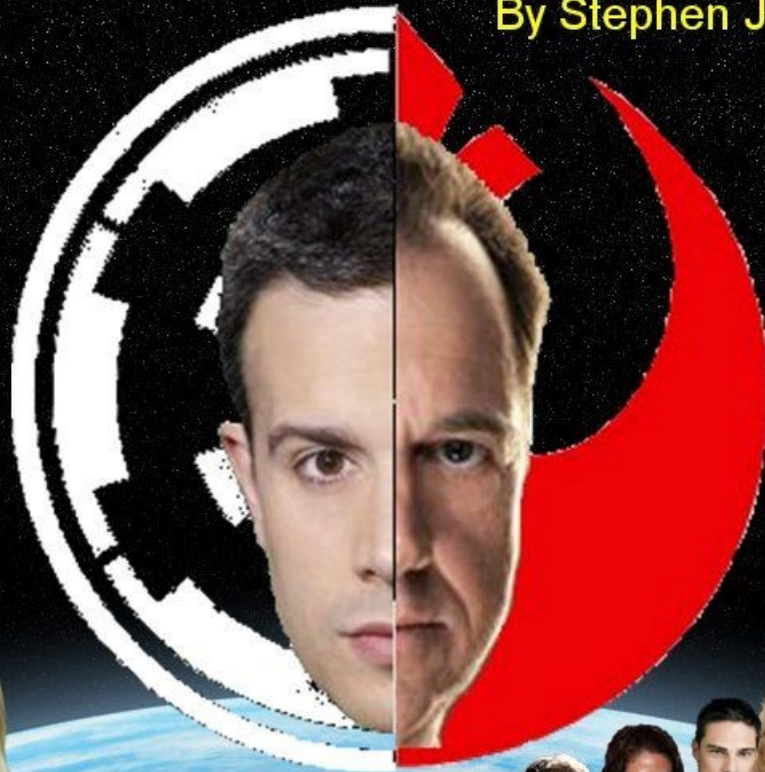


# STAR WARS

## 2-10: The Allastra Deception

By Stephen J Dutton



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Civil war turns father against son

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

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

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

## THE ALLAISTRA DECEPTION

CAPTURED BY THE EMPIRE, KARA MUST HOPE FOR HER TEAMMATES TO LAUNCH A RESCUE. BUT WHILE SHE WAITS SHE IS FORCED TO WONDER IF HER FELLOW PRISONER CAN BE TRUSTED...

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

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# 1.

This was all Jaysica's fault.

Kara Bilstran was sure of that as she lay in the tiny room that the Imperial troops had thrown her into. They had caught her red handed with a bag containing an illegal blaster and four pre-prepared explosives charges; she may as well have been wearing an Alliance uniform. The bag had belonged to fellow rebel Jaysica Horbid, the group's demolitions expert. Often she destroyed things simply by touching them, but professionally she used explosives just like most other people.

This time it appeared that Jaysica had decided to use Kara's bag for storing her equipment without first bothering to ask. So when Kara had walked through the Imperial checkpoint the troops manning it had not reacted well.

It was not in Kara's nature to go down without a fight, however and she had given such a strong account of herself when the soldiers arrested her that they had been forced to produce a second set of binders to restrain her ankles after she gave one of them a kick that he was unlikely to forget for some time. After that they taped her mouth shut when she tried to bite a chunk out of the face of one of her captors. It was only then that they had brought her here.

Not that Kara had any idea where here was. She had been hooded for the journey and the soldiers had only removed the hood when they dragged her into the room. Though perhaps because they did not relish being kicked and bitten again they had left her bound. It made little difference in here though. The room was barely large enough for Kara to lie out straight in and had few features. A rubber mattress in one corner had been provided, but given the stains upon it Kara preferred to remain on the bare floor. A refresher unit in the corner was clearly blocked. The stench it gave off filled Kara's nostrils and if not for the tape covering her mouth she would have done her best to avoid inhaling through her nose at all.

When Kara got out of here she was going to make sure that Jaysica paid for what she had done.

The door to her cell slid open suddenly and Kara saw a group of Imperial soldiers standing just beyond the doorway. One of them carried something made of bright orange fabric. He snarled at Kara, doubtless because of the bite marks clearly visible on his face. Meanwhile a crate about two metres long lay at the soldiers' feet. Kara saw that the crate was open to reveal a thick foam lining, but nothing else inside. Whatever the Empire had planned for her, Kara doubted it was going to be pleasant.

Major Vorn Larcus observed the droids carrying crates from the structure to the vehicles parked a short distance away through his macrobinoculars. Each of the crates was emblazoned with markings of the Allastran Defence Forces.

"They're definitely moving out." He said to the other two rebels beside him, Mace Grayle the captain of the independent freighter the *Silver Hawk* and the former mercenary Sergeant Tharun Verser.

"So the news stories are true then." Mace said, "The Empire's disbanding the local military."

"Got their asses kicked once too often by us." Tharun commented.

"I think their sloppy security had something to do with it." Mace added, "Gotta love a defence force that can't defend its own facilities properly."

"Well let's just hope their security is sloppy for one last day." Vorn said, "The rebellion needs those weapons."

Then he produced his comlink and activated it, "Tobis, are the charges ready?" he asked.

Tobis Dorfus, Mace's engineer replied almost immediately.

"Err." He began.

"Something's gone wrong," Tharun commented, looking at Mace, "and I bet it has something to do with Jaysica."

"There's been a problem." Tobis went on.

"Told you." Tharun said.

"He'll never admit it was Jaysica's fault." Mace replied.

"What's happened Tobis?" Vorn asked.

"Jaysica." Tharun whispered and Vorn looked at him, frowning.

"It looks like Kara took Jaysica's bag by mistake." Tobis said, "The one with the explosives in it."

"Now Tobis," Vorn said, "Kara was still aboard the *Silver Hawk* when we left. So how exactly did Kara manage to take Jaysica's bag and not the other way around?"

"He's blaming me isn't he?" Jaysica's voice was then heard over the comlink, "It was an accident!"

Vorn shut down his comlink.

"Our one chance," he said to the two men beside him, "is that Kara is still on the ship and can get to us in time." Then he reactivated his comlink and signalled the *Silver Hawk*.

"Oh master Larcus!" the excited tones of Vorn's protocol droid, Jeeves exclaimed as soon as the connection was made, "Thank heavens its you!"

"What is it Jeeves?" he asked.

There was a rapid chirping sound in the background, the sound of an astromech droid.

"Yes Harvey," Jeeves said, "I was just about to tell the major that."

"Jeeves I need to talk to Kara." Vorn said.

"But master Larcus," Jeeves replied, "that's what I have to tell you sir. Mistress Bilstran left the ship just over an hour ago."

"Okay Jeeves. Now listen, this is important. Did she take a bag with her?"

There was more chirping.

"I will not hurry up!" Jeeves snapped at Harvey, Tobis' R5 unit, "I will tell master Larcus what you have discovered in the proper manner."

"What's going on Jeeves?" Vorn asked.

"Well as you know master Larcus, Harvey has been monitoring the local military communications and it would seem that a woman answering the description of mistress Bilstran was detained a short time ago. They say she was in possession of explosives. I don't see how that could be though, after all mistress Horbid was supposed to have taken them all with her when you left earlier."

"Yes, she was." Vorn said sternly. His anger evident, "Vorn out." And he shut down the comlink.

"One of you two contact Tobis and Jaysica," he said to Mace and Tharun, "Tell them to meet us back at the ship as soon as possible. I swear if I have to speak to Jaysica right now I'll say something I shouldn't."

"Major, what about the mission to get the weapons?" Tharun enquired.

"Without the explosives," Vorn said, "there is no mission."

