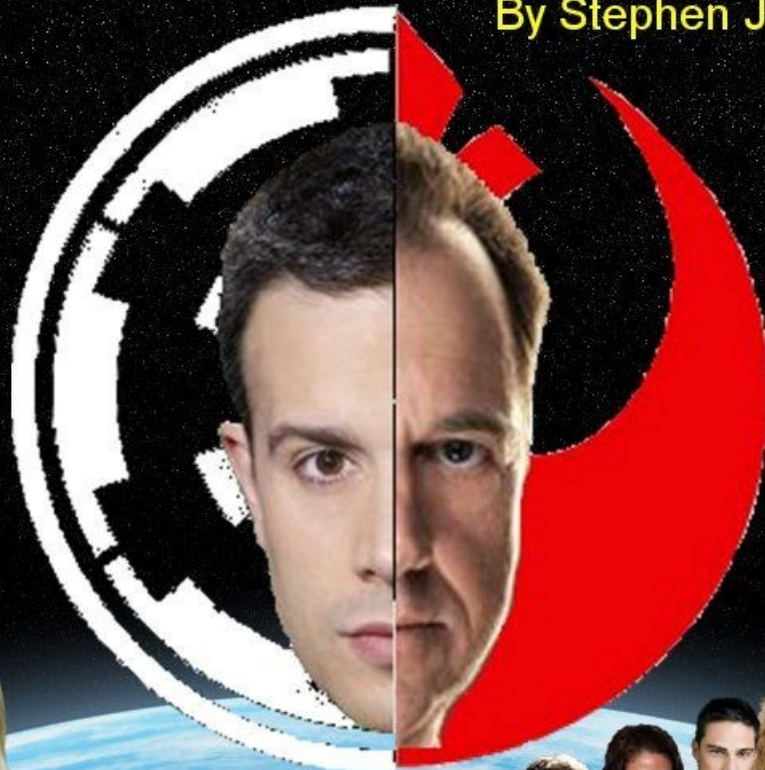


# STAR WARS

## 6-02: Mutual Enemies (Part 3)

By Stephen J Dutton



*Handwritten signature*



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...

## MUTUAL ENEMIS (PART 3)

KARA IS BELIVED DEAD AND JAYSICA AND TOBIS ARE STILL MISSING. BUT THE REMAINING OCCUPANTS OF THE *SILVER HAWK* HOPE THAT A RECORDED MESSAGE WILL LEAD THEM TO THEIR LOST COMRADES...

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

Star Wars is the intellectual property of Lucasfilm Ltd. This story is unofficial and Lucasfilm has not approved any of it.

# 1.

The only weapon that Tobis and Jaysica had between them was the knife that Tobis had been able to steal from their captor before using it to effect their escape. They were attempting to reach the ship that had brought the rebels to this remote abandoned settlement on a world at the fringe of explored space. The difficulty was that they had been captured in one of the myriad of underground passageways running beneath the settlement and taken to a cell that was also underground. Now that they were fleeing above ground they were unsure of the path they were taking as they tried to return to the Silver Hawk. Holding the knife in one hand, Tobis led Jaysica by the other as he led them through the settlement as the sun set. At each junction he paused, partially out of concern that one of the criminals who had captured them could be lurking around it and also to see if there was any landmark that he recognised.

"Tobis look!" Jaysica suddenly exclaimed as they reached another junction and she pointed to the middle of the street.

"Oh, err, what's wrong?" Tobis asked, looking around but failing to see what Jaysica had noticed.

"Look at the tracks." She replied, "Look at how many there are."

Tobis looked down and even in the failing light he could see that the sand in the street had been churned up by a large number of people walking along it recently, far more than could be explained by the other rebels in Jaysica and Tobis' group or the two criminals who had held them prisoner. Letting go of Jaysica's hand Tobis approached the track and crouched down beside them. The poor light made it difficult to pick out details and combined with this the wind had begun to fill in the footprints since they had been made. But there were so many of them that some still retained enough features to show that they had been made by identical boots and they were of a pattern that was familiar to almost every member of the Rebel Alliance in the galaxy. They were issued to Imperial stormtroopers.

Clutching the knife tightly Tobis looked around, suddenly concerned that he and Jaysica could be being watched by the Imperial troops and all too aware that with the optics built into their helmets, the stormtroopers would not be impeded in observing the two rebels by the lack of light.

However, the stormtroopers must have had a reason to come to the settlement and Tobis doubted that it was just a regular patrol, the settlement was too out of the way to be worth bothering about and the most likely reason for them to have come here was to hunt for the rebels.

"Err, I think we should follow them." He said.

"Follow them? But isn't that dangerous?" Jaysica replied, "We don't even have our blasters."

"I, err, I know." Tobis said, "But I think that they, well, they may have been looking for the *Silver Hawk* as well and they probably had a better idea of where the ship is than we do."

"I don't know Tobis." Jaysica said nervously.

"Well, err, I don't really have any other ideas." Tobis admitted.

Jaysica sighed.

"Okay then, but I've got a bad feeling about this." She said.

They set off following the direction of the tracks, still continuing the pattern of pausing at junctions to check for any signs of an enemy presence. Though now they were concerned about stormtroopers as well as the two criminals they had been captured by. The problem came when all of a sudden the tracks they were following split up into smaller groups. As well as heading in different directions there were far fewer stormtroopers in each group and this made the tracks more prone to being erased by the wind.

"Now what?" Jaysica asked as she and Tobis tried to pick a direction to follow.

"Err, we need to pick a set of tracks to follow." Tobis replied, "Though I'm not sure that it really matters which."

"Then we should carry on going the same way." Jaysica said, looking down the street that was the continuation of the one they had come down and she began to walk away from Tobis.

"Oh, err, wait for me." He called out as he dashed to catch up with her.

As it turned out it would not have mattered which set of tracks they had followed, though they spread out initially they all converged on a single location a short time later and where they met was the *Silver Hawk*. The YT-1300 class transport was still in the same condition as it had been when the rebels had disembarked. The initial touchdown of the ship had gone without incident, but as its full weight was applied to the ground it had suddenly given way beneath one of the landing struts and Jaysica and Tobis had been given the task of finding a way down into the chamber below the ship to assess the risk of a further collapse when they had been ambushed.

"I don't think there's anybody at home." Jaysica said and then a thought struck her, "Tobis, do you think that the Empire's captured them all?"

"Oh, err, I hadn't considered that." He replied, "Well, err, I don't think so." And then he crouched down and began to inspect the underside of the ship.

"What are you doing?" Jaysica asked as he crawled underneath, "What if it falls again?"

"Well, ah, the ship doesn't seem to have shifted any further since we landed, so, err, I'm guessing that's stable." Tobis responded from beneath the ship.

"So what can you see?"

"Ah, not much. I'll need to get a light from inside the ship. But I think it's safe for us to go inside." Tobis answered and then he emerged from under the ship again, batting sand from his overalls. Then he located the place where the Silver Hawk's upper hull came closest to the ground and climbed up on top of the ship before helping Jaysica up after him. The top hatch was sealed, but appeared undamaged; obviously the stormtroopers had not attempted to force an entry to it. However, both Jaysica and Tobis knew the entry code to the top hatch by memory and as soon as Tobis entered it the hatch hissed open and he smiled. "Let's get inside." He said to Jaysica, "Then, well, then maybe we can find out where everyone else is."

At barely eighteen standard years old Cass Grayle was the youngest of the rebel team and approaching the stormtrooper squad surrounding the cluster of buildings that was her destination made her nervous.

"Those binders aren't too tight are they?" the man in the stormtrooper armour escorting Cass asked. He was not a real stormtrooper, instead inside the armour was Major Vorn Larcus III, the leader of the rebel team and this was his plan to get them both past the guards. Somewhere near the top of one of the buildings was a datapad and comlink being used to broadcast a signal that was clearly intended to draw in the rebels. It was an obvious trap and Vorn had decided that whoever had set it expected the rebels to see through it.

Therefore, the last place they would be expecting the rebels to go was to the transmitter itself. But between the two rebels and their destination lay not only the eight stormtroopers outside the buildings but also a full squad of ten currently inside them. To make matters worse this second squad was led by an agent of the Imperial Security Bureau who happened to be Vorn's own son, Garm Larcus.

"No they're loose." Cass replied about the binders, "I'm having to hold them on."

"That'll do." Vorn said, "I doubt any of this lot will stop to inspect them."

Just then two of the stormtroopers surrounding the buildings, one of them wearing the red shoulder pauldron of a squad leader spotted the two rebels and as expected they mistook Vorn for a stormtrooper from another squad.

