

# STAR WARS

## 2-06: Take the Ocean Queen

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Civil war turns father against son

[http://www.hazugfiles.webspace.virginmedia.com/Writing/Star%20Wars/Star\\_Wars\\_Index.htm](http://www.hazugfiles.webspace.virginmedia.com/Writing/Star%20Wars/Star_Wars_Index.htm)

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...

## TAKE THE OCEAN QUEEN

MON GALAMARI CRUISERS ARE THE BACKBONE OF THE REBEL FLEET, BUT THERE ARE OTHER EXAMPLES OF THE CLASS USED FOR OTHER PURPOSES WITHIN THE EMPIRE. THE *OCEAN QUEEN* IS ONE SUCH VESSEL AND THE REBELLION IS KEEN TO OBTAIN IT...

Original characters created and story written by Stephen J. Dutton.  
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# 1.

Vorn Larcus III had been aboard a Mon Calamari star cruiser before. That particular vessel had been converted from a peaceful passenger transport vessel to a ship of war, a process that had involved replacing luxury cabins and observation galleries with barracks and turbolaser emplacements. The *Ocean Queen* was different however; it remained a commercial vessel that plied the stars carrying high paying passengers to far off places.

The ship had come to the attention of the Alliance only recently when its owners decided to use it to provide close up tours of the local nebula that was considered a natural wonder. Ships like the *Ocean Queen* were designed specifically to be operated by crews drawn from the aquatic Mon Calamari species with displays and environmental settings tuned specifically for their biology. It was for this reason that the ship's owners had retained many of the original Mon Calamari crew. Thanks to the Empire's slavery laws, the crew had not had a say in this.

The Alliance had sent Vorn here for two reasons. Firstly they wanted to liberate the Mon Calamari enslaved on this vessel and secondly they wanted the ship itself. Vorn was a natural choice for the assignment. Before joining the Alliance he had been part of the nobility of his homeworld of Estran, so he was used to behaving as the passengers of the ship would and he could easily blend in with them. However, he could not hope to capture the ship by himself so he was not here alone.

"Are we checked in yet boss?" a woman asked from behind Vorn and he turned around to see a tall woman in an expensive looking dress standing there.

"Yes Kara. I'm just waiting for the droid to come and get our luggage." He replied. Kara Bilstran served as his unit's medic. She lacked the refinement that a mission like this really called for, but her stunning good looks made her the ideal candidate to impersonate the sort of woman that would latch onto an older and richer man.

"Well I've just seen Tobis and Jaysica heading off to their room." Kara said, referring to the other two rebels that had come aboard with Kara and Vorn. Tobis was a starship engineer while Jaysica was an expert in security. Both of them had skills that would come in useful on this mission. "Did you know they're in the honeymoon suite?" she added, smiling.

"Yes, well the general thought that it would be good to have them masquerading as newlyweds." Vorn replied.

"Yes well you should have seen their faces when they found out." Kara said, "Jaysica looked ready to explode."

"Yes I thought that would happen."

"Well just wait until she sees what I've put in her luggage."

At that point an electronic sounding voice interrupted them.

"Excuse me master Larcus," Jeeves, Vorn's protocol droid said, "but your cases have been offloaded from the shuttle and the porter droid is ready to show us to the cabin."

Behind Jeeves a flat, rectangular droid hovered just above the deck. On top of the machine was a pile of suitcases that was almost as tall as Vorn himself. Vorn was well aware that he had packed only a single case, which meant that all of the others must contain the clothing that Kara had been able to take from the storage facility that she and Jaysica had been given access to in order to be able to dress the part.

"You know," he said quietly to Kara, "you were supposed to take only what you need for the mission."

"That wasn't what the quartermaster said." Kara replied, "He said we could take what we wanted."

"And I see you wanted quite a lot." Then he looked at Jeeves, "Okay then. Lead the way." He said to the droid.

"Wow." Jaysica said as she stared open mouthed around the cabin she and Tobis had been assigned to. At first she had been angry at being caught off guard by the Alliance booking them into the honeymoon suite, but now she was quite happy about it.

"Where would you like your cases sir?" the porter droid asked Tobis.

"Jaysica?" Tobis said, looking at the young woman still staring around the room.

"What?" Jaysica replied.

"Where should we put the cases?" Tobis asked.

"In the corner somewhere." She said and she waved to a corner. The droid drifted to the corner and lifted the cases from its cargo carrying body to the floor.

"Enjoy your voyage with us." The droid said, "And congratulations on your wedding." It then drifted out of the cabin and closed the door behind it.

"This place is amazing." Jaysica exclaimed when she and Tobis were alone. She dashed towards the bed and leapt onto it. There was a 'crack' as one of the wooden legs gave way and the bed tilted to one side. Jaysica rolled off onto the floor and gave out a yelp as she fell.

"Are you alright?" Tobis asked, rushing over to her.

"I'm fine." She replied, waving him away, "But I think there's something wrong with the bed."

"I'm sure we can get it fixed." Tobis said.

"Its alright for you." Jaysica said, "You're sleeping on the couch anyway."

"I... Oh." Tobis said. Then he went red and looked away.

"Anyway," Jaysica said as she picked herself up and walked across the room to the cases now piled in the corner, "I want to unpack and pick out what to wear first." She picked a case off the top of the pile and carried it to the damaged bed before attempting to open it. "Tobis," she said, "give me a hand with this. The latch is jammed."

Tobis obliged and the two rebels both tried to open the case.

"I think there's too much in it." Tobis said, "The pressure is jamming it shut." He then pressed down as hard as he could on the top of the case, "Try it now." He said.

Jaysica pressed the switches to release the latches and there was a pair of 'clicks' as they opened.

"See," said Tobis, "I knew it would work."

"Well let go of the lid then," Jaysica said, "there's important stuff in here I'm going to make as much use of as possible."

Tobis let go of the top of the case and it sprang open. The sudden release of pressure on the contents causing the items packed nearest the top to be catapulted over Jaysica and Tobis. Specifically the numerous tiny foil packages of contraceptives placed there by Kara after Jaysica had packed her clothes in it.

Though not as impressive as the honeymoon suite, the cabin that Vorn and Kara had been assigned to was still luxuriously decorated and while Jeeves unpacked the cases the rebels took the opportunity to see what their room had to offer.

"There's a bath." Kara said, "A bath big enough to swim laps in."

"That's the Mon Calamari for you." Vorn said, "They're an aquatic species. The ship is filled with water features and pools." Then he held up a datapad marked with the crest of the company that ran the ship, "The information files list all sorts of activities and services available relating to water and the ocean. How do you fancy a full body seaweed wrap?"

"What does it do?" Kara asked.

"Smells like the ocean at low tide I suppose." Vorn replied, "But I wouldn't know because its listed under spiritual rejuvenation and I'm a man."

"So does that thing give us a deck plan then boss?" Kara asked as she lay down on the bed, picked up the controller for the room's entertainment system and began to scroll through the menus.

"A partial one." He said, "It just covers all of the areas open to passengers. Tobis will have to hack their system to get us the rest."

"Well that shouldn't be a problem for him." Kara said, then she added, "Hey boss there's something wrong with this."

"Wrong with what?" he asked.

"This controller. I can't get any of the good movies."

"You mean the adult ones?"

"Yes. They're locked out."

"Oh Major Larcus," Jeeves said, "that was my doing. Since you are both here on business it seemed highly inappropriate to-" and the droid was cut off as Vorn shut him down.

"You what this means don't you?" Kara said.

"What?"

"We'll have to unpack by ourselves." And she put down the controller unit and went to the cases instead.

"Oh crap." Vorn said.

"Its not that bad." Kara said as she pulled clothes from the open case, "It'll only take us a few minutes to get it done."

"Not the unpacking." Vorn replied, "This." And he held up the datapad.

"What is it?" Kara asked, walking towards him.

"The passenger manifest." He told her, "Take a look here." And he pointed at a list of the people travelling in the first class cabins.

"So what?" Kara asked, "A bunch of rich people. I don't know any of them."

"No, but I do. Her." And Vorn tapped the datapad display over a particular name.

"Lady Lynn Sharva." Kara read out loud, "Who's she then?" An ex-girlfriend?"

"No, most definitely not. When I left Parliament-"

"You mean when they threw you out?"

"Yes okay then. When I was expelled from Parliament she took my place. She used to be the sector's senator for a while."

"Hang on." Kara said, snatching the datapad from Vorn's grasp, "If every cabin is given one of these then she's got one with your name on it. Everyone on board has."

"You think I don't realise that?" Vorn said, "At least I'm only listed as Vorn Larcus and not Lord Vorn Larcus the third. Plus we're not in first class. Hopefully she won't be interested in who's in any of the cheaper cabins."

"Thank the force for upper class snobs." Kara said and she gave the datapad back to Vorn, "But you may want to check out who else is aboard in one of the cheaper cabins."

Vorn scrolled through the list.

"This could be a problem." He said.

The chime of the doorbell attracted the attention of both Kara and Vorn. Vorn walked to the door and opened it to find Jaysica and Tobis standing in the corridor.

"Well if it isn't the happy couple." He said jokingly. Jaysica squeezed past him, with a frown on her face.

"Too soon?" he said to Tobis.

"Here," Jaysica said to Kara as she pulled a handful of foil packets from her pocket, "I think these are yours."

"Don't say it." Vorn said out loud as he shut the door.

"Boss I wasn't-" Kara began.

"Yes you were." Vorn interrupted, "I know that look. Now we've got work to do without you two bickering all the time." Then he looked at Tobis, "Do you have it?" he asked.

Tobis produced a mem-stik and plugged it into the cabin's entertainment system. Immediately a menu appeared listing the contents of the device and Tobis selected the file he wanted.

"This is everything we know about the ship." Tobis said as a large image of the *Ocean Queen* appeared on the wall-mounted display.

"We have this already." Kara said, "It only shows us the public areas."

"That's true," Tobis replied, "but by comparing this limited deck plan with the external images you took from the shuttle I can determine where access points to other areas are likely to be."

"Can't you just hack into the main computer and download a full schematic?" Vorn asked.

"That may be possible sir." Tobis replied, "But given that we don't know exactly how many of the original Mon Calamari systems have been replaced, relying on me being able to do that could be risky."