"I don't see why everyone's being so uptight." Jaysica said when the team returned to the *Silver Hawk*. They had only just come back aboard and were unpacking their gear in the lounge, ready to stow it away properly, "After all it was just an acc-"

"Yes we know!" Vorn yelled and he slammed his hand down on the table in front of Jaysica, causing her to jump backwards in surprise, "It was just an accident. Well its always just an accident with you isn't it? You're a kriffing accident waiting to happen. Each time something is lost or broken because you're not paying attention its just another accident. Well not this time young lady. The fact that the operation was blown because of your carelessness is one thing, but Kara is missing. The Empire probably has her, but she could be dead for all we know."

Vorn stepped backwards. There was silence in the room. No one, not even the droids made any sound.

Everyone stared at Vorn.

"I'm warning you Miss Horbid. If we can't get Kara back then you're through here. I'll see you back in droid maintenance doing work that's too menial for machines before the week is out. Do you hear me? Well? Do you?"

Jaysica looked down at floor.

"Oh get out of my sight!" Vorn snapped, "I seriously feel like shooting you myself right now."

Then, with tears welling up in her eyes, Jaysica ran to her cabin and shut the door behind her.

Mace approached Vorn.

"Major," he began, "I hate to bring this up, but we're on a schedule here. If I don't get to Estran-"

"Yes I know." Vorn replied without bothering to let Mace finish, "There's not much we can do anyway without knowing exactly where Kara's been taken."

"So we're just leaving her?" Tharun commented.

"No we're most definitely not." Vorn said, "We'll have the local resistance keep a watch out for news of her and figure something out when we get back."

"Vay, don't you ever knock?" ISB Agent Garm Larcus asked when his office door slid open and a young woman came rushing in.

"Why should I?" she asked, "What would you be doing in here you wouldn't want me to see?"

Garm thought for a moment, hoping to come up with a sarcastic reply.

"Good point." He instead replied, "Now what's the hurry this time?"

"I've got you a present." Vay said, smiling as she tossed a bag onto the compact couch beside her.

"A present? Why?"

"Because I like working with you and I think you'll really like my present."

"What is it?" Garm asked with a sense of foreboding. At times Vay Udra was a subtle as a rancor in a ceramic shop and Garm did not want to have to explain a bizarre gift from her to his wife. Losing or breaking the gift 'accidentally' would not work. Garm was pretty sure that Vay would sense the deception in him.

"It's not a what. It's a who." Vay replied.

"I don't think Jennay would let me keep a Twi'lek slave girl."

"Good for her." Vay said and she rushed to where Garm was sitting and squeezed her way in between him and the computer that was on his desk in front of him, practically sitting in his lap before he pushed his chair backwards. Rapidly she tapped the keyboard until an image appeared on the monitor. Garm leaned closer as he instantly recognised the woman in the picture.

"An army unit grabbed her on Allastra," Vay explained, "and when they ran her image it flagged up with me. She's one of your father's people isn't she? The one who shot you? Kara Bilstran she's called apparently." Garm just stared at the picture.

"Strange." Vay said looking at Garm, "I'd have thought seeing an image of her would have made you angrier than this. Anyway I had the army transfer her onto a ship, a fast one, and she's being transferred here."

"Here?" Garm repeated and he looked directly at Vay.

"Yes, here to this very building."

"What's the ETA?"

"Well it's only a thirty minute jump from Allastra, but I don't know if the ship's left yet. So it could be anytime in the next couple of hours. I better get ready."

"Ready for what?" Garm asked, puzzled.

"Well since you've been teaching me all about how to carry out investigations and interrogations and she may try to use the fact that she shot you to throw you off balance I thought I'd do this one."

Garm leant back in his chair.

"You've planned all this out haven't you?" he asked.

"Yes I have." Vay replied, "I'm going to trick her into thinking I'm on her side."

"And how pray tell are you going to do that?"

Vay smiled and returned to the bag she had discarded earlier. From it she pulled a set of bright orange overalls.

"Ta-da!" she announced, "Allastran security forces issue restraint overalls, used for transporting prisoners. Stick me in a cell wearing these and the rebel woman will think she's still in a cell on Allastra and I'm a fellow prisoner being moved from one holding cell to another. Now help me get these on, I can't do it alone." And Vay threw the bag and overalls back onto the couch and unzipped her bodyglove.

"Whoa!" Garm exclaimed as Vay began to peel off the garment and he spun his chair around to face away from her and stared at the floor.

"Oh you're so sweet." Vay said, "Do you do that when your wife undresses too?"

"I don't need to," Garm replied, still looking down at the floor, "she's my wife. She'd be upset if I didn't look."

"Well I doubt I've got anything she hasn't. Have I?"

Garm didn't answer and Vay continued to change. She smiled when she noticed Garm lift his head slightly to look briefly at a polished metal plaque on the wall that reflected her clearly in its surface.

"Okay I need you now." Vay said eventually, "It's alright. I'm decent, well sort of. You can look without breaking your marriage vows."

Garm got out of his chair and approached Vay. She was standing facing away from him, the back of the overalls hanging open. Calmly, Garm took hold of the zipper and slowly pulled it upwards, careful not to trap Vay's hair in it.

"What's so amusing?" Vay asked.

"What? I didn't say anything." Garm replied.

"No but you just thought of something that amused you."

"Oh its just something I've heard people talking about that's all."

"What? Tell me."

"Well some of the guys around here like to discuss what they think you do or don't wear under your bodyglove, that's all."

"Well you know now don't you? Are you going to tell?"

"Never." Garm replied as the zipper clicked into place at the base of Vay's neck. Then he added, "There, you're done."

"Thanks. Now how about you walk me down to the detention section?"

Garm paused.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" he asked, "This woman is dangerous and this isn't a game."

"Look at you being all protective." Vay replied and she stepped closer to Garm, rubbing up against him,

"Maybe I'm more dangerous than she is. It's my game and my rules. Don't you think this is exciting?"

Garm frowned.

"Zipping you up in that thing isn't quite enough to get me excited." He said.

"Really?" Vay replied, "What would?" Then she kissed Garm's cheek, "Now take me to the detention section."

She added, "Unless you want poor little me going there on my own all helpless like this." and she pulled a face, pouting her lips and fluttering her eyelids.

"Helpless? I doubt it. I bet you could get out of that in a moment."

“I couldn’t get into on my own, what makes you think I could get out? Trust me Garm, right now I really need your support.”

## 2.

Garm walked alongside Vay as the pair made their way towards the building's detention section. Normally he maintained a respectful distance from the young woman when they walked together, but on this occasion he wrapped an arm around her gently to steady her.

"What's the matter?" he asked as she let out what sounded like 'Ooh' and 'Ah' repeatedly.

"It's this floor." Vay replied, "It's freezing. Didn't anyone plan for people walking barefoot in here when it was designed?"

Garm glanced down. The Empire made widespread use of standard modular construction methods, meaning that the same metal floor panels that were used aboard cruisers and space stations had also been used for the floors of this building.

"I don't think they had that in mind."

He stopped suddenly.

"Why are you stopping?" Vay asked, "I want to get off this cold floor."

Garm knelt down and wrapped both his arms around Vay's waist tightly before he stood up again, lifting her over his shoulder.

"Hey!" Vay cried out, "What are you doing?"

"Getting you off the floor." Garm replied, "So quit complaining."

Walking beside Vay, Garm had noticed numerous people that they passed in the corridors staring at them, presumably because of how she was dressed. But that was nothing compared to the attention they drew as he carried her over his shoulder towards the detention section. At one point he was certain that even a squad of stormtroopers stared as they passed.

"Here we are." Garm said as he reached the door to the detention section and hit the button that opened it.

As soon as he entered the troops inside snapped to attention before they too stared at him.

