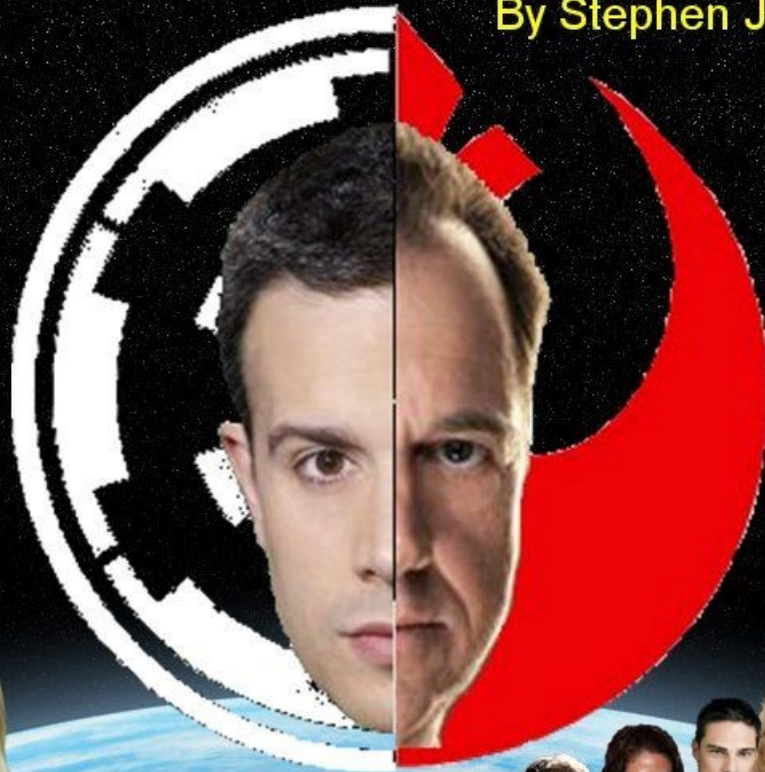


STAR WARS

3-07: The Final Goodbye

By Stephen J Dutton



*By JH
JH/JH*



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...

THE FINAL GOODBYE

A RAID BY IMPERIAL TROOPS BRINGS ISB AGENT GARM LARCUS TO THE ATTENTION OF A DANGEROUS FOE. BUT WITH RIVAL IMPERIAL AGENCIES MORE INTERESTED IN GAINING POLITICAL ADVANTAGE WILL GARM BE LEFT VULNERABLE TO ATTACK...?

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

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

1.

It was raining heavily and Marshas Decken was glad of his wide brimmed hat tonight. The licenced bounty hunter had been waiting for almost an hour now and he was getting worried that his contact was not going to show up. Then the motion sensor at his waist vibrated, alerting him to someone approaching. Placing a hand on the heavier of his two pistols he looked around to see who it was.

"About time you got here Agent Larcus." He said, recognising the man creeping towards him.

"Garm's fine." Garm Larcus replied, "I'd have been here earlier but I was trying to find Vay."

"The blonde that got herself kidnapped?"

"That's the one. I thought she'd appreciate some payback."

Marshas looked around again.

"So she's not coming then?" he asked.

"No, I've no idea where she is. Hopefully she hasn't been kidnapped again."

"Well if she has at least we're in a position to break her out. Or at least we would be if there were more than two of us. Couldn't you get any backup?"

Garm nodded.

"A full company." He said, "They're keeping a low profile a bit further out. If this place really is a PLAE safe house I don't want them slipping away."

The PLAE, or People's Liberation Army of Estran was a terrorist group that sought to have the planet of Estran secede from the Empire and set up as an independent world. Like many such groups they also envisioned such an independent world being controlled by themselves. Violent in the extreme, there was a standing bounty on all members of the organisation that attracted men such as Marshas Decken. Some of them even managed to end up not being found in a shallow grave in the wilderness after getting too close.

"More storm commandoes?" Marshas asked and Garm shook his head.

"Not for a raid like this." He replied, "I've got a unit of COMPForce troops instead."

"Oh great." Marshas replied sarcastically, "Do this lot at least know which end of their blasters need pointing at the enemy?"

COMPForce was the armed wing of the Committee for the Preservation of the New Order, or COMPNOR. Though their loyalty to the Emperor was unquestioned, many COMPForce units had a reputation as well equipped amateurs playing at being real soldiers.

"This lot do." Garm said, "I've worked with them before."

There was the sound of a repulsorlift engine and both Garm and Marshas turned to see a large, battered repulsor truck approaching. The vehicle halted beside them and the large side door opened just long enough for two men to disembark. Each of them wore dull grey cloaks that could barely conceal the white body armour beneath them.

"Major Kramm," Garm said, "good of you to get here." Then he turned back to Marshas and added, "Marshas Decken, meet Major Dayle Kramm and Captain Kyle Layne. COMPForce Assault Division."

The men nodded in greeting and then Major Kramm looked at Garm.

"So where's the moff's fancy woman tonight?" he asked, referring to the rumour that Garm's usual partner Vay Udra was in fact the mistress of the local sector moff.

"I don't know." Garm replied, "Now did you bring the vest?"

"Here." Captain Layne replied and from under his cloak he produced an armoured blast vest that he handed to Garm, "So you'll be coming in with us them?" he added as Garm began to put the body armour on.

"Wouldn't miss it." Garm replied.

"Not got another of those have you?" Marshas asked.

"I think we can find something." Captain Layne told him.

"How about you tell us what we're facing her first?" Major Kramm asked, "I've got over a hundred men in unmarked vehicles scattered over three city blocks. I'd like to get this over with so we can all go home."

"That would be good." Garm agreed, "Jennay was really annoyed when I had to leave in the middle of dinner."

"Maybe she thinks you're sneaking off to see that Vay." Captain Layne commented.

"Probably." Garm agreed, "Even before she was pregnant Jennay was paranoid about that. Vay's behaviour doesn't help either."

"Send her my way." Captain Layne said, "I'll keep her busy for you." And he grinned.

"You know none of this is getting us any nearer actually carrying out this raid." Major Kramm said.

"Marshas," Garm said, "tell us what you know."

"Okay," Marshas said, "the building opposite is a storage facility rented out to a travel company. They supply vehicles for vacations, boats and camping speeders that sort of thing. Only it's just a cover, the constant

stream of vehicles moving in and out is so they can move weapons out of here. They've got a simple production line going, masking the noise with maintenance on the vehicles."

"How many people?" Major Kramm asked.

"I've seen about twenty. Mainly humans, but a few other species too."

"Weapons?" Captain Layne asked.

"I spotted one or two with blasters, just small stuff though. If they've got anything bigger than a pistol then they've kept it out of sight. Of course, since they're actually building weapons in there they could have almost anything."

"That's why I called you lot in." Garm said, "I figured we'd need more firepower than a team of ISB agents would have."

"Good call." Major Kramm said, "Now I suggest you get in the van because we're going for a short drive."

"A drive? Where?" Marshas asked.

"Right through that big front door over there."

The lightweight metal shuttering of the building's front door collapsed under the impact of the repulsor truck, scattering pieces of it all around the entrance. As soon as the vehicle came to a halt its doors were flung open and the occupants began to leap out, with Garm one of the first.

"Imperial Security Bureau!" he yelled, firing a single shot from his pistol into the ceiling, "Everyone in this building is under arrest on suspicion of treason against the Empire!"

