like to leave a man behind. Not when your sort prides themselves in loosening tongues. Among other body parts of course."

Garm drew his blaster and checked that the power cell was fully charged. If he was going to have to enter combat then he did not want to find himself running out of ammunition unexpectedly. Then he walked over to the door and opened it to find the trooper on guard still standing in the passageway outside.

"What's going on?" Garm asked.

"Rebels attacking the southern perimeter sir." the guard replied, "They've managed to infiltrate a force of about platoon size into the base and they've been sighted heading this way. The CO has put in a call for air or orbital support but the enemy are already too close."

"Stang." Garm hissed, "Stay at your post. I'll be in here with the prisoner."

"Yes sir." the guard said before Garm returned to the improvised cell and looked at the prisoner.

"Hiding?" the prisoner asked.

"Making certain that if your friends get this far all they find is a corpse." Garm replied as he positioned himself facing the door and with his blaster held pointing right at it.

It was just a few minutes later that Garm heard an explosion from outside the room followed by rapid bursts of blaster fire that ended abruptly with the sound of something heavy striking the wall and Garm guessed that it was the body of the guard falling backwards.

"Get up!" Garm yelled, rushing to the prisoner and dragging him into a standing position that required the chair he was still bound to to be lifted off the floor as well. Using the man as a shield Garm then aimed his blaster at the door again, ready to shoot the first person to make the mistake of trying to enter the room. For a few moments there was only silence before light flashed from all around the edge of the door as the explosive compound that the attackers had placed on the other side was ignited and burned through it in moments. Instinctively Garm fired, his blaster bolt flying through the open doorway and striking the wall opposite. Then he caught sight of someone's hand as it appeared at the side of the doorway and hurled something into the cell that bounced off the side wall and rolled across the floor. Looking down Garm had just enough time to recognise the stun grenade for what it was before there was a sudden flash as the explosive device went off, discharging its stored energy as a single pulse that filled the cell and then everything went black.

Smoke rose from the tracking station as Vay came within sight of it, still running. Much of the smoke came from the impacts of mortar rounds and the damage that they had caused but there was also damage that Vay knew had to have come from blasters being fired within the perimeter of the base.

"Agent Udra." Cook said when he saw Vay rushing towards him but she ignored him and rushed past, heading for the underground room where she had last seen Garm and the prisoner.

She hurried down the steps and along the passageway lined with pipes until she came to where it opened out and she saw the foldaway table now upturned and the defence force trooper who had been guarding the prisoner now lay dead from a blaster wound. The door to the improvised cell was open and Vay rushed up to it and looked inside. But inside she saw no sign at all of either the prisoner or Garm.

Hearing footsteps from behind her, Vay spun around and drew her blaster. But she relaxed when she saw that it was Lieutenant Cook walking towards her.

"A unit of uniformed men used the mortar barrage as a diversion to enter the base from the other direction." he said, "Before we even knew they were there they were already breaking into this building."

"What happened to Garm?" Vay asked.

"I can't be sure but some of my men said that they saw the intruders carrying two men away from here. One was our prisoner and the other was Agent Larcus."

3.

Director Corvin Helieos was the highest ranking member of the ISB in the sector and Vay stood in silence in his office as he reviewed her report.

"Agent Larcus has been listed as missing." he said.

"Missing?" Vay asked, "But isn't there going to be an investigation?"

"Of course there is but you know how the Alliance works. They'll be moving him to one of their bases as we speak. He may even be off planet already."

"I'd like to head up the investigation." Vay said.

"Hah!" Director Helieos exclaimed and he leant forwards across his desk, "Now look here Agent Udra, Garm Larcus may have valued your assistance and recruiting you to the ISB was a massive poke in the eye for Gayal Tharr while she ran intelligence but you are just a junior agent. Remember that. So that means you do whatever the agent you are partnered with tells you to. Now I suggest you go and make sure that all of yours and Garm's outstanding casework is written up ready for whoever I decide to assign as your new overseer. Dismissed."

"Yes sir." Vay said, hiding her anger as she turned around and left the office.

Returning to the office that she shared with Garm, Vay sat down and sighed.

Giving up so easily?

"Why would you care?" Vay said out loud, not worried about who might overhear her talking to the spirit of Lara in the privacy of the office, "You've made your opposition to my being with Garm quite clear."

Isn't that an image of his late wife he still keeps on his desk?

"The key word there is 'late'. He's with me now." Vay said. Then she added, "Or at least he was until those kriffing rebels abducted him."

At least you know he'll be looked after. His father is a rebel after all.

All of a sudden Vay smiled and sat up straight. Then she activated the computer terminal in front of her and began to search through some of the files, though not through any of those associated with official investigations.

Vay what are you doing?

"Looking for the ship that Garm's father travels on." Vay responded, "We're certain that it's captained by a man named Mace Grayle but he's got friends in the Estranian Parliament and we've been told not to investigate him without any clear evidence to start of with."

So no evidence means no investigation. But no investigation means no evidence.

"No formal investigation." Vay said, "But I know that Garm's been collecting information and leads on Captain Grayle for a couple of years now."

Getting Captain Grayle arrested isn't going to help Garm.

"Who said anything about having him arrested?" Vay asked, "If I can find him then I can get a message to Garm's father and I can get Garm released."

How is that supposed to work?

"Because I'll offer to trade myself for him." Vay said but there was no response from Lara, "What's the matter? Didn't you think I'd do something like that?"