Being primarily a civilian building most of the government complex had its internal security provided by COMPForce, the fighting arm of the Committee for the Preservation of the New Order. COMPForce personnel were as loyal and incorruptible as stormtroopers, but their training methods were haphazard and produced units of variable quality more akin to local defence forces. Whether the guards stationed here were of the best quality mattered little to Garm, he just needed to know that they would follow his instructions and look after Vay.

"Can I help you sir?" the COMPForce officer at the control station enquired.

"We need a vacant cell." Garm said as he set Vay down.

"God this floor's cold!" she exclaimed, hopping from foot to foot.

"We aren't here to make people like you comfortable, you rebel scum!" The man snapped.

"Watch your tongue lieutenant!" Garm shouted back, "This is a covert ISB operation and you will co-operate with myself and my partner fully. Do you understand? Or shall I have you relieved?"

"I'm sorry sir." The officer replied, standing at attention again, "We're expecting a prisoner transfer from Allastra and given the way your partner's dressed I assumed that—"

"Apology accepted lieutenant." Vay interrupted, "Now how about a cell? One with a functioning surveillance system that my partner can have access to. Even if it isn't carpeted. When the prisoner from Allastra arrives put her in the same cell as me and make sure she doesn't know she's on Estran now"

The lieutenant signalled to two of his men and they moved to stand either side of Vay in a typical formation for escorting prisoners. However they appeared unsure as to how to direct her, normally they would just drag a prisoner to their cell but that was obviously inappropriate for this occasion.

"Err, this way please miss." One of them said and he pointed along a row of cell doors, "Cell one-one-three-eight."

Garm followed Vay as the guards escorted her to a vacant cell and opened the door for her.

"Will you be okay in here on your own?" he asked her, "Our real prisoner might not get here for hours yet. I can wait with you if you want."

"No get out." Vay replied sitting on the raised platform that passed for a bed so her feet were no longer on the cold metal floor, "If she sees you here when they bring her in she's bound to recognise you. It may tip her off."

"Okay then." Garm said, "Bye for now." And he shut the cell door. An audible 'thud' indicating that the reinforced security bars had slammed into position to prevent it being pried open.

"Oh kriff." Vay swore, "My nose would start to itch now wouldn't it?"

Garm made his way back to the control station with the guards.

"That's her isn't it?" the lieutenant asked, "The moff's bit on the side." Officially Vay was introduced as an intern from COMPNOR sent to work with Moff Gergor Horatian the sector's Imperial governor, but the widespread belief was that she was his mistress.

Garm just stared at the lieutenant.

"Would you mind answering a question sir?" the lieutenant went on.

"Go on." Garm replied, "But I'm not promising anything."

"Well, it's just that there's been a lot of discussion sir—"

"Get on with it." Garm said impatiently.

"Well it seems that you might know what she wears under the bodyglove she's normally in."

"How should I know that lieutenant?" Garm replied, "Every time she comes into my office she makes me turn my back while she takes everything off."

Garm then left the room, leaving behind him gaping mouths.

"Do you think he's telling the truth?" one of the guards said out loud as soon as Garm was gone.

"If he is," the officer replied slowly, "then I need to get a transfer to the ISB."

Returning directly to his office, Garm sat at his desk and used his computer to access the security feed from the cell he had just locked Vay inside. The image clearly showed his partner sitting down with her legs drawn up close to her body.

"I hope you know what you're doing." He said as if he were speaking directly to Vay herself.

Garm's shift had ended more than an hour ago, but he was still sat at his desk. His wife Jennay had not sounded happy when he had called her to let her know that he was working late, especially when he explained that he had no idea when he would be home. Right now he was not working though, he had his feet up on his desk while he repeatedly threw a small rubber ball at the far wall and caught when it bounced back at him while he waited for the call that Kara had arrived. Occasionally he paused in his throwing of the ball to look at his computer display, just to check on Vay who had by this time spent several hours alone in the cell. He was about to throw the ball again when his communicator buzzed. The display indicated that it was the detention section calling him.

"Larcus." Garm said, activating the comm.

"Detention section here sir." Garm heard the COMPForce lieutenant say, "We're just changing shifts sir and the prisoner has arrived from Allastra."

"Excellent." Garm replied, "Put her in the cell with Miss Udra and remember that what goes on is classified. Tell the new shift not to monitor what is happening. I will do that from here."

Vay was starting to think that maybe she should not have had herself locked in the cell until it had been confirmed that Kara had arrived on Estran. But she was committed to this course of action now and she was sure that the guards would use any change in her plan as an excuse to badmouth her behind her back. Garm would not of course. He would say whatever he had to say to her face in private.

She looked up when she heard the cell door's bolts drawing back and saw the door open. She watched as two of the detention section guards dragged a struggling prisoner into the cell backwards. Even from behind, Vay could not help but realise that this was Kara. She was bound in an orange jumpsuit like Vay's and the guards had explicit instructions to bring her and only her here. The guards let go of Kara and dropped her to the floor. It was then, as the guards marched out of the cell that Vay saw that her plan had just run into a snag. It would be very difficult for her to get Kara to talk while her mouth was still taped shut.

"Are you alright?" she asked, feigning concern for Kara's well being and the rebel nodded as she sat up.

"Hey guards!" Vay shouted and she got off the bed and made her way to the cell door, "You can't leave her in here like this! What if she chokes? Hey! Can you hear me out there?" and she banged her shoulder against the cell door.

In his office, Garm watched the scene unfolding on his computer. At first he could not tell why Vay was making such a fuss, she certainly had not mentioned this to him as part of her plan. Then he saw that Kara was gagged.

"Detention section this is Agent Larcus." He said, activating his communicator, "Why is the new prisoner gagged?"

"I believe that she arrived like that sir." Came the reply, a new voice from the officer of the newly arrived shift.

"Well I'm on my way down. Just wait for me."

"Yes sir."

Vay kicked the door with the sole of her foot.

"Hey out there! She needs help!"



There was a 'thunk' as the bolts withdrew and Vay stepped back from the door. When it slid upwards Garm was standing outside the cell with the duty officer behind him, both with blasters in hand.

"Get back." He said to Vay and obediently she returned to the bed and sat down.

Garm stepped into the cell and approached Kara. Reaching down he ripped the tape from her mouth.

"Ow!" Kara cried out, "That hurt." Then she looked up properly and recognised Garm, "Well hello there junior." She said, "How's the arm?"

"Shut up!" he yelled and he slapped Kara's face hard enough to knock her sideways.

"Leave her alone!" Vay yelled and she leapt up and ran at Garm.

Effortlessly Garm sidestepped her fake attack, instead clenching his free hand into a fist and delivered a blow to Vay's stomach just below where the overalls she wore forced her to keep her arms folded in front of her. The wind knocked out of her, Vay collapsed onto the cell floor, gasping for breath.

Without another word Garm holstered his blaster and left the cell, the door dropping shut as soon as he was outside.

"Was that a good idea?" the officer asked as he too returned his weapon to its holster, "Hitting the moff's girlfriend?"

"I'm not worried about the moff." Garm replied, "He won't do anything. Her on the other hand... Well I think I'll be paying for that punch at some point."

### 3.

Back in the cell Vay sobbed between gasps.

"He hit me." She just managed to say, "I didn't think he'd hit me."

"What did you expect?" Kara asked, "He's ISB. Did you think he'd take you out for dinner and romance?"

"I'd like that." Vay answered, looking directly at Kara as she tried to get back up.

"Personally I think you're better off getting punched in the guts."

"You-" Vay began before she had to stop and gulp in another deep breath of air, "You called him 'junior'. Why? Do you know him?"