"So we find stuff the old fashioned way then." Kara said, "The mark one eyeball."

"When do we start?" Jaysica asked.

"First thing tomorrow." Vorn said, "Tobis can try and hack into the ship's computer while the rest of take a good look around. Jaysica I want you to concentrate on the rear section from this bulkhead here," and he pointed at the display, "Kara can take the centre section and I'll take everything forwards of here."

"Err boss," Kara began, "that gives you the first class cabins doesn't it?"

"Why is that a problem?" Jaysica asked, "The major will fit in better in that section."

"The problem is that there's someone there that knows him," Kara said, "and she knows he's a rebel and doesn't like him."

"Okay then Kara, we'll swap. You take the forward section. I'll take the middle. Everyone happy now?"

No one spoke, but everyone nodded.

"Good." Vorn said, "Now it's getting late, I say we all turn in and get some rest before we steal this ship."

When Vorn came out of the bathroom Kara was already in bed.

"Is it okay for me to have this side?" she asked.

"Frankly I'm just glad you picked a side instead of sprawling out all over the thing." Vorn replied as he placed his neatly folded clothes on a chair. Then something occurred to him and he looked at how Kara was lay, she had pulled the blankets right up to her chin so that just her head was visible, "I'm worried I may not like the answer to this question." He said as he walked round to what was now his side of the bed, "But you are wearing something under there aren't you?"

"Of course I am boss. What do you take me for?"

"Do I have to answer that?" Vorn asked as he got into bed and turned out the light.

"No." Kara replied, "But if you'd left the light on you'd see that its something nice and slinky I picked out just for you. I helped Jaysica pick something nice out at the same time."

Vorn turned the light back on and looked Kara in the eyes.

"What have you done?" he asked.

"Boss I am offended by the suggestion that -"

"What did you do?"

"Nothing. She wanted help choosing something and since there's more fashion sense in my little finger than her entire body she asked my advice. Trust me, if I'd left it up to her she'd have probably picked out something made of polymer. Poor Tobis would have died of fright."

"You still haven't told me what you actually told her to pick."

"It was something really nice. Something smooth and shiny with lacy bits at the edge."

"Well that doesn't sound too bad." Vorn said and he turned the light out.

"Made of thermosilk."

Vorn turned the light back on and sat up.

"Thermosilk? When that stuff heats up, for instance by being placed next to a human body doesn't it—"

"Go transparent?" Kara said and she too sat up, "Why boss, I completely forgot about that. Oh well, I'm sure Tobis will mention it."

Kara and Vorn looked at one another and smiled. Then they both lay down again and Vorn turned out the light.

"Boss?" Kara said.

"No. You can't have a glass of water."

## 2.

When Jaysica awoke she saw that Tobis was still sleeping soundly on the couch. She climbed out of bed and walked past him towards the bathroom. Yawning, she turned on the light and reached for the hairbrush she had left beside the sink. Then she looked at herself in the mirror.

Tobis sat up, alert and awake when he heard the scream. He knew immediately that it came from Jaysica and he looked around for her. She was not in the bed, but Tobis saw that the bathroom light was on and he rushed towards it.

"Jaysica?" he called out as he got close to the door, "What's wrong?"

"Don't come in!" she shouted and the door was slammed shut from the other side. Tobis ground to a halt just in time to avoid running right into it.

"Jaysica? What's the matter?" he asked, tapping on the door.

"I said don't come in! You mustn't come in!" Jaysica yelled.

Tobis waited outside the bathroom door and a few moments later the handle turned slowly and the door opened. Tobis leaned to see through.

"Are you alright?" he asked as Jaysica emerged wearing a robe that she gripped tightly closed.

"I just need to get dressed," She replied without looking at Tobis, "and then I need to go and have a word with Kara."

"About the mission?" Tobis asked, but Jaysica didn't answer.

"Kara, I said are you going to get that?" Vorn called from the bathroom as he shaved.

"What was that boss?" Kara replied, the sound of the hair dryer forcing her to raise her voice.

"Never mind." Vorn said, stepping from the bathroom and wiping his face with a towel, "I'm done. I'll get it." And he opened the cabin door.

"Where is she?" Jaysica demanded as she stormed in, clutching something made of a shiny fabric in her hand, "Where is that bitch?"

"Jaysica," Vorn said, shutting the door behind her, "is that any way to talk about your friend?"

"Oh she's no friend of mine!" Jaysica snapped and she marched up to Kara who turned off her hair dryer and set it down, "Here you go." She said, hurling the garment she carried at her, "Take it."

"What's the matter?" Kara asked, picking up the garment and holding it up. Vorn saw that it appeared to be the nightdress Kara had described to him the night before, "This looks really nice. Don't you like it boss?" she added.

"It went transparent!" Jaysica yelled, "I only noticed when I went into the bathroom this morning."

"Hang on," Kara said, standing up, "so Tobis never said anything?"

"Tobis didn't see me thank god. He was still asleep on the couch."

"On the couch?" Kara asked, "Why wasn't he in the bed? I thought it was huge."

"I'm not sharing a bed with him!" Jaysica exclaimed.

"Why not?" Kara asked.

"Because I haven't – Well, I mean, I've never. You know. Shared a bed with anyone."

"Whoa." Kara said in amazement, "What never?"

"No." Jaysica said quietly, "Never."

"Hang on. When we were at that hotel you spent the night in the same bed as the boss."

"Yes but that was different." Jaysica said, "Nothing was going to happen because you were in the room. Besides the major's really old."

"Yes." Vorn interrupted, "But somehow despite my advanced years, my hearing is still perfect."

"Well I think you should let Tobis share the bed." Kara said, "Don't you agree boss?" she added looking around Jaysica at Vorn.

"I'm not having anything to do with this conversation." Vorn replied, "My teeth need cleaning." And he went back into the bathroom, closing the door behind him.

"Look," Kara said, "do you see me worrying about being here with Vorn? It's just a mission."

"Yes but what if something happens?"

"Like the ship crashes?"

"No. Between us."

"Maybe something should. After all he did save your life. Have you thanked him properly?"

Jaysica just stared back at Kara.

"Besides," Kara added, "don't forget all those training lectures. Sometimes we have to do things on assignment that aren't what we'd normally do. Remember the motto, 'What happens on assignment stays on assignment.'"



"Well I guess-" Jaysica began. Then she remembered why she had come to the cabin in the first place, "Hang on!" she snapped, "You're just trying to worm your way out of trouble."

"Is it working?"

"No!" Jaysica snapped and she walked up to the bed, stuck her hand beneath the pillows and felt around, "A-ha!" she exclaimed as she pulled out Kara's nightdress, "I think I'll be taking this." And then she stormed out of the room.

"Is it safe to come out?" Vorn said, his head appearing around the bathroom doorframe.

"Yeah, the Klutz is gone boss." Kara said. Then she added, "Oh and boss there's good news."

"What?"

"Tonight you get to see me in this." Kara said, holding up the thermosilk nightdress and smiling. Vorn banged his head against the doorframe slowly and deliberately.

"Honestly," he said to himself, "sometimes its like working with kowakian monkey lizards. Drunk kowakian monkey lizards. Wearing blindfolds, thick mittens and roller skates."

"I love you too boss." Kara said.

"I know. Now let's get to work, we've a long day ahead of us."

Finding places to gain access to the areas of the *Ocean Queen* normally off limits to passengers was not difficult. There were doors clearly marked 'OFF LIMITS' all over the vessel. But to access these required a key that the rebels lacked. They could of course just take one from a crewmember, but that would alert security to their presence and their plan relied on remaining anonymous. Therefore they had to locate alternative means of getting to these areas.

At approximately one thousand two hundred metres long, even dividing the *Ocean Queen* up into three still left each of the rebels with almost four hundred metres of the ship each to search. Furthermore, because of the taper towards each end of the vessel Vorn, searching the centre section had more ground to cover. With a datapad showing what the rebels knew of the ship in their hands, Kara and Vorn both headed for the places where Tobis had suggested they look for hidden access points. Unsurprisingly these locations were located deep within the ship, away from the hull that was littered with the observation decks that were among the attractions for the ship's high paying passengers.

Jaysica had decided to try a different tactic in her search and when she returned to the honeymoon suite she began to rummage through one of the cases that she had not unpacked the previous evening.

"Here it is." She said as she found the dress she was looking for and she went into the bathroom to change.

"What was that?" Tobis said, looking up from the computer terminal at which he was sat, but by then Jaysica had closed the door behind her so he went back to work.

"How do I look?" Jaysica said as she emerged from the bathroom. Tobis looked up for a moment, but his jaw dropped and he just stared at Jaysica as she put on some shoes and picked up her bag. The dress she had chosen was nothing more than a bright red polymer tube that ran from beneath her arms to midway down her thighs. The only details on the otherwise featureless surface were columns of holes that ran the length of the dress each side beneath Jaysica's arms. It was these holes that really caught Tobis' attention since they showed that there was nothing worn beneath the dress. Jaysica ignored the fact that Tobis had not replied and went on, "I did consider a swimsuit, but the problem is that stores didn't have any of those nice black ones that the major's daughter says are really expensive and I didn't want to bring one of the four I already have just in case someone asks for them back and the only other thing they had was a gold coloured metal bikini and I thought that's just cheap and tacky. I mean who would wear something like that? So hopefully this dress will get me enough attention to get some answers from the crew. What do you think?"

"Err." Tobis replied, still trying to take in the sight of Jaysica's dress.

"Well I'm off now." She said and she headed out of the suite.

From there she took the nearest turbolift to the rear of the vessel and walked up to the first male crewmember she found.

"How may I help you miss?" the man asked. He did not appear to be as old as Vorn, but Jaysica put him at about twice her age.

"Oh hi there." She said to him in a friendly tone, "I was just wondering if its possible to get a look at any of the bits of the ship that passengers don't normally get to see."

"The only areas off limits are the operating sections." The man replied, "Why would you want to see them?"

"Because I'm interested in machinery." Jaysica lied, "Big machinery, the bigger the better. I mean how big are the engine on this ship? Or its computer core?"

"You really wouldn't want to go into the engineering section dressed like that anyway miss. It's full of fishmen."

Jaysica almost called the man out on this. But then she remembered that the passengers on this ship were generally not the sorts to care about aliens.

