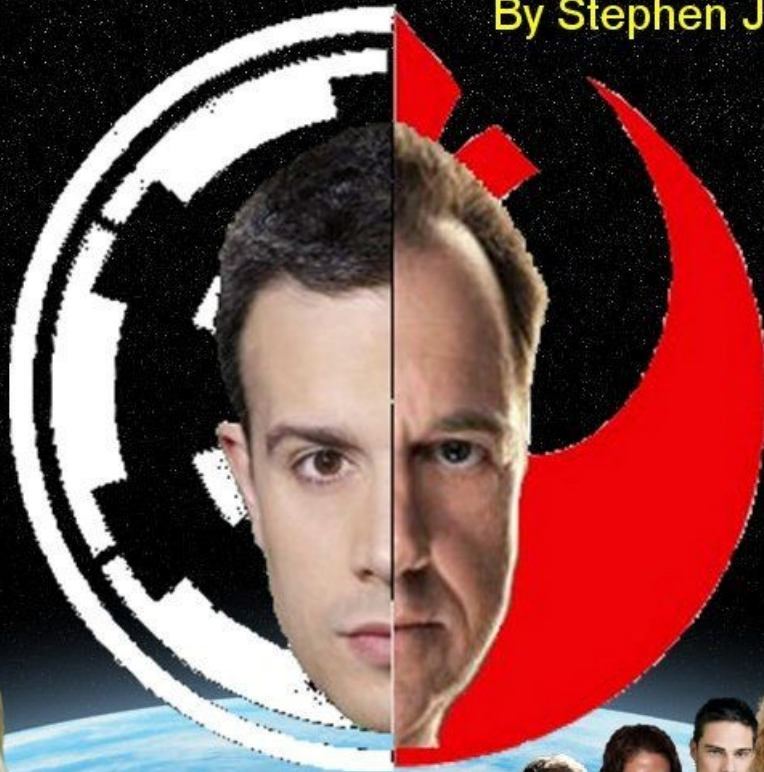


# STAR WARS

## 6-10: Escape Plan

By Stephen J Dutton



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Dutton



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...

## ESCAPE PLAN

HELD CAPTIVE ON AN ALLIANCE SAFEWORLD, IT IS SUPPOSED TO BE IMPOSSIBLE FOR PRISONERS TO ESCAPE. BUT WHEN A YOUNG COMPUTER GENIUS AND SEVERAL CRIMINALS GET TOGETHER, THEY COME UP WITH A PLAN THAT COULD BE THEIR PATH TO FREEDOM...

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

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# 1.

As well as bases for its starfighters, capital ships and ground forces the Alliance to Restore the Republic maintained a network of safe worlds intended to provide havens for those close to Alliance members who would face imprisonment or execution because of the actions of their relatives in the rebellion. Conditions on these remote worlds were often sparse to help avoid attracting the attention of any Imperial scouts that happened to come close, but were still preferable to being arrested by the Empire's agents.

One such safe world existed in the region known as the Spire Worlds, a vertical column of star systems located between two massive gas clouds that formed part of the nebula that neighboured the sector. This particular world was also the location of a prisoner of war camp where conditions were even more basic than in the rebel settlement. Imperial soldiers taken prisoner by the Alliance would be left here to fend for themselves with the bare minimum of supplies necessary for survival. Escape from such prisoner of war camps was regarded as impossible despite the lack of security fences or watchtowers. There was not even any need for any guards since there was nowhere for the prisoners to go. The prison camp was built on the far side of the planet from the Alliance settlement and even if any of the prisoners were able to make the voyage around the planet without any maps or navigation aids and reach the settlement there were no spacecraft there either and they would still be trapped on the planet.

However, this particular world was also home to a third settlement. Much smaller than either the Alliance colony or the prisoner of war camp this was operated by Alliance Intelligence and was used for debriefing both new prisoners and those who had been determined to possess useful intelligence. The level of technology here was by necessity superior to that anywhere else on the planet but there was still no way for anyone to send or receive signals from off world let alone leave the planet. However, what this prison camp did possess was walls, guards and locked cells.

Sliet Sall, a sullustan freighter captain and his borneck cyborg assistant Derl Corack had been captured by a rebel field team. As agents of the galaxy wide criminal organisation known as Black Sun it had been decided that they could possess vital information that would help the Alliance protect itself against the activities of it. Therefore, they had been sent to the intelligence outpost to be questioned. Each of the Black Sun agents was escorted through the outpost by a pair of armed guards. Both were hooded to prevent them from observing their surroundings and Sliet's hands were bound to keep him from resisting. Derl however could not be bound in this manner since a blaster hit had blown his bionic arm off close to his shoulder. Therefore the yellow-skinned near human was being gripped tightly by his two guards.

The hoods were removed when the prisoners reached the cell block and they got their first look at the rooms that would house them until Alliance Intelligence determined that they had no more useful information and they were transferred to the main prisoner of war camp.

"Two more guests for you." one of the guards escorting Sliet said to the cell block guard.

"Down there with the others." he replied and the two Black Sun agents were led down one of the corridors lined with cells. Unlike an Imperial detention block where each cell was sealed by a heavily armoured solid door the cells here possessed much lighter ones made from a transparent material that was punched with small holes at regular intervals. This allowed a patrolling guard to check on prisoners without the need for any electronic surveillance and removed the need for a complex air recirculation system since air could easily flow through the doors. Most of the occupied cells held men or women in Imperial uniforms that were in various states of disrepair. But neither of the pair adjoining the vacant ones that the Black Sun agents were led to held such prisoners.

In one of the cells was a tall human in dusty green combat fatigues. Middle aged and stern looking he glanced at the two new arrivals through his cell door before averting his gaze again. On the other hand the second neighbouring prisoner was a much younger human, appearing to be around twenty standard years of age and he observed the two new prisoners far more closely. In particular he studied Derl with interest. The guards placed the two Black Sun agents in opposite cells before sealing the doors and heading back to the control desk.

"What are you looking at boy?" Derl hissed, scowling at the younger human.

"You should be more careful." Sliet added as he stared back at the young man, "We're dangerous men. I have the death sentence in twelve systems hanging over me."

"Hah!" the man in combat fatigues exclaimed and he got to his feet and walked up to the door of his cell, "Listen here little mouse man." he said to Sliet, "The rebels aren't going to let you out of your cell to follow through on any of your threats. So do us all a favour and don't pretend that you can do anything."

"What is that child to you?" Sliet replied.

"Who him? No one. The name's Durvell by the way. Kenit Durvell."

"I've never heard of you." Sliet said.

"Nor me." Derl added.

"And I don't know who either of you are either." Kenit replied, "But I do know that the Alliance thinks you know something useful. That's why you're here. That's why the boy is here. That's why everyone is here. This place is where the Alliance puts people who know things it wants to know about and you don't get out until you tell them everything. I've been here about seven months now I think. But the boy's been here for three years."

"What could that child know that the Alliance would need?" Sliet asked.

"More than you." the younger human answered, frowning and Kenit laughed.

"Jaran there is some sort of super genius." Kenit said, "The rebels grabbed him at some posh hotel in the Shadow Region. From the sounds of it, they were the same group that caught me as well." and he scowled, "And I swear that if I ever get my hands on that vacc head Verser I'll snap his neck."

"Verser?" Sliet said, "Tharun Verser?"

Kenit snorted.

"Oh let me guess. You've met the valiant Lord Vorn Larcus the third and his group as well."

"Yes." Sliet hissed.

"Well if he ever comes here then I suppose we can all get our revenge on him." Kenit said with a smile.

Jaran pressed his face to the door to get the best view down the corridor in the direction of the control station.

"You don't need to sit here wishing for something." he said softly, "I can get us out of here."

Kenit snarled.

"Not a good thing to joke about boy." he hissed.

"I'm not kidding." Jaran said, "There's a way out of these cells and I know what it is."

Sliet snorted.

"Foolish youngling." then he looked at Kenit, "Are all your species this stupid?"

"No. Just him." Kenit replied.

"Fine." Jaran said, "Don't believe me. We can all just stay here and rot. Or maybe you'll enjoy living the rest of your life in a tent in the middle of nowhere." and he retreated to the back of his cell and sat on the mattress that was all that served as a bed.

"Go on then." Kenit said, "Tell us your idea."

"It's him." Jaran said, looking across at Derl.

"You are insane." Derl replied, "Even if I had my arm I couldn't break down this door."

"I know that." Jaran said as he returned to stand by his own cell door so that he communicate with the others more quietly, "But whatever it was that blew off your arm has left some of its components intact. I'm thinking about the motors."

