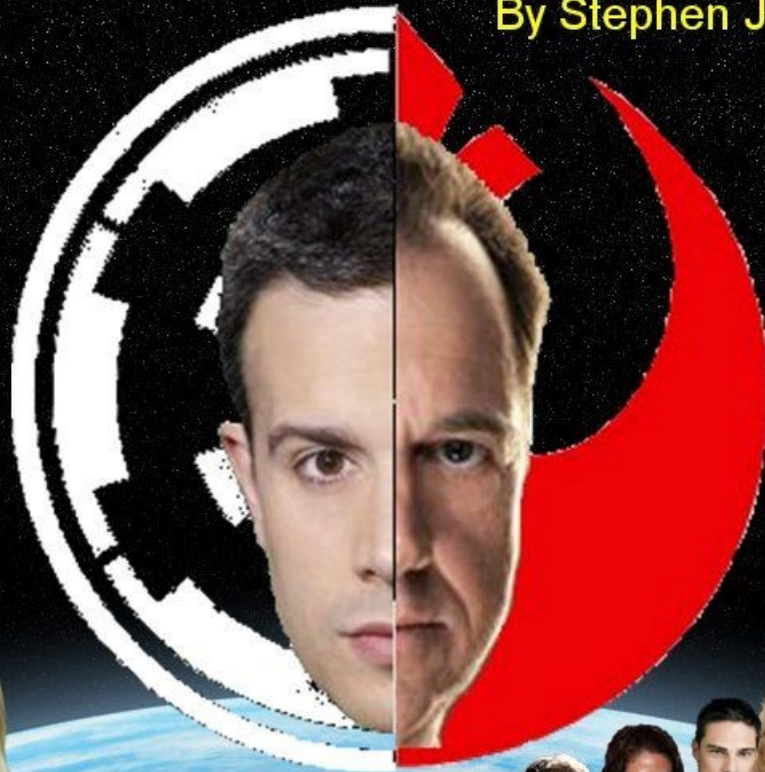


# STAR WARS

## 2-03: Trail of a Traitor

By Stephen J Dutton



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Civil war turns father against son

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

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

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

## **TRAIL OF A TRAITOR**

ALLIANCE OPERATIONS IN THE SECTOR HAVE BEEN COMPROMISED BY AN IMPERIAL  
MOLE. BUT NOW A CHANCE FIND OFFERS THE OPPORTUNITY TO ROOT OUT THE  
SPY...

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

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# 1.

Mace Grayle, captain of the YT-1300 class transport *Silver Hawk* looked at the systems exposed when he removed the access panel and frowned. Though he had access to an extensive collection of tools while conducting repairs here at Alliance sector headquarters, this repair looked like it would also require some replacement parts that would be expensive.

"This is what happens when you let droids fly." He said, "They got her here from Allastra alright, but they ran the engines too hot for too long."

"Is it really that bad?" his engineer, Tobis Dorfus asked as he walked up behind Mace and looked behind the panel also. Then when he saw the damage he simply added, "Oh."

"You know if we hollowed out that R5 unit of yours we could use him as a beer cooler." Mace said and there was a vulgar sounding noise from the astromech droid that was repairing fractures on the *Silver Hawk's* landing gear.

"It's not Harvey's fault." Tobis said as he held a scanner near to a conduit to test its integrity, using the name he had given to his droid, "If we had more help with the regular maintenance then we wouldn't put the drives under such stress whenever we take her out."

Mace looked at Tobis.

"And I can guess who you want me to hire." He said.

"Jaysica does have some ability." Tobis said, "After all, how else could she have been assigned to droid maintenance?"

"She's swapping the skill chips in mouse droid Tobis. That girl is a walking disaster area."

"She has Penny as well." Tobis added referring to the mouse droid owned by the young woman they were discussing, "We could configure her to do all of these checks and Harvey can handle most of what's wrong. Then we'd have far more time for ourselves."

"So you can waste it with your girlfriend?" Mace asked.

"Oh Jaysica's not my girlfriend." Tobis replied quickly.

"Of course not." Mace said.

"And she could help with the supply runs." Tobis added, "You're always saying how much you hate buying all that stuff. This way you could –"

"Okay then."

"- stay with the ship while we both –"

"I said alright." Mace repeated.

Tobis paused and looked at Mace.

"Really?" he asked.

"She gets room and board on the ship." Mace said, "Plus two percent of what we make on the runs."

"Two percent? That's not much."

"I figure she'll cost us more in damage. Besides, if she's as miserable as Kara and you say she'll be glad to be back. Now go and ask her."

The droid maintenance section of the space station was lined with shelves holding parts from various types of droids. Some easily recognisable such as the domed and conical coverings for the heads of astromech units and others mysterious bundles of wires and tubes that only a specialist could name. Some of them for machines that had not been built in centuries. The station that served as the Rebellion's headquarters in the sector was thousands of years old, and there had been some discarded droids here when the rebels moved in. Though no longer functional their parts had been kept just in case.

"Can I help?" a woman's voice asked as Tobis stepped into the room.

Tobis looked around and saw the head of droid maintenance standing there. Lieutenant Asha Lerner was as tall as he was and very attractive.

"Err..." Tobis said, conversing with others not being a strong point.

"Err?" the lieutenant repeated, "Speak up." And she leant closer to him.

"I'm looking for Jaysica." Tobis said just loud enough for her to hear him.

"Oh." Lieutenant Lerner replied, "Her."

Crash!

The sound came from further into the room, beyond the shelves.

"She's here." Lieutenant Lerner said to Tobis with a sigh, "Unfortunately. Feel free to go back there and talk to her. The less work she does the less she can break."

While Lieutenant Lerner remained near the door Tobis then began to walk between the shelves in the direction of the noise. It did not take him long to reach an area that opened out with several workbenches

scattered about. One of the benches had collapsed and a young woman was crouched down on the floor picking up tools and spare parts.

"I'm so sorry." She said, "It was an accident. I—" and then she looked up and saw Tobis, "Oh. Its you. What are you doing here?"

"I, err, well I came to see you."

"Why?"

"Mace wants to offer you a job."

Jaysica's eyes lit up.

"Really? I can leave here?"

"Yes." Tobis replied, "He needs someone who help with —"

"Let's go." Jaysica said and she turned towards another, intact, workbench and picked up her bag and a datapad, "I don't know why I'm bringing this thing." She said, holding up the datapad, "It hasn't worked since Kara gave it to me. I think it was another of her little jokes." Then she handed it to Tobis, "Maybe you can fix it." She said then she began to walk towards the door.

"What's going on?" Lieutenant Lerner asked as Jaysica and Tobis appeared from between the shelves.

"I've been offered another position." Jaysica answered her, "Is it alright if I go?"

A smile spread across Lieutenant Lerner's face.

"Yes." She replied, "It's fine. Just leave." And she opened the door for Jaysica.

On the way back to the docking bay with Jaysica, Tobis studied the datapad that she had given him.

"You say Kara gave this to you?" he asked.

"That's right. When we got back from Allastra rescuing the major. Why?"

Until recently Kara Bilstran had been part of the same rebel field team as Jaysica, the team that had been transported aboard the *Silver Hawk*. But when Major Vorn Larcus III the unit's leader had been captured by the Empire the team had been disbanded and its members reassigned. Even after the rescue of Vorn it had yet to be reformed. Kara was the unit's medic and she had frequently argued with Jaysica. Tobis guessed that she had known full well that the datapad did not work when she gave it to her. What Tobis could not understand was why it wasn't working. It had power and the display activated, but it did not respond to commands via the touch screen.