There were shouts from amongst the various parked vehicles and a sharp 'crack' that echoed around the interior of the building as someone discharged a projectile weapon. One of the COMPForce troopers fell back as he was hit, but his thick armoured breastplate stopped the bullet and the man behind him helped him back to his feet.

Garm charged at the man with the gun, firing his blaster as he moved. The man ducked behind the vehicle that he was using for cover and Garm ceased fire. Then something heavy hit him from the side and he was knocked from his feet.

"You're welcome." Marshas said as a blaster bolt flew just above them, right where Garm would have been.

"That was too close." Garm said, "Where's the gunman?"

"Woman." Marshas said, "Behind the coastal speeder."

Garm looked and saw a somewhat overweight woman running away from them on the far side of a repulsorlift vehicle that was clearly built for use on water.

"Let's get after her then." Garm said, getting back to his feet and he and Marshas ran after the woman.

They followed her until she reached a set of stairs that led down to a basement level and just as she began to descend them Garm fired at her. The shot struck her between the shoulders and she died without a sound, tumbling down the stairs.

"Let's go find out what she was running towards shall we?" Garm asked.

"After you." Marshas replied.

From the top of the stairs Garm and Marshas could hear the raised voices of the beings in the basement and they saw the flickering shadows as they moved about. Suddenly one of the terrorists appeared at the bottom of the stairs and aimed a blaster up at Garm.

"Stang!" Garm exclaimed as he stared down the barrel and he dived aside just as the man fired.

Crouching by the top of the stairs, Marshas reached into his coat and produced a bright blue sphere that sparkled.

"A little something from back home on Naboo." He said, smiling and he hurled the energy ball down the stairs. The weapon burst on impact with the floor and released the disruptive energy it stored. The terrorist cried out in pain and dropped his blaster as its electronics were overloaded, causing the weapon to overheat in his hands.

"Go!" Marshas yelled and both he and Garm charged down the stairs into the PLAE's weapons' factory. All around them were containers of volatile chemicals and the equipment for mixing them together. The explosive that this process would produce were not as powerful as modern military or even commercial grade explosives, but they could be deadly nonetheless. Further on Garm saw machine tools that were being used to manufacture more crude firearms of the sort that had been used against them upstairs. Like the explosives, such weapons would be no match for those available to Imperial troops, but the PLAE had never been strong on stand up fights against the military or law enforcement units.

"Set for stun." Garm said as he adjusted his blaster, "I don't want a stray shot triggering this lot."

"That's no guarantee." Marshas replied as he too set his blaster for stun, "The energy pulse could trigger a detonator."

"Still safer than a live shot." Garm said as he blasted another terrorist, a green-skinned rodian. The alien collapsed immediately and his weapon fell from his grasp.

There was the clatter of projectile fire and both Garm and Marshas dived for cover. The gunfire continued and each time either of the two men tried to peer around their cover and get a look at their attackers they were forced back.

"Say what you will about slugthrowers," Marshas said to Garm, "but at least bullets don't trigger explosives." Garm reached for his comlink and activated it.

"Major Kramm," he said loudly over the sound of the gunfire, "we're under fire and pinned down. We need your assistance immediately."

"What's your location?" Major Kramm's voice responded.

"The basement. There's a staircase near the back of the building that leads down to the terrorists' workshop."

"On our way agent. Hang on."

"One more thing, this place is full of unstable materials. Set your weapons for stun."

"Copy that. Weapons on stun."

There was a sudden break in the gunfire and Marshas leant around the barrel he was crouched behind and fired a single shot.

"Of course, slugthrowers also tend to run out of ammunition rather quickly." He said and he got up and ran forwards.

A man struggled to load bullets into a weapon that was not yet fully tested, but the mechanism would not cycle and as he desperately tried to get it to work Marshas shot him also. Garm emerged from cover also, aiming his weapon ahead of him as he moved. There were only a handful of terrorists left in the basement, all trying to move boxes out of the way of the exit that they had inadvertently blocked.

"Freeze!" Garm yelled, before shooting one of the terrorists who reached for a metal rod that appeared to have been intended for fashioning a slugthrower rifle's barrel. Immediately the remaining terrorists stopped dragging boxes and raised their hands.

Just then there was the sound of heavy footfalls as several COMPForce troopers, accompanied by Major Kramm came charging down the stairs. The trooper at the front of the group wielded a large armoured shield that the entire group was able to use as cover.

"We've got them." Garm said to Major Kramm, "Just leave me a couple of men to help secure this lot and you can get back to clearing the rest of the building."

"It's already done." Major Kramm said as he removed his helmet.

"Hey what's this stuff?" Marshas suddenly said as he lifted up a sheet covering a stack of crates. Each of the containers was marked with a prominent symbol, the badge of the rebel alliance.

"Well this is interesting." Garm said, smiling, "Looks like you'll be earning more than you expected from this little raid Mister Decken." He then added.

"Pity your partner missed all the fun." Marshas said.

"Yeah," Garm replied, "I just wish I knew what was so important that she didn't answer my communications."

2.

Vay Udra parried the attack, the bright red blade of her lightsaber blocking the swing of the green bladed weapon her opponent was wielding. The man she faced was Ibram Kellensen, an Imperial Inquisitor sent by the Emperor to evaluate her progress. Or so he claimed, Vay had no way of verifying what Ibram had told her but then again she had no reason to doubt it either. One thing was for certain though, at one time this man had been a Jedi knight, but some incident in his past had allowed him to avoid the fate of almost all of the other members of that ancient order and instead brought him into the service of Emperor Palpatine.

"Good!" he called out, "I can feel your anger. Use it!"

Vay went on the offensive, lunging forwards in a move that she expected to catch the much older man off balance. But rather than being forced to concede defeat he stepped out of her path and let her stumble past. With a flick of his thumb he shut off his own lightsaber and brought the pommel down on the base of her skull.

She let out a surprised grunt and dropped her lightsaber, the weapon deactivating as soon as it fell from her grip. She reached out to retrieve it, but before she could take hold of it the lightsaber suddenly leapt into the air and flew towards Ibram's hand instead. Activating the second weapon and holding them crossed he loomed over Vay and swung them both down, halting just before he decapitated her.

"You are slow." He said as he shut off both lightsabers, "And predictable. Now get up."

Vay got to her feet and reached out to take back her lightsaber. But as her hand neared the deactivated weapon Ibram swung it at her, striking her across the head with it and she staggered back, clutching at the point of impact.

"Foolish child." He said as he clipped his own lightsaber to his belt, "What the Emperor sees in you I will never understand. But then again – Come here."

Vay stepped forwards and Ibram reached out and grasped her around the throat.

"You're hurting me." Vay gasped, struggling to breathe.

"Open your mind to me." Ibram replied, gazing directly into her eyes.

Keep him out.

The voice in Vay's head called out to her again. It had warned her about Ibram when he had first arrived and now it was delivering another warning, so Vay tried to shield her thoughts from him.

Anger.

Hatred.

Fear.

Ibram smiled as he penetrated Vay's mental defences and sensed her state of mind.

"Good." He said, "These feelings will make you strong. But you must learn to-" then he stopped mid-sentence and a look of confusion appeared on his face.

There was something else in Vay's mind, amongst the cold and dark thoughts she had been raised to draw upon to increase her power Ibram saw a tiny spark of light. A last glimmer of hope and salvation.

Garm.