"What's going on?" the genuine squad leader demanded.

"This one couldn't keep up with the others." Vorn replied, "I'm taking her to see Agent Larcus."

The squad leader's helmet moved to suggest that he was staring Cass in her eyes and she gulped, fearing that their plan had been exposed.

"Move along." The squad leader then said, looking up at Vorn and waving him on. In response Vorn just nodded and pushed Cass forwards.

"Move along." He told her sternly.

As they approached the nearest entrance to the building cluster Cass glanced around at the other stormtroopers, still concerned that they would discover the ploy.

"I never thought we'd get past those troops." She muttered, "When it came down to it I was certain they'd realise that we're tricking them."

"Careful." Vorn replied softly, "There's still time for them to discover us. Especially if any of them hits upon the idea of trying to contact me via comlink."

"Why?" Cass asked.

"Because the one in this helmet was locked out when we removed it from its owner." Vorn told her, "Unless a stormtrooper shuts it off with his tongue before he removes his helmet that's what happens. Now eyes front until we get inside."

They entered the buildings through the nearest doorway and paused while Vorn checked to see if there were any other stormtroopers close by and Cass slipped her hands out of the binders.

"Okay we're clear." Vorn said, crouching down and removing his backpack. From inside he took a blaster rifle identical to the one he was armed with and handed it Cass, along with a spare power cell, "Keep it on semi-auto until you get used to it." Vorn warned her and Cass nodded as she adjusted the weapon.

"Okay, now which way do we go?" Cass asked and Vorn looked around.

"Up." He replied, "From the feed Penny sent us we'll find her about two thirds of the way up the next building over and the datapad right near the top."

"And what about the stormtroopers?"

"Hopefully we'll be able to keep out of their way." Vorn said as he picked up the backpack again, "But if not we'll just have to hope that I'm the first one they see."

"And that they're as easy to fool as the ones outside?" Cass added with a smile.

"That too. Now come on, stay close behind me and keep that blaster close. Once we've got the datapad we'll signal Mace and Tharun."

“Okay.” Cass said, slipping the blaster rifle under her jacket as best she could, “I just hope dad and Tharun are having as easy a time as we are.”

## 2.

A short burst of blaster fire indicated that the stormtroopers chasing Mace Grayle and Tharun Verser were getting closer. The two rebels had been able to maintain a reasonable distance while they drew some of the stormtroopers away from the buildings now being infiltrated by Cass and Vorn away from them, but unfortunately several of the previous turnings they had taken had been poor choices and had slowed their overall progress.

Tharun spun around and fired a burst from his heavy blaster rifle. The attack was intended to make the stormtroopers think twice about getting too close and the former mercenary grinned as he saw the squad split apart, assuming that they had panicked briefly and that they would need time to regroup before continuing to pursue the two rebels. However one of the two groups of stormtroopers continued to give chase, apparently opting to abandon their comrades.

"Just four after us now captain." Tharun said as he turned again and continued to run, "The other three have dropped out."

"Then we need to find somewhere we can defend." Mace replied, "Against just four stormtroopers we've got pretty good odds."

"What about the major and Cass?" Tharun asked.

"It'll take those other troops some time to get back to them." Mace said, "And who knows? Maybe we'll be able to catch up with them and take them out."

"I like that plan captain." Tharun said, "So where do we set ourselves up?"

"I think the *Silver Hawk* is just up ahead." Mace replied, "If we climb up on top of her we may be able to conceal ourselves long enough to ambush this lot following us. Assuming the ship hasn't sunk entirely into the ground of course."

"Well it's a start of a plan at least." Tharun said, "We'll just have to see how it goes."

The two rebels carried on running, heading towards where the *Silver Hawk* had landed. What they had no way of knowing however, was that the stormtroopers had already been there once and were aware of the ship's location. When they had noticed the direction that the rebels were taking their squad leader had assumed that they were falling back to their vessel and split half his squad off to try and cut them off. So when Mace and Tharun rushed into the area of open ground where the *Silver Hawk* had landed they found three stormtroopers already waiting for them.

"Freeze you rebel scum!" one yelled. All three of the white armoured figures was positioned in cover and aiming his weapon at one of the two rebels and when Tharun looked over his shoulder he saw the remaining four appear behind them, grind to a halt and all raise their weapons as well.

"Okay we need a new plan." Mace said, "Quickly."

When Jaysica and Tobis had first re-entered the *Silver Hawk* they had struggled to move around because of the angle at which the ship rested. However it had not taken long for Tobis to bring the power core back online and engage the ship's systems, including the artificial gravity that now allowed them both to move around unimpeded. Only the internal lights and engines had been left shut down so as to keep the ship appearing lifeless while they searched for any useful equipment.

Jaysica hit upon the idea of retrieving two of the emergency survival kits from an escape pod. These held no weapons other than a knife, but the other basic equipment could still be of use until they could either replace or retrieve what had been taken from them when they were captured and while Tobis searched the cabins for anything that may have been left behind she headed for one of the escape pods.

Where she witnessed a squad of stormtroopers capture Mace and Tharun.

Jaysica gasped when she saw the other two rebels surrounded by stormtroopers through the escape pod's sole viewport. Both Mace and Tharun were on their knees with their hands on their heads while the Imperial troops advanced on them slowly.

She was about to call out for Tobis when she stopped herself. Despite the thickness of the viewport and hull of the escape pod she was concerned that the stormtroopers may hear her if she shouted too loud. But she knew that she still needed to do something to help the two rebels outside.

Then she remembered the laser cannon.

The *Silver Hawk* was armed with a single turret mounted laser cannon on its upper hull and it occurred to Jaysica that when Tobis powered up the ship's systems, the laser cannon would be amongst those brought back on line. Jaysica smiled and ran from the escape pod, heading to the crew lounge where a ladder led up to the turret. The gravity in the turret was at right angles to the rest of the ship and Jaysica let out a brief squeal as she found herself momentarily disorientated by this. Then she clambered into the gunner's seat and looked at the controls.

"Come on, you can figure this out." She said to herself softly, "Kara does it all the time so it must be easy." As Jaysica had hoped the turret obviously had power and she quickly located the button to activate the targeting display. Through the large viewport that dominated the wall in front of her Jaysica could see the laser cannon, appearing as if it hung down from above her when in fact due to the difference in gravity to the norm it was in fact located just behind her and pointing forwards. But as soon as she activated the targeting system the weapon sprang into life, raising itself up away from the hull and by taking hold of the control column Jaysica was able to swing it around towards the stormtroopers.

"Holy kriff!" Tharun yelled as he saw the turret turn.

"Down!" Mace snapped. Both he and Tharun had had their arms bound behind their backs so all they could do was hurl themselves forwards into the ground, but as the startled stormtroopers turned towards the *Silver Hawk* it meant that there was a considerable difference in height between them.

The laser cannon was meant for engaging starships at ranges of many thousands of kilometres in space, not as an anti-infantry weapon for use at point blank range. But that was not to say that it was incapable of harming the stormtroopers, in fact just the opposite was true.

There was a sound like a clap of thunder as Jaysica fired the laser cannon and even lying face down on the ground both Mace and Tharun felt the heat of the blast as the high energy bolt ripped through all three of the stormtroopers who had been standing in front of them. Whereas even Tharun's powerful Blastech A-280 rifle would merely punch a large hole through an armoured stormtrooper at ranges of several hundred metres the single shot from the *Silver Hawk's* laser cannon incinerated the three stormtroopers from the waist up before the blast slammed into the wall of the building behind them and tore the long abandoned structure apart.

However, there was a downside to the destruction wrought for the rebels. The collapse of the nearby building, combined with the recoil and thermal disruption caused by the firing of the laser cannon made the *Silver Hawk* shift slightly and there was a groaning sound as the underground structures beneath the ship, already damaged when one of its landing struts opened up a hole in the roof of one strained to continue to hold it up.

"Jaysica!" Tobis shouted from the cabin he was searching when he heard the laser cannon fire, "No!" and he ran out into the lounge, hoping to prevent her from firing again. But he was too slow and as Jaysica fired a second shot that impacted amongst the remaining four stormtroopers and blasted a crater large enough to expose another underground tunnel the ground beneath the back of the ship gave way and the *Silver Hawk* dropped down into the hole.

Jaysica screamed as she felt the ship suddenly moving until it came to sudden stop with a powerful jolt just moments later. Then she heard the sound of Tobis climbing up the ladder behind her and she looked around just as he poked his head into the turret.

"It was an accident." She said.