"Did she say where she got it?" Tobis asked.

"No. I just saw her pull it from her tunic."

"Which one?"

During the recent rescue operation Kara had initially been disguised as a nurse, but had then replaced that with the uniform of an Imperial Intelligence agent.

"The Intelligence one." Jaysica replied, "Why?"

"Jaysica," Tobis said, "I think that this could be important." And he halted and changed direction.

"Tobis? Where are you going?" Jaysica called after him.

"To take this to Lieutenant Pay." He replied.

Few members of the Rebel Alliance in the sector knew that Lieutenant Geran Pay existed and even fewer knew that he was more than just a data analyst. He had been assigned to the sector headquarters when it became apparent that the Empire had been able to infiltrate an agent into the organisation. This agent was believed responsible for exposing the location of an Alliance safeworld and also the proposed defection of a Navy warship. Geran's task was to root out this spy so that Rebel operations could return to normal before the entire sector force was critically damaged.

As Jaysica and Tobis approached the cluster of rooms given over to Geran an armed guard approached them. The man had been sent by Alliance high command with Geran as security. Being from outside the sector it was known that he was not the Imperial spy. At first the man had a hand on the blaster pistol holstered at his waist, but when he recognised Tobis and Jaysica he relaxed and instead reached for his comlink.

"Visitors." He said into the device.

"Who?" a voice that Jaysica and Tobis both recognised as Geran's replied.

"Dorfus and Horbid."

"Let them pass."

The guard shut off his comlink and waved Jaysica and Tobis past without saying a word. Before they could reach the door that led to Geran's work area it slid upwards and the man himself appeared in the open doorway.

"Come on in." he said, smiling.

"Thanks Jaysica said as Tobis let her go in first. Looking at Geran as she went she did not notice the slightly raised doorframe and she tripped on it.

"Whoa there!" Geran said as he caught her. Then he looked at Tobis, "She still having the accidents?" he asked.

"That's not funny!" Jaysica snapped and she punched Geran's arm.

"Hey!" Geran replied, "I could have you shot for that." Then he waved the guard back as the man approached, "Now get inside and tell me why you're here."

When the door shut behind Jaysica and Tobis, Geran sat down beside a computer terminal and span the chair so that he was able to face his guests.

"Well?" he said.

"Oh." Tobis said and he held out the datapad, "We brought you this. We can't make it work."

"I'm not maintenance." Geran said, but he took the datapad anyway and looked at it.

"Kara gave it to me." Jaysica said and Geran's eyes opened wider briefly at the mention of the attractive woman.

"How is she?" he asked, "Has she hit any more officers recently?"

"No," Jaysica replied, "but I think she knew that datapad didn't work when she gave it to me."

"Which brings us back to why you're bringing it to me." Geran said.

"We think Kara got it from the Imperial Intelligence woman." Tobis said and Geran's eyes widened again. He turned his chair around and grabbed a narrow probe from the desk in front of him.

"Yes!" he cried out, "This thing has a voice lock!"

"What does that mean?" Jaysica asked.

"Secure voice locks are expensive." Tobis said, "The Empire only issues them to certain individuals."

"Such as the woman your friend Kara left tied to a hospital bed." Geran said. Then he waved the datapad back at them, "This thing could be the break I've been looking for."

General Syres Kain looked Geran in the eyes.

"You think that this is that important?" he asked.

"I do." Geran answered him, "The datapad was definitely taken from a high ranking intelligence agent."

"Where is it now?"

"Back in my office, under guard. I've pulled the storage drive and have my own equipment working to penetrate its security."

"So where does Major Larcus fit into this?" the general asked.

"We know the major's team are clear." Geran said, "So they're the ideal people to help me with the investigation."

"I thought you brought your own people with you."

"Just a couple of guards and assistants. None of them know this station or its people as well as Major Larcus's team does."

"Well there's a problem there." General Kain said, "Major Larcus's team was disbanded when he was injured."

"You could reinstate it." Geran said and the general let out a snort.

"His team ran off on an unauthorised trip to Allastra. Hardly the sort of thing that inspires confidence. Neither does the fact that one of them has a habit of striking officers."

"One officer," Geran corrected, "even if it was twice. Besides, I was involved in that little trip too. So was Colonel Ergard."

General Kain said nothing. What Geran was saying was true. Almost a dozen rebels had taken it upon themselves to fly to the world of Allastra to rescue their friend and now it seemed that in addition to having successfully rescued a valuable officer they had also returned with the evidence that could unmask the spy that was paralysing Alliance operations by their presence.

"Very well." General Kain said with a sigh, "I'll reactivate the unit and they can assist you. But its still reliant on the major getting the all clear from medical."

"Thank you general. That's all I need."

In an office on another level of the station a rebel logistician in the personnel management department opened the message from General Kain that told him of the reactivation of Vorn Larcus's field unit and instructed him to transfer its former members from their current assignments to the major's command. Rather than make the amendments to their personnel files immediately, the officer activated his desktop communicator.

"Get me Captain Tarl." He said, "I've got news for him."

Major Vorn Larcus III got out of bed and put on robe.

"Hang on!" he called out as the doorbell chimed again. Then he grabbed hold of the walking stick beside the bed and made his way to the door. When he opened the door he saw a familiar figure standing there.

"Hello lieutenant." He said to Geran, "How can I help you?"

"I'm not disturbing you am I?" Geran asked.

"No. I'm still officially on bed rest. I'm not supposed to be doing anything."

"How come you don't just let your droid answer the door?" Geran asked and he glanced around Vorn towards the gold coloured protocol droid sat motionless in a far corner.

"What Jeeves? I turned him off. He kept on wanting to do things that I'm perfectly capable of doing for myself. Like answering the door."

"Can I come in? What I have to say is better not said in a public corridor." Geran said and he looked around him as a rebel he didn't know walked past.

"Go on then." Vorn said and he stepped back from the door.

Geran entered the room and took a seat as Vorn walked back to the bed and sat down on the edge, looking at Geran.

"Had company?" he asked as he noticed a pair of glasses and half empty wine bottle on the table in the centre of the room.

"My daughter was here earlier. Complaining about how Shyla Nerin is working her too hard and asking if my injuries meant if I could retire back to Estran." Vorn said, referring to the local head of Alliance Support Services who his daughter now worked for directly, "Now what do you want?"

"Tobis came to see me earlier." Geran began, "He brought me a datapad that Kara took from the intelligence agent on Allastra."

"Kara?"

"Yes. Apparently when she couldn't get it to work she gave it to Jaysica instead. Tobis got it from her. I think that it may lead us to the spy we know the Empire has inserted into the Alliance and I need your unit to help me find him. The general agrees and he's reactivated your unit."

A smile spread across Vorn's face. His recuperation was boring him and he had been disappointed to find out that his unit had been disbanded in his absence.

"Get going." He told Geran, "I'll find the others and bring them to your office as soon as I can."

Geran nodded and stood up.

"I'll let myself out." He said.

When the door shut behind Geran Vorn leaned back and looked over the far side of his bed.

"He's gone." He said, "I don't think he saw you."

"Hello Kyle." Captain Jarad Tarl said when the door opened.

"Captain Tarl sir." The logistician said, standing up straight.

"Sit down." Jarad told him, "You got a drink stashed in here?"

Kyle smiled and reached beneath his desk and produced a pair of cans of beer. He handed one to Jarad and then opened the other for himself.

"This stuff is awful." Jarad said after he had taken a sip. Then he took another before adding, "So what did you want to see me about mister Varner?"

"I've had the general down here." Kyle replied, "He's reactivated Major Larcus's unit."

