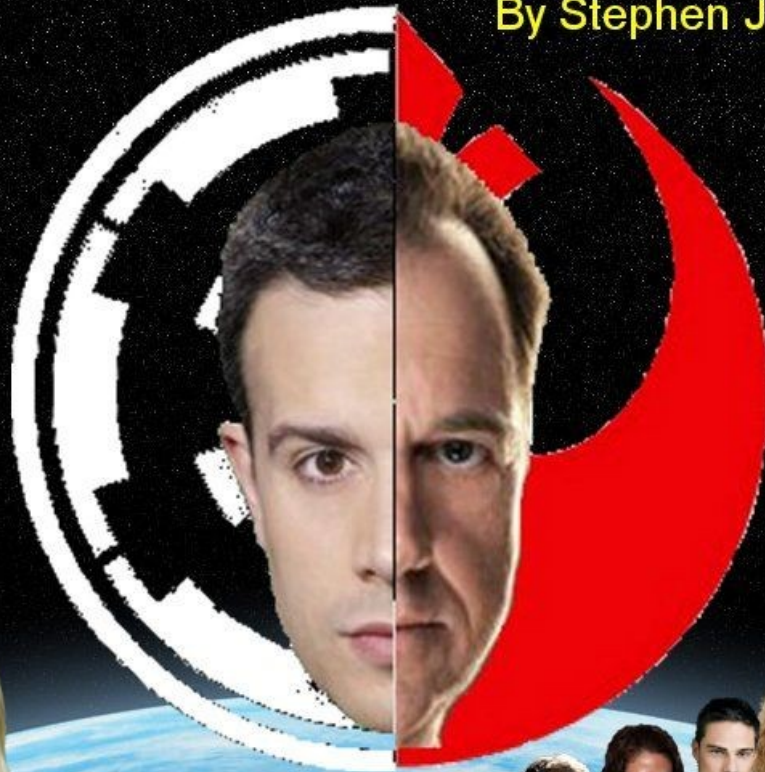


# STAR WARS

## 6-04: Too Good to Miss

By Stephen J Dutton



6-04  
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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...

## TOO GOOD TO MISS

WHEN THE ALLIANCE RECEIVES WORD THAT MOFF GREGOR HORATIAN IS DUE TO TRAVEL TO A REMOTE AND LIGHTLY DEFENDED WORLD THEY CANNOT AFFORD TO MISS THE OPPORTUNITY TO EITHER CAPTURE OR KILL THE MOST SENIOR IMPERIAL OFFICIAL IN THE SECTOR. BUT IS ALL OF THIS JUST A LITTLE TOO CONVENIENT?

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

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# 1.

Moff Gregor Horatian, governor for the entire sector always found it disconcerting when senior officials from any governmental department were waiting for him when he arrived at his office in the morning. Especially when they were from Imperial Intelligence.

"Miss Tharr. Mister Kellesen." he said to the two individuals in greeting. Gayal Tharr was the chief of Imperial Intelligence for the sector and wore a standard Imperial uniform like the moff himself. On the other hand Ibram Kellesen wore no uniform. The gaunt appearing man was an Imperial Inquisitor, a former Jedi knight now committed to serving the Empire, "Do come in and take a seat. Can I have refreshment brought to you?"

"You may dispense with the pleasantries moff." Ibram replied, "Our presence here is not social."

Moff Horatian glanced at the Force user, considering how nothing he did seemed in the slightest bit social.

"Moff Horatian we'd like to talk to you about Tretor."

"Vorn!"

Major Vorn Larcus the third looked up from his datapad when he heard his name being called out from down the corridor and he saw the mon calamari Lieutenant Colonel Shintal Sallir heading towards him. The colonel was in overall command of all of the Alliance's field teams for the sector and as such was Vorn's superior.

"Yes colonel." He replied, "How may I help you?"

"I understand your team is back to full strength." Colonel Sallir said.

"As of today, yes." Vorn told him, "Kara's back from her maternity leave so we're back up to the full four team members plus Captain Grayle and his crew. Seven in total."

"Excellent." Colonel Sallir said, "Because I've an urgent mission for you. I'd have given it to Commander Kord, but his team is already deployed and neither Captain Myrell's or mine is suitable for this assignment."

"Why not?" Vorn asked, puzzled as to what may prevent the colonel from undertaking a mission. He had never been concerned about deploying his all mon calamari team before.

"Because this mission is to Tretor." Colonel Sallir told him.

"Are you sure you're alright coming back so soon Kara?" Vorn asked his much younger wife as they walked across the hangar bay of the Alliance space station towards the *Silver Hawk*, the YT-1300 class transport ship that their team was based aboard.

"How often are you going to keep asking me that boss?" she asked in reply, "I had the baby three months ago and being cooped up aboard the station with your little princess butting in all the time is driving me stir crazy. I hope our kid grows up better than your first two."

"Well thank you for letting Lyssa watch Vorn while we're gone. It'll be good practice for her now that she and Tharun are expecting a child of their own." Vorn said, the Vorn he referred to being Vorn Larcus the fourth, his and Kara's son.

"Oh yes, thanks for reminding me about that. How has the mighty warrior taken the prospect of fatherhood? I haven't seen him since your little princess broke the news." Kara asked.

"I think it's easier to just let you see." Vorn replied as they reached the access ramp of the *Silver Hawk* and proceeded up it arm in arm.

"Am I holding this right?" a large man in combat gear was asking a pair of young women when Kara and Vorn entered the *Silver Hawk's* lounge. The man was Tharun Verser, a former mercenary who was now not only part of Vorn's rebel team but also his son in law. The elder of the two young women was Jaysica Horbid, the team's explosives and security expert while the younger one was Cass Grayle, the adopted daughter of the *Silver Hawk's* owner and captain, Mace Grayle.

"That depends." Cass replied as she looked at the cloth bundle he was holding to his shoulder, "Is it supposed to be a baby or an anti-walker missile?"

"You think I need advice on how to hold a missile kid?" Tharun asked.

"It's just the body armour and rifle slung over your shoulder confuse the matter Tharun." Jaysica added.

"Huh." Kara commented, "Show's what you know. Take it from me, I'd have been happy to have that rifle plenty of times in the last three months."

"Is baby Vorn that much trouble?" Cass asked.

"No, but the boss's little princess is." Kara answered as she sat down.

"That's my wife you're talking about." Tharun pointed out.

"Only because you got drunk." Kara replied.

"Wow, good come back." Tharun said as he unrolled the towels he had been using to practice holding a baby and tossed them onto the counter behind him. Then he grinned and added, "Mom." and Kara scowled.

"Kara." Jaysica said as she sat down at the table opposite Kara, "If you're married to the major and Lyssa is his daughter-"

"Yes that makes her my step daughter. But she's older than me and I don't like being called 'Mom'. Okay?" Kara interrupted.

"Actually that's not what I was going to say." Jaysica said, "I was going to point out that now Lyssa and Tharun are having a baby won't that make you its grandmother?"

"Oh I've got a very bad feeling about this." Tharun said as Kara's eyes narrowed and he reached for the helmet resting on the counter.

"What's wrong?" Mace asked as he appeared in the lounge from the corridor leading to the cockpit, accompanied by his engineer Tobis Dorfus.

"Dad I need to learn about explosives quickly." Cass said.

"Huh?" Mace responded, still having no idea what was going on.

"Oh, err, Jaysica ought to be able to teach you." Tobis said.

"I don't think that's going to be an option for long lad." Tharun said.