Kara Larcus and Vay Udra both screamed together. Trapped in the basement of a collapsed building the heavily pregnant Kara had unexpectedly gone into labour and much to the annoyance of the female ISB agent Vay the rebel insisted on applying pressure to her hand with each contraction.

"Will you stop doing that!" Vay snapped, "Why can't you just let go of me and get on with this yourself?"

"Because right now inflicting as much discomfort on you as I can is what's giving me something other the pain I'm in to think about." Kara replied, "I'd have thought that inflicting pain on people was something you studied at witch school."

The insult was carefully considered. Vay Udra was skilled in the use of the Force and Kara was well aware of that fact.

"Just you remember that when Garm gets us out of here." Vay said, "I'm going to make sure that you pay for – Ow! Hey, you didn't even have a contraction then."

"No that one was just for fun." Kara snapped, "And don't think that threatening me with junior's going to scare me. The boss will get here first. There are perks to being married to him you know."

"Lieutenant Larcus miss," the golden coloured protocol droid standing at the far end of the couch that Kara was lay on said, looking up from monitoring how far through labour Kara was, "I believe that I can now see the head of your child."

Kara let out a brief laugh.

"Oh thank the gods." She said before there was a distant rumble and the entire basement shook.

Kara had to grab onto the couch with both hands to stop herself from falling off and this meant that she was forced to let go of Vay's hand. Vay herself swayed as the basement shook but she remained standing as she shook the hand that Kara had been squeezing to try and get blood back into it. Meanwhile at the end of the couch the protocol droid toppled over and crashed to the floor.

"Jeeves!" Kara called out, "Jeeves are you okay?"

"I am functional mistress." The droid said as it began to get back to its feet.

"What the hell was that?" Vay asked, looking upwards, "It felt like an artillery strike."

*Anger.*

Vay sensed the sudden emotion from Kara and she looked around see the look of extreme displeasure on her face.

"Jaysica." She hissed, "I know it's her the worthless klutz. I'm stuck down here giving birth and she's trying to bury me and the baby alive."

*Pain.*

Kara screamed as she felt another contraction.

*Not much time left Vay. Now's your chance to help.*

The voice that spoke to Vay through the Force belonged to an ancestor of hers who had been a member of the Jedi Order some four thousand years earlier named Lara Udra. Lara's spirit now spent a great deal of time trying to persuade Vay to turn away from the life that she had been raised to by the Emperor and his agents.

"What am I supposed to do?" Vay said out loud. The question was really directed at Lara, but neither Jeeves nor Kara suspected that the long dead jedi was communicating with Vay.

"We require something to wrap the child in." Jeeves said, "Might I suggest your tunic?"

"What?" Vay said before realising how her question had been interpreted, "Of course." And she began to undo her tunic. Meanwhile Jeeves looked at Kara again.

"I think that now would be a good time to push lieutenant." The droid said and as Vay stepped towards it she heard a sudden shrill cry that did not come from Kara.

Vay stopped in her tracks, staring at the tiny child as she held out her tunic. Jeeves took the garment and promptly wrapped the crying baby in it before looking at Kara again.

"Congratulations Lieutenant Larcus mistress. It is a boy just as you expected." The droid announced.

Still staring at the newborn child Vay could think of only one thing to say.

"Give him to me."

In orbit around the planet Colonel Harris Ergard waited for word from Vorn's team. He had intercepted the subspace signal that had drawn the rebels here and when Vorn had taken his team down to the surface the colonel had kept his compact scout ship in orbit instead. He was resting on his bunk when all of a sudden his R2 astromech droid Sparky began chirping furiously from the cockpit.

"Sparky what's going on?" he exclaimed as he pulled himself from his bunk and rushed to see what had excited the little droid so much. Sparky had accessed the ship's sensors to monitor the area surrounding the settlement where the *Silver Hawk* had set down and right now the readings coming from the surface were somewhat disturbing. The sensors had recorded a massive and sudden release of energy that could have caused by only one thing, a high energy weapon had been discharged, "Oh Sparky," the colonel said when he saw this, "I've got a very bad feeling about this."



### 3.

Marshas Decken was finding tracking the rebels difficult. The squad of stormtroopers the licensed bounty hunter had been attached to had lost the single rebel they had seen in the maze of underground tunnels beneath the settlement and Marshas had been unable to pick up the trail after that point.

"These guys know what they're doing," he told the stormtrooper squad leader.

"Your orders sir?" the stormtrooper replied. Marshas liked that about stormtroopers, their discipline was absolute and thanks to Garm Larcus having ordered them to obey him they were acting as if he were a member of the Imperial military.

Marshas sighed. Randomly searching the underground passageways was unlikely to bring results and he had already witnessed part of a tunnel collapse while pursuing another group of rebels. With careful use of blaster fire into the ceiling the rebels could easily trap Marshas and the squad of stormtroopers down here.

"We'll head back to the surface and check in with Agent Larcus," he told the squad leader, "I think we passed a way out just back there so we may as well see where that brings us out rather than head all the way back to where we came in."

"Yes sir," the stormtrooper said and with a single wave of his hand the rest of his squad turned and began to head towards the exit.

Marshas followed close behind them, still looking to see if he could detect any signs of which way the rebel had gone. Above ground the tracks of a single man could be hidden by the wind covering them with sand, but down here there was no such wind and much less sand than existed on the surface.

That was when the tunnel shook suddenly and debris fell from the ceiling, not enough to collapse the entire tunnel on top of the stormtroopers but enough to cause them to leap towards the sides of the tunnel where the walls provided more stability. Accompanying the disturbance was a sudden rumble that could only be explained by an explosion.

"What the hell was that?" Marshas exclaimed, looking upwards now.

"I don't know sir," the stormtrooper squad leader replied, "Shall I try to raise a surface unit?" and Marshas shook his head.

"I'll try and get Agent Larcus directly," he replied, taking out his comlink and hoping that the signal would be able to penetrate the metal plating and ground above his head, "Garm, Garm are you there?" he transmitted and after a moment's pause he received a reply.

"Right here Marshas," Garm's voice said, "What's your status?"

"No signs of the rebel your men tried to chase underground," Marshas replied, "But we just felt an explosion. What's going on up there?"

"I'm not sure," Garm told him, "My men and I are still searching for the source of the rebel transmissions but I did send a squad to hunt down two rebels that fired on us and I can't raise them."

"Do you know where they were heading?" Marshas asked.

"They went south, that's all I can tell you. But they didn't call in the route they took," Garm answered.

"Sounds like they were tricked into a trap," Marshas said, "The rebels probably set a bomb and took out the entire squad in one go. I'm heading back to the surface now, do you want me to investigate?"

"No. If the rebels can keep picking us off there won't be enough of us left to take on them or Keena. There's a dense cluster of buildings in the northern sector of the settlement, that's where I am. I want you to hook up with the squad I've left outside and reinforce them. I'll join you when we've cleared the buildings and we'll handle this together."

"Got it," Marshas replied, "I'll be there as soon as I can."

"What the kriff are they playing at?" Kenit Durvell asked the woman crouched beside him. The woman was an unlicensed bounty hunter named Keena Vayal and the events happening in this long abandoned settlement were supposed to be according to her plan. She had approached Kenit with the prospect of getting revenge on Tharun Verser, the former mercenary who had killed many of Kenit's former comrades and forced him into the mercenary life himself when his government attempted to kill him to cover up what had happened. Tharun may have changed sides since then, but Kenit still wanted revenge and according to Keena all he had to do was help her trap the entire rebel team that Tharun was part of.

But things had started to go wrong when a platoon of Imperial stormtroopers had just happened to arrive at the abandoned settlement at the same time as Keena and Kenit were attempting to trap the rebels. However, Keena had been unconcerned. If fact the prospect of capturing the ISB agents leading the force had excited her. Apparently as well as knowing someone who would pay for an illegal bounty on the rebels she also knew someone who would pay for the ISB agents. Of course the sheer quantity of Imperial troops made taking

them on directly a suicidal prospect, but Keena had instead come up with the idea of letting the rebels deal with as many of the stormtroopers as possible.

The flash of the first shot from the laser cannon had drawn their attention, suggesting that the rebels were indeed taking action against the stormtroopers. When the second shot came both of them were looking in that direction and they flinched at the flash created when the laser blast demolished the building. But using a weapon of such power risked destroying a body so totally that there would be no corpse left to claim a bounty on.

"Looks like someone just decided to make use of their ship's laser cannon." Keena replied as she aimed her macrobinoculars towards the *Silver Hawk*, "Hopefully they've taken out that entire squad of stormtroopers." "Well we've still got a full squad to deal with here." Kenit responded, "And I think that it's about time I went and did something about them."