"I know that little fascist nerf herder, his father and his bitch sister. Trust me that one's a real nasty piece of work. He even shot his own father. Right before I put a blaster bolt into his shoulder. I wish it gone a bit higher and to the side, I'd have taken his kriffing head right off."

"Is that why you're here?" Vay asked, "For shooting him?"

"No. No I-" Kara began before she stopped suddenly, "I don't even know who you are." she said.

"My name's Vay. Vay Udra." Vay replied, regretting it as soon as she had. She wished she had thought to use a fake name. If the Alliance had any knowledge of her then it was an outside possibility that Kara would recognise it, "I was caught trying to hack into the defence computer network."

"Why would you want to do that?" Kara asked.

"Because people need to know the real reason the local defence force is being shut down. It's nothing to do with downsizing in the wake of Imperial peacekeeping successes. It's because the rebels have beaten it too often and the Empire's taking over direct control of planetary security."

"You're right there." Kara said with a smile, "I've given them a bloody nose a time or two myself."

"You're with the Alliance? Here on Allastra?"

"Stubbs! Over here!" a voice yelled across the cantina when the lieutenant entered after finishing his shift in the detention section. He nodded at the three men he saw there, all of them wore Imperial uniforms of one sort or another and one of them was waving in his direction before making his way over to sit at there table. "You're never going to guess who was in the detention section today." Stubbs said as he sat down, "Larcus. The Killer."

There had been numerous rumours about Garm Larcus ever since another ISB agent he had been partnered with had turned up dead and a number of people believed that he had killed the man.

"They finally pinned something on him?" one of the others asked.

"No. She was with him."

"The blonde?" another man asked and all of them leaned closer, "What were they doing?"

"He was sticking her in a cell. Had her all tied up."

"That's sick." The first man commented.

"No, not like that." Stubbs replied, "Some secret mission to do with another prisoner. Some rebel-"

"Can I take your order?" a woman's voice interrupted and Stubbs looked around to see a teenage waitress standing there with a datapad.

"What? Oh. Yes." And Stubbs glanced at the menu before selecting what he always had, "Bantha burger. Well done with green sauce and a blue shake."

"Fries?" the waitress added.

"Yes please." Stubbs replied then he turned back to his friends, "So anyway their bringing some rebel woman called Bilstran in from Allastra-"

Stubbs didn't notice the waitress look up briefly when he mentioned the rebel's name.

Cass Jungan passed the datapad with Stubbs' order on it to her employer in the kitchen.

"Is it alright if I take off early Corayle?" she asked meekly, "I don't feel well."

"Look at it out there Cass," the man replied; waving his arm towards the entirely human crowd in his cantina, "It's shift change. That means I've got the entire day shift coming out of that place looking to be fed."

"I know and I wouldn't ask but-"

"I get it. Well all right then, I suppose getting the other staff to do your work for you is better than having to clean up if you're ill on a customer. But don't think I'm paying you for the two hours you've got left."

"I know. Thanks boss." Cass said, smiling, and she rushed out of the kitchen to the yard where she kept her bicycle. The vehicle was primitive, regarded as a toy to most people, but in her situation she still could not afford anything better. Cass pushed the bicycle out of the yard into the street, got onto it and cycled off as fast as she could. Had her employer followed her out of the kitchen and watched her leave, he may have

realised that she was not heading in the direction of her apartment. Instead she cycled a few blocks in the other direction to another cantina, one that offered its patrons free access to the planetary data network. Leaving her bicycle chained to a fence outside she went, ordered the cheapest thing she could and then sat at a terminal as secluded as possible. Then she accessed the planet's public shipping database and entered the name of vessel to search for.

*Silver Hawk.*

The search term produced an immediate response. It confirmed that there was a YT-1300 class freighter of that name registered on Estran with the Bureau of Ships and Services, the official body that maintained starship records across the galaxy. It listed the name of the owner as Mace Grayle and stated that he was also the primary operator of the vessel. None of this was news to Cass; she knew the crew and passengers of the *Silver Hawk* by name anyway. What she needed to know was where the ship was right now. If Kara Bilstran had been captured on Allastra then the rest of her team could be light years away. On the other hand they had told her that they came to Estran quite often.

Then she found the information she was looking for. The *Silver Hawk* was listed as having entered the system thirty minutes ago and had been given permission to land at a commercial spaceport elsewhere on the planet. Now all Cass had to do was get a message to them.

The *Silver Hawk's* registry details gave Cass the ability to address a message to the ship directly from this terminal, but she had been warned against that. There should be no public data trail from her to any Alliance operative for the protection of both parties. Her information was passed on by means of dead drops that were unsuitable for such time sensitive information and she had no access to other secure communications. However, she did have the name of a man who could be used as an intermediary.

Odras Balve was a career criminal that Mace owed a lot of money too. This meant that the pair met up almost every time that Mace was on Estran, so it was likely they would meet again soon. Vorn and Mace had given Cass Odras's name as a potential contact point along with a stern warning. Odras Balve was dangerous. He was a thief and a killer. Anything she asked him for should be paid for on delivery, with the price agreed beforehand. Payment in advance ran the risk of him just taking her money and giving nothing in return. Alternatively buying on credit was a route to being indebted to him for the rest of her life and Odras would happily see her end up as a door prize in some seedy bar to settle such a debt, assuming he did not decide she was too much to his own liking and keep her for himself. He had repeatedly offered to write off Mace's debt if the smuggler was willing to turn Jaysica and Kara over to him.

Nervously, Cass got up from the computer and headed for the public video comm booth located in the corner of the cantina and inserted her credit stick. When the dialling pad appeared on the booth's screen she entered the information she had been given for Odras Balve.

"What?" the man who answered the call asked as soon as his face appeared on the screen.

"Oh. Err. Are you Odras Balve?" she asked back.

"Mister Balve is busy." The man replied.

"I need to speak to him." Cass said, "I need a favour from him."

"Mister Balve doesn't do favours. Mister Balve does business."

"Then I need to do business with him. I can pay."

The face on the screen moved about as if the man was studying the image of Cass that was visible to him on his own screen.

"Yes," he said, "I'm sure you can. Wait there." Then the man disappeared and a few moments later another man appeared. Bald and stern looking, he stared at Cass and then grinned.

"Hello young lady," he said, "now what can Uncle Odras do for you today?"

Kara and Vay sat beside each other on the 'bed' in the cell. Vay rocked back and forth, the pain in her stomach still considerable. Had her arms not been bound, Kara would have put one around her.

"So," Vay managed to say, "what's it like being a hero?"

"Hero?"

"Yes. It takes guts to stand up to the Empire. More than I've got."

"You did pretty well not so long ago." Kara replied, "Not many people charge armed ISB agents while they're tied up."

"And look where it got me. I just didn't think."

"Not many heroes do. They just do what seems right without thinking about the consequences. The only one I know does anyway."

"Who?"

"My boss. Junior's father. He was a rich man on Estran before he joined the Rebellion. Tried to expose how the local government was faking attacks on its own people to justify bringing in more Imperial troops and laws to curtail freedom of movement and expression. He told the truth because it was the right thing to do and his rivals had him declared a traitor."

"Do you think he would have been better off keeping quiet then?"

"Well if he'd done that he'd never have met me. I suppose that makes up for everything he's lost. If not more."

"You get on well together then?"

"Oh yeah, me and the boss are like, like... Well if I could get a couple of fingers free I could show you."

"How about you just tell me instead?"

The *Silver Hawk* settled into the docking bay and Mace looked out of the cockpit viewport.

"Uh-oh." He said when he saw the cluster of figures standing outside. He did not know who most of them were, he had never seen them before, but the assortment of blasters they carried told him that they were trouble. But what really concerned him were the two figures he did recognise. One of them was a wookiee, the massive furred being towering over the others including his employer, Odras Balve, "I've got a bad feeling about this."