"You're kidding."

"No sir. Look, here's the order." And Kyle pointed to the message sent to him by General Kain, "If he's taking an interest in personnel assignments then—"

"Don't worry Kyle." Jarad interrupted, "The general isn't interested in you or our little arrangement. I know what Lieutenant pay is doing and I know why he wants Larcus's people. Look at it this way, neither of us likes Larcus and now he's back working with those two fools again." Then he drained the rest of the can of beer before throwing the empty can into a nearby bin, "But you may want to get rid of that can before someone in authority finds out you're drinking in here." And he turned around and left.

## 2.

"I'm really sorry." Jaysica said as she scrubbed the deck of the docking bay beneath the *Silver Hawk*, "It was an accident. Anyway, who leaves a can of paint lying around like that?"

"She does have a point." Tobis said to Mace quietly as the pair watched Jaysica down on all fours furiously scrubbing at the large green stain on the deck.

"I don't care." Mace said, "She was here two minutes. She gave me hug to thank me for something that was your idea and kicked over a bucket of paint. Now I owe that bloody Inra fifty credits."

"Why?" Tobis asked. Inra Vayne was the captain of the *Beauty Queen*, another light freighter in rebel service and she and Mace did not get on. It was highly unusual for him to associate with her.

"Because I had faith in her." Mace said. This sounded even more unusual.

"Really?" Tobis asked.

"No." Mace admitted after a brief pause, "Inra was winding me up about our maintenance trouble and I said we were getting Jaysica and Penny back which would sort everything out just fine. Then she bet that Jaysica would screw up in less than thirty minutes and I didn't want to give her the satisfaction of refusing to take up the bet."

"Hello there." A man's voice said from behind Mace and Tobis, causing the two men to turn around. There they saw a tall man with a shaven head wearing overalls. This was Sen Verid, Inra's engineer, "How are things going?" he asked.

"Your boss send you to check up on us?" Mace asked.

"Just interested, that's all." Sen said, "Is that Jaysica scrubbing the floor there?"

"You know it is." Mace said.

"Pretty stupid that." Sen said with a smile, "Kicking over a can of paint like that."

"What colour is that?" Tobis said suddenly, pointing to several spots of bright green paint on Sen's clothing.

"She cheated!" Mace yelled, "Inra had you put that can there."

"Yeah well maybe she did." Sen said as he ran his hand over his shaven head, "But neither of us kicked it over. So you owe my captain fifty credits."

Furious, Mace leapt to his feet. He picked up an empty ration packet and hurled it towards Sen. The engineer flinched as it passed by him.

"You tell that bitch she'll get nothing from me!" he shouted. Then he took a step towards Sen before Tobis got up and held him back. Still smiling, Sen turned around and walked back towards the *Beauty Queen*.

"Fifty credits." Mace said to Tobis, "Your girlfriend's cost me fifty already."

"She's not my girlfriend." Tobis said as he released his grip on Mace.

"There! All done." Jaysica said suddenly and she stood up, wiping her hands together. Then there was a 'squelch' as she put her foot in the near-empty can and splashed green-coloured liquid around her.

"Was it fifty no matter how many accidents there were?" Tobis asked.

"No. Fifty for each one." Mace replied with a sigh.

"I'm sorry captain." Tobis said.

"You will be." Mace replied, "I'm taking it out of your pay."

Tobis thought about protesting, but he didn't want to make Mace more annoyed than he already was and risk him firing Jaysica. The silence between the engineer and his captain was broken by the sound of someone else approaching them.

"Hello Captain, Tobis." Tharun Verser said.

The former mercenary was wearing the combat fatigues he favoured as well as the armoured vest he normally reserved for combat operations. He carried a large kit bag over one shoulder while his rifle was slung over the other.

"Mace is good enough." Mace replied and he held out his hand towards the newcomer, "You don't work for me any more."

"Then you haven't heard?" Tharun asked, looking from Mace to Tobis and back again.

"No." Mace replied, "What is it?"

"We're back." Tharun said, a massive grin on his face, "I got a call from the major himself. His unit has been reactivated and we're billeted to the *Silver Hawk* again."

Tobis's face lit up.

"You're kidding." Mace said.

"Would I be here with all my worldly belongings if I was?" Tharun asked rhetorically and he patted his bag. Then he looked towards Jaysica and called out to her as she continued trying to pull the bucket from her foot, "That includes you too little lady." He said.

"What does?" she asked. Unfortunately, looking up at Tharun caused her to lose her balance and she fell to the deck face first with a high-pitched squeal. Tobis rushed to help her up.

"That's another fifty captain!" Sen yelled from beside the *Beauty Queen*.

"Yeah?" Mace yelled back, "Well I just found out your boss owes me five hundred!"

"Well just give me a few minutes to stash my gear and then what say you we all head off to the computer geek's office?" Tharun said to Mace.

"Geran?" Mace replied with a puzzled look on his face.

"The very same. The major said that it was him that requested the general reactivate us."

There was a loud 'clang' as Jaysica took a step towards Mace and Tharun, shaking Tobis's grip away from her arm.

"What's happening?" she asked.

"You two go get your droids." Mace said, "I don't know of your boyfriend told you, but we're back in business."

"Do I have time to get this off my foot?" she asked, lifting the foot with the paint can wedged on it.

"No." Mace replied.

Vorn, Kara and Jeeves were already in Geran Pay's office with the counter intelligence agent when Mace arrived with the rest of the team.

"Major." He said, "Good to see you up and about again."

"Thanks." Vorn answered, "Do you hear something banging?"

"That's just Jaysica major." Tharun said, "She's right behind us."

It was at that moment Jaysica appeared, the paint can still wedged on her foot.

"It's not my fault!" Jaysica protested as she sat down on a bench just inside the door of Geran's office, "I didn't put the can there."

"But you still put your foot right in it, didn't you?" Kara said with a smile.

"Harvey come help me with this." Jaysica said and she lifted her foot and the paint can up off the floor.

Tobis's astromech droid rolled towards Jaysica and a narrow door on the droid's cylindrical body opened up to reveal a compact circular saw. The tiny blade began to buzz as it rotated rapidly and it approached the paint can that Jaysica held out. As the saw began to cut through the metal can sparks began to fly.

"Excuse me Mistress Horbid," Jeeves said, "but I don't think that's an awfully good idea. Paint can be somewhat flammable and there are-" Before the golden droid could finish his warning one of the sparks touched the green stain on Jaysica's trouser leg and there was a flash as it caught fire. Simultaneously, both Harvey and Jaysica let out loud shrieks.

"I'm on fire!" Jaysica yelled as she stared in horror at the burning fabric.

A second door opened in Harvey's body and a nozzle appeared. Jaysica let out another shriek as a blast of carbon dioxide from the nozzle enveloped her. When the cloud cleared she was coated in the white residue of dry ice.

Having heard the commotion from outside, Geran's two guards burst into the office with their blasters drawn.

"It's alright." Geran said, "We're all safe now. I hope."

"Are you alright?" Vorn said to the clearly dazed Jaysica. Then he looked at Kara and tilted his head in Jaysica's direction, indicating that he wanted her to check on the young woman.

"Are you hurt sweetie?" Kara said, leaning close to Jaysica.

"What?" she replied, staring back at Kara. Lumps of frozen carbon dioxide were now dropping from her onto the floor.

"She's fine." Kara said and she returned to stand beside Vorn.

"If we're all done," Geran said, "perhaps we can get on with what we came here to do."

"What is that exactly?" Tharun asked, "No one's told me yet."