"Did you just hear that?" Cass asked when the sound of the explosion reached her and Vorn.

"That rumbling?" Vorn asked in replied, "Yes, I heard it and I've got a bad feeling about it."

"Why?"

"Because we haven't seen anyone with the sort of firepower to create a blast like that. So that must mean that there's more here than we realise." Vorn explained, "Unless-"

"Unless what?" Cass asked when Vorn trailed off mid-sentence.

"Well if someone fired the laser cannon on the *Silver Hawk* then that could create a significant blast.

Certainly enough to bring down any of the structures we've seen here. But I don't see anyone being dumb enough to try something like that given the state of the ship when we last saw it."

Mace and Tharun both looked up, sand smeared across their faces. With their arms bound behind them getting up from where they lay was difficult and instead they just stared at the *Silver Hawk* until the hatch on the upper hull opened and Tobis appeared from within the ship.

"Tobis! What are you doing to my ship?" Mace yelled.

"What? Oh, err, well, it was-" Tobis began.

"It was the little lady wasn't it lad?" Tharun interrupted. Then he smiled, "Nice to see you got away from that Durvell guy though lad. Now how about you come down here and untie us?"

"Oh, ah, yes. I'll just go and get something to cut you loose." and he vanished back into the ship.

Vay smiled as she looked down at the child in her arms. He had stopped crying soon after she had taken hold of him and now appeared to be asleep.

"I think he likes me." she said, "That's good."

"Please, don't hurt him." Kara responded.

*Fear.*

Vay frowned as she sensed Kara's concern for her child. Then she noticed something else as well.

*Love.*

The baby had been born only minutes earlier and Kara had yet to hold him, but her feelings for him were intense.

*He isn't yours Vay. Give him to his mother.*

Vay's frown deepened at Lara's intervention.

"Don't worry I'm going to take good care of you." she said, looking directly at the sleeping child.

"Like hell you will you little witch." Kara hissed, "He's mine." and she began to struggle to get to her feet, still exhausted from giving birth but determined to reach her child.

Vay reached out with one arm and delivered a slight shove through the Force, pushing Kara back onto the couch.

"Oh do remember where you are." she said, "When we get dug out of here you'll be lucky if you spend the rest of your life in a labour camp. More likely you'll be shot for treason. How are you supposed to care for a youngling? I'll take him back to Garm and we'll raise him. Garm will instil a proper sense of right and wrong into him."

*Vay no!*

Vay flinched at the sudden intensity of Lara's outburst from within the Force.

"I tell you what though, you may as well hold him for a while. It's not like you'll have much chance later on." she said, walking back towards the couch. Kara watched suspiciously, but reached out to take her baby as Vay handed him over and she looked directly at him for the first time.

"You are so beautiful." she said.

Vay stepped back, watching Kara intently.

*Your mother held you like that once. Before someone took her from you. Are you really going to put him through that as well?*

"Lieutenant Larcus miss," Jeeves said, "I was wondering if you had chosen a name for him yet?"

Kara smiled.

"Yes I have." she replied, "I want a name that makes me think of someone strong and brave that's always had my back. Well almost always. He's called Vorn. Vorn Larcus the Fourth."

Vay snorted.

"Stang that's corny." she muttered and Kara glared at her.

*Hatred.*

Vay smirked when she felt Kara's reaction, but then she felt something else in the Force. Not a thought or a feeling but a presence, or more accurately several presences and that meant only one thing.

There were people close by.

"Hey!" she shouted suddenly, rushing to the collapsed staircase that had led up to the surface, "I'm down here!" Then, unable to tell for certain if she had been heard she drew her blaster.

"Excuse me Miss Udra," Jeeves said, "but I don't think that is a terribly good idea, the structure around us is not entirely stable and even a shot from a relatively low powered blaster could-"

"Not entirely stable?" Vay interrupted, "Well we'll soon see about that won't we?" and she fired her blaster into the rubble blocking the staircase.

Marshas heard the muffled blaster shot just as the stormtrooper squad was passing by the collapsed structure close to where the rebel vessel had landed and his first instinct was that it had come from the direction of the starship. However, when he drew his weapon and turned to face it he saw that the *Silver Hawk* had sunk deeper into the ground since he had last seen it, now only the front half visible as it pointed upwards.

"Hey! Help!"

The muffled cry came from behind Marshas and the stormtroopers and they spun around to look in the direction of the collapsed building instead.

"Hello!" Marshas yelled, "Can you hear me?"

"Yes! Yes I can hear you. I need you to dig me out." Vay called out, her reply still muffled by the layer of debris between them.

Marshas holstered his blaster again.

"Come on." he said to the stormtroopers, climbing up onto the debris, "We need to dig."

Slipping past Garm and the squad of stormtroopers searching the buildings proved relatively easy for Cass and Vorn. Thanks to Penny, the mouse droid that they had used to scout the structures they knew exactly where they wanted to get to and how to get there. On the other hand Garm and his troops were searching every corridor, room and walkway of the interlinked buildings and had too few men to properly cover all of the routes around them.

Nearing the top of one of the buildings the two rebels heard a sudden chirping sound and looked down to see Penny roll out from a nearby alcove that was filled with rusted pipes and clusters of cables that at one time would have carried power and data around the building.

"Penny!" Cass exclaimed.

"Careful." Vorn said as he looked around, "There could be stormtroopers nearby. Keep your voice down."

"Sorry." Cass whispered before Penny chirped again and began to head in the direction of the transmitter that the rebels wanted.

"I suppose we better follow her." Vorn said, "Follow me."

"Yeah I know. Stay close and be ready to play the meek little prisoner." Cass replied.

"Did you hear that?" Garm asked the stormtrooper closest to him as they searched the latest room they had come to.

"Hear what sir?" the stormtrooper replied.

"It sounded like, like a droid." Garm said as he exited the room and stood in the hallway outside. There was a grime covered window close by and he walked up to it, doing his best to peer through. The dirt covering the window made it impossible to pick out details but he could spot the difference between the dull metal of the walkways connecting the buildings he and his squad were searching and the plain white of stormtrooper armour, "Who the hell is that?" he said out loud when he saw a single stormtrooper heading up an external ramp. Then he turned to the leader of the squad accompanying him, "Sergeant, do you have any men outside about four levels up?" he asked.

"No sir." the stormtrooper replied, "My entire squad is on this level and inside."

"Well someone's out there dressed like one of us." Garm said, "Give me one of your men and I'll go check it out. The rest of you keep searching for that transmitter."

The squad leader waved to one of his men who nodded before following Garm as he headed for the nearest doorway that led out onto the exterior walkways and looked upwards just in time to see the white armoured figure disappearing back inside.

“Hurry.” Garm said, “We can’t let them get away.”

Kenit checked each turning as he made his way towards the stormtroopers. The last thing he wanted was to suddenly encounter an advanced scout who would raise the alarm. The first stormtrooper he saw was indeed ahead of where he had estimated the bulk of the squad to have reached but the white armoured soldier was not alone. Instead he was accompanied by the girl Keena and Kenit had seen with the rebels and although she was doing her best to conceal it she was carrying a blaster rifle. Clearly she was not a prisoner and that meant that he was not looking at a genuine stormtrooper either.

The pair ducked back into the building and Kenit realised that they had just gone into the room where he and Keena had set up the transmitter that the rebels were supposed to think was a trap. It was of course but one that relied on the rebels realising that and heading for a location that they would think allowed them to gain the upper hand but would in reality have them walking right into the real trap.

Then he saw Garm and another stormtrooper appear from lower down the building, about where Kenit had expected the Imperial troops to have reached. He watched as Garm and the stormtrooper hurriedly ascended the walkways after the two rebels and smiled as he realised that the two primary targets of this hunt were about to be in the same place at the same time and with minimal protection.

## 4.

The transmitter consisting of a datapad attached to a comlink sat right in front of Cass and Vorn when they entered the room.

"Wait, stay back." Vorn said as he ripped the helmet from his disguise, "Let me check it for a booby trap."

"I thought you said it was safe?" Cass said.

"I did. But it never hurts to be sure." Vorn replied as he advanced on the transmitter.

"Then wouldn't the helmet be useful? If there is a bomb—"

"I can hardly see a thing in it." Vorn interrupted, "Now stand back while I take a good look at what we've got here."

Cautiously he knelt down beside the transmitter and peered behind it. The simplest form of booby trap was a pressure switch placed behind an object and to fall for something so basic would be embarrassing. However he found no evidence that the comlink or datapad had been tampered with so he decided to take a chance and simply reached out and picked them up.

