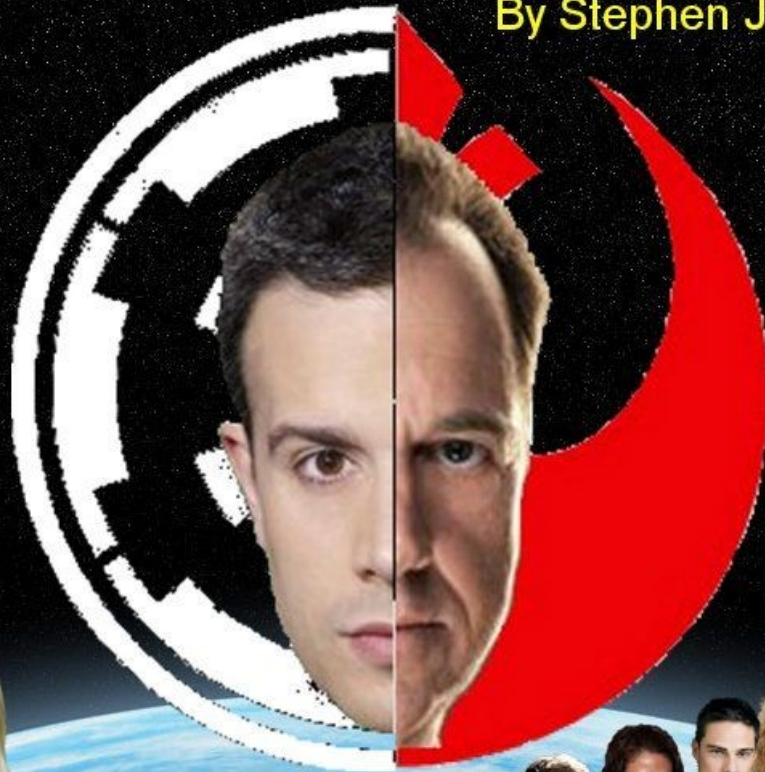


# STAR WARS

## 6-12: Diversionary Attack

By Stephen J Dutton



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Civil war turns father against son

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

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

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

## **DIVERSIONARY ATTACK**

MOST OF THE ALLIANCE FLEET IN THE SECTOR IS DUE TO BE WITHDRAWN FOR A SECRET ASSIGNMENT. CONCERNED THAT THIS WOULD LEAVE THEM VULNERABLE TO IMPERIAL ATTACK, THE LEADERS OF THE REBELLION IN THE SECTOR PLAN AN ATTACK TO PUT THE EMPIRE ON THE BACK FOOT. VORN LARCUS AND HIS TEAM ARE INSTRUCTED TO ATTACK ONE OF THE MOST HEAVILY GUARDED IMPERIAL FACILITIES IN THE SECTOR AND TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE, THEY ARE NOT DOING THE JOB ALONE...

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

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# 1.

"Enter." Rear Admiral Aphanar said when her door chimed and it slid open to reveal one of the Alliance's communications staff.

"Admiral I have an encrypted communication for you." the man said when the door had closed behind him and he held up a datapad, "A courier just delivered it." and then he handed the datapad to the mon calamari admiral.

"Thank you ensign. You are dismissed." the admiral said and she waited while the communication officer left her office. Only when she was alone did she connect the datapad to her computer. Contained on the computer was the encryption key required to access the message that the datapad held. If it were connected to any other computer then all of the data stored on the datapad would have been instantly wiped. Delivered to the Alliance headquarters in person by a trusted courier rather than transmitted, the message was as secure as it was possible to make it. There was a short delay while the datapad and computer verified one another's identity and then the playback began as a holographic image of another mon calamari in the uniform of an Alliance admiral materialised in front of Admiral Aphanar.

"This is Fleet Admiral Ackbar," the hologram spoke, "and I have a message of the utmost importance. All fleet units receiving this order are to proceed for the arranged rendezvous point in the Sullust system. Further orders will be issued once you have arrived." and then the hologram flickered and vanished.

Admiral Aphanar paused, taking in the order. She had begun initial preparations to move her fleet battlegroup to Sullust but knowing what the target was likely to be she had not honestly expected the order to ever actually come.

Then she activated her intercom.

"General Kain?" she said.

"Yes admiral." the general's voice replied, "What can I do for you?"

"General it's about the rumours of a fleet deployment. I'm afraid that they are true and I've been ordered to proceed to Sullust."

"I see." General Kain said, "Then I suppose we need to review our options."

"So what's the story major?" the former mercenary Tharun Verser asked as he found his superior officer already sat in the briefing chamber.

"Your wasting your time Tharun." the young woman who had her arm wrapped around Vorn's waist replied. The three rebels were the only ones present in the room so far, though it seemed unlikely that it would remain that way for long. "The boss doesn't know."

"Kara and I only got the message to come here." Vorn added, "It didn't say anything about why."

"Well maybe Mace'll know." Kara said as she looked towards the entrance to the room where Jaysica Horbid, the final member of their field team had just entered the room in the company of the crew of the transport ship they were assigned to, the YT-1300 class *Silver Hawk*, had just arrived. Jaysica herself was holding the hand of Tobis Dorfus, the ship's engineer while it's owner Captain Mace Grayle and his daughter Cass were just in front of them.

"Why bother bringing just the seven of us here?" Mace said as they approached the already seated rebels.

"Actually it's not just the seven of us." Kara said as she looked at the entrance to the briefing chamber again and the other rebels all looked there as well.

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

Approaching them was a group of half a dozen more rebels, all apparently human. However, all of Vorn's team were aware that the only woman among the newcomers was a hapan, a near human species. This was Inra Vayne, the captain of the YT-2400 class *Beauty Queen*. Inra was well known for the pride she took in her ship and she often taunted Mace over the relative age of his ship compared to her own. Accompanying her was her engineer Sen Verid, who in contrast to Inra's immaculate appearance wore heavily worn overalls covered in grease stains and behind them was the four man team assigned to the *Beauty Queen* led by Commander Dayle Kord.

"Mace Grayle." the hapan woman said, "Whatever's going on, high command must be desperate. Or else this job just isn't important."

"Well if your ship is involved then it must be something easy enough that you won't get it dirty." Cass commented and Mace grinned.

Inra drew in breath to reply but Dayle put a hand on her shoulder.

"Just sit down." Dayle told her.

"Of course commander." Inra said, ensuring that as she sat down there was a gap between her and any of Vorn's team. The rest of Dayle's group then proceeded to fill in this gap just as a third group entered the

room. Unlike the first two however, none of this group were members of the Alliance's field operations teams. Instead it was Admiral Aphanar and General Kain. As the pair headed for the centre of the room the door slid shut and sealed behind them while the rebels already present all stood at attention.

"At ease." General Kain said as he and the admiral reached the centre of the room and he turned to face the other rebels. He waited while they took their seats again and then continued to speak, "I'd like to start by reminding you all that what is said here is classified." he stated, "You are not to discuss it with anyone outside this room. Now I am aware that there have been rumours that a large part of the fleet battlegroup assigned to this sector is to be withdrawn and I am here to tell you that these rumours are true. I'll let Admiral Aphanar explain further." and he stepped back, allowing the admiral to take centre stage.

"My orders are to make the bulk of our naval forces available for an operation that may be of lengthy duration." she began.

"The bulk?" Mace commented, "So not all?"

"That's what 'bulk' means nerf herder." Inra muttered.

"What about the *Renegade*?" Mace asked. The *Renegade* was a Corellian corvette and he was engaged to it's captain.

"The *Renegade* will be among the vessels I am taking with me." Admiral Aphanar replied, "The ships remaining behind will be the *Night Wraith* and *Rancor's Claw* along with our three customs corvettes. I'll also be leaving behind our headhunter squadron as well as all of the TIE fighters we've been able to acquire."

It did not take much to notice a pattern to most of these vessels. The *Night Wraith* was an Imperial star destroyer and the *Rancor's Claw* a gladiator-class cruiser that had both been seized from the Imperial Navy, as had the customs corvettes and TIE fighters. All of these ships were easily identifiable as Imperial designs that in the heat of battle would be easy to confuse with enemy vessels. Though other ship classes used by the Alliance fleet were also used by the Imperial Navy, they were generally relegated to support roles rather than forming the core of Imperial battle fleets.

"That doesn't leave us with much." Vorn commented.

"About the equivalent of two Imperial lines." Dayle said, nodding in agreement.