"So what?" Kenit asked, "Those motors aren't strong enough to drive these doors, even if there was a way of hooking them up."

"The doors are magnetically sealed." Jaran said and he tapped the metal plate set into his cell door where it met the locking mechanism set into the wall beside it.

"So?" Kenit asked.

"Electric motors are magnetically driven." Sliet commented.

"Exactly." Jaran replied, "And the magnets in bionics are particularly strong. They have to be to drive a limb with such a small motor."

"So what?" Kenit asked.

"So if we take a pair of these magnets and press them really hard against the top and bottom of the lock simultaneously so that their like poles face one another then the lock will try and compensate for the presence of the fields by turning both ends of itself into the same pole. Which is something it can't do. A magnetic lock doesn't have a monopole function so the lock will instead try to switch between poles really quickly and that will do two things. First it'll draw in a lot of current that will burn out the lock and more importantly the fluctuating field will repel the door."

A smile spread across Kenit's face.

"Then what are we waiting for?" he said, peering towards the guard post to double check that the guard was not coming towards them.

"Well he needs to pull some of the motors out of his arm and give them to someone who still has two arms to hold a pair to the lock simultaneously.

Derl frowned.

"Do it." Sliet told him.

"But-" Derl began.

"Just get on with it." Kenit interrupted, "Pull a couple of motors and roll them across to me. Then I'll take care of the guard and let the rest of you out."

"How do we know you won't just leave us here?" Sliet asked.

"You don't." Kenit replied before looking at Jaran again, "But I get the feeling that I'll be needing him for more

than just getting out of this cell.”

Sliet then looked at Derl again.

“Hurry.” he said.

Derl frowned before reaching into the exposed electronics of his ruined bionic arm as he felt for the tiny cylindrical motors that drove it. When he found one he tugged at it, but the cylindrical device was fixed in place and offered no easy places to grip it firmly.

“Hurry up.” Kenit hissed.

“I’m trying.” Derl replied as he tried pushing the motor back and forth to dislodge it. The mounting of the motor was designed to prevent it from simply sliding out of place, so putting lateral pressure on the device helped loosen it and after about a minute of effort there was a ‘crack’ as a part of the mounting broke and the motor slid out.

“Quick. Toss it over here.” Kenit said when he saw Derl holding the motor and the borneck crouched down just inside his cell door and tossed the motor through one of the holes near the bottom. The tiny device rolled across the floor of the corridor to Kenit’s cell opposite his and came to a halt against the door where the large human was able to pick it up between his fingers. Then while Derl was busy removing a second motor from his arm Kenit trod on the one he now possessed to break open its casing so that he could remove the motor. Repeating this for the second motor, Kenit held a magnet in each hand and approached the door of his cell. “Make sure you’ve got the like poles facing one another.” Jaran said and Kenit nodded, moving the magnets closer together until he felt them repel one another and he smiled. Then he suddenly thrust the two magnets towards the lock of the door, using all his strength to hold them in place as the lock attempted to repeal each one alternately. All of a sudden there was a “Snap!” and the door slid open part way as the lock overloaded and burned out.

“I told you it would work.” Jaran said, grinning.

“Great kid.” Kenit replied, “Don’t get cocky.”

Leaning out of his cell, Kenit checked that the guard was still right where he was supposed to be and smiled when he saw that the man had his back to the cells. Clearly he considered it more likely that he would have to deal with someone entering the detention section through the main door than any of the prisoners being able to break out of their cells.

Slowly Kenit crept down the corridor towards the guard and as he went most of the Imperial prisoners spotted him and got up to try and watch. Not one of them called out any sort of warning though and the cell block remained silent as Kenit neared his target. However, just as the guard was about to come within arms reach Kenit heard a creak as he stepped on a loose floor panel and he looked down briefly.

“Oh kriff.” he hissed as the guard spun around, reaching for his blaster. But before the guard could draw his weapon Kenit lunged at him, knocking him to the floor. As they struggled Kenit brought his knee up into the guard’s stomach, knocking the breath from him. Then he followed this up with a blow aimed at the man’s throat. Dazed and gasping for breath the guard was rendered helpless as Kenit then knelt down on the back of his neck until he heard a ‘crunch’ as it broke. Then Kenit scooped up the dead guard’s blaster and got to his feet.

## 2.

"The keys!" one of the Imperial prisoners suddenly yelled, "Get the keys."

"The keys! The keys!" other prisoners began to yell.

"Quiet down!" Kenit shouted as he knelt down again to search for the cell block key, "You'll bring the whole outpost down on us." Then, finding the key he ran back along the corridor lined with cells, pressing the card against the readers set into the wall beside each door and went on to the next one without even waiting for the occupant of the cell to step outside.

"Great work kid." he said to Jaran, pausing as the young man's cell slid open, "That's one I owe you."

Then a stern sounding voice called out from behind Kenit.

"Okay now hand over that blaster." the man said, "I'm in charge here." and turning around Kenit found himself face to face with a man in an Imperial officer's uniform. The rebels had removed his rank badge and code cylinders before placing him in his cell so there was no way of determining his rank.

"Oh really?" Kenit asked, "And who might you be?"

"I am Lieutenant Colonel Keffries." the officer replied, "And I am the senior officer here."

Kenit looked around at the other Imperial prisoners. There were several more officers, all of whom lacked any indication of rank on their tattered uniforms along with what looked to be a number of technicians and even a small group of identical faces that could only belong to cloned stormtroopers. All together there were around twenty Imperial prisoners being held in the cell block and Keffries was apparently the highest ranking of them.

"Well colonel-" Kenit replied.

"Lieutenant colonel." Jaran interrupted.

"Sorry, *lieutenant* colonel," Kenit said, despite knowing that 'colonel' was a perfectly acceptable abbreviation of the man's rank, "I'm the one with the blaster and Jaran here is the one that figured out a way to free us. So I think that means we're in charge here."

The colonel scowled.

"I order you to hand over that weapon!" he hissed, "Before I-" but he was suddenly cut off in mid sentence as Kenit slammed the butt of the blaster into his face.

"Perhaps you'd prefer it back in your cell." he said as Colonel Keffries staggered backwards, clutching at his nose as it bled. Then Kenit looked around at the other prisoners, "So who else has a problem with my leadership?" he asked, paying particular attention to how the stormtroopers reacted.

However, the next of the Imperial prisoners to speak up, another officer who looked significantly younger than Keffries did not attempt to seize control.

"So now we're out of our cells, how do we get off this planet?" he asked.

Sliet looked at Jaran.

"It was your idea that got us this far." he said, "what comes next?"

"You have been here longer than any of us." Kenit commented.

"I'm not sure." Jaran replied, "Like the rest of you I've never seen the outside of this place."

"A pity you killed the guard." Sliet said to Kenit, "He could have been a useful source of information."

"Well I doubt we'll have to wait for long before someone else turns up." an Imperial technician said, "Perhaps we can make them talk."

"No." Kenit responded, "We need to concentrate on getting out of here as fast as we can. We don't know how many rebels there are here or what their weapons are like. That means we just can't risk hanging around here for too long." then he spotted the computer terminal at the guard post, something he had ignored up until now and he turned to Jaran, "How much information do you think you can pull from that?" he asked.

"That depends." Jaran replied.

"Depends on what?" Derl asked.

"On whether the rebels have hooked it up to a network or not." Jaran answered, "But unless we can find a datapad then we're going to be limited to what we can remember ourselves. That thing looks too bulky to carry about, even if it does have a battery."

The prisoners hurried to the computer terminal with Jaran, Kenit and the two Black Sun operatives gathering around it while most of the Imperial troops positioned themselves just inside the door ready to ambush anyone who entered unexpectedly.

"So is it networked?" Kenit asked as Jaran sat in front of the computer.

"Yes." Jaran replied, "It's a very basic network but it is still a network."

"But can you slice your way into it?" Sliet asked, "It is an Alliance military system after all."

Jaran smiled.

"I don't need to." he said, looking around at the dead guard lying on the floor, "Our friend down there was still



logged in when Kenit killed him.”

“So what can you tell us about our home?” Kenit asked, looking up at ceiling while Jaran began searching through the Alliance network.

“A lot of it's underground.” Jaran replied.

“That figures.” Colonel Keffries said, snorting and walking over to join the former prisoners around the computer. Kenit glanced at him and smirked when he saw the traces of dried blood still evident around the man's nose, “Rebels love to cower in holes in the ground.”

“I'm more interested in how many more rebels we need to get out of here.” Derl added.

