

# STAR WARS

## 5-09: An Inside Job

By Stephen J Dutton



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...

## AN INSIDE JOB

WHEN REBEL AGENTS START DYING IN UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES IT IS SUSPECTED  
THAT THE EMPIRE HAS UNCOVERED PART OF THEIR NETWORK. HOWEVER, VORN  
LARCUS III AND THE CREW OF THE *SILVER HAWK* SOON COME TO SUSPECT  
OTHERWISE...

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

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

# 1.

Ben and Sothos watched as the Imperial troop transport halted and a squad of stormtroopers exited the vehicle.

"Regular as clockwork." Sothos commented and the short statured bothan's fur rippled as he smiled, "I told you so."

"Yeah, yeah, I know." Ben replied as they both watched the armoured soldiers march into the nearby monorail terminal, light from inside spilling out onto the poorly lit street as the doors opened, "Now it normally takes about ten minutes for them to swap with the unit already on duty so let's get this done and we can be away before that lot come out."

Checking that no one was watching the two rebels dashed across the street and then walked towards the troop transport. The armoured vehicle's repulsorlift engines were still active, levitating its not inconsiderable mass about half a metre off the ground. Somewhere inside it the rebels knew were still a pair of Imperial soldiers so what they were about to do had to be done carefully, taking advantage of the limited visibility afforded by the vehicle to its occupants. The poor street lighting here was no accident, several of the lights had been disabled by the simple means of firing pellet rifles from a nearby roof into the lighting elements early in the day. Since there had been insufficient time for the local authorities to arrange for replacements the resulting gloom now served to cover the approach of the two rebels.

Silently they crouched down and then rolled underneath the transport, feeling the down blast of the repulsorlift field pressing against them.

"Charge." Ben whispered as he took out the tool necessary to open up an inspection cover and made use of it. Sothos reached under his jacket and took out a small lump of detonite and handed the explosive to his comrade who then pressed it up against a pipe that was now exposed. Sothos knew that this was a fuel line and that when the charge exploded its effectiveness would be magnified enough to turn the transport and its occupants into a blazing inferno.

"Here's the detonator and fuse." Sothos then said softly, passing the device to Ben and the human rebel pushed one end into the explosive.

"Okay, let's set this thing and get out of here." Ben then said, "How's eight minutes sound?"

"Should be fine. Do it."

Ben adjusted a small dial on the end of the fuse protruding from the charge until the compact display read eight minutes. Then he pressed the button labelled 'ARM'. But as soon as he did this instead of starting to count down from eight minutes the display suddenly switched to one second.

"Oh no." Ben said before the ball of flame consumed him and Sothos along with the transport and it's crew.

Leetan pulled off her boots as she returned home and then headed for the communicator. A light on the device was blinking to indicate that there were messages stored on it and she activated the playback function, walking towards the kitchen as the first message began to play. The recordings were the typical type, one from her older brother to invite her to a family meal during in which she would undoubtedly hear about how successful he was, one from her bank to say that she had gone overdrawn and several automated sales calls that her communicator had yet again failed to automatically delete.

While these messages played she headed into the kitchen and removed a bowl of food from her refrigerator. Taking a fork from a drawer she stirred the food and then placed it in the oven. Then just as she was about to set the oven she heard the sound of her front door sliding open and she spun around. Knowing that she had locked the door behind her she quickly grabbed hold of a storage jar and opened it. She rummaged around in the cereal it held and took out the hold out blaster hidden at the bottom before she crept towards the kitchen door.

Cautiously she held the blaster out in front of her as she stepped out into the lounge but as soon as she did so a hand knocked her blaster aside and she turned to face the intruder.

"Oh its you." She said, gasping. Then she frowned, "Just what the hell do you think you're doing sneaking in here like that?" she asked. But rather than an explanation the only reply came from the muzzle of another blaster that was aimed at her chest.

Some people accused Jonan of driving like a maniac but he just saw it as making the best use of his speeder's acceleration and handling. The vehicle was not the most expensive or powerful type available, but Jonan knew how to get the best out of it. As usual when he got into the open topped vehicle and started the

engine he pressed down on the accelerator pedal a few times while it was still in park so that he could hear the sound of the engine as it echoed around the parking lot and he smiled. Then he shifted the vehicle into gear and pressed down on the accelerator again and braced himself for the forward acceleration. However, instead of racing forwards the speeder instead shot vertically upwards and slammed into the ceiling with such force that it crushed not only the reinforced forward windshield but also Jonan's head and upper body against it. Then as the altitude control repulsorlifts burnt themselves out the vehicle simply dropped back down to the floor with an almighty 'Crash!' that echoed even more than the engine noise that had impressed Jonan so much.

Under cover of darkness the YT-1300 class light freighter *Silver Hawk* approached low over the countryside and then hovered briefly above a field as its landing gear lowered and it then descended. From a nearby hillside two men watched the ship land through macrobinoculars. "Okay they're here." One said to the other, "So let's go say hello."

"So can I come too dad?" Cass asked Mace Grayle, the *Silver Hawk*'s captain and he turned to look back at the teenage girl.

"That depends on the major." He told her and her face fell.

"So that's a 'no' then." She said.

"Just try asking the major before giving up." Mace responded.

"Ask me what?" Major Vorn Larcus asked as he stepped from his cabin into the ship's lounge.

"Cass wants to come with us major." Mace replied and Vorn frowned briefly.

"Go on then." He said.

"Really?" Cass exclaimed.

"Yes really." Vorn replied, "This isn't an assault mission and quite frankly if anything goes wrong I don't see that you'd be any safer here than with the rest of us."

A wide grin appeared on Cass' face.

"I'll go get my things." She said and then she darted around Vorn towards the crew cabins. When she reached the door to the one she occupied she found her way blocked by one of the women she shared it with. A woman whose stomach was heavily swollen with pregnancy.

"Did you hear Kara?" I get to come with you all." Cass said.

"Great kid. Don't get cocky." Kara replied and then she squeezed past Cass and entered the lounge, "Getting soft boss?" she asked as she kissed Vorn on the cheek.

"Someone's in a bad mood." Mace commented.

"Yeah, well I've decided that this is my last mission. I'm done. At least until the baby's born." Kara replied and both Mace and Vorn looked at one another.

"I figured we'd have to physically restrain you to get you to take a break." The man sat at the nearby table added.

"I agree with Tharun." Mace said.

"Yes, what's wrong Kara?" Vorn asked.

Kara sighed.

"That last op scared me boss." She replied, "Our kid isn't even born yet and I came close to getting hit by a torpedo. So I've decided I want to start my leave as soon as we get back to headquarters."

"Okay." Vorn said, nodding, "I'll make the arrangements when we get back. In the mean time would you rather stay here?"

"I just heard you telling Cass that the ship wasn't going to be any safer. Plus I'm not leaving you in the lurch like that." Kara said, "Now just let me sit down for a couple of minutes, your kid is weighing me down."

A series of high-pitched electronic chirps attracted the rebels' attention towards the corridor that led to the cockpit where a pair of droids were approaching. One, the one that had made the noise was an R5 type astromech droid while the other was a humanoid gold coloured protocol droid.

"Yes Harvey, I will tell them that." The protocol droid said.

"What is it Jeeves?" Vorn asked.

"Major Larcus sir, there are two individuals heading towards the ship." The protocol droid answered.

Tharun leapt to his feet and picked up the heavy blaster rifle that lay on the table.

"Go with him." Vorn told Mace, "I'll get the others." And Mace nodded and as he rushed towards the *Silver Hawk*'s access ramp he drew his heavy blaster pistol.

As the access ramp was lowered light spilled out from inside the ship. Tharun emerged first, running down the ramp with his rifle held up against his shoulder. Knowing that his eyes would take time to adjust to the night he used the weapon's built in scope to improve his view of the surrounding countryside.