"Why?" Jaysica asked, "All I did was point out how technically Kara is about to become a-"

"Say it and you die!" Kara yelled, leaping to her feet and starting to dive across the table only to be grabbed and held back by Vorn. Meanwhile Jaysica squealed and also leapt to her feet.

"Help me Tobis!" she cried out as she scurried to hide behind him.

"If we could all settle down." Vorn said, looking from Kara to Jaysica and back to Kara.

"Okay fine." Kara replied, "I want some real excitement." and as Vorn relaxed his grip she sat back down again.

"That's better." Vorn said before he addressed all of the assembled rebels who were also taking seats around the table, "General Kain has ordered us to the Tretor system." he explained.

"Any particular reason?" Tharun asked.

"We're to rendezvous with members of the local resistance and act as the advance scouts for a task force that needs to be deployed quietly. In addition we'll survey some of the planetary defence facilities so that they can be disabled when the time for the main attack comes."

"How big a force are we talking about?" Mace asked.

"A division." Vorn replied and there were gasps from around the table.

"Stang boss, that's not a task force, that's an invasion." Kara exclaimed.

"That is a lot of fire power major." Mace agreed.

"Ten thousand men plus tanks." Tharun commented.

"What does the Alliance intend to do with all those troops major?" Jaysica asked.

"Maybe we're actually taking the planet." Cass suggested.

"Oh, err, no. That wouldn't work." Tobis told her.

"Why not?" Cass asked.

"Because the Empire would just come along and take it back kid." Tharun told her, "Especially if we've dismantled its defences."

"Then what-" Cass began.

"I was just getting to that." Vorn interrupted, "The division is to distract and engage the Imperial garrison and local defence forces while we and the local resistance fighters join a detachment from SpecForce to assault the primary target. At the same time a fleet battlegroup will engage Imperial ships in orbit to prevent them from intervening."

"Just what is the primary target boss?" Kara asked and Vorn took a deep breath.

"It's Moff Horatian." he replied, "The reconstruction work on Tretor has reached a key stage and we've learned that he is going there personally to oversee a dedication of a monument to the lives lost defending the planet in the Clone Wars. Ideally we want to capture him, but if that's not possible then killing him will be almost as useful to us. In addition we expect him to travel to Tretor aboard the *Iron Warrior* so our aim is to destroy that ship as well."

"So we take out the sector's political leader and Fleet Admiral Vretan as well?" Mace said and he smiled, "I like it."

"What about you boss?" Kara asked, "You knew both of them before you joined the Alliance didn't you?"

"Yes I did. I met both while I was in Parliament and I know that there is good in both of them. But they're part of the Empire's war machine and if it comes down to it I know we have to take them out to win this war."

"If this mission's so big then is there another team going along to help?" Cass asked, but Vorn shook his head.

"Commander Kord's and Captain Vollen's groups are elsewhere and can't be recalled in time." he said.

"What about the others?" Cass asked.

"They've all got non-humans in." Tharun said.

"So?" Cass asked.

"Don't you know about the history of Tretor kid?" Tharun asked her in reply.

"I had to quit school remember?"

"Tretor was a major battlefield in the Clone Wars." Mace told her, "It had a population of several species and at the start of the war they couldn't decide where their loyalties lay. Most of the humans wanted to side with the Republic while the other species wanted to either declare neutrality or even join the Confederacy."

"They had their own private civil war over it until the Empire restored order right after it was founded." Tharun added.

"And then the humans took advantage of the Empire's new policies to exclude all other species." Mace said, "Those already there were removed and now non-humans aren't even allowed to visit unless the Empire overrules the locals. Which it rarely does."

"We're going because we can move openly." Vorn said, "Now make sure you've got everything because we need to get going soon. Our window of opportunity is very small and this is a chance that is just too good for the Alliance to miss."

## 2.

The *Silver Hawk* dropped out of hyperspace relatively close to Tretor, just beyond its gravity well. In the cockpit Mace and Vorn looked out at the space surrounding the planet.

"Navy." Mace said suddenly, pointing towards a cluster of starships close to one of Tretor's orbital cargo handling facilities. Vorn studied the Imperial ships more closely using the *Silver Hawk's* sensors.

"Strike cruisers." Vorn replied, "But I wouldn't worry. They look like they're breaking orbit." and sure enough there were flares of light as the four medium cruisers began to accelerate away from the planet, "Must just be an attack line on patrol."

"I don't know." Mace said, "I always get a bad feeling when I see Imperial Navy ships I'm not expecting."

"Just take us down. The locals will be expecting us."

Mace flew the *Silver Hawk* into the atmosphere and headed towards the primary spaceport in the capital city. Everything that the team did had to appear normal and above board, even the slightest hint of trouble could cause the moff to cancel his visit. On some worlds in the sector customs officials could be bought off to avoid having to justify the team's presence but here the customs agents needed to be tricked rather than bribed. "Purpose of visit." the agent said as Mace and Vorn walked down the access ramp and Mace handed over his registration documents.

"Charter flight." Mace replied.

"And you are the owner of this ship, the *Grey Ghost*?" the agent asked Mace, using the false name presented on the documentation and also broadcast by the rigged transponder.

"I am." Mace told him, "And this is my navigator Mister Vorn."

"I need to see your passengers." the customs agent said, "We have strict immigration controls here on Tretor."

"Of course." Mace replied and he walked back up the access ramp, "Mister Dorfus. The customs agent would like to see you and your people." and the other rebels promptly emerged from the ship. Tobis had traded his usual overalls in for more casual clothing while Tharun's combat gear had been exchanged for civilian attire and he was the only one of the group carrying a weapon, his blaster pistol being holstered to his hip.

Meanwhile all three female rebels were now dressed in high quality and figure hugging clothing rather than the casual and practical outfits they normally wore. Mace frowned briefly when he saw Cass.

"This is Mister Dorfus." Mace told the customs agent, "Perhaps you've heard of him?"

"No. Should I have? The agent replied.

"Mister Dorfus is among the most renowned holo imagers on Estran." Tharun said sternly and he looked at Tobis, "Isn't that right sir?"

"What? Oh, err, ah-" Tobis stammered.

"He's offended that you don't recognise him." Tharun told the agent.

"And what is he here to take holos of?" the agent replied.

"The women." Vorn said and the three female rebels all smiled.

"I see." the agent said, staring at each woman in turn before turning his attention to Tharun, "And what about you? Why do you need that weapon?"

"Some people want to get close to the ladies." Tharun said, "I stop them."

The agent did not reply. Instead looking down at his datapad.

"I'm clearing you all for two weeks." he said, "If you need to extend your stay then contact the central immigration department."

"Excellent." Mace replied and looked round at the other rebels, "I think the droids can handle the unloading of the equipment." he told them, "We should go find the hotel." then as they were heading for the exit from the docking bay he placed a hand on Cass's shoulder, "And when we get there you're getting changed young lady. That dress is too high at the bottom and too low at the top. Understood?"

The team booked into a hotel local to the spaceport and waited while their droids had their belongings delivered to them. As soon as a large packing case sealed with a fake Imperial Customs seal that described the contents as 'Recording Equipment' Tharun opened it and set about assembling the weapons it contained. As he did this he noticed Cass looking somewhat glum.

"What's wrong kid?" he asked.

"I was looking forwards to being a glamorous secret agent." she said, "But now I have to wear my regular stuff."

"I wouldn't worry about it." Tharun told her, "Kara and the little lady are both getting changed right now as well. Do you really think that you could take on the Empire in high heels?"

