

STAR WARS

DARKNESS RISING

4-01: PROBLEMS &

RESPONSIBILITIES

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The prospect of Morton Crayne telling the Republic authorities everything he knows leaves Rylee with a harsh choice, either find a way to prevent this or incur the wrath of her father. Leaving the safety of her home in the company of a team of mercenaries, Rylee now has to infiltrate a Republic prison and break Morton out in person.

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1.

"Rylee my dear, I need to speak to you." the man whose image suddenly appeared as a hologram in front of the young woman sat at her desk said.

"Of course dad, what can I do for you?" Rylee asked as she looked up from her computer terminal.

"Not over a communication channel. In person in my office. Now Rylee." her father said, smiling at his daughter in a manner that unnerved her.

"Okay, I'll be with you in-" Rylee began.

"Now Rylee. There's a good girl." her father interrupted and then his hologram vanished.

"Now Rylee." Rylee said, mocking her father's order, "I'm a qualified lawyer and he still orders me around like I'm a schoolgirl."

Rylee made sure to secure her computer terminal before leaving her office. She considered the room secure in itself but securing her computer was an extra precaution that she considered necessary. The route to her father's office took Rylee to the edge of the space station where massive windows offered a view of the bright blue planet that it orbited. The door to her father's office did not open automatically when Rylee approached it and instead she had to press an intercom button beside it and wait.

"Yes?" she heard her father's voice say.

"Dad it's-" Rylee began before the doors suddenly slid open.

"Come in Rylee. Take a seat." her father told her and Rylee did as she was told, the door closing behind her a soon as she entered the office.

Despite also being located on the outer edge of the station, the office that Rylee's father conducted his business from lacked any such windows. He considered his work so sensitive that providing a means to be able to conduct visual surveillance of it from outside the space station was considered too much of a security risk. Much larger than her own office, the one used by Rylee's father was decorated with transparent cases each of which contained a single antique artefact floating in a repulsorlift field so that it did not make physical contact with any part of the case.

Rylee's father continued to type at his computer terminal as Rylee approached his desk and sat down in one of the chairs facing it, waiting for him to react to her presence.

"Dad-" she said but her father held up his hand.

"Wait one moment my dear." he said as he finished and then he looked at her and smiled, "Did you think I wouldn't find out?" he asked.

"Find out what dad?" Rylee asked.

"Oh don't act coy with me Rylee. You're a good liar, it goes with our profession but I've always been able to see through your acts. I know what you've been doing and I know the sorts of people you've been making deals with to do them. The Assembler can be trusted, I've dealt with it myself but this man Morton Crayne? What were you thinking involving him in your little scheme?" her father said.

"Morton Crayne has proven useful. Dad, you should see some of the things I've been able to gather. They'd put what you have here to shame." Rylee said, pointing a hand towards the cases and the antiques they contained.

"I know exactly what he found for you and I know what he lost and how important that could be. But what use is any of what he found if it brings the wrath of the Republic down on us my girl? Surely I taught you to be more careful than this. Just because something is rare and precious does not mean that we risk everything to obtain it. I was prepared to turn a blind eye to your little hobby for a while but there are people already asking me difficult questions about what you're doing. They want me to reel you in before you cause a scandal." Rylee's father said.

"Look dad, I know what I'm doing." Rylee protested.

"Oh really? In that case can you explain how Morton Crayne has managed to end up in a Republic jail cell?" her father said.

"That wasn't my fault. He won't talk." Rylee replied.

"Oh really? What do you know about an individual called Teron Sharr?" Rylee's father said and Rylee sighed.

"Ah." she said, "Teron was a member of Morton's gang. He staged something of a coup and took with him most of the gang and also a number of artefacts."

"And now he's rushing around the galaxy collecting for himself. Or is he? Who is this Teron Sharr working for Rylee?"

"No-one that I know of dad."

"Precisely, no-one that you know of. That you know of. Think about that for a moment girl. This young man was able to seize control of a criminal gang and is now proving quite successful in running it. In fact it looks like he is doing a better job than Morton Crayne himself managed. Now Morton Crayne has struck a deal

with the jedi.”