"We are done for the day." He said, suddenly releasing his grip on her, "Go home."

Vay gasped and raised a hand to her throat.

"My lightsaber." She croaked and she held out her hand.

"Just leave." Ibram said, "You can have the weapon back when you earn it."

"Jennay, I'm home!" Garm called out.

"About time." Garm's wife replied as she came down the stairs, "Oh." She then added when she saw that Garm was not alone.

"Good evening." Marshas said, removing his hat, "I'm sorry to disturb you but I thought I should apologise in person for dragging your husband away from you."

"He gave me a lift." Garm said.

"You're speeder packed up again?" Jennay asked.

"Afraid so." Garm answered, "I called a service droid, but it could be a day or two before its done."

"Fine. But at least introduce our guest properly."

"Of course, Jennay this is Marshas Decken."

"Licenced bounty hunter. Pleased to meet you." Marshas said and he held out his hand. Smiling Jennay shook it.

"So did you have a good reason for taking Garm from me?" he asked.

"Jennay, you know I can't discuss cases." Garm said.

"That's why I didn't ask you."

Marshas smiled.

"Well I can say that I've been promised a very handsome reward." He said, "Now if you'll forgive me I ought to be going. It was a pleasure to meet you Missus Larcus."

Marshas then put his hat back on and left the house, behind him Garm closed the front door.

"Two days to get your speeder fixed? But we have the hospital the day after tomorrow."

"I know, we'll just have to take your speeder."

"You hate driving my speeder Garm."

"Then you can drive. It's not like you're stomach's sticking out so far you can't reach the controls yet." Then Garm ducked back as Jennay hit his arm.

Foran Fallir was in a bad mood. He had got the message about the raid that had cost his organisation the use of not only a safe house but also all of the equipment and personnel inside at the time.

"What did we lose?" he demanded as he entered the meeting room, a small space behind a cantina run by one of the PLAE's members. Already several other high-ranking PLAE members were present, including the commander of the safe house who had been fortunate not to have been there at the time of the raid.

"A dozen or so vehicles modified for weapons running and all of the manufacturing equipment." One of the others told him.

"What about people?" Foran asked.

"No one important." The safe house's commander replied, "And no one that knows anything about anyone here."

"Except you." Foran said, looking straight at the man.

"Do you take me for a fool?" the safe house commander replied.

"Be careful comrade." Another man interjected, "Comrade Fallir is our leader."

"That's no reason for him to insult me. Not one of the comrades we lost knows my real name or anything about me."

"But every last one can pick you out of a line up." Foran said, "Then you can lead them to us." Then he put an arm around the man's shoulders, "Comrade, I think you lay low for a while. I think about two metres down should do it." And as a puzzled look appeared on the man's face Foran produced a knife and drove it under his ribcage. As the body slumped to the floor with the hilt of Foran's knife still protruding from it Foran looked around at the other men, "Have our host get rid of that would you?" he asked, "And then get me the name of whoever did this to us."

Garm waved at Jennay as she drove away after dropping him off outside the front of the capital building. Then he turned around and began to walk up the main steps.

"Agent Larcus!" a woman's voice called out.

"Oh no." Garm muttered to himself as he looked towards the source of the cry and saw an attractive dark haired woman rushing towards him, followed by two men holding recording equipment.

"Agent Larcus." She said again as she got closer to him, "Is it true that you led the raid last night?"

"What raid would that be Miss Gorord?" Garm responded, avoiding looking at the reporter as he walked up the steps.

"Oh don't give me that agent. It's all over the planet that the ISB raided a PLAE safe house last night right here in the city and seized large quantities of arms."

"Is that so?"

"You know it is. They're also saying that you recovered evidence that the PLAE is now a part of the Alliance to Restore the Republic. Can you comment on that Agent Larcus?"

"Not unless this is only to be broadcast after ten at night." Garm said.

Two white armoured figures approached from the top of the steps.

"Authorised personnel only." One of the stormtroopers announced. The two guards ignored Garm, instantly recognising not only his white ISB uniform but also him personally. However, they stepped between him and the reporter, blocking her path.

"If the rumours are true will the moff be making a statement?" she called out after Garm, "He can't avoid me forever."

Garm just smiled to himself as he walked into the building and was waved through security by the guards. He got straight into the turbolift and pressed the button for the floor where his office was located. But just as the door was closing another man in an ISB uniform leapt in.

"Garm, glad I caught you." He said.

"Director Helios." Garm replied. Corvin Helios was in charge of all Imperial Security Bureau operations in the sector and in his role as the moff's personal ISB advisor Garm reported to him directly.

"That was some good work last night Garm." The director said, "In fact there's a meeting in ten minutes with the moff to discuss it. I want you there to see the look on Gayal's face when we announce that the PLAE are now part of the rebellion."

"Sorry to disappoint you sir," Garm replied, "but word of that may have already leaked out. I ran into Neema Gorord out front. She knew about the crates."

"Stang!" Director Helios snapped, "Who the kriff talked?"

"I doubt it was one of the COMPForce troopers." Garm said, "Plus Marshas wouldn't stay in business too long if people knew he was talking to the press. It must have been one of the clean up crew."

"They were ours Garm. When I find out who it was I swear I'll have them enforcing water saving measures on Tatooine for this. Well we can only hope that Gayal hasn't heard about it yet."

The turbolift door slid open at Garm's floor and Director Helios pressed the button for the top floor. The door slid shut again with both men still in the turbolift and continued upwards; when they opened again they stepped out into a corridor vastly different to those on the lower levels. Like most Imperial structures the capital building was a product of modular construction from a template that was standard throughout the Empire. This meant that the corridors were constructed to the typical functional pattern found everywhere from the most remote outposts to the garrison cities of Carida. However, on the moff's personal level the décor had been altered to his own taste and fine wooden panels lined the walls.

"Gayal's here already." Director Helios noted as he looked towards the moff's office door. Outside, talking to the moff's receptionist was a woman in the uniform of an Imperial Intelligence agent. This was Gayal Tharr, the sector's chief of that organisation that the ISB often found itself competing with. The mutual contempt that Director Helios and Gayal Tharr held for each other was well known.

"Yes," Garm said as they approached the office door, "but who's that guy with her?" he asked as he caught sight of Ibram standing behind Gayal.

Director Helios shook his head.

"I don't know." He said, "But I do now he arrived a couple of days ago and was met by the moff and your friend Vay."

Ibram turned slightly and Garm suddenly spotted the lightsaber hanging from his belt.

"Stang, he's an inquisitor." Garm exclaimed, keeping his voice low, "What the kriff is an inquisitor doing here?"

"Your guess is as good as mine." Director Helios replied, "You know how those guys work. Fear and surprise are their tools. They're fanatically loyal to the Emperor."

"Perhaps we're not the only ones hoping to spring a surprise in the meeting." Garm suggested.

3.

The meeting room had space for far more people than were actually in attendance. Normally when he called such a meeting Moff Gregor Horatian would include not only the security and intelligence services but also the military, but today both the army and navy were absent. The only other participant was Rodge Larrs, the head of COMPNOR for the sector and the public face of the Empire to its billions of inhabitants.

"Director, I believe you have an announcement." The moff said.