He rushed from the cockpit towards his cabin.

"What's the hurry?" Vorn asked as Mace ran past him in the lounge.

"Trouble." Mace replied, "Balve's outside with a bunch of goons."

Vorn's eyes widened and he turned towards Tharun who was sat at the table with the parts of his rifle laid out for cleaning.

"Get that thing back together." Vorn said to him.

"On it major."

Then Vorn rushed to his own cabin for his gun.

Less than a minute later the three rebels were back in the lounge and all armed.

"Tobis'll be here in a moment." Mace said, "He's just looking for his blaster's power cell. I think he used for something that needed fixing." And at that moment the engineer came rushing from the cabin he shared with Mace, fumbling to load his blaster.

"Where's Jaysica?" he asked.

"She hasn't come out of her cabin yet." Tharun said.

"An extra gun could come in handy." Mace said to Vorn.

Vorn took a deep breath as he thought about it.

"Tell her to get Kara's gun. She should know where it is." He said.

"You heard the major," Tharun said to Tobis, "go get your girlfriend."

"Oh. Err. She's not my girlfriend."

"Not now!" Mace shouted and Tobis ran to Jaysica's cabin.

## 4.

Mace was the first one down the ramp, his deck clearing blaster cradled in his arms. The weapon was designed to be a non-lethal stunner, but it produced an expanding cone of energy instead of a tightly contained bolt. A single shot could take out half of the thugs that Odras had brought with him.

Close behind him the other rebels followed. Tharun remained by the ramp, his rifle raised, while the others advanced a bit further before they too came to a halt and allowed Mace to carry on alone.

"Ah captain Grayle." Odras said out loud, "You're late."

"Not late enough for you to be backed up by this rent-a-mob from the goon squad." Mace replied as the pair of men came closer.

"Nevertheless, you owe me an extra six hundred credits in late fees this month."

"Yeah, I know. I've got it here."

Odras looked past Mace at the rebels behind him.

"You're one short aren't you? The tall brunette? My offer still stands you know, her and the short one over there would cover your debt quite nicely."

"No chance sleemo."

"How about the charming young lady who contacted me less than an hour ago then?" Odras asked, "Are you as attached to her? People I know would pay a lot for someone as young as her. Plus there's that whole waitress uniform. Shows she knows how to take instruction."

"What the hell-?"

"Cass Jungan I believe she said her name was." Odras interrupted.

"You stay the hell away from her!" Mace snapped and he began to raise the deck sweeper.

Odras' wookiee bodyguard roared and stepped forwards, prompting everyone else present to aim their weapons at one another.

"Its alright!" Odras commanded, raising his hand, "Everyone stay cool."

The wookiee stepped back and, nervously; everyone else lowered their weapons.

"Now if we could just behave in a civilised manner," Odras said, adjusting his jacket, "I can tell you why I'm here."

"Go on." Mace said.

"Well, your friend Miss Jungan asked me to give you a message. She wants to meet up with you and your friends as soon as possible. She didn't say where though. It seems she didn't want me knowing exactly where she would be at any given time. Anyone would think I'm not be trusted."

"Kids are smart nowadays." Mace replied.

"Well anyway, given the urgency she attached to her message I thought you'd rather I came to see you on this occasion. She paid for express delivery you see."

Cass lived on the far side of the planet, in Estran City itself, so the quickest way to reach her was a sub-orbital flight in the *Silver Hawk*. Such flights were common enough that they attracted little, if any, attention from local authorities. So it was that less than an hour after talking with Odras Balve, in addition to Mace handing over the latest of many loan repayments, the ship set down in one of the private docking ports in the seedier part of the capital city's spaceport district. The rebels then proceeded to the apartment block in the nearly as unpleasant part of the city where Cass lived alone. They stood together on the landing outside her door while Vorn knocked.

"I don't think anyone's at home." Tharun commented when no one answered, but at that moment the door suddenly slid open.

"You got my message!" Cass exclaimed excitedly when she saw them and beckoned them to enter. Then she noticed that Kara was not with them, "So its true," she said, "they've got Kara."

"What do you know about Kara?" Vorn asked.

"I overheard some Imperial soldiers talking about a prisoner that was being brought in from Allastra." Cass said, "They said her name was Bilstran."

"Sounds like Kara alright." Tharun said, nodding slowly.

"So we can save her right?" Jaysica asked.

"I'm sure that's what the major's thinking little lady." Tharun replied.

"Indeed I am." Vorn added, "Indeed I am."

"We can get in there easily enough." Vorn explained when the rebels, including Cass returned to the *Silver Hawk* to study what information they had about the Imperial's capital building in the sector, "Thanks to the

information Cass has been feeding us, we can forge entry passes rapidly. Plus, since we're only interested in the detention section we shouldn't trip any other internal alarms."

"That sounds too easy." Cass said.

"It is." Tharun replied, "What's the problem major?"

"Well if we're going to just walk in through the front gate then we won't be able to take any weapons in with us." Vorn said, "We'll have to find some inside."

"Oh great." Cass said, "A building full of armed Imperial troops and we're heading in there without even a single blaster?"

"No. Not we." Vorn said, looking directly at Cass, "You're not going. Now we're all grateful for the risks you take in feeding us information and for getting word to us about Kara, but you're still only sixteen and I'm not putting you in the line of fire."

"But I—"

"But nothing." Tharun interrupted, "The major gave an order. You're not going on this op."

Cass remained silent.

"Now we'll need Penny." Vorn went on. Penny, or MSE-6-PNI was the mouse droid that belonged to Jaysica.

"Then I can come?" Jaysica asked excitedly, "I'm not in trouble any more?"

"I wouldn't say that." Mace said, "Kara's going to be fuming when we get her back."

"As I was saying." Vorn interrupted loudly. Then he lowered his voice to a more typical speaking volume, "We'll take Penny with us. We can use her to scout ahead of us and use her camera to let us know if there are any security patrols about. We need to get to the detention section without being challenged. Then we overpower the guards, release Kara and leave using one of the airspeeders parked on the roof. As for you Jaysica, yes you are coming with us. In addition to bringing Penny along I want you to bring Kara's bag, it's got her medical supplies in it and we may need them if things go bad."

"Guards who'll have blasters." Tobis pointed out.

"So the more of you there are the better then?" Cass suggested.

"You are not going." Vorn said, "That's final. You'll wait here with Jeeves and Harvey until we return."

"And if you don't?" Cass asked.

"Then you go home," Mace told her, "and you stay away from Odras Balve."

Tobis handed out the forged identity cards created using the systems on the *Silver Hawk*.

"These are the best I could do." He said, "I found five people look enough like us that we can convincingly disguise ourselves as them and use their identities to get through the gate."

"What about biometrics?" Jaysica asked as she took the badge offered to her.

"I doubt they'll scan our eyes at the gate." Mace replied as he pinned his badge to his jacket.

"Hang on a minute." Jaysica said suddenly, "What does this say?" and she pointed to the place on the identity card that specified the job function of the bearer.

"Looks like 'sanitation engineer' to me." Tharun said as he too read his card.

"We fix refresher units?" Jaysica exclaimed, "We clean up other people's—"

"We won't actually be doing it." Vorn interrupted, "Unless things go wrong. Badly."

"But fixing refreshers?" Jaysica protested.

"It was all I could find." Tobis explained, disappointed at Jaysica's dismay, "We needed a group of people that could conceivably be trying to get into the building after hours. I figured a maintenance crew."

"Look on the bright side," Mace said, "there's an excellent promotion scheme in this line of work."

"Yeah." Tharun agreed, "Do a good job for a year and the Empire let's you have a brush."

"That's so not funny." Jaysica said to him.

"If we're quite finished." Vorn said, "We've got a friend to save."