“He wouldn't turn on me.” Rylee said.

“Oh no? He's already given up his former associate Teron Sharr. If the jedi had been a bit quicker then they may just have caught him but for now it looks like he's escaped them. So if Morton Crayne can't give the jedi Teron Sharr then who else is left for him to sell to them for his freedom Rylee?”

“Me.” Rylee admitted.

“You. Which means us. Do you really think that we will escape the jedi's attention if they come after you?” her father said.

“No.”

“No, we won't. Which means that you have to make certain that Morton Crayne is not able to tell the jedi anything about you.”

“You mean kill him.” Rylee said.

“If you're not smart enough to figure out another way then yes, kill him. But I'm leaving it up to you. You've failed me for the last time with this little stunt my dear. Don't fail me again.” her father said sternly.

When Rylee left her father's office she encountered another man standing outside it. Clad in body armour but with his helmet under his arm so that his face was exposed he grinned at her.

“How long have you been waiting here?” Rylee asked.

“Since about two seconds after you went in to see your father.” the armoured warrior answered, “He said that you'd probably be wanting to speak to me when you were done.” and Rylee frowned at how easily her father seemed to be able to predict her behaviour.

“Sometimes I swear he must have a pretty high midi-chlorian count.” she commented as she started to walk back towards her office and the warrior smiled again as he walked alongside her.

“So what do you need me to do?” he said.

“Didn't my father already tell you then?”

“No, he left that part out.”

“It's Crayne.” Rylee said, coming to a halt and turning to the warrior.

“What about him?”

“He's managed to get himself arrested by the Republic and my father wants to make sure that he doesn't start reciting chapter and verse about everything he's done for us to them.” Rylee said.

“I can see how that would be a problem for you.” the warrior said.

“I need you to send a team to deal with the issue.” Rylee told him, “Break him out if possible, he may still be useful to us, but if that's not an option then he needs to be killed. Can your people handle that?”

“Of course. Although there are a few things that we'll need first.” the warrior responded.

“Such as?” Rylee asked.

“Such as Crayne's location and the security in place guarding him.” the warrior answered.

“I was just going to ask about that myself. Come with me.” Rylee said and then she led the warrior the rest of the way back to her own office and once inside she activated the long range communication system, standing where the holographic recorder would pick her up.

There was a slight delay before the transmission was answered, the encryption measures in place to prevent the signal from being monitored and understood by anyone else taking time to establish a secure connection.

Once the connection was made though, an image of a large spiderlike being appeared in front of Rylee.

“Assembler.” Rylee said, “I need your help in locating Morton Crayne. I also need-”

“You need any information that could be used to free him from the Republic's prison.” the Assembler interrupted.

“Does everyone know what my father and I discussed?” Rylee said, folding her arms defensively.

“I deal in information. I know that Morton Crayne worked for you. I know that Morton Crayne has been arrested. Therefore, it stands to reason that you would want him free to work for you again. It seemed efficient to begin the process of procuring the information that you will need.” the Assembler explained.

“So do you have it?” Rylee asked.

“Of course. Though the cost of obtaining it on such short notice was significant.” the Assembler said.

“How much?” Rylee said, knowing that even the most basic of information from the Assembler cost tens of thousands of credits.

“One million credits.” the Assembler told her and Rylee felt herself wobble for a moment. One million credits was far more than she had ever paid the Assembler before now but she did not dare try to haggle with the alien infomerchant. If she made him angry then there was the risk that he would increase his price and she did not have the time to try looking for an alternative source for the information she needed.

“Okay, I'll transfer it in the usual manner.” she said.

“Very good. The information will be provided once payment is confirmed.” the Assembler said and his hologram promptly disappeared before Rylee could reply.

"A million credits?" the warrior who had been watching from the edge of the office exclaimed, "He's milking you. He knows that you're desperate and he's inflating his price to take advantage."

"Of course he is. Do you think I don't know that?" Rylee snapped back at the warrior.

"So are you going to ask your father for the credits?" the warrior said.

"Are you kidding? I'm going to make sure that the next time I see my dad I can provide proof that Crayne is either free from prison or dead. Anything less than that and I wouldn't be surprised if he disinherited me. I've got the money, I'll pay the Assembler myself." Rylee replied.