"This." Geran answered him and he held up the datapad that Jaysica and Tobis had brought to him. Or at least what was left of it, the handheld device had been broken open and some of its internal components removed. "Jaysica and Tobis have provided me with a datapad taken from a senior member of Imperial Intelligence." Geran went on.

"Hey!" Kara interrupted, "I took that from the bitch."

"Yes and you should have given it to me right away." Geran replied.

"Busted." Tharun said and Kara frowned at him.

"As I was saying," Geran said loudly, "this was taken from a senior member of Imperial Intelligence and it is likely that the person it was taken from knows the identity of the spy that they have been able to place in the Alliance, most likely on this very space station."

"So why smash it?" Tharun asked.

"Imperial Intelligence secures the datapads given to senior personnel with voice locks." Geran told him, "So I've removed the memory drive so I can try and access the data directly."

"Have you been able to?" Vorn asked him.



Geran nodded.

"I have indeed." He said, "It took some time to break through the internal security features, but I've been able to take an image of its data storage areas and I've run them through a pattern recognition program to try and identify the spy."

"Who are we looking for?" Mace asked.

"I don't know." Geran said.

"But I thought you said you'd taken an image of the drive?" Tobis said.

"Yes, but the name of the spy wasn't there." Geran said.

"Then why bring us here?" Vorn asked.

"Because even though the agent's identity wasn't explicitly revealed, there are clues on it as to who they are. Specifically, several pieces of intelligence that were gathered. Look." Geran walked to his desk and tapped on his computer keyboard briefly. Then, in the air in the centre of the room a hologram appeared. The projection was only two-dimensional and it consisted of numerous small rectangular images.

"These were all taken on this station," Geran said, "but the angles don't match any of our security cameras, plus some of them are in places where there are no cameras for security reasons. The only remaining option is that the spy took them."

The assembled rebels looked at the images floating in the air in front of them.

"The resolution changes." Tobis said, "The being that took these images is using different recording devices."

"Yes, I noticed that too." Geran said.

"Isn't that odd?" Mace asked, "I mean wouldn't having lots of cameras attract attention around here?"

Clang!

The noise came from near the door and everyone looked around to see that Jaysica had recovered her senses enough to have ripped the paint can away from her foot.

"This boot is ruined." She said looking at the bright green boot on her foot. Then she looked up at the others, "Those weren't taken with cameras by the way." She said pointing to the images in the hologram, "They're taken from droid memories."

The rebels all looked at her in stunned silence.

Limping slightly, Jaysica got up and walked up to the hologram.

"See here," she said, pointing at one of the images, "at first glance it looks like there's a camera in a bag or something on the floor, but it's actually a mouse droid."

"So it's a modified one like Penny?" Vorn asked and he looked down at Jaysica's mouse droid. To assist with infiltration of Imperial facilities Jaysica had fitted her droid with a holographic recorder and internal comlink to transmit the data wirelessly.

"Oh no," Jaysica said, "this is data taken directly from the droid's memory of what its seen."

"This one can't have been taken by a mouse droid." Tobis said and he indicated another of the images. This one showed a group of senior Rebel officers, including General Kain and Rear Admiral Aphanar holding a discussion. The angle was at approximately eye level with most of the officers rather than looking up from the floor.

"No." Jaysica agreed, "I'd say it was taken by a protocol droid. Or possibly a serving droid."

"Espionage droids?" Mace exclaimed, "How could so many have been infiltrated?"

"No." Geran said as he tapped at his keyboard again, "I see what your friend is saying. These are just the images that droids have placed in their own memories after having witnessed the events shown. Someone's downloaded them and transmitted them to Imperial Intelligence."

"Then its someone in droid servicing." Tharun said, "That narrows it down."

"Not necessarily." Tobis said, "These images aren't store like this for very long. If they were then the droid's memory would fill up in weeks. Whoever extracted the images had to have access to the droids within a couple of hours."

"And since droids work shifts longer than most organics," Vorn said, "that would limit what could be recovered if the spy just waited for them to return to maintenance section."

### 3.

Lieutenant Asha Lerner was engrossed in the inner workings of a labour droid when the door slid open. She glanced up at the open doorway and was surprised to see Jaysica enter the room.

"What are you doing back here?" Asha asked, standing up straight and setting down the tool she had been using to probe the droid laid out in front of her.

"Oh I think I left something here." Jaysica replied, "Is it alright if I go and look for it?"

Asha sighed. She had not long since cleaned up the mess that Jaysica had left behind her.

"Alright then." She said, "But please try not to break anything."

Jaysica smiled and then headed between the shelves stuffed with spare parts towards her former workstation.

Once there, Jaysica set down her bag on the bench and looked over her shoulder to make sure that Asha wasn't watching her. Then satisfied that she was not being observed she opened her bag and removed Penny from it. Next to the workbench was a row of inactive mouse droids that were waiting to be fitted with skill packs that would tell them what tasks they were to carry out during their duty shift. Jaysica took the first of these droids and then put Penny in its place. She put the other droid in her bag and sealed it up.

"Found what you are looking for yet?" Asha called out from her own workstation.

"No." Jaysica replied as she picked up the bag and put it over her shoulder, "I don't think its here after all."

Then she returned to where Asha was still working on the labour droid.

"Then if you don't mind, I'm very busy and the longer you're here the more likely it is that you'll break something so get out."

Jaysica frowned.

"There's no need to be like that." Jaysica said and she turned around to face the door. As she did her backpack snagged on a nearby set of shelves. They wobbled as the bag was pulled away from it and parts placed near the front fell to the floor with a clatter.

"Out!" Asha yelled.

As quickly as she could, Jaysica left the workshop and Asha shut the door behind her. Standing alone in the corridor Jaysica pulled her comlink from her pocket and activated it.

"Its done." She said softly, "Penny's in the rotation."

"Good." Geran responded, "Now get back here and we'll see what happens to her."

The office door opened suddenly. Kyle had been leaning back and relaxing with his feet up on the edge of his desk and he narrowly avoided falling to the floor as he quickly tried to appear as if he was hard at work.

"Mister Varner." Vorn said as he entered the tiny room and stared down at Kyle.

"What do you want?" Kyle asked.

"That's what do you want *sir*." Tharun said as he followed Vorn into the office and Kyle noticed that the big man had his hand placed on top of his sidearm.

"Well *sir*," Kyle said, "whatever you're after I can't help you. There aren't any other field agents available. You'll just have to stick with the one's you've got."

"I'm not after people." Vorn said as he put his hands on Kyle's desk and leant towards him, "The ones I have are more than good enough." Then he paused to enjoy the scowl on Kyle's face. He was well aware that Kyle Varner had assigned Jaysica and Kara to his team because he felt them to be incompetent. Then he went on, "I want you to copy the personnel files, specifically those relating to duty assignments, onto a portable drive for us. We'll take it with us."

"And why should I do that?" Kyle asked.

"Because if you don't give it to us then General Kain will have to come down here himself and get it and he is not as forgiving as we are." Tharun said and he released the cover of his holster.

"I don't have one." Kyle said with a smirk.

Vorn also smiled as he reached inside his jacket and pulled out a compact computer drive that was marked with the badge of the Alliance and labelled as being certified as free from malicious data. Kyle's expression changed to a scowl once more as he took the drive and plugged it into his computer. He tapped at the keyboard and leant back again.

"Shouldn't take long." He said, "Unless there's a problem."

"We'll wait." Vorn said, "no matter how long it takes."

Kyle leant forwards again.

"I'll just see what I can do to speed up the process." He said, "I wouldn't want to keep an important officer waiting."