"Yes sir. Thank you." Director Helios said and he reached out to the touch panel set into the table in front of him. As soon as he pressed the panel a hologram appeared floating in the middle of the room, "This is footage taken last night." he explained, "As you can see the crates we seized are marked with Alliance insignia. Upon opening-

"Is this really the extent of your shocking announcement?" Gayal suddenly interrupted, "A few symbols painted on some boxes?" then she looked at the moff, "Moff Horatian really, do we have to waste our time with this?"

Moff Horatian looked at Director Helios.

"Do you have more?" he asked.

"Actually yes, I was just getting to it. The crates contained blaster power packs that were marked with Allasatran Defence Force serial numbers. Previous operations have already confirmed that the batch they came from was stolen by the rebellion before it could be secured. Another contained military grade explosives that lacked the chemical markers that all Imperial contractors are required to include. This could only have come from the Alliance."

Director Helios then lent back in his chair, smiling.

"Look at her." He whispered to Garm, "She had no idea."

"Miss Tharr," Rodge Larrs said, leaning on the desk, "can you explain how Imperial Intelligence managed to miss this?"

Rodge Larrs could hardly be considered impartial in the rivalry between the ISB and Imperial Intelligence. The ISB was a part of COMPNOR after all.

"Your people only stumbled across this by chance." This was Ibram, the man spoke softly seeing no need to raise his voice, "Without the independent contractor who himself had no knowledge of these crates before the raid, they would have never been discovered. Rest assured Mister Larrs, Imperial Intelligence is more than capable of getting to the bottom of this. We do still have an agent in the Alliance."

Now it was Gayal's turn to smile.

"When did they last report in?" Director Helios said suddenly, "Aside from when they sent several navy squadrons on a wild bantha chase around a bunch of ancient space stations for nothing."

Moff Horatian sighed. He hated these meetings.

"Larcus! Of course it would be him!" Foran bellowed and he hurled the mug he was sipping caf from into the corner, shattering it into hundreds of pieces, "And what about this bounty hunter?"

The news report they were watching showed Garm as he carefully avoided giving any information to Neema Gorord and then followed it up by explaining how an anonymous source had identified the original intelligence on the safe house as having come from an un-named bounty hunter.

"He's already off world comrade. Our spies say he left for Hayatan in response to a bounty posted by Kurrad Industries."

"He can wait." Foran said, "Right now I want Garm Larcus dead."

"Are all your meetings like that one?" Ibram asked as he sat down in Gayal's office while she poured him a drink from the caf maker in the corner.

"Unfortunately yes." She replied, "How do you take it?"

"Dark. Now tell me more about this group, the People's Liberation Army of Estran."

"There's not much to tell." Gayal replied, handing Ibram the drink and then pouring one for herself, "They existed under the Republic as well. In fact I think they've been around for as long as there have been people living on Estran."

"And what do they want?"

"They're your run of the mill isolationist group. They want to withdraw from galactic politics completely. Of course the independent world they're dreaming of will be run by themselves, none of that messy democracy the rebels want. That's why we've never linked the two groups; we never thought to even bother looking for a link. Neither did the ISB."

"I get the impression that Moff Horatian favours them over Imperial Intelligence." Ibram said.

"He does. Gayal replied, nodding, "He even has that young woman Vay, whoever she is running around after Garm Larcus half the time. He says that she's an intern from COMPNOR, but my people can't find anything on her. I suspect he's sleeping with her."

"This Garm Larcus you mentioned?" Ibram asked, making the question sound casual.

"No. Gregor. But again, my people can't give me a definitive answer."

"I believe that Vay Udra can be used to the advantage of Imperial Intelligence." Ibram said, "But she must be removed from the influence of this Agent Garm Larcus first."

"Great. How?"

"I am not sure yet. For now just have your people tail Agent Larcus. Perhaps we can discover something about him that we can make use of."

Gayal smiled.

"Spying on the ISB." She said, "What fun."

Imperial Intelligence Agents Krayl and Nexer had been given orders to wait in this parking garage when someone bringing them orders would meet them. No coded identification data had been provided so the implication was that the bearer of the orders would be someone they were familiar with. However, neither of them expected it to be the head of their organisation for the entire sector that stepped out of an unmarked speeder and walked calmly towards them. Unsurprisingly on this occasion she had dispensed with her uniform and wore civilian clothing.

"Miss Tharr." Krayl said when he recognised Gayal and both snapped to attention.

"At ease." She replied, "I have a very special assignment for you both. One that must not be discussed beyond us. Do you understand?"

"Of course ma'am." Nexer said.

"Good. Now here is your target." Gayal said and she held up a datapad on which the display showed an image of Garm Larcus wearing his ISB uniform, "You are to tail this man only. He is a member of the Imperial Security Bureau and no action is to be taken without my express permission. Are there any questions?"

Both agents looked at Gayal and shook their heads briefly.

"Good. Now here is everything you need to know." Gayal said, handing the two agents a mem-stik, "It's a one time readable file, so commit it to memory because you won't get another chance. Now get going."

Garm was reviewing the initial results of the questioning of the terrorists arrested the previous evening. The Interrogation branch of the ISB had not had chance to conduct a full a full-scale interrogation on any of them yet, apparently most of the droids used for the procedure were unavailable because of maintenance. The raid had not just taken the PLAE by surprise. One or two of the interrogators had instead taken it upon themselves to get some answers but Garm placed little faith in the ability of a human to beat answers out of anyone with any reliability. Droids on the other hand were designed and built to determine when they were being given factual information. Such was their reputation that some subjects confessed as soon as they saw the droid floating into the room.

The door slid open suddenly and Garm looked up to see Vay entering the office.

"Vay." He said, "Where have you been? I must have left twenty messages."

"I know." She said as she sat down, "I had other work to do."

"Ah, of course."

Technically Garm was not cleared to know about Vay's abilities, but they had been demonstrated to him on several occasions and as such he knew that Moff Horatian was likely to call upon her for tasks that Garm was not involved in.

"So where are you up to?" Vay asked.

"Looking over what we found last night." He replied.

"Which is what?"

"Well until we can actually get some droids to start pulling answers from people all I've got is what was said to stop one of those Interrogations Branch nerf herders from pulling out teeth and fingernails instead."

"What about the weapons? The Alliance ones?"

"Obviously only part of the shipment. Explosives with no detonators and power cells with no blasters.

Fortunately we seized a whole bunch of vehicles too; I've got forensics guys looking at them now. With any luck we'll be able to figure out where they were shipped from. Its not like the rebels could have just landed a ship on the roof after all. No ship small enough to do that has a cloaking device and one without that sort of protection would have been seen."

"You've got something though haven't you? I can sense it."

Garm smiled, knowing better than to try and hide anything from Vay and he turned his computer monitor around for her to see.

"Local cops pulled this guy from the river where two others had just dumped him at about three this morning. As is normal procedure they ran his prints and it was flagged up in our system because we pulled a set of his

prints from the crates with rebel markings about an hour ago. Thanks to his driving licence still being on his body we have an address we can check out.”

“So why aren’t you there already?” Vay asked.

“Easy,” Garm replied, “I don’t have a ride.”

Rather than the functional vehicle that Garm used, one with enough room for half a dozen people and significant cargo the speeder that Vay had at her disposal was significantly more up market. Seating only two people the jet-black vehicle with its blacked out windows had very little room for anything else.

Fear.

Vay drove and she did so at such a speed that Garm frequently found himself squeezing the arms of his seat as she carried out manoeuvres that made his concern for their safety easy to pick up on.

“I should be insulted at you thinking like that.” Vay said.