No I didn't. But I must say I'm impressed. That sort of self sacrifice is just the sort of behaviour I'm trying to promote in you. Looks like my methods are working.

The name Odras Balve was mentioned in a great many law enforcement reports but most of those reports went no further. So far no-one had come forwards willing to testify to what the alleged crime-boss did and he had a knack of being able to avoid surveillance operations set up to try and trap him so for now at least he remained at large. But those surveillance operations had still produced large numbers of images of beings who frequented his place of business, a cantina in a run down area close to a starport, that thanks to regular uses of facial recognition software by Garm to conduct mass searches for his father and his team of rebels had revealed the fact that Mace Grayle was a regular visitor to Odras's cantina.

Vay now stood opposite the cantina and eyed it up. She doubted that Mace would be inside at this moment but her plan did not require that he was and so she headed towards the entrance. Knowing that the sight of an ISB uniform could cause problems Vay instead wore the temperature controlled bodyglove that she had frequently worn prior to joining the ISB. She had trained to fight in this and she knew it guaranteed her freedom of movement if needed. Pouches around her waist allowed her to carry a compact holdout blaster as well as her lightsaber discretely.

As soon as she entered the cantina Vay could see several of the patrons looking towards her and thanks to her ability to sense feelings through the Force she could tell that a lot of this had to do with her slender and

attractive appearance combined with the skin tight polymer bodyglove and she fought the urge to leave and return wearing something that hid her appearance entirely. Instead she carried on walking up to the bar and waited for the barman to come to her.

"What can I get you?" he asked.

"I need to speak with Odras Balve." Vay replied.

"Mister Balve doesn't see anyone without an appointment." the barman said.

"You will take me to Mister Balve now." Vay said, waving her hand subtly as she pushed the idea into the barman's mind.

"I will take you to Mister Balve now." he repeated.

"You serve your master well and you are sure to be rewarded." Vay added as the barman walked along the bar and led her to a door behind it.

"Mister Balve." he said, activating the intercom beside the door, "Someone to see you."

"Who?" the voice of Odras Balve responded and the barman paused.

"Someone important." Vay whispered to him.

"Someone important." he repeated.

"Really? Someone important? Then I must see them immediately mustn't I?" Odras said and the door slid open, "Come on in. Take a seat." Odras called out to Vay and he waved her into his office.

Vay entered and the door slid shut behind her. Only then did she become aware of the large wookiee standing just inside the door and when she glanced up at him the alien snarled and growled at her. Without flinching as most people would when exposed to a snarling wookiee for the first time Vay then walked over to the desk and sat opposite Balve, doing her best ignore the thoughts she could sense coming from him regarding her. Thoughts that if anything were even more vile than those she had sensed in the bar outside the office.

"So tell me your name young lady." Odras said, "And tell me how I might help you."

"I know you can get a message to Mace Grayle." Vay replied and she held up a mem-stick, "He needs to get this." then she set it down on the desk between them and slid it towards Odras.

"Oh really?" Odras asked, "And what exactly is in it for me?" and Vay scowled briefly as she sensed one option of payment he was considering.

"I have cash." she said, "Untraceable." and she placed five hundred credits in bank notes on the desk.

"Is that all?" Odras asked, "All Mace's friends seem to think that I'll do their bidding for such a pittance." then he eyed Vay again, "Plus not one of them seems interested in any of the alternate ways of paying."

"Five hundred credits will be enough." Vay said, waving her hand again as she tried to use the Force to compel Odras to accept the money.

"No it won't." he replied scowling.

"Yes it will." Vay repeated, concentrating as hard as she could on pushing him to accept. But the result was not what she had hoped for.

"What do you take me for little girl?" he yelled, "Trying to intimidate me like you're some sort of jedi? I'm old enough to remember the jedi and they didn't scare me. Now take your message and leave your money and get out of here." then he looked towards his wookiee bodyguard and nodded. In response the wookiee stepped forwards, growling and reached out to grab hold of Vay but she reacted too quickly. Leaping out of the chair she easily placed herself beyond the reach of the wookiee and reached for one of the pouches at her belt. Guessing that she was about to draw a weapon Odras reached under his desk and pulled out his own holdout blaster before leaping to his feet and taking aim at Vay. But Vay was not reaching for her blaster, instead she drew her lightsaber and there was a 'snap-hiss' as she ignited the bright red blade.

"Intimidated yet?" she hissed, holding the blade out towards Odras.

Fear.

Vay smiled as she sensed she finally had the crime boss where she wanted him.

"The price is five thousand." Odras said finally and he looked down at the money on the desk, "I'll take that as a down payment and take the rest from Mace on delivery. I'll just add it to his debt and he can square it with you later. Assuming he agrees to take delivery."

"Doesn't sound very equitable to me." Vay commented, constantly looking back and forth between Odras and the wookiee to make sure that neither was able to do anything that took her by surprise. Given their already tense emotional state Vay was not confident that she would sense any action they took in advance.

"Well you could always kill me and find someone else to deliver your message." Odras replied, "Now do we have a deal?"

Vay exhaled and shut off her lightsaber.

"We have a deal." she said.

"Then I suggest you leave." Odras said and Vay just smiled as she put her lightsaber away and then left his office. Once the door had closed behind her Odras looked at his bodyguard, "Tell the others to keep an eye out for her." he said, "If she comes within three blocks of here again I want her killed before she makes it back inside."

4.