In moments the data transfer was complete and Kyle detached the drive from his computer before handing it back to Vorn.

"There you are. Now will there be anything else *sir*?"

"No." Vorn said as he put the drive in his jacket, "We're done here."

Vorn then strode from the office.

"Nice to be working with you." Tharun said before he followed him.

The door slid shut behind the former mercenary and Kyle went back to his computer, not to work but instead to access the messaging system. He opened up a new message form and addressed it to Jarad Tarl.

'They are looking at personnel assignments.' He typed before he hit send.

"Here you go." Vorn said as he tossed the drive to Jaysica. Then as she bent down to pick up the drive she failed to catch he looked at Geran who was pouring himself a drink, "So how is the plan going?" he asked.

"So far nothing's happened." Geran replied as he sipped at his drink, then finding it too hot he blew on it,

"Penny hasn't been activated yet, so she's not sending any pictures to us."

"Ooh this is interesting." Jaysica said suddenly.

"You've found something already?" exclaimed Mace, "Geran I though you said that the duty logs would just help us confirm where the spy had worked, not actually let us catch them."

"So who's file are you looking at?" Tharun asked Jaysica.

"Kara's." Jaysica replied as her smile grew bigger, "This is great."

"What?" Kara said, "I'm not a spy."

"I know," Jaysica said.

"Then what are you looking at?" Geran asked.

"Her intelligence score." Jaysica answered, "Mine's higher."

"No way!" Kara said and she rushed to look at the computer display. There she saw that Jaysica had accessed both Kara's and her own personnel files and they indicated that Jaysica's recorded intelligence was higher than Kara's.

"Boss, she's faking data!" Kara protested, "Tell her to put it back the way it was!"

Mace sat at another terminal and looked at the files himself.

"No." he said, "These are genuine."

"See." Jaysica said, looking up at Kara, "All the times you've called me stupid and I'm smarter than you."

"If you're quite finished," Geran said, "we are here for more than looking up who's smarter than who. Besides, I'm smarter than any of you."

"We'll have to take your word for that," Mace said, "after all your file is fake."

-STARTUP-

-DEPLOY LEVEL FOUR-

The simple command placed in Penny's active memory caused the tiny droid to dash across the floor away towards the door. A skill pack had been fitted that would allow the droid to carry out the tasks that awaited it at its destination. That Penny was not one of the regular mouse droids assigned to work on the Alliance space station had not been spotted when the skill pack and instructions were loaded, after all this series of droids all looked pretty much the same.

It was just after Penny left the droid maintenance section that another command, one embedded deeper in the droid's memory was activated.

-ENGAGE HOLOCAM-

-ENGAGE DATALINK-

-BEGIN IMAGE TRANSMISSION-

Tharun had returned to the *Silver Hawk* to get some sleep while the others remained in Geran's office to await a signal from penny. He had not bothered unpacking his belongings yet, instead he had just dumped his kit bag on the floor of the cabin he was once again sharing with Vorn aboard the *Silver Hawk*. He tossed his outer clothing onto the bag before climbing the ladder leading to his bunk and getting into bed. He had just closed his eyes when there was a tapping at the door.

"What?" he yelled, annoyed at being interrupted.

"Master Verser sir," the high-pitched voice of Jeeves called out, "Lieutenant Pay has just signalled us that Penny has begun transmitting. You are needed immediately."

"Oh just great." Tharun said as he climbed back down from his bunk to get dressed again, "Go tell them I'm on my way." He called out to the protocol droid standing outside the cabin.

Tharun headed straight for Geran's office, but unlike the last time he had gone there he went equipped for battle. If Jaysica's droid was about to reveal the identity of the spy to the rebel investigators then there was a high probability that they would have to be taken by force.

As it happened, when Tharun reached his destination he found his fellow team members still just sitting around waiting while the image being transmitted to them by Penny floated above the holographic projector. "What's going on?" Tharun demanded, "Shouldn't you all be getting ready to arrest the spy?" "Penny hasn't identified them yet." Jaysica said, yawning, "She's still just calibrating the gravity regulators in the main docking bay." "So why drag me out of bed?" "Because when she does find out what's going on we want to be ready to go straight away." Vorn said. "Can you play that bit again?" Mace suddenly said while he stared at the floating image, "About two minutes back." "What is it?" Geran said, "I didn't see anything suspicious." "Neither did I." Mace said, "I just want to see that bit again." Harvey caused a second floating image, smaller than the main one to appear beside the primary one. This also displayed the footage from penny's concealed camera, but this one showing the footage that had been shown a few minutes earlier. Central to the image was a light freighter in the docking bay, quite clearly Captain Inra Vayne's *Beauty Queen*. "What are we looking at?" Kara asked. "There." Mace said, pointing at the image where Sen was carrying out maintenance. As the rebels watched they saw him pull a piece of chewing gum from his mouth and use it to hold a component in place. "That's brilliant." Mace said, "Inra's always going on about how great her ship is and now we know it's held together by chewing gum." Harvey suddenly let out a shrill squealing. "What is it?" Tobis said and his astromech droid let out a series of chirps. "It would appear that Penny is leaving the docking bay Master Dorfus." Jeeves translated. "So what?" Tharun asked, "Perhaps she's finished what she was doing there." "Oh no sir." Jeeves replied, "It would appear that Penny is responding to an errant command in her skill pack." "The spy's got her!" Jaysica cried out and she jumped up to head for the door. "No." Vorn said, grabbing hold of her. Then he looked around at the others, "Mace, take Kara and Tharun and go after her. We'll stay here and keep you up to date. Hold back until we've identified who's calling Penny to them." "I expected you to go with them." Geran said quietly to Vorn after the others had left the room. "As much as I hate to admit it," Vorn said, "I'm not up to rushing around anywhere just yet."

## 4.

Given the time, the corridors of the space station that served as the sector headquarters of the Alliance were quiet and Mace's group was able to move quickly through them. After leaving Geran's office they headed directly for the nearest turbolift cluster to take them to the docking bay level. Then they allowed the others to direct them towards Penny.

Like most mouse droids, Penny would often emit soft bleeps regardless of whether they were trying to communicate or not. Therefore, when they drew close they were able to follow Penny by these sounds without giving away their own position.

Abruptly the bleeps that were echoing down the station's empty corridors ceased and there was only silence. Mace looked at Kara and Tharun.

"That can't be good." He said. He was just about to reach for his comlink to report in when it chimed anyway, "Go on." Mace said as he activated the device.

"We've just lost the feed from Penny." Vorn transmitted, "How far away are you?"

"Just round the corner." Mace replied, "We can't hear her either."

"Move in." Vorn ordered.

Mace returned the comlink to his belt and drew the heavy blaster pistol from his shoulder holster. Likewise Kara drew her own weapon from her thigh and Tharun braced his rifle in his shoulder. Then the three rebels picked up their pace and moved swiftly around the corner into the corridor where Penny was. Or rather where she was supposed to be.

The corridor was completely deserted. It stretched out ahead of the trio towards a wide blast door at the far end. A door that was closed.

"She can't have gone through there." Kara said, "We'd have heard the door shut after her."

"There must be another exit then." Tharun suggested.

Mace nodded.

"Move slowly," he ordered, "check both sides for a hatchway at deck level."

Moving together the rebels advanced cautiously down the corridor, still clutching their blasters. Despite the age of the space station, the rebels kept its corridors clean so there was no layer of dust for Penny to leave tracks in as she rolled through it. Without any such telltale trail to follow the rebels could only hope that whatever hatchway had opened for her would stand out from the walls around it. But by the time they had reached the blast door at the far end of the corridor they still had not found it.