"I'd have a human guide to protect me wouldn't I?"

"Oh we don't do tours anyway. We even keep the inspection shafts sealed and covered during flight."



"Inspection shafts?"

"Yes. You may have seen on your shuttle trip here that the *Ocean Queen's* ion drives are located in a ring around the sternward hull."

"Yes, I saw them."

"Well because most of the ship's critical control systems are located more towards the centre it means there's a gap between them and the engines."

Jaysica could not help but smile. The crewman thought this was because she found his explanation interesting, whereas it was simply because he was telling her everything she needed to know.

"This means that we need shafts running from the core of the ship out to the engines so that our engineers can inspect all of the circuitry and conduits visually. It's a safety requirement you see miss."

"But if the shafts are covered-" Jaysica began.

"Oh the covers are detachable." The crewman replied, "When we're in port they are all removed and the fishmen go over the entire system."

"So they have some special tool then?"

"No, just a regular power driver. Now I'm afraid I have to bet getting on miss. I'm sorry I couldn't be of any help to you, but rules are rules."

"Oh don't worry." Jaysica replied, "You've been very helpful. I'll be sure to remember your name when I fill in the comment data file when we dock." And she ran her finger over the man's name badge without bothering to read it.

As the crewman left and passed out of sight Jaysica headed further sternward. She knew what she was looking for now and each blank wall panel she found she placed a hand on. The areas of the ship where the *Ocean Queen's* mon calamari slave engineers worked would be at a greater temperature than the corridors she wove her way through, so all she had to find was a panel that was warmer than the air in the corridor.

In a corridor located just off the *Ocean Queen's* ventral axis she found what she was looking for. A panel about half way up the wall that was several degrees warmer to the touch. Jaysica looked at it more closely and a smile spread across her face when she saw a bolt at each corner painted to blend in with the panel. She opened up her bag and pulled out her multitool. She looked closely at the bolt face and unfolded the matching tip on the tool. Then she set to work on the bolts and removed the panel.

Behind the panel she found an open shaft but it was narrower than she had expected it to be, barely wide enough for her to crawl through. But it was all she had for now.

Folding the multitool and putting it back in her bag, Jaysica put her head into the shaft and tried to see where it led. She frowned when she saw that it just led upwards and then bent around out of sight.

"I hate access shafts." She muttered to herself as she began to climb in, "Something always goes wrong."

The uneven surface of the shaft's interior would have allowed Jaysica to climb up it easily had she not chosen to keep her shoes on. Though there were plenty of handholds to be had, the high heels got in the way. Then she felt something digging into her back and she realised that something protruding from the surface behind her as poking into her back. What ever it was it was not sharp however, so Jaysica continued to climb.

"Whoa!" she exclaimed suddenly. She had just used a convenient pipe located above her head to pull her further up the shaft when her dress rolled down to her waist. Her first instinct was to fold her arms over her chest, but she remembered that to do so would see her plummet down the vent.

Instead she reached down with one hand and tried to pull her dress free of whatever it was caught on. She could feel the dress, but could not get it loose. Leaning forwards, Jaysica wedged her body in the vent and reached down with her second arm. That was when her feet gave way.

Jaysica screamed as she fell, bouncing from wall to wall inside the shaft. She wanted to reach out and grab hold of something to stop her fall, but her arms seemed stuck by her sides. She flew out of the bottom of the shaft and landed flat on her stomach, sliding further back across the floor from the vent access. There was a 'snap' and for a moment she thought her ankle was broken, but the lack of any pain told her that it was instead one of her heels.

Lying face down on the floor and moaned. Her head was pounding after the repeated, though light blows it had suffered on the trip back down the vent and she went to bring a hand up to her forehead. That was when she found she still could not move her arms from her sides.

"What the-?" Jaysica said, rolling over and looking down, "Oh no."

Her arms were now inside her dress. When she had fallen the dress had rolled back up her body and over them. She wriggled her arms, trying to slide them back out of the dress without tearing it, but the polymer material that it was made from was over stretched and was gripping her even more tightly than it was supposed to. She wriggled some more and was just able to get one of her hands to pop out through one of the holes down the side of the dress. She slid across the floor and grabbed hold of her bag, still lying on the floor where she had left it when she went up the vent. Using the wall to brace herself, Jaysica got back to her feet and began to hobble back towards her cabin. By avoiding the primary corridors she thought that she

could make it without being seen. Then she could signal Kara to come and help her. Of course there were almost a thousand metres of corridor between here and where she wanted to be.

About half way back to the honeymoon suite Jaysica hit a snag. So far she had been able to avoid running into anyone. She had avoided the primary corridors that ran down each edge of the ship, giving the occupants excellent views of the outside and had not used turbolifts just in case they opened when someone was right outside. But now, just on the edge of a cluster of economy class cabins she had come to a small area that contained a pool with a fountain that had several benches arranged around it and on one of these benches there was a woman.

Sitting with her back to Jaysica the woman appeared to be reading something from a datapad. Unfortunately this suggested that she was not about to just get up and leave, allowing Jaysica to continue unobserved. However, Jaysica determined it did give her the chance of being able to sneak past without the woman noticing her. If she kept close to the wall then the woman may not other to turn around.

Carefully Jaysica edged around the back on the bench on which the woman sat, doing her best not to make any noise. This was made more difficult given that she had one broken heel and was have having to walk lop-sided. Added to this she was dragging her back long the floor by its strap. Jaysica hoped that the woman would be too engrossed in what she was wearing to notice her.

As she inched her way behind the woman, Jaysica felt something snag as she pulled her bag along. Not again. She thought to herself, remembering how she had got into this situation to begin with and she tugged on the bag strap as best she could.

Unfortunately the bag was caught on her own undamaged shoe and when she pulled on the strap it pulled the shoe out from under her. She screamed as she toppled over. The woman sat on the bench had just began to turn around in response when Jaysica fell into her and sent her into the pool in front of her with a massive splash.

"I'm so sorry." Jaysica exclaimed as she wriggled about on the floor between the bench and the pool, "I'm having a little trouble here. It was an accident. Honest." Then she looked up at the woman now standing up in the pool, "Oh no." she added.

"You!" Doctor Jenessa Drame said, glaring at Jaysica.

Doctor Drame was a xenoarchaeologist for the University of Estran. She had encountered Jaysica on a field expedition to the site of some ancient ruins on a remote world and thanks to Jaysica accidentally gluing the pair of them together had not formed a very good impression of the rebel.

Jenessa stepped out of the pool and began to walk away from Jaysica.

"Wait!" Jaysica called out, "Where are you going?"

"Back to my cabin." Jenessa said, "Or do you think I'm going to spend the rest of the trip in soaking wet clothes?"

"You can't just leave me here." Jaysica protested.

"Watch me."

"But I really need your help. My arms got stuck in my dress and now I need to get back to the honeymoon suite."

"The honeymoon suite?" Jenessa asked, "The university sends me on this ship to do a guest lecture at another university and only gives me the cheapest cabin there is, but you get the honeymoon suite?" then Jenessa paused before continuing, "Hang on. You're not actually on your honeymoon are you?"

"I'm here with the major."

"Vorn married you?" Jenessa exclaimed, taking a step backwards and steadying herself against the wall.

"Oh no. We're on a mission. I'm in a cabin with Tobis. The major's sharing with Kara."

"Oh great." Jenessa said, "I thought this would be a quiet week's trip. Now I have to worry about you lot blowing everything up." Then she stepped forwards and bent down to help Jaysica up.

"Oh thank you." Jaysica said, "The honeymoon suite's that way." And she nodded in the direction she wanted to go.

"My room is closer." Jenessa replied, "Vorn can come and collect you. I'm just doing this as a favour to him. I'm not in this for your revolution."

Jenessa practically dragged Jaysica down the corridor to her cabin, and then shoved the rebel inside ahead of her.

"You just sit here," She told Jaysica, shoving her into a chair, "while I go get cleaned up."

Jenessa then made her way to the bathroom.

"Hey!" Jaysica called after her, "Couldn't you do something about me first?" and she wriggled from side to side in the chair. One of her feet hit a table near to her and the lamp that stood on top of it fell to the floor and smashed.

"What was that?" Jenessa demanded from the bathroom.

"Oh, err, nothing. Just a slight mishap. I'll clean it up when you get me free."

Jenessa leant out of the bathroom, rubbing her hair with a towel and saw the broken lamp.

"Sixty seconds! I was in here less than sixty seconds and already you're trashing the place!" then she disappeared back into the bathroom.

"It was an accident. It wouldn't have happened if you hadn't left me here."

"You're right about that." Jenessa replied, reappearing with a robe in her arms.

"Oh I don't need a robe to wear." Jaysica said, "This dress will be fine as soon as I get my arms free."

"Its not for you to wear." Jenessa said and she pulled the belt cord from the robe and knelt down.

"What are you doing?" Jaysica asked as Jenessa began to bind her ankles together.

"Making sure I don't have to explain any more breakages to the university."

"Just let me go and I can get out of here!"

"Not likely. I want an explanation from Vorn about what's going on." Jenessa answered and she stood, pulled Jaysica out of the chair and instead dragged her towards the bed. She pushed the rebel onto the bed and secured her ankles to its frame.

"There." Jenessa said, breathing heavily, "Now I know you're not going to break anything while I'm in the bathroom. You just keep quiet and I won't need to find anything to stuff in your mouth. Deal?"

Tobis was still attempting to penetrate the *Ocean Queen's* firewall when the door chimed. He went to the door and opened it, expecting to find either Kara or Vorn standing there. So for him to see Jenessa was a total surprise.

"Oh. Err. Ah." He stammered.

"May I come in?" she asked.

"Well I don't- wait. Err, yes. Come in."

"Where's Vorn?" Jenessa asked as she walked past Tobis and stared at him, her arms folded and a stern expression on her face.

"Err."

"I know he's aboard. Your walking disaster area told me."

"Jaysica? Where is she? Is she alright?"

"She's fine." Jenessa replied, "She's tied to my bed."

"Oh. Right. Err. I think I better contact the major."

"Good idea. Why don't you go do that?"

### 3.

"So why does she have a facecloth in her mouth?" Vorn asked as they all stood around the bed.

"Because she wouldn't shut up about being tied to the bed." Jenessa replied, "Kept going on about your mission. It was really annoying."