"Precisely." Admiral Aphanar said and she stepped to one side and she inserted a mem-stick into the room's holographic projector, "Therefore it has been decided that you will undertake a mission that will prevent the Empire from taking advantage of our weakness to tighten their grip on the sector." and there were gasps from the gathered rebels when they saw the hologram.

"Is that what I think it is?" one of Dayle's team asked, a lieutenant called Brak Laeven.

"Depends." Tharun said, "Do you think that it's the Imperial Navy's sector headquarters?"

"The equivalent of our own headquarters." Vorn commented.

"You see here the Empire's sector group headquarters orbiting the capital world of Estran." Admiral Aphanar went on, "All strategic operations at fleet level and higher are planned at this facility and as such it houses the cream of the Imperial Navy's leadership, often including Fleet Admiral Praus Vretan himself."

"Are you asking us to assassinate the fleet admiral?" Vorn asked.

"Not necessarily." General Kain answered.

"Indeed, this is a sabotage mission. Not an assassination." Admiral Aphanar added.

"Oh, err, but if we destroy the space station, won't that risk debris falling to the planet?" Tobis asked.

"Total destruction of the station is not the intention of the mission either." the admiral replied, "Instead we want you to infiltrate its key areas and render them inoperable. Specifically tactical and strategic planning and communication centres are to be targeted."

"What about any warships docked?" another of Dayle's team asked. This was Marse Horkin, a former Imperial Navy fleet trooper. His expertise and familiarity with Imperial Navy operations would make him an invaluable resource for this mission.

"Any ships that can be sabotaged would be considered a bonus." Admiral Aphanar said, "But the main target remains the station itself."

"So what's the plan then?" Kara asked and the admiral and general glanced at one another.

"This briefing is not to provide you with a plan of attack," General Kain replied, "It is just to instruct you on what you are to come up with a plan to do."

## 2.

In a much smaller planning suite Dayle and Vorn stared at the hologram of Imperial Navy headquarters while they attempted to find a way of infiltrating the facility. As the home base of an entire fleet consisting of almost four hundred Imperial warships, including six Imperial star destroyers or their equivalents it was swarming with not only the crews of those vessels but also all of the support staff required to maintain them as well as those involved in the operation of the space station itself. Of course this meant that it was impossible for any of the space station's crew to know everyone by sight and that would work in the rebel's favour, allowing them to move around anonymously. But first they had to get aboard.

In addition to the docking ports required for the warships based at the space station there were dozens of hangars for shuttles and the TIE fighter wings based there to defend it. Finally there was a tether connecting the station to the surface of the planet below. As well as anchoring the space station in a permanent orbital position the tether included a cluster of turbolift shafts that allowed personnel to travel between the surface and the space station without needing to step foot on a shuttle.

"Marse knows his way around that thing." Dayle commented.

"And I'm sure he also knows the security measures that are in place to stop us getting aboard in the first place." Vorn commented.

"Well the turbolifts are obviously out." Dayle said, looking at his datapad, "No matter how many times I go over it I just don't see how we can smuggle our gear aboard one of them without it being seen by someone." "Which leaves us only a shuttle." Vorn responded, "And it would have to be just one unless we can figure out some way of timing our arrival perfectly."

"Even if we could we'd still have to acquire cleared shuttles in a small enough time window that we can load them and fly them there before anyone can notice that they're missing." Dayle said.

"What about infiltrating a patrol ship?" Vorn said, "If we could sneak aboard a capital ship, a destroyer maybe, then we can just hide out there until it docks."

Dayle checked his datapad again and shook his head.

"We just don't have enough information on patrol schedules." he pointed out, "We could wind up on a ship heading out for the blockade in the Spire Worlds for six months."

Just then the door to the planning suite slid open and Kara entered.

"Aren't you done yet boss?" she asked.

"I'm afraid not." Vorn replied, "In fact this could be an all night think." and Kara frowned.

"So I guess I'll be getting up to do all the feedings." she said.

"Sorry." Vorn replied.

"Well it could be worse." Kara said, "Marse and Tharun are having to carry Sen back to the *Beauty Queen*. He drank so much he can hardly stand. Plus Mace has offered Tharun a twenty credit bribe if he can get Sen to Puke in Inra's precious ship." then she looked at Dayle, "Perhaps I shouldn't have said that in front of you commander." added, smiling nervously.

"Perhaps not." Dayle agreed.

"No." Vorn said, holding up his hand and grinning.

"Hey look boss, I had hardly anything to do with-" Kara began before Vorn interrupted her.

"No, I mean 'no' to you being wrong to mention it Kara." he said, "It's times like this remind me how lucky I am that you agreed to marry me."

"I was pregnant." Kara pointed out, "You knocked me up so you had to make an honest woman of me. It was only fair."

"Well I still got the better end of the deal." Vorn said and he turned back to the hologram, "We've been looking at this all wrong." he explained, "We've been going over the physical structure of the station when we should have been looking at the weakest point in any security system."

"The people." Dayle said.

"Exactly." Vorn responded, "We can just walk past any security checkpoint providing we're with someone that the guards wouldn't dare challenge."

"Yeah, but which high ranking Imperial officer is going to invite us into one of the most heavily defended installations in the sector?" Kara asked.

"None of them." Vorn admitted, "But if they'd had so much to drink that they had to be escorted back to the station then-"

"Then their escort would just be waved past because no low ranking guard would dare embarrass a flag officer." Dayle said before Vorn could finish and Vorn just smiled. Then he turned to Kara again.

"You're brilliant." he said, "I really do love you."

"I know." Kara replied, "But you better not wake me or baby Vorn when you finally figure this out." then she

blew him a kiss and left the room.

"So Vorn," Dayle said, "how exactly do you propose we get a bunch of high ranking Imperial Navy officers drunk at just the right moment?"

"Vorn my boy, why didn't you just come to the house?" Lord Couran Desh asked as he sat down opposite Mace and Vorn in the somewhat seedy cantina on Estran. Like Vorn Lord Desh had served in the Estranian Parliament, though he had been significantly more senior and had even served as Speaker for a time. Like Vorn he had come to see the Empire for the evil force it was, but unlike Vorn he had chosen to retire rather than speak out against it publicly. Fortunately as it happened, because while Vorn's opposition to the Empire had resulted in his expulsion from Parliament and forced his defection to the Alliance Couran had remained highly regarded and since that time had been providing Vorn whatever information or help he could. Over time the rest of Vorn's team had come to know about Couran, but the secret of his identity went no further than that.

"Because mine isn't the only unit involved in what we're planning." Vorn told him.

"Ah, so its more of this wonderful secrecy I've come to expect. A pity you weren't so devious while you were in Parliament my boy. You could have replaced me as Speaker. Been elected to the Senate even. Before the Emperor disbanded it of course."

"And been Lord Torr's best friend in the whole galaxy." Mace commented, referring to the nobleman who had prompted Vorn's exile and even now hoped to bring him to justice. Then Mace smiled and raised his glass, "Besides, you don't have beverages of this quality at your house." and he took a sip and then winced, "I must buy some bottles of this to take back to the ship." he gasped, "Then every time Cass pesters me for a drink I'll give her one of them and she'll never touch a drop again."

"Assuming that engineer of yours doesn't use it to degrease your hyperdrive." Couran said as he took a large gulp of his drink., "Stang, that's bad." he said, "On second thoughts this wouldn't degrease a hyperdrive, it would dissolve it." then he looked at Vorn, "So what do you need from me this time?" he asked.

"An invitation to a party." Vorn replied.

"Oh I do love a good party." Couran said.

"So long as the drink is better than this." Mace commented before downing what remained in his glass in one go and then wincing and shuddered as he banged the glass back down on the table.

"Come on Mace, how did you get invites to an upmarket party like this?" Inra asked as she pulled on the boots that went with her disguise. All of the rebels were dressed in Imperial uniforms to attend the party being thrown by Lord Desh to mark the anniversary of an obscure battle in the Clone Wars that he happened to have fought in and in keeping with the nature of the party they would be wearing rank markings suggesting that they were naval officers. There would not only be military personnel at the party though, Lord Desh had also invited numerous other important individuals from the worlds of politics, industry and academia. When Vorn had announced to his and Dayle's teams that they would be attending as well there had been looks of astonishment from Dayle's team.

"It'll be that Lady Shiva." Marse suggested, "Mace can do no wrong by her."