“You know that camera just flashed you don’t you?” Garm replied as they passed through a speed tarp at well over the legal speed limit.

“Gregor will pay the fine.” Vay replied, “According to the vehicle registry he owns this speeder after all.”

“Making those rumours work for you then?”

“Why not?”

Because it’s lying.

Vay frowned briefly as the voice in her head made itself felt once more.

“Well we’re at his house now, so how about you slow down before we crash through the front gates?”

Vay braked sharply and Garm felt his body being pressed into the straps of his safety harness. As he got out of the speeder he briefly considered getting down and kissing the ground.

“Do it and you’ll be walking home.” Vay told him. Then she looked at the house they had arrived at. It was a large and well-kept building with a wide garden running all around it, “I thought these PLAE people were into supporting the downtrodden masses.” She said, “This place looks a bit fancy.”

“Yeah, well maybe it means we’re dealing with someone high up in the organisation.” Garm said, “One of the ones who gets to do all the treading down and such.”

As Garm and Vay walked up the drive they saw a pair of policemen standing outside the front door speaking with a middle aged man.

“Oh that’s just great.” Garm muttered, “The cops were told to leave well alone until after we’d been through this place.”

Then one of the policemen looked in their direction and a puzzled look appeared on his face.

“Can I help you sir?” he asked, looking straight at Garm.

“You can explain what you’re doing here.” Garm replied, “You were told to stay away an hour ago.”

“But I only called them ten minutes ago.” The middle aged man said.

“What?” Garm said, “Who are you?”

“I’m Han Losus.” The man said, “I live next door. I spotted that Mister Jallin’s door was open so I came round to see why. That’s when I discovered the break in and called the police.”

“Wait here.” Garm said and he walked into the house, “Not you Vay.” He called out and she followed him inside.

Standing in the hallway it was obvious that someone had been here before them. Every closet and drawer had been opened and its contents looted.

“The vid player’s still here and the computer’s smashed.” Garm commented as he looked into the lounge and saw the upturned furniture, “They weren’t after items of value.”

“You think they were after the same as us don’t you?” Vay asked and Garm nodded.

“I think that Mister Jallin was a link from the people we arrested to those higher up in the organisation. They killed him so we couldn’t find him in time to make him talk. Then they came here and emptied the place of everything that could lead us to them.”

4.

"Are you sure this is a good idea?" Nexer asked as Krayl parked at the end of the street where Garm's house was located.

"It's the only one I've got." Krayl replied, "We couldn't keep up with that speeder he drove off in, but he's got to come back here sooner or later. I've set up an alert to warn us if he goes back to the office and logs into the computer system. This way we've got everywhere covered."

"We're a bit exposed out here." Nexer commented, "I mean look, there's hardly anyone about and yet here we are just sitting in this speeder."

"Well given how secret all this is supposed to be I don't want to go identifying ourselves to the locals and asking to use their homes. If anyone looks like they're taking an interest in us we'll move."

A speeder drove past the agents' own vehicle and turned into the Larcus' driveway. A camera concealed in their own vehicle noted the licence plate and identified the speeder as belonging to Jennay Larcus.

"It's just his wife." Nexer said as Jennay parked the speeder out of sight.

"So she's here at home while he's out running around with the moff's fancy woman." Krayl commented.

"What do you think she wears under that bodyglove?" Nexer said, referring to the black bodygloves Vay typically wore.

"I heard that when they're alone in his office she doesn't even wear that." Krayl replied.

"Does the moff know about that?"

"Maybe that's why he bought her a fancy speeder, trying to win her back."

From beside a house right across the street from the Larcus residence two more men watched as Jennay went inside. They should not have been there and the only reason they were able to remain was that they had chosen that house because the owners were not currently at home. Everything about their presence had to remain secret, which was why they had not broken in. Any signs of a crime taking place would bring police or worse yet Imperial attention to them.

"That's it." One of them said, "We're clear."

"Okay I've got the stuff. Let's go." The other replied as he picked up the battered hold all they had brought with them and the pair walked calmly away from the house, paused briefly before crossing the road and then approached the Larcus residence.

"What's this?" Nexer said as the agents watched the two men.

"I don't know. Gardeners maybe?"

"Gardeners come in vans full of tools. Those guys have one small bag between them."

"Well we can't see them from here. Perhaps we should move closer."

"No. Those aren't our orders." Nexer pointed out, "We better call it in first."

The men watched the house carefully as they neared it, paying particular attention to the windows. They did not want to be seen. Just in front of the house they could see Jennay's speeder and they ducked down low and crouched behind it. The one with the bag then kept watch as his comrade lay on his back and slid beneath the vehicle.

"Okay, gave me the gun." He said softly from under it.

The other man rummaged through the bag until he found a powered bolt removing gun and passed it to the man under the speeder. There was a whirring sound as the bolts on an inspection panel were then removed one at a time until the panel came loose.

"Can you see the main ignition circuit?" the man on lookout duty asked.

"Yeah, its right here." The one under the speeder told him, "Give me the sensor." and he held his hand out from beneath the vehicle.

Like most modern speeders, Jennay's vehicle was fitted with a security device that would sound an alarm if its ignition system was interfered with in any way. However, the system could not detect a purely passive monitoring device being attached to the wiring. The sensor that the man fixed to the vehicle was a simple magnetic field detector that would produce an output when it registered the magnetic field created by current flowing through the ignition system, something that would occur when someone next tried to start the engine. "Okay," the man said when the sensor was in place, "now pass me the charge."

"I have Agent Nexer on the line for you ma'am."

"Thank you," Gayal replied, "put him through. Oh, but there is to be no monitoring of this call outside this office."

"Of course ma'am, I'll transfer it via your personal scrambler."

"Hello Agent Nexer?" Gayal then said as the communications unit on her desk indicated that it a secure connection to an outside source had been made.

"Yes ma'am."

"Do you have something to report?" Gayal asked.

"Yes ma'am. I'm afraid we lost Agent Larcus when he left the capital building. We've taken up a position near his home in an attempt to reacquire him but we've noticed something out of the ordinary."

"Don't worry about Agent Larcus' position for now." Gayal said, "He's reported his location in. But what have you found?"

"Well we've spotted two male humans acting suspiciously in the area. They've approached the Larcus residence and are now out of sight. Do we have permission to move in closer?"

Gayal thought for a moment. The last thing she wanted was for her surveillance mission to be revealed just for the sake of disturbing a pair of burglars.

"Are you monitoring police comms?" Gayal asked.

"Yes ma'am."

"And have there been any alarms reported in the area?"

"No ma'am."

So they probably weren't burglars, Gayal thought to herself. But she was still reluctant to have her agents reveal themselves.

"Hold your position." She said, "When the subjects come back into view follow and apprehend them when they're a block away. Tharr out."

The two came walking back out of the driveway as calm as they had appeared when they walked up it and they turned and walked away from the two watching intelligence agents. Krayl started the speeder as they neared the end of the street and began to drive towards them. The two men walked past a public trash canister and the one with the bag deposited it inside the canister without breaking his stride.

"Grab that." Krayl said as he pulled over beside the trash canister.

Nexer got out of the vehicle and dashed around it to pull the bag lining the trash canister out of it and then tossed it into the trunk of the speeder. Then he got back in as quickly as he could.

"Okay, let's get after them." He said.

Krayl accelerated the speeder, catching up with the two men just around the corner. He pulled in and slowed to a halt just ahead of them and both agents stepped from the speeder at the same time.