"And why is she tied to the bed exactly?" Vorn then asked.

"She'd already broken the lamp. I wasn't giving her chance to wreck the rest of the room."

Kara looked at where the remains of the lamp lay.

"Yep. That lamp looks pretty broken boss." She said, "I'd definitely say Jaysica had been near it."

"I'll probably have to pay for that." Jenessa said.

"Don't worry about it," Vorn reassured her, "there's an identical one in our cabin. We can just switch them. We weren't planning on paying our bill anyway."

"You do realise that's why things are so expensive for those of us not in your rebellion don't you?" Jenessa asked.

A sudden if muffled outburst from Jaysica turned everyone's attention back to her.

"And why are her arms inside that rubber tube?" Vorn asked.

"Err." Tobis said from the back of the group and everyone looked at him, "It's a dress."

"Polymer again?" Kara said, shaking her head and cradling it in her hands.

"She wears that stuff a lot then?" Jenessa asked.

"It's not the first time." Vorn answered.

"I think she has some sort of fetish." Kara said and Jaysica produced another muffled noise. "Never mind,"

Kara went on, picking up Jaysica's bag. Pulling the multitool from it she extended its short knife blade, "I'll cut her out of that thing in a moment."

Jaysica shook her head violently and wriggled about, grunting.

"Fine." Kara said, "Be like that. See if I care if you're stuck there." Then she looked at Vorn, "Boss, I'm hungry. It's dinner time and we all skipped lunch to search this ship." She said, "I'm going to put on a nice dress for dinner." Then looking at Jaysica she added, "One made of something normal." And after putting down the bag and multitool she left the cabin.

"Oh don't look at me." Jenessa said, raising her hands as Vorn turned his gaze towards her, "I just want you to get her out of my cabin. I didn't say I'd help you do it."

"I don't suppose I can order you to either." Vorn said back to her, "Well, in that case I think Kara had the right idea. Would you care to join us for dinner?"

"I'd be delighted." Jenessa replied.

"Then if you'll come with me I'm sure that Kara has something fancy that will fit you. Call it compensation for your trouble."

"Err, major." Tobis said as Vorn linked arms with Jenessa and the pair walked towards the door.

"Yes?" Vorn asked.

"Err. Well. It's just that—"

"Is he always like this?" Jenessa said.

"Often." Vorn said, "But he's very good at his job." Then he turned back to Tobis, "Do go on."

"Well what about Jaysica? Shouldn't we untie her?"

Vorn looked at Jaysica who stared back and nodded rapidly.

"Oh yes." Vorn said, "Do something about that Tobis. Then I want the pair of you to join us for dinner." And with that Jenessa and Vorn also left the room, closing the door behind them.

Now alone together in the room Tobis turned to look at Jaysica and he just smiled nervously.

Tobis held out the chair for Jaysica to sit down before taking the final seat for himself. Vorn noticed that he seemed to know exactly how to behave in so formal a setting.

"You've done this before haven't you?" he said.

"What?" the engineer replied.

"This." Vorn repeated, indicating the table setting, "You've eaten somewhere like this before haven't you? And you learnt all the correct things to do."

"Oh. Err. Yes sir." Tobis answered, picking up the menu and opening it.

"Where was that then?" Jenessa asked him.

"It was when I was younger." He replied.

"Go on." Vorn said after a short pause.

"Well it was my fourteenth birthday." Tobis said, "The ship I was working on at the time was in port and the officers took me to a place they often visited for the night. I learnt it for going there so I wouldn't stand out and make them look foolish."

"So it was some swanky hotel then was it?" Jaysica asked.

"Err. No. Not quite." Tobis answered and he buried his head in the menu.

Aside from Jaysica all of the others at the table grinned at each other.

"Learn a lot while you were there?" Kara asked, "Perhaps you could teach Jaysica some of it while you're both here."

Vorn coughed as he swallowed a mouthful of wine before he was ready and Jenessa stifled a laugh.

"Ooh I'd like that." Jaysica said, smiling, "After all it could be useful if we're going to do this again."

Vorn and Jenessa looked at one another, both desperate to hold back laughter.

"How about it Tobis?" Kara said, staring at the engineer who just looked back at her, confused.

"We could start tonight." Jaysica said excitedly, "Its not like there's much else for us to do in our cabin." Then she looked at Kara, "Perhaps the major could teach you as well."

Kara turned towards Vorn. She sat up straight, placed her hands in her lap and fluttered her eyelashes at him.

"Could you do that boss?" she said with a smile, "Could you please? I could do with some one on one tuition."

"I doubt there's much I could teach you." Vorn replied.

"Oh come on sir," Jaysica said, "you're bound to know more about it than her."

"You do know what to do don't you?" Jenessa asked him.

"Well, I do have some experience." Vorn said with a grin and he raised his glass and took another sip.

"So teach it to Kara then." Jaysica said.

"Oh yes, please do." Kara said, still sitting up, "Would it help if got down on all fours and begged?"

"Kara, why are treating this like such a joke?" Jaysica asked, "Its an opportunity for us to learn."

Jenessa leant towards Jaysica and spoke quietly into her ear.

"It was a brothel."

Jaysica went red. Kara could control herself no longer and she burst out laughing.

Across the room Kara's outburst made a middle aged woman turn to face her.

"How coarse. Just laughing out loud like that." She said between mouthfuls of her meal, "I wonder who would bring such a person here." And she looked at the others on Kara's table. "I don't believe it." She whispered.

"What is it my lady?" the younger woman sat with her asked.

"The man sat at the same table as that boisterous female Kay, the older one facing us. That's Vorn Larcus the third. I'm sure of it."

"But Lady Sharva, isn't he-" Kay began as she tried to see for herself.

"My predecessor as Parliamentarian," Lady Sharva interrupted, "and a wanted traitor."

"Well," Jenessa said at the end of the meal, "it's been fun, certainly more fun than our last meeting, but I think its time to call it a night."

"Can I walk you back to your cabin?" Vorn offered, standing up at the same time as Jenessa.

"That would be nice." She replied.

"Excellent." Vorn said. Then he looked at his fellow rebels, "Jaysica, Tobis, I'll be along later to see what you've come up with. Then I'll see you later on Kara." All of the rebels nodded in reply and as Vorn escorted Jenessa out of the restaurant they got up themselves and headed for their own cabins. As Vorn walked out of the restaurant with Jenessa neither of them noticed the young woman who began to follow them from a distance.

Upon reaching Jenessa's cabin she opened the door and then turned to Vorn.

"Would you like to come in?" she asked.

"I suppose I should." He said, "Just to see what damage was done by my people after we left."

The pair of them entered the cabin and took a quick look around.

"Well I'm shocked." Jenessa said as she saw the spotless room. Even the broken lamp had been cleaned up, "I was half expecting a hull breach."

"Why do you think I stood behind you when you opened the door?" Vorn asked and they both smiled.

"Can I offer you a drink?" Jenessa asked, "Caf at any rate. I've seen the minibar's price list."

"Yes thank you."

"And you can tell me why you're really here. Don't worry; I'm not about to run off to security. That's why you came here isn't it? To make sure that I wouldn't."

"Last time we met you didn't seem like a very big fan of the Alliance." Vorn explained as Jenessa switched on the caf maker.

"Oh I'm still not." Jenessa replied, "But when we got back to Estran last time the media started reporting how an undercover Imperial unit came to the rescue of a university expedition that had been taken hostage by the Alliance."

"Which you know isn't true."

"Exactly. Now what are you doing on this ship? I doubt the rebellion pays well enough for you to be here on vacation. Plus of course Jaysica kept going on about a mission."

"Perhaps it would have been better to leave that cloth in her mouth." Vorn said and as Jenessa handed him a cup of caf he added, "Thanks."

"So why are you here then?"

"It's a supply mission. We're here to boost the Alliance's resources."

"Boost their resources? What can possibly be on this ship that- Wait. Hang on. You're here for the ship aren't you? You're planning to steal the entire kriffing ship."

"Perhaps I should leave." Vorn said and he placed his drink down on the table.

"Wait." Jenessa said, "You could stay you know."

"Oh. Thank you. But I don't think I should."

"There's someone else then."

"Sort of, yes."

"I didn't know if there would be. You seem to travel a lot."

"It is complicated. Flying off on missions all the time does tend to get in the way."

"Its serious though?"

"I'm not sure. I don't know if she thinks it is, but I'm not looking for anyone else. I'm sorry."

"Don't be. I shouldn't have asked."

"I'd best be going anyway. I need to find out what my people are up to and how much damage it's caused. To the ship and themselves." And he left the cabin.

Alone her cabin Jenessa sat on her bed and deliberately fell backwards, throwing her arms out wide.

"Way to go Jen. For someone so smart you sure made a fool of yourself tonight."

In the corridor outside Vorn rubbed his face as he walked along. Then he caught sight of a mirrored panel.

"You still got it." He said to himself.

## 4.

The uniformed security guard stood aside for Lady Sharva when she entered the captain's office. One of the chamber's walls was transparent and through it the *Ocean Queen's* bridge was visible. Lady Sharva scowled when she saw that the flight crew were non-humans.

"Is it safe to have them running the ship?" she said to no one in particular.

"Of course your ladyship." The captain replied as he stood up and approached her, "You will notice that one of them is not a mon calamari, but instead a quarren. That is Kasgor Kalls, my flight master. Unlike the mon cals, the quarren are far more amicable and willing to work for the galaxy's greater good. There are several of them keeping an eye on the other alien crew. They are more tolerant of the moist environment they prefer."

Lady Sharva did not reply. Loyal they may be, but the quarren were still... alien.

"Anyway," the captain said, "how may I help you this evening Lady Sharva? I do hope the standard of your accommodation is acceptable."

"Of course it is." Lady Sharva replied, turning away from the aliens in the adjoining room, "But at fifty thousand credits per night I would expect no less."

"Then what brings you here your ladyship? The purser said you claimed that the matter was urgent."

"Indeed it is captain. Your vessel has been infiltrated by a rebel spy."

"A rebel spy? Impossible!" the captain exclaimed, "Our security—"

"Any security can be breached captain." Lady Sharva interrupted, "When I was senator for this sector I saw enough reports from security agents to understand that."

"Indeed my lady." The captain conceded, "Now who is this alleged rebel spy?"