"Well it didn't explode. That's a relief." Cass said.

"Hey, it's me." Vorn replied, "I don't fall for booby traps."

"I wouldn't speak so soon if I were you father." Garm suddenly said from the doorway behind the two rebels.

Cass spun around, raising her rifle but Garm lashed out and struck her face with the back of his hand. Then as she cried out and ducked back he simply ripped the weapon from her grip and tossed it aside.

"Don't move!" the stormtrooper behind Garm shouted at Vorn, aiming his weapon at the rebel but Vorn chose to ignore him. Dropping the transmitter he rolled aside and as a blaster bolt flew past where he had just been he raised his own rifle and returned fire. The shot struck the stormtrooper in the shoulder and he staggered backwards across the walkway outside before toppling over the safety rail and plummeting to his death.

Then Vorn swung his rifle towards Garm, but his son was ready for him.

"Go on!" he yelled as he held Cass in front of him and pointed his own blaster at Vorn, "Take the shot."

Vorn sighed and slowly got to his feet, lowering his rifle. Then he dropped it to the floor and raised his hands.

"Good." Garm said, "Now kick it over towards me." but Vorn remained still, "Well didn't you hear me?" Garm asked, "I said—"

"He heard you Mister ISB Agent." Kenit said as he pressed the muzzle of his blaster pistol against the back of Garm's head while keeping his rifle trained on Vorn, "It's just that he's more concerned about me than you."

With the artificial gravity aboard the *Silver Hawk* active the rebels inside could be forgiven for forgetting that the ship as in fact resting at a severe angle.

"Well Jaysica managed to wreck most of the stormtroopers' gear with those laser cannon blasts." Mace said as he laid out what they had been able to recover on the table in the ship's lounge, "We've got a couple of medpacs, some syntherope dispensers and some glow rods."

"I still saved your lives probably." Jaysica muttered.

"That you did little lady." Tharun agreed.

"The problem," Mace continued, "is that with Tobis and Jaysica not having their gear any more they're going to have share ours Tharun. Give Tobis your sidearm."

"Here you go lad." Tharun said and he nodded as he handed Tobis his blaster pistol. It was a standard military pattern weapon that was identical to Tobis' normal sidearm so the engineer knew exactly how to use it.

"What about me?" Jaysica asked.

"What about you?" Mace responded.

"Well I need a blaster as well. Shouldn't I get your pistol?" Jaysica said.

"You're kidding." Mace exclaimed, "You let off a laser cannon and you expect me to give you one of the galaxy's most powerful handguns? Here, take my deck sweeper."

Tharun frowned and leant towards Mace,

"Captain, you do realise that you just gave her a weapon that discharges energy in a cone don't you?" he said softly.

"Yeah. But its a stun weapon. She won't be bringing any buildings down with that I hope." Mace replied quietly.

"I hope you're right." Tharun said, "But you're still taking a chance giving a weapon like that to the little lady."

"Okay now," Mace said, speaking out loud again, "the way I see it our situation is as follows, we're dealing with a platoon of stormtroopers led by the major's son and that blonde Force witch he hangs around with plus a rogue bounty hunter and a mercenary that both have specific grudges against us. The good news is

that we've already dealt with almost half the stormtroopers and we now know how to find the bounty hunter's ship."

"Well shouldn't we join up with the major or Kara?" Jaysica asked, "They need to know what's happening as well." and then she noticed Mace and Tharun look at one another nervously, "What's wrong?" she asked. "Kara's dead Jaysica." Mace replied, "The building we used as a camp collapsed with her inside it."

Vay grinned as she looked up to where she could hear the sounds of digging from above. Marshas and the stormtroopers were working hard to clear the stairwell and it would not be long before they broke into the basement.

"Almost done." she said, glancing around at where Kara sat cradling baby Vorn while Jeeves stood close by. *And then you're going to wrench that child away from it's mother aren't you?*

Vay frowned and looked up again.

"What's the matter?" Kara asked when she saw the expression on Vay's face, "Those clones not digging fast enough for you? Perhaps you should tell your masters to pump a few more growth hormones into the gestation tanks."

"Make jokes while you can." Vay replied, "I doubt you'll find your trial funny. Assuming there is one."

"There won't be." Kara hissed, her eyes narrowing as she glared at Vay, "There's no way I'm letting anyone take my child so you'll just have to kill me right here."

*You would as well wouldn't you? Tell me Vay, do you think Garm will agree to raise that child with you?*

*You're not his wife, no matter what you'd like to think.*

"Garm once told me he wanted his family back together." Vay said softly, looking at Kara again.

"Tell him he can't have mine." Kara replied.

"Lieutenant Larcus miss," Jeeves said, "given the extreme nature of our situation perhaps it is unwise to antagonise Miss Udra."

"Jeeves come closer a moment." Kara said and as the droid bent over she reached out and switched him back off, "That's better." she said as the droid collapsed and then she glared at Vay again.

*Anger.*

Vay had been taught that anger could be a very powerful tool. Anger and hate inspired people to become great while those who meekly accepted their lot in life would forever remain where they were. Now anger seemed to flow out of Kara at an incredible rate, anger coupled to the love she felt for the child that she had held for only a short time. Vay had no doubt that her threat to protect that child with her life was serious.

"Vorn's wife." Vay said to herself softly, "So Garm's stepmother as well."

"Speak up." Kara called out, "You'll need to speak clearly if you want me to relay your last words to junior."

Just then there was the sound of debris falling from above and a hole appeared in the wreckage blocking the ruined staircase.

"Agent Udra!" Marshas called out, "We're through. Stand back." and after a short pause that was just long enough for Vay to retreat to a safe distance the wreckage at the top of the stairs collapsed entirely.

The collapse destroyed what remained of the stairs but it left a large gaping hole in the ceiling that Vay could clearly see the night sky through and shining a glow rod down through the hole as he looked into it was Marshas.

"Agent Udra, are you injured?" he called out and Vay rushed to stand beneath the hole.

"No. No, I'm fine." she replied.

"What about your prisoner?" Marshas asked and Vay's eyes shifted towards Kara.

*Now's your chance to show what sort of person you can be Vay.*

"She's not down here." Vay replied, "The collapse separated us."

"But I thought I heard voices while we were digging." Marshas said.

"Just me talking to myself I'm afraid." Vay replied and then there was a brief cry as baby Vorn awoke.

"What's that?" Marshas demanded.

Vay reached out through the Force, connecting with the minds of Marshas and the stormtroopers.

"Sounded like the rest of this place ready to fall in." She said, "Throw me a line so I can climb out of here before it does."

A length of syntherope was lowered down to Vay and she grabbed hold of it before being pulled up to the surface, leaving behind a somewhat confused Kara.

Kenit watched Cass bind both Garm and Vorn's wrists and ankles while they lay face down on the floor before the mercenary locked her wrists around a pipe mounted against a wall. All the while he kept glancing of of the door to check on the progress of the stormtroopers below. The one killed by Vorn had alerted the rest, both inside and around the buildings to trouble here and even now they were making their way up the exterior walkways.

"That ought to hold you while I take care of those stormtroopers." he said.

"You'll never get away with this." Garm hissed as he looked up from the floor, "You're heavily outnumbered and out gunned."

"I wouldn't be so sure about that." Kenit replied, "I'd say you've been losing rather a lot of your soldiers today Agent Larcus. I even buried that nice little blonde friend of yours under a building. From what Keena said there was one of his lot in there as well." and he glanced at Vorn.

"You did that? You killed Kara?" Vorn yelled. Then in a quieter and more serious tone he added, "When I get free you're a kriffing dead man."

"Whatever old man." Kenit replied before he left the room.

As Kenit left Cass noticed Garm grinning.

"What's so amusing?" she asked, "Kara's dead and your friend is as well."

"Oh no she isn't." Garm replied, "The bounty hunter that called me here is probably close to digging her out and when he's done she's going to slice up that mercenary and his female friend. I doubt there'll be anything left for you have revenge on father."

Kenit used the network of walkways to cross to another building from where he had a better view of the stormtroopers as they ascended the outside of the other building, heading for where he had left his captives. Though they moved in small groups so that some of them were always ready to respond to an ambush their focus was on the building they were climbing rather than any of the adjacent ones so none of them noticed as Kenit set up his rifle, unfolding its stock and bracing it against his shoulder.

"Now let's see if you've remembered where you are." he muttered before squeezing the trigger.