The holographic projector in Geran's office showed a schematic of the area where Penny had disappeared.

"Nothing." Geran said, "There is no opening in the walls at all along that corridor."

"Could the map have been altered?" Tharun asked.

"No." Vorn replied, "It was created by the rebels who first surveyed the station about fifteen years ago. There have been too many copies made since then for someone to get away with altering one. The discrepancy would be noticed pretty rapidly."

"But it is wrong." Mace said, "Which raises the question is it a mistake or was something left off deliberately?"

"There's only one member of the survey team still here." Geran said, "Colonel Harris Ergard."

Vorn snorted, then Tobis spoke up.

"He can't be the man we're after." He said, "The colonel spends most of his time off station searching for new base sites."

"That would give him the opportunity to contact the Empire without being observed." Geran commented.

"Yes but he couldn't collect the data could he?" Mace said.

"No." Geran admitted, "But this may work for us."

"How?" Kara asked.

"Well we can ask him about the survey without worrying about him being the spy." Geran replied.

"What about Penny?" Jaysica interrupted suddenly, "Shouldn't we be out looking for her?"

"She'll be fine." Tobis said, "Droids aren't disappearing from the inventory so the spy must be planning on returning her before she's missed by droid maintenance."

"This is going back a fair bit." Colonel Ergard said as he leant over the desk that had a hard copy of the station schematic laid out on it. There were several large sheets of flimsiplast that had the schematics printed on them and he shuffled through them, "Why the sudden interest now after all these years?"

"We think that there's a hidden exit from this corridor." Vorn said.

"Well all I can tell you is that there were fourteen of us who did the original survey of this place, which is not enough to check every rivet and bolt. Remember that construction of this space station took place about four

thousand years ago. From what we know the republic stopped and started work several times as other issues arose and by the time it was built nav beacons like this were obsolete and it was never brought into the network. We've got no idea how many changes were made to the specs during construction. The truth is that there are areas that we haven't been yet because we never figured out how to get to them."

"So you're saying that there could be a doorway in that corridor that we don't know about?" Mace asked.

"Easily. It's fairly remote. I can't see why anyone would go there unless they were lost. What were you doing down there anyway?"

Before anyone could reply Harvey let out a whistle. While the rebels had been focusing on the station schematics he and Jeeves had been watching for any signals from Penny.

"Penny has begun transmitting again." Jeeves exclaimed excitedly as he translated for the astromech droid.

"Where?" Jaysica called out as she rushed to see the images now being transmitted by her mouse droid.

Harvey whistled again.

"It would appear that Penny is heading back towards the docking bay from the corridor in which she was last believed to be in." Jeeves said.

"I'm going to get her." Jaysica said.

"No." Vorn ordered and Jaysica looked at him in disbelief.

"He's right." Geran added, "We need to see what she does now just in case she's been tampered with. If you go and get her now you give our operation away."

"What operation?" Colonel Ergard demanded, "I outrank all of you here and I want to know what's going on."

Vorn looked at Geran and the counter intelligence agent nodded at him.

"You know about an Imperial spy having infiltrated the station?" Vorn asked.

"Yes." Colonel Ergard replied, "The general filled me in not long after our safeworld got hit."

"Well we think that they're using our own droids to gather data." Vorn went on, "So we inserted one of our own into the regular rotation to try and find out who's doing it. She disappeared in the corridor we've been asking you about."

There were two slight 'snaps' as both Jaysica and Tharun bent the chemical light sticks they carried to break the internal barrier keeping the reactive chemical apart. Then they shook the tiny plastic rods to produce a soft glow. Jaysica tossed her light stick near to her feet, while Tharun hurled his down the empty corridor.

"Good." Vorn said, "Now at least we can see properly."

Beside him Geran held up his datapad.

"This is the last image that Penny sent before we lost her transmission." He said, "So it's a fair bet that the hidden exit is near to the point where this was taken." Then he began to advance down the corridor, his gaze repeatedly moving from the datapad to the corridor in front of him and then back again. Behind him the other rebels advanced in silence, all of them with their weapons at the ready. If the spy had concealed themselves in this corridor then there was no telling how they would react.

Vorn also held another device in his free hand. His dalabar surveillance detector was designed to scan for concealed sensors, both audio and visual and Vorn hoped that it would give them advance warning if the spy had set up a security system. Of course, the device was commercially available which meant that Imperial Intelligence was well aware of its capabilities. If they had supplied their agent with surveillance equipment then it would likely be screened against detection.

"Here." Geran said suddenly and he came to a halt and crouched down to try and get a view from as close to the angle that Penny would have, "Yes, this is definitely it. Penny was taken from about here."

"I'm not reading any surveillance." Vorn said.

"Good." Geran replied, "Then lets get looking."

Colonel Ergard unrolled the flimsy of the corridor.

"I think there's a power conduit running vertically just behind this wall here." He said, looking at one of the walls.

"So the door's not there then." Kara said.

"Actually that would make it a good place to start looking." Tobis responded, "Whatever systems the spy is using are going to need power from somewhere."

"Yes," Jaysica added, "I was just thinking that too. You'd have to be less intelligent than me to think otherwise. Oh wait, you are."

"Boss, I swear I'm going to hit her." Kara said, turning towards Vorn.

"Just keep quiet the pair of you." Vorn said, then he looked at Tobis, "Get searching." He added.

Tobis opened up the toolbox he had brought with him and removed a small box with a lead attached to it.

Looking at the front of the box he then passed the end of the lead over the wall where the colonel had indicated. On the front of the box where Tobis looked was a display that consisted of a simple bar graph and as he moved the very end of the lead the bar moved up and down.

"Its here." He said when he had found the location on the wall that made his scanner register the highest.

Putting the scanner away, Tobis then produced a plasma welder and some darkened goggles.

"Look away everyone." He warned before he began to cut a hole in the wall. The rebels all averted their gaze from the blinding light of the plasma welder as it melted through the ancient metal wall. The crackling sound of the welder ceased and Tobis leapt backwards as a rectangular shaped sheet of metal crashed to the deck at his feet. The other rebels flinched at the sudden sound before they turned around to see what had been revealed.

Just as Colonel Ergard had said, a power conduit could be seen running from the deck above down to the one below. More importantly a junction could be seen that led off along the corridor and it was obvious that the parts used to build this spur were not of the same style as those used for the four thousand year old conduit itself.

"Looks like we go this way." Mace said and he sidestepped along the corridor looking the wall up and down. "Wait a moment," Vorn said as he looked into the hole, "it looks like there's quite a lot of room back here." "Enough room for a person you mean?" Kara asked. "If they're small and thin enough, yes."

"Excuse me master Larcus," Jeeves said, "but I hope you don't expect me to crawl through that gap. I'm programmed for etiquette not infiltration."

"Don't worry Jeeves," Kara said, "I doubt he's thinking about you." And she looked at Jaysica. "What? Me?" Jaysica said as she realised that everyone was looking at her, "Why is it always me?" "Because you're the one that has to stand on a step to headbutt an ewok." Kara said and she smirked. "Okay, okay." Jaysica said as she removed her backpack and jacket, "Anything's better than swapping mouse droid skill packs for a living but I've got a bad feeling about this."

"The power line looks insulated." Tobis told Jaysica as he and Tharun helped her through the hole, "But be careful not to touch it just in case." "I will be." Jaysica replied nervously then she began to make her way along behind the wall, sidestepping while keeping her back against the other side of the bulkheads.

In the corridor, the other rebels waited for Jaysica to tell them where the power line led. But after more than a minute of waiting there was just silence.