"There's nothing alleged about it captain. The man's name is Vorn Larcus the third."

The captain stared at Lady Sharva.

"I think I know that name." He said, "Wasn't he your—"

"Yes, yes captain." Lady Sharva interrupted, "he served in the Estranian Parliament prior to me. A shameful legacy for that respected body. Now what are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to do my duty." The captain replied and Lady Sharva smiled, "I'm going to contact the authorities and inform them of his presence."

"So what do we have?" Vorn asked while sat in the honeymoon suite with Jaysica and Tobis. Jaysica handed him a drink, "No thanks." He said, "I've had more than enough." Then he dodged as Jaysica spilt some of the drink as she withdrew it.

"I managed to get through the firewall," Tobis said, "and I've downloaded a full deck plan. Plus Jaysica knows how to find the access shafts we'll have to use."

"Don't remind me." Jaysica said as she sat down.

"So we're on then?" Vorn asked.

"Yes sir." Tobis said.

"Excellent." Vorn said and he stood up again, "Now get some sleep. By tomorrow we'll be at the nebula. Mace and Tharun should be ready to meet us there. That's when we'll act."

"That fool!" Lady Sharva exclaimed upon returning to her suite.

"My lady," Kay replied, "what's the matter?"

Lady Sharva's anger was obvious from her voice, but Kay was certain she'd felt it before her employer had spoken a single word.

"That fool captain has called the Imperial Security Bureau. They've told him to arrest Larcus and hold him until we reach port." Lady Sharva said and she slumped down on a couch.

"But my lady, isn't that what you wanted?"

"No it is not! I thought that the captain would simply eject that traitor into space. But by telling the Empire about him they've painted themselves into a corner. Now they can't just kill him or people will start asking awkward questions."

For a brief moment Kay thought that Lady Sharva had finished with 'Like his son.' But she realised that the words had not been spoken out loud.

Jenessa was just drifting off to sleep when her cabin door buzzer sounded. She glanced at the clock beside her bed and seeing that it was almost midnight she ignored the door. The buzzer went again. Then whoever it was standing outside pressed the button and held it down.



"Oh for crying out loud." Jenessa said to herself as she got out of bed and put on her robe, "This had better be really good."

Opening the door she saw Kay standing in the corridor.

"Thank goodness you're awake." The young woman said.

"Not much chance of sleeping with you leaning on the buzzer." Jenessa replied, "Now what do you want."

"Its about your friend. He's in danger."

"Who?" Jenessa asked and she yawned.

"Lord Larcus." Kay replied, "The rebel leader."

Jenessa suddenly leant forwards and looked both ways down the corridor to make sure that there was no one there who could heard what had just been said.

"Come inside." She said and she guided Kay into her cabin. "Now what's going on?" she asked after the cabin door slid shut.

"Its Lady Sharva," Kay began to explain, "she recognised Lord Larcus and told the crew about him. They've contacted the authorities and have been told to arrest him. You have to do something."

"Why me?"

"Because he knows you. If I try and warn him he'll think it's a trap."

Jenessa paused. For all she knew this was a trap designed to catch her aiding rebels. But Kay's tone of voice seemed sincere.

"Wait here." Jenessa said and she dashed to the cases in her closet.

"What are you doing?" Kay asked.

"Do you know how modern weapon scanners work?" Jenessa asked in reply.

"No. What does that have to do with it?"

"They emit a magnetic field." Jenessa explained as she opened up a case and began rummage inside, "Now modern blasters all use magnetic fields themselves to direct the particle beam that stabilises the energy bolt. So when a blaster is placed near to a scanner it will sense a disturbance caused by the components inside."

"So what?" Kay asked.

"So the spaceport we came aboard at only uses that sort of scanner. The sort that can't detect something like this." And she produced her revolver from the case along with a box of ammunition. Tipping several rounds into her hand, she then loaded the firearm. "Now give me a couple of minutes to get dressed and we'll go and warn Vorn." She added.

"I'm in here!" Kara called out from the bathroom when Vorn returned to their cabin. The bathroom door was open so Vorn wandered over and stood beside it. From there he could just about make out Kara's head in the bath above a mass of bubbles.

"What happened?" he asked as he looked away.

"You can come in boss." Kara said, then she continued, "I was trying out the jacuzzi setting and thought I'd add some of those scented bubble things that were by the bath."

"Let me guess," Vorn said, "this happened." And he indicated the bubbles that were threatening to spill onto the bathroom floor.

"Yup." Kara said.

"I would expect this sort thing of Jaysica." Vorn said.

"Hey! Take that back!" Kara exclaimed as she splashed Vorn.

"Okay I'm sorry." Vorn said, wiping bubbles off his shirt, "If it were Jaysica the bubbles would be in the corridor by now." And both he and Kara smiled.

Before Kara could say anything more the door chimed.

"I wonder who that is at this time." Vorn said as he walked back to the door.

As soon as the door opened Vorn found himself looking at a group of four men all in the dark coloured suits of the *Ocean Queen's* security guards.

"Yes?" he said to them.

"Vorn Larcus the third," the lead guard said loudly, "you are under arrest for treason. You will come with us."

Two of the guards stepped forwards and took hold of Vorn. One of them produced a set of binders from beneath his tunic and locked them around the surprised rebel's wrists.

"Where's the other one?" the lead guard asked.

"She's not here." Vorn replied.

While one of the guards remained by the door with Vorn the remaining three moved further into the cabin. In the bathroom Kara had heard the exchange at the door and she took a deep breath before sliding beneath the surface of the bathwater.

"He's telling the truth." One of the guards said, "There's no-one else here. Just a droid that's been turned off."

"What about that?" another one said, pointing into the bathroom at the bath full of bubbles.

"I thought I'd run my friend a bath." Vorn said, "As you can see it went a bit wrong."

The leader of the guards looked at his men.

"You two stay here and wait for her to come back." He said to the two not holding on to Vorn. Then he looked at the final guard, "We'll take the prisoner to the brig."

"What about the droid?" one of the guards ordered to remain behind asked.

"Forget it." Their leader told them, "We'll pick it up later with the rest of their stuff."

Vorn was then led from the cabin by two of the guards while the other pair sat down and waited for Kara.

When Kara slid her head up from under the water she could hear the two guards talking.

"Of course it was him that did that to the bathroom." she heard one saying, "No woman could screw up running a bath like that." And Kara frowned.

Slowly Kara moved across the bath, taking great care not to make any noise by splashing the water around. The last thing she needed was for the guards to hear her and walk in on her. She carefully pulled herself out of the bath and grabbed a nearby robe to wrap herself in. Then she crept towards the doorway.

From there she could still hear the two guards talking to one another. She knew that she had no chance of overpowering the men, but she also saw that the door out of the cabin had been left open. Carefully she peered out of the bathroom to make sure that the guards were not looking in the direction of the door. Then she tiptoed out into the corridor before breaking into a run.

Jaysica looked at Tobis as he lay on the couch reviewing the *Ocean Queen's* schematics again.

"Tobis." She said softly and the engineer looked at her, "Come here." She added.

"What is it?" he asked as he got off the couch.

"The others are right." She said, "There's enough room here for us both."

Tobis suddenly stopped.

"Oh." He said, not knowing how to respond without offending the woman he cared for so much.

"Well hurry up." Jaysica said, pulling the sheets across the bed next to her.

Tobis almost broke into a run as he made his way to the bed and got in beside Jaysica, leaving a wide gap between them.

"Thank you." He said, unable to think of anything else to say and he began to study the datapad he held again.

"Come closer." Jaysica said, "There's lots of room and you might fall out way over there."

"I'll be fine," he replied, "I don't fall out of beds." Then he turned red as he realised that he may have just insulted Jaysica by suggesting that she needed to be careful about falling out more than he did.

Jaysica said nothing; instead she just lent over and kissed Tobis on his cheek. Tobis turned his head and looked at her.

"What was that for?" he asked, putting a hand where she had kissed him.

"You kissed me first."

"What? When?"

"On the mining ship. When you froze us so we'd survive the ship breaking up."

"Oh. That. Sorry."

"Why?" Jaysica asked and she slid up to Tobis and stared at him face to face, "Plus you kept your eyes shut when you got me out of that dress earlier. That was really sweet of you. You can kiss me again if you want."

"I. Err."

"Do you like me Tobis?"

Tobis tilted his head and moved closer to Jaysica.

Then the communication unit beside the bed buzzed.

Jaysica turned quickly to look at the communicator and there was a 'crack' as she and Tobis butted heads.

Both of them gave out cries of surprise and clutched their heads where they had struck one another. Jaysica reached out for the communicator and activated it. An image of Kara appeared on the screen.

"What?" Jaysica snapped.

"Get out." Kara said quickly.

Hearing this, Tobis assumed that Kara was referring to him.

"She invited me to get in." he said, "We weren't doing anything." And he got out of the bed.

"Was he in the bed with you?" Kara asked, a puzzled look appearing on her face.

"It's a big bed." Jaysica said, "Now what do you want? And why are you soaking wet? Are those bubbles in your hair?"

"Security took the boss." Kara said, "I only got away by hiding underwater in the bath. You need to get out of your room before they get there for you too."

"Where are you?" Jaysica asked as she slid to the edge of the bed.

"By the fountain sternward from my cabin. By the turbolifts."

"The one on the balcony?"

"That's the one. Meet me there. Oh and bring some of Tobis's clothes for me."

"What for?"

"I was in the bath Jaysica. All I've got is a robe and you're too short for anything to fit me."

"Okay see you soon." Jaysica said and she shut down the communicator and got out of bed, "We have to get dressed," she said to Tobis, "we have to go before security gets here and arrests us."

"Is that what's happened to Kara?" Tobis asked in reply.

"She got away, we've got to go and meet her."

"Okay." Tobis said as he rushed towards his clothes, "Does she need anything?"

Jaysica stopped.

"No." she said, "She's fine."

Kara shivered as she crouched behind the fountain and waited for Jaysica and Tobis to arrive. The ship's ventilation system produced a slight breeze through the corridors and the water that still clung to her skin made her feel this. Then she heard footsteps and stood up expecting to see Jaysica and Tobis arriving to meet her. But instead she found herself staring at a security guard.