Cass sighed.

"Probably not." she said and then they were interrupted by someone coming to the door.

"Stay back." Mace told Cass as Tharun drew his blaster and Vorn headed for the door. He pressed the control to open the door and prepared himself to dive out of the way to give Tharun a clear shot if it turned out to be a trap. However, instead of a squad of Imperial troops he found himself looking at a grey haired woman.

"Did you report a failure with the heating?" she asked, despite the temperature inside the hotel suite being quite comfortable.

"It only breaks when I turn it on." Vorn replied and the woman smiled as she stepped inside.

"Vorn Larcus?" she asked, "Or is it Mace Grayle?"

"Vorn." he replied, "Captain Grayle is the man twenty years younger than I am standing over there."

"Well I'm Brya Tell." the woman said, holding out her hand, "The resistance sent me."

"So its your group that found out about the visit?" Vorn asked as he shook her hand.

"That's right." Brya replied, "One of my people masquerades as a member of COMPNOR."

The Committee for the Preservation of the New Order was part political party and part social organisation as well as controlling the infamous Imperial Security Bureau. Membership was considered key to advancement on many worlds throughout the Empire.

"I must say," Brya added, "I hadn't expected the Alliance to send us someone as well known as yourself Major Larcus. I've followed some of your exploits on the news feeds."

At that moment Kara emerged from one of the bedrooms and walked over to Vorn, kissing him and placing an arm around his waist.

"Hi," she said to Brya, "I'm Kara Larcus as in his wife."

"Kara this is Brya Tell." Vorn said, somewhat embarrassed by her tone, "She's our resistance liaison."

Kara smiled.

"Liaise away." she said.

"What do you need?" Brya asked, looking at each of the gathered rebels.

"We'll need to see these installations we'll be sabotaging." Tharun said.

"Plus the areas you've allotted for the Alliance to drop troops into without being seen." Mace added.

"And any information about Moff Horatian's itinerary." Vorn said.

"I have some of that here now." Brya replied, producing a mem-stick from her pocket, "This has recordings made of all of the defence installations that will need taking out."

"How recent?" Vorn asked, taking the mem-stick and tossing it to Tobis, who plugged it into the hotel suite's entertainment system so that its holographic viewer could be made use of as a display screen large enough for everyone to see.

"Between three weeks and six hours." Brya replied.

"Then we'll have to survey some of them again." Tharun said and Vorn nodded.

"Take Jaysica and check out any you think we need more up to date details on." he said. Then he looked back at Brya, "What about the other information?" he asked her.

"We have surveys of several areas that are out of the way where ships could be landed and unloaded." she replied, "But it depends on what your specifications are."

"And the itinerary?" Vorn added.

"Still unknown." Brya admitted, "But Merret, that's our man inside COMPNOR is attending a function tonight where there will be people who'll know about it. I'll have him-"

"No." Vorn interrupted, "Don't have him do anything that may risk his detection. Once all this is over I'm hoping that you'll all be able to stay in place rather than require evacuating. That means none of you can get caught doing anything illegal."

"Err, then how do we get the information we need major?" Tobis asked and Vorn smiled.

"Easy." he said and he looked at Kara, "Put your best dress and heels back on." he told her, "You're going to a party."

"Really?" Kara replied, "Will you dance with me?"

"I'm afraid I won't be there." Vorn replied, "People will stare too much at a man like me with a woman as young as you at a formal COMPNOR event. Mace will attract less attention."

"How are we supposed to get into this event major?" Mace then asked.

"That's easy as well." Vorn said with a smile, "Just ask your best friend to put in a good word for you."

"My best friend?" Mace said, confused. Then his eyes widened, "Oh you don't mean-" he began.

"Oh yes he does." Kara said and then she kissed Vorn again, "Boss you're evil."

"Will someone tell me who he means?" Cass asked.

"Lady Sharva kid." Tharun said and Cass frowned.

"But isn't she the-" she began.

"The person who took over from him in the Estranian Parliament? Yes." Tharun said.

"What is it Kay?" Lady Sharva asked her handmaiden when she entered the room as the noblewoman was



getting a massage.

"I'm sorry to disturb you my lady," Kay replied, "but there is a call from Captain Mace Grayle of the Silver Hawk."

"Captain Grayle?" Lady Sharva responded, her eyes widening, "Well what are you waiting for? Put him through."

Kay went to the corner of the room where the control panel for a holographic imaging system was located and all of a sudden a life sized projection of Mace appeared standing in the centre of the room.

"I'm sorry to disturb you Lady Sharva." he said.

"Not at all." she replied, "I can always spare a few minutes for the man who saved my life from those rebel scum. Now how may I help you?"

Mace smiled.

"I'm in the Tretor system." he said, "There's an individual here that I'd like to meet to try and establish a business relationship with, but I can't get close to him."

"And you want me to put in a good word for you?" Lady Sharva asked, "Just tell me his name."

"Actually I'd like to keep that confidential if you don't mind your lady ship." Mace said, "But I know that he'll be at the COMPNOR function being held here tonight. I was wondering if you could get me on the guest list."

"Why of course I can my dear captain. Rodge Larrs is a personal friend of mine. COMPNOR does nothing in this sector without his say so. I'll put in a call and have a pass delivered to you." Lady Sharva said.

"Actually I'll need two passes." Mace said, "If its not too much trouble. I'm in the Luna Shadow Hotel by the spaceport."

"Captain, you'll have the passes within the hour." Lady Sharva told him, "You have my word."

"Well that was easy." Jaysica said.

"That's because she's a stuck up nerf herder." Kara commented, "Right boss?"

"Personally I'd have gone with criminally corrupt nerf herder." Vorn replied. Then he turned to the golden coloured protocol droid standing in the corner of the room, "Jeeves." he said to the droid.

"Yes major Larcus sir?" it replied, stepping out of the corner.

"I need you to assist Captain Grayle and Kara with the etiquette for a COMPNOR function." Vorn said.

"Well I shall do my best sir. But given the limited time available-" the droid began.

"Actually I want you to go with them." Vorn interrupted, "They'll need you to keep them out of trouble."

"Why it will be my honour sir." Jeeves replied, "Now first of all may I recommend a change of clothing?"

"So are we going to wait here while they're at the party and Jaysica and Tharun are out spying on the Empire?" Cass asked Vorn.

"Don't think you'll be sat watching cartoons while we're gone." Mace commented.

"She won't have time." Vorn responded, "She and Tobis will be coming with me to check out these landing zones. The Alliance needs to know which are suitable for our ships."

The Imperial-class star destroyer *Iron Warrior* was docked at the sector's naval headquarters orbiting the capital world of Estran. On its bridge Fleet Admiral Praus Vretan watched the crew preparing the mighty vessel for departure when he became aware of a man in an Imperial uniform striding towards him.

"General Dern." the admiral said.

"Admiral Vretan." the general replied.

"I hadn't expected to see you up here Julius." Admiral Vretan said.

"It was a last minute thing Praus." the general told him, "Apparently I'm to go with you as well."

"To command the regiment I'm carrying?" Admiral Vretan asked and General Dern nodded, "What about the local commander? Does he know that you'll be taking command?"

"I assume so." General Dern said, "Army operations beyond Estran aren't normally my area of authority. But our special guest requested my presence personally."

"Ahh." Admiral Vretan said, "He's aboard I take it?"

"And in the finest guest quarters you have Praus."

"And what does he think of them?"