A large number of the patients in the medical ward aboard the space station that served as the Alliance's headquarters in the sector were suffering from injuries sustained in combat, with accidents relating to maintaining equipment being the second most common cause. However, the patient in the bed that Major Vorn Larcus III was standing beside was there for a different reason altogether.

"She's beautiful." he said as he looked at the newly born infant in his arms and in the bed his daughter Lyssa smiled.

"We're calling her Hallanah." she said, "After mother." and Vorn smiled.

"Very nice." he said and he looked at the man stood opposite him, Sergeant Tharun Verser, a former mercenary who was now not only part of his rebel field team but also his son in law.

"Lyssa thought you'd approve major." he said.

"I do, oh I do." Vorn said.

"But where is my beloved stepmother?" Lyssa asked, "I was hoping she'd come to visit her new grandchild."

"I thought it better I come alone." Vorn replied, "You and Kara don't exactly see eye to eye on much."

Kara Larcus was another member of Vorn's team and being in her early thirties was in fact younger than Lyssa. She and Vorn had married after she told him she was expecting his child, a son that Kara had also named Vorn, "I also thought it better that Tobis found something to keep him and Jaysica away." Vorn added, referring to two other rebels. Jaysica Horbid was the fourth and final member of Vorn's field team while Tobis Dorfus was the engineer of the ship that they were stationed aboard, the YT-1300 *Silver Hawk*.

"Yeah, we'd like to have little Hallanah here a while before Jaysica drops her." Tharun commented.

"Maybe we could invite her to Hallanah's eighteenth birthday or something." Lyssa suggested and Vorn smiled. Jaysica had a habit of being accident prone in anything not relating to her speciality. Which was fortunate considering that she was the team's explosives expert.

Just then the door to the ward opened and an excited voice called out.

"Oh wow! Look dad!" and Vorn looked around to see Mace Grayle and his adopted daughter Cass entering the room. Cass promptly rushed forwards to look at the baby, "Can I hold her?" she asked, looking at Lyssa.

"Just for a while." she said and Vorn carefully passed the child to Cass.

"Be careful." he said, "Get your arm under-"

"I know." Cass responded, "I held my little brother before the Empire took him and my parents." she looked at the baby and smiled.

"Just don't get any ideas." Mace said, "You're too young to be thinking about having one of your own."

"I'm eighteen." Cass replied.

"Like I said, you're too young." Mace said, "There'll be plenty of time for you to be thinking about babies after I'm dead."

"Which in our line of work could be next week." Tharun muttered and both Mace and Vorn glared at him.

"Congratulations by the way." Mace said and he looked at Lyssa, "But giving Cass ideas isn't why we're here."

"I wouldn't need to have ideas if you'd just hurry up and marry Malia and have a baby of your own." Cass said without looking away from Hallanah.

"Major I think we have a problem." Mace said, "When I went to make my regular payment he said that someone had been to see him with a message for me. He said she was wearing a black bodyglove and was armed with a lightsaber."

"Vay." Vorn said, frowning.

"That's what I thought." Mace said, "So I paid the money Odras was demanding-"

"Paid?" Cass said, "It's been added to his debt."

"I agreed to pay and he gave me this." Mace said and he held up the mem-stick that Vay had given to Odras.

"Have you looked at it?" Vorn asked.

"No. Given it's origin I thought it better to bring it back here for Tobis to take a look at before plugging it into a computer that it could be designed to infect with some sort of malware. Where is he anyway?"

Given that Mace had only taken Cass with him to Estran, Tobis had no duties to carry out and had therefore, opted to remain in his quarters with Jaysica and both of them sat up suddenly in Tobis's small bed when there was a banging on his door.

"Tobis." Mace called out, "we've got work for you."

"What? Oh. Err." Tobis replied before the door slid open and Jaysica squealed as she ducked back under the covers before Mace and Vorn entered.

"Jaysica we both know it's you." Vorn said and she peered out from under the covers.

"Hello major." she said.

"Tobis, when you're finished here we need you to take a look at this." Mace said and he held up the mem-stick.

"We'll be waiting aboard the *Silver Hawk* when you don't have your hands quite so full." Vorn added before he and Mace backed out of Tobis's quarters and closed the door behind him. Then the pair looked at one another and smiled, "What's the betting Jaysica was supposed to lock the door?" Vorn asked.

"Oh definitely." Mace added, "At least they weren't doing anything weird."

The pair then headed for the nearest turbolift to take them to the massive main hangar where the *Silver Hawk* was docked. As the turbolift moved between decks it halted and the door opened to allow another officer to enter.

"Ah, Major Larcus. Captain Grayle." the man said, smiling.

"Lieutenant Pay." Vorn replied, "How's life in intelligence?"

"Found any yet Geran?" Mace added.

"Oh ha-ha." Geran answered. Originally Geran Pay had been sent to the sector to hunt for an Imperial mole inside the Alliance. But when she had been exposed and killed he had remained to help with strategic planning, "As it happens, I've been kept busy for the last couple of weeks with Lieutenant Halowan." he added. Lieutenant Owen Halowan had been an Alliance sleeper agent working undercover in the Imperial Navy and passing information back to the Alliance. But when Vorn's team had been captured Owen had blown his cover to rescue them, helping them steal the venator-class star destroyer *Justice* in the process.

"Good man." Vorn replied.

"Yes, a pity he couldn't have stayed in place but he's full of helpful information that we should be able to put to use while most of our fleet's gone." Geran replied.

"Any idea when they'll be back?" Mace asked.