The man came to a sudden halt when he saw Kara appear still dressed a robe and dripping water onto the floor. Then he recovered his sense and reached into his tunic and produced a compact blaster.

"Freeze!" he shouted.

"Oh you had to say that didn't you?" Kara said, "I am freezing."

"Come over here." The guard ordered, "Keep your hands where I can see them.

"Not really anywhere I can hide them is there?" Kara said as she walked around the fountain with her hands in the air.

"Turn around and put your hands behind your back."

"Oh great." Kara said as she did as she was told.

She felt the guard grab hold of one of her wrists roughly, but before he could lock binders around it there was the hiss of a turbolift door opening.

"Move along please." Kara heard the guard say to whoever had just emerged from the turbolift, "This is a ship security issue."

Then there was a 'click.'

"Drop your gun. Get back and raise your hands." Jenessa said.

The guard let go of Kara and she turned around to see the guard staring down the barrel of Jenessa's slug thrower. Keeping her gun trained on the man, Jenessa crouched down and scooped his discarded weapon. That was when he made his move.

Grabbing hold of Kara, he shoved her towards Jenessa and the two women collapsed in a heap on the floor. There was a sudden booming sound as Jenessa's weapon discharged when she dropped it, sending a projectile into a nearby wall.

The guard made a grab for his own dropped weapon, but at that moment Kay stepped from the turbolift where she had been waiting and kicked the blaster away from him. The guard then grabbed hold of Kay by the leg and with a sharp tug he pulled her to the floor.

"Stay down!" he bellowed as he reached inside his jacket. When his hand emerged it held a short cylinder that expanded with a flick of his wrist to form a longer baton. He swung at Kara just as she was untangling herself from Jenessa and she caught a blow across her shin. Crying out in pain, Kara rolled across the floor and the guard turned towards Jenessa.

The xenoarchaeologist had pulled herself across the floor in an attempt to get to her revolver, but before she could reach it the guard grabbed the back of her collar and dragged her backwards.

"Don't even think about it missy!" he shouted as he pulled her away from her gun. He let go almost immediately, hurling Jenessa further back.

Kay made an attempt to pick up the revolver herself. But as she gripped it the guard brought his baton down on her arm hard. She screamed as the blow struck her and the weapon was dropped again, though this time it did not discharge. Kay collapsed, cradling her badly injured arm and crying. The guard stood over her and raised his baton to strike again.

That was when the blaster shot rang out.

The guard collapsed, a smoking hole in his back. Kara looked in the direction of the attack and saw Jenessa standing there, holding the guard's blaster.

"Oh my God." Jenessa said, "Is he – Did I–"

"Yes he's dead." Kara said as she got back to her feet.

"But I never–" Jenessa began to say as she dropped the gun to the floor.

"Don't worry about it right now. It was him or us." Kara said, "Now pick those guns up again and give me a hand with her."

Jenessa nodded and picked up the two dropped guns from the floor while Kara approached Kay.

"Let me see." she said as she crouched down beside the sobbing young woman and Kay held out her arm. Then came the sound of running and the three women turned around just in time to see Jaysica and Tobis come rushing around the corner.

"We heard shooting." Tobis said, "What's happening?" Then he spotted what Kara was wearing, "Why are you in a robe?" he asked.

Kara looked at Jaysica.

"Oops." Jaysica said, "I forgot."

"Yeah, right." Kara replied. Then she helped Kay to her feet before looking around and adding, "Look, we can't stay here. We to find somewhere to lay low."

"How about my cabin?" Jenessa suggested, "I can lend you something to wear as well."

"I like that idea." Kara replied, "Lead the way."

"Wait. Shouldn't we take the guard's key and comlink?" Kay asked.

"And let the ship's crew know we have them?" Kara replied, "No. The gun will do."

## 5.

The YT-1300 class transport ship the *Silver Hawk* dropped out of hyperspace just beyond the nebula. From inside the cockpit, the massive brightly coloured cloud of gas filled the viewport.

“So the rich and famous pay how much to come and look at this?” Tharun Verser asked from the co-pilot’s seat. He knew little of the ship’s systems, but since only he and the ship’s captain, Mace Grayle were aboard there was no reason for him not to be there.

“Tens of thousands of credits.” Mace replied.

“When they could just charter a ship like yours and see for what, a few hundred?”

“Yes but on my ship you don’t get served fancy little snack foods by slave labourers.”

“No, you pay your only crewman.”

“I’m not paying him for this run.” Mace said.

Tharun grinned.

“I doubt the lad will complain. He gets to spend a few days shackled up with his darling Jaysica.” He said.

“Providing he has the wherewithal to do anything with the opportunity.” Mace replied.

“Think the major will try anything with Kara?” Tharun asked.

“You’re kidding right? I’d be asking if Kara would try anything with the major.”

Tharun considered this and nodded in agreement.

“By the way,” he asked, “what’s in that case Kara gave you before she left?”

“Oh that.” Mace answered, “I gave Mallia’s size to Kara and she got me a bunch of clothes for her from storage. I figured since her and Jaysica are using up valuable space in my hold with everything they’re grabbing I should ask for something in return.”

A bleeping sound came from the *Silver Hawk*’s controls.

“What’s that?” Tharun asked.

“Something just dropped out of hyperspace.” Mace said, sitting up straight and studying his instruments.

“The *Ocean Queen*?”

“I think so. They’re here. Now we wait for them to ask for our help.”

“What’s that?” Tharun asked, pointing to another return on the sensor display.

“There’s someone else out here.” Mace said, taking a closer look for himself, “If they hang around they could cause problems.”

The return suddenly disappeared; a pulsing indicated that whatever it had been had just entered hyperspace.

“Well they’re gone now.” Tharun said, “So I guess we can relax.”

“Yeah.” Mace said, drawing out the word and giving the indication that he hadn’t been paying attention, “The thing is they just went into the nebula.”

“Into the nebula?” Tharun asked, “I thought you couldn’t do that.”

“You can if you know what you’re doing, but you need accurate charts. Whoever they were I’m guessing they come out here quite a bit.”

Back in her cabin Jenessa headed straight for the mini bar.

“I may as well find out what a seventy credit candy bar tastes like.” She said and she pulled out the candy bar and took a bite.

“Well?” Kara asked as she used a towel to improvise a sling, “How does it taste?”

“Like every one credit bar I’ve ever had.” Jenessa said, “No wait, I think it’s stale. At seventy credits I suppose its been in here for years.”

“But candy doesn’t go stale.” Tobis said, no one paying any attention to him.

Kara looked at Kay.

“How’s that?” she asked.

“Better.” Kay replied, nodding.

“Kara, may I have a word?” Jaysica asked and she pulled Kara to one side.

“What is it?” Kara asked, then she added, “Ow! What was that for!” as Jaysica punched her on the arm.

“All that stuff you said.” Jaysica said to her quietly, “About Tobis. If you hadn’t called us on the comm. I’d have slept with him!”

“Oh.” Kara replied, neither of them noticing that Tobis was staring at them. Before Kara could say anything else Jaysica stormed across the room and sat down as far from Kara as she could get.

“Any chance of something to wear?” Kara asked Jenessa, who was wrapping half chewed bits of candy in the bar’s wrapper ready to put in the bin.

“Sure.” Jenessa replied and she opened the nearest closet, “Just pick something out.”

Kara walked towards the room. As she passed Tobis he suddenly lashed out and punched her in the arm just like Jaysica had done.

"Ow!" Kara exclaimed in disbelief. Then she lent close to him and whispered, "Same reason, different point of view?"

"I don't know what you're talking about." Tobis replied.

"This is pretty." Kay said, picking up the holocron from beside the bed, "What is it?"

"Oh just something I picked up during a dig." Jenessa told her, "It's supposed to be a data storage device, but it doesn't seem to work."

"Is it supposed to tingle?" Kay asked.

"Tingle?" Jenessa asked, snatching the holocron away, "I don't feel anything."

"Maybe it's just me." Kay replied.

"Anyway," Jenessa said out loud, "what are we going to do now? I'm guessing that your plan to seize the ship is blown."

"No, we can still do it." Tobis said.

"Without the boss?" Kara asked as she pulled on a pair of trousers beneath the robe.

"Oh yes." Tobis replied, "We just need to get to the computer core."

"Why?" Kay asked, "Can't you just use the computer terminal in here?"

"No." Tobis said, "We need to upload code that will disable the ship's ability to enter hyperspace or send transmissions over interstellar distances. I was able to hack through their firewall to get a full schematic, but I don't have enough access to send code back to a protected drive."

"So what happens after you strand the ship here?" Jenessa asked.

"They'll call for help locally." Kara said.

"Locally? But what are the odds of there being a ship nearby?" Jenessa then asked.

"Well obviously we've thought of that." Jaysica answered before the others had a chance, relishing the idea of demonstrating she knew more than Jenessa about something, "Our ship's waiting nearby. They'll bring us guns."

"Plus we get two more people." Kara added.

"Two more? But the crew of this ship is in the thousands." Kay said, "How are you going to fight all of them?"

"They don't need to." Jenessa said, "Most of the crew are mon cal slaves. Get them to revolt and the ship is theirs. When do we start?"

"We?" Kara asked, "I thought you weren't part of this."

"Well I've not got much choice now have I?"

"That guard's not identifying you," Kara pointed out, "and no one saw us come in here. You're still not connected to us. Neither of you are." And she looked towards Kay.

"They can be hostages." Tobis said.

"Hostages?" Kay replied, "I don't like the sound of that."

"No. Its good." Kara said, "We'll supposedly hold you hostage so that people won't know you helped us. You'll be off the hook entirely."

"But how will people know we're supposed to be you're hostages?" Jenessa asked, "Put a gun to our heads and the captain will call out security."

"Only if it's done publicly." Kara said, "We'll do it in private. We just add one genuine hostage to act as your alibi."

"Who?" Jaysica asked.

"Who else?" Kara said and she looked at Kay again, "Her employer, the bitch that got the boss arrested."

Lady Sharva paced up and down in her suite. Wherever Kay had gone to, she had been gone too long for her liking. She was paid to wait on Lady Sharva after all, not enjoy herself at her expense. Then the cabin door intercom sounded and Lady Sharva strode towards the door. This was Kay's job.

"Yes?" she asked, the frustration clear in her voice.