“A personnel list would be useful.” Kenit agreed, “Plus a duty roster and a floor plan.”

“I can't be certain,” Jaran replied, “but I'd say that there are about a dozen rebels here.”

“Then we have them outnumbered.” Keffries said with a grin.

“Too bad we only have one-” Sliet began before a stormtrooper stood right by the door looked around and called out a warning.

“Someone's coming.” he said.

“Everyone back.” Kenit replied, waving the Imperials away from the door while he crouched down behind the desk on which the computer sat, “You too boy.” he told Jaran as he aimed his blaster towards the door.

The door slid open to reveal two rebel guards holding a hooded figure in an Imperial uniform between them. Almost immediately they both realised that the situation in the detention section was not as it should be and they let go of their prisoner.

“Stang!” one exclaimed as he reached for the blaster at his hip while the other went for his comlink.

Kenit aimed at the one going for his comlink first. Though the first guard's blaster was a threat, it was not as dangerous to the escaped prisoners as the alarm being raised. Firing once Kenit shot the rebel guard in the chest and his comlink went flying from his grip before he could activate it. The other guard looked around in horror as his dead comrade collapsed and then before he could regain his senses a stormtrooper rushed at him and tackled him.

The pair landed in a heap with the guard still holding his blaster. However, just as he tried to swing it around towards the stormtrooper a pair of Imperial technicians ran to the aid of the stormtrooper, grabbing hold of the guard's arm and twisting it so that he screamed in pain and dropped his weapon. Meanwhile an Imperial officer reached out to the hooded figure and pulled him to safety before removing the hood from over his head.

“Out of the way!” Kenit snapped and the trio of Imperial soldiers dived away from the guard to give Kenit a clear shot. There was a flash of blaster fire from Kenit's weapon just as the guard was trying to get back to his feet and the rebel fell backwards as he was hit and lay still, “Quick! Get him inside before anyone else turns up.” Kenit said, “And you,” he added, looking at the stormtrooper, “grab that blaster.” Then as the bodies were being moved out of the way he looked at Sliet, “You take that one.” he told the sullustan, pointing to the blaster that the first guard he had shot had in his holster and Sliet nodded.

Unlike the military issue blaster that Kenit had taken from the detention section guard, the two who had arrived with the prisoner were armed with lighter and less efficient sporting weapons that offered much less hitting power and ammunition capacity. With no spare power packs carried by any of the guards the escaped prisoners were going to have to keep a careful watch on their ammunition expenditure until they could locate a source of replacements, assuming that there were any here at all.

With the only door in or out of the detention section now guarded by Sliet and the armed stormtrooper Kenit stood over Jaran watching as he searched the Alliance network for the rest of the information that he had been asked to find. However, after a rather short search he stopped and shook his head.

“There's no floor plan.” he said, “Or duty roster.”

Keffries snorted.

“Then we have no idea where the rest of the rebels are or if they are alerted to our escape.” he said, folding his arms and glaring at Jaran.

“No floor plan and no information on how many rebels are on duty?” Kenit said as he considered their situation, “This is going to make things more difficult.” then he looked down at where the dead guards had been lined up and smiled, “I've got an idea.” he said.

When the door to the detention section slid open again Kenit peered out into the corridor outside, now wearing the uniform of one of the dead guards.

“It's clear.” he said and then the stormtrooper armed with the captured blaster emerged with Jaran. The stormtrooper was also wearing a captured uniform.

“Are you sure about this?” the stormtrooper asked, “My face is pretty memorable.”

“The rebels are probably familiar with all of their comrades anyway.” Kenit replied, “We just need to keep our heads down and hope they pay more attention to our uniforms than to who we are.” then looking back into the detention section he added, “Sliet, you're in charge while I'm gone. Seal this door and barricade it with

whatever you can. We'll be back as soon as we can."

As the door slid shut the stormtrooper placed a hood over Jaran's head and then he and Kenit began to lead the young man down the corridor, trying to make themselves looking like rebel guards taking a prisoner for interrogation.

"So what's your name?" Kenit asked the stormtrooper, "You do have one don't you?"

"Trill herf xesh-" the stormtrooper began before Kenit interrupted him.

"No, not the number assigned to you when you popped out of the tube they grew you in. Your name. I know that clones name themselves."

The stormtrooper grinned.

"Echo." he said.

"Echo? How did you get that as a name?"

"By repeating exactly what the training manual said when our instructors questioned us." Echo replied.

"Well Echo, let's see how much you were taught about breaking out of secure rebel facilities." Kenit said before a door ahead of them slid open and a rebel stepped into the corridor, "Eyes down!" Kenit hissed and both he and Echo looked downwards to try and hide their faces.

"What's going on here?" the rebel asked as he saw the two disguised men with the hooded Jaran between them.

"Interrogation." Kenit said, still keeping his head lowered, "Prisoner from cell one-one-three-eight."

"Nonsense! Just who the hell are you anyway?" the rebel demanded.

"Oh I've got a bad feeling about this." Kenit muttered as the rebel leant closer to Echo.

"Surprise!" Echo snapped, raising his head so that the rebel got a good look at his mass produced face and as the man gasped and reached for his comlink the stormtrooper drew his blaster and shot him at point blank range, "Boring conversation anyway." Echo said.

"Okay deception isn't going to work." Kenit said, plucking the hood from over Jaran's head, "Just stay behind us boy, because now we're going to do this the noisy way."

Jaran just nodded and then Kenit and Echo both broke into a run, darting through the door that the rebel had just emerged from with their weapons in their hands. The room beyond was a small office, filled with datapads and another computer terminal sat on a desk. However, there appeared to be nothing of any immediate use so they left the room as quickly as they had entered it and continued on along the corridor to the next door.

When this one slid open it revealed an empty interrogation room holding just a few chairs and a recording device set into the ceiling. Fortunately the device was inactive so the remaining rebels in the outpost could not use it to observe the escaped prisoner.

At the very end of the corridor was the door to a turbolift and Echo pressed the button to summon it. The three escaped prisoners waited while the turbolift arrived. But when the door opened it revealed another member of the base staff who instantly realised that there had been a breakout when he saw them.

"Stang!" he exclaimed as he reached out to close the door again. But Kenit was quick enough to push his hand through the door way, holding back the door long enough for him to push his blaster up against the chest of the rebel and pull the trigger.

"Inside quick." he said to Echo and Jaran and they got into the turbolift where Echo watched the corridor while Kenit studied the control panel and Jaran crouched down to search the body slumped against the wall.

"A-ha!" Jaran exclaimed.

"What is it?" Kenit asked.

"Spare power packs." he replied, holding up a pair of standard blaster power packs.

"No blaster?" Echo asked and Jaran shook his head.

"No." he said.

"You take the power packs." Kenit told Echo, "You need them more. Now what floor should we pick?"

"The top one." Jaran replied.

"Why?" Kenit asked and Jaran shrugged.

"Doesn't the important stuff tend to be at the top?" he responded, "Besides, then we're bound to be above ground and we may be able to find a window and take a look outside."

"He's talking sense." Echo commented.

"Top floor it is then." Kenit said as he pushed the button for the uppermost floor.



### 3.

The outpost's top floor consisted of a single large open plan room. There were several computer terminals on desks around the edge of the room while the centre was dominated by a large table with chairs all around it, obviously intended for the staff to discuss their progress. When the doors to the turbolift slid open there were four rebels sat at the table reviewing datapads while a fifth stood back beside a chart on the wall. It was this rebel that first saw Kenit as he stepped from the turbolift.

"Look out!" he managed to yell before Kenit shot him.

Instantly the other rebels dived for cover, just as Echo stepped out behind Kenit and fired at the first rebel he saw, a man trying to hide behind a chair that did nothing to stop even the relatively low powered blast from Echo's sporting blaster pistol. The next shot came from a rebel as she drew her blaster and returned fire.

However, in her eagerness to get out of the line of fire she did not give herself enough time to aim and the shot passed between Echo and Kenit, narrowly missing Jaran before it slammed into the back of the turbolift. All that this achieved was to attract the attention of both Echo and Kenit towards her and both men opened fire. Echo fired three shots in rapid succession before his weapon ran out of ammunition while Kenit followed these up with another pair of shots that sent the woman's blaster flying from her hand as she collapsed. One of the two surviving rebels attempted to recover the weapon, but as he scabbled across the floor towards it Kenit shot him in the back, following this up with a second shot to make sure that he was dead.