"Concerned about Captain Mayan?" Geran responded, knowing that Mace was engaged to Malia Mayan, captain of the Corellian corvette *Renegade*, "Well I'm sorry to say that even if I did know I probably couldn't tell you. I've heard high command have been pulling in ships from all over the galaxy."

"Yes, the rumour is that the Alliance intends to invade Sullust." Vorn said, "Even though there's no way that we could hold the system."

"So is that what you're up to while waiting to hear whether you'll get command of the *Justice* then?" Geran asked, "Speculating about where the fleet is?"

"Mace is understandably concerned and his concerns are my concerns." Vorn replied.

"As a matter of fact we've just received a highly secret message from an unusual source within the Empire." Mace added and Geran's eyes widened briefly as he held up the mem-stick.

"Really?" he asked, folding his arms, "Because if there's anything in it of intelligence value-"

"Don't worry we'll tell you." Vorn interrupted, "In fact why don't you come with us to the *Silver Hawk*? We were going to wait for Tobis but I get the feeling he'll be a while yet. You can see what you make of it instead."

Geran smiled.

"Here." Mace said, passing him the mem-stick.

Vorn's team gathered in the lounge area of the *Silver Hawk* and Cass hurried to make sure that she got to sit beside Kara who had her son Vorn in her lap.

"Cass I mean it. You're too young to have one of your own." Mace said when he saw his daughter waving at the baby who responded by just looking back up at her.

"Oh leave her alone captain." Kara replied, "It's always good to have an extra babysitter for when we're off fighting scum and villainy."

"And miss out on the excitement? No thanks." Cass replied.

"So what do you have for us today then boss?" Kara asked.

"A secret message." Tharun replied.

"Err, wasn't I supposed to take a look at the mem-stick first?" Tobis asked.

"You were otherwise occupied with Jaysica." Vorn replied and Jaysica averted her eyes, "So we found someone else to make sure that the mem-stick wasn't dangerous." and at that point Geran entered the room from the direction of the cockpit with a portable computer in his hands that had the mem-stick plugged into it. "Well I've run all of the best counter-slicing software over this," he said, "and there's no malware that I can find. But I can tell you that it holds a holographic recording."

"Plug it into Harvey." Mace said, looking at an R5 astromech droid stood at the far side of the room that let out a rude sounding noise.

"Now now Harvey." Jeeves, Vorn's golden coloured 3PO protocol droid said, "There is no need for that sort of language. Captain Grayle just requires you to use your holographic projector to allow everyone to view the message."

Geran took the mem-stick from his computer and held it up.

"R-fives can be uppity." he said, "Maybe someone he knows should try this."

"Go on lad." Tharun told Tobis, "He's your droid after all."

"Oh, err, yes." Tobis replied and he got up to take the mem-stick before plugging it into Harvey.

"Is this going to be rude boss?" Kara asked, "Because I don't want our son exposed to filth."

"Apparently it's from Vay." Vorn replied.

"Plus it came via Odras." Mace said, "So there must be something wrong with it."

Then as Tobis returned to the couch the astromech droid began to play the message.

"Help me Vorn Larcus, you're my only hope." the image of Vay said as soon as it appeared. In the recording she wore her ISB uniform and was standing up straight as she looked into the recording device, "I know that you have little reason to trust me but your son Garm has been captured and I have been forbidden from taking part in any investigation or rescue attempt. Therefore, I hope that as his father you will agree to meet with me so that we may discuss his release. If this is acceptable to you then you may contact me at Garm's home where I shall be staying for the immediate future." and then Vay's image leant forwards and reached out as if to deactivate the recording device she had used to create the message and then vanished. At which point Harvey let out a brief whistle.

"Harvey indicates that is the extent of the message." Jeeves translated and everyone looked at Vorn.

"Sounds like a trap to me major." Tharun said.

"Me too." Mace added.

"Oh I know that look." Kara said, watching Vorn closely, "You want to go and check it out don't you boss?"

"I have to." Vorn replied.

"I've got a bad feeling about this." Cass said, "She arrested me when I hadn't done anything wrong."

"Err, I thought you stole her datapad." Tobis pointed out.

"But that was for a good cause." Jaysica responded.

"I have to go." Vorn said again, "I know I can't expect any of you to come with me."

"No way boss." Kara said, "You've run off before on some personal quest and now we're married I'm forbidding you to do it again. Besides, you already have the perfect son right here. Why do you need junior the fascist G-man as well?"

"Well since Garm's my brother in law I suppose I'd better come along." Tharun said and then he looked around, "So who else is in?"

"It's a trap." Mace said, "I'm sure it is. But I'll come along to watch your back major."

"Oh, err, I will as well then." Tobis added.

"Well if Tobis is going then I have to go and make sure he's safe." Jaysica added.

"He's probably be safer if you stayed here." Kara muttered.

"I'm with you too." Cass said, "If it is a trap then I want to be there when you turn the tables on her." and then all of the team looked at Kara.

"What?" she asked.

"Perhaps it is best you stay behind." Tharun said, "You can keep Lyssa company while I'm gone."

"Okay I'm in." Kara replied and then she squeezed past Cass and walked over to where Geran was stood, "Here." she said as she passed baby Vorn to him, "You can look after Vorn while the boss and I are gone. The boss's little princess can help if you get stuck."

"Are you all insane?" Geran asked as he took hold of the baby, "You're talking about rushing off to walk into an obvious trap designed specifically to catch all of you."