"Imperial Agents." Nexer announced, holding up his identification in one hand while the other rested on the blaster he revealed from beneath his jacket, "Stay where you are."

"What's the problem?" one of the two men asked as the agents approached them.

What was in the bag you just dumped?" Krayl asked.

"What bag?"

"The bag that's now in the trunk of our speeder." Krayl said and both men just looked at one another, "Oh never mind." Krayl went on, "We'll open it up when we get you back to the station house. Now under the terms of the Galactic Empire Security Act we are detaining you for questioning on suspicion of terrorist related activities. Any questions?"

One of the men looked as if he was about to make a run for it, but as Nexer began to slide his blaster from its holster he stopped and both men raised their hands.

Unlike the Imperial Security Bureau that was a creation purely of Emperor Palpatine's New Order, Imperial Intelligence had been created from the various intelligence agencies of the Galactic Republic and still maintained some of its principles. One of these concerned the handling of prisoners by most of its departments, preferring manipulation and trickery over torture and as such when Gayal Tharr entered the cell where the two men brought in by Agents Krayl and Nexer neither prisoner had a mark on them as they sat with their arms bound behind them.

"Ah gentlemen," she said to the prisoners, "please allow me to introduce myself. I am the chief of Imperial Intelligence in this sector and from now on I now have total control over what happens to you."

The two men just stared back at her blankly. Gayal looked at her datapad.

"According to our analysis the bag you dumped in the trash right before my men apprehended you contained traces of an explosive compound on the restricted list. Is that so?"

"What bag?" one of the prisoners asked and Gayal looked at the agents who had arrested them, "You witnessed them disposing of the bag?" she asked despite already knowing the answer.

"We did," Krayl replied, "and our speeder recorded it."

"Really?" Gayal said, now looking back towards the prisoners, "Would you like me to go to all the trouble of playing that recording back for you? Or would you rather not annoy me by wasting my time?" and she leant across the table between her and the prisoners.

"We don't know anything about explosives," The other prisoner replied, "and you'll never prove otherwise."
"Of course we won't." Gayal agreed, "Not in time to stop whatever device you planted from going off. Though we can all take a good guess at where the bomb is can't we? Its somewhere on the property of Garm Larcus and his lovely wife. You do know what Garm Larcus does for a living don't you? He works for the ISB, so I suppose I ought to hand you over to them instead of keeping you here. Perhaps they can get the information from you quicker than I can. They take a pride in that you know, loosening tongues. Along with other body parts. I hear they like to leave your eyes until last so you can see the pile of body parts taken from you as it grows. Now tell me gentlemen, will you give me the information I want now? Or shall I ask the ISB to get it instead?"

"You're bluffing." A prisoner said, "We know you hate the ISB. You'd never hand us over to them and risk them taking credit."

"And what exactly would they be able to take credit for?" Gayal asked, "You've as good as confessed. Now I'm a reasonable woman so I'll give you both a few minutes to consider what you're going to do." And then she left the room.

Gayal then walked into the room next door. Unlike the brightly lit interrogation cell this room was lit only dimly. The reason for this was simple; the wall dividing the two rooms was dominated by a one-way mirror that needed the difference in light levels to function properly.

"Is that how you handle all your interrogations?" Ibram asked as he continued to stare through the glass.
"My department has certain standards inquisitor." She replied, "Besides I think we both know what they were doing at Garm's house. Like I said to them, they've planted a bomb there. My guess is that they're both PLAE members out for revenge."

"So what do you intend to do now?" Ibram asked, "Any action you take will reveal our surveillance of Agent Larcus."

"It'll be worth it." Gayal answered, smiling, "An ISB agent owing his life to us? That's the sort of thing guaranteed to annoy them. Plus we look good in front of the moff while the ISB looks like it can't even take care of its own people."

"And what of these two?" Ibram asked, nodding towards the glass.

"We'll have them on explosive charges and attempted murder. That's a death penalty right there. Its enough to turn them before we let them go wouldn't you agree?"

Ibram hesitated.

Garm.

That single thought had stood out amongst all of the others in Vay's mind, the one thing keeping her from truly becoming one with the Dark Side. Ibram concentrated and looked to the future.

The bomb going off with Garm there.

Vay totally under the sway of the Dark Side.

"No." he replied without looking at Gayal.

"Then what would you have me do?"

"Nothing." Ibram said, Just hold these two here for now and have your men stand down from monitoring Agent Larcus."

"But what about the bomb? The disposal unit will need as much information about it as possible."

"No they won't. They will not be deployed. The bomb will be allowed to detonate."

"You're kidding me." Gayal exclaimed, "We're not talking about just setting up a sting operation and watching someone while they break the law here. We know what these two have done and if we don't act then there's a real chance that an Imperial agent will end up dead. ISB maybe, but still an Imperial agent."

"You will do nothing." Ibram repeated, "Garm Larcus is fated to be killed, there is no point in trying to avoid it."

"And what then? What do we do after we've let Agent Larcus die inquisitor?"

"We continue with your plan Agent Tharr. We turn these two to our side as our part in a deal for not executing them for treason and murder."

"But letting a man die when we can prevent it. That's obscene."

"Obscene only from a certain point of view Agent Tharr." Ibram said, staring deep into her eyes.

"What's happening?" Foran asked as he sat up in bed. He had made a point of being as far from Estran City as possible before the bomb intended to kill Garm Larcus went off and where he was it was now the middle of the night, "Why am I being disturbed?"

"They were arrested. The men we sent to plant-

"Be careful you fool! This line isn't secure. Now explain properly, but watch how you say it."

"Of course comrade. I'm sorry. The two men that were assigned to make the delivery have failed to return. They called in to confirm that they had made the delivery to the correct address but never made it back to the sorting office. We think they were arrested."

"Arrested by whom? The ISB?"

"We don't know. We know that the police don't have them. It must be the ISB."

"Then they know about the delivery?"

"That's just it, no it doesn't look like they do. There's no sign of military activity to deal with it."

Foran smiled.

"Then our delivery men have kept our business confidential." He said, "Try and find out why they were picked up and who by. It could just be a coincidence. But make sure they can't be linked to you. I'd hate to lose another loyal comrade so soon after Jallin. Call me back when you have more." Then Foran broke the link. He was about to try and get to sleep when he instead activated the computer beside his bed and began to look up details about flights away from Estran.

If the ISB was getting close then perhaps it was time to be off planet for a while, he thought to himself.

5.

"Aren't you going to invite me in to say hello to Jennay?" Vay asked Garm as her speeder hovered stationary at the end of his drive.

"I don't think that's very good idea." Garm replied, "You're not her favourite person."

"But I'm very likeable."

Garm sighed.

"Thanks for the ride." He said as he got out of the speeder.

"I'll see you tomorrow then." Vay said.

"No you won't." Garm replied, "Jennay's got her scan at the hospital, I'm going with her."

"There she is now." Vay said, looking towards the house where Jennay had just appeared in the doorway, frowning. Vay smiled and opened the side window so that she could wave to Jennay, but Jennay's expression did not change.

"Bye Vay." Garm said and he began to walk away from the speeder.

"Bye Garm." Vay replied and then she looked back towards Jennay and waved again, "Goodbye Jennay."

She said to no reply.

When he got to the door Garm embraced his wife and gave her a kiss.

"Why did you have to get a ride from her?" Jennay asked.