"Actually she won't even be there." Mace replied, "It would raise too many questions if she saw me in this uniform." and then he pinned a commander's rank badge to his chest and turned to look at Cass, "How do I look?" he asked.

"Do I really need to follow everyone's orders?" Cass asked in reply. Given her young age her uniform indicated that she was only a midshipman who would be attending only as an assistant to a fully qualified officer.

"Yes you do." Mace told her and she frowned.

"Don't sweat it kid." Tharun said as he walked into the room in his own uniform, "Just stick by me and I promise not to boss you around all night."

"You still haven't answered my question." Inra told Mace, "I want to know how you and Major Larcus managed to get us into this fancy shindig. So does everyone else. Right?" and she looked around at Dayle's team. Both Brak and Marse nodded.

"It is an interesting question." Brak said.

"See, everyone wants to know." Inra said.

"He hasn't said anything." Cass commented, looking at the final member of Dayle's team, a man called Coll Jurven who was busy trying to conceal a second blaster beneath his disguise in addition to the pistol holstered at his belt.

"Jurven wants to know as well." Marse said, "You do, don't you Coll? Right?"

"Right." Coll said, looking up briefly before returning to his task.

"Then I guess you're all going to be disappointed." Mace replied, "Because I'm not telling any of you anything."

It was then that Dayle, Kara and Vorn entered the room, already dressed in their own Imperial uniforms and

in their hands they carried several small plastic cases.

"Commander do you know how we got invites to this?" Inra asked.

"From a classified source." Dayle replied as he set down the two cases he carried and then opened them up.

"Okay, everyone needs at least one of these." he said as he removed an auto-injector that would normally be part of a medpac's contents and held it up.

"What's in them?" Brak asked.

"It's blend of a mild sedative and ethyl alcohol." Kara replied as she too began to unpack auto-injectors.

"Starting the party early?" Tharun asked as he reached out and took two of the devices and tucked them into his tunic.

"These aren't to be used on yourself." Vorn said, "The mix is calculated to rapidly incapacitate an adult human for at least two hours."

"It won't necessarily knock them out." Kara added, "But it will definitely make them appear to be absolutely poodoo faced."

"Language." Mace commented, glancing at Cass.

"I've heard worse than that dad." Cass said.

"I've heard her use worse." Tharun added.

"The idea is that we use these inject a handful of navy officers." Dayle explained, "Then we remove them from the party and take them back to naval headquarters via shuttle."

"Just make sure that you pick high ranking officers." Vorn added, "We need individuals that the guards will easily be able to identify and won't want to challenge. We're hoping that will get us past security."

"And from there there's no telling how much mischief we can get up to." Kara said and then she turned to Coll, "Hey Coll, you're their medic, you know what you're doing with these?" and she tossed several of the auto-injectors to him one after another.

"Right." he said, catching each one and putting them in his pockets.

"Just try not to be so chatty." Kara added, "You may give us away."

"Right."

### 3.

"We're eye candy that's all." Captain Louisa Yay said as she and the captains of the other two venator-class star destroyers in the same line as her rode towards the party in a navy staff landspeeder, "The admiral just wants people to think we're all besotted with him."

"Trust me Louisa," Captain Sayla Naje replied, "no one is going to mistake you for someone besotted with anyone." Captain Naje was the senior captain of the line. All three were female and had been ordered to attend the party by their superior, Admiral Kenit Hall. The admiral was a well known chauvinist and the three female officers were generally treated with barely concealed contempt by him.

The final captain, Jayan Celtis looked out of the speeder window and smirked.

"What?" Captain Yay said.

"I don't know what you mean." Captain Celtis replied.

"Yes you do Jayan." Captain Yay hissed, "What's so kriffing funny?"

"Well I was just thinking," Captain Celtis answered, "that maybe you and the admiral would be a good match." then she looked at Captain Naje, "Haven't you always noticed that sexual tension between the two of them?"

"Now that you mention it they do seem to go a bit over the top with their supposed hatred of one another."

Captain Naje replied with a smile.

"I'd just as soon kiss a wookiee!" Captain Yay snapped.

"The lady does protest too much." Captain Celtis said just as the speeder came to a halt outside the mansion home of Lord Couran Desh.

"Oh let me out of this speeder." Captain Yay said, opening the door and hurriedly exiting the speeder, "I need a drink."

"Good stiff one?" Captain Celtis said as she followed her out of the speeder, "Maybe if you ask the admiral he'll offer you-"

Captain Yay spun round angrily pointing a finger at her fellow star destroyer commander.

"Don't even go there." she said just as Admiral Hall came walking towards them from his private speeder.

"Okay follow me in," he told the three female captains, "and remember that your behaviour tonight will reflect on our squadron so try not to embarrass me." and without waiting for a reply he turned on the spot and strode towards the entrance to Lord Desh's home.

"Well here goes." Captain Naje said, adjusting her tunic after the speeder ride and she began to follow the admiral inside.

"I've got a very bad feeling about this." Captain Yay added.

The rebels had arrived at Couran's home before the party began and concealed themselves in one of the many upstairs rooms. The household staff were aware of their presence of course, but only those whose discretion Couran knew he could trust were on duty that night while the SE-4 droids being used to serve refreshments had been programmed to accept the rebels at face value and delete all records of them after the party. Couran's involvement with the scheme had been hidden from Dayle and his team quite easily. As far as they were concerned Lord Desh believed that the rebels were a covert security unit here to protect the high ranking Imperial officers that were expected to attend. In the room with them were two droids, firstly the R5 astromech droid that belonged to Tobis and was known as Harvey while Jaysica's mouse droid, Penny, was also present.

A knock at the door made the rebels all turn towards it, but as the door opened it revealed only a golden coloured protocol droid.

"Jeeves." Vorn said, sighing with relief, "What's going on down there?"

"I estimate there to be in the region of one hundred and six guests now in attendance Major Larcus sir." the droid answered, "That is a mix of military and civilian."

Dayle and Vorn looked at one another.

"How many of those are Imperial military?" Vorn asked.

"At least sixty sir." Jeeves replied.

"That's enough for us to blend in." Dayle said.

"Providing we don't all go down there in one big group." Vorn added, nodding, "Okay, I'll head out first with Kara."

"Why you?" Inra asked, "The commander has seniority."

"Maybe so." Dayle responded, "But he knows more about buildings like this. I'll follow in a couple of minutes and I'll take young Cass with me. I'm impersonating someone with enough rank that a personal midshipman wouldn't appear amiss."



"Okay, I'll see you downstairs." Vorn said before he and Kara slipped out of the room with Jeeves and headed downstairs.

"Wow there are a lot of pompous looking people here tonight boss." Kara whispered as they descended the stairs.

"They don't just look pompous." Vorn replied quietly, "I recognise some of them and they are about as pompous as they come."

"They won't recognise you will they?" Kara asked, "I'd hate to have to draw a blaster and ruin his Lordship's décor."

"Oh no, don't worry." Vorn reassured her, "These people will see the uniform only. They won't be paying attention to who's wearing it."

Just then a voice called out from just inside the main front door as the arrival of more guests was announced.

"Admiral Kenit Hall accompanied by Line Captain Sayla Naje and Captains Jayan Celtis and Louisa Yay."

"Stang!" Vorn hissed as he suddenly averted his gaze away from the front door just as the four officers were entering the house, "Sayla."

"Didn't you serve with her in the Clone Wars?" Kara asked.

"Why yes Lieutenant Larcus miss." Jeeves said, "The major was the navigator aboard Captain Naje's star destroyer."

"Which means she can't help but recognise me." Vorn said, "I know she still remembers me." then he caught sight of Couran, "I better go find out how many more of my old colleagues he's invited. Come on."

Keeping his face turned away from Captain Naje, Vorn moved through the crowd to where Couran was speaking with a man in an Estranian Police Force dress uniform.

"Excuse me your Lordship," he said, "May I have a quick word."

"Why of course you may commander. Tonight my home is yours after all." Couran replied before turning back to the police officer, "I'm so sorry, but I'll be right back with you." he said and then he and the rebels discretely slipped into Couran's office where they could be alone.

"Couran what's Sayla Naje doing here?" Vorn asked as soon as the door was closed and they would not be overheard.

"Who?" Couran asked.

"One of the boss's old bosses." Kara explained, "That's all she was right boss?" she then added, "Because if I catch her talking poodoo about you I'll scratch her eyes out like a rancor fillets a bantha." and she mimicked clawing someone.

"Try to avoid the buffet table when you do that." Couran requested.