"Its me my lady." Kay replied.

"Where do you think you've been?" Lady Sharva asked, "No wait, I'll let you in and you can explain why I shouldn't fire you and have you put off the ship." And she released the door.

As soon as it was unlocked the door flew open and the rebels burst in.

"Who do you think you are?" Lady Sharva demanded, and then she became quiet when Kara aimed the security guard's blaster at her.

"Sit." Kara ordered.

"They're rebels my lady." Kay said as both she and Jenessa made their way to sit on the same couch as Lady Sharva.

"Your arm-" Lady Sharva began, at last noticing the sling.

"She should have stayed still." Kara said then she threw a glance at Tobis.

"Get that door shut." She told him and he nodded at her before closing the cabin door.

"Okay ladies," Kara said, "you may all consider yourselves prisoners of the Alliance to Restore the Republic. When our demands are met you'll be released."

"Demands?" Lady Sharva exclaimed, "The Empire does not meet the demands of insurgents." Then she looked at Jenessa, "And who are you?"

"Doctor Jenessa Drame. Department of Xenoarchaeology at the University of Estran. I ran into this lot a few weeks ago. When I saw them here tonight they took me hostage before I could raise the alarm."

"We should shut her up." Jaysica said, pointing at Jenessa, "I've tape in my bag."

"No." Kara said forcefully.

"Ignorant thugs." Lady Sharva snapped.

"Her on the other hand." Kara mumbled, "Nah, probably not enough tape."

"Err." Tobis suddenly said.

"What?" Kara asked.

"Shouldn't we be going now?" he asked.

"Yes, I suppose we should." Kara replied, and then she looked at Jaysica, "Will you be alright here? You've got that gun haven't you?"

"Right here." Jaysica answered, pulling Jenessa's revolver from her bag.

"Good." Kara said, "then she turned back towards Tobis, "Okay lets go."

As little volume as possible had been devoted to the *Ocean Queen's* detention section by its owners.

Prisoners were kept in cells consisting of compact barred cages instead of individual rooms separated by thick armoured walls. Of course this meant that it was easy for security guards to visually check on their captives without needing electronic surveillance devices.

Though there were several other prisoners in the detention section Vorn was the only human, the remainder being mon calamari. The air was drier in here than any other part of the ship that Vorn had been to and he guessed that this was a deliberate setting in the environmental controls. The mon calamari much preferred moist atmospheres and conditions such as these would make them more controllable by the guards. In the cage next to his Vorn saw a mon calamari lying face down in its bed. Stripped to the waist, its back was covered in the fresh wounds inflicted by a whip. In addition to these, Vorn could see the scars of older injuries from a similar weapon. The mon calamari groaned.

Vorn reached for the bottle of water that he had been left with and passed it through the bars.

"Here." He said to the injured mon calamari, "Take this."

The mon calamari turned his head and Vorn saw his facial injuries also.

"Why?" the on calamari gasped, "It is all you have."

"I think you need it more."

The mon calamari lifted himself into a sitting position and took the water.

"Why are you here?" he asked Vorn after gulping down the precious liquid.

"My name's Vorn Larcus and I'm here to rescue you." Vorn replied.

The schematic obtained by Tobis made it easy for the two rebels to locate a corridor where an access point to the *Ocean Queen's* engineering sections was located and it did not take long to discover a wall panel that was easily removable. Tobis undid most of the screws holding the panel in place, leaving just the row across the top. Then he bent down and prised up the bottom of the panel. Crouching down also, Kara looked underneath.

"Coast's clear." She said and crawled beneath the panel. Then she held it up from the other side as Tobis followed her under. When she let go of the panel it dropped back into place without leaving any trace that they had come through, "Okay Tobis, which way now?"

"Oh yes. Err." Tobis replied, fumbling in pockets for his datapad, "This way." And he headed off down the corridor.

At this time of night the overwhelming majority of the crew were asleep, even amongst the slave workers. But the problem was that the majority of those crewmembers who were still about in this part of the ship were security staff watching for any signs of trouble from the mon calamari.

Tobis pressed himself up against an alcove wall and waved at Kara to get back when he heard a guard approaching. Reaching into his jacket pocket he pulled out the tool he had used to remove the screws and he waited for the guard to get closer. He saw quickly that the guard was not human, but a quarren.

"Squid." He whispered back to Kara.

Gripping the tool tightly in his hand, Tobis jumped out of his hiding place and stabbed at the quarren with the improvise weapon. He aimed for the gills slits either side of the quarren's tentacled head, but the guard stepped aside at the last moment. Tobis stumbled as his attack failed to connect and turning around the guard reached for his belt where a stun baton was located. He activated the weapon and raised it up high, intending to bring it down on Tobis. But before he could strike Kara rushed him from behind and wrapped an arm around his neck. She tightened her grip and the stun baton dropped to the floor, a brief flash of light



coming from its tip as it hit the deck plating. Frantically the choking guard tried to get free of Kara's grip. But Kara placed a hand firmly on the back of his head and with a strong, deliberate twist she broke his neck. "Well," she said as she let the guard's body fall to the floor, "they'll know we're in here when they find him." "We can stash him here." Tobis replied quickly and he rushed to a row of lockers for protective suits, "It should buy us some time. Anyway the computer core is just ahead." "Great." Kara said as she ripped the guard's security key from his body and dragged him to the open locker. With the guard's body concealed the rebels ran along the corridor to a large door where Tobis halted. Without asking, Kara hit the control to open the door. The heavy door rumbled open and Kara held her breath, expecting a squad of heavily armed guards to come pouring around the corner in response to the noise. As soon as the gap was wide enough both Kara and Tobis leapt through into the computer core and shut the door behind them.

"Okay Tobis, get to work." Kara said and she stood back.

Tobis located a suitable socket for a mem-stik almost immediately and inserted the one that he had brought with him. Then he rushed to the nearest access terminal and began to type.

"There." He said after a few moments, "The new code is uploaded. We just need to wait while the computer recompiles it and loads it into memory."

"How long will that take?" Kara asked.

"About three minutes."

"Then the ship's stuck here right?"

"The new lines of code will affect the control routines for the ship's hyperdrive motivator and subspace array. If anyone tries to use either system then the control system will fail to initialise."

"So yes? They'll be stuck."

"Yes. They'll be stuck and unable to call for help from anyone not in the immediate area."

The captain of the *Ocean Queen* was not happy to be awoken by a pounding on his door.

"What the hell do you want?" he asked the nervous looking steward standing in the corridor outside.

"You need to come quickly sir." The steward replied, "It looks like we've been sabotaged."

Grabbing a robe instead of putting on his uniform the captain hurriedly followed the steward back to his office. Through the clear wall he could see the bridge crew rushing from one control station to another while Kasgor yelled orders at them.

Two other crewmen were waiting in his office. One was his human first officer, while the other was the quarren overseer from the engineering department.

"So what's happening?" the captain asked the two beings as he sat down heavily.

"We were attempting to make contact with Estran at zero fifteen," the first officer began, "but we were unable to make a connection. We initially suspected interference from the nebula so plotted a micro jump to take us a couple of light hours further out. That was when we found the hyperdrive was not responding either."

"What the hell?" the captain exclaimed.

"The systems are fine captain." The engineering overseer assured him, "I watched the mon calms run the tests and confirmed the results myself."

"So what's happened then?" the captain demanded, "If everything's working why am I here?"

"It must be software." The first officer said.

"Software?"

"Yes captain, "The engineering overseers said, "Someone must have introduced malicious code that is preventing the systems from operating."

"Despite our firewall?"

"Yes sir." The first officer said, "We believe that the associate of a rebel we have in holding may have been able to gain access to the core directly."

"Show me." The captain said and he stood up and walked towards the glass wall. Part of the barrier slid aside and allowed him and his senior officers to enter the bridge.

"Keep working!" Kasgor bellowed as some of the mon calamari paused and turned towards the captain.

The first officer led the captain towards a nearby console that had been adapted for human vision rather than the versions used by the mon calamari. The first officer tapped on a few keys in a sequence that would typically activate the *Ocean Queen's* long distance communications. But instead the screen just reset back to its previous state. The captain frowned and repeated the sequence for himself only to get the same result.

"As you see sir-" the first officer began.

"Yes I do see!" the captain shouted, "Now just tell me what we can do about it."

"We can reinitialise the entire system." The first officer said, "Clean reboot from backup code stores. We recompile and reload the entire thing."

"How long will that take?"

"Eighteen hours." The overseer said, "At least."

"Eighteen hours?" the captain repeated.

"Yes sir. We need to scrub the current core memory entirely. We don't know how deeply the malicious code has penetrated." The overseer answered, "But that's not the worst part. During those eighteen hours we'd experience massive loss of control. Everything would have to be done manually and we don't have enough people to do it."

"So the passengers will be furious and I'd be fired. Options?" the captain asked.

"Call for help locally." The first officer said, "There's a ship nearby. They could patch through a call to Estran and get a specialised team out here. They could purge our system without us needing to shut anything down."

"Make the call." The captain said.

## 6.

"Are you going to get that?" Tharun asked as the *Silver Hawk's* communications signal indicated an incoming call.

"I don't want to appear too eager." Mace replied.

"Ah, playing hard to get." Tharun said as he sat down in the co-pilot's seat and yawned.

"I think that's long enough." Mace said and he activated the communications system, "Hello *Ocean Queen*, this is the *Silver Hawk*. How may I help you?"

"Ahem, *Silver Hawk*, we have suffered serious system failures and require urgent assistance. Under the Imperial Shipping Code I-

"I know the code *Ocean Queen*. We stand ready to assist you, transmit docking instructions we are coming aboard." And Mace shut down the audio communication system before the *Ocean Queen* could reply. A moment later a data stream from the *Ocean Queen* arrived with the docking instructions.

"Treat them mean, keep them keen." Tharun said.

"Doesn't work with women." Mace said.

"Then you're not doing it right."

In comparison to the *Ocean Queen*, the *Silver Hawk* was a tiny ship and Mace piloted his vessel into the hangar bay of the larger one with ease. When he strode down the access ramp into the hangar bay he found the *Ocean Queen's* captain waiting for him, along with a pair of security guards.

"Expecting trouble?" Mace asked looking at the blasters both guards carried on their hips.