"He didn't say. But I get the feeling he's used to better."

Fleet Admiral Vretan sighed.

"Well it was his idea to go there on my ship." he said, "I just hope he doesn't complain too much."



### 3.

The building being used for the COMPNOR function was one of the most luxurious on the planet, standing out amongst the rather more utilitarian structures that surrounded it in the government district. It was meant as a museum and all around the outside were projected images of some of the exhibits on view during its opening hours. Right now though only those who were members of COMPNOR or the lucky few to have been invited anyway were being allowed inside. Kara and Mace arrived by autotaxi and were dropped off round the corner from the main entrance to conceal their mode of transport from those being driven right up to the main steps in an assortment of luxury speeders. Kara wore an expensive looking dress that she had acquired when she had had to infiltrate a luxury hotel while Mace instead wore a formal suite that had been hurriedly hired from the hotel itself. As they walked arm in arm around the corner towards the main entrance Jeeves followed behind them, his plating reflecting more light than normal thanks to his having been given a fresh coat of polish to help him blend in as well.

"This doesn't feel right." Mace whispered as they approached the steps leading up to the building's entrance.

"The suit looks fine." Kara reassured him.

"No, not the outfit. The fact that I'm unarmed. I'm not used to it." Mace replied.

"Don't worry, I am." Kara told him and he frowned.

"Where can you fit your blaster under than dress? Wait, do I want to know?" he asked.

"I've got the boss's hold out blaster taped to the inside of my leg." Kara told him and when he drew in breath to speak again she added, "And no, you can't reach for it if there's trouble. Try it and I'll not only punch you in the face I'll tell Malia and you'll have to explain yourself to your angry fiancée."

"Got it." Mace said as they reached the base of the steps and he took out the passes, "Well here goes." he added.

They climbed the steps to where a droid stood by the door.

"Good evening." the polished machine said, "May I take your passes please?" and it held out a hand. Mace presented the two passes and the droid scanned them, detecting and decoding the tiny electronic tags set into the ink of the lettering.

"Thank you." the droid said as it returned the passes, "Please go inside."

Mace and Kara just nodded at the droid as they entered the building while Jeeves ignored the other droid entirely.

"So what now?" Kara asked as both rebels looked around the lobby they had just stepped into.

"Might I suggest clearing the doorway?" Jeeves said.

"Good point." Mace replied, "We need to find this Merret guy, Jeeves, you remember what the guy looks like right?"

"Why of course I do Captain Grayle sir." Jeeves replied, "But do you not have a copy of the image that Miss Tell provided?"

"Yes, on my datapad." Mace said, "And that's back at the hotel because it's not fancy enough to bring here." Kara grunted.

"I knew I should have brought the boss's. His is really fancy." she said.

"Mistress, might I suggest not making noises such as that while here?" Jeeves said, "They are not the sort normally made in an environment such as this."

"Excuse me, Captain Grayle?" a voice said from behind the rebels and they turned to see a man standing looking at them.

"Who's asking?" Mace replied.

"Why I believe that this is Mister Merret." Jeeves said.

"Brya told me to expect you." Merret said.

"I'm Mace." Mace told him, "This is Kara and the droid is Jeeves."

"At your service sir." Jeeves said.

Merret looked around.

"We should find somewhere private." he said, "Follow me."

"You know your way around this place." Mace said as he, Kara and Jeeves followed the local rebel.

"I work here." Merret replied, "I helped organise all of this." and then he paused by an office door and looked around to check that they were not being watched before he opened it and beckoned to the other rebels to follow him inside.

"So how do we get the itinerary?" Mace asked the moment the door slid shut behind them.

"I don't have it." Merret replied.

"That wasn't what he asked." Kara told him, "Just tell us who does have it and where it is."

"Okay, it's in the chairman's office." Merret replied, "He's really important in COMPNOR and it was his idea to

have the moff come to dedicate the new wing of the museum.”

“So where's his office?” Mace asked.

“Here, I'll show you.” Merret replied as he activated the computer on the desk and called up a floor plan of the building, “There, that's it on the top floor.”

“Of course its the top floor.” Kara said, “So all his minions really are beneath him.”

“Does the party go that far up?” Mace asked.

“Of course not.” Merret said, “The top three floors are senior management division only.”

“What about security?” Kara asked.

“None.” Merret told her.

“None?” Kara repeated.

“Think about it.” Mace said, “Who'd go up there? Everyone invited tonight is a good little Imperial citizen. Who would think of heading up to the chairman's office to rifle through his belongings?”

“You mean apart from us?” Kara asked.

“It's on a mem-stick in his ash tray.” Merret told the rebels.

“How do you know all this?” Mace asked.

“He's asked me to help organise the moff's visit here.” Merret replied, “I saw him plug the mem-stick in then.”

“And is it protected?” Kara asked, “Rigged to fry if we don't follow the right procedure when we access it?”

“Oh no. The chairman isn't terribly good with computers.”

“Then all we need to do is copy it to another mem-stick and we've got it.” Kara said, “Sounds almost too good to be true.”

“Yes it does.” Mace replied, “Maybe the Force is just with us on this one.” then he looked at Merret, “Lead the way then.” he said.

“I can't go with you.” Merret replied, “If anyone notices I'm missing they'll come looking for me.”

“Yeah he's right captain.” Kara said, “We're the ones who are anonymous.”

“But there's no security right?” Mace asked Merret, “We can just go right up?”

“That's right. You may need to pick the lock of his office door, but that's all.” the local rebel replied, nodding.

“I think we can handle that.” Mace said, “Jeeves you better wait here I think.”

“Oh I quite agree Captain Grayle sir.” the protocol droid replied, “Breaking and entering goes against my programming.”

The tracking station's antenna was silhouetted against the night sky as Tharun studied it through his macrobinoculars while beside him Jaysica waited patiently. Both rebels wore Imperial uniforms. Jaysica a standard duty uniform while Tharun wore an army trooper's uniform that allowed him to carry a military issue blaster pistol on his hip without it looking out of place. On the other hand Jaysica had a hold out blaster tucked inside her tunic.

“There's some construction work going on.” Tharun said, “Looks like they're expanding the landing field.”

“Why would they do that?” Jaysica asked but Tharun shrugged.

“Don't know.” he replied, “I don't see that this place would get enough traffic that they can't handle the volume and I don't see why they'd want to handle anything bigger than they're already capable of.”

“Well should we try and find out?” Jaysica suggested, “I mean while we're here anyway.”

“Not a bad idea little lady.” Tharun said, “But we need to focus on sabotaging that antenna first.” and then he put his macrobinoculars into the holdall he carried and added, “Now come on, that construction work has left a nice hole in their fence that we can use to get inside.

A large section of the perimeter fence had been removed to allow for the expansion of the landing zone and all of the sensors had been removed from the ground as well. Both rebels kept low as they advanced, aware that the area was likely to be well patrolled to make up for the lack of fixed security systems.

“Stop!” Tharun hissed as he heard the sound of movement ahead in the darkness and he came to a sudden halt but Jaysica reacted too slowly and walked into the back of him. Tharun just wobbled but Jaysica lost her footing on the incline they were walking along and slid down it on her stomach until reaching the bottom and Tharun winced as she lifted her head to reveal a face now covered in mud.

Then a strange warbling sound made him turn, his hand instinctively reaching for the blaster on his hip but rather than an Imperial patrol a small native creature bounced out of the darkness, halted briefly and let out another warbling sound.

“What is it Tharun?” Jaysica asked.