"Got them." He said as he saw movement in nearby undergrowth and he dropped to his knees.

Behind him Mace pulled a glow rod from his pocket and pointed it in the direction Tharun was aiming.

"I see them." He said then, raising his voice he called out, "Who's there?"

"Just two men on a lonely road." Came the reply.

"Better to travel in larger numbers when there are predators about." Mace shouted and both he and Tharun lowered their weapons as two figures stepped out into the open, "Headquarters sent us." Mace said to them as they came closer, "We hear you're having trouble."

"Trouble's putting it lightly." One of the two newcomers replied, "We think that the Empire's made us."

"You weren't followed were you?" Tharun asked.

"No. But our network is suffering losses we can't explain."

"What sort of losses?" Vorn asked as he descended the access ramp with the remaining occupants of the *Silver Hawk*. In addition to Cass and Kara there were two others, a man and a woman who stood close together.

"Tobis, Jaysica make sure the ship is secured." Mace said to these other two, "We'll leave the droids to keep an eye on things. They'll only slow us down going across this terrain."

"But I can carry Penny." Jaysica said.

"Then go get her." Vorn said, "But be quick." Then he looked at the two locals, "I believe that introductions are in order." He said, "I'm Major Vorn Larcus and my team are Lieutenant Kara Larcus, Sergeant Tharun Verser and Corporal Jaysica Horbid who just went back into the ship." He went on, pointing out each member of his team in turn.

"And I'm Captain Mace Grayle." Mace added, "Tobis here is my engineer and Cass is my daughter."

"Pleased to meet you." One of the local rebels replied, "My names Jak Rottun and this is Leon Torf. If you'd like to come with us we've got a speeder waiting."

"It better be big." Kara commented as she looked around at the number of people standing beside the *Silver Hawk*.

"Come on mom. You're not that fat." Tharun said, leaning close to be able to say it right into her ear as the two locals began to walk away.

"Stop calling me that!" she hissed and she punched him in the chest, his armoured vest absorbing the blow. He then grinned and he joined the others in following after the two local men.

"I take it you've got a safe house somewhere." Mace said to Jak.

"Sort of." Jak replied.

"Sort of?" Mace repeated.

"Well right now we can't be certain that anywhere is secure." Jak explained, "But let's just say that the place we're taking you is as hidden as we can make it."

## 2.

It was still dark as the repulsorvan carrying the rebels entered the city and wound its way through the almost deserted streets towards a residential area.

"Okay we're there." Leon said from the driver's seat and Cass peered over his shoulder. There she saw a tall featureless building that stretched up into the sky. There were no windows visible at all, but the way the building reflected light from streetlamps suggested that the entire outer surface had been covered in one way reflective glass.

"I don't get it." She said, "It's just an apartment block. Is your base just one of the apartments?"

"Not exactly." Jak said, "Let's just say that when this building was constructed the contractor didn't just intend to rent out apartments."

Leon then turned the van into the parking lot beneath the building and found a spot to park. He and Jak then led the newly arrived rebels to the nearest turbolift and once they were all inside Jak inserted a key into the override port located beside the list of floor numbers.

"If you take a look at the floor numbers on the buttons," he said as he turned the key and the turbolift began to ascend, "you'll see that as is common with a lot of buildings like this they go straight from twelve to fourteen. Even in this day and age thirteen is still considered an unlucky number and age it is avoided in construction. However, the contractor and architect of this building were both suspicious of Palpatine's power grab and when he declared his new order they started work on this place. As well as the floors filled with apartments they included another one that doesn't appear on any officially logged plans. Right from the start they wanted somewhere that they could hide out and when they joined the Alliance they brought this little piece of real estate with them." The display showing the floor number above the door then turned from twelve to thirteen and Jak turned the key back to its original position, bringing the turbolift to a halt. Then as the door slid open he added, "Welcome to floor thirteen."

The room that the turbolift door opened into was a large space filled with tables, charts and display screens. "Ah Jak, Leon, you've brought them. Excellent." A grey haired man who walked with the aid of a stick said as he saw the group exiting the turbolift and he headed towards them, waving them closer.

"Mister Cresk, this is Major Larcus." Jak told the man.

"Of course he is. I remember him well." He replied and he looked at Vorn and smiled, holding out his hand in greeting. Then as Vorn shook it he added, "I remember your last speech to Parliament. Decrying the increasing regulation and restriction of liberty."

"The speech that killed my career." Vorn replied, "And very nearly me too."

"But you're here now. That's all that matters." Cresk said, "Now my name is Mykal Cresk and if you come with me I'll explain exactly why we need your help." And he then turned and walked towards a nearby door. Following him Vorn and his team found themselves in a meeting room that was dominated by a large table surrounded by chairs. Laid out across this table were several datapads and on the display of each one was an image of a corpse.

"What happened?" Cass asked as she picked up a datapad that showed an image of a badly mangled body that Mace snatched away from her, "I'm almost eighteen dad." She reminded him, "I can handle pictures with a bit of blood in them."

"Doesn't mean I'm going to have to like it." Mace replied, "Now sit down and don't touch anything."

"What about the chair?" Cass muttered and Mace frowned.

"I take it that these are the losses your man mentioned." Vorn said as he too picked up a datapad.

"Yes." Mykal replied, sighing, "Good people all of them. Cell leaders and handlers. Eighteen altogether."

"How many arrests?" Tharun asked, sitting down and pulling a datapad towards him.

"Arrests? There have been no arrests." Mykal replied and the rebels of Vorn's group looked at one another, confused.

"But, err, if the Empire has identified members of your network then wouldn't they, err, well, they'd arrest some of you for questioning wouldn't they?" Tobis said.

"That is what we thought." Mykal said, "And we warned our people to go to ground after the first few deaths but there was no reaction from the Imperial authorities to most of these deaths."

"Most?" Vorn commented.

"Yes." Mykal said and he looked around the table until he found a particular datapad, "These two were killed when the bomb they were planting went off prematurely. The information there is taken from an ISB report passed onto the media. The rest come from Estran's own law enforcement."

"Major this isn't right." Tharun said, holding up a datapad, "The Empire should be all over these deaths."

"Maybe they are." Kara said, "If it's Imperial Intelligence then maybe they've decided to skip the show trials and go straight to the execution part. They've plenty of killers on their books."



"What about a bounty hunter?" Jaysica suggested.

"A bounty hunter that leaves the body behind rather than taking it in for the reward?" Mace replied, "Not likely."

"No. I think Kara's idea of an assassin is more likely." Vorn said. Then he looked at Mykal and added, "I take it that you suspect a leak?"

"Sadly yes." The old man answered, "I hate to think that one of the people I've trusted my life to is a traitor but there doesn't seem to be any other possible answer." The door to the room then slid open again and man obviously more than a decade younger than Mykal entered, "Ah Taven, meet Major Larcus and his team. Major, Taven is currently acting as my deputy." And Taven smiled and nodded.

"Acting?" Vorn commented.

"Yes. I've yet to assign the position permanently since we lost the man who previously occupied it." Mykal replied.

"Which of these was he?" Mace asked as he looked at the datapads.

"Oh he's not among them. Heddren vanished about a month ago." Mykal answered, then he paused, "His loss was a great one to us and I'm afraid that with all this nastiness I've not been able to give replacing him the attention it deserved. Taven was his assistant so he's been filling in until I can find someone to take over permanently."

"I'm sorry to interrupt," Taven said, "but we've just received a message. One of our cells is asking for extra equipment."

"Well it appears that duty calls." Mykal said, looking around the room, "I'll leave you here to review this information. If you need anything then don't hesitate to ask me or Taven."

"Of course." Vorn replied, "You've given us plenty to go on."

"Excellent." Mykal said and he hobbled out of the room with Taven following and closing the door behind them.

"So anyone else think that the old deputy's disappearance isn't as unconnected to this as the old man thinks?" Tharun asked out loud and there were nods and murmurs of agreement from around the table.