The blaster bolt missed the stormtroopers by a considerable margin, as did the next two that Kenit fired in rapid succession. But as soon as the stormtroopers realised that they were under attack they halted their climb and turned to face Kenit. The mercenary ducked as a volley of blasterfire came back towards him, slamming into the wall behind him and punching holes right through it. In turn he switched his rifle to fully automatic and fired off a short burst that also missed the stormtroopers entirely. Had any of the Imperial soldiers realised what he was actually trying to do then they would have reacted differently, but as it was they held their position and continued to fire at Kenit who once again changed his position and fired a burst that was not aimed for the stormtroopers themselves.

It was aimed at the walkway they were all standing on.

Kenit's first carefully placed shots had taken out three of the supporting struts that helped keep the walkway against the wall. Then the bursts were aimed at the walkway itself, just ahead of the leading stormtroopers. With all of these shot through the walkway was suddenly left no longer able to support the weight of the soldiers currently on it and there was a groaning sound. This was followed by a sudden 'Snap!' as the walkway collapsed, tipping most of the stormtroopers from it. Two, those closest to the sections of walkway that remained attached to the side of the building remained, now clinging onto the end of the walkway as they tried to drag themselves back up. But Kenit switched his rifle back to semi-automatic and with two aimed shots he sent both tumbling after their comrades.

Grinning, he folded the stock of his rifle again and slung the weapon over his shoulder. Then he took out his comlink and activated it.

"Okay Keena," he transmitted, "I've taken care of the stormtroopers here and captured your two most wanted prizes. Now what exactly are you planning to do as your share of the work?"

Instinctively Mace grabbed the back of a seat when he entered the cockpit of the *Silver Hawk* and saw the view outside of the viewport where the buildings were presented to him at a severe angle. Then he sighed as he remembered the ship's artificial gravity field and sat in the pilot's seat.

"This is the *Silver Hawk* calling Colonel Ergard. Do you read me?" he said.

"Ergard here. Go ahead Captain." the colonel's voice responded almost immediately.

"Colonel it looks like we've walked into a trap. The *Silver Hawk* is temporarily disabled and we are outnumbered by Imperial troops. Any chance of some air support?" Mace asked, aware that the scout ship piloted by the colonel offered levels of performance that rivalled some starfighters.

"I think I can manage that captain. Though I don't recommend my flying around on a general hunt for enemy forces. I'll be here waiting for a specific target." Colonel Ergard replied.

"Understood Colonel. We'll call when you're needed. *Silver Hawk* out." Mace said, then he got up and headed back into the ship's lounge where the other rebels were waiting, "Okay," he told them, "if we can give the colonel a target then he's willing to take it out from the air."

"That should be a help." Tharun said, nodding slowly.

"Then I think its time we went to see how the major and Cass are getting on." Mace said, "They ought to have checked in by now and with those buildings crawling with stormtroopers I've got a bad feeling about what may have happened to them."

## 5.

Kenit was smiling when he rejoined Keena.

"That was foolish." she said to him.

"What? Taking out two squads of stormtroopers? How many have you dealt with so far?" he responded.

"You could have brought down this entire building." Keena told him.

"But I didn't did I? And more to the point I've got Garm and Vorn Larcus all tied up and ready to be shipped off to your clients. Added to the pair we've already got locked up leaves just two more."

"Three." Keena corrected him, "You're forgetting Vay Udra. The Force user."

"Crushed under tonnes of metal." Kenit said, "I saw her go into the building that fell in."

"And I've seen that annoying nerf herder Marshas Decken dig her out again." Keena replied and Kenit scowled.

"It's not my fault he's here." he said, "You're the one he's tracking isn't he?"

"That's not the point." Keena replied, "The problem is that with her on the loose we need to be ready for her to try and rescue her boyfriend."

"What about the other rebel that was in the building?" Kenit asked.

"I didn't see her come out. She must have been killed. There's no way that Vay would have left her behind."

Keena said, "Now I think I ought to go and get the ship. I'll load the other two prisoners on it and then come back here for the ones you've just caught. In the mean time I want you to go after the other rebels then we'll take down Marshas and Vay together. Understood? No heroics against her."

"Got it. I'm not really interested in her anyway. Verser's the one I want."

There was considerably less activity around the buildings than when Mace and Tharun had left to draw off as many of the stormtroopers as they could. Both rebels studied the area closely through macrobinoculars closely from the spot where they had last seen Cass and Vorn but could make out no sign of any Imperial activity. However, there was no sign of the two rebels either.

"Captain, bodies." Tharun said suddenly when he saw numerous bodies in white armour scattered amongst the buildings that made up the structure.

"What are they all doing there?" Mace said.

"Not much. They all look dead." Tharun replied. Then as he continued to search the area something caught his attention in one of the buildings close to the main cluster, "Movement." he said, "Over there in the window right next to those body bags."

"Wait, yeah I see it." Mace said as he looked at the window in question and saw a familiar cone-shaped head peering back out, "Hang on, is that Harvey?"

"Harvey?" Tobis said, "Err, does he look okay?"

"Looks just fine from here lad." Tharun replied.

"And I'll bet he can tell us what's going on." Mace added, "Let's go join him."

Rather than taking a roundabout route like Cass and Vorn had done the rebels darted directly across the clear area surrounding the buildings until they came to the one containing Harvey and as soon as they entered the room the little droid began to chirp furiously.

"What's he saying lad?" Tharun asked, looking at Tobis.

"Oh, err, I'll need a datapad." he replied.

"Take mine." Mace said, tossing Tobis his datapad and the engineer promptly plugged it into the astromech droid. Then his eyes widened.

"He keeps saying she's alive." he said, "Kara."

"Kara's alive?" Mace exclaimed.

"How does he know that?" Jaysica asked.

"He says that while he was tracking the transmissions from this cluster of buildings his sensors picked up life signs under the rubble of the collapsed camp."

"The camp was in the basement." Tharun said, "It must have survived the collapse."

"Okay Tobis, take Jaysica and Harvey and go find her. Tharun and I will take care of things here. Here's my comlink for you to stay in touch."

Tobis just nodded, catching the tossed comlink before he and Jaysica darted from the room, with Harvey rolling after them. Then Mace and Tharun turned their attention to the cluster of buildings that Cass and Vorn had gone into.

"Look, someone's up there." Tharun said, pointing towards one of the buildings where a figure could be seen descending the walkway around it. In the darkness it was impossible for a human to positively identify the figure with the naked eye, but it was obviously not a stormtrooper.



"Could be the major." Mace said as he reached for his macrobinoculars, "Though if it is I'd like to know why Cass isn't with him." and then he lifted the macrobinoculars to his eyes, "Stang!" he exclaimed, "It's Durvell!" and dropping the macrobinoculars he instead raised his rifle, as did Tharun. The optical sights mounted to both weapons gave a better view of Kenit as he continued heading for the ground, though not as clear as the picture from Mace's macrobinoculars had been.

"I have you now." Tharun hissed before he squeezed the trigger of his weapon. Then as he saw Kenit fall he loudly added, "Got the vacc head!"

"No." Mace replied, still watching through his scope even as Tharun lowered his weapon, "You just clipped him, looks like his armour stopped most of the hit." Mace fired a shot from his own weapon just as Kenit rolled out of sight, "Stang! Missed him." he snapped.

Tharun lifted his rifle back to his shoulder and looked down the scope. For a moment he thought he saw movement at the side of the building but as he focused on that location he saw nothing. Or at least that was how it appeared at first, but as he continued to search for Kenit he saw another flash of movement and he realised what he was looking at.

"He's dropped a line." he said, "Durvell's rappelling down the far side of the building where we can't touch him without risking bringing the whole thing down."

"Then we need to get somewhere that we can see him from." Mace replied, "Come on, we'll head him off." and the two rebels backed away from the window and turned to run from the building.

The moment they burst outside they raised their rifles again, uncertain of rapidly Kenit would have been able to reach the ground. Each aimed their weapon at a different side of the building, ready for Kenit to make an appearance from either but they both headed for the side that they had last seen him on.

"Stay in close." Mace said as he approached the corner, "I don't hear-" and then all of a sudden a rifle butt was swung into his face and he fell.

Tharun swung his rifle around just as Kenit leapt out from behind the corner. But the other man was too close for him to be able to get a shot at and Kenit used the butt of his rifle as a club once again, this time striking at Tharun's hand and making him drop the rifle before a second blow under his chin made him stagger backwards. Regaining his sense rapidly Tharun was about to reach for his pistol when he remembered that he had given it to Tobis and he stared at Kenit, expecting him to shoot at any moment. But instead Kenit did something unexpected, instead of firing his rifle he tossed it away.