Moff Horatian knew that any security screen was only as good as its weakest link. A fact driven home so well by the repeated failures of the Allastran Defence Forces to prevent infiltration that had led him to disband and replace them with Imperial troops. As such he trusted the protection of the perimeter of the capital building to stormtroopers instead of the somewhat variable COMPForce troops that patrolled inside. So it was that when the five rebels approached the main gate they were met by four of the faceless soldiers.

"Who are you?" one of the stormtroopers demanded. He had his rifle in the holster at his side, unlike his comrades who all held theirs across their chests, ready to bring them to bear.

"Sanitation." Vorn announced as he held out his identification, "We've been called in to make an emergency repair."

"What sort of emergency requires your presence at this hour?" the stormtrooper demanded.

"Someone decided to use the moff's private refresher." Vorn explained, "Only it seems that whoever serviced it this morning put the primary pump back the wrong way around, so when he flushed... Well let's just say the blast was enough to hit the cooling system on the ceiling."

"Yeah." Tharun added with a smirk, "It hit the fan."

The stormtrooper stared back at Vorn, his expression invisible behind his faceplate.

"I need to see all your identity cards," he said, "and open your bags for inspection." Then he walked along the row of rebels and used a datapad to call up images of the names he read off them. Tobis's research had been good and the identities picked fooled the stormtrooper. However, when he reached Jaysica he halted. "Why is there a mouse droid in your bag?" he demanded.

"I, err—"

"She took it home with her when her shift ended." Vorn said, "To help fix her kitchen sink. I gave her permission, I didn't think it would be missed."

"I'm not looking for a droid." The stormtrooper said. Then he waved them through the gate and added, "Move along. Move along."

## 5.

"Tell me more about Vorn." Vay said, "He sounds like an interesting man."

"He is. But hold that thought because I need to try something." Kara said and she used the cell wall to steady herself as she got to her feet. Then she went to the door and leant her back against it, bracing herself using the floor.

"What's that supposed to do?" Vay asked.

"There's an interesting little fact about some of these security doors." Kara explained, "The motors that move the reinforcing bolts are actually very weak, they just push metal rods from side to side so they don't need to be very powerful. If you apply enough pressure against the door from either side then you can shift it just enough to jam the bolts in place. The motors can't apply enough force to pull them out of the way."

"Is that supposed to help us escape?"

"No. It's not."

"Then what does it do?"

"It prevents anyone from opening the door."

"Why would we want that? We can't escape while we're in here."

"No," Kara admitted, "but that's not what I want to do."

"Then what do you want to do?"

"I just want to keep your friends out of here long enough for us to have a proper little chat."

Garm froze when he heard this and he squeezed the rubber ball hard. Had Kara figured out that Vay was attempting to trick her?

"What are you talking about?" Vay asked.

"Well you are an Imperial agent aren't you? ISB I'd guess since you seem to be working with Junior out there. Now be a good little fascist and stay where you are and start answering questions. Trust me girl, even without the use of my arms I can still mess you up."

"Oh no." Garm said to himself. Then he activated his communicator, "Detention section, this is Agent Larcus."

"Detention section." The duty officer answered, "How can I help?"

"Vay's cover is blown, get her out of that cell. Be aware that the prisoner may be attempting to jam the door. Cut your way in if you have to, but make sure Vay isn't harmed. I'm on my way to back you up." Then Garm broke the link and ran for the door.

"Why do you think I'm a spy?" Vay said doing her best to sound offended just in case she could still salvage part of her plan.

"You called the boss by name." Kara said.

"You used it." Vay replied.

"No I didn't." Kara said, "I never use his name. I call him 'boss', he says he hates it but I still do it. Even when we're alone together. You knew his name because junior told you."

"I don't know what you're talking about." Vay protested and she began to approach Kara.

"Yeah right sister." Kara replied, "Now get back and sit down."

"Look, if we could just talk about this we could – Arrrgh!"

Vay cried out as Kara suddenly delivered a swift kick with her heel that struck her just below the knee.

Unable to steady herself with her arms, she collapsed in a heap.

"I said get back!" Kara shouted and using her good leg, Vay pushed herself across the floor back away from Kara. At the same time there was a grinding sound as the door bolts attempted to retract. "See," Kara said to Vay, "the door jams if you lean on it hard enough."

From the other side of the door came the sound of banging as the guards began attempting to force their way in.

While his men pounded on the cell door, trying their best to dislodge whatever was causing it to jam, the duty officer monitored the information that his control station was feeding him. He looked up just long enough when the main door opened and a mouse droid rolled in. He assumed it had been despatched automatically to investigate the failure of the cell door to open.

"There's only one guard." Tobis said as the rebels watched the feed from Penny's spy camera to Vorn's datapad.

"There'll be more." Tharun commented, "Somewhere."



"Wait." Mace said, "What's that?" and he placed his finger on the datapad, "Tell Penny to back up."

"Penny backs up slowly." Jaysica said into her comlink and the little droid obeyed.

"There!" Mace said suddenly.

"Stop there Penny." Jaysica told her droid.

"I see it." Vorn said, "That weapon rack isn't secured."

"Tell Penny to get us one of those guns." Vorn told Jaysica.

"And a power cell." Tharun added.

"Penny," Jaysica said into her comlink, "bring us one of those rifles and a power cell please."

Penny responded with just a single chirp.

Two mechanical arms unfolded from within Penny's casing, one heavier than the other. Penny rolled forwards, closer to the weapon rack and reached out with the heavier arm for one of the rifles stored there. Meanwhile the lighter arm instead reached out and grasped hold of one of the power cells on the shelf below the weapons themselves. Then, clutching the weapon and ammunition in its hands Penny rolled out of the detention section. The duty officer didn't even bother to look up.

Penny sped down the corridor and around the corner to where the rebels waited. Tharun bent down and scooped up the rifle and its power cell. In a single well-practiced movement he loaded the weapon then released its safety catch.

"Ready major." He said.

"Okay then." Vorn said, "Let's go."

The rebels advanced down the corridor towards the door to the detention section before pressing themselves up against the wall either side of it.

"Send Penny in first again." Vorn said to Jaysica softly, "Check the way for us."

"You heard him girl." Jaysica whispered to her droid and Penny rolled through the doorway again.

Vorn looked at the feed from Penny's camera. It still indicated that the duty officer was alone at the control station. He held up his index finger to Tharun and nodded.

Tharun whirled around and braced himself against the doorframe. The duty officer glanced upwards and his eyes widened as he saw the rebel pointing a blaster rifle directly at him. Before the startled guard could call out Tharun fired once. The bolt of energy struck the duty officer in the chest and he fell backwards, dead without a cry.

"Go!" Vorn snapped and the rebels rushed into the detention section. Mace and Tobis both ran for the control station. Mace bent down and pulled the dead officer's blaster from its holster while Tobis instead began to check out the control panels.

There was the sound of footfalls from one of the corridors filled with cells as the rest of the security staff, attracted by the gunshot came to investigate. With a flick of his finger, Tharun switched his rifle to automatic and fired on the charging guards. Mace joined him, loosing off shots from the dead guard's blaster. Trapped in the narrow confines of the corridor the remaining guards stood little chance against the hail of fire and, like their late commander, they died before they could return fire.

Mace then aimed his weapon towards one of the security cameras mounted on the walls.

"No!" Tobis called out, "Don't shoot them. Or the blaster traps."

"Why the hell not?" Tharun demanded as he took aim at one of the wall mounted automated blasters.

"Because if you do then the security office will know that someone's tampered with them." Tobis explained, "Trust me, shooting out those things is the easiest way to get someone calling us up and asking questions we can't answer."

"Then what do you suggest?" Vorn asked, leaning on the edge of the control station.