Then Kenit looked at Echo and pointed towards the far side of the table with his hand held out aligned vertically. Echo nodded and the two men began to advance slowly around both sides of the table simultaneously, both holding their blasters at the ready. Reaching the very end at the same time they both spun to face the final rebel now cowering there.

"On your feet you rebel scum!" Echo yelled and slowly the rebel got to his feet, holding his hands above his head.

"Now where's the communications gear?" Kenit asked.

"What?" the rebel replied.

"You heard him!" Echo yelled, bringing the butt of his pistol down on the back of the man's skull while he was facing Kenit, "You must have some way of communicating with the traitors you work for."

"I think you better tell us." Kenit added, "Because it looks like I'm going to be the good guy in this interrogation and that means that what he'll do to you if you don't answer is going to be really nasty."

"I'm not-" the rebel began before there was the sound of a blaster going off and he screamed in agony.

"Oops." Kenit said as the rebel fell to the floor, clutching at his ruined kneecap.

"It's over there!" the rebel cried out, pointing with his free hand to the far side of the room.

"Go check it out." Kenit told Jaran and he nodded before rushing across the room to investigate the equipment on the desk. Sure enough it was an integrated communications unit that was capable of both sending and receiving video, voice and data messages.

"This is it." Jaran said.

"Then I guess we don't need you any more." Echo said and he pointed his blaster to the rebel's head.

"No wait!" the rebel pleaded but Echo shot him anyway.

While Jaran studied the communications equipment Kenit looked around the room.

"Five here." he said, "One in the turbolift and one in the corridor."

"Plus a total of three in the detention section." Echo added, "That makes ten. So only two left. Where do you suppose they are?"

"My guess would be somewhere on the lower levels." Jaran said, overhearing the conversation.

"What make you say that?" Kenit asked.

"Well think about what we know about the rebels we've seen so far." Jaran replied, "We've seen guards and the intelligence agents who have been questioning us. But we haven't seen any of the technicians that must be keeping this place running."

Echo picked up the blaster dropped by the female rebel.

"I'll head back to the detention section." he said, "With this and the blaster you left there three of us can go after the rebel techs while you look after him."

Kenit nodded.

"Send everyone else up here." he said, "If we're sending a message then we'll need to know what to send and who to."

The freed Imperial officers all watched as Jaran adjusted the settings on the communications equipment.

"It's no good." Jaran said, "This gear is just standard in system stuff. It's limited to the speed of light."

Keffries looked out of the window where the evening sky was dominated by coloured clouds of gas.

"We're in the Spire Worlds." he said.

"Yeah, I noticed that." Jaran replied, "So unless it happens to be intercepted by an Imperial patrol it will take about thirty years for a signal sent by this gear to reach the closest inhabited planet."

"Well I don't know about you, but I don't plan on staying here that long." Kenit said.

"I don't see any maps of the planet." an Imperial officer commented, "So we've no idea where the rebel colony is."

"Probably too far to walk." another officer responded.

"It wouldn't help anyway." Kenit replied, "You know as well as I do that the rebels don't keep starships or advanced communications equipment lying around on their safe worlds. Not unless they're using them as military bases as well."

"Then what do you suggest?" Keffries asked, folding his arms, "So far under your leadership we're still prisoners, but now we're just all sharing a cell the size of a planet."

"We wait." Kenit replied.

"Wait? Wait for what?" Keffries demanded and Kenit pointed to the communications equipment.

"If that pile of poodoo can't get a signal to another system then how do you suppose the rebels get the information they get out of us back to their bosses you stuck up scruffy looking nerf herder?" and Keffries scowled at being so blatantly insulted by a man who looked to be nothing more than a common mercenary, "They send a courier ship." Kenit went on. "So all we have to do is wait for it to turn up and hijack it. Even if we can't get everyone inside we can still send someone for help. That sullustan Sliet had the look of a starship pilot about him. I'll bet he can find his way down the Spire to the Shadow Region or even all the way to the Trade Corridor."

"You'd put our freedom in the hands of an alien?" Keffries hissed.

"An alien that knows how to fly a starship?" Kenit replied, "You bet I would."

"I've got a bad feeling about this." Keffries said.

"Yeah, I bet you do." Kenit said.

Lieutenant Geran Pay of Alliance Intelligence strode across the main hangar of the space station that served as the Alliance's headquarters in the sector.

"Captain Vayne!" he called out to the attractive woman standing beside a YT-2400 class freighter, "Are you ready to leave?"

"It's going to be a while lieutenant." she replied as she turned to face him. Then she turned back towards her ship and peered into the open hatchway she was stood beside, "Sen, how long until we're ready to go?"

"Uh, I should have the ship ready by morning captain." a man's voice responded from inside the ship and Captain Vayne scowled.

"Morning?" Geran exclaimed, "Inra, you promised me that the Beauty Queen would be available."

"And she will. Honest." Inra replied, "Sen just likes to be cautious in his estimates. Don't you Sen?" and at that point a shaven headed man emerged holding a piece of machinery in his grease covered hands.

"If you know a way of re-polarising a negative axis power coupling any quicker I'd love to hear about it captain." he said. Then he smiled as he saw another figure walking across the hangar bay, "Hey Tobis!" he yelled and the young man turned around.

"Oh, err, what?" he asked, "I, err, I don't have time to help you. I'm just-"

"No way I'd let you near my ship anyway." Inra said without letting him finish, "Considering the state of yours." and she looked at the older YT-1300 class ship that he had been heading towards.

"Tobis, the lieutenant here needs a ride. Do you reckon that you could take him in the *Silver Hawk*? The *Beauty Queen* here is having some engine trouble I need to take care of."

"That hunk of junk?" Inra said, snarling, "Lieutenant you're better off waiting for my ship to ready. It's easier that having to wait for a tetanus jab afterwards."

"Oh come now Inra." Geran said, "I've been aboard the *Silver Hawk* before, I know what to expect and she's not that bad." and then he headed towards Tobis, "So how soon can we leave?"

"Ah, well, err, I'd have to check with the captain." Tobis said.

"Fine." Geran replied, "So let's go ask him."

"Oh, err, he's not aboard right now." Tobis said.

"Then I suggest we go aboard and contact him from inside." Geran said, "Come on now sergeant, I'm in a hurry."

"Oh, err, okay." Tobis said and with Geran following he continued towards the *Silver Hawk*.

Tobis was the first to walk up the access ramp and the moment he reached the top a woman's voice spoke to him.

"Hi there Tobis." she said, "I've been waiting for you." and Tobis' eyes widened when he saw the young woman standing in the doorway leading to the crew cabins with nothing on.

"Err, Jaysica perhaps you should-" Tobis began before Geran appeared behind him and there was a high pitched shriek as Jaysica tried to cover herself with her hands as she ducked out of sight and there was the

sound of something being knocked over and falling to the floor.

"I take it back." Geran said.

"Err, what?" Tobis asked.

"Well, I wasn't expecting that." Geran told him.

A knock at her cabin door made Captain Malia Mayan look up from her bunk.

"Come in." she called out and the door slid open to reveal her navigator standing in the passageway outside.

"I'm sorry to disturb you captain." she said.

"Not at all Krissa." Malia replied and she looked at the man sleeping beside her, "Mace has nodded off."

"Actually there's a message coming through for him." Krissa explained, "I tried to patch it through to you but you'd turned off your comm."

Malia groaned and shook Mace.

"Mace honey, time to wake up." she said.

"Urrrgh." Mace said, pulling the bed sheet over his head.

"Mace!" Malia yelled and she pulled the bed sheet back down again.

"What?" Mace asked, frowning.

"Krissa says she has a message for you." Malia told him.

"Fine. Put it through." Mace said and he reached out to grab hold of his trousers.

"I'll go back to the bridge and put the call through then." Krissa said from the doorway before closing it.

Mace moved to sit in front of the monitor.

"Mace here." he said as the monitor came to life.

"Captain? I, err, I'm not disturbing you am I?" Tobis asked.

"Yes. Yes you are." Mace replied.

"Oh. Err. Oh."

"Just get on with it. If the major wants-" Mace said.

"Oh, err, actually it's Lieutenant Pay." Tobis interrupted, "He wants a ride."

Mace's eyes widened.

"Geran huh? Well I suppose we can't turn down Alliance Intelligence can we? I'm on my way." he said and then he shut off the communicator before Tobis could reply.

"You want to go where?" Mace asked Geran when the two men sat opposite one another in the *Silver Hawk's* lounge.

"It's an Alliance safe world." Geran replied.

"Yeah, I get that. But what's there that would interest you?" Mace said.