"Yes and hopefully when we escape it we'll come back and give you some more of that data you love so much." Mace replied.

"Thank you everyone." Vorn said, "I want you to know that this means a lot to me."

"Don't thank me yet boss." Kara said, "You don't know what I'm going to ask for in return yet."

5.

Vay extended her arm as she stepped from the shower and using the Force she called a towel to her grasp that she then wrapped around her. Calling a second towel in the same way she then began to rub her hair with it as she walked towards the doorway that led to the bedroom that the bathroom was connected to, all the while humming a tune that she had had stuck in her head all day. But focusing on the tune had distracted her and it was only as she opened the bathroom door that she became aware of a presence close by and she looked up and gasped.

"Hi there." Kara said, smiling as she aimed a military style blaster pistol at Vay, "We just thought we'd drop by for a little chat."

"Nice towel by the way." Cass added as she and Jaysica appeared in the bedroom doorway, both of them also aiming blasters at Vay who then looked around briefly.

"Looking for this?" Kara asked and she held up Vay's lightsaber, "Now get those hands up."

Vay dropped the towel she had been drying herself with and raised her hands.

"How did you get in here?" she asked.

"Turns out junior didn't change or upgrade his security system after Jaysica broke in the last time." Kara replied, "Kind of dumb for an ISB agent wouldn't you say?"

"I need to speak to Vorn." Vay responded, "It's important."

"Yeah, yeah, we know." Kara said, "Junior's been kidnapped." then she glanced at Cass, "Okay, secure her." she said.

Cass promptly put her blaster away and took out a pair of cable ties that she connected in a figure eight as she carefully walked over to Vay.

"Hold out your hands." she said as she stopped a short distance away from Vay so that Kara still had a clear shot at her, "Together." and Vay did as she was told.

"You don't need to do this." Vay said as Cass placed the cable ties around her wrists, "Just let me get dressed and – Ow!" Vay cried out as Cass suddenly pulled the cable ties tight. Unlike proper handcuff ties the plastic of the cable ties was narrow and dug into Vay's wrists.

"Now put your feet together." Cass said, crouching down as she took out two more of the ties that she then used to bind Vay's ankles together, prompting her to wince as the ties were pulled tight again.

"There." Cass said as she went back to her feet and backed away.

"Good." Kara said and then she stared at Vay, "Okay you little witch, let's get going. Our speeder is parked right outside." But Vay just stared back at her, "Well?" Kara asked,

"I can't." Vay said.

"Why not?" Kara asked.

"Because you tied my kriffing legs together you bunch of nerf herders. Look." and then Vay took a couple of experimental hops forwards, wincing again as the ties dug into her with each movement.

"We didn't think this through did we?" Cass asked.

"What do we do now?" Jaysica added.

"You could bring Vorn here." Vay suggested.

"Oh no lady." Kara replied, "No way are you getting the boss into your little trap. Mace and Tharun practically had to pin him to the wall to stop him coming with us." then she looked around the bedroom and smiled, "Got it." she said and holstering her blaster she walked over to the bed and removed the cover from a pillow before walking up to Vay and pulling it over her head so that she could not see.

"Oh how is this supposed to help?" Vay asked, "Do you expect me to jump about blindfolded?"

"No I just don't want to have to look at your face while we carry you." Kara replied. Then looking at Cass and Jaysica she added, "Someone grab her feet."

"Hey wait." Vay said, but the three rebel women ignored her and she was lifted up off the floor between Kara and Cass before being carried out of the bedroom, down the stairs and then outside where she felt the coolness of the night air on her still damp skin.

"Get her in the trunk." Kara said and Jaysica opened up the trunk of the landspeeder that was parked at the end of the drive so that Vay could be tossed inside.

"Think any of the neighbours saw us?" Cass asked, looking around.

"Who cares?" Kara replied, slamming the trunk of the speeder shut hard enough to provoke a cry of complaint from Vay.

Locked inside the trunk Vay felt the landspeeder set off into motion and also each time the driver took a corner at a speed that was too high, which to Vay felt like every time a corner was turned. Eventually the speeder was brought to a halt and Vay heard the trunk being opened again.

"Okay grab her legs again and let's get her aboard." Kara said before Vay was lifted out of the trunk and then carried aboard the waiting *Silver Hawk*. The next thing Vay knew she was being set down on the cold metal deck and her arms were suddenly lifted up above her head and secured to the pipe she seemed to be sat up against with another cable tie.

"That should do the trick." Kara said.

"You don't think it's a little over the top?" a male voice that Vay recognised as Tharun's replied.

"Not with her witch powers." Kara said.

"They only work on the weak willed though." Tharun pointed out.

"Why is everyone looking at me?" Jaysica then asked.

"Oh no reason little lady." Tharun said, "Now I suggest we go tell the major everything's ready."

"Just one minute." Kara said before reaching out and pulling the pillow case from Vay's head, "Comfy?" she asked.

"No." Vay replied, "These ties are cutting off my circulation."

"Oh dear." Kara said, "Never mind though. We're all going to talk to the boss so don't go anywhere while we're gone."

"Wait." Vay called out as the rebels turned to leave, "I need to speak to Vorn. You can't just leave me here like this."

"Oh yes we can." Cass replied, grinning, "Just like you did to me." and then the rebels exited the hold and closed the door behind them.

Now alone in the hold Vay sighed.

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

Why? Because you're now at the mercy of people you've spent three years trying to have arrested and killed?