"Why is she here Couran?" Vorn asked again.

"Calm down my boy. Now I sent an invitation to good old Praus-"

"Praus Vretan?" Kara interrupted, "The fleet admiral himself?"

"The very same." Couran replied, "I knew he'd never attend of course, he has no time for an old fool pretending to be a war hero after all. But he's politically savvy enough that he would send someone important along in his place. Unfortunately I couldn't exactly pick and chose who he sent."

"Of course." Vorn replied, "I'm sorry."

"Not at all my boy, now I'll go out first and find someone to viscously assault." Couran told him.

In small groups the rebels left the upstairs room and went down to join the party. Each of them assessed the various naval officers present, noting their rank and whenever they got the chance to engage them in conversation also any information that they divulged about their postings. Unfortunately most of the naval officers present were either based on the surface of Estran or lacked the rank for a fleet security trooper, let alone a stormtrooper to be unwilling to detain a party containing them.

However, from the moment Brak saw Admiral Hall he knew that he was the ideal target.

"Have you noticed that guy?" he whispered to Mace.

"Yeah, I've seen him." Mace replied, "But he doesn't seem to be drinking much."

"No, but I'm sure that if we make him think that there's a call for him we can get him away from the party and take him down." Brak said.

Mace nodded.

"Okay we'll need to make sure we've got some people in a back room waiting for him." Mace said, looking around for more of the rebels, "Okay, there's the major and Kara and it looks like Coll's lurking in the corner."

"Yeah," Brak commented as he looked towards his teammate, "taking him to parties never works out."

"Well you just keep an eye on the admiral. I'll get the others into position." Mace said, slapping Brak on the shoulder and then he began to squeeze his way through the crowd of guests towards Vorn.

Brak watched as Admiral Hall headed out into the back garden, taking a drink from a passing SE-4 droid as he passed it. Once outside the admiral paused to speak with a man in civilian garb that Brak did not recognise as he followed the admiral. Close by he spotted Marse, Sen and Tharun clustered together near a table covered in food, all three apparently consuming as much as they could.

Brak frowned and then walked over to them.

"You three do remember what we're doing here don't you?" he hissed, "You ought to be mingling."

"We need drinks to mingle properly sir." Sen replied.

"Don't call him sir." Tharun reminded him, "According to our uniforms we're all the same rank, remember?" then he turned to Brak, "Cass isn't back with our drinks yet." he added, "The droids have wine, but you need to go to the kitchen for beer."

Brak did not look impressed.

"You're not here to drink." he said.

"Drinks." Cass said from behind him suddenly and as Brak watched she began to hand out bottles of beer to the other rebels.

"What are you doing?" Brak asked her.

"Maintaining our disguise." Cass replied as she ended up with just a single bottle left that she then raised to her lips.

"Well go tell that admiral over there that there's an urgent call for him and take him upstairs." Brak told her, snatching the beer away from her and taking a drink from it himself. Then he looked at the other rebels now staring at him, "What?" he asked.

"So you can drink beer and we can't?" Marse responded.

"Well when on Corellia and so forth." Brak told him and he took another sip of his drink. Meanwhile Cass glared at him.

"Go on kid." Tharun said, "Sooner you get rid of the admiral the sooner you can get yourself a nice glass of fizzy glug."

Cass then glared at Tharun briefly before she turned around and made her way over to Admiral Hall.

"Excuse me admiral." Cass said as she approached Admiral Hall and the man he was speaking with and she saluted him before continuing, "There's an urgent call for you."

"From who?" Admiral Hall asked, scowling at the interruption, "Can't you see I'm in the middle of a conversation with Mister Kurrad here?"

"I'm sorry admiral." Cass replied, "But the nature of the call is beyond my clearance." and Admiral Hall sighed.

"Of course it is midshipman." he said and he looked around, "Now where am I to take this call?"

"Inside sir. Please follow me." Cass said and the admiral nodded and followed Cass back into the house.

Cass led the admiral through the areas of the house reserved for use by the staff and as such devoid of party guests and up the back stairs towards one of the rooms that had been set aside for using to ambush Imperial officers. Arriving at the chosen room Cass opened the door and then stood aside, standing at attention and saluting him again as he walked past. Inside the room he saw Mace and Vorn standing in front of him.

"Well?" he demanded, "Where's this call?" and then he heard the sound of the door behind him closing and he spun around to see both Coll and Kara blocking his way, "What the-" he began as all four rebels pounced simultaneously. Mace and Vorn grabbed hold of Admiral Hall's arms, seizing them tight as Kara snatched his drink away from him with one hand while clamping the other over his mouth allowing Coll to move in with his auto-injector. The device was pressed to the admiral's neck and there was the characteristic 'clunk' of it discharging the chemical cocktail it contained directly into the bloodstream to his brain.

Admiral Hall's eyes widened briefly as he realised what was happening but was powerless to resist before being overcome and he went slack in the arms of the rebels holding him.

"Okay, let's get him back downstairs." Vorn said.

"Where do we put him boss?" Kara asked.

"I saw that Lord Desh has a small atrium near the kitchen." Vorn replied, both Kara and Mace aware that he had known about the room for many years but the statement was for Coll's benefit, "We can stash him there until we have enough to make the trip worthwhile."

"It's just this way captain." Jaysica said as she and Tobis escorted Captain Naje up the same set of stairs that Cass had led Admiral Hall up just a few minutes earlier.

"And you're certain that it's star dock engineering?" the captain replied.

"Oh, err, yes captain." Tobis replied, "They've noticed unusual radioactive emissions from your ship. They, err, they need your permission to perform a full system shut down."

"The drives were given a clean bill of health just yesterday." Captain Naje said, shaking her head but still following the two rebels. Then they reached the top of the stairs and turned down the hallway where they saw Cass waiting outside one of the rooms, "Midshipman?" Captain Naje asked, "What are you doing up here?"

"Oh." Cass replied, "Oh, the admiral had to take a call."

"Really?" Captain Naje replied and she looked at Jaysica and Tobis, "There seem to be a lot of calls coming in for people."

Just then the door beside Cass opened and Captain Naje saw Admiral Hall being carried out between two

men in Imperial uniforms.

"Admiral?" she said and then she smiled, "Oh I see. Did his call feature a lum chaser by any chance?" she asked before she saw the face of one of the men carrying Admiral Hall, "Vorn?" she exclaimed.

"Sayla?" Vorn responded.

"Oh kriff." Sayla said suddenly and she reached out for the blaster holstered on Tobis' hip, it being the nearest weapon she could see.

"Grab her!" Mace snapped, still holding onto the admiral with Vorn.

As the captain attempted to grab Tobis' sidearm he took the opportunity to take hold of her wrist and twisted her arm, forcing it up behind her back. Meanwhile Coll darted around Mace, Vorn and the now heavily intoxicated Admiral Hall and punched Captain Naje in the stomach hard enough to knock the wind from her. At the same time both Cass and Jaysica pulled auto-injectors from their pockets and stepped forwards ready to use them. Cass got to the captain first and pressed the auto-injector under her jaw before triggering it. Then seconds later she went as limp as the admiral.

"What the kriff were you doing?" Kara hissed as she stepped into the hallway, glaring at Jaysica, "You knew she'd recognise the boss."

"But we didn't know that any of you were up here." Jaysica replied, "Tobis and I were just doing what we'd been-" and then as she pushed her auto-injector back into her pocket there was a sudden 'clunk', "Oh no." she said.

"I've got a bad feeling about this." Cass added and then Jaysica collapsed.

"Well I don't know about any of you," Kara said as she looked down at Jaysica, "but I feel safer already."

Vorn sighed.

"Cass and Kara, pick her up. We'll stick her in the atrium with these two. Coll you help Tobis with Sayla." he said.

"Right." Coll replied, nodded as he helped take the weight of Captain Naje.

## 4.

The rebels took the two incapacitated Imperial officers and Jaysica down to the atrium as Vorn had suggested and sat all three on an ornate bench overlooking the small pool at the centre of the room. "Okay, Coll and Kara better stay here and keep an eye on this lot." Vorn said, "If either of these two look like they're coming around then inject them again. I take it you're both familiar with the safe dosages?" "Sure." Coll said. "Don't worry boss." Kara added, "We've got this covered." Vorn smiled and he turned to leave. "Oh and Kara?" he added, looking back towards her. "Yes boss?" she asked. "No messing with Jaysica alright?" Vorn told her and she frowned.