"There's a POW camp there as well." Geran told him.

"Ah. I see." Mace said, "So that means that there's also an Intelligence post there to question prisoners who may have useful information." and Geran smiled.

"Got it in one." he said.

"Fine. You wait here and I'll just go and let the major know that the *Silver Hawk* will be indisposed for a day or so. It won't take longer than that will it?" Mace replied.

"Oh no, it's just a quick visit. I doubt that anything interesting will happen." Geran answered and Mace got to his feet and headed for the cockpit. In the corridor connecting it with the lounge he met Tobis.

"Err, should we be doing this captain?" the engineer asked.

"Why not?" Mace asked in response, "If there was a mission coming up I'd know about it by now and if there's an emergency then whatever ship was supposed to take Geran to the outpost can handle it. Besides I want to have a little private word with the Intelligence lieutenant. I think he may know something that I want to."

"You mean about the rumours of a fleet deployment?" Tobis said, "Isn't, well, isn't that supposed to be a secret?"

"Which is why I'll ask him in private." Mace answered with a grin.

## 4.

Geran was studying his computer while the *Silver Hawk* travelled through hyperspace towards the safe world but he looked up when he heard Mace approaching from the cockpit.

"Well Tobis and Jaysica are watching Cass fly the ship." he said as he got himself a drink, "I don't think she needs watching just for a quick run through hyperspace like this but it never hurts to have a couple of more experienced pilots to hand. Well, one more experienced pilot and Jaysica."

"Has your daughter flown much?" Geran asked.

"Oh, a little. I started her off in a TIE fighter and I've been showing her the ropes of the *Silver Hawk* since she came aboard permanently." Mace answered, approaching the table and sitting down, prompting Geran to close his computer, "Something secret on there?" Mace asked, "So what is it? Embarrassing porn or fleet deployment data? Because I'd rather you weren't looking at the former while Cass is around."

Geran smiled.

"Why do I get the feeling that you're about to ask me about fleet deployment?" he asked and now Mace also smiled.

"Well there have been rumours." he replied, "And since I'm engaged to the commanding officer of the *Renegade* both Cass and I would like to know if there is any truth in them. Are we about to invade Sullust?" Geran leant across the table and glanced towards the cockpit.

"This goes no further right?" he whispered and Mace nodded, "Good. Then here's the truth." and he paused again, "Admiral Aphanar doesn't tell me what she's been ordered to do with her battlegroup and I'm not stupid enough to ask." and then he leant back in his seat again while Mace just frowned.

"Dad, we're about to drop out of hyperspace." Cass' voice sounded over the intercom.

"I better get to the cockpit." Geran said, "I'll need to call ahead to tell the outpost we're coming." and both he and Mace got up.

In the cockpit Cass looked over her shoulder as the two men entered the room.

"We're coming up on the system now dad." she said.

"And how's her flying been?" Mace asked Tobis as Cass got out of the pilot's seat to allow him to sit down. Meanwhile Geran took the co-pilot's seat beside him.

"Oh, err, fine." Tobis replied.

"I still don't see why I can't learn as well." Jaysica added, "If I knew how to fly the ship then-

"Go a week without just walking into something and we'll talk about letting you fly my ship between planets."

Mace interrupted before the swirling lights of hyperspace suddenly condensed into the stars of realspace instead and the planet that was the Alliance safe world hung in space ahead of the ship, "Well, we're here." he told Geran, "Now you can tell your friends that we're here." and he pointed to the communications system. Geran nodded and activated the short range transmitter.

"Outpost Besh this is Lieutenant Pay aboard the *Silver Hawk*." he said, "We are on approach. Over." and then he waited for a reply. When none came he signalled the outpost again, "Outpost Besh this is Lieutenant Pay, respond. Over." but again there was no reply.

"Tobis are they receiving our transmission?" Mace asked and Tobis turned to one of the displays beside his chair.

"Err, try again." he said.

"Outpost Besh come in. Over." Geran transmitted before looking at Tobis.

"Err, I'm not getting a link confirmation." the engineer said.

"What does that mean?" Cass asked.

"Modern communication systems include a sub carrier that contains data about the system doing the sending so that the receiver knows how to interpret the signal." Geran replied, "And even if no one answers our signal then their system ought to have responded with the sub carrier message to let our system know that the signal got through."

"I don't know what any of that means." Cass replied.

"Didn't you go to high school?" Geran asked.

"No." Cass said, "After the Empire murdered my parents I had to give it up."

"Oh. Oh sorry." Geran said, "Look, as well as me trying to talk to the outpost our communication system is trying to talk to theirs so that both systems know how to interpret the signals."

"Of course you can also use the sub carrier to track where the receiving unit is." Mace added, "It's called a connection trace."

"So can you find the outpost from that?" Cass asked, looking at Tobis.

"Err, I could if there was any signal from it at all." he replied.

"Don't worry." Geran said, "I know where the outpost is. There's probably just a problem with their comm

system. While I'm meeting with the outpost commander maybe you can do something to fix it."  
"I don't know." Mace replied, "I've got a bad feeling about this."

Kenit's eyes flickered open suddenly when Sliet shook him awake.

"What's wrong?" he asked the sullustan.

"The rebel ship." Sliet replied, "It's here and I think you should take a look at it."

"Why?" Kenit asked as he got out of the improvised bed he had set up for himself in the cave that the escaped prisoners were now using for a camp.

"Just come and see." Sliet said, passing Kenit a set of macrobinoculars that they had taken from the outpost. Kenit followed Sliet to the mouth of the cave where a pair of stormtroopers were on watch, one of them watching the night skies with another set of macrobinoculars.

"It's up there." the stormtrooper with the macrobinoculars said, pointing, "I spotted it when it began its entry into the atmosphere."

Kenit raised his macrobinoculars to his eyes and aimed them at the approaching starship. Then frowned and lowered them.

"Is that the ship I think it is?" he asked.

"The *Silver Hawk*?" Sliet asked in response, "It certainly looks like her doesn't it?"

Kenit grinned.

"Tharun Verser is mine." he said, "Anyone else who touches him is dead. I'll rip their eyes out myself."

The *Silver Hawk* circled the outpost while Geran and Mace studied it from the air.

"I can't see any signs of life." Mace said.

"Neither can I." Geran agreed.

"Won't they all be asleep at this time?" Cass asked from behind them.

"Someone would be on watch." Geran replied, "And even with all their communications out they'd know about us being here by now and someone would have come outside and signalled us from the ground."

"So what do we do now?" Cass asked.

"Depends on what you mean by 'we'." Mace replied, "You're staying put on the ship."

"Aw, dad-" Cass began.

"No, not this time young lady." Mace interrupted, "Tobis and the lieutenant can come with me to check out the outpost, but I want you and Jaysica to stay here with the *Silver Hawk*. Keep the ship sealed until we get back."

Cass sighed.

"Okay then." she said as Mace directed the *Silver Hawk* downwards.

He brought the ship in to land a short distance from the outpost. Not so close that someone would be able to suddenly rush out from it and reach the ship before being spotted, but not so far away that it was out of small arms range just in case covering fire was needed. Mace then gathered the ship's occupants together in the lounge with the weapons they had available to them.

"Okay Geran and Tobis are coming with me to investigate the outpost." Mace said, "So Tobis and I will take a rifle each and Geran you can take Cass' carbine."

"What about me?" Cass asked.

"If you need a weapon then there's always my hunting rifle." Mace replied, "Plus the deck sweeper. But I'd rather you stayed in the cockpit and were ready to take off if there's any sign of trouble."

"And what do we do if there is?" Jaysica asked, "Do we go to the colony for help?"

"No." Mace told her, "The colony doesn't have any significant weapons. If you need to leave then go straight back to headquarters and they can send a force to deal with whatever's going on here."

"Why not just call them from orbit?" Cass asked.

"Because right now there are dozens of Imperial vessels in the Spire Worlds blockading the nebula," Geran told her, "and it only takes one of them to intercept a signal to track it back here." and he picked up a carbine from the table and began to study it.

"Err, do you know how to use that?" Tobis asked.

"Of course I do." Geran replied with a frown before the folding stock suddenly sprang open and hung below the weapon, swinging from side to side, "Though I may be a little out of practice." he added.

"Okay let's get moving." Mace said and then he looked towards the astromech droid that had been watching from the corner, "Harvey, plug yourself into the nav computer. If Cass needs to fly the ship away she'll need you to calculate the jump." and the droid chirped before heading to the cockpit.