"I don't need that." he hissed, "I'm going to gut you like a bantha." and he reached for the knife sheaf on his belt.

A chirping sound from the darkness made Cass look around just as Penny rolled into the room from an adjoining one.

"Penny!" she exclaimed, "Where have you been?"

"Who?" Garm commented, straining to look around from where he lay.

"Her self preservation programming must have kicked in." Vorn said as he too attempted to look at the tiny mouse droid. Then he looked up at the counter where Kenit had left all of the personal equipment of his three prisoners well out of their reach.

"Cass, can you guide Penny to Garm's belt?" he said.

"What do you need my belt for?" Garm asked.

"Don't the ISB issue universal keys for binders any more? Ones that will open any make or model?" Vorn replied, "Penny's going to get it for us. Well, me and Cass anyway."

"Penny." Cass said, "Get me the belt up on that counter, the black one."

Penny chirped once and rolled over to the counter, then backed away slightly so that the belt was in view of the droid's optical sensor. Then a small hatch opened in the droid's casing and a mechanical arm extended upwards to grab hold of the belt and pulled it from the counter. Then it took the belt to Cass.

"Thank you Penny." Cass said as she began to rummage through the pouches of the belt, a process made more awkward by the binders around her wrists. However, she was soon able to locate a binder key and pressing it to the lock sensor of her binders. There was a soft 'beep' and the binders promptly dropped from her wrists, causing Cass to smile.

"Good, now unlock me." Vorn said and Cass slid across the floor the short distance to where Vorn lay to release his wrists and ankles before the two rebels got back to their feet.

Immediately Vorn rushed to their equipment and searched for his comlink. As soon as he found it he turned the device on and held it to his mouth.

"This is Vorn, is anyone there?" he broadcast, hoping to reach any of his team.

"Err, hello?" Tobis' voice replied, "This is Tobis."

"Like that wasn't obvious." Garm muttered from the floor.

"Keep quiet you." Cass ordered him, picking up a rifle from the counter and pointing it at him.

"Tobis what's your situation?" Vorn asked, "I take you escaped from Durvell?"

"Oh, err, yes sir. Now we're heading back to the building where the camp was for Kara." Tobis said and Vorn drew in breath.

"Tobis." he said after a short pause, "The building where we set up camp collapsed. Kara's dead."

"Oh. Ah. No she's not sir." Tobis replied, "Harvey says she survived so Captain Grayle sent us to dig her out." Vorn's eyes widened and he could not help but smile.

"She's alive." he said to Cass, "She's alive!" then he remembered about Vay. He knew very well that Vay Udra was a killer and that she would have little difficulty in taking out both Jaysica and Tobis. On the other hand he could not call them off and leave his wife buried alive, "Be careful." he warned Tobis, "Vay Udra may be down there with Kara. Is Harvey with you now?"

"Err, yes sir."

"Then have him scan the area and try to pick out Kara specifically." Vorn ordered.

"Yes sir. Ah, but what about Vay?" Tobis asked and Vorn glanced at his son.

"Leave her." he said, "We'll dig her out when all of us can be on hand to keep her under control. Vorn out." then he put the comlink away and picked up his rifle, "Give me the key to the binders." he told Cass, holding out his hand. When she gave him the key he went over to Garm and unlocked his ankles before helping him to his feet, "Okay," he said, "now we wait until we know how Jaysica and Tobis do."

Entering the underground chamber where her ship was Keena headed directly for the locked door leading to the side room where she and Kenit had left Jaysica and Tobis.

"Okay." she called out, "I'm going to put you aboard my ship so no trouble or else-" and then as the door opened she saw that the improvise cell was empty, a large section of the ceiling having collapsed to produce a way out to the surface.

Keena screamed in fury.

Spinning around on the spot she stormed towards her ship, a bulkier version of the common TIE fighter design meant for long range reconnaissance and scouting duties. Entering the ship she went straight to the pilot's seat and began preparing it for flight.

Kenit put his hand on the scabbard and found it empty. Not realising that the weapon had been stolen by Tobis he looked around quickly to see if it had fallen onto the ground.

"Lose something?" Tharun asked and then he dived at Kenit, tackling him and knocking him to the ground. The two men struggled with one another. Both men wore body armour and helmets, so only blows aimed for the face and neck would be of any use and with them both being skilled combatants such blows were difficult to deliver without the other man seeing what was coming and acting to avoid it. Therefore the brawl became more of a wrestling match, with each man trying to pin the other down beneath him.

Kenit made an unexpected move, attempting to head butt Tharun, but all it accomplished was to produce a loud 'Crack!' as their helmets made contact. Tharun then managed to slip a hand loose of Kenit's grip and reached for his own knife. But at the same time Kenit's hand went to the blaster pistol holstered at his waist and both men drew their weapons at the same time. Kenit brought his pistol up, intending to shoot as soon as the muzzle was pointed at any part of Tharun at all and willing to accept the risk of being burned by the back blast of a blaster hit so close to himself if it meant incapacitating his opponent. But Tharun saw what was happening and pulled himself closer to Kenit, trapping the blaster between them. Then he thrust his knife into the arm Kenit was using to hold the blaster.

Kenit screamed as the blade sank into his flesh, relaxing the grip he had on both his blaster and Tharun and allowing the rebel to pull away and scabble across the ground to where Kenit's rifle lay. However, before he could reach the weapon he felt Kenit grab hold of his ankle and drag him backwards. Tharun reacted by rolling onto his back for a better view of his opponent and then delivering a kick that sent Kenit backwards but failing to get him to let go of Tharun. Kenit tried to stand but Tharun delivered another kick to his knee that brought him back to the ground and finally released his grip on Tharun's ankle. But even as Kenit hit the ground he saw his blaster pistol right in front of him and he scooped up the weapon and aimed it at Tharun even as the rebel was reaching out for the dropped rifle.

Tharun heard the sound of a blaster shot and flinched. Then he heard a cry of pain and smelt burning flesh just as it dawned on him that he had not been shot and he turned to see Mace aiming his pistol at Kenit who was now clutching at his arm where he had been hit.

"Finally woke up huh?" Tharun said to Mace, breathing heavily.

"It seemed an appropriate moment to intervene." Mace replied.

"So what are you waiting for Verser?" Kenit asked, glaring angrily at Tharun, "Why not finish me off?"

Tharun glanced at Mace.

"No need." he replied as he looked back at Kenit, "Kenit Durvell, you may consider yourself under arrest. I'm sure the Alliance will figure out what to do with you."

"Though we may want to get him out of here quickly." Mace added, "We've got company. The bad sort."

## 6.

"I'm going to kill Garm for giving such lousy directions." Vay hissed as she and Marshas finally found the cluster of buildings Garm had described. But it was neither of them that first saw Mace and Tharun with their prisoner.

"Look miss! Rebels!" one of the stormtroopers called out when he saw Mace and Tharun dragging Kenit between them towards the buildings on the far side of the cluster right in front of the Imperials and he fired a shot towards them.

Tharun reacted by turning around and gripping his heavy rifle in one hand he fired a burst right back at the stormtroopers. Given that the rifle was not intended to be used when held with just one hand the burst failed to score any hits but Vay still drew and activated her lightsaber, using the glowing red blade to bat aside some of the bolts that came closest to her.

"After them!" Marshas yelled.

"No!" Vay responded, "Let them go for now. We need to find Garm."

Approaching the remains of the building that had held the camp Jaysica and Tobis saw the gaping hole where Marshas and the stormtroopers had already dug into the basement.

"Oh no!" Jaysica exclaimed, "We're too late. Someone got here before us."

Behind her Harvey chirped and Tobis looked at the datapad he had plugged into the droid for a translation.

"Oh, err, he says that there is still someone down there." he said before there was an unexpected sound from within the hole.

"Is that someone crying?" Jaysica asked and then a smile appeared on her face, "Tobis! It's a baby!" and she rushed up to the hole, "Kara!" she shouted into the darkness of the basement, "Kara it's me, Jaysica. I'm here to rescue you."

"Jaysica?" Kara called out from below, "Is that really you?"

"Yes its me." Jaysica replied.

"Oh Gods no. Now we're really in trouble." Kara said and Jaysica's face fell, "Is there anyone else up there with you? The boss maybe?"

"Just Tobis." Jaysica said.

"Tobis! Oh thank the Gods Tobis is here to rescue us."

Hearing the sound of blaster fire from outside Vorn rushed to the door and looked down. Searching the darkness below he saw the shot fired by the approaching stormtroopers and the burst Tharun fired in return, along with the ignition of Vay's lightsaber.