"I wouldn't expect Crayne to be able to pay you back. He already owes you thousands." the warrior said.

"I know. This is a cost I'll just have to swallow myself. How soon can you have a team ready?" Rylee said.

"That depends on what that spider comes back with. If Crayne is just stashed in some provincial jail then this could just be a simple smash and grab. I'll take my stand by unit and go. On the other hand if we need to study a complicated security system then picking the right team could take longer. A few hours maybe."

"Fine, that will have to do." Rylee said, "Oh and one last thing, I'm coming too."

"You're kidding." the warrior said, "Have you ever fired a blaster at anything other than a static target?"

"I won't be doing any fighting. I'll leave that to you and your team. That's your job, not mine. I just want to be around to make sure that there are no screw ups."

"As you wish." the warrior said, bowing his head to Rylee.

2.

Rylee took a shuttle down to the planet's surface to meet with the warrior and the strike team he had chosen for the mission to free Morton Crayne. The reason for departing from the planet rather than the space station was so that the anonymity of the strike team could be preserved. Their vessel, a gunship that had been extensively modified to disguise its origins from anything other than a thorough investigation that would require completely dismantling it, was stored in a remote cave on land that could not be linked to Rylee's family. Had it launched from the orbiting space station then hangar records would have established the link. "Rylee." the warrior said as she walked down the access ramp of her shuttle and looked at the gunship. "That's it?" she asked and the warrior smiled.

"That's it." he replied, "Like it?"

"It's a heap of junk." Rylee said, noticing the hull panels that did not match the colour of the rest of the vessel, suggesting that they were emergency repairs, while a crude image of a woman had been painted on one side.

"She may not look like much but she's got it where it counts. I've had a lot of special modifications made." the warrior told her, "Now I'll introduce you to the team that you'll be accompanying."

"I'll be accompanying? Don't you mean we?" Rylee commented but the warrior shook his head.

"No, your father has other work for me. Don't worry, I hand picked these men." he said and then he placed two fingers in his mouth and whistled loudly, "Fall in! Front and centre!" he yelled and a group of seven men came rushing out of the gunship. All six men were either human or near human and two of them had identical facial features. Each of them wore a blast vest and was armed with a blaster but there was no uniformity to their equipment, even the two identical men were armed in different ways.

"Where did you get them?" Rylee asked the warrior, "Thugs to go?"

"No, each of these men is one of mine. They just look different out of uniform. Flack here is the commanding officer for this mission." the warrior said.

"I am in command of the mission." Rylee said.

"Not this time. Flack and his men are experienced troops and you'll need that experience to get through this. You obey Flack's orders. Check with your father if you want. I've already discussed all this with him." the warrior told Rylee and she frowned.

"Carry on." she said, folding her arms and looking at the ragged looking team of soldiers.

"Okay well we've got the Pugh twins, the old guy is McGrew the pilot." the warrior continued and at that point the grey haired soldier smiled and raised his hand.

"You can call me Barney miss." he said and Rylee looked away from him, not impressed at his familiar attitude towards her.

"Next to him is gunner Cuthbert, the tall guy is Dibble and the one at the end is Grub." the warrior said, "Now I need to get back to your father so I'll leave you in their tender care. Take care of her lads."

"You can count on us boss." Flack replied and then he and his men watched as the warrior made his way up the access ramp of the shuttle that had brought Rylee here before it rose up off the ground and headed up into the sky.

"Okay princess, best get aboard. We don't have much time here." Flack said and he and his men headed back into their ship.

Rylee took another look at the patchwork appearance of the gunship and sighed before she followed them. The interior of the gunship was cramped, with equipment cases lashed to the walls above the seats that lined both walls of the rear section of the ship behind the control stations. McGrew was already sat in the pilot's seat with Flack beside him as Rylee entered the ship and she came to a sudden halt and wretched as a rancid smell filled her nostrils.

"What an amazing new smell you've discovered." she said, "What the hell is that?"

"Don't know princess but it's coming from in there." Flack responded and he pointed to one of the two doors in the gunship's interior.