"Okay, we've got two." Vorn said softly as he stood beside Dayle at one of the food tables, "An admiral and a captain. The captain is the one who could recognise me. Coll and Kara are with them." "So you can move around more safely as well." Dayle replied, "Unless Lord Desh himself spots you of course." "Huh?" Vorn responded. "Come on Vorn, I've studied your record. You were practically his apprentice in Parliament. He must be able to recognise you by sight." Dayle said. "Have you seen how old the guy is?" Vorn asked in reply, "That guy can barely see clearly past the end of his nose but he's too vain to do anything about it. Don't worry, he won't recognise me." "He better not. Because this will all be for nothing if we get caught because of some old fool realising that his house is full of rebels." "How about letting someone else at the food?" a female voice said and as Dayle and Vorn looked around Captain Yay pushed her way to the table with a plate and Vorn smiled. "I don't believe that we've been introduced." Vorn said, holding out his hand in greeting. "Not going to happen old man." Captain Yay replied. "Excuse me?" Vorn said and Captain Yay sighed. "Look, I'm a captain and you're just a commander and you're way too old for me." she said as she piled food onto her plate, "So you can just forget about boasting how you got lucky to all your friends tomorrow. I'm out of your league." Then she stuffed a small pie into her mouth and while she was still chewing she turned around and added, "Now out of my way." and she pushed past them again. "Oh she's our next target." Vorn said as Dayle just grinned. "If you say so 'old man'." he replied and Vorn scowled. "Oh kriff off. You're five years older than me." "Maybe, but I wear it better." Dayle said, "Now I think that if we're targeting her then Inra is our best bet. I doubt that any of our male colleagues could get near her without her making enough of a disturbance that we'd be noticed. Though maybe that Jaysica of yours could be of use. Assuming she doesn't have any more of her little accidents of course." "Ah." Vorn commented and Dayle winced. "Oh no." he said, "What's she done this time?" "Injected herself in the leg with her auto-injector." Vorn replied, smiling nervously and Dayle just shook his head. "Why do you keep her around?" he asked. "She really is a good demolitions and security expert." Vorn answered, "Plus Tobis is smitten with her. Even if I got her replaced she'd still end up on the *Silver Hawk* most if not all of the time anyway." "Okay then." Dayle said, "I'll go find Inra and let her know we have a job for her. You keep an eye on the red headed rancor over there." "Oh sure, you get the easy job." Vorn replied. "Rank has its privileges major." Dayle said with a smirk.

"Excuse me captain, but the admiral wishes to speak with you." Inra told Captain Yay. The captain was stood in the garden doing her best to remain apart from the other party guests. "Typical." she responded, snorting. Then she looked more closely at Inra, "Wait, who are you? I don't recognise you." "I'm fleet administration ma'am." Inra replied and the captain snarled. "Yes, you have that look about you." she said, "So where is that pompous nerf herder then?"

"This way ma'am." Inra said, indicating for Captain Yay to follow her back inside.  
"Oh just tell me where he is." the captain said, "I can find my way around a star destroyer so navigating the passages of this place shouldn't be much trouble."  
"He's in the atrium ma'am." Inra said, "It's located close to the kitchen."  
"Yes, I spotted it from the outside. I'm sure I'll find it." Captain Yay said before thrusting her plate into Inra's arms and she strode back into the house.  
As she vanished inside Inra put the plate down on a nearby wall and hurriedly took out her comlink.  
"Target is on the move." she said into the device, keeping her voice low, "She's heading for the atrium."  
"The atrium?" Dayle's voice replied, "But we're waiting upstairs."  
"Well I couldn't describe the way up to a bedroom I've not seen so I just told her the atrium." Inra explained, "She insisted on not being escorted."  
Dayle adjusted his comlink to signal all of the rebels at once.  
"Is anyone near the atrium to back up Coll and Kara?" he broadcast, "The target is heading for the atrium."  
"Stang." Kara responded, "We could have done with a bit more warning."  
"I suggest everyone converges on the atrium." Vorn said, "Whoever gets there in time helps subdue the target. Meanwhile Kara and Coll need to make sure that she doesn't get scared off."  
"Okay boss. We're on it." Kara replied before shutting off her comlink.

In the atrium Kara looked at Coll.

"You got that?" she asked and Coll nodded without speaking. Kara looked at the bench where both their captives and Jaysica were sat, all three so badly intoxicated as to be immobile, "Okay, let's move him to where he can be seen from in the next room." Kara said, walking over to Admiral Hall and hooking one of her arms under one of his, "Well Coll, are you going to help or not?" she asked and Coll nodded again before he walked over and helped lift the admiral to his feet,  
"You rebel scum." the admiral said, slurring his words badly, "You'll never get away with this, this, this whatever it is."  
"It's a dastardly scheme to get every Imperial officer drunk and listen while they prank call their superiors." Kara said as she and Coll dragged him towards a seat that was in full view of the doorway.  
"Well you won't get away with-" the admiral began as he was sat down in the seat but before he could finish he suddenly vomited and both Kara and Coll leapt back in surprise.  
"Is he kriffing drunk?" Captain said suddenly from the doorway as she stared at the admiral in disgust and then she glanced across at Captain Naje and rolled her eyes, "Oh not her as well." she added, "And I suppose they expect me to get them back to headquarters right?"  
"Wrong." Kara replied as she pressed her auto-injector to Captain Yay's neck. The captain lashed out as she realised what had happened, but her reactions and co-ordination were already suffering from the injection and Kara easily dodged the blow. Meanwhile Coll stepped in to grab hold of Captain Yay, wrapping his arms around her while she went limp.  
"Okay stick her over there on the bench." Kara told him, nodding towards the bench where Captain Naje and Jaysica were sat.  
"Right." Coll replied as he dragged Captain Yay towards the bench.  
"You know you really know how to cram a lot of meaning into just one word." Kara commented.

Gathered together in the atrium the rebels looked at their three prisoners.

"If we're going to get them to fleet headquarters before they start to come round then we really need to have them on the shuttle within the hour." Kara said and Vorn nodded.  
"I think we've got time for one more." he said to Dayle.  
"Did you have a particular subject in mind?" Dayle asked.  
"Captain Celtis." Kara said.  
"Exactly." Vorn replied.  
"Who is Captain Celtis?" Brak asked.  
"When the boss and I were coming down stairs she arrived with these three." Kara explained, "The doorman announced them all by name."  
"Then we need to find her." Dayle said, "She's the obvious one to notice that these three are missing." then he looked at Brak, "Go see if you can find her." he ordered.  
"I should go as well." Vorn added, "I saw her arrive after all. I know what she looks like."  
"Okay. The rest of us will wait here for you two to check in." Dayle agreed, nodding before Brak and Vorn slipped out of the atrium and headed back to the party.  
"Okay, so if you were a starship captain where would you be?" Vorn asked as he and Brak looked around, trying to identify any female Imperial military officer wearing a captain's rank.  
"Don't ask me." Brak responded, "I just produced music for a living. The nearest I ever got to a star destroyer was when I helped with a video shoot in a hangar."

Vorn sighed.

"Well at least we can be thankful for the misogyny of the Empire." he said, "There aren't that many women that gain high rank in the navy."

Then Brak caught sight of a woman in an Imperial uniform stood speaking to several women in civilian clothing.

"What about her?" he asked, pointing Vorn towards the officer.

Vorn looked around and smiled.

"Yes that's her." he said, but his face fell when one of the other women stood with her turned around so that he could see her face, "Oh stang." he hissed, "How many people I know has Couran invited tonight?"

"You know that woman?" Brak asked.

"Yes I do." Vorn answered, "Fortunately she's well aware that I'm with the Alliance and is sympathetic. But we can't rely on how she would react to seeing me here."

"Who is she?" Brak enquired.

"Doctor Jenessa Drame of the University of Estran, where some students apparently call her 'Darth Drame'." Vorn told him, "She teaches xenoarchaeology and has helped us out with issues regarding the rakata."

"Then I perhaps I ought to-" Brak began but Vorn held up his hand.

"Wait, I've got an idea." he said, smiling, "Go tell Jenessa that there's a message for her, not Captain Celtis. No, in fact you can just whisper to her that I want to speak to her."

"Why?" Brak replied.

"Because you can bring her over here to me safely and then we can get her to help us in apprehending the captain. That way of anything goes wrong then witnesses won't be saying that all four of the missing officers were told that they had messages waiting for them by people disguise as other Imperial officers."