"Because we were in the field. If she hadn't dropped me here she'd just have had to take me back to the office for me to wait for you to come pick me up. Now were your parents okay with taking Cayla?"

"Of course, they love spending time with their granddaughter."

"Good, because we've got an early start for the scan."

"I know, its me they're scanning remember? Or are you planning on messing about with the scanner when the doctors aren't in the room like when I was expecting Cayla?"

Garm grinned.

"Well you could have let me buy one for myself." He said and then they went inside.

"Is something wrong?"

Gayal looked up from her desk when the agent asked the question. He had just come into the office with some datapads to leave on her desk, not expecting to still find her here.

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Well you're not normally here this late unless there's a major operation going on."

"Just mulling over the day's events." She replied and the agent smiled before leaving the room.

Gayal suddenly reached out for the communicator and activated it, selecting a number she rarely used but still had listed in her directory.

"Ordnance disposal." A voice said at the other end.

"This is Gayal Tharr of Intelligence. I-" then she paused, remembering the way Ibram had looked at her when she questioned the wisdom and morality of his strategy and something deep inside told her that crossing an inquisitor was not a good idea, "I'm sorry." She then said, "I seem to have connected to you by mistake." And she broke the link, "All of us have to make sacrifices." She said to herself softly.

Vay was just about to leave her apartment the next morning when the door comm. chimed.

That's strange, she thought. Her neighbours were mainly much older than she was and of course extremely wealthy to be able to afford to live in such an expensive building, she did her best to keep out of their way and so far they had returned the favour. On those occasions she did happen to meet one of them she could feel their contempt towards her, with many of them believing she was simply here to prey on older men for their money. Therefore for any of them to be at her door was an oddity while anyone else would have had to come past the guard in the lobby who would have called ahead.

"I'm coming." She called out as she approached the door, collecting her holdout blaster first. She had been attacked here once before and without her lightsaber the compact blaster was her only real weapon. When she opened the door her face fell, "How did you get up here?" she said.

"The force has a strong effect on the weak minded." Ibram said, "The guard for example."

"Well I suppose you may as well come in." Vay said, stepping aside and Ibram strode past her.

"So this is how you are spending the allowance provided to you." He said with contempt as he looked around the apartment, "On luxuries. These things will make you soft. Or maybe they already have, that is why you performed so poorly when we sparred."

"Gregor thought it was a good idea." She replied, "If people think I'm his mistress then they'd expect him to treat me like this."

"So you are playing the role of a whore?" Ibram said with a sneer.

"Is that why you came here this morning?" Vay said as she sat down and set down the blaster on a table beside her, "To insult me before work?"

"I am here to bring out your full potential." Ibram said, "And you are unwise to lower your defences." And he reached out his hand towards the blaster. Before Vay could react the weapon flew through the air to his grip and he took aim. Vay rolled aside as a blaster bolt cut into her chair, mere centimetres from where her head had just been.

Ibram fired again as Vay dived behind the sofa and once again her furniture took the brunt of the attack. Two more shots were fired, punching holes through the sofa that convinced Vay that remaining there was not a good idea even though both missed her by a wide margin. She leapt just as another shot was fired and as the bolt tore through the sofa it caught her on her side. Fortunately the bodygloves she habitually wore were designed to absorb the energy of such glancing hits, but she still felt it and she dropped to the floor in a heap.

There was the sound of metal sliding against metal followed by a 'clunk' as Ibram ejected the power pack from the blaster and let it fall to the floor as he looked down at Vay.

"There was still one shot left in that." Vay said as she pulled herself back to her feet, "You could have finished me."

"If I meant you to be dead I would have taken your head with the first shot." Ibram replied, "Your are far too slow."

"So that's why you've trashed my living room?" To get me to move quicker?"

Deception.

Vay caught a brief flash of Ibram's thoughts. Whatever he had come here for it was for more than just a bit of sparring practice that could have been done equally well if not better in a more formal setting.

Ibram stepped forwards towards Vay and held out his hand to help her up. Though she did not believe that he was acting out of any concern for her she took it anyway and as her flesh touched his she tried to see deeper into his mind.

"You would read my thoughts?" Ibram yelled and he dragged her upwards and hurled her, single handed in an arc over his head. She cried out in alarm, unable to resist as she was flung down and crashed through a table made of glass. Though her bodyglove offered protection against the energy blasts of blasters it did nothing against the physical force of her impact with the table nor did it protect against the shards of broken glass, one of which sliced through the material of the bodyglove and into her just below her ribs.

Vay screamed and as Ibram stood back and watched she reached down to where the large shard of glass protruded from her side and carefully pulled it free. Then, with her hand clamped over the wound she looked up at the inquisitor.

"Never try that again." Ibram told her without the slightest hint of the anger that he had just displayed, "What I know is not for you."

"Why are you here?" Vay asked, "Really?"

"Because this is where we must both be." Ibram said, "I have foreseen it." Then he picked up a cushion and ripped the fabric covering from it, "Use this." He said as he tossed it to Vay. Catching the cushion cover in one hand she pressed it against her wound. He looked around and seeing a chair immediately behind him he sat down. As she did so his cloak moved aside enough that Vay saw not only his lightsaber, but also her own dangling beside it.

"Sit." He commanded, pointing at the seat he had shot earlier. Vay looked around and then dragged herself into the chair.

"So what do you want to talk about?" she said, "I'd offer you a drink but as you can see I'm not quite at my best today."

Ibram stared at her without speaking and projecting no thoughts through the force that Vay could read.

"You're not much of a conversationalist you know." Vay said, "That's why I like Garm so much. He's much better to talk to."

Did you sense that?

The voice in Vay's head surprised her with its sudden return.

What? Vay thought to herself.

He's thinking about Garm. He reacted to your mention of him.

This was not normal for the voice. Typically it only made an appearance, metaphorically, to criticise Vay's actions or issue cryptic warnings.

"Something troubles you?" Ibram asked.

The voice was calling out to Vay through the force - that was all she knew about it and it occurred to Vay that perhaps Ibram could also sense it when it spoke.

Don't worry. He can't hear me. We won't let him.

"No." Vay said in answer to Ibram's question, "I just get cranky when I'm in pain."

"Life is pain." Ibram said, "Those strong enough to cope with it are those who prosper in the end."

"You know who really copes well with the unexpected?" Vay asked and after a short pause she added, "Garm."

Good. Whenever you mention Garm his concentration slips a bit.

"You're trying to distract me." Ibram said, "I can tell. But your powers are no match for mine. Not yet."

"Maybe not." Vay said, "But I think you'll find I'm full of surprises." And ignoring her injury she leapt to her feet and reached out towards Ibram, using the force to pull her lightsaber from his belt. Caught unawares Ibram could only watch as the weapon flew to her grip and with a 'snap-hiss' was ignited. Ibram copied her, leaping out of the chair and drawing his weapon and as Vay lunged at him his blade blocked the path of her own.

"Good!" Ibram exclaimed, "Use your anger, it will make you powerful. With great power comes great reward." And then he pushed Vay back.

Narrowly avoiding the remains of the table, Vay reached out her hand again and using the force she hurled a lamp towards Ibram. The inquisitor dodged the crude strike easily only to raise a hand of his own and from it bright blue lightning shot towards Vay. She caught the attack with her lightsaber, holding the blade in the path of the lightning and straining to keep hold of it.