"Hang on a moment." Tobis said as he manipulated the controls, "The cameras transmit their signal via this panel. It stores the data locally for a few minutes. I can use that recording to create a playback loop. There. Got it." And Tobis pointed at one of the displays. It showed the dead duty officer standing alone at his post, "This is a thirty second loop from just before Penny came in. Anyone who looks at the feed will just see him working."

"Hang on a moment." Vorn said, "Do you hear someone coming down that corridor?" and he wandered back towards the main door.

Garm burst into the detention section expecting to be met by the duty officer. Quickly he surveyed the scene and instead saw the bodies of the guards strewn about. Standing barely a metre away from Garm was a man with his back to him. Garm reached for his blaster and he had just opened the cover of his holster when the man turned around and Garm looked into the eyes of his father.

"You!" Garm exclaimed, his hand hovering over his blaster for a moment. That moment of delay was all Vorn needed and, clenching his hand into a fist he struck Garm. There was a 'crunch' as the blow connected with Garm's face and blood splattered from his nose. Garm himself fell backwards and landed on the floor. No longer secured, his blaster fell from his holster and skidded across the floor.

"That's for shooting me in the back!" Vorn shouted, "Now stay down!"

Garm looked up at his father, his nose bleeding profusely and frowned at him.

"It might be best if you just bled." Tharun said as he approached, his rifle trained on Garm, "Get those hands behind your head." He added and obediently Garm placed both hands at the back of his head.

"Have you found her yet?" Vorn asked Tobis as he continued to scan through the cell database.

"Err. No, she's not listed." The engineer said without taking his eyes off the screen before him.

"Why don't we just open them all?" Jaysica asked.

"Because believe it or not," Mace replied, "some of the beings in those cells could be there for a damn good reason. Do you want us to have to take on a psychotic barabel just because we opened the wrong one?"

"Oh. I see." Jaysica said and she glanced at Vorn, concerned that her question may not have impressed him at a time when she knew she had to.

"There's a cell just listed as reserved." Tobis said, "One-one-three-eight."

"Which way?" Vorn asked. Tobis looked at the screen again and then pointed down one of the rows of cells that spread out from the control station.

"That way." He said, "I think."

Followed by Mace, Vorn ran down the row of cells, checking each number in turn until he found the one he was looking for.

"Here it is!" he called out, "Get the door open."

From the control station Tobis tried to release the door, but the display indicated a problem.

"Its not working." He called out to Vorn, "Something's jamming it."

Standing immediately in front of the door, Vorn banged on it with his fist.

"Kara!" he shouted, "Are you in there?"

Inside the cell Kara's face lit up when she heard her name being called from outside and she recognised Vorn's voice. She ceased leaning on the door and turned around.

"Boss! It's me! I'm here!" she shouted back.

With Kara no longer putting pressure on the door the bolts were suddenly free to retract and moments later the cell door slid open.

"Oh boss! It is you!" Kara cried out as soon as she saw Vorn and she rushed towards him.

"Whoa there." Vorn said as he first embraced Kara then stepped away, "Turn around, I'll get you out of this thing."

Kara looked at Mace, then down the corridor to where the other rebels stood.

"How about we wait till there's not such an audience boss? The Empire didn't leave me with much else."

"Who's she?" Mace interrupted and he pointed into the cell to where Vay sat.

"Some Empire bitch." Kara said, "friend of your son's I think." She added to Vorn.

Mace pointed his blaster at Vay.

"Get up." He said.

Vay was led limping from the cell to where Garm knelt.

"Get down." Tharun ordered her and Vay knelt down beside Garm.

"Hope you don't expect me to put my arms over my head." She said, but Tharun ignored her.

"Are you alright?" Garm asked Vay, "Did they hurt you?"

"I'll be fine." Vay replied, "That Kara's got a kick like a nexu though. Oh and next time I ask you to tie me up remind me to use the refresher first. I really need to go. My stomach ache isn't helping."

"Sorry about the whole punching you thing." Garm said.

"That's okay." Vay replied, "It was a surprise but it's not what matters. What matters is you came charging down here to rescue me. Again."

"Yeah I suppose I did. That's two you owe me."

"Are these two married or something?" Jaysica said having heard the exchange and Garm glared at her angrily.

"No." Tharun said, "They get on too well."

Standing at the end of the corridor of cells where she had just been imprisoned, Kara called out.

"I don't suppose anyone has something for me to wear instead of this thing do they?"

"Just roll it down to your waist," Mace suggested, "and grab a tunic from one of the guards. They don't need them any more."

"Help her out Jaysica," Vorn said.

Kara looked at the bodies.

"Oh great. Corpse clothes. Plus the Klutz gets to help me change. It's her fault I wound up here to begin with you know."

"I think I feel safer with her tied up." Jaysica commented.

"I can still give your ass a good kicking." Kara said.

"That's true." Vay said, remembering her knee.

"Right then." Vorn said loudly, not wanting to get into the issue of blame for now, "We need to be getting out of here. Tobis, I want you to find us a route to the roof that avoids security checkpoints and patrols."

Tobis began accessing the computer again.

"Come on Tobis." Vorn said as he became impatient at the lack of a reply.

"Err." Was all Tobis could manage in response.

"I've got a bad feeling about this." Tharun said, "What's the problem lad?"

"We need a suitable rank cylinder to access the landing pad. The only ones we have are from the duty officer here. He was a lieutenant, we need a captain or greater."

Vorn smiled and looked at his son. Specifically at the array of coloured pips on the breast of his uniform.

"You got yourself a promotion recently." He said, waving his finger at Garm, "I see you're equivalent to a major now." Then Vorn glanced at the pocket where Imperial officers kept their coded rank cylinders. It was empty. "Where are they son?" he asked.

Garm remained silent, just staring back at his father. Vorn sighed.

"We really need those rank cylinders my boy." Vorn said, "But I am your father and you must know that I won't do anything to hurt you. Permanently anyway. But as for your lady friend here..." Vorn looked at Tharun, "Break one of her legs." He said.

Tharun took a step towards Vay.

"No!" Garm snapped and Tharun came to a halt.

"Something to say?" Vorn asked.

Garm hesitated.

"They're in my office." He said.

Vorn smiled and looked at his companions.

"You see." He said, "I knew that he wouldn't want anything to happen to a lady under his protection. He's just like me."

"A chauvinist?" Kara replied sarcastically.

"Do you want to stay in those overalls all night?" Vorn asked back with a smile.

"No. Do go on boss." She replied.

Vorn turned his gaze back at Garm and Vay.

"Okay son. How about you show your old man your office? Tobis will come with us to make sure you hand over the correct cylinders and Tharun can bring your friend here. Just to make sure you co-operate."

## 6.

Garm led the way towards his office. Binders secured his wrists together in front of him, but his tunic had been removed and draped between his arms to conceal them. Behind him Tharun escorted Vay with a hand firmly placed on her shoulder and the muzzle of the blaster beneath his jacket pressed against the base of her spine. Finally Tobis and Vorn brought up the rear, both of them unarmed. The idea was to look as inconspicuous as possible. Hopefully, if they happened to come across a security patrol it would just pass them by, believing them to be ISB agents escorting a prisoner.

"Here it is." Garm said, halting outside his office. He had left in such a hurry that the door was wide open. "After you son," Vorn said, "and remember that we have your friend here if you've got a weapon stashed in there."

"Don't worry, my blaster wound up on the floor of the detention section."

When the rebels followed Garm into his office the ISB agent raised his arms in the direction of his desk.

"There they are." He said, indicating the pair of small silver coloured cylinders that lay there.

Tobis picked up the cylinders and examined them closely.

"These should do sir." He said, smiling.

"Good." Vorn replied, "Take them back to the detention section and plot us a suitable route out of here."