"Could he be the one killing these people?" Cass asked.

"He's got help if he is." Kara replied.

"How do you know?" Cass then asked.

"Oh, err, because they died in different ways." Tobis told her.

"Huh?" Cass said.

"Assassins tend to favour one single way of killing." Mace explained, "By sticking to one method they get good at it."

"But that's not always true." Jaysica pointed out, "Some just examine their target's closely and look for some way to exploit whatever they do."

"Though that does require a good knowledge of the target that takes time to build up." Tharun said.

"Which this Heddren would have had." Vorn said, "We're going to need to get information about him at some point."

"Major have you noticed how most of these people didn't know one another?" Mace asked as he lined four datapads up in front of him.

"He's right boss." Kara added.

"Of course he is. Dad knows his stuff." Cass commented.

"Do you know why we know this kiddo?" Tharun asked her.

"Err. No." Cass replied.

"It's because the Alliance uses a cell structure that limits knowledge of who's in a particular cell to just a handful of people. Typically just other cell members and a single contact further up the chain." Mace explained to her.

"Didn't you ever wonder why your real father never introduced you to everyone in the rebellion?" Kara then asked her.

"I just figured that he didn't want me involved." Cass replied.

"Well it's because he probably only knew about half a dozen himself." Tharun said.

"Err." Tobis began as he too began comparing datapads.

"What is it lad?" Tharun asked him.

"Well, err, have you all noticed how not a single cell has been taken out?" Tobis responded and all of the others began checking the datapads in front of them.

"That can't be right." Kara said, "Look, these two guys taken out by their own bomb. Where is the rest of their cell?"

"Not amongst these lieutenant." Tharun answered.

"But each of the casualties was in a position of authority." Vorn noted, "Look, apart from that bothan who was killed along with his cell leader every one of these people was the nominal leader of their group. The only ones who weren't were the ones who acted as handlers at the next level up."

"I don't get it major." Tharun said, "Sure killing off these people is bad for us, but none of them represent a crippling blow."

"And the fact that there haven't been any arrests is suspicious." Mace added.

"Okay we need more information." Vorn said, "I'll see what I can find out about this Heddren. Mace I want you to look deeper into these people. See if there was anything connecting them not in these reports. Cass and Kara can help you. The rest of you take a look at what intelligence Mykal's people have gathered on the authorities around here. I want to know just who we're up against."



### 3.

Mace peered down the corridor at the door to the late Leetan's apartment.

"Okay the coast is clear." He said, "No guard. Let's go." And then he darted towards the door and took out the datapad containing the information on Leetan, "Come on there must be an access code in here somewhere." He said to himself.

"Hey Mace," Kara said, "notice anything weird?" and she reached out and took hold of the tape stretched across the doorway warning people not to enter.

"Police tape? What's strange about that?" Cass asked.

"Alliance activity doesn't come under local jurisdiction." Mace told her, "I know that Mykal said that the Imperial authorities hadn't reacted, but I thought that just meant that they hadn't moved on to other rebels in the aftermath of the deaths. They should still have sent the ISB to go over this place." Then he looked back at the datapad and smiled, "Here it is." He said as he typed the access code into the panel beside the door and then ripped away the tape as it slid open.

Inside the apartment was still fully furnished and tidy. The only indication that anything had happened was the white tape outline on the floor by the doorway to the kitchen that indicated where Leetan's body had been found and a short distance away from this was a cross of the same tape that showed where Leetan's blaster had ended up before the police took it away.

"The Empire's never this tidy." Kara said as she stepped inside, "They should have ripped this place apart."

"Yes they should." Mace replied, "They knew that she was a rebel so they'd have brought in a scanning crew at the very least and removed absolutely everything that could be related to rebel activity. The communicator for example." And he pointed to the communication unit.

"Maybe they're too busy." Cass suggested, "All these deaths. Maybe they don't have enough agents to investigate them all and they're just taking their time to get around to it."

"No." Mace said, "They'd find the people. Kara, let's see what we can find."

"Sure." Kara replied, "But I call dibs on the refresher."

"Why would you want to search the refresher?" Cass asked.

"I'm pregnant. I need to pee. So get out of my way."

Then as Kara headed for the bathroom Cass looked at Mace.

"So what do you want me to do dad?" she asked him.

"There's a computer over there." He said, looking at a desktop terminal at the far side of the apartment, "I doubt that there are any incriminating files on it but this Leetan may have accessed files on external drives using it. See if you can find out if she was."

Cass nodded and was just starting to walk towards the computer when she reached the tape outline of Leetan's body.

"How did she die?" she asked as she paused.

"She was shot." Mace replied, "A blaster at close range."

"So from inside the apartment then?"

"Yes. Probably not far from where you're standing now."

"But wasn't the door locked when we got here?"

"Yes. You saw."

"So how did the killer get in?" Cass asked and Mace looked back towards the door and frowned.

"The lock wasn't tampered with." He said, pointing to the door, "So either someone else had access or she let them in."

"But if she opened the door to her killer wouldn't they have just shot her right inside the door?" Cass asked.

"Possibly. But even if they didn't I doubt that they'd have given her time to go and get a weapon. There's no sign of a struggle so whatever happened, it was quick. I think that the killer had a key. A key or-" and then he looked down at the datapad he still held, "Oh I've got a very bad feeling about this." He said.

"What?" Cass asked and then her eyes widened as she saw a tiny red dot appear on Mace's chest, "Dad look out!" she yelled and she ran forwards and dived into him, knocking him to the floor just as the blaster bolt shattered the window and flew through the air right where Mace had been a moment earlier. Cass then screamed as two more blaster bolts flew just over them and tore chunks out of the wall behind them.

"What's going on out here?" Kara demanded as she emerged from the bathroom.

"Kara get back!" Mace yelled and she took a step back just in time to avoid the next shot that came through the window.

"Oh kriff!" she snapped, "Who the hell is that?"

"Not a trained sniper thankfully." Mace replied.

"How do you know?" Cass asked him.

"Well have you been hit yet? Because I haven't." Mace replied.

"Only because I pushed you out of the way when I saw the targeting dot." Cass pointed out.

"Yes and a professional would have shot you in the back first and then moved on to me." Mace said. Then he peered over the furniture to try and get an idea of where their attacker was firing from. There was another shot and the sudden flash of light startled Mace for a moment, "Kara do you have your blaster?" he asked as he blinked his eyes in an attempt to get rid of the spots now floating in his vision.

"Right here." She replied as she pulled a military-issue blaster from under her jacket.

"Good. Give it to me." Mace said.

"What's wrong with yours?" Kara asked.

"My heavy pistol doesn't have the range yours does. Our guy is on the roof opposite and I'll have a better chance of hitting him if I use yours."

"Okay catch." Kara said and she threw the weapon towards Mace. It landed with a 'thunk' on the floor just in front of him and he quickly scooped it up.

Keeping low Mace then slid across the floor until he could see the building across the street through the destroyed window and he lined up the blaster pistol on the roof. There was another flash and Cass screamed as the chair she was behind had a smoking hole punched right through it.

"Cass are you okay?" Mace called out.

"She's fine." Kara responded, "Do it while we've still time." And Mace opened fire. He did not fire just one or even just a handful, with only a vague idea of where their attack was he fired the blaster repeatedly and sent one energy bolt after another across the street to the roof opposite. Then after several seconds in which there was no further fire from the roof he stopped.

"Okay let's go!" he snapped and he leapt to his feet and headed for the door, grabbing hold of Cass and dragging her with him.

"Ow!" she exclaimed, "What are we doing?"

"Kid blaster bolts were just flying back and forth across the street." Kara replied as she followed Cass and Mace from the apartment, "It may be early but that sort of thing tends to disturb people and when people are disturbed they call the cops."