“My guess would be some local version of a rat.” Tharun replied as he relaxed and watched the creature bounce away, “Now get back up here.”

Jaysica climbed back up the incline and Tharun grinned as he saw the layer of mud now covering the front of her uniform as well as her face. Then his face fell.

“What's wrong?” she asked.

“You.” Tharun replied, “We need to get you cleaned up before anyone sees you.”

“Is it that bad?” Jaysica asked.

"Little lady, Lyssa has these mud pack things she puts on sometimes. Says they're good for her skin. Well You look like you've just used up her entire life's supply. Now come on, I think that the barracks are this way." Avoiding any patrols the two rebels made it as far as the barracks and headed inside.

"Okay let's have Penny." Tharun said, "We'll use her to find a way to the showers that won't get you seen." Jaysica crouched down, removing her backpack and setting it down in front of her. Reaching inside she removed a compact box shaped mouse droid and set it down. The droid chirped as Jaysica then took out a datapad with a comlink already attached to it and she saw a translation of what the little droid had just said on the display.

"No." she said with a frown, "I'm not supposed to look like this. Now go find the showers. I need to clean up." The droid chirped again and then sped away. Looking at the datapad again Jaysica saw an image being broadcast back from the droid and she held it out for Tharun to see.

"I guess we go that way for now then." he said.

Rather than risk getting into an elevator with someone who would see them continue past the floors occupied by the COMPNOR function Kara and Mace took the stairs. Given the number of flights of stairs to be climbed Kara opted to remove her shoes for the climb and go barefoot, a choice that did not produce quite the benefit she had hoped for.

"Problem?" Mace asked when he heard her gasp the moment she first placed a foot on the stairs.

"Of course there is." she replied, "These stairs are freezing. Why can't a fancy place like this afford to heat them?"

"These are stairs." Mace replied, "Who uses stairs in a building like this unless there's a fire or something? And then the coldness of the stairs would be somewhat mute."

"Well I think we should leave a note in the suggestion box." Kara said, "I'm probably going to lose my toes to frost bite."

"If you say so. You're the medic after all." Mace replied and then he hurried up the stairs, leaving Kara behind.

Mace waited at the top of the stairs while Kara caught up with him.

"Get ready with that blaster." he told her, "Just in case." and then he opened the door and peered out into the corridor, "Clear." he said before both he and Kara darted out of the stairwell.

"Oh that's better." Kara said as she ran along the carpeted floor rather than the cold metal stairs.

As the rebels had hoped the floor seemed deserted with not even any cleaning droids to disturb them as they searched for the chairman's office.

"Here it is." Mace said when he saw a door labelled 'CHAIRMAN' in an area of the corridor that opened out to allow a desk for a receptionist to be placed outside the office door without obstructing it.

"So do we need a key?" Kara asked.

"Merret never said anything about that." Mace replied as he touched the control panel and the door to the office slid open, "That was convenient." he added.

"Too convenient." Kara replied and she pulled aside the lower half of her dress and ripped the blaster from between her legs, "Ouch!" she exclaimed as the tape securing it in place was also ripped away and she rubbed her leg where the blaster had been.

"Perhaps a little more thought into how you conceal your weaponry?" Mace suggested.

"Yeah and a little less tape." Kara responded, "Now let's get the information we came for and get out of here. I've got a very bad feeling about this. Normally we're ass deep in stormtroopers by now and given how long and shapely my legs are that's a lot of stormtroopers."

The two rebels entered the office and closed the door behind them just in case anyone did decide to walk by the office while they were technically burgling it. They found the mem-stick exactly where Merret had told them it would be, out in the open resting in an ash tray that did not look to have ever been used for its intended purpose. Mace sat down at the desk and activated the computer, a holographic display appearing in the air in front of him as Kara passed him the mem-stick.

"So how do we transfer the data?" she asked.

"We'll just send it out using the museum's network connection." Mace replied, "A guy like the chairman is bound to have his own link to the outside world. Ah yes, there it is." and he pointed to an icon on the display, "I can just send it to the *Silver Hawk* directly and the chairman will be none the wiser."

"Providing he is as computer illiterate as Merret claims." Kara said.

"Well he's been right about everything so far." Mace said and then he smiled, "All done. The file has been copied to the *Silver Hawk's* computer for us to study at our leisure." and he shut down the computer and returned the mem-stick to the ashtray.

"Good." Kara said, "Because there's a party going on downstairs and you owe me at least one dance."

## 4.

Penny soon located the shower block for enlisted women and Tharun waited out in the corridor with the droid while Jaysica went inside to clean up. Fixed to the walls of the corridor outside of the shower block were an assortment of notices and posters intended to boost morale and remind Imperial personnel of precautions to take against rebel attack. Tharun snorted as he saw one that extolled the virtue of vigilance at all times and considered how he and Jaysica had penetrated the base without any signs of security.

"Pardon me sir, I need to get past." an electronic voice said and Tharun looked around to see a droid pushing a laundry cart. Without speaking he stepped out of the way and watched it head into the shower block before turning his attention back to the wall and the information displayed upon it, hoping that there may be something of use amongst the propaganda and statements of the obvious.

"What are you doing here trooper?" a stern female voice exclaimed suddenly and Tharun turned to see a grey haired woman in an officer's uniform looking back at him, "You do realise that this is the women's shower block don't you?"

"What that?" Tharun replied, looking towards the door clearly labelled 'ABLUTIONS, FEMALE'.

"Yes that!" the woman snapped, "Now what are you doing here?"

"Waiting for a friend ma'am." he replied, "She had a bit of an accident." and at that moment the droid that had gone into the shower block emerged again pushing its cart that now looked full.

"Well I'll be checking trooper and if I find out that there have been any complaints from the women about a man hanging around the showers I'll come looking for you. Just because you're one of the reinforcements doesn't mean I won't find you. Do you understand?"

"Yes ma'am." Tharun replied, snapping to attention and saluting.

"Very good." the woman said as she walked off down the corridor.

"Salutes should be returned you old witch." Tharun muttered and then he became aware that Penny was chirping, "What?" he asked, but all the droid could do in return was chirp and bleep some more.

"Tharun." Jaysica's voice called out from inside the showers.

"Right here little lady." he replied, standing by the door, "Though if you don't come out soon I'm probably going to be carted off as a pervert and my wife will leave me."

"Is there a droid out there?" Jaysica asked

"You mean Penny? Of course she's here."

"No, I mean a service droid with a laundry basket." Jaysica corrected him.

"There was. Why?"

"Because its taken all my clothes."

Tharun winced and placed his head in his hands.

"Seriously?" he replied as he looked up again.

"Yes, all of them. All I've got is a towel."

Tharun turned towards the wall and banged his head against it.

"What was that Tharun?" Jaysica called out.

"Nothing little lady. Just thinking." Tharun replied and he took a deep breath, "Well hurry up and get out here. We'll have to find you something else to wear. Something that won't give away our presence here."

Moments later Jaysica's head appeared around the door frame.

"Promise you won't laugh." she said.

"I make no such promise." Tharun replied and Jaysica frowned before stepping out into the corridor and Tharun smirked.

"Don't laugh at me. It's not my fault." Jaysica said, lashing out at Tharun.

"Oh I don't know." Tharun replied, "I think that wearing a towel decorated with the seal of the Empire is a good look for you. I'd offer you your blaster back but I'm not sure that you've anywhere to keep it."

"Let's just get going okay?" Jaysica said, "This floor is cold."