"Oh shut up. Nobody asked you. Besides this is what acting the way you want me to gets me."

"Not much of a trap if you ask me boss." Kara said as she sat down in the *Silver Hawk's* lounge.

"And there was no sign of Garm?" Vorn asked.

"None. The little witch was alone." Kara replied.

"And in the shower." Cass added.

"Yeah, as traps go it wasn't very effective." Kara said.

"So what do we do now major?" Tharun asked.

"I guess we talk to her." Mace replied before Vorn could.

"Has anyone considered the possibility that she may have been telling the truth in her message?" Jaysica asked, "Maybe the major's son really has been captured by someone."

"Again." Kara commented, "We've been here before. Of course last time 'here' was actually in the middle of that nebula dodging rakata."

"Given what we know about this young lady how can we be sure of anything she has to say to us?" Tharun asked.

"Err, yes." Tobis added, "She does work for the Empire."

"And it seems she's in love with my son." Vorn said, "I'm hoping that we can use that to our advantage."

Tharun smiled and looked at Kara.

"Just think," he said, "she could end up as your daughter in law." and Kara just scowled at him.

"I'm going in there to talk to her." Vorn said.

"I'm not so sure that's a good idea major." Tharun replied, "She seems pretty keen to get in the same room as you. This could still all be part of some plan we haven't figured out yet."

"Oh, err, she could be hoping to manipulate you with the Force into releasing her." Tobis suggested.

"I doubt the major is sufficiently weak minded to fall for that." Mace said.

"Why does everyone always look at me whenever that's mentioned?" Jaysica asked, noticing the number of glances in her direction.

"Instinct." Kara answered. Then she looked at Vorn, "Perhaps it would be a better idea if I went in there boss." she suggested, "I can take Penny with me to record what goes on and you can watch on a datapad." Penny was a mouse droid that belonged to Jaysica who had modified the tiny droid with a holorecorder and comlink that allowed whatever it saw to be transmitted back to a suitable viewing device."

"I don't think anyone should go in there alone." Mace said, "A droid isn't enough for back up."

"I'll go." Tharun offered.

"Take my deck sweeper." Mace said, "Then at the first sign of trouble you can let her have it without worrying about hitting Kara as well." A deck sweeper was a short ranged stun weapon that release a massive burst of energy in a cone rather than a directed bolt, making it useful for clearing the passageways of a starship in one go. However, its short range and limited rate of fire limited its usefulness in anything other than close ranged fights such as boarding actions.

"Gee thanks captain." Kara replied.

"But, err, what if she doesn't answer any of your questions?" Tobis asked.

"Then I guess we need to find more persuasive methods of getting her to talk." Kara said.

Vay looked up when the door to the cargo hold slid upwards and Kara entered with a mouse droid rolling in after her. She then watched as Kara headed for a nearby crate and sat down on top of it while the mouse droid came to a halt not far inside the hold.

"What's this?" Vay asked, "The infamous mouse droid torture?" then there was the sound of another door opening and Vay twisted her neck to look round to where she could just about see Tharun standing just inside the other doorway holding a bully looking weapon with a flared muzzle, "I need to speak to Vorn." Vay said, turning back towards Kara, "Not either of you."

"Look you little witch," Kara hissed, "we took a vote and the majority of us agreed with me that what we ought to do is tie your arms and legs down between those four posts for the cargo elevator, take away your towel and then let Harvey in here to go to work on you with his arc welder and all the other sharp pointy things he has inside his little metal body. However, according to the boss and Mace although we're fighting for democracy we don't actually practice it on this ship. So the boss has already done you a big favour and if you don't return it by talking to me then you can stay in here until the war's over for all I care."

"Garm's been abducted." Vay said, "I've already told you. Now I need to speak to Major Vorn Larcus the third so I can negotiate for his release."

Kara frowned.

"Negotiate for Garm's release?" she asked, "Who the hell took junior?" and then Vay frowned as well.

"You did." she answered, "The Rebel Alliance captured him."

6.

Back in the *Silver Hawk's* lounge the other rebels were all sat around a datapad that showed the feed from Penny's camera and when Garm having been captured by the Rebellion was mentioned everyone looked at Vorn.

"Is that true major?" Jaysica asked.

"I don't know." Vorn replied.

"Well wouldn't the Alliance tell you if they had your son?" Cass said.

"It's possible that any group holding him hasn't been in touch with HQ yet." Mace pointed out.

"Err, ah, or they may not know it's him." Tobis added.

"I think it's time I spoke with Vay directly." Vorn said and he set the datapad he was using to observe the goings on in the hold down on the table and headed for the door.

As it slid open Kara turned to look at him, as did Vay.

"At last." Vay said, "Could you do something about this?" and she tugged at the cable ties binding her wrists to the elevator mechanism.

"No." Vorn replied sternly and Vay's face fell, "Tell me what happened to my son."

"Untie me first." Vay said, "Then I'll tell you everything."

"Let's go." Vorn said to Kara and he turned around as if to leave.

"Wait!" Vay called out and Vorn paused, "Okay. Look there was a tracking station on Estran, a local defence outpost not Imperial. The troops stationed there caught someone messing around with an antenna array and they figured he was one of yours so they called us in. But when Garm and I arrived the outpost came under fire from a rebel rescue team. They broke out the prisoner and they took Garm along with them. Now will you help me?"

"Help you do what?" Vorn asked.

"Get Garm released of course." Vay replied, "What else?"