"Okay, I understand." Brak said, nodding and then he began to walk towards Jenessa. He approached her from behind and tapped her on the shoulder.

"Yes?" she asked as she turned and Brak leant in closer.

"Major Vorn Larcus sends his compliments ma'am." Brak whispered, "He would like to speak with you."

"What now?" Jenessa asked.

"That's correct." Brak said, this time seeing no need to whisper.

"Oh very well. Lead the way." Jenessa said. But before she followed Brak she looked at the other women she had been speaking with to apologise, "Sorry about this." she said, "I'm sure it won't take long."

Jenessa then followed Brak as he led her into a quiet passageway where Vorn waited for them both.

"What are you doing here?" she hissed.

"The Alliance likes to gate crash fancy parties." Vorn answered.

"Oh very funny. Are you trying to get us all shot?"

"No, not all." Vorn said, "But I do need your help."

"My help? What with?" Jenessa asked.

"That captain you were speaking to." Vorn said.

"What Jayan?" Jenessa replied and Vorn nodded.

"Yes, we need to get her somewhere quiet." Vorn replied and Jenessa frowned.

"I'm not helping you assassinate someone." she said.

"Oh don't worry." Vorn said, "We need her alive." and he pulled his auto-injector from his pocket, "This will make her appear drunk. Then we'll escort her away from the party. We've already got the three others she arrived with so we want to get her out of the way before she can notice that they're gone and raise the alarm."

"Okay." Jenessa said, nodding, "I'll help you out. Now who were the others she arrived with?"

"Captains Naje and Yay and Admiral Hall." Vorn told her and Jenessa nodded again.

"Wait here." she said and then she turned around and headed back to the party.

Heading straight back to the same group of women she had been speaking to she smiled at them.

"Sorry about that." she said, "It seems my son has decided to crash his speeder."

"Is he okay?" Captain Celtis asked.

"Oh he's fine. Or at least he will be until I get hold of him." Jenessa said, "Oh by the way Jayan, did you arrive with an Admiral Hall?" and Captain Celtis sighed.

"yes, why? What does he want now?" she asked.

"I'm not sure." Jenessa said, "But I bumped into a Captain Yay who was asking if I could get you to meet her through that door."

Captain Celtis nodded.

"Well now it looks like it's my turn to excuse myself." she said, lifting her glass and draining what remained of its contents. Then she headed towards the passageway where Brak and Vorn lay in wait.

Both rebels were stood just inside the passageway when the captain got there and they stepped aside to allow her to pass.

"Have either of you seen a loud red head about?" she asked them.

“No ma'am.” Brak replied.

“Very well.” Captain Celtis said as she began to walk past the two rebels and she failed to notice as Vorn produced his auto-injector and pressed it to the back of her neck.

## 5.

"Well here's the last of them." Vorn said as he and Brak dragged Captain Celtis into the atrium.

"Then we need to be getting out of here." Dayle said and he turned to face the other rebels, "Okay, Marse, Sen, Tharun and Tobis, you all go grab us a couple of speeders. I saw plenty parked up outside and we'll get going to the naval station east of the city."

"Oh, err, what Jaysica?" Tobis asked as he cradled her in his arms.

"Oh let's just leave her here." Kara said.

"We're going to need her Kara." Vorn pointed out.

"Plus I think his Lordship will notice when the party's over and she's here." Tharun added.

"Yes, we can't leave her to be arrested." Dayle said, "We'll just have to carry her with the others as far as the shuttle and then see if we can sober her up on the flight. Now everyone get moving. The longer we wait the more likely this lot are to start recovering."

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

The four rebels ordered to obtain speeders headed out of the house and towards the large exterior garage. Here the vehicles that had brought the party guests were all lined up, some empty while others had drivers waiting with them and the rebels marched up to a cluster of what were clearly military speeders.

"Transport for Admiral Hall and Captains Celtis, Naje and Yay." Marse announced sternly and two naval crewmen stepped forwards, "Good. We need to take your speeders." Marse told them and the two men looked at one another, confused.

"But sir-"

"Don't 'but sir' me!" Marse snapped, familiar with the contempt that commissioned officers in the Imperial Navy often showed towards enlisted personnel, "The admiral and the three captains require transportation back to headquarters and we will be taking them. You can go back in whatever other speeders are available or you can even walk for all I care. Now hand over the keys to those landspeeders."

Reluctantly the two enlisted men surrendered their vehicles to the rebels disguised as officers and could only watch as they were driven back towards the house and parked near a side door. Admiral Hall and Captain Yay were then loaded in one speeder with Vorn's team while Dayle's loaded Captains Celtis and Naje into the second vehicle before both then drove off.

They proceeded to the closest naval station that they knew would have a shuttle available to take them to the orbiting headquarters. The speeder carrying Admiral Hall drove up to the gate first and Tobis brought it to a halt just short of the guard post, forcing the stormtrooper sentry to walk over to the vehicle. As he approached Vorn, having swapped the rank badge from his disguise for the admiral's, lowered one of the tinted rear windows just enough that he could pass one of the admiral's code cylinders through.

"Admiral Hall requiring emergency transportation." Vorn said sternly, "Inform your superiors I need a shuttle clearing for immediate launch but I will provide my own crew."

The stormtrooper returned briefly to the guard post to verify the code cylinder was authentic before returning to the speeder and passing it back through the gap in the window.

"Move along sir." he said as the barrier in front of the speeder began to slide aside, "Move along."

"Move along driver." Vorn repeated and the speeder, followed by the one containing Dayle's team was waved through the gate.

There were adequate signs directing the rebels towards the landing field even without the tall tail fins of the shuttles identifying it and as the rebels drove up they saw that one of the shuttles was clearly being prepared for launch as Vorn had requested. Seeing the speeders approach a lieutenant, the only one in an officer's uniform present walked over to them and saluted.

"The shuttle is prepared as you requested admiral." he said.

"Very good." Vorn replied from inside the speeder, "Now clear the area while I get my people aboard."

The lieutenant nodded and turned around.

"Clear the area." he called out and the ground crew began to withdraw. Only when they were gone did the rebels disembark, carrying their Imperial prisoners and Jaysica along with several large kit bags holding their equipment aboard the shuttle.

"Okay Mace," Vorn said, "get this thing off the ground."

"Yes major." Mace answered.

"I better go keep an eye him." Inra said to Dayle, "Just in case he gets confused by a control console that doesn't date back to before the Great Hyperspace War."

"Can I go too?" Cass asked and Vorn nodded.

"I don't see why not." he replied.

"Sure I'll show you to fly a lambda-class shuttle like a pro as well." Mace added, "Some people rely too much



on fancy gadgets to be able to learn to actually fly themselves.” and he glanced at Inra as he said this last part.

The three rebels all headed for the cockpit and it was not long before the others felt the shuttle rise up off the ground. At this point Vorn turned to Kara who had opened up her medical kit was attempting find something to counteract the effects of the injection Jaysica had accidentally given herself.

“Well?” he asked, “Can you do anything for her?”

“I’ll have her up and walking about by the time we get to the station boss.” Kara told him, “But it’ll take a stimulant that’ll make her feel really sick and she’ll be left with one hell of a hangover. In fact it’ll be almost as bad as what those four are going to have,” and she looked at where the four Imperial officers were slumped in the chairs that the rebels had strapped them in to.

“That reminds me.” Vorn said and he removed Admiral Hall’s rank badge from his chest and returned it to the admiral’s.

“For a while I thought you were going to keep hold of that.” Dayle commented and Vorn smiled.

“I’ve got to admit,” he replied, “it did feel good.”

Flying from the surface of Estran to a space station orbiting it was just a quick hop in modern space travel, taking less than ten minutes in total and in the cockpit Cass’ eyes widened and she gasped as they neared the naval headquarters.

“How big is that thing?” she asked and before anyone could answer her she added, “Are those star destroyers?” and she pointed to a docking arm where several large vessels were docked with the station. Mace smiled.

“Naval headquarters is about forty kilometres across at its widest point.” he told her, “And yes, those are star destroyers.”

“Officially only four of the are.” Inra added, “The three lined up over there are venator-class ships and the modern navy considers them heavy cruisers rather than destroyers. But some people just like to cling to out of date stuff.” and she sneered at Mace.

“Shuttle *Verrium* you are approaching the orbital security zone.” a voice suddenly said from the communications system, “Stand by for docking orders.”

“Confirm that control.” Mace responded, “This is shuttle *Verrium* awaiting orders. Over.” and he looked at Cass, “Okay, go tell the others we’ve arrived.” he told her.