When the *Silver Hawk's* access ramp was lowered Geran, Mace and Tobis came rushing down, halting at the bottom as they looked around. But the darkness restricted their vision and only Mace had any macrobinoculars.

"No sign of life still." he said.

"Err." Tobis said and Mace glanced at him.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Oh, err, well, I was just remembering that probe droid we encountered a couple of years back." Tobis replied.

"If there is an Imperial probe droid around then we're going to have to get out of here in a hurry." Geran said,

"One of those would have already alerted the Empire to our presence."

"Then let's just hope that it isn't." Mace replied, "Now let's move." and he got to his feet and began to run towards the outpost, followed by Geran and Tobis.

When the three rebels reached the entrance to the outpost the rebels pressed themselves up against the wall either side, with Geran breathing deeply as he tried to catch his breath.

"Hey look I'm just not used to this like you two are, okay?" he said when he noticed Mace looking at him.

"Never mind." Mace replied, "Now what's inside?"

"Well this level is mainly the staff's living quarters with some storage as well. Then there's the command and control section on the upper floor while below ground is most of the storage, utility provision and of course the detention and interrogation sections."

"Then we head up to command first." Mace said before slamming his hand down on the control to the door.

The interior of the outpost was in darkness and the rebels had to light glow rods to illuminate their way, well aware that the light cast by them would also give away their presence to anyone waiting for them in the darkness. With the outpost lights out every remaining source of light was easy to spot and the illuminated keypad to the turbolift caught the rebels' attention.

"Are there any stairs close by?" Mace asked Geran, reluctant to be caught in an ambush while exiting the turbolift.

"No." Geran replied, "But there are handholds running up and down the shaft."

"That still leaves us coming out of the same door." Mace said, "But if we take the turbolift then at least we don't need to open the door manually." and he waved the other two rebels towards the turbolift entrance.

They used the turbolift to take them up to the command and control level and as soon as the door slid open all three rebels recoiled at the smell.

"Wow. What an amazing new smell Alliance Intelligence has discovered." Mace said to Geran while he covered his nose and mouth with his hand.

"What is that?" Geran asked.

"What's the matter?" Mace asked in response, "Haven't you ever smelt dead bodies before?"

"Bodies? Dead bodies?" Geran said nervously.

"That's right." Mace answered, "They tend to smell when they start to rot." and then he crept out of the turbolift, shining his glow rod down at the floor.

"Over here." Tobis said as he did the same and came across a body.

"Here are two more." Mace responded, "Looks like they've been shot."

"I take it you mean with a blaster?" Geran asked as he felt around for a light switch, "A-ha." he added as he found one and the command centre's lights came on and revealed the full extent of what had happened. The bodies of the rebels who had been in the command centre when Echo and Kenit had struck were still where they had fallen, though it was clear that the bodies had been searched and anything of use removed from them.

"So who did this?" Mace commented.

"Err, well, wouldn't it have been the prisoners?" Tobis asked.

"I'd like to know how they got out of their cells if it was." Geran replied.

"But who else-" Tobis began.

"One of the base staff could have gone stir crazy." Mace interrupted. Then he looked at Geran, "But I think that we ought to check out the detention section before we make any assumptions." he added and Geran nodded in agreement.

Returning to the turbolift the rebels headed down to the level where the detention section was located and readied themselves in case any of the prisoners were loose and waiting for them. However, when the door slid open the only thing in the corridor outside was the body of one of the base staff. Like those in the command centre he had been shot and from the presence of several small items scattered around it, it had been searched after death.

"The detention section is that way." Geran said, pointing past the body and the rebels advanced.

Reaching the detention section they found that what furniture there was here had been moved around and was now piled up either side of the door. There were also three more bodies here, two appearing to have been shot like all of the others found so far while the third had no apparent blaster burns on him.

"Neck's broken." Mace said as he crouched to inspect the body, "My guess is that he died first and whoever killed him took his blaster."

"Err, the cells are all empty." Tobis called out as he looked down the corridor of cells.

"Oh kriff." Geran exclaimed as he rushed to Tobis' side to see for himself.

Sure enough ever cell door was open and there were no signs of any of the prisoners that they had recently held.

"How many are we talking about?" Mace asked as he joined the others.

"Twenty-five altogether." Geran told him, "Twenty-one are Imperial military."

"Who are the other four then?" Mace asked.

"Oh you already know them all I think." Geran replied, "Those two Black Sun agents you captured recently were brought here as was that young computer genius you apparently grabbed before I was transferred to this sector."

"And the fourth?" Mace asked.

"You remember Kenit Durvell?" Geran asked.

"What? That psycho who keeps trying to kill Tharun?" Mace asked, referring to Tharun Verser, the former mercenary who was part of the rebel team that the *Silver Hawk* usually carried, "Why was he sent here?"

"Well, I think that someone thought he may have information on the Church Of Infinity's activities." Geran explained and Tobis nodded.

"He was working for them the first time we met him." he commented.

"Plus it was hoped that he could be turned." Geran added, "He's got no love for the Empire."

"Yeah, he hates them as much as he hates us." Mace replied. Then he frowned, "What are those?" he asked as he caught sight of something on the floor just inside one of the cells further down the corridor and he went to take a closer look.

Inside the cell that Kenit had occupied the remains of the motors from Derl's arm were still scattered on the floor, with the magnets stuck to the metal plating just inside the doorway.

"Magnets from something." Geran said as he tried picking up one of the magnets and felt it resist him.

"Err, I think that these are electric motors." Tobis commented as he studied the other remains, "The magnets are from inside them."

"But why smash up electric motors?" Mace asked.

"I'm guessing someone wanted the magnets for something." Geran replied.

"Oh, err, are the locks on the cell doors magnetic?" Tobis asked.

"They look it." Mace answered as he looked towards the door.

"Oh great." Geran exclaimed, "That's just great. They used the magnets to trip the locks. But where did they get the motors from? The prisoners would have been searched and anything like that-"

"One of the Black Sun agents was a cyborg." Mace interrupted.

"Yes, err, and Kara shot his arm off." Tobis added, pointing to the spot on his own arm where another of the rebels normally stationed aboard the *Silver Hawk* had shot Derl.

Geran sighed.

"That must have allowed them access to the motors operating the arm." he said.

"And I'll bet it was that little nerf herder Jaran that figured out how to use them to open the cell doors." Mace added, "Now come on, we need to get out of here and back to the ship. Somewhere around here are two dozen escaped prisoners and I'm willing to bet that they know we're here."

Inside the cave the escaped prisoners listened to the output of a comlink that was being relayed a signal from the outpost's detention section.

"Okay they're down there." Jaran said as they listened to the rebels discussing how the escape had been carried out.

"Then make sure that's where they stay boy." Keffries said.

"And don't forget to jam their comlinks." Kenit added.

Jaran just smiled and tapped the screen of the datapad he had connected into the comlink.



## 5.

As the three rebels approached the exit from the detention section the door that they had left open suddenly slid shut, moving faster than the motor would normally allow it to. Then as it slammed into the door frame on the other side there was a flash accompanied by an acrid smell of burning.

"Uh-oh." Geran said, "I've got a very bad feeling about this." and he ran forwards to try and open the door. However, no matter how hard he jabbed at the control the door remained shut, "I knew it!" he snapped, "We're locked in."

Mace too out his comlink.

"*Silver Hawk* come in." he signalled. But rather than being connected to his starship the comlink just produced a random burst of noise.

"Oh, err, I think that we're being jammed." Tobis said.

"Really?" Geran said sarcastically, "I'm glad one of us was able to figure that out." then he looked at Mace, "Okay, so how long before either your daughter or his girlfriend figure out that something has happened to us?"

"That depends." Mace said, "They may notice that we haven't checked in in about ten or fifteen minutes. But that's dependent on them paying attention to the time."

Cass squealed as her character in the video game leapt over a gap to land on a narrow platform where a spinning helmet was located.

"Ha!" she said, "Did you see that? I got it."

Jaysica frowned.

"Well just watch this." she said as her character ran between two walls that moved back and forth only to be crushed between them.

"Winner player two." the games console said.

"I want a rematch." Jaysica said, frowning.

"Okay, but so far you owe me three weeks of my chores." Cass replied.

Kenit studied the *Silver Hawk* through his macrobinoculars. He and the other escaped prisoners who had been able to arm themselves with blasters taken from the outpost, ten in total, along with Jaran were lying down close to the transport ship doing their best to keep out of sight while Kenit determined what defences had been set.

"I don't get it." he said to no one in particular, "Verser should have either gone into the outpost or be guarding the ship."