"Well I doubt the Empire had streakers in mind when they designed it." Tharun said, turning around heading down the corridor. Then he heard the 'hiss' of the door closing after Jaysica followed by a squeal. Tharun winced again, "The towel just got caught in the door didn't it?" he said.

"Don't turn around!" Jaysica snapped.

"Oh I'm perfectly happy looking this way." Tharun reassured her. Then he waited while Jaysica opened the door again to free her towel.

"Thanks. Let's go." she said then and Tharun began to walk, revealing the large mirrored panel set into the wall at the end of the corridor and Jaysica scowled, "So is this the way the droid went?" she asked as she followed him.

"Yes, but I'm not looking for the droid." Tharun replied.

"But it's got my clothes." Jaysica protested.  
"Which are covered in mud anyway." Tharun reminded her, "I've got a better idea for a disguise."  
"What? Another uniform?"  
"Little lady I'm not certain we'd find another in your size." Tharun said, "We're heading for droid maintenance."  
"But what do you hope to find there?" Jaysica asked but Tharun just grinned.  
"You'll see." he said.  
"Oh I've got a bad feeling about this." Jaysica replied.

The droid maintenance section was unmanned at this hour and Jaysica breathed a sigh of relief as the door closed behind her without catching on her towel.  
"So what are you looking for?" she asked as she saw Tharun searching the room that was lined with inactive droids, "I don't see anything for me to wear in here."  
"That's because you're not using your imagination little lady." Tharun replied and then he came to a halt and smiled, "Ah, this looks good." he said as he stared at a row of astromech droids.  
"You can't be serious." Jaysica exclaimed as she then watched as Tharun pried off the dome shaped head of an R2 series droid and then began to rip out all of its internal workings from both the head and the cylindrical body, "I'll never fit in that."  
"Sure you will little lady. Just curl up and crouch inside the body." Tharun replied.  
"And how will I move?"  
"You won't need to." Tharun told her, "I'll push you."  
"That's the most ridiculous idea I've ever heard." Jaysica said, "I won't do it."  
"More ridiculous than not bothering to use a locker to store your clothes while using a public shower?" Tharun asked, "Now just get in Corporal Horbid. That's an order from your sergeant."  
"Well I still have a bad feeling about this." Jaysica said as she walked up to the hollow droid and Tharun helped her to stand inside it. Then she tried lowering herself down into the body of the droid. Despite being not much more than one and a half metres tall it was still a tight squeeze for Jaysica to fit and she winced and gasped several times as she caught herself on something inside the casing and started again.  
"Hurry up." Tharun told her, "We can't stay here all night."  
"I'm trying." Jaysica said, "But like I said, I don't fit." but then all of a sudden her foot slipped inside the droid's casing and she dropped down violently. The towel dropped as she fell and it landed beside the droid while Jaysica herself fell into it, ending up with her legs folded up in front of her and just her head sticking out of the droid's body.  
"That's great." Tharun said, "Just right." and he bent down to pick up the hollowed out head he had set aside.  
"No it's not great." Jaysica replied as she tried to move, "I'm stuck in here."  
"You can't move at all?" Tharun asked.  
"No. Not at all. How can I sabotage the sensor array like this?"  
"Well I guess you'll just have to tell me what to do little lady." Tharun said as he fit the droid's head into place, "Now keep quiet." and then he began to push the hollowed out droid that now held Jaysica towards the door.  
"I can hardly see a thing in this." she said as she tried to peer through the large lens set into the R2 unit's head.  
"Shush." Tharun said, opening the door, "Astromechs don't speak basic remember?"

Before the Clone Wars the place that Vorn now looked at had been a vibrant spaceport. But an attempt by the Confederation to land a force of droids here early in the conflict had begun a series of battles in which the area changed hands repeatedly until both sides were fighting over little more than ruins. However, the ground itself remained suitable for landing spacecraft and even though the tracking and control systems were long gone it looked adequate for the Alliance's needs.  
"So is this what we need then major?" Cass asked.  
"I think so." Vorn replied, "But we need to head closer and have Tobis and Harvey check it out more closely and he glanced round at where Tobis was standing beside his astromech droid R5-HV.  
"Oh, err, of course sir." Tobis replied.  
"And you stay close to me." Vorn told Cass, "The reason the local rebels know about this place is because of the local underworld. Smugglers tend to use it so there could be people already here."  
Harvey let out a brief series of angry sounding chirps when Vorn mentioned this.  
"What did he just say?" Cass asked Tobis.  
"Err, I'm not sure." Tobis replied, "But, well, I don't think he's keen on going somewhere dangerous."  
Putting his macrobinoculars away Vorn unslung his rifle and unfolded its stock.  
"Tell him to do as he's told." he said, "And point out that we're likely to be at least as well armed as any outlaws we run into."

Tharun pushed the hollowed out droid that held Jaysica through the corridors of the tracking station, heading from the service sector to that where the base operations were carried out. Penny moved ahead of him, guiding him towards the computer system that processed all the data from the antenna. Along the way he passed by numerous Imperial personnel, not one of who gave him a second look despite the fact that he was pushing a droid that should have been able to move under its own power.

"Is it just me or are there a lot of army troopers about for a base like this?" he said softly when he and Jaysica were alone in a quiet corridor.

"Don't ask me." she replied, "I can't see one colour of uniform from another. Besides, aren't there supposed to be army guards?"

"Yeah, but the resistance didn't say there'd be this many." Tharun said. Then he saw Penny stop by a turbolift and chirp, "We want level four right?" he asked.

"Yes. The computer's on four through six, but the main access is on four." Jaysica replied before Tharun opened the turbolift door and promptly found himself looking at a turbolift filled with Imperial officers. Smiling he pushed the droid into the turbolift and pressed the button for level four. Then he simply faced the front of the turbolift as it began to move.

"What's wrong with that droid?" one of the officers said.

"What?" Tharun replied, "Oh, bad motivator. But its sensors are configured just right for-"

"No, not the astromech. The mouse droid." the officer interrupted and he pointed to where Penny was repeatedly banging into the interior wall of the turbolift and Tharun smiled as he realised that the tiny droid was deliberately distracting the officers away from Jaysica.

"Oh that. I think it's just due for scrapping." Tharun said, "You know how they get after a few months." The officer grunted.

"Don't I just. All because someone wanted to save a few billion credits on getting us decent droids." he said and Penny suddenly stopped and let out a shrill beep. Then the turbolift stopped and the doors opened.

"This is my floor." Tharun said as he pushed Jaysica back out of the turbolift and Penny shot out behind him. As the doors closed and Tharun continued pushing Jaysica down the corridor he leant down close to the astromech's domed head, "That was close." he whispered, "I thought we'd never get past those officers. I think we can thank Penny for that."

"I keep saying how smart she is." Jaysica replied.

"Shush. Guards." Tharun hissed as Penny halted outside a door guarded by a pair of army troopers. Calmly Tharun walked up to them and reached for the control, smiling as the guards looked at him without speaking. Then he pushed Jaysica through the open doorway into the sensor control centre.

Several rows of consoles were manned by Imperial technicians monitoring tracking data from over half a continent while officers moved between them to check on their work and Tharun took a quick head count.

"I make it fourteen." he whispered. But as he was focused on the Imperial staff he failed to notice that he had just pushed the hollowed out astromech droid onto a slope and all of a sudden it rolled away, accelerating straight towards the wall at the end of the room. Inside the droid the immobilised Jaysica squealed, producing a sound not unlike a genuine R2 unit until she slammed into the wall and all eyes in the room turned towards the droid as Tharun dashed towards it.