An officer backed by a full squad of stormtrooper marines was in the docking bay when the access ramp to the shuttle *Verrium* was lowered and Marse marched down it. He had been selected to approach the security team thanks to his familiarity with the station’s methods of operation.

“Your arrival here is unscheduled commander.” the officer announced as the stormtroopers raised their blasters and pointed them at Marse.

“The admiral’s arrival is somewhat unscheduled.” Marse replied and he held out a code cylinder that had been taken from Admiral Hall’s tunic. The officer took the cylinder and plugged it into his datapad.

“This belongs to the admiral.” he said, “But you are clearly not him.”

“No.” Marse answered and then he looked around just as Dayle and Vorn appeared on the shuttle’s ramp supporting the admiral between them, “Though as you can see it would perhaps be best if there were as few records of his return as possible.”

The security officer frowned as the admiral was brought to him.

“Lieutenant arrest these men!” Admiral Hall blurted out, “They are all rebels and traitors and I will see them hang.”

The lieutenant recoiled as the admiral yelled at him, thanks to a few shots of strong drink being tipped over him and the lingering smell of his own vomit Admiral Hall was not only visually dishevelled but also smelt badly as well.

“I’m afraid he’s had rather a lot to drink.” Vorn said, “As have his companions.” and he glanced back to where the three captains were now being carried from the shuttle as well with the rebels’ three droids bringing up the rear.

The lieutenant nodded and looked at Marse.

“Just get them out of here.” he said, stepping away from Admiral Hall.

“Arrest them!” Admiral Hall yelled again, “Arrest them all!” but apart from a few glances from technicians working on other craft in the hangar he was ignored.

“Okay we’re clear.” Tharun said, looking back at the hangar door as it slid shut behind them. The station followed the time zone of the capital city even though it was not positioned directly above it. Therefore it was considered to be night time aboard the station and only a small portion of its crew were on duty. This meant that many of the corridors would be empty and the rebels could move about relatively freely.

“Brak and Tobis now its up to you.” Dayle said and he pointed towards a nearby computer terminal, “Get us as much information on this place as you can. I want a deck plan.”

“Oh, err, yes sir. Come along Harvey.” Tobis replied as Brak just nodded and the pair then went over to the

terminal and watched as Harvey extended a computer access probe from inside its cylindrical body and plugged in. Meanwhile both Brak and Tobis took out datapads and did likewise, connecting them to the terminal so that any data Harvey was able to access

The droid chirped as it navigated the station's computer systems, searching through deck plans and security systems to try and provide the rebels with the information they needed to sabotage the station. The latter of these were restricted though and Harvey was unable to access them from the terminal it was plugged into.

"There's the deck plan." Brak said as he saw numerous maps of station corridor appear on his datapad screen in rapid succession.

"Is there somewhere we can stash this lot?" Vorn asked as he plucked the admiral's remaining code cylinders from his tunic and the rebels holding the three captains did the same.

"Oh, err, yes I think so." Tobis replied, "That is, err, Harvey has found the locations of their quarters."

"Only for three of them." Brak added, "It doesn't look like Captain Yay lives aboard the station."

"Then we dump her with the admiral." Kara said as she adjusted her grip on Captain Yay.

"Why the admiral?" Dayle asked.

"Oh I don't know." Kara replied, "It's just that when she arrived in the atrium she seemed really concerned for his well being."

"Hah!" Coll exclaimed, but he said nothing more when Dayle and Vorn looked towards him.

"How far are their quarters from here?" Vorn asked.

"Err, I'd say about two kilometres." Tobis replied as he checked the deck plan on his datapad.

"There's a turbolift that will take us right there just around the corner though." Brak added.

"Okay, let's move." Dayle said, "We'll try to gain access to more secure parts of the network after we've dumped these four."

"And you lot better get changed." Vorn added, looking in turn at Marse, Sen, Tharun and Tobis. Having a large group of officers all wandering the station late at night would look out of place. Therefore spare uniforms had been brought along so that Sen and Tobis could disguise themselves as technicians while Marse and Tharun would swap their grey officers' uniforms for the black of fleet security troopers.

Fleet Admiral Praus Vretan saluted the guards as he entered the central command facility of Naval Headquarters. At this time of night there was only a skeleton staff on duty and the admiral often found that he was able to get more work done when there were fewer people around to interrupt him. However, on this occasion he was approached by a man in an admiral's uniform almost as soon as he stepped through the door. This was Admiral Trent, the officer tasked with commanding the headquarters itself while the fleet admiral was able to focus on directing naval operations.

"Fleet admiral." Admiral Trent said, saluting and Admiral Vretan returned it.

"Yes admiral? Is there a problem?" he replied.

"Perhaps." Admiral Trent said, "Admiral Hall has returned early from the surface sir. His code cylinder was used to record his arrival but he did not sign in personally."

Officially anyone arriving at or departing Naval Headquarters was supposed to sign themselves in and out to provide a record of their movements. However, simply presenting a code cylinder was generally accepted as a more rapid way of demonstrating who came and went and Admiral Vretan had no complaints about this being done. However, he was also aware that Admiral Trent had been passed over for command of the Tector-class star destroyer *Horrific* in favour of the younger but politically well connected Kenit Hall and as such had a grudge against his rival.

The fleet admiral sighed.

"And where is he now?" he asked.

"His code cylinder was used to access his quarters sir." Admiral Trent replied.

"Then I don't see what the problem is admiral." Admiral Vretan said, "I did not order Admiral Hall to stay at Lord Desh's party all night."

"No sir. But-"

"Look, if you want to monitor Admiral hall's movements then by all means do so. This is your station after all. But since it appears that he is turning in for the night I doubt that you'll get much from doing so. Now if you don't mind I have work to do." and with that the fleet admiral strode past Admiral Trent and went into his office.

Kara and Tharun were the last to rejoin the other rebels after they carried Admiral Hall and Captain Yay to his quarters and left them there.

"What took you so long?" Dayle asked.

"Well Tharun had to change while I made sure that the admiral and captain were properly sedated." Kara replied.

"Kara what did you do to them?" Vorn asked.

"Nothing boss." Kara replied defensively, "I just tucked them up in bed and gave them a shot. That's all."

They'll both wake up in the morning with a massive hangover and very little memory of anything that's gone on tonight."

"Well we need to get a move on." Dayle said, "I've got a bad feeling about being aboard a space station crewed by more than and hundred and fifty thousand Imperial officers and enlisted men. Now we're going to split into three groups. Each group will have the code cylinders from one of the captains we incapacitated and one cylinder from the admiral. Try not to use the admiral's cylinder unless it's absolutely necessary though, they're bound to be more noticeable than the captains'. Now Major Larcus and I have discussed this and we've decided that we'll each take our respective teams in search of different targets. I'll take mine towards the main command and control centre while the major takes his to the communications array. Our aim is to disable not only the strategic planning systems but also all external fleet wide communication."

"You said there'd be three teams commander." Sen noted, "That's only two."

"Yes," Dayle replied, "there will be a third team that will be tasked with procuring an escape vessel for us. We have a full manifest of all the ships docked here and we've noticed that there's a Corellian gunship that was captured from pirates being kept here. Now most of its weapons are offline but its ion and hyperdrives are functional so it ought to do just fine as an escape vessel. The third team will secure it for us. This team will consist of Captains Grayle and Vayne and young Cass as well."

As soon as Dayle announced this both Inra and Mace glared at one another.

"Major I-" Mace began.

"Mace I don't want to hear it." Vorn interrupted, "We need to get that ship up and running. Now if you don't think you're up to the task then I can have Kara-"

"No, I'll do it." Mace responded before Vorn could finish.

"Good." Vorn replied.

"What about you?" Dayle asked Inra and she smiled.

"Sure. I've no problem with it." she told him as she took the code cylinders he held out.

"Okay, then we've all got work to do so I suggest we get to it." Dayle said, "Good luck and may the Force be with us all."

The night shift was generally a quiet time aboard the station and Admiral Trent was able to monitor the security computer for any signs that Admiral Hall's code cylinders were being used without neglecting his other duties. However, as far as he could tell Admiral Hall had returned to his quarters as soon as he had arrived and remained there. But something about the situation did not sit well with Admiral Trent. He knew that his rival was a social climber who had made use of his political connections to advance his naval career. So to hear that he had left a social function that was packed with important people from the worlds of politics and business seemed odd.