"Young lady I am not in the habit of launching attacks on my own people." Vorn said.

"I know that. I want to do a deal." Vay said and Vorn frowned.

"What sort of deal?" he responded curiously.

"If you can get Garm released then I'll trade myself for him." Vay said, "I won't resist."

Vorn and Kara exchanged glances and smiled.

"Hey blondie." Kara said, "Notice anything about your current situation? You're already our prisoner."

"Which means you have nothing to offer me." Vorn added before turning around again and this time exiting the hold before Vay could call out to try and stop him.

"I'm with him." Kara said, pointing towards the open doorway and then following Vorn out of the hold, Vay then heard the sound of the door behind her opening and closing as Tharun also retreated and left her alone in the hold.

"So this has been a waste of time then." Tharun said as he returned Mace's deck sweeper to him.

"Not necessarily." Vorn responded and he glanced back in the direction of the hold, "We've at least got her as a prisoner. Given her abilities, taking her out of play will benefit the Alliance. The Empire can't just conjure up an unlimited number of Dark Side adepts."

"So we're taking her back with us then?" Mace asked.

"That's the plan." Vorn said, "Let HQ decide what to do with her. But I need to put a call in first. If a cell here on Estran really has managed to capture my son then I want to know who. It's the only way to be certain that he's being well treated."

"Then everyone better get ready for take off." Mace said, "Alternately if anyone's got anything they want to take care of here on Estran they can get off now and we'll pick them up when we get back."

Vay looked around as she heard the *Silver Hawk's* engines starting up and then felt a slight lurch as the ship lifted off.

"Well that didn't go as well as I'd hoped." she said.

But you at least tried to do something good. That's what matters in the long run. People remember being treated well.

"Yes and I'm not going to forget being tied to this pole because of it in a hurry either." Vay replied to Lara. As far as she could tell there was nothing sharp that had been left behind by the rebels. In fact she could see no unsecured objects smaller than the handful of standard cargo containers in the hold and it seemed likely that the *Silver Hawk's* occupants had taken care to ensure that there was absolutely nothing here that Vay could use the Force to call to her grip and then make use of to cut through the cable ties that continued to dig into her flesh, "How about you use those thousands of years of experience you've got to help me get out of this. I

can make a dash for an escape pod and be out of here before any of them can stop me if I can just get loose."

I don't have thousands of years of experience Vay. I stopped experiencing things when I died and trust me, there is no-one else here willing to help you escape back to your Empire.

"Who's she talking to?" Cass asked as she continued to watch the feed on the datapad. When the three rebels had left the hold Penny had remained there, still recorded Vay and transmitting an image to the datapad.

"What's that kid?" Tharun asked as he poured himself a cup of caffeine.

"She's talking to someone." Cass said.

"Who is?" Kara said, stepping into the lounge from her cabin.

"Cass is still watching the feed from Penny." Tharun told her, "She says our guest is talking to someone but there's no-one in there with her."

"Well you know what she's like." Kara said, "Following that crazy old Force religion has probably driven her mental."

Mace flew the *Silver Hawk* to the outer edge of the Estran system, where the Empire's monitoring stations would be less likely to intercept a transmission sent to the rebel headquarters and track it to its destination. Then Mace brought the ship to a halt and looked at Vorn who was sat in the seat beside him.

"Well we're in position." he said, "No-one's going to pick up our signal out here." and Vorn reached out to activate the *Silver Hawk's* subspace transmitter.

"This is Major Vorn Larcus calling headquarters." he signalled and he waited for a reply.

"Copy major. Go ahead." a voice replied and Vorn glanced at Mace.

"It's good." he said, "Sub channel ident matches HQ." The sub channel ident Mace referred to was a stream of coded data that accompanied the reply from the Alliance headquarters and identified it to the *Silver Hawk's* computer as having come from the ancient space station rather than an Imperial vessel attempting to trap the occupants of the *Silver Hawk*.

"I need to speak with Lieutenant Geran Pay immediately." Vorn said and there was another pause caused by the time it took for the signal to reach its destination and a reply to return.

"Stand by major. Putting you through." the voice at the other end said and then there was another brief pause.

"Major Larcus?" Geran's voice asked, "What's wrong?"

"Nothing I hope." Vorn replied, "But I need to know about one of our cells that hit a defence force tracking station recently. They're holding my son."

"Major I don't have information on every raid conducted by every cell." Geran replied after the short delay.

"The raid was just to rescue a prisoner." Vorn said, "The prisoner had been caught interfering with an antenna array so it sounds like they were trying to gather intelligence."

"And that is the sort of thing you keep tabs on isn't it?" Mace added.

"Yes it is." Geran said, "But no-one's mentioned anything to me about trying to get into local Estran communications. Are you certain that we're talking about an Alliance group?" and Mace and Vorn exchanged glances as they tried to figure out how to tell Geran what their source was, "Hello? Are you still there?" Geran asked when the delay in waiting for their answer went on longer than he expected.

"Our source was insistent that it was." Vorn said.

"Your source? Wait, do you mean that Imperial agent from the hologram?" Geran said.

"Yes that's right." Vorn admitted, "Don't worry though, we've got her secured and she's not listening in on this transmission."

"Well I'm sorry to say that it sounds like she's trying to manipulate you major. I suggest ignoring everything she says."

"Understood lieutenant. We'll be in touch." Vorn replied and then he shut off the transmitter and leant back in his seat.