"Vay's here." he said as he stepped back into the room.

"But I thought she was supposed to be buried with Kara." Cass replied as Garm grinned.

"She was." Vorn said, taking out his comlink, "Tobis, Tobis can you hear me?"

"Oh, err, yes major. We're at the camp now."

"Is Kara – Is Kara there? Is she safe?" Vorn asked.

"Err, yes sir. Ah, I mean I think so, we're just about to go down to get her out and then we'll take her back to the ship." Tobis replied.

"Hurry." Vorn said and then he shut off the comlink and looked outside again to see the glowing red light cast by Vay's lightsaber as she, Marshas and the stormtroopers began to scale the walkway outside the building. Then there was a roaring sound from the distance as Keena's scoutship took to the air and circled around.

"Oh no." Vorn said, "I've got a very bad feeling about this."

An alarm in the cockpit alerted Colonel Ergard to the launch.

"A Lone Scout." he said, glancing at Sparky and the droid chirped, "Yes, I know Mace hasn't asked for us yet." he replied when he saw the translation of what the droid had said appear on a nearby display, "But I think that this counts as an emergency. We better go now."

Keena circled the cluster of buildings and she too saw the red of Vay's lightsaber blade.

"So you got out did you?" she said to herself, "Why doesn't that surprise me." Then she activated her ship's communications, "Kenit are you there?" she transmitted but there was no reply, "Kenit, can you hear me? Vay's loose." but again her partner in this endeavour failed to reply. Then, just as she was considering her next options an alarm sounded to warn her that someone was trying to get a weapons lock on her ship, "Oh kriff!" she exclaimed.

The sky lit up as Colonel Ergard fired his ship's twin laser cannons. Warned just in time, Keena had been able to raise her shields and there was a flash of light as the laser blasters struck the invisible barrier surrounding her ship.

"Holy poodoo!" Tharun exclaimed as he looked up at the dogfight beginning overhead. Meanwhile Mace reached out his hand.

"Give me your comlink." he said and Tharun handed him the device, "Tobis," Mace said into the comlink, "where are you?"

"Oh, err we're all back at the *Silver Hawk* captain." Tobis replied.

"Good." Mace said, "Major can you hear me?"

"Right here Mace." Vorn replied, "Cass is here with me as well and we've got Garm."

"Where are you?" Mace asked.

"At the top of the building where the recorded message was being broadcast from. Though I'm not sure how long it's going to be safe to stay here for."

"Tobis," Mace said, "best guess how safe is it for us to try and take off in the *Silver Hawk*?"

"Oh, err, we ought to be fine. Providing we build up power slowly and stop if anything goes wrong."

"Good. Start the pre-launch checks. Tharun and I are coming back with a prisoner. We'll launch as soon as we get back and pick up the major. Mace out."

Though the design of Keena's ship was derived from that of the Empire's TIE series of starfighters it offered nowhere near the same level of performance and Colonel Ergard's ship was faster, more manoeuvrable and better armed. Keena knew when she was outmatched and when it was better to flee than fight. The rebel pilot could just decide to come after her she knew, but if he did then she would be in no worse a position than she was now. But Keena believed that he would remain where he was to cover the rebels on the ground while they battled against the remaining stormtroopers. There was the issue of Kenit of course. He was still somewhere down below, though he had failed to respond to her most recent attempts at communication. Licensed bounty hunters considered it bad form to abandon a comrade, but Keena had no such scruples and right now abandoning Kenit was the option most likely to allow her to escape.

"Don't think you've heard the last of me." she hissed despite there being no-one around to hear her and then she transferred as much power as she could to her ship's repulsorlifts and accelerated away.

In his scoutship Colonel Ergard had listened in on the conversation between Mace and Vorn and when he saw that the Lone Scout was withdrawing he looked towards the building where he could see Vay leading a squad of stormtroopers up towards the room where he guessed Vorn was located.

"Vorn, it's Harris." he broadcast, "can you give me a visual signal of your position?"

"Happy to oblige colonel." Vorn's voice replied and there was a flash of light from a glow rod right where the colonel had expected it to come from.

"Vorn you've got stormtroopers closing in on you, plus someone with a lightsaber with them as well. I'd try to take them out, but I'd likely bring the building down around you."

"Is there time for the *Silver Hawk* to get to us?" Vorn asked.

"No." Colonel Ergard replied, "The *Silver Hawk*'s still on the ground and those stormtroopers are getting closer. I'd say you've got three minutes tops. I can swing by and pick you up, but you'll have to jump."

In the room at the top of the building Vorn frowned at looked round at Garm. With his arms bound he could not jump from a walkway to a ship, but if was untied then he would undoubtedly try to escape.

"Cass grab all our stuff and come with me." Vorn said, "We're leaving."

"What about him?" Cass asked, looking at Garm.

"His friends will be here soon, they can deal with him. Now come on."

Colonel Ergard brought his ship as close to the building as he dared, leaving a gap of barely two metres between the side of ship and the walkway where Cass and Vorn waited.

"Sparky hold her steady." he told his astromech droid, "I'm going to open the door." and he got up from his seat and headed for the hatch near the rear of the cockpit. There was a rush of air as he opened the hatch, despite the ship being stationary and he saw Cass and Vorn standing on the walkway, "Jump across!" he yelled and keeping one hand on the side of the hatch he extended the other towards them.

"Cass, you first." Vorn said and Cass looked down nervously.

"I can't do it." she cried out.

"You must!" Colonel Ergard yelled, "Look, just reach out for my hand and jump. I'll catch you."

"Okay." Cass said nervously, her reply lost amongst the sound of the scoutship's engines. Then she leapt across the gap between walkway and ship, reaching out ahead of her.

Just as he'd promised Colonel Ergard caught hold of her arm and pulled her inside his ship. Then as soon as he let go of her he reached out for Vorn who promptly made the leap himself.

"Sparky let's go!" Colonel Ergard yelled as he sealed the hatch and as it closed he saw the *Silver Hawk* slowly rising into the air.

The two rebel ships rendezvoused in orbit around the planet, Colonel Ergard docking with the *Silver Hawk's* top hatch. Vorn was still wearing his stolen stormtrooper armour when he and Cass climbed down into the *Silver Hawk* and went directly into the lounge. There they saw Kara sat on the couch with her legs laid out along it with a blanket covering them. In her arms she held a small bundle.

Vorn looked at her and smiled.

"Hi boss," she said, "Are you going to come and say hello to your son?"

Without saying a word Vorn went over to Kara and sat beside her, looking down at the baby asleep in her arms.

"I'm so glad you're both okay." Vorn said, planting a kiss on Kara's forehead, "I thought I'd lost you."

"Ooh he's so cute." Cass said as she looked down at the baby as well.

"Yeah, he takes after me." Kara replied. Then she ran a finger along the baby's hairline and repeated the motion on Vorn's forehead, "Though he has his father's hairstyle."

"So what's he called?" Cass asked.

"Vorn." Kara said and Cass frowned.

"Won't that get confusing?" she asked.

"Why?" Kara responded, "Who else do I call Vorn?"

"What about the major?" Cass said.

"Oh him. He's the boss." Kara said, looking at Vorn. Then she looked back down at the baby, "And he is Vorn Larcus the fourth."

"Can I hold him?" Cass asked.

"Not right now." Kara told her, "No-one is taking him from me. Go ask Jaysica what happens when people try."

Vorn smiled and kissed Kara again.

"Well I better go get changed." he said, getting up and heading for the crew cabins.

"Boss!" Kara called out and he turned around, "Could you just pull this blanket up a bit?"

"Anything for the mother of my child." Vorn replied, returning to pull the blanket further up Kara's body, exposing her bare feet. Then he headed for the cabins again.

"Boss!" Kara called and when Vorn turned around she wiggled her toes, "Now my tootsies are cold."

Vorn sighed and returned to pull the blanket over her feet.

"How's that?" he asked.

"Perfect." Kara replied and Vorn turned back towards the cabins, "Boss!"

Vorn sighed as he turned around again.

"I love you." Kara said and Vorn smiled.

"I know."

Marshas did not accompany Garm and Vay back to the shuttle that had brought them here, he had his own vessel concealed close by. With most of the stormtroopers Garm and Vay had brought with them having been killed there was plenty of space in the shuttle for the return trip but Vay still sat close beside Garm and leant her head on his shoulder.

"Garm," she said, "tell me about Cayla."

"Cayla?" Garm replied, "You've met my daughter, you know all about her."

"Not all about her." Vay replied, "Tell me about the day she was born."

Vay, no.