"Jaysica where are you?" Vorn shouted into the hole. "I'm fine." Jaysica replied. "That wasn't what you asked was it?" Mace said to Vorn. "No it wasn't." Vorn replied then he shouted into the hole again, "Jaysica where are you stuck?" Kara put her head in her hands. "How did you know?" Jaysica asked. "Because we've known you more than thirty seconds." Tharun shouted back. "It's not my fault." Jaysica called out, "It's really dark in here and I'm snagged on something on the wall behind me." "Oh great." Vorn said then he called out, "Bang on the wall Jaysica." There was a dull thumping from behind the wall then Jaysica called out again. "Hang on, I think I can reach it." She said. Suddenly there was a 'click' and part of the wall slid backwards. "The stupid klutz actually did it." Kara said, shaking her head. "She's smarter than you." Tobis muttered. "What was that?" Kara asked. "Leave it." Vorn said sternly before adding, "Lead the way sergeant."

Tharun activated his glow rod, brought his rifle up to his shoulder and stepped through the gap into the passageway beyond. Close behind, Mace and Colonel Ergard and then the rest of the group followed him. "A little help?" Jaysica said as she squirmed and tried to reach the lever that she was caught up on, "Guys? I'm still stuck here."

It was not until Tobis came through at the rear of the group that he was able assist Jaysica in getting free. "About time." She said before following the other rebels along the passageway. "So you had no idea this place was here then?" Mace said to Colonel Ergard. "Not a clue." The colonel replied as he gazed around the passageway. "Of course," Geran interrupted, "it makes you wonder how many more places like this there are scattered around the station."

"One is too many for my liking." Tharun said as he continued to lead the way. Then he suddenly came to a stop and held up his hand for the other rebels to do likewise. "What is it?" Mace whispered. "The passageway opens up ahead." Tharun replied quietly, "This could be it." "Major," Colonel Ergard said, looking briefly over his shoulder, "if you don't mind I'll take command for this bit."

"That's fine." Vorn replied, nodding, "I'm not exactly up to it myself."

"Okay then." Colonel Ergard said, "Sergeant Verser you go first, Captain Grayle and I will follow you then Tobis can bring up the rear."

"What about the rest of us?" Kara asked.

"Remain here until we call you in. You're our medic and everyone else has only light weaponry. Just stop anyone that tries to get past us."

"Okay then." Kara said, disappointed that she was being left behind. As she spoke Tobis squeezed past the other rebels until he was immediately behind Mace and Colonel Ergard.

"When you're ready sergeant." The colonel said as the other three members of the assault group braced themselves, blasters and glow rods gripped firmly.

Tharun held out a hand with three fingers extended. Then he retracted one, then another. Finally he brought the hand back under his blaster rifle and ran towards the end of the passage.

As soon as he burst into the chamber at the end Tharun swept his weapon around, twisting his body so that the light cast by the glow rod tucked into his webbing followed his gaze. He side stepped away from the end of the passage to let the next three rebels through, each one of them moving in a slightly different direction so that they covered as much of the room as possible.

"Clear." Tharun called out.

"Clear." Mace said.

"Clear." Colonel Ergard added and finally Tobis spoke up.

"Clear." He said, repeating what the others had said.

"How about a bit more light in here sergeant?" Colonel Ergard said and Tharun pulled another of his chemical light sticks from his webbing and activated it, "You can come on in now." The colonel added as the room was illuminated.

"Wow." Tobis said as looked around the newly lit room, "Look at all this stuff."

The walls of the chamber that had remained hidden from the Alliance for so long were lined with modern looking tools, all suitable for use with droids while a workbench was located in the centre of the room.

"Where did all of this come from?" Jaysica asked when she saw the equipment. Then a particular tool caught her attention, "Hang on." She said, "I've seen that before."

"How do you know?" Geran asked.

"Because I broke it." She replied, "It was sent to see if it could be repaired."

"Ask a stupid question." Kara commented as she returned her blaster to her holster.

"I wouldn't be surprised if all this equipment had been damaged at some point." Vorn said, "Then logged in as being beyond repair by someone who instead brought it here and fixed it."

"Hang on." Tobis said suddenly, "What's that?" and he pointed his glow rod towards an alcove that was barely lit by the chemical lamp. In it stood a large unmoving figure.

"It's a droid silly." Jaysica said.

"It's not like any droid I've seen before." Geran said as he moved closer to the alcove.

"It must have been left here when the Republic abandoned work on the station." Vorn said.

"So it's four thousand years old?" Jaysica asked.

"They." Tobis said, "There's more than one." And he shone his glow rod deeper into the alcove where more of the bulky humanoid droids stood in a row. Most of the droids appeared incomplete, only the droid closest to the rebels did not look to be missing any parts.

Tobis took a step closer and suddenly the droid sprang into motion. It swung a reinforced arm towards Tobis and knocked the engineer off his feet. The droid then charged across the chamber, leaping over the workbench as Tharun attempted to bring his rifle to bear.

Mace was quicker off the mark and he was able to fire a single shot from his heavy blaster pistol that struck the charging machine just above the elbow. There was an explosion as the limb was severed and the damaged part crashed to the floor.

"Look out!" Kara shouted and she dived on top of Vorn, knocking him clear as the droid continued to run towards them.

The droid reached the passageway. Just narrow enough to fit, the machine continued to run and it vanished into the darkness.

"Tharun! Get after it!" Vorn yelled as Kara helped him back up and Tharun immediately broke into a run as he moved off in pursuit.

"He may need backup." Colonel Ergard said, looking at Mace.

Mace nodded and ran after the former mercenary.



## 5.

The droid was not difficult to track. It was a heavy machine moving as fast as it could, which meant that each footfall echoed down the empty corridors of the space station like a beacon that guided Mace and Tharun towards it. Clearly familiar with the layout of this part of the station, the droid moved with a purpose.

"Where do you think its heading?" Tharun said as the two rebels continued to pursue the machine.

"No idea." Mace replied, "I don't get down here much."

The droid reached a long straight section of corridor and began to head down it as fast as it could. When Tharun reached the start of the corridor he halted rather than continue pursuing the droid and dropped into a crouching position. He steadied his blaster rifle against his shoulder and squeezed the trigger. A short volley of energy bolts hurtled down the corridor after the droid and cut across its torso.

The droid's body sagged as its casing split open. It continued to try and escape but after just a few steps it toppled over and lay on the floor, its legs still twitching as if trying to run. Tharun got back to his feet and advanced on the droid. He fired twice more into the flailing machine and blew off its legs.

"You know the major probably wanted us to be able to study that thing." Mace commented as he looked at the wrecked droid lying on the floor.

"The memory's all that matters," Tharun replied, "and I made sure I didn't hit the head."

Back in the concealed chamber where the droid had been discovered the remaining rebels were conducting a thorough search.

"These definitely look like they're left over from when the station was built." Tobis said as he examined the row of incomplete droids, "I think that these were cannibalised for parts for the operational one."

"So that raises the question of who carried out the work." Vorn replied.

"Well if Mace and Tharun get back with the droid I may be able to pull that out of its memory." Tobis said.

"Somebody mention us?" Tharun called out from the passageway. Then he held up the severed head of the droid, "Here you go lad." He added as he handed the head to Tobis.

"Thanks." The engineer replied and he put it down on the workbench.

"Let me help." Geran said as he stood beside Tobis.

"Me too." Jaysica added, "I worked in droid maintenance." And as she too moved towards Tobis and Geran she accidentally knocked against a row of tools that clattered to the ground.