"It's okay." he called out, "Just a bad motivator."

"Well just do what you came here to do and then get out before it wrecks the place." an officer replied.

"Yes sir." Tharun said, saluting briefly and then frowning when the officer just turned away, "Can't anyone round here return a salute he muttered as he pulled Jaysica away from the wall and towards a side door.

The door led to a narrow corridor that was lined with ducts and bundles of wiring and Tharun crouched down beside Jaysica and lifted off the head of the droid shell.

"Okay little lady, where do I start?" he asked.

Jaysica blinked now that she was again exposed to a normal level of lighting rather than the reduced amount that got through the darkened lens that had been her only window to the world inside the droid shell and then she looked around.

"There." she said, looking up at a panel that was about half way up the wall, "Open that up. There's a mutlitool in my kit."

Tharun nodded and rummaged through his bag until he found the pocket sized tool and unfolded a screw driver that he used to open up the hatch, exposing a cluster of small circuit boards connected to a single set of data and power lines.

"Okay, what am I looking at?" he asked.

"Those are the power monitoring circuits for the entire system." Jaysica told him, "Destroy them and the system shuts down."

"But how do we do that without the Empire knowing its been sabotaged?" Tharun asked next.

"We use the system's own power to start a fire. Pull one out."

"Which one?"

"Any. There'll be a backup for each so even if you remove an active one the system won't lose power. Then

you need to break the circuit at the main fuse.” Jaysica told him.

“How?”

“Just rip it off with the multitool.”

“If you say so little lady.” Tharun said as he ripped a component from the board.

“Now you can connect the output to the rail of one of the other supplies.” Jaysica said, “I brought cables.”

“What will that do?” Tharun asked.

“With two different rails connected and no fuse to protect either of them it’ll cause a massive flow of power that will burn out every component exposed to it. The system will keep functioning for a while, but there’ll be a fire and it will shut down.”

Tharun smiled.

“I get.” he said, “And the Empire thinks it was just a circuit failure. No bomb so no explosive residue.”

“That’s right.” Jaysica said, nodding while Tharun connected the circuit in his hand to one that was visibly different and then rapidly slid the one in his hand back into place. Almost immediately he noticed some of the components starting to darken and he hurriedly replaced the hatch cover before picking up the droid head again.

“Okay little lady, let’s get out of here before this thing blows.” he said.



## 5.

Harvey scanned the ruined spaceport's landing zone and confirmed the suitability of the surface to handle the heavy mass of the vessels that would be used to land the Alliance's armoured units.

"Okay, that makes four." Vorn said, "Three fields for the infantry and this place for the heavy stuff."

Then Harvey chirped excitedly.

"Oh." Tobis said as he looked at the translation on his datapad.

"What's wrong?" Vorn asked, "Is there something wrong with the landing zone?"

"Err, no sir." Tobis replied, "But Harvey indicates that the thermal profile of this area suggests that it has been used extensively in the last few days. He err, he also states that the odds of those ships having avoided the local tracking stations are at least two thousand to one."

"Does he have to tell us the odds?" Cass asked, "What difference do they make? Why can't he just tell us that its unlikely?"

"Droids don't think." Vorn pointed out, prompting a rude sounding noise from Harvey, "Anyway, we better be getting back to the ship. The Alliance needs to know that we've surveyed the landing zones."

When the fire alarm sounded the personnel of the tracking station began to head for the exits immediately. Though there were plenty of notices explaining the proper procedure for an evacuation some of the staff inevitably chose to ignore parts of it, heading in the wrong direction to fetch belongings or trying to force their way through those ahead of them. Knowing that the fire would take time to spread from the antenna control system to other parts of the base Tharun took his time, still pushing Jaysica along ahead of him inside the hollowed out droid. Penny still rolled on ahead of him and like Tharun the droid did not display any of the urgency that seemed to be gripping its Imperial counterparts, several of which zoomed past at high speed in an effort to reach safety. However, Tharun did not expect Penny to suddenly veer off down a side passage and start chirping furiously.

"What's up with your droid?" Tharun asked.

"How should I know? I can't even see her." Jaysica responded as Tharun looked down the corridor Penny had headed down and he smiled.

"I'll be right back." he told Jaysica, "Don't go anywhere."

"Go anywhere? Where could I go stuck like this?" Jaysica replied and then she realised that Tharun was no longer pushing her along the corridor, "Wait Tharun, where are you? Don't just leave me here."

Ignoring Jaysica's pleas Tharun ran down the corridor after Penny, coming to a halt when he reached the laundry cart that had been abandoned here by the droid that was now no where to be seen. Opening up the cart he looked inside and smiled.

"Jackpot." he said to himself, opening his bag before reaching into the cart and pulling out Jaysica's mud-stained uniform and stuffing it into his bag, "Nobody's going to miss this stuff after all this panic." Then he reached into the cart again and pulled out more uniforms that looked to be in sizes matching his team members, stopping only when his bag was so full that he had to struggle to get it closed again. Then he looked down at Penny, "Okay Penny, let's go get the little lady out of here so she can get back into some clothes."

Returning to the hollowed out droid that held Jaysica, Tharun continued pushing it down the corridor.

"Tharun is that you?" she asked from inside.

"No." Tharun replied, "It's the ISB come to move you to a holding cell for giving yourself away. Now stay quiet, we're almost there."

"Almost where?"

"Parking lot. I figure we should be able to swipe the keys to a speeder in this chaos and just drive out of the main gate."

Mace limped as he got out of the taxi back at the docking bay.

"It's not funny." he told Kara.

"Oh yes it is." she replied, "You'll need to learn to dance better than that for your wedding or Malia will just end up putting a heel into your foot as well and I promise you she won't appreciate you using the same sort of language you used at the museum. Now the boss, he's a really good dancer. I get excited just thinking about it."

"So that's what got you together then is it? The shared ecstasy of dance?" Mace asked and Kara snorted.

"More like the shared concern that we were about to be killed by an assassin droid and a lack of anything else to do other than make out while we-"

Before she could finish Mace pulled her into the shadows at the edge of the docking bay.

"Speeder." he told her, "Imperial." and they both peered at the vehicle parked towards the rear of the *Silver Hawk*. Sure enough it was a land speeder that bore Imperial markings on its side, "I've got a bad feeling about this." Mace added and then he heard a ripping sound as Kara produced her blaster and a gasp as the tape tore at her skin as well and he sighed.

"Oh shut up." Kara hissed, hitting his arm.

"I never said anything." Mace replied, "Now do you mind? The ship is open and there's an Imperial speeder right outside."

"After you captain." Kara said and Mace frowned.

"Since you're armed maybe we should go with ladies first?" he suggested.

"It's you ship captain. You're the one supposed to go down with it." Kara responded and Mace sighed.

"Okay, stay close behind me." Mace told her and he began to creep towards the *Silver Hawk*.

The two rebels crept up the access ramp, listening for any signs of trouble. But as they got closer to the top they heard an unexpected sound.

"Is that the washing machine?" Mace whispered, confused.

"Sure sounds like it." Kara said, "Maybe some Imperial troops broke in to do their laundry."

"Captain is that you?" Tharun's voice then called out and Kara and Mace hurried the rest of the way up the ramp and looked into the lounge. There they saw Tharun now dressed in his usual camouflaged combat fatigues rather than the field grey Imperial uniform he had worn for his assignment sat on the work counter beside the washing machine. Then they also noticed that the table had a pile of Imperial uniforms on it.