Tobis nodded and sprinted off back the way they had come.

Vorn looked at Garm and Vay.

"We better make sure these two don't cause us any more trouble." He said to Tharun.

Having unlocked them briefly, Garm winced as Tharun locked the binders around his wrists again and secured him to his office chair.

"Okay princess," Tharun then said looking at Vay, "get on your boyfriend's lap." And Vorn shoved Vay forwards. Vay did as she was told and sat in Garm's lap so that they faced each other with her legs either side of him.

Tharun stepped back and watched as Vorn began to wrap tape tightly around the pair of Imperial agents on the chair, immobilising them both. He completed the process by binding their ankles together beneath the chair so that their feet were clear of the floor, preventing them from pushing the chair around.

"I'll keep an eye on them sergeant." Vorn said, "You go check on the others and take that bodyglove over there with you, it looks like it might fit Kara."

Tharun nodded and left the room, taking Vay's bodyglove with him. After he left, Vorn and the two agents looked at one another in silence.

"So," Vorn said eventually, "how have you been son? How are Jennay and Cayla?"

"You'll never get away with this." Garm snarled back and he tugged at the binders and tape that restrained him.

"Careful there Garm." Vorn warned him, "You may hurt your little friend if you fall over." Then he looked directly at Vay, "She doesn't say much does she?"

Looking back at Vorn, Vay closed her eyes and breathed deeply. Then she opened her eyes and stared Vorn in the face.

"Cut us free." She said flatly, "You want to cut us free."

Vorn looked at the desk beside his son and the young woman he was bound to. There sat a desk tidy with a pair of scissors sticking out of it. Vay smiled as Vorn reached towards the desk.

"That's good." She said, "Now hurry up and free us."

Vorn lunged for the desk, but instead of picking up the scissors he instead grabbed hold of the rubber ball that Garm had earlier been throwing against the wall. Before the surprised Vay could say anything more, Vorn forced the ball into her mouth.

"My son should have warned you young lady," Vorn said to Vay as he picked up the reel of tape again, "I worked with real Jedi during the Clone Wars. Before your Empire murdered them all. I think you'll find my mind is strong enough to resist your petty little tricks. Still, thank you for exposing your abilities to me, the Alliance needs to know what its facing." Then he broke off a short piece of the tape and stuck it over Vay's mouth to fix the rubber ball in place.

Vay tried to speak, letting out a short series of angry sounding grunts and she jerked her body against the tape holding her against Garm. She had no chance of breaking free, but she did succeed in shifting her and Garm's balance beyond the point where the chair would support them and the pair fell sideways. There was a 'crack' as her head hit the floor.

"Young lady," Vorn said, "that is what happens when you speak with your mouth full."

"Dad, she's bleeding." Garm said as he saw blood flowing from beneath Vay's hair, "You can't leave us here like this."

"Actually son," Vorn replied, "given what you two do, yes I can." Then he tore off another length of tape and pressed it over Garm's mouth. As Garm snarled at his father and Vay continued to try and hurl insults at him despite the ball taped in her mouth, Vorn crouched down and placed his hands beneath Garm. He strained as he attempted to lift the chair back up.

"You know, this would be much easier if I wasn't still recovering from when someone shot me." Vorn said before he made a second attempt that succeeded in returning Garm and Vay to an upright position.

"Now behave both of you." He said, wagging his finger at them mockingly, "Because I'm not doing that again." In reply there was a snort from Vay as loud as she could manage.

It was then that Kara appeared at the door now wearing Vay's bodyglove with her own bag over her shoulder and one of the COMPForce guards' blasters holstered at her waist.

"We're ready to go boss," She said to Vorn, "and not a moment too soon if you ask me. This thing's really uncomfortable, I can't wait to get back into some normal clothes." Without speaking, he turned around and headed out of the office past Kara. That was when she saw Garm and Vay taped to the chair, glaring at her. She reached into her bag and produced her recording rod. She aimed it at the two Imperial agents and activated it, recording a short amount of video as Garm and Vay struggled in vain to get free.

"Just one for the album." She said, "Smile if you can." Then she put the recording rod away and turned towards Vorn as he walked away. "Shouldn't we take these two with us boss?" she called after him, "I mean they could have some useful intel. We'd have to keep them all taped up like this for a few days on the ship of course. But they look pretty happy together."

Both Garm and Vay let out angry sounding noises at this suggestion and Vay glared at Kara as if trying to burn an image of the rebel into her mind.

"Too much effort." Vorn called back, "We have to keep a low profile here and we'd never explain them away if we happened to run into a patrolling guard on our way out. Now stop messing with them and get a move on."

Kara shrugged and reached through the doorway for the control panels beside it.

"Well I think you make a lovely couple. Sweet dreams." She said before she hit the light switch, turning out the office lights so that the room was lit only by what light came in from the corridor. Then with a smile she brought her hand down on the button labelled 'LOCK' on the door control panel and then withdrew it before the door could slide shut, sealing itself from the inside and cutting off Garm and Vay's protests.

Vay felt her anger rising, but knew there was nothing she could do about it. Then, as if from nowhere she suddenly felt a tremor in the force.

*This is your own fault*, a voice seemed to call out to her.

Moff Gregor Horatian sat and stared as stormtroopers led Garm and Vay into his office to see him. He was not in a good mood. It had initially been assumed that the rebels who had brazenly infiltrated the building had abducted the pair. It had been a fearful aide that had made that suggestion to the moff, concerned that he would not take the disappearance of his young mistress very well. It was not until well into the afternoon that someone attempted to gain access to Garm's office so that case files could be transferred, only to find it sealed from the inside. The technical team that forced its way in then discovered the two helpless agents still bound to the chair. Statements given by other officers in the facility actually suggested that Vay had deliberately allowed herself to be restrained before the raid even took place and that Garm had gone along with it.

Before being brought before the moff Garm had removed his tunic and given it to Vay to wear in place of the overalls that were no longer appropriate or the bodyglove that had been stolen. His greater height meant it came down almost as far as her knees.

"I can't tell you how disappointed I am in you two." Moff Horatian said, leaning forwards across his desk.

"Gregor, its not Garm's fault-" Vay said as she began to sit down, careful to avoid the tunic riding up too far.

The moff held up his hand for silence.

"I'm not interested and don't bother to sit down." He replied sternly, "You should have known better than to attempt what you did and he should have known enough to stop you."

"I'm sorry." Vay said, well aware that Garm had tried to talk her out of the idea.

"Enough." Moff Horatian replied, "Go home the pair of you. You'll be contacted when you're needed again."

"Garm I'm sorry." Vay said when they were out of the moff's office.

"You don't need to be." He replied.

"Something's the matter though isn't it? You don't sound like you normally do."

"I think that has something to do with having just spent sixteen hours tied to a chair with you in my lap and sitting in a pool of what was mostly not my own urine. When I explain to Jennay why I didn't come home at all last night I may just mention the first part of that, she wouldn't like the rest."

"Do you blame me? It was my plan after all."

"No. I blame my father and his fellow revolutionaries. Except for the urine. Now do you want a ride home or would you rather walk all the way dressed like that?"

Vay just smiled.

“By the way,” Garm added, “I think there’s a rumour going round that you spend a lot of time naked in my office.”

“How did that get started?”

“Who knows who starts these things?”

In the lounge of the *Silver Hawk*, Kara walked up to one of the blank areas of the wall with a roll of thin plastic in one hand and a reel of electrical tape in the other. She taped one end of the roll to the wall and then unfurled it to reveal a large hardcopy of an image taken from the video of Garm and Vay both staring directly ahead before securing the other end to the wall also.

“The Empire’s finest.” She said to herself. Then she looked at the image from different angles, “That’s weird. The eyes follow you around the room.”