"Get me docking bay seven." he said into his intercom and there was a short pause before there was a reply.

"Docking bay seven." the security officer replied.

"It's Admiral Trent. Did Admiral Hall tell you why he returned from the surface early?"

"Err, no sir. I didn't actually speak with the admiral himself."

"What?" Admiral Trent said, frowning even though the communication was audio only, "Why not?"

"Ah. Well it's juts that the admiral was somewhat under the influence of drink at the time. As were the three captains that his entourage were escorting here."

"What entourage?" Admiral Trent demanded.

"There was a party of command officers and a midshipman with them sir and, err well they wanted the admiral's return to be handled discretely. So I accepted the admiral's code-"

"What about his escort?" Admiral Trent demanded, slamming his fist down on his desk.

"Well, I let them take the admiral-"

"No! I mean who were they? You did verify their identities didn't you?"

"Well no sir. The admiral was with them though."

"So he vouched for them?"

"No sir. In fact he was ranting about them being traitors."

"You weak minded fool." Admiral Trent hissed and he shut off the intercom. He then leapt to his feet and rushed from his office through the command centre to Fleet Admiral Vretan's private office, pressing the intercom.

"Yes?" the fleet admiral asked.

"Sir I think we may have a serious problem." Admiral Trent told him.

## 6.

Jaysica winced as the access panel was removed and a throbbing sound filled the corridor.

"Problem there little lady?" Tharun asked as he stood watch. Vorn's team was located on one of the station's lower levels below the main communication control centre. According to the files accessed by Harvey this was the location of the power conduits that fed the primary subspace antenna so an explosive placed here would cut the headquarters off from the fleet bases and units all around the sector. The loss of the antenna could be bypassed of course, using secondary antennas, surface based transmitters or the communication systems of ships docked at the station, but these introduced a level of inefficiency and limited the amount of communications that could be processed simultaneously.

"Yeah!" Kara added loudly, slapping Jaysica on the back, "What's wrong?"

"You know what's wrong." Jaysica replied, "I've still got a headache after that last injection you gave me."

"You mean the one to sober you up after you accidentally injected yourself at the party?" Kara said with a grin, "It's hardly fair to blame me for that now is it?"

"Just get the charge planted." Vorn said, "Tobis, where should it go?"

"Oh, err, right there I think." Tobis replied.

"Don't think, this is important. It has to be right." Vorn told him and Harvey chirped.

"Major Larcus sir," Jeeves said, "Harvey indicates that Sergeant Dorfus is correct in saying that a charge at that position will create a chain reaction that will destroy the entire primary subspace communications array."

"Okay then plant the charge there Jaysica." Vorn said, nodding and Jaysica produced a lump of detonite explosive from her bag that was already fitted with a detonator linked to a wireless fuse. Carefully she pressed this up against the power conduit and moulded the charge so that it stayed in place when she removed her hand.

"Okay, now get that cover back on." Vorn ordered, "I want to take out as many of the auxiliary antennas as possible as well."

"A rebel team here?" Fleet Admiral Vretan said, scowling at the thought.

"Yes sir. I believe that the admiral was drugged and brought back here against his will."

"So you've tracked the use of his code cylinders?"

"No sir, there's no trace of his cylinders being used. But the code cylinders of all three of the captains who accompanied him have been used to access various sections of the station."

"Show me." the fleet admiral said, getting out of his seat and Admiral Trent led him back into the main command centre and to a security console.

"Captain Yay's cylinders have been used here in the secondary docking area." Admiral Trent said, pointing to a representation of the Naval Headquarters.

"None of our ships are docked there." Fleet Admiral Vretan said.

"No sir, but there is a hyperspace capable gunship that the rebels could be planning to steal." Admiral Trent told him.

"So the rebels are here to steal just one small ship? That seems unlikely."

"Quite so sir. I think that they are also interested in either infiltrating or sabotaging the effectiveness of our systems. The code cylinders of Captain Celtis have been used here near our primary communications array while Captain Naje's have been used right here. Which means that-

"It means they're coming here." Fleet Admiral Vretan interrupted, "Contact security immediately. I want marine units deployed to detain all three rebel units before they can do any damage. Have an extra team on standby just in case there's another unit out there with Admiral Hall's code cylinders. But no alarms, I don't want the rebels being tipped off."

"Okay Cass how's that?" Mace called out. Cass was alone on the bridge of the gunship while Inra and Mace had climbed up into the main computer core above. Now they were attempting to restore full computer function to the ship so that it could be flown.

"Still nothing dad." Cass replied.

"I told you so." Inra said, "This is a modern ship Mace, not some relic held together by tape and prayer."

"I'd like to see you do any better." Mace responded.

"Then stand back. Look, we need to plug this circuit back in." Inra said as she pushed another of the detached circuit boards back into its slot, "Any better?" she then shouted down to Cass.

"Uh no." Cass answered as she looked at the main flight console. Then she glanced across at the internal security monitors and saw that they had come to life. More significantly one of these monitors she saw stormtroopers entering the ship, their stance indicating that they were expecting trouble, "Oh I've got a very

bad feeling about this." she said to herself and then she looked up at the open hatchway above, "Dad, we're going to have company." she called out.

The turbolift carrying Dayle's team up towards the main command centre came to an unexpected halt.

"What happened?" Brak asked out loud.

"Sen, check the system." Dayle ordered and without speaking Sen plugged his datapad into the control panel.

"Nothing wrong here commander." he said, "Someone's pulled the plug remotely."

Frowning Dayle took out his comlink.

"I've got a bad feeling about this." he said and he raised the comlink to his mouth, "Vorn come in." he signalled.

"Vorn here. Go ahead commander."

"Vorn our turbolift just stopped. Can you find out why?" Dayle asked but before Vorn could reply there was a sudden 'thunk' from the roof of the turbolift car and as the rebels looked upwards the emergency hatch was suddenly pulled open and a fist sized object dropped through. There was brilliant flash of light as the stun grenade detonated, hurling all of the rebels against the walls of the turbolift car before they slumped to the floor.

"Commander what happened?" Vorn's voice asked from the comlink, "Commander Kord can you hear me?"

Vorn lowered his comlink.

"I think the Empire knows we're here." he told his team. Then he lifted the device back to his mouth, "Mace come in." he transmitted.

"Mace here major. Sorry but we're a bit busy right now. We're not alone on this ship and I'm not sure that we can evade them for long."

"I've just lost contact with Commander Kord and his group." Vorn said, "Can you get out of that ship and hook up with us?"

"I doubt it major." Mace replied.

"Then just seal yourselves in." Vorn told him, "We're on our way to you. "Vorn out." and he put the comlink away," Come on, let's go." he said and he began to stride down the corridor. However, before he had got half way to the end a squad of stormtroopers burst around the corner and all aimed their blasters towards the rebels.

"Surrender you rebel scum!" the officer standing behind the stormtroopers called out, "We have you surrounded and as Vorn looked around another group of stormtroopers appeared, aiming their blasters around corners behind the rebels.

"We're doomed." Jeeves said.

"How long will they take to get here?" Cass asked.

"Too long." Mace said as he walked over to the bridge entrance and closed the door. Then he drew his blaster and shot the control panel beside it, "That ought to hold them for a while." he added.

"Not long." Inra said and she looked upwards, "Maybe we could hide up there and ambush them." she suggested but Mace shook his head.

"That's the only other way out of here." he said, "Those stormtroopers would be expecting it."

"Then what are we going to do?" Cass said worriedly and Mace looked around. He noticed an access panel beneath one of the control consoles that had been removed exposing a space behind it. That space was obviously too small for either him or Inra, but it looked just about big enough for Cass.

"In here." he told Cass, holstering his blaster and dragging Cass to the console.

"What? No. I want to help you." she protested as Mace pushed her down into the compact space.

"You can't." he told her, "Now just stay hidden while Inra and I try to hold off these stormtroopers until the major gets here." and he lifted the panel back into place, plunging Cass into darkness. Then both he and Inra drew their blasters and took cover just as there was a pounding on the door.

Behind the panel Cass turned on her glow rod, illuminating the cramped space she was squeezed into and she heard the pounding cease unexpectedly before a moment later there was the sound of an explosion accompanied by a loud 'Clang!' as the door to the bridge was blown in. Then she heard muffled cries followed by the unmistakable sound of blaster fire that lasted for just a few seconds before there was only silence.

Scared, Cass closed her eyes tightly and turned off the glow rod.