"Who will probably give this place priority." Mace added, "What with it already being a crime scene and all. I just wish we'd had time to burn whatever was left in there."

"So where are we going?" Cass asked.

"To the building opposite." Mace replied, "I want to see if anyone comes out of there in a hurry like we're doing."

Mace burst out of the apartment building first, with Cass not far behind.

"Okay there it is." Mace said, looking across the street, "I'll watch the front door and you keep an eye on the parking lot. Just make a note of the model and registration of anything that comes out of them."

"Right dad" Cass replied and the pair of them dashed across the road to the other building.

Mace halted on the sidewalk opposite and looked towards the main entrance to the apartment building while Cass ran along the side wall until she came to the large doorway leading to the parking structure beneath it. Both of them stood and waited calmly watching the entrances for any sign of someone fleeing the building. That was until Mace heard the sound that he had been both expecting and dreading, that of an emergency siren.

"Cass move!" he called out and he waved at her as he began to retreat back across the street.

"Dad what's wrong?" Cass responded.

"This place is about to be swarming with the police." Mace told her, "And worse maybe."

Cass ran after him and they both reached the building they had just left right as Kara appeared in the doorway, gasping for breath.

"What's going on?" she asked as she tried to get her breath back.

"Police." Mace told her and he took hold of her arm and guided her away from the other building.

"Oh great, just what we need." Kara said as she walked with them, looking back over her shoulder just in time to see a pair of police speeders come to a sudden halt between the two buildings and their occupants disembark.

"Are they coming after us?" Cass asked, afraid to look back.

"No." Kara said, "There's only four of them and I think that they're heading into the buildings."

"They'll head for whoever called them first." Mace said, "Then they'll want to investigate where the shooting was coming from. Unless we do anything to give ourselves away they won't think to come after us."

"What about the shooter on the roof?" Kara asked.

"No sign of him." Mace told her.

"Then let's just hope he's still in there and those cops decide to shoot him before he can say 'Hey, I work for the Empire.'" Kara said.

"If that is an Imperial assassin in there then I doubt that a handful of policemen would even slow him down. Though from his aim I'd say he came near the bottom of his marksmanship class." Mace replied, "But right now I'm more interested in whether we can make it away from here so keep calm and keep walking. We're just a family out for an early morning stroll."

Vorn found Mykal sat alone eating as he studied a datapad.

"May I have a word with you?" Vorn asked.

"Yes of course, sit down." Mykal said and he put down the datapad and looked directly at Vorn, "Now how may I help you?"

"I was wondering about Heddren." Vorn told him, "I'm concerned that his disappearance may be related to what's going on now."

"Oh no, I don't think that that is possible." Mykal replied.

"Why not?"

"Well because if the Empire had captured him then they'd already have raided this place. Heddren designed it you know."

"He was the architect your man told us about?" Vorn asked.

"Yes. I contracted him to design me a building and he did. I believe that he also included several, ah, shall we say 'interesting' features in other buildings he designed right up until his disappearance."

"Well I'd like to look into his disappearance along with what's been happening more recently." Vorn said and Mykal frowned.

"Major, Heddren was my friend and I would dearly like to know what happened to him, but according to our sources the Empire had no hand in his disappearance and right now I want to know what is happening to the people I have lost more recently."

"Are you saying that you're forbidding me to investigate Heddren's disappearance?" Vorn asked in response and then he leaned closer to the other man and added, "Are you intending to block my investigation?"

"Of course not." Mykal replied defensively.

"Then you'll give me the information I want?" Vorn asked and Mykal's frown deepened.

"Yes." He said reluctantly, "I'll let you have everything we have. Now if you don't mind I have other work to be doing."

"Of course." Vorn said as he got back to his feet, "I'll be waiting for the information." Then as he began to walk away another of the local rebels came rushing up to him.

"I'm sorry sir, but I think you should come quickly." The woman exclaimed.

"What's wrong?" Vorn asked her.

"It's Captain Grayle sir, he says that his unit has come under fire."

"Let's go." Vorn replied quickly and as the woman turned and headed back the way she had come Vorn went after her.

The woman led Vorn to one of the communications consoles set up in the hidden base. In order to help keep the existence of the base secret the walls were shielded against wireless transmissions that made devices such as comlinks useless for communicating with the outside world. Instead Mace had contacted the hidden base itself, making use of one of the external antennas that was shared with the building's apartments.

"Mace, it's Vorn. What's happening?" Vorn asked as he leant over the communication console.

"Major we were ambushed." Mace replied, "Single shooter from the building opposite."

"Are you alright? Is Kara-" Vorn began.

"We're all fine here boss." Kara replied, "How are you?"

"Where are you now?" Vorn asked, ignoring the question.

"East quadrant." Mace told him, "Near the monorail terminal."

"Okay stay there for now." Vorn ordered, "It's obvious that someone is trying to stop us and I think we need to find somewhere that no one else knows about to go through what we've learned."

"We've got poodoo boss." Kara said.

"That's alright. We've still got the data that the locals have provided us with and there's still Tharun's group. I'll contact them from here and have them standby. Plus there's someone else I can ask as well." Vorn told her.

"So do you have any thoughts on where we can set up this secret meeting place?" Mace asked and Vorn smiled.

"Yes actually. I was thinking about the first place we met." He replied.

## 4.

"Hey little lady! Are you going to be much longer?" Tharun called out as he and Tobis stared up into the hole in the ceiling. The two men were standing in a service tunnel that ran beneath the commercial district of the city. The tunnel was lined with clusters of high voltage cables for power distribution while lower energy communication lines were to be found overhead. The lines that the rebels were interested in ran into a nearby police station that they had sent Jaysica's mouse droid Penny into. The little droid had been instructed to locate the communications landline and send small but easily identifiable energy pulses down it so that the waiting rebels could identify the exact line.

"It's really dark in here." Jaysica replied from inside the hole.

"Doesn't she have a glow rod?" Tharun asked Tobis.

"Err, she should have." He replied.

"Have you got a glow rod?" Tharun then shouted into the hole.

"I dropped it," Jaysica replied, "and it's too dark in here to find it."

"Oh that's just great." Tharun muttered and he looked at Tobis again, "Lad that girl of yours is trouble. You know that right?"

"Hang on I think I've found it." Jaysica then called out, "Yes, that's Penny's signal all right. This must be the line from inside the police station."

"Then splice the line and tell her to get out of there." Tharun told her.

"I'm doing it." Jaysica said, "But if I hurry I'll do it wrong."

"You know lad if Kara were here I'm sure she'd have something really sarcastic to say about that." Tharun then said to Tobis.

"Okay I've done it. The transmitter's in place. I'm coming out." Jaysica said and there was the sound of movement from above.

"Oh, err, be careful." Tobis warned her, "Those panels don't look very-" but before he could finish his warning there was a sudden 'Crash!' as the ceiling gave way and Jaysica squealed as she along with fragments of the lightweight panels came down on top of Tharun and Tobis.

"It's alright." Jaysica said as she lay dazed on top of the pile of debris, "I'm not hurt." And then she heard a groaning sound from beneath her, "Tobis?"

"No, err, I'm here. I'm fine." Tobis said as he brushed fragments of the ceiling panels off himself and sat up.

"Oh no." Jaysica then said as she quickly got to her feet and began uncovering Tharun. As she pulled a piece of the ceiling from over his face he looked up at her and scowled. Then she noticed something on the floor beside his head and she smiled, "Oh look," she said as she reached down to pick it up, "There's my glow rod."

"So glad I could help you find it." Tharun said hoarsely. Then there was a chirping sound from his comlink,

"Go ahead." He said when he activated the device.

"It's me." Vorn said, "What's your status?"

"Hang on, I'll check." Tharun replied and he looked at Tobis who in turn looked at his datapad and nodded,

"The splice is in place major and we've got a signal coming through."