"So where's all this great power old man?" Vay said as she felt the grip of her lightsaber heating up, "Even Garm could take this."

Sure enough Ibram's concentration slipped at the mention of Garm's name and Vay was able to push her lightsaber forwards. This deflected the lightning back towards Ibram and he was forced to cease the attack before the energy enveloped him instead.

Vay lunged again, aiming the tip of her lightsaber for Ibram's chest. But he just smiled as he ducked to one side and brought his lightsaber blade up beneath hers and lifted it upwards. Then with his free hand he lashed out at her, smashing the heel of his palm against the bottom of her jaw and throwing her back again. Vay's lightsaber slipped from her grip, deactivating as soon as she released it and it rolled across the floor. Standing in the middle of the room and looking down at her, Ibram shut off his own weapon.

"You see how much stronger you are when you use your anger?" he said to her.

"Let's see shall we?" Vay replied and she focused all of her anger into a single sudden burst of energy that she used to send Ibram flying back across the room and into the wall at the far side, "Now what's got you so bothered about Garm?" Vay demanded as she got back to her feet and focused on Ibram's mind.

See saw it all.

A ball of fire expanding and Garm landing on the ground, his life force seeping away.

Herself filled with rage at his death.

Vay reached out and called her lightsaber back to her grasp.

"When?" she asked, "When will this happen?"

"It already is." Ibram gasped.

Vay snarled and activated her lightsaber.

No!

Vay was taken by surprise at the sudden outburst from the voice.

You can still save him. But you must leave now.

Vay looked towards the door and Ibram sensed what she was thinking.

"You mustn't!" he called out as she ran to the door, using the force to open it before she got there and he tried to get up in time to stop her, but by the time he reached the doorway she was already in the turbolift heading down towards the parking garage beneath the building.

Two of the other building residents were standing just outside the turbolift door when it opened and Vay barged between them, knocking both to the floor. As Vay ran towards her speeder she could hear them yelling abuse at her as they picked themselves up again. When she reached the speeder Vay got straight in and started up the engine. Then as she began to drive the vehicle out of the garage she looked down at the communication unit set into the dashboard. Reaching out she activated it and selected Garm's home number.

Rather than try and follow Vay, Ibram instead walked back into her apartment and went up to the nearest window. As he looked out into the street below he saw the black shape of Vay's speeder emerge from the garage, causing other vehicles to swerve wildly and horns blared.

Ibram focused his anger on Vay and looked to the future once more. Then he smiled as he saw no change from his initial vision.

6.

"I've got it!" Jennay called out as she ran to the communicator terminal in the bedroom, "Hello?" she then asked as she activated the device.

"Jennay its Vay. Listen this is important I'm on my way over now. Wait for me there."

"No." Jennay replied sternly, "Look, you're not to come here Vay. We're going to the hospital and I'm in no mood for any of your little games today." And she shut off the communicator. Then, before the unit had chance to sound again Jennay set it to withhold all calls and instead divert them to the messaging system.

"Who was it?" Garm shouted from downstairs while he finished his breakfast.

Jennay began to head down the stairs and saw Garm coming out of the kitchen.

"Would you believe it was that Vay?" Jennay asked, "You've got to do something about her Garm."

"I'll talk to her." He said, "Again."

"Good. Now where's my bag?"

"Well I don't have it now do I?"

"Well help me look then, we've got to leave in five minutes."

Vay pushed the speeder as hard as she could. At this time of day the streets were crammed with vehicles containing people on their way to work and even with her force enhanced senses and reactions she was unable to make the best use of the speeder's performance.

Be calm. Do not let your anger control your actions.

The voice was at least back to its usual pattern and as usual it was of no help whatsoever.

She felt a twinge in her side and Vay suddenly remembered the wound. Placing a hand to her side she found that it had started bleeding again, but she knew that she had no time to stop and see to it. Then at last Garm's home came into view ahead of her.

Jennay got into the speeder while Garm put her bag in the trunk. He began to walk around to the passenger door when he suddenly put a hand to his pocket.

"Hang on." He said, "I've left my wallet." And he headed back towards the house.

Vay brought the speeder to a halt and leapt out without bothering to turn off the engine. She spotted Jennay sat in her speeder and then Garm coming out of the house.

"Garm!" she yelled, waving, "Garm wait!"

Garm's face fell as he spotted Vay rushing up the drive.

"Oh kriff." He said, "Just what I need."

"Come on Garm," Jennay said from the speeder, "we have to go." And she started the engine.

Vay was knocked backwards by the explosion and a ringing sound filled her ears. Looking towards the house she saw Jennay's speeder burning and just beyond it she saw Garm lying motionless in the driveway.

"Garm no!" she cried out, dragging herself back to her feet and she began to stagger closer to him. Her injury was more noticeable to her now and it took every bit of her will to get her to where Garm lay. She slumped down beside him and held his head in her hands. He was alive but just barely; his presence in the force was fading fast.

"Garm." She said, tears forming in her eyes.

"What's happening?" a voice called out from behind her and Vay sensed the approach of a single individual, with more gathering further back. The noise of the explosion had obviously attracted the attention of the other local residents.

"He's still alive." Vay said, "Call an ambulance."

"But-" the man began before Vay interrupted him.

"I said call an ambulance." And she looked around, glaring directly at the man, "Now!"

The man hesitated for a moment as Vay looked at him with eyes that were now golden yellow. Then he ran into the house through the door Garm had not had a chance to close.

Tiredness was overwhelming Vay now, a result of her injuries. But she could not bring herself to take her eyes off Garm.

"Garm don't go." Vay said softly and his eyes fluttered open. Looking up at Vay he gasped and uttered a single word.

"Jennay."

The man came rushing back out of the house.

"I called them." He exclaimed, "They're on their way here now." But then he realised that neither Garm nor Vay was moving as they lay together in the driveway.

Behind Neema Gorord the street was sealed off with tape to keep people away from the crime scene. The perimeter was manned by local civilian police but further back men in Imperial uniforms could be seen moving about, searching for evidence.

"So far there has been no official word of what happened here today." Neema said, "But according to witnesses I spoke to earlier this morning there was an explosion now believed to have come from a bomb planted beneath a vehicle. Now we haven't been allowed closer than this yet and so we cannot tell how much damage has been caused. However, it has been suggested that there were three fatalities, including an off-duty Imperial agent who-

The screen suddenly went blank as Foran Fallir switched off the vid player set into the wall and then he leant back in his chair and smiled. Then he activated his communicator and waited for the signal to be answered.

"Hello?" he said, "I've got a ticket booked with you for later today that I'll not be needing any more."

"So is this what you foresaw?" Gayal asked as she approached Ibram, "Is this a part of your grand scheme?"

"I have no grand scheme Agent Tharr." He replied without taking his eyes away from the window, "Like you I am merely a part of the Emperor's grand scheme. A more important part of course."

"So is this what the Emperor planned on then?" Gayal asked and she joined him in looking through the window into the intensive care unit where both Garm Larcus and Vay Udra floated in separate tanks of healing bacta, their eyes closed as the medical droids carried out their work.

"No." Ibram said, "It is not." Then he turned away from the window and towards Gayal, "And what of your own arrangements? Are they complete?"

"Of course they are. Agents Krayl and Nexer are already on a flight to Chandrilla. No one will ever be able to connect us with this. Unless Vay knows."

"She knows only that I foresaw the bomb and tried to keep her away. Beyond that she is as ignorant as everyone else."