"I see why Lieutenant Lerner couldn't wait to get rid of you." Kara said as Jaysica crouched down and began picking up the scattered tools.

"I'm sure she'll be happy to make use of these though." Colonel Ergard said, "These must be worth a fortune."

"And hard to come by." Mace added, "A lot of this stuff isn't made in large quantities. People who've got it hang on to it."

"Here we go." Tobis said and he removed a palm sized rectangular object from the droid's head, "This is its memory. Hopefully this will tell us everything we need to know."

"Here." Geran said and he handed Tobis one end of an electrical lead. As Tobis took the lead, Geran opened up his portable computer and plugged the other end into it. As soon as Tobis connected the lead to the droid's memory module Geran began to tap at the keyboard.

"There's not much video memory here." The slicer said, "In fact its only since we came in and woke it up."

"What about its recognition database?" Vorn asked, "Are there any images or voice recording that we can use to identify the spy?"

Geran tapped at the keyboard again. Then shook his head.

"Looks like the droid has had its memory wiped. There's nothing older than about two months. I'm guessing that's when the spy last worked on the droid, then they wiped its memory so it couldn't be used to incriminate them."

"So we're back where we started." Kara said and she folded her arms.

"Not quite," Colonel Ergard replied, "at least we know how the spy was gathering their information and we can put a stop to that now."

"We may have more than that." Geran said as a wide smile spread across his face, "The droid had a full construction diagram programmed into it and the spy left it in place."

"So what?" Colonel Ergard asked.

"This tells us where the droid was rushing to." Tobis said, "There's another concealed chamber located near to the station's outer rim. A big one."

It was decided that greater numbers would be beneficial to raiding the second hidden chamber. With this in mind Geran summoned all four of the troops that he had brought with him and to further boost the firepower available to them they stopped off at the *Silver Hawk* for mace to collect the deck sweeper he kept there. The cumbersome energy weapon fired stun blasts that spread out as they travelled to envelop a large area.

Though this would be of no use should they encounter any more droids it could be useful if the spy himself turned out to be present. Together with Tharun, this gave them a well-armed six strong infantry unit to deal with any resistance while the remaining rebels could provide support as needed.

The detailed schematic downloaded from the droid identified this place as where it had been attempting to get to, though it offered no clue as to why. The manner in which it had lashed out at Tobis suggested that the droid had lacked the life preservation programming that many modern droids included, so it would have been possible for it to remain in the chamber and try to fight off the rebels. Whatever was in this second chamber had been important to the droid.

The schematic indicated quite clearly where the entrance to the chamber was, but it had been decided that the rebels would be making their own entrance. For this Jaysica had prepared a set of explosive charges that would blast a large hole in a bulkhead instead. Just in case the chamber was open to space the rebels chose a spot beside a blast door. By positioning themselves on the other side of the door Harvey would be able to close the door in the event of decompression.

"All set." Jaysica said after giving the charges one final check and made sure that the bags of water placed over each charge to direct as much of the blast into the bulkhead and muffle the sound were securely placed. Then she dashed back to where the others were waiting, "Of course I'd be happier if we were using proper cutting charges instead of demolition charges."

"And I'd rather we were all in environmental suits." Tharun added.

"Well we can't requisition either without risking attracting attention from the wrong people." Vorn said as he assembled his small game blaster. Though relatively low powered it was still superior to his hold out blaster pistol.

"Here goes." Jaysica said and she grasped the comlink that she had set to transmit the detonation signal, "On three. One... Two... Three!"

Boom!

The charges detonated exactly as intended and a large, irregular section of the bulkhead was blown inwards. There was no sudden rush of air escaping into space so the rebels knew that the chamber was pressurised.

"Move!" Mace yelled and the six members of the assault team leapt to their feet and rushed towards the hole. Jumping through in pairs the rebels then spread out, allowing their glow rods to illuminate the area before them. Behind them the remaining rebels moved into the chamber and took up positions either side of the hole, taking care not to leave themselves silhouetted in the gap.

"It's a hangar." Kara exclaimed as she saw what the light cast by the various glow rods in use revealed.

There was no doubt that Kara was right. A spacecraft of a type not often seen for millennia dominated the large chamber. With wings folded up each side of its fuselage, it bore a passing resemblance to modern Imperial shuttles that suggested that it was designed for a similar purpose. Two of Geran's guards moved towards the vessel and advanced up the access ramp that had been left open. As the first of them reached the top of the ramp he felt his foot snag on something and he looked down.

"Bomb!" he yelled a split second before the explosion that hurled him across the hangar.

"Everybody out!" Vorn shouted as the ship burnt.

The rebels exited the hangar as quickly as they had entered it. Along with another of Geran's guards Tharun picked up the guard caught in the blast and between them the two men carried him out of the hangar. As soon as all of the rebels were through the blast door Harvey let out a squawk and the sections of the door slammed together, containing the fire in the corridor on the far side.

Geran pulled his comlink from his pocket.

"Lieutenant Pay to control." he gasped, "Fire on level eight four. Section six sealed off. Vent the atmosphere."

"Confirmed lieutenant." The reply came, "Standby for venting."

There was a dull rumbling as the stations atmospheric pumps sucked away the air that the flames beyond the blast doors needed. Then the rumbling stopped.

"Okay then," Geran said, "I suppose we'd better get some vacc suits and see what's left."

"What about attracting unwanted attention?" Jaysica asked.

"A little late for that." Vorn said, "Half the station was probably woken up by the explosion."

This time the rebels took more time as they entered the concealed hangar. They already knew that there was no one waiting to ambush them inside, but had no idea about what damage the fire had caused. As it happened there was very little damage beyond the shuttle itself.

"Looks like the damage is fairly localised." Vorn said as he took in the scene in the hangar.

"I see what you mean." Mace replied, "Lucky this thing wasn't fuelled or we could have lost the entire deck. Including us."

"So why start the fire?" Kara asked.

"I can't see there being any forensic evidence left." Geran said as he looked at the gutted interior of the shuttle, "This was to prevent us identifying the spy."

"At least it means that this place was important to them." Colonel Ergard said, "They must have come here quite often to be worried about what they'd left behind."

"Do you think that was why the droid was coming here?" Tharun asked, "To find its master?"

"Actually I think it was coming to signal the Empire." Geran answered, "Look at this." And he pointed to a cable that ran from an open hatch on the outer hull of the shuttle to a power conduit on the hangar wall.

"The subspace antenna." Tobis said as he looked for himself.

"Exactly." Geran replied, "The spy's link to the Empire."

"But we still don't know who the spy is." Jaysica pointed out.

"Maybe not." Vorn told her, "But we've taken care of his data gathering and cut him off from his masters. I don't know about you but I call that a win."

"Plus we got back all that equipment." Tharun added, "Your ex-superior in droid maintenance will be happy about that."

"So we give her a load of tools and we get Jaysica in return?" Kara said, "I'd hardly call that a win."

"I take it you've heard?" Kyle Varner asked Captain Tarl when the officer arrived at his workspace.

"Indeed I have. It seems that now everyone knows there's a counter-intelligence operation going on." Jarad replied, "Rear Admiral Aphanar is planning a series of strikes right now. She wants to make up for the time lost while her fleet was paralysed for fear of being ambushed. I told you that they weren't interested in us."

"So you already knew about the spy then?"

"Of course I knew. I was there when General Kain first announced it. Now down to business."

Kyle hunched over his computer.

"What is it this time?" he asked.

"A certain corporal is looking for a promotion to sergeant," Jarad said, "and he's willing to offer us this in return." And he held out a small sheet of flimsyplast material.