"Good." Vorn said, "Now look, someone tried to take out Mace's group. Don't worry, they're all fine. Anyway I think that there's someone with knowledge of what the local Alliance forces are up to that's trying to stop us so I want us to continue this mission separate from them as far as we can. For that we need a safe house and I've got the perfect one in mind."

"Where?" Tharun asked.

"The place you first brought Mace and Tobis to meet me." Vorn said and Tharun frowned.

"You're joking." He said.

"Sergeant, when have you ever known me to joke about this sort of thing?" Vorn asked.

"Never. So do you want us to head straight there?" Tharun replied.

"No. Go meet up with Mace. He's near the monorail terminal in the east quadrant. I'll meet you there as soon as I can."

"Understood." Tharun said and he shut off his comlink and looked at Jaysica, "Okay little lady, tell Penny to get back here and we'll get going."

"Going where?" Jaysica asked.

"Err, to the east quadrant monorail terminal." Tobis replied.

"No, I mean after that. Where does the major want us to hide?" Jaysica then asked and Tobis was just about to tell her when Tharun interrupted.

"No lad, don't tell her. Let it be a surprise." He said with a grin.

When Vorn arrived at the monorail terminal all of the others were there waiting for him.

"Anyone need a ride?" he asked as he leant out of the rented landspeeder.

"Boss are you crazy?" Kara asked as she looked at the expensive appearing vehicle, "Couldn't you have picked something less conspicuous? Like an AT-AT maybe?"

"Trust me Kara," Vorn replied, "where we're going this won't stand out at all."

"Fine. But I call shotgun." Kara said. Then as she got into the vehicle beside Vorn she added, "So are you going to tell us where we're going? Because it doesn't seem fair that none of you boys is willing to tell us girls."

"Really?" Vorn said as he looked at the other male members of the team as they too got into the speeder.

"Really." Jaysica said.

"And it's annoying." Cass added.

"As well as sexist." Kara said.

"Kara I promise you, you'll like this place." Vorn said with a smile and then he accelerated away.

Vorn drove away from the densely populated city centre to an area just outside where luxurious mansions sat in large estates.

"Are we going to stay with Lord Desh?" Jaysica asked as she looked out of the window.

"Lord Desh?" Cass asked, "Is that the same guy who was in charge of parliament?"

"The very same." Kara said, "He and the boss go way back. But we're not staying with him."

"How do you know?" Jaysica asked.

"Because wherever we're going it's where the boys all first got together," Kara said, "and the boss kept Lord Desh a secret remember?"

"Oh yeah." Jaysica said.

"So who else does the major know around here?" Cass asked.

"Lord Torr and Lady Sharva spring to mind." Kara commented, "Though I can't see either of them inviting us in for tea."

"So who-" Jaysica began before Vorn interrupted.

"This is it." He said as he turned the speeder into the driveway of one of the mansions. He halted the vehicle in front of the gates and got out just long enough to rush to the control panel set into the wall just beside them and entered a code into the keypad that triggered the opening sequence. Then he rushed back to the speeder, "Okay let's get off the street before someone spots us." He said and he drove through the gates.

"What is this place?" Cass asked.

"Looks abandoned." Kara said as she noticed the overgrown state of the garden.

"It is." Tharun replied, "For a few years now."

Vorn just smiled as he pulled up outside the mansion's front doors and switched off the engine.

"Okay then," he said, "let's go inside."

"I don't know." Jaysica said as she got out of the speeder, "Places like this tend to have good locks. I'm not sure if I can pick it very quickly."

"Don't worry." Vorn replied, "I've got that covered." And as he had done at the gate he typed an access code into the locking mechanism beside the front doors. Then there was a soft 'click' as the lock released and he pushed the doors open.

"Uh-oh." Jaysica then said as there was a chirping sound, "Sounds the alarm is still active."

"Wait here!" Vorn snapped and he rushed inside the mansion, heading for a doorway under the stairs that dominated the hallway. Just inside that door he found the alarm keypad and entered another code to deactivate it before it could sound. Then as he emerged he called out to the other rebels, "Not yet. Stay where you are for a moment."

"Boss what's going on?" Kara asked from just outside the door, "Who owns this place?"

Vorn walked right up to Kara and suddenly picked her up. Then as she stared at him with a startled look on her face he stepped back across the threshold.

"I do." He said and then he kissed her and added, "Welcome home Lady Larcus." Before setting her back down.

"Okay I'm confused." Jaysica said and Tharun looked at Kara, expecting an insult in response but she remained silent as she gazed around.

"Err, this is where the major lived before he joined the Alliance." Tobis told Jaysica, "Tharun brought us here to evacuate him and Lyssa."

"Now come on in all of you." Vorn said, waving the others, "This is the last place that anyone will expect to find us."

"What about your neighbours?" Cass asked as she stepped inside nervously.

"That's the advantage of a big garden and a good wall." Vorn answered, "The neighbours won't notice we're here so long as we don't make an excessive amount of noise."

"So why bring us here anyway boss?" Kara asked, walking around the hall as she continued to look around, "Not that I object to you showing me the fancy house that's half mine."  
"Because if someone tried to kill you then they had to know where you were going to be." Vorn explained.  
"And only the local rebels knew where we'd be." Mace added, "Whereas no one knows about this place."  
"There's plenty of room for us all." Vorn said, "Kara and I will take my old room of course. Tharun I'm sure that Lyssa wouldn't mind if you took hers and the rest of you can take your pick. But before then we can set up in the dining room. Come on I'll show you all where it is."

The team had the initial set of datapads provided by the local rebels, the new data regarding Heddren and his disappearance and now also access to the local police data network thanks to the device planted by Jaysica that so far remained undiscovered. All of this proved to be too dull for Cass to tolerate for long and she asked to be excused.

"I could do with a break." She said, "Anyone with me?"

"We don't really have-" Vorn began before Kara interrupted.

"I am." She said, "Come on kid, let's go see if we can find a vid screen in my new house." And she got up and took Cass' hand before leading her through the mansion until they came to a room where numerous chairs and couches were covered in sheets while a large display was fixed to the wall.

"Well this looks promising." Cass said.

"Indeed it does." Kara replied, pulling the sheet from over a couch before sitting down, "Now find the remote and let's see what's on shall we?"

As it happened only a fraction of the channels that the screen was set up for were available, the rest being dependent on subscriptions that Vorn had long since stopped paying for. However, they soon found a channel that still showed short animations that looked promising and they sat back to watch.

"I need to find the refresher." Kara said after some time, "I'll be back soon." And she got up and left Cass watching the screen alone. Almost as soon as Kara had left the room though Cass heard the sound of a repulsorlift engine from outside and she sat up straight. All of the curtains were closed to conceal the rebels' presence should anyone happen to come wandering up the drive so she could not see what was happening. But she could definitely hear the sound of an approaching speeder. The sound came to a sudden stop as the vehicle was halted and then Cass heard a door slam as someone got out of it. Dashing to the door leading to the hallway Cass heard the sound of footsteps from outside and she looked around.

"Kara!" she hissed, worried that raising her voice would reveal her presence to whoever was outside, "Kara there's someone outside."

However, wherever Kara was she was out of earshot and Cass doubted that she would be able to raise any of the others without shouting which meant that she was on her own. Cass reached into her jacket to where her blaster was strapped to her side. It was just a lightweight sporting pistol and she knew that she was not supposed to use it without someone telling her to first, but right now Cass could not think of any other action to take so she drew the weapon and pointed it at the front doors.

The footsteps stopped right outside the front doors and then there was a moment of silence before one of the doors began to open.

"Don't move!" Cass yelled as a figure stepped inside, "I've got you covered!"

"Yes it rather seems that you do young lady." The white haired man in the doorway replied, "Now would you mind putting that blaster down and finding an adult for me to speak to?" and then he stepped fully inside the hall and closed the door behind him, "Are you still here?" he then asked as he turned to face Cass again.