"We think we've been sabotaged captain," the *Ocean Queen's* captain replied, "it pays to be cautious."

"Indeed it does." Mace said, patting his own heavy blaster pistol in its holster, "After all the rebellion uses this sort of ship and is known to hijack vessels in deep space." And at that point Tharun came down the ramp holding behind Mace, holding a heavy blaster rifle. Both security guards reached for their pistols. "I just needed to be sure captain." Mace said, holding up his hand at Tharun to halt.

"Of course. I'm Captain Largen, commanding officer of the *Ocean Queen*. In exchange for your assistance I'm prepared to offer you and your associate access to our facilities."

"First class?" Mace asked hopefully.

"Economy captain. Be reasonable." Captain Largen answered.

"Okay then. So how can I help you?" Mace asked.

"We just need access to your communications array captain- Captain?"

"Grayle. Mace Grayle."

"Captain Grayle. We need to request a computer security team to undo the damage the rebels have done to my ship."

"Rebels? Are you sure?"

"Oh yes, we have one in custody."

"In custody?" Tharun interrupted.

"Yes, he was recognised by one of our other passengers. We took arrested him as soon as we could, but his partner escaped our guards and sabotaged the ship."

From an observation port high up above the hangar bay Kara and Tobis watched as Mace escorted Captain Largen into the *Silver Hawk*. The security guards remained in the hangar, attempting to stare down Tharun.

"Tharun really wants to try out that new gun of his doesn't he?" Kara said and Tobis nodded, "Does it work yet?" Kara then asked and Tobis shook his head. "We'll give them ten minutes to send a message." Kara went on, "Then we'll go grab some decent firepower."

Tharun sat at the bottom of the *Silver Hawk's* access ramp and watched Captain Largen escort Mace from the hangar. In his hand he held a datapad given to him with a list of services that the *Ocean Queen* were offering.

"You need to practice sneaking up on people." He said when he heard Kara and Tobis approach and he stood up. When he saw what Kara was wearing he frowned. "I thought you had your choice of all those fancy clothes." He said, "How come you're dressed like a history teacher on a field trip?"

"Because I had to borrow these clothes from a history teacher. You're lucky I'm not naked."

"I don't call that luck." Tharun replied, "Now what's all this about someone being caught? I take it it's the major?"

"Yep. Some bitch he knows from his lordship days spotted him. He's been locked up somewhere. Now how about giving us some decent guns so we can get him back?"

The cabin door opened and Jaysica span around. Tobis froze when she pointed the revolver directly at him. "Oh, its you." She said and she relaxed, pointing the gun back towards her 'prisoners'. "Here." Tobis said, taking a compact blaster from a bag over his shoulder and handing it to Jaysica. She accepted the more familiar weapon and put down the revolver. "What about the major?" she asked. "Kara's on her way there now. They'll handle the crew. All we have to do is keep these three here until it's time."

With the mission now so far advanced Kara was in no mood for taking things slowly, so she just shot the first security guard she encountered. By setting her blaster pistol to deliver an incapacitating stun bolt rather than a lethal one she avoided damaging his uniform, a uniform that she then stole.

The guard in the detention section barely looked up when Kara first entered the room. But then he did a double take.

"The chief will tear you a new one for having your uniform like that." He said when he saw how poorly Kara's disguise fitted. She responded by pointing her blaster right at him.

"Open the cells!" she snapped, "All of them! Now!"

For a moment the guard froze, surprised at Kara's sudden change from ally to enemy. When he recovered his senses he acted poorly and reached for his own weapon. Kara shot without hesitation and the guard toppled backwards in his chair.

"Hi boss!" she exclaimed, "I don't suppose you know which button opens your cell do you? Never mind, I'll just press them all."

Kara ran her fingers along the rows of switches and one after another the cell doors swung open.

"Here you go boss." Kara said when Vorn's cell opened and she gave him a blaster, "Now what bout these mon cal's?"

"We will fight." One of the other prisoners said, "But we have no weapons."

"You do now." Kara told him, "That guard won't be needing his and I've got another two blasters taken from others in my pockets."

"Can you free your people with these?" Vorn asked.

"We can." Another mon calamari replied, "The overseers and guards will not expect armed resistance.

"Good," Vorn said, "because I've got an appointment on the bridge."

Captain Largen poured Mace a drink. Mace accepted it and took a sip. It was good, genuine Corellian whisky. But then, Mace thought to himself, on a ship like this he would expect nothing less.

Suddenly the communicator on the desk interrupted them.

"Captain it's the mon cal's!" and a panicked sounding voice exclaimed, "They're revolting. They have guns and-" and then the signal was cut off.

Largen turned towards the bridge just in time to see Vorn burst in through a side door and shoot Kasgor in the chest.

"I am seizing this ship on behalf of the Alliance to Restore the Republic!" Vorn shouted and the mon calamari bridge crew looked at one another in stunned silence.

Kara ran past Vorn and towards the captain's office, the glass door sliding open automatically.

"Okay you two get your hands up." She ordered.

"You rebel scum." Mace said as he raised his hands, "You'll never get away with this. This ship's disabled."

"Let me worry about that honey." Kara said as she took Mace's blaster from its holster and tossed it aside,

"Hey boss!" Kara called out, "I'm going to take these two to where we've got the other prisoners stashed. Will you be alright here?"

"I think so." Vorn replied, "Remember we need the hyperdrive back on line before we can get out of here."

"I thought this ship was supposed to be secure captain." Lady Sharva said as Captain Largen sat down in her cabin. Kara had escorted both him and Mace there as her prisoners with incident. Leaving them under the watchful eye of Jaysica she left with Tobis to undo the damage his tampering had done.

"I'm sorry your ladyship," he replied, "but there were certain failures totally beyond my-"

"Well you've failed for the last time captain. Mark my words; you'll never get another command after this. I'll be registering my complaints with the highest-"

Her rant was interrupted by a sudden wailing sound from the *Ocean Queen's* public address system.

"The evacuation alarm!" Largen exclaimed.

"Now hear this!" Vorn's voice said over the system, "This vessel is now the property of the Alliance to Restore the Republic! Any being who does not wish to join us should immediately proceed to an escape pod. Anyone resisting will be placed under arrest and interned for the duration of the war."

"Okay everyone," Jaysica said, "you heard the major. It's time for you all to leave. There's a lifeboat just down the corridor that should fit you all in. Now get moving."

Jaysica's 'captives' marched out of the cabin ahead of her. Mace was careful to make sure that he was at the back. As soon as he stepped through the cabin doorway he spun around and grabbed Jaysica's blaster, pulling it from her grasp. With his other hand he shoved her back into the cabin before shooting the door controls.

"That should hold her." He said as the door dropped shut, "Now the rebellion may be getting your ship Captain Largen, but they're not getting mine. Anyone who doesn't want to be floating in an escape pod until rescue turns up may want to come with me."

Vorn stood at the *Ocean Queen's* navigation station, programming its navigation computer with the information necessary to make the jump to rendezvous with a waiting rebel ship. Of course the *Ocean Queen* would be unable to make the jump until Tobis was finished.

"Captain!" one of the bridge crew called out, addressing Vorn as the commanding officer of the ship, "I have Imperial ships in sector three-seven!"

"Show me!" Vorn snapped and he rushed towards the crewman. On his sensor display the mon calamari pointed out a set of three returns where a trio of Imperial Navy ships had just dropped out of hyperspace. The ships were large, each one almost as big as the *Ocean Queen*. Venator-class ships Vorn realised. It seemed that the *Ocean Queen's* call for help had been picked up by a nearby patrol group.

"Captain," another crewman called out, "I'm monitoring a communication from the light freighter that escaped from our hangar aimed at the Imperial vessels. I believe they are alerting them to our situation."

"What are those star destroyers waiting for?" Vorn said as he realised that they were within range of the star destroyers' turbolasers.

"The escape pods jettisoned from this ship are currently located between us and the Navy vessel captain." The crewman told him.

"So we've actually found a navy captain that's trying to avoid un-necessary casualties." Vorn said, "That's nice of him."

Then a signal was received that demonstrated that Vorn's evaluation of his opponent had been slightly inaccurate. The captain was not a 'he'.

"*Ocean Queen* this is the star destroyer *Firebrand*. Stand down and prepare to be boarded." She said.

"I know that voice." Vorn said to himself as he thought back to his days in the service of the Republic, "Sayla Naje, my old CO." Vorn grabbed a headset and opened a communications channel with the *Firebrand*. "Hello there Sayla." He said jovially, "Still stuck on that old bucket I see. Those ships of yours must be almost as old as us." He then tried to picture Captain Naje's face given that she was several years younger than he was.

"Vorn?" Captain Naje replied, "There's no way out this time. Stand down and I'll see you treated well."

Vorn watched the sensor display as the three Imperial ships became many when they began to launch wave after wave of fighters. Vorn adjusted the communications system.

"Tobis we need that hyperdrive."

"Tobis says two minutes boss." Kara replied, "Code's recompiled, but it's not loaded yet."

"I two minutes we're going to be ass deep in eyeballs." Vorn replied, using the rebellion's slang term for Imperial TIE fighters.

"Would it help if I got out and pushed?" Kara asked sarcastically.

"It might." Vorn replied before ripping off his headset, "Helm!" he shouted across the bridge, "Bring us about, I want as much distance between us and those fighters as possible." Then he whispered to himself,

"Whenever you're ready Tobis."

On the bridge of the *Firebrand*, Captain Naje stared out of the viewport. Her fighters were visible as tiny specks of blue light from their engines, while the *Ocean Queen* was just a cigarra shaped object moving slowly away.

"Give it up Vorn." She said to herself, "You're hyperdrive is shut down. There's no escape." Then she turned towards a young officer standing behind her. "Lieutenant, prepare your men."

The *Ocean Queen* rocked as the first group of TIE fighters flew passed and peppered the ship's shields with blasterfire. Vorn prayed that the *Ocean Queen's* shields were as effective as those on other mon calamari vessels.

"Boss! We're done!" Kara's voice yelled over the intercom.

"Punch it!" Vorn shouted and the mon calamari crewman at the helm initialised the hyperdrive.

With a flash of light the *Ocean Queen* jumped into hyperspace.

"Captain Naje!" one of the comscan operators called out, "The ship no longer appears on our scopes."