"Where did you get all of these?" Mace asked as he grabbed a tunic and noticed that it was in his size.

Immediately he began to try it on.

"Oh they were having a sale." Tharun commented, "I figured they'd come in useful."

"Good idea." Mace replied.

"But how did you manage to steal an are-two unit?" Kara asked as she looked at the hollowed out droid in the far corner of the room.

"Ah." Tharun replied, sliding off the counter and walking over to the droid. Then he reached out for its head.

"No don't." Jaysica's voice said from inside and Kara gasped, her eyes widening.

"Is the klutz in there?" she exclaimed, moving closer to the droid and trying to peer through the lens of it eyepiece.

"Kind of, yeah." Tharun replied.

Mace frowned.

"Come on you two, you know the major hates it when you mess with her." he said.

"Hey it's not my fault." Tharun said, "She's kind of stuck. That's why I took the speeder, pushing her all the way back here would have taken all night."

"Kind of stuck' huh?" Mace said, "And how exactly did she get 'kind of stuck'?"

"Well she got in and she can't get out." Tharun said.

"Obviously." Mace said, "But I'm interested in the circumstances in which one of you and I'm guessing that it's you sergeant, decided that it would be a good idea for Jaysica to squeeze into an astromech droid shell."

"Holy kriff she's naked!" Kara exclaimed as she lifted up the droid's head and looked inside.

"Yeah, she got mud on her uniform and we had to improvise." Tharun replied as Kara pushed the droid's head off completely to expose Jaysica's head beneath it.

"Please tell Tobis to hurry back and get me out of this." Jaysica pleaded.

"Oh I'm sure your boyfriend will be back just as soon as he and the boss are done." Kara replied, "Now let's move you over to the table."

"Why? What are you going to do to me?" Jaysica asked, "Its just not fair. You got to dress up and go to a party and I'm stuck like this."

"Oh sweetie," Kara said, "right now I'm not going to let anyone do anything to you." and at this both Mace and Tharun looked at one another.

"Did she get hit on the head?" Tharun asked.

"Not that I noticed." Mace replied.

"Oh shut up the pair of you." Kara replied as she positioned Jaysica by the table and headed for the fridge returning with a can of fizzy glug and a straw, "Here." she said to Jaysica, "I'm sure you could use a drink."

"Seriously Kara, what are you up to?" Mace asked her as Jaysica began to drink.

"Nothing captain." Kara told him, "Because quite frankly I can't think of anything right now that tops the thought of Jaysica being stuck naked inside an R2 unit. So I may as well be nice to her and get in the boss' good books."

"Okay, she must have got hit on the head when I wasn't looking." Mace said, looking at Tharun and then there was the sound of footfalls from the docking bay outside as well as the chirping of a droid.

"Sounds like the boss is back." Kara said, looking round just as Vorn and Tobis appeared with blasters in their hands.

"What's with the speeder outside?" Vorn asked.

"Ask your son in law." Mace replied.

"I just signed it out." Tharun added, "The base staff weren't checking paperwork when the fire alarm started. I manage to snag us some uniforms as well."

"There is just one slight hitch though boss." Kara said and she stepped aside.

"Holy kriff what happened to Jaysica?" Cass exclaimed from behind Tobis and Vorn.

"Cass! Language!" Mace snapped.

"Sorry dad, but look."

"Yes I know. Jaysica is naked inside an are-too unit." Mace said and he frowned before adding, "Okay that's a phrase I never thought I'd have to use."

"Which one of you did this?" Vorn asked.

"It was an accident." Jaysica said.

"Of course it was." Vorn replied and he looked at Tobis, "Tobis, please sort her out."

"Err, yes sir." Tobis said and as he pushed Jaysica towards the workshop Vorn looked at Mace and Tharun.

"So how did it go?" he asked, "Apart from bringing Jaysica back like that."

"The itinerary is in the computer." Mace said.

"And the sensor array will be off line for a day or so." Tharun added.

"Then I better let the Alliance know." Vorn said, "The sooner they start the next stage of the operation the better."

Rear Admiral Aphanar looked around the bridge of her flagship cruiser the Wave Rider at the other mon calamari command crew.

"Admiral I have General Kain for you." the comscan operator told her.

"Put him through." she replied and on the main screen an image of a dark skinned human appeared.

"Admiral," the general said, "we've just heard from Major Larcus on Tretor. Everything is ready for your arrival."

"Then we shall begin immediately general." she replied and as the screen was shut off she activated the intercom linked to the second mon calamari cruiser in her formation as well as the various transport ships filled with troops and equipment, "All craft prepare to enter hyperspace on my command." she ordered.

## 6.

Ibram walked onto the bridge of the *Iron Warrior* and headed for Fleet Admiral Vretan as he stood near the large viewports at the front surveying the other ships of his own squadron, two lines of gladiator-class medium cruisers plus a pursuit line of light corvettes.

"Your ships are ready admiral?" the fallen jedi asked just as Admiral Vretan turned to face him.

"They are." he replied, "My line will jump directly for Tretor and Admiral Hall's forces will join us as soon as they are needed."

"Excellent." Ibram said, "Everything is proceeding as I have foreseen it."

"Well they're on their way." Vorn said as he returned to the lounge and sat down beside Kara who reacted by sliding onto his lap and wrapping her arms around him, "So did any of you run into any trouble?" he asked after kissing Kara.

"None boss." Kara replied, "Went like a dream."

"The guy who had the itinerary wasn't a big believer in security." Mace added, "The mem-stick was on his desk right where Merret said it would be."

"And there was a nice big hole in the perimeter fence around the tracking station major." Tharun said, "The little lady and I just walked right in there."

Vorn frowned.

"What do you all mean that there were no problems. Surely you must have run into at least one security measure."

"Well there were a lot of army troopers inside the tracking station." Tharun commented, "More than I'd have expected. But they weren't on a heightened state of alert or anything."

"And we were at a civilian party." Mace pointed out.

"You were at a COMPNOR party." Vorn reminded him, "There should have been security to prevent anyone trying to take out any of the guests while they were all gathered together with hardly any civilians to get in the way." then he looked at Tharun, "And if the tracking station was full of troops then why couldn't they find anyone to stand sentry on a hole in the fence?"

"Perhaps because they were new and didn't know the local procedures." Tharun said, "One officer that spoke to me mentioned reinforcements."

"I want to see that speeder. I've got a very bad feeling about this." Vorn exclaimed, pushing Kara off his lap and rushing from the Silver Hawk to the landspeeder that Tharun had stolen. Behind him the other rebels ran after him.

"Boss, what's wrong?" Kara asked as she and the others watched Vorn going over the speeder.

"Here." Vorn exclaimed, pointing to a small metal plate fixed to the back of the speeder, "Allastran garrison. This speeder was shipped in from Allastra."

"So what?" Kara asked, "They're bringing in a few extra troops for the moff's visit."

"We saw a troop line leaving orbit when we first arrived." Vorn pointed out, "Why didn't those ships hang around to help with security? And why have they been landing them in the middle of nowhere rather than at commercial and military spaceports."

"Because the Empire didn't want us to know that they've been increasing the forces they have here." Mace said.

"Exactly." Vorn replied, "All of this has been calculated to draw in a large Alliance force that the Empire then plans to overwhelm and destroy. Probably in front of the media as well."

"Boss are you saying what I think you're saying?" Kara asked.

"Yes." Vorn replied, "It's a trap."