"Get your hands up!" Cass snapped, waving her blaster at him.

"Young lady in case it has escaped your attention I am walking with the aide of a cane. If I raise both hands I'm likely to fall over."

"I'll shoot you." Cass threatened him.

"I doubt it. You see I own a blaster just like that one and I've always found that they function so much better when you load them." The man said and Cass looked down at her blaster.

"Oh stang." She said as she began fumbling through her pockets looking for a power cell.

"Lord Desh!" Kara's voice called out from the top of the stairs and she began to descend them towards him, smiling.

"Ah Kara my dear. How many times must I ask you call me Couran?" Lord Desh asked as he smiled back at her and he walked towards the stairs to meet her at the bottom where she kissed him on the cheek, "I must be getting old you know." He then said and he looked around at Cass, "You rebels are getting younger all the time."

"Kid what the hell are you doing with that blaster?" Kara said as she noticed the weapon in Cass' hand.

"Oh I think she was planning on shooting me." Lord Desh said, "Though in her defence I doubt that a blaster that small could harm an ego as big as mine. Now where is the man who has managed to make you his own? He asked me to meet him here."

“Come this way Couran.” Kara said and as she was leading him towards the dining room she glanced back at Cass, “Come on kid, you too. And put that blaster away before Mace finds out what you did and takes it off you.”



## 5.

Cass frowned and then followed Kara and Lord Desh back to the dining room where the other rebels were still sorting through the information they had. Now though they had found some sheets of paper and flimsiplast and covered one wall in them so that they could attempt to connect people and events together using a complicated looking diagram.

"Look who I found boss." Kara announced as she entered the room with Lord Desh still holding her arm.

"Couran." Vorn said, "It's good to see you again."

"Indeed it is my boy and it's good to see this old place being put to good use again." Lord Desh replied and he sat down on the nearest chair, "Now I believe that you were interested in what the authorities know about a series of deaths?"

"That's right." Mace said, "Someone's been taking out members of local Alliance cells but as far as we can tell the Empire and local government aren't following up any of the killings with arrests or anything like that."

"That's probably because they've no idea that these people are members of the rebellion." Lord Desh said, "I asked around and no one has connected any of these deaths to one another."

"Sorry to be sceptical your lordship, but how do you know that you weren't being lied to?" Tharun asked.

"Young man, when you've spent as much time on committees set up to get to the truth of something you get a feel for when you're being lied to. Plus of course the people I spoke to do like to brag about how important their rather tedious work really is. If they knew something then they would have let it slip." Lord Desh said. Then he looked at the wall now covered in notes and diagrams and frowned, "I say, who is that?" he said.

"Who?" Vorn asked in return.

"That older fellow. Not as old as me of course, but he does seem to have seen a few more years than any of these others." Lord Desh replied.

"He was called Heddren." Vorn said, "He was the first to die."

Err, didn't he just vanish?" Tobis commented.

"Yes of course." Vorn said, "He disappeared some time before all these killings started and we think that there could be a connection."

"You know I think I met him once." Lord Desh said, "Yes, that's it I did. He was an architect wasn't he? It was at the opening of some building he'd designed. It won an award though I never could understand why since it was so ugly."

"Apparently he included all sorts of secret passages and rooms in a lot of his designs for use by the resistance movement he and Mykal Cresk set up." Vorn said.

"In fact I saw that building on the news this morning." Lord Desh went on, "That Neema Gorord was doing a report from it."

"Neema Gorord? The journalist who's always asking questions about what's being done about us?" Jaysica asked, "Well not us specifically, but the rebellion?"

"The very same young lady." Lord Desh said, "Apparently there was blaster fire from the building that Heddren designed and Neema was demanding to know if there was any rebel involvement. I don't suppose it was any of your doing was it?" and Tharun and Vorn both looked at Mace who winced.

"Sort of." Vorn said.

"Hang on a minute." Mace said and he looked at Lord Desh, "You say that one of the buildings was designed by this guy?" and he pointed to the image of Heddren on the wall.

"Yes my boy, that's exactly what I'm saying."

"But which one?" Cass asked, "Dad fired back."

"Dad?" Lord Desh commented and he looked at each of the male rebels in turn with a frown.

"It's complicated." Mace said.

"The captain adopted her." Jaysica added.

"Doesn't sound too complicated to me." Lord Desh said, "but then I always was rather bright."

"And modest as well." Vorn added.

"Yes, that too." Lord Desh replied and both men grinned at one another.

"Oh, err, I think I can get a list of the buildings that Heddren designed." Tobis said and he promptly began to search through the public data network for the information.

"What good does that do us?" Cass asked him.

"Well, err, I was just thinking that maybe the reason no one came out of that building after someone tried to shoot at you is because they had, well, a secret way out." Tobis replied, "Ah. Yes here it is." And he moved away from his computer's display so that the others could see it more easily and pointed to one of the addresses listed there, "These, ah, these are all the buildings given planning authority that had Heddren listed as their designer and that's the one that the sniper was on the roof of."

"I'd hardly call him a sniper." Kara commented, "He missed with every shot. Not that I'm complaining though."  
"Then that's where we need to go." Vorn said, "We'll assume that there is some secret passage that the gunman used to get away and see if we can find it."

"How are we supposed to do that?" Jaysica asked, "It's an apartment block. There could be hundreds of places that a secret door could be hidden."

"Yes there are." Mace agreed, "We'll need to get Harvey from the *Silver Hawk*. His sensors should be able to help locate any empty spaces or shadows where areas have been shielded."

"We'll collect the rest of our weapons as well." Vorn added, "It may be that the gunman didn't escape and is still holed up inside somewhere. If he is I want us to have every advantage possible. Even if there are going to be five of us."

"Five?" Jaysica commented.

"Cass and Kara are staying here with Couran." Vorn replied, "We may need further information from the data network set up we've got here and I don't want to put either in danger."

"But-" Cass began.

"But nothing young lady." Mace interrupted, "This time you stay right here. Don't worry, we'll be right back." And Cass frowned.

After driving back to the *Silver Hawk* to collect Harvey and Jeeves, Tharun drove the speeder into the parking lot beneath the apartment block and drove around slowly until an area labelled 'GUEST PARKING' was located and the rebels disembarked. The building was not exceptionally upmarket and so the rebels had seen no need to change into more expensive looking clothing, but Tharun carried a battered looking holdall that held most of the group's larger weaponry and kept it out of sight while Mace had a dedicated rifle case over his shoulder that contained his sporting rifle.

"So where do we start major?" Tharun asked.

"The first floor I think." Vorn replied, "Tobis we need Harvey to do a complete circuit. He needs to look for any signs of concealed rooms or passages."

"Err, yes major." Tobis replied.

"Take Jaysica and Jeeves with you." Vorn then added, "The rest of us will head straight up to the roof and see what we can find up there."

The first floor of the building was dedicated to the actual running of it and featured no apartments other than one intended for a building manager. However, the owners of the building had at some point decided that all of the day to day running and maintenance was better carried out by droids and so this had been left empty for some time. This meant that Jaysica and Tobis were able to move around the floor with little risk of being noticed.

A sensor probe extended from the top of Harvey's head as the droid scanned the walls for any signs that they could be concealing any rooms or passageways that the rebels could not see and it was after less than ten minutes that the little droid halted and let out a chirp.

"Master Dorfus sir," Jeeves said, "Harvey indicates that he has located an unusual deviation in the path of the building power lines. As if they have been routed around something."

"A secret passageway?" Jaysica asked and there was another burst of sound from Harvey.

"Oh no Miss Horbid." Jeeves translated, "It seems to be a small room about two metres to a side."

"Oh, err, does the deviation take the power lines around it or over it?" Tobis asked.

"Around sir." Jeeves said when Harvey replied with more chirps and bleeps.

"Err, can he scan the floor above?"