"So what do we do now major?" Mace asked, "Everyone's aboard so we can just head straight back to headquarters if you want. Then we can hand her over to Geran and his interrogators."

"Somehow I don't see them getting any useful information out of her." Vorn said, "The jedi I knew wouldn't even break under torture and they wouldn't have fallen for any of our distract and deceive methods either." then he took a deep breath, "In fact there's only one person she does seem interested in talking to."

"Oh I've got a bad feeling about this." Mace said, "Geran just told you to ignore everything she has to say."

"I know that Mace. But he's parsecs away and she's in our hold. I'm going to speak to her again and I'm going in there alone." then before Mace could try and persuade him otherwise, Vorn got out of his seat and left the cockpit, walking back to the lounge area where the other rebels were now in the process of plugging a games console into Harvey to make use of the droid's holographic projector.

"Hey boss want to be on my team?" Kara asked, "We're playing Sith Storm Four."

"Maybe later." Vorn replied without looking at her, "I've got something to do first." and he headed for the hold. Mace appeared moments later, just as the door to the hold closed behind Vorn.

"Is Penny still transmitting to that?" he asked, pointing to the datapad that now lay on the table.

"She should be." Jaysica replied, "No-one's told her to stop."

"Good." Mace said, picking up the device and turning it on, "Because I've got a very bad feeling that we're all about to end up neck deep in poodoo."

"Figured out I'm trying to help you get Garm released?" Vay asked as Vorn sat down on a crate in front of her.

"I don't know what you're trying to do." Vorn replied, "And frankly I'm not so sure having Garm released is the best thing that can be done for him. Hallanah and I tried to instil a sense of civic duty in our children when we raised them but I had no idea that would end up causing Garm to willingly serve a totalitarian regime like the Empire just because it was deemed the lawful government of the day."

"So you're just going to let your precious Alliance ship him off to some primitive hell hole in the middle of nowhere then?" Vay asked.

"That's just it Miss Udra." Vorn said, "I've spoken with those in the know in the Alliance and they don't know anything about the things you've been telling me. No-one has reported taking an ISB agent captive. No-one has reported launching an attack on an EDF tracking station and no-one asked for advice on slicing into a communications antenna."

"But the soldiers at the outpost reported he was a rebel." Vay said, confused, "He was armed with a brand new military rifle and the rebels who were part of the rescue mission were too well armed and trained just to be part of some local rabble."

"You know the Estranian government itself has a history of launching false flag attacks to justify crack downs on its own people." Vorn said, "That was how come both Tharun and I ended up joining the Alliance. His mercenary unit was tricked into carrying out the attacks and when the government turned on them he came to me with proof. Of course the Parliament ignored me and I was expelled but that doesn't change the truth of the matter." then he frowned, "Though I doubt that the Estranian government would run the risk of abducting an ISB agent. That's not the sort of attention they'd want to attract."

"Well someone attacked that tracking station." Vay said, "Take me there and I'll show you myself where the mortar bombs landed."

"Out of the question." Vorn said, "There is good in you wherever my son is concerned I think. But you are still an enemy agent and I realise that you could turn on me at any moment so I hope you'll understand that I'll be limiting any input you have on my actions to advice that I'll be treating with suspicion."

"But you're going to go after Garm?" Vay asked.

"I certainly intend to, yes." Vorn replied, "If he really has been abducted and the Alliance doesn't have him then that means someone else does and I intend to find out who. Hopefully at least some of my team will agree to help me but I'll go alone if I have to."

"Then what?" Vay asked, "What will you do when you find him? Tie him up next to me?"

"You know what young lady, I really haven't thought that far ahead yet." he said.

Then both Vay and Vorn felt the *Silver Hawk* shudder as its ion drives were fired and the ship began to move again.

"We're moving." Vorn said.

"No kidding." Vay responded as Vorn hurried to the door he had entered through. Just as he was about to open it however, the door was opened from the other side to reveal Cass.

"Cass I-" Vorn began.

"Dad's in the cockpit." she said before he could finish, "He wants to see you." and she stepped aside to allow him to rush past her, running through the now empty lounge towards the cockpit. Meanwhile Cass stared at Vay.

"What?" Vay asked and Cass smiled.

"You left me tied up in an interrogation cell." she said and Vay sighed.

"So I suppose you're thinking that this makes us even are you?" she replied.

"No." Cass said, "I thinking that I hope dad and the major leave you in here until you die." and then she closed the door.

Mace was alone in the cockpit when Vorn rushed in.

"Mace what are you doing?" he demanded.

"Setting a course." Mace answered, "This is my ship after all."

"Well we can't go back to headquarters just yet." Vorn said, "I need to go to Estran first."

"I know I heard you. We all heard you." Mace said and Vorn frowned, "Penny was still transmitting everything that was said in there major."

"Mace I have to-"

"Count me in." Mace interrupted, "You can count us all in. I'm laying in a course for Estran though when we get there it would help if I knew where this tracking station we'll be looking for is."

Vorn sat down in the co-pilot's seat.

"I wasn't sure if you'd agree." he said and Mace smiled.

"If it was Cass I'd do anything to make sure she was safe." he replied, "But I don't think that our willingness to help is what you ought to be concerned about."

"Really? Then what should I worry about? I'm not going to rely on anything our guest in the hold has to say if that's what concerns you."

"No major. What worries me is how our superiors in the Alliance are going to react when they find out we went running off to save a member of the ISB. Especially since this won't be the first time we've done it."