"Something's blocking the refresher." Dibble commented before he sealed the hatch Rylee had just come through.

"Didn't anyone think to get it fixed?" Rylee asked.

"It adds to the character." McGrew answered, "Now everyone take a seat, we're lifting off." and then before waiting for everyone to sit down he suddenly pulled back on the flight controls and the gunship lifted off with a lurch and Rylee came close to falling over, stopped only when Dibble caught her.

"You can let go of me." she said to him sternly and he released his grip on her as the gunship was settling into a constant rate of ascent.

"Okay so now what?" Rylee said as she sat down, "What's your plan for getting Morton Crayne out of jail."

"All in good time princess." Flack replied, turning his chair around to face towards the rear of the gunship, "First of all you need to take off all your clothes."

"What? Are you insane? Do you know who I am? How dare you-" Rylee said angrily.

"You stand out too much princess." Flack interrupted, "So you need to ditch that fancy dress, those shoes and all that jewellery that probably cost more than this ship and get into this instead." and then he reached down to a bag on the floor and from it he took a plain grey partial bodyglove and a pair of rubber shoes that he tossed to Rylee one item at a time.

"If you think I'm getting undressed in front of all of you then you've got another thing coming." Rylee said.

"You can use the refresher if you want." Flack suggested and his men grinned as Rylee's face fell.

"What's in there?" she asked, looking at the other door.

"Oh that's just a closet. It's full of rations." Grub said and Rylee walked to the door and opened it. Sure enough the compact space was stocked with cartons of ration bars.

"I'll change in here." she said, stepping inside and looking for the door controls.

"Fair enough princess." Flack said and he got up and walked over to the doorway to press the control from the outside.

"Hey!" Rylee called out from inside the closet, "There's no light in here."

"I know princess. That's why I didn't suggest it. Can't you change in the dark?" Flack said.

"I'll be fine." Rylee responded and then there was a 'thump' sound from inside the closet as she banged into something and Flack returned to his seat.

"She's going to be trouble captain." one of the Pugh twins said.

"We've got a very bad feeling about this." the other added.

"Me too but the boss made our orders clear. She wanted in on the mission so she'll be taking centre stage when we get to the objective." Flack replied.

"And how long will you be leaving her locked in the closet?" McGrew added and the other troops all laughed.

Rylee glared angrily at Flack as the closet door slid open and she emerged wearing the bodyglove and rubber shoes. The sleeves and legs of the bodyglove extended only part way down her limbs to her elbows and knees, leaving the lower portions of her limbs exposed.

"Sorry about that princess, we didn't hear you banging." Flack said as Rylee pushed past him and sat down.

"Just tell me what the plan is." she said and Flack joined the other soldiers all sat in the rear of the gunship while it flew through hyperspace.

"The prison is in an otherwise uninhabited system in the core." Flack began and he activated a portable holographic display unit to show an image of a fortified installation built into the side of a tall cliff. This location looked to have been picked because it was too far above the bottom of the cliff and too far below the top for an escaping prisoner to attempt to climb in either direction without specialised equipment and stand a realistic chance of success, "As you can see we have detailed plans thanks to your source."

"I should say so for a million credits." Rylee muttered.

"Morton Crayne is being held in an isolation wing rather than general population so that gives us an opportunity." Flack continued, and he adjusted the holographic display to show a section of the jail's interior, "As you can see the isolation wing is located not far from the inward processing section and also the security centre."

"How does that help?" Rylee asked, "The security section will be crawling with guards."

"Yes it will princess so you better shut your mouth and listen carefully because you'll be the one to get us past them." Flack said.

"Me?" Rylee responded in surprise.

"Yes princess, you. You see we're all travelling under the cover of being a team of bounty hunters and you are our bounty. We've got a warrant that tells us to deliver you here to claim a rather substantial reward, fake of course and when the prison's system can't verify it they'll try to confirm it with the issuing sector. A sector remote enough that a subspace signal will take a few hours to get there and back."

"Why wouldn't they just use the holonet for instant communication?" Rylee said.