"I hope this obsession of yours is not going to compromise our escape." Keffries said and Kenit snarled at him. Then he got up and began to creep towards the ship, alert for any signs of a sentry who had been able to remain unseen. However, he and the rest of the group managed to reach the *Silver Hawk* with no indication that they had been detected.

"Okay we've got three choices." he said as he looked around, still convinced that there would be at least one rebel outside the ship to protect it, "There's the boarding ramp, the cargo elevator or the top hatch."

"The ramp and elevator will take time to operate." Echo pointed out, "The hatch will open instantly." and Kenit nodded.

"I agree." he said, "So let's get up there and see if the kid can get us inside this thing."

Another stormtrooper gave Echo a boost to get up on top of the *Silver Hawk*'s saucer-shaped hull and from there he began to help the others up as well. As soon as Kenit was on top of the ship he pulled Jaran up after him and led him to the nearby top hatch. But as Kenit crouched down he noticed Jaran had a nervous expression on his face.

"What's wrong kid?" he asked.

"That's not going to go off is it?" Jaran asked, pointing to the turret mounted laser cannon that was pointing right at Kenit.

Kenit grinned.

"Only if you really screw up hot wiring this hatch." he said.

Jaran sighed and crouched down, producing his datapad and a handful of tools that he had taken from the outpost. Then he began to inspect the control panel for the hatch. Locating an access port he plugged the datapad into it and began to tap at the device's screen.

"How long is this going to take?" Keffries hissed.

"As long as-" Kenit began before there was a soft 'click' and Jaran smiled.

"Seals released." he said softly, "But you'll have to pull it open by hand."

"That'll do kid." Kenit replied, "Now just you wait here and let the professionals do their job."

"Ha! I got you!" Jaysica exclaimed as she fired a missile into Cass' character in the video game, but Cass was not paying attention.

"Did you just hear something?" she asked, looking towards the combined airlock and storage chamber adjoining the lounge.

"Oh you're just trying to make excuses for losing." Jaysica replied.

"No, I definitely heard something." Cass said as she got to her feet and approached the door to the adjoining room.

"Oh you're just hearing things." Jaysica said, "It's nothing. Now are you going to come back here and play the game or do Tobis and I get breakfast in bed for-" but then Cass opened the door and gasped as she found herself staring into the face of a stormtrooper.

"Rebel scum!" Echo snapped as he slammed the butt of his pistol into Cass' face and she collapsed in a ball, screaming in pain. Jaysica looked at the table where the weapons left behind by Mace were still lined up and she did her best to leap up and grab one. However, as Echo stepped through the door and dragged Cass out of the way Kenit and another two stormtroopers burst into the lounge behind him and rushed at Jaysica, wrestling her to the floor before she could arm herself.

"Stay down!" Kenit yelled at her. Then he looked at the other escaped prisoners who were just now climbing down into the *Silver Hawk*, "Search the ship." he told them, "I want Verser."

Cass sniffed, doing her best to hold back tears. Her nose was still bleeding from being struck but she had not been allowed to do anything about it by her captors. She and Jaysica were both sat cross-legged on the floor of the lounge with their hands behind their heads while some of the escaped prisoners watched them and the rest made sure that the ship was clear. The armed escapees had been joined by the others now and some of them had now armed themselves with the weapons that had been on the table.

"There's a droid plugged into the flight systems." Sliet said as he and Derl returned from the cockpit.

"Did you try and disconnect it?" Kenit asked but Sliet shook his head.

"There's no telling what it's plugged into." he replied, "If we disturb it we may short something out." Kenit looked at Jaran.

"Can you do something about that?" he asked and Jaran nodded.

"Sure." he replied.

"What about getting us off the ground?" Keffries asked.

"We'll need a pass code." Sliet told him, "Captain Grayle has secured the console."

"Then we need to find him." Kenit said, "There's no way either of these two can fly the ship. One of them's a kid for kriff's sake."

"Then have the boy override the lockout." Keffries said, "We're not wasting any more time than necessary just because of your vendetta."

"Firstly I'm not so desperate to kill Tharun Verser that I'm willing to delay getting out of here," Kenit replied, "and secondly have you considered what would happen if the kid made even one mistake while poking about in the flight systems?"

"They could burn out and we'd be stranded here." Jaran added, "Kenit's right. We need that code."

"We'll leave the kid and a few others here to guard these two and the ship." Kenit said, "The rest of us will head into the outpost to get the access code from Mister Grayle. I'm sure that he'll co-operate when he sees we have these two."

"What about this Tharun Verser?" Keffries asked and Kenit shrugged.

"That depends on whether he's stupid enough to show his face to me." he responded, "If he if then he's a dead man."

Five of the escaped prisoners were left with Jaran to help guard Cass and Jaysica. Four of them were technicians who had taken knives from the cutlery draw to arm themselves with while the final one was an officer. Without his rank badge or code cylinders it was impossible to tell what rank he actually held but from his age Jaran guessed that he was relatively junior, most probably a lieutenant.

The lieutenant sent one of the technicians to the *Silver Hawk's* workshop and he returned with a set of cable ties and some tape with which to bind and gag the two prisoners. But just as he was about start tying up Jaysica, Jaran suddenly called out to him.

"Wait!" he snapped, "Not yet."

"What's going on?" the lieutenant asked.

"She owes me." Jaran replied, staring at Jaysica and smiling.

"Oh I've got a very bad feeling about this." she said.

"Ah, so you remember what you and your other friend promised me when I took you to my hotel room then?" Jaran asked.

"Explain yourself." the lieutenant said to Jaran, "What is she supposed to do?"

"Strip." Jaran said.

"You can't-" Cass exclaimed before she felt a knife pressed against her throat.

"I don't think you're in a position to be giving any orders." the technician with the knife told her.

"No you're not." the lieutenant agreed, "But don't worry. We won't leave you out. You can wait until your friend has finished before you get to undress as well."

"I'm not going to-" Jaysica began but the officer suddenly punched her in the stomach and she collapsed.

"Get up." he hissed, "Get up and do as you are told. Trust me, it'll be a lot easier if you do it yourself than if we have to do it for you."

## 6.

Harvey found being plugged into the *Silver Hawk* and ignored annoying. However, while plugged into the ship's systems the droid had detected the opening of the top hatch and knew immediately that something was wrong. Detaching from the computer to investigate would have been a violation of orders so Harvey remained in place and instead activated all of the intercom panels throughout the ship, using them as listening devices to transmit everything going on directly to the droid.

The presence of the escaped prisoners aboard the *Silver Hawk* was obviously a cause for concern, but Harvey had no way of fighting them off so the droid stayed plugged in while the intruders conducted their rather cursory search of the ship, looking only to see if there were any more rebels aboard. Harvey continued to listen as the group left behind threatened Cass and Jaysica. Given the relationship between Jaysica and Harvey's owner the astromech was unwilling to just sit back and do nothing and so began to make a few alterations to the intercom.

Jaysica struggled for breath as she tried to get up. The punch had knocked the wind from her and she was in a great deal of pain.

"Hurry up." the lieutenant ordered her, "You've got ten seconds or-" but before he could continue a sudden high pitched noise filled the entire ship at such a volume that all anyone could do was clamp their hands over their ears to try and keep the painful noise out.

Known as sound bombs, devices that created noise that was intended to either incapacitate or drive off an intruder had existed since before written records could say and the principle was so simple that even the relatively basic circuitry of the *Silver Hawk's* intercom system could flood the entire ship with pain inducing sound.

The two captive rebels and the escaped prisoners guarding them were all on the floor of lounge as Harvey rolled into the room, unaffected by the sound. The droid chirped, the sound lost amongst the overpowering noise coming from the intercom and as it rolled up to Jaysica a hatch opened in its cylindrical body and a grasping arm emerged. Taking hold of Jaysica's collar, Harvey dragged her from the lounge into the short corridor that connected the crew cabins and bathroom together. The droid then returned to the lounge and dragged Cass into the corridor as well before closing the door behind them. Finally Harvey rolled to the far end of the corridor to where there was an inspection cover. Opening this up the droid was able to connect with the *Silver Hawk's* computer and shut off the sound in the corridor.

Neither Cass nor Jaysica recovered immediately, but when they did they helped one another up.

"Are you okay?" Cass asked and Jaysica nodded. Then Harvey chirped.

"Harvey saved us." Jaysica said, still trying to breath properly.

"Yes but we're trapped in here." Cass said, "If Harvey turns off the sound out there then those men will recover."

Then Jaysica had an idea.

"The major." she said as she opened the door to the cabin that her commanding officer and Tharun shared.