"Only in a limited fashion sir. The structure of the building limits what Harvey can detect, but he indicates that the power lines for the floor above deviate in an identical manner."

"Tobis what is it?" Jaysica asked.

"Err, I think it's a turbolift shaft." He told her and he began to investigate the wall closely, "Ah, here it is." He said and he pointed to what looked to be a power socket set midway up the wall, but as he pushed the side of the protruding socket housing it slid aside to reveal a door control panel and with the push of a button part of the wall first retreated backwards and then slid out of the way to reveal a turbolift.

"Tobis you're amazing!" Jaysica exclaimed, "Where do you think that this goes?" she asked and Harvey let out a brief chirp.

"Harvey indicates that it goes both up and down mistress." Jeeves translated.

Cautiously Tobis drew his blaster and stepped inside the turbolift.

"Err, perhaps you should all get inside as well." He told Jaysica and the droids.

On the roof Tharun crouched at the edge, cradling his heavy blaster rifle and overlooking the neighbouring building where the smashed windows of Leetan's apartment could be seen along with several scorch marks on the wall surrounding them. Beside him there were chunks missing from the low wall intended to prevent anyone from accidentally falling from the roof where Mace's return fire had struck it.

"I'd say you came pretty close to nailing our bad guy here captain." He said.

"Not close enough though." Mace replied as he and Vorn searched for any signs of how the gunman had escaped. So far though only the main door to the building below seemed to have seen any recent use, most likely when the police had come up to investigate the shooting.

Then there was a hissing sound as part of the roof opened up and a turbolift car emerged unexpectedly.

"Down!" Vorn snapped as he took cover behind a vent and unslung the rifle he had over his shoulder.

Likewise Mace and Tharun aimed their weapons towards the turbolift.

The door to the turbolift slid open and Jaysica stepped out to see blasters aimed right at her and she gasped.

"Don't shoot! It's me!" she called out.

"Careful there little lady." Tharun said as he lowered his rifle.

"Tobis what's this?" Mace asked as Tobis also stepped from the turbolift.

"Oh, err, it's a turbolift." Tobis replied.

"Yes we can see that." Vorn said, "But what's it doing here?"

"Well, err, I think that Heddren had it installed to let someone move between floors in secret." Tobis answered.

"Okay so I think we know how our bad guy got away." Mace said, "He just got into this turbolift and was away before we could cut him off."

"The question is how did the shooter know about this thing?" Tharun asked.

"Unless he just happened to stumble across it, he must have had access to Heddren's real plans for the building." Vorn said, "And there's one place I can think of that those would be found. Heddren's home."

Cass and Kara sat either side of Lord Desh as he held out a datapad on which he opened up numerous images of Vorn and his family when they had been younger.

"So you've known the boss's family a long time then." Kara commented.

"Oh yes my dear. The Desh and Larcus families have known one another for generations." Lord Desh replied.

"But you still kept in touch with him when he joined the Alliance." Cass said, "Weren't you worried about the scandal?"

"Oh it's hardly the first scandal to have hit the Larcus family young lady."

"What do you mean?" Cass asked.

"Well when one of Vorn's ancestors first came to this sector they were fleeing a terrible mess that they'd got into. Something so bad that it even attracted the attention of the Jedi Order."

"The Jedi?" Cass commented, "What happened?"

"Oh Vorn's ancestor ran here and changed their name."

"So this person wasn't called Larcus then?" Kara asked.

"Oh no, she was called Cra-" Lord Desh began before the front doors opened and Vorn burst in followed by the others who had gone with him.

"Boss!" Kara exclaimed, "What's going on?" and she tried to get to her feet.

"We need to find Heddren's address." He replied as he headed for the dining room.

"Help me up." Kara said to Cass before Lord Desh instead offered his hand for her to stand up, "The missing guy?"

"Yeah, the major thinks that the bad guy must have been there to find out where all the secret doors are."

Tharun said.

Upon reaching the dining room Vorn picked up the datapad that contained the information on Heddren and searched for his address. Then he held it up beside Tobis' computer where the list of buildings designed by Heddren was still on the screen.

"I thought so." He said as he looked round to the other rebels standing at the end of the room, "Heddren designed his own home."

"I think that I shall be departing now." Lord Desh said, "As exciting as you make your adventures sound my boy, I'm guessing that what you're proposing may be considered breaking and entering and I don't think that is a fitting activity for someone of my status. I have a party to prepare for."

"A party?" Jaysica commented.

"That's right young lady. It's a fundraiser for the university. That charming Doctor Drame invited me."

"You're being invited places by Jenessa?" Mace asked.

"Indeed I am and an old man must have his fantasies." Lord Desh answered. Then he turned to Kara, took her hand and kissed it before adding, "Which from your appearance may occasionally come true."

## 6.

"Okay unfortunately this thing doesn't list an access code and Mykal didn't give me a key." Vorn said as the team sat in the speeder and looked at Heddren's house, "So Jaysica I need you to override the lock."

"Her?" Kara said, "You do realise that there could be people in all these other houses that will notice the fireball when she accidentally tears open a tibanna gas line?"

"Oh Mistress Larcus I do not believe that tibanna gas is used to heat the homes in Estran City." Jeeves then said and Kara scowled at the droid.

"I know what I'm doing." Jaysica said before getting out of the speeder and darting towards the front door. Standing under the porch she looked around and when satisfied that no one other than the rebels in the landspeeder were watching she crouched down. Aware that the keypad could have an anti-tamper system she instead focused on the socket for the key. From her pocket she took a compact multitool and a spare power cell for her blaster. Forcing the blade into the lock she then closed her eyes tightly as she pressed the terminals of the power cell up against the blade and the lock so that all three formed an electrical circuit. There was a sudden flash and a sharp 'crack!' as the power cell discharged through the lock. The sudden pulse of energy running through the mechanism burnt it out almost immediately and the front door slid open. Hearing the 'hiss' of this Jaysica opened one eye before turning around and smiling.

"See." She called out, "I told you I could do it." But then her face fell as she attempt to remove her multitool from the lock only to discover that the discharge of the power cell had created enough heat to fuse it to the lock, "But I think I broke this." She then said to herself.

"What about the alarm?" Tharun asked as the rest of the group approached the house.

"I don't think it's set." Jaysica replied.

"Heddren probably didn't have time to set it before disappearing." Mace added as the rebels went inside.

"Okay let's have Harvey give this place the once over." Vorn said and the astromech rolled forwards and chirped as the sensor probe emerged again.

"Major this place looks pretty tidy." Tharun said as he wandered into the next room.

"He's right." Mace agreed.

"So what?" Cass asked, "Most people try and keep their homes tidy."

"Yes, err, but if Heddren was attacked here then there should be some signs." Tobis said.

"Well if he just left he'd have set his alarm." Kara pointed out.

"Split up and search the other rooms." Vorn said as he closed the front door again, "The more we know about what happened the better." But then Harvey let out a high-pitched bleeping and as the rebels rushed to see what the droid had discovered they saw it positioned beneath a large wall mounted screen that at that moment was showing a large still image of a wooded landscape.

"Now that's a vid screen. It's even bigger than the one in our house boss." Kara said, "How big is that? Two metres?"

"Looks it." Tharun said, "Perhaps we should try and take it major. It would look good hanging on the wall of the *Silver Hawk's* lounge."

"Yes it would." Kara agreed with a smile.

"What are you worried about?" Mace asked her, "You're going on leave when we get back."

"Really?" Jaysica said.

"Excuse me." Vorn said loudly, "I doubt that Harvey was intending to recommend that we upgrade our in-ship entertainment system So perhaps we should find out why he wanted to attract our attention." And then he looked at Jeeves, "Well?" he asked.

"Harvey indicates that the screen is concealing an empty space behind it Major Larcus sir." The protocol droid replied.

"Okay so how do we open it?" Mace asked as she stepped closer to examine the screen.