"Too expensive princess." Flack said, "So they'll have to wait and during that time they'll stick you in a processing cell while we wait aboard the ship. That's when you have to break out and deactivate the security system."

"And how exactly am I supposed to do that? I'm no security expert or an escapologist." Rylee said.

"You'll have these." Flack said and he held up two compact devices, "This is an electronic skeleton key. Put it next to any of the locks in the prison and it will run through all the codes to open them until it gets the right one. It's also how you'll get yourself out of the binders you'll be left in. Then this is a computer spike. Just plug it into a network port in the security section and it'll give us access to their entire network. As soon as we have that we'll trigger an override of security in general population and let them all out of their cells."

"So you cause a riot?" Rylee said and Flack smiled.

"Exactly. When the alarms go off we'll head into the processing area supposedly to secure you but we'll cut through the security section while the bulk of the guards are off dealing with the riot to secure isolation and break your boyfriend out of his cell." he said.

"Morton Crayne is not my boyfriend." Rylee said, staring at Flack.

"Sure princess, whatever you say." Flack replied and then there was a bleeping sound from the flight console and McGrew went to the front of the ship to check the instruments.

"We're coming up on the prison." he said and Flack nodded.

"Okay princess, time to finish getting you dressed." he said and Rylee sighed.

"Fine." she said and she held out both her arms in front of her for him to put binders on them.

"Not yet. You still look too clean. We need to do something about that. Cuthbert go get our ladyship's outfit." Flack said.

"Sure captain." Cuthbert replied and he walked over to an access panel that he opened to reveal a set of coveralls stuffed inside, "All dried off and ready." he said as he removed them after putting on a pair of gloves and then he brought them over to Rylee who winced and recoiled at the smell.

"Stang those smell worse than the refresher." she said.

"They should, we had them soaking in it while you were changing." Flack replied.

"Well I'm not wearing them." Rylee said and Flack shrugged.

"Have it your way princess but they're for your protection." he said and she frowned.

"How are those supposed to protect me?" she asked.

"Look princess this is a prison. Every prisoner is searched when they arrive. The guards will run a body scan, there's now way to prevent that but we can at least make it less likely that they'll want to do a pat down or strip search. Would you want to rub your hand over someone that smelt like those overalls?" Flack explained and Rylee frowned.

"Fine. Give them to me." she said and she reached out to snatch the filthy overalls from Cuthbert, wincing again as she gripped them and felt something squash in the palm of her hand.

Rylee was glad of the coverage given to her body by the bodyglove as she put the overalls on although the skin on her lower limbs and neck still felt as if something was scratching at it and she did not like to think about the substances that the garment had been soaked in. As soon as she had put the overalls on one of the Pugh twins handed Flack a set of binders that included a rigid metal belt.

"Okay now step forward princess." Flack said and when Rylee did as she was told he wrapped the belt around her waist and she heard it 'click' as it locked shut with the binders for her wrists in front of them. Flack then locked these around Rylee's wrists and backed away.

"Are we done now?" she asked.

"Well you certainly are princess." Flack replied, grinning and she frowned.

"What do you mean?" she said.

"I mean that you still don't get what's going on here do you princess? You're an embarrassment to your father and he's decided that it's time to get rid of you. In a few minutes we'll be dropping out of hyperspace at one of the worst holes in the Outer Rim Territories where we will hand you over and you will spend the rest of your life locked in a cage smelling like a sewer. No-one here knows who you really are and if you try to tell them then they'll just think you're crazy and move you to a cell that's padded and dope you up to your eyeballs instead." Flack said and Rylee's eye's widened.

"No." she said, tugging at her binders.

"Oh yes princess. Perhaps you should be more careful before you let strangers tie you up." Flack replied.

"I'll pay you. I'll pay you all." Rylee exclaimed, "A million credits a piece. No two. Just let me go, please."

"You hear that lads? She does know how to say 'please' after all." Flack said, looking at his grinning men.

Just then there was another bleeping sound from the flight console.

"Core beacon trill herf xesh one-one-three-eight dead ahead. Dropping to realspace now." McGrew announced and the gunship promptly dropped out of hyperspace, the bright tunnel visible through the forward viewport being replaced by stars.