"What about him?" Cass asked as she watch Jaysica head for the closets at the far end of the cabin.

"Before the major started using Tharun's old rifle he had one of his own." Jaysica said, "It was just a lightweight survival rifle meant for hunting small game but it's still a blaster."

"You think he just left it in here?" Cass asked.

"Yes I – A-ha!" Jaysica replied as she pulled what looked like a rifle stock that had been removed from a weapon from a closet.

"Where's the rest of it?" Cass said.

"That's the clever part." Jaysica explained as she detached the base of the hollow stock and tipped out what was inside, "It's designed to break down and fit in here. It even floats." she added as she assembled the weapon.

Now armed Jaysica stood by the door to the lounge.

"Okay Harvey," she said, "shut off the sound and open the door."

From its position at the far end of the corridor the droid chirped and then Cass and Jaysica heard the muffled sound coming from the other side of the door cease, at which point Jaysica opened the door.

"Freeze!" she shouted as the escaped prisoners were getting back to their feet.

The lieutenant stared at her.

"Put that blaster down." he said, "It's not even a proper rifle so why don't you just give it to me before I have to hurt you?"

"Stay back!" Jaysica shouted but the lieutenant reached down to the floor and picked up one of the knives dropped by the technicians when Harvey's sound bomb was triggered. As he stood back up he took another

step towards Jaysica and there was a sudden flash as she fired the survival rifle at him. Although low-powered there was still enough energy in the blast to kill a human, especially at such close range and the lieutenant's body fell backwards and landed beside Jaran, "Anyone else think I won't shoot them as well?" Jaysica asked but no one replied. Instead the Imperial technicians all raised their hands, "You too you little pervert." Jaysica said, pointing the rifle at Jaran and he too raised his hands in surrender.

"So what now?" Cass said.

"Get those cable ties and that tape." Jaysica said, "We're going to tie them up and stick them in the hold."

"But what about dad and Tobis?" Cass asked, "And that other guy? We can't just abandon them."

"We're not going to." Jaysica replied as she continued to stare at Jaran, "We're going to help them and this little nerf herder's going to help us."

Tobis sighed as he continued to try and get the door open.

"Problem?" Geran asked.

"What? Oh, err, the motor's burnt out." he said, "Now normally we'd, err, we'd just be able to use the manual override to open the door but there are emergency bolts that have been moved into position that are physically holding the door shut."

"Let me guess," Mace said, looking at Geran, "those bolts can only be accessed from in the corridor."

"How should I know?" Geran asked, "It's not like I designed this place."

Just then there was a sudden burst of static from Tobis' comlink.

"Tobis! Tobis can you hear me?" Jaysica's voice called out.

"Jaysica?" Tobis replied.

"Yes it's me. Are you safe?"

"Err, we're locked in." Tobis said.

"How the hell did she break through the jamming?" Geran asked.

"Oh, err, I'll ask." Tobis said, "Jaysica, how did you break through the jamming?"

"Oh Cass and I have got that little pervert Jaran here. He was the one that set up the jamming and we've been able to get him to shut it off."

"Well get him to unlock this door." Mace said loud enough for the comlink to pick up his words.

"Hang on, we've locked him in the hold. Cass has got his datapad right here." Jaysica said, "I think she's got the hang of it." and then there was a sudden 'clunk' from beside the door. Tobis then pulled open a small hatch beside the door to expose a lever that he began to move back and forth. As he did so the door began to open.

"That's great Jaysica." Mace said, "The door's opening."

"Be careful." Jaysica warned, "There are more escaped prisoners on the loose. They're coming after you now."

"Okay thanks." Mace said, "We're on our way back to the ship now."

Tobis shut off the comlink and put it away. Then the three rebels began to run back towards the turbolift.

However, as they approached the door to the turbolift shaft they heard the sound of the turbolift approaching.

"Quick, get in here!" Mace snapped as he dived into an office.

"What are we supposed to do in here?" Geran asked as the rebels concealed themselves behind a table so that they could not be easily seen.

"The people coming down that shaft after us think we're locked in the detention section right?" Mace replied.

"That's a reasonable guess, yes." Geran said.

"So hopefully they'll just go right past and we can slip past to the turbolift and get out of here." Mace said and Geran smiled.

"I like it." he said.

The three rebels waited quietly until they heard the sound of a group of people running past the door in the corridor outside and Mace smiled.

"I told you it would work." he whispered as he got to his feet and crept to the door. First he peered out in the direction of the detention section and he could still hear the sound of running from that way. Then he glanced towards the turbolift and saw that the escaped prisoners had left it guarded. One of the guards was an Imperial officer who was armed with a bulky weapon with a flared barrel that Mace recognised as his decksweeper, a short ranged stun weapon designed for boarding actions. Rather than a concentrated bolt it fired an expanding stun blast that in this situation would fill the entire corridor. The second guard was obviously a clone stormtrooper and he was armed with a long barrelled hunting blaster.

"Those are both mine." Mace hissed and he ducked back into the office, "Okay we've got a problem." he said, "There are two guards. One has my hunting rifle and the other has my decksweeper. We need to take him out first." and then he switched his rifle to fully automatic. Tobis did the same and was just pointing to the fire selector on Geran's carbine when the Intelligence agent pulled it away.

"I know how to do it." he hissed before the stock suddenly unfolded again, "I think."

Mace suddenly leant around the door and fired, keeping the trigger of his rifle held back. He aimed the

weapon at the officer to begin with and the stream of high energy bolts practically cut the man in half as Mace swung the rifle towards the stormtrooper, killing both men before either even had a chance to turn their weapons towards him.

"Clear!" Mac snapped before he leapt out into the corridor and ran towards the turbolift.

"They're behind us!" Kenit yelled when he heard the shooting, "Quick! Back to the turbolift." and the escaped prisoners turned around and ran in the opposite direction.

Pausing only to pick up the weapons that the escaped prisoners had stolen from the *Silver Hawk*, the three rebels rushed into the turbolift and just as the doors were closing Mace saw Kenit appear around a corner and he smiled and waved at him.

"Be ready." Mace said, "We can't be sure that there won't be anyone waiting for us at the top." then he slung his rifle and grabbed the decksweeper, "Get behind me." he added.

Four of the remaining five escaped technicians had remained on the upper level of the outpost where the rebels needed to get off to return to the *Silver Hawk* and they all turned towards the turbolift when its doors slid open and gasped as they saw the decksweeper pointing at them. Mace did not bother with a warning. Instead he just fired and the expanding cone of energy enveloped all four men, incapacitating them instantly. "Come on." he said and he broke into a run, heading for the exit.

"Look! There's dad and the others." Cass exclaimed as she saw Mace exit the outpost and come running towards the *Silver Hawk* through the cockpit canopy.

"Are you sure it's them?" Jaysica asked as she tried to get a good look at them, "It's very dark out there."

"Yes it's them. Go open the door and I'll get the ship started." Cass said, pressing buttons on the console to activate the *Silver Hawk's* engines.

Geran, Mace, and Tobis were almost at the *Silver Hawk* when a voice called out in the darkness.

"Grayle!" Kenit shouted, "Grayle give up!" and then there was a flash of red as someone fired a blaster and the shot went wide.

"Keep moving. We're almost there." Mace said and he smiled as he saw a crack of light that grew wider as the *Silver Hawk's* access ramp began to open.

Believing that the ship was still controlled by his allies Kenit was furious when he saw Jaysica waving the rebels aboard from the ramp and he ground to a halt.

"No!" he yelled, dragging the word out and he watched helplessly as the ramp closed once more and there was the roar of repulsorlifts as the *Silver Hawk* took off.

"Oh Tobis I'm so glad you're safe." Jaysica said, embracing and kissing him.

"Oh, err, yes. Thanks." he replied. Then Jaysica looked at Mace.

"So what are we going to do about those escaped prisoners down there now?" she asked and Mace shrugged.

"I guess that's up to the Alliance." he replied, "They aren't going anywhere and if another ship comes here it'll be expecting them."

"The colony and the POW camp are both on different continents." Geran added, "There's no danger of them reaching either."

Then Mace looked at the door to the hold.

"So you locked the prisoners left on the ship in there did you?" he asked and he reached for the control for the door.

"Captain wait!" Jaysica snapped, "I think you should-" but Mace opened the door and his eyes widened when he saw the bound and gagged prisoners in the hold.

"Jaysica," he said, "would you mind explaining why my cargo hold appears to be full of nudists?"

Jaysica smiled.

"Well they thought of it first." she replied.