"Well, err, perhaps the remote control can move it." Tobis suggested.

"Okay everyone look for the remote." Vorn said.

"Ooh, here it is." Cass said as she picked up a remote control that she guessed was for the screen. Then she frowned, "But which button opens the door?"

"What you mean there isn't one that's labelled 'open secret door' kid?" Kara asked and in return Cass pulled at face at her.

"I saw that young lady." Mace said, drawing his blaster, "Now everyone stand back because I think I know how we can open this door."

"Oh no, I've got a bad feeling about this." Tharun said.

"There goes the new vid screen for the lounge." Kara said, sighing and then Mace fired.

The blaster bolt struck the vid screen at the edge and there was a shower of sparks as the screen went blank and then shattered to reveal a hidden room behind it.

"Is that what I think it is?" Cass asked as she saw the long package wrapped in plastic lay on the floor just inside the room.

"You mean a body?" Tharun said as he stepped into the room and prodded the package, "I think so."

"Kara take a look at it." Vorn said.

"Why? I think he's dead boss." Kara responded.

"Just take a look and make sure it's Heddren." Vorn told her.

Meanwhile Tobis stepped through the destroyed vid screen and walked over to where a computer sat on a desk.

"Err, I think that this is still active." He said as he sat down in front of the computer and the display screen came to life.

"So what's on it?" Vorn asked.

"Oh, err, it's locked out." Tobis replied.

"Locked?" Mace asked as he and Vorn both stood behind Tobis and looked at the screen. Sure enough there was simply a message that read 'PASSWORD ERROR LIMIT REACHED.'

"So someone tried to access it too many times without the password and got locked out?" Mace said, "Can you get around it?"

"Err, me? No. But Harvey may be able to." Tobis said and he waved his droid towards him. Obediently Harvey began to connect itself to the computer. Initially the droid beeped quietly as it began to remove bypass the computer's operating system to remove the software lock and instead directly manipulated the processor core to override the password. Then as it completed the task and restarted the computer it let out a shrill tone.

"Harvey indicates that this computer is set up to receive feeds from a camera concealed within this room. It appears to be triggered when it detects movement." Jeeves translated.

"Then it should show us who put that body here." Vorn said, "Harvey, find that recording and play it back for us."

Harvey chirped as the droid reviewed the video files stored on the computer and then a beam of light appeared from the droid's head that spread out to form a free floating holographic screen. The data was only two dimensional, so the projection formed a flat image in mid air. The image showed the concealed door open as a figure backed through it dragging the wrapped body.

"So we've got a picture of the bad guy's back." Kara commented, "At least if he runs away we'll be able to recognise him."

Then the figure stood up and turned around, presenting it's face to the camera.

"Freeze it there!" Vorn snapped and Harvey halted the playback.

"Boss is that who I think it is?" Kara asked.

"Yes." Vorn replied, "It's Taven, Heddren's deputy."

"Mister Cresk I've got Major Larcus on the line for you." One of the rebels on duty on the thirteenth floor called out.

"Ah, excellent." Mykal replied and he walked towards the communications console, leaning on it to support himself, "Yes major, have you found anything?"

"We have." Vorn replied, "May I ask who is with you right now?"

"There is just the communications operator and myself here major."

"Good. Could you tell me where Taven is?" Vorn asked.

"Taven? Why he's at his desk." Mykal said.

"Mykal, he killed Heddren." Vorn replied.

"What?" Mykal exclaimed and he suddenly looked around to where Taven was working, "Security!" he yelled,

"Arrest him!" and he pointed towards Taven.

Startled Taven looked around as a pair of armed guards began to close in on him from both sides. Before they reached him however he regained his senses and from beneath his desk he produced a blaster and opened fire. Both guards ducked and drew their own weapons but Taven was already moving and firing his weapon rapidly enough to keep the guards pinned down and deter anyone else from attempting to challenge him.

Reaching the turbolift he opened the door and leapt inside, closing it before anyone else could catch up with him. Then he jabbed at the button for the parking lot and waited, breathing deeply as the turbolift descended. There was a chime as the turbolift reached the parking lot and the door slid open. But blocking his escape were Mace and Tharun.

"Going somewhere?" Tharun said, glaring at him sternly.

However, because they were stood in a public area neither of the two rebels had their blasters in their hands whereas Taven still held his weapon and he swung it upwards.

"Blaster!" Mace yelled and both rebels dived towards Taven in an attempt to disarm him. But even as they took hold of Taven's wrist the blaster went off again and although the bolt passed between Mace and Tharun the heating effect of the high-energy bolt was enough to cause both men to flinch. They relaxed their grasp and moved aside just enough to allow Taven to slip free and leap between them, bringing the butt of the weapon down onto Tharun's head as he did so.

"He's running!" Vorn snapped as the rest of the team watched from their speeder, "After him!" and they threw open the doors of the vehicle and jumped out, "Not you two." Vorn told Cass and Kara, "You stay put." Then he followed Jaysica and Tobis who were already weaving between the other parked vehicles as they searched for Taven. Unlike Mace and Tharun though, the rebels now had their weapons held ready.

"What's going on out there?" Cass said as she struggled to see what was happening, but the structure of the parking lot along with the numerous parked vehicles severely limited her line of sight. Then Harvey let out a chirp and Cass looked to where the droid's head was pointed just in time to see Taven slip between two rows of speeders, "He's over there!" she exclaimed and she jumped out of the speeder and rushed towards him.

"Cass, come back!" Kara shouted as she got out of the speeder and stood beside it, but the teenager carried on running, "Boss! He's over there!" Kara then yelled, "Cass has gone after him!"

"Cass?" Mace wheezed as he and Tharun staggered back to their feet. Then he looked around until he saw where Kara was waving and he reached under his jacket for his blaster before heading in that direction. Meanwhile Taven was attempting to reach the exit while avoiding Vorn's team. He had been able to figure out roughly where most of them were and was slowly moving around them when he heard Kara shouting and he looked around towards her as he kept on moving. This meant that he did not see Cass appear around a support column ahead of him until he ran right into her and she squealed as they both fell and his blaster fell from his grip.

"I'll kill you little whore!" he snapped as he struggled with Cass while also looking for his blaster. Seeing the weapon under the engine pod of the landspeeder parked next to them he reached under it and grabbed hold of it, but as he dragged the weapon out into the open Mace's foot came down heavily on his hand and there was a crunch of breaking bones followed by a howl of agony from Taven.

"Get off my daughter." Mace said, snarling at Taven as he pressed his blaster to the man's head. Then as Taven let go of Cass and she scrambled clear of him Mace struck him in the face with his blaster and called out, "Major I've got him."

Then the turbolift door opened again and Mykal and a group of armed rebels spilled out.

"Over there!" Vorn yelled to them, pointing at Mace.

"Taven!" Mykal shouted as he hobbled towards the man while his own guards took hold of him, "I trusted you and you sold us out to the Empire."

"The Empire has nothing to do with this old man." He replied as he spat blood onto the floor.

"Then why?" Mykal asked.

"All I wanted was to be taken seriously." Taven said, "So I went to Heddren to get him to recommend me as his successor, but the old fool said I wasn't up to the job and we fought. It was an accident when I killed him I swear, but when I realised what had happened I thought you'd pick me to replace him anyway so just hid the body. But you were as bad as Heddren, you made certain that everyone knew you didn't want me in the job. Don't you see, you made me kill those others to stop them getting the job? None of them need have died if you'd just promoted me."

"That's what all this is about?" Kara asked, "A kriffing promotion?"

"You're still a traitor Taven." Mykal said and then he looked to one of the guards, "Get rid of him. Make it quick and dump the body somewhere it won't be found."

Taven did not struggle or yell as he was lifted to his feet and led away. Instead he just looked at Cass.

"I'd have got away if it wasn't for that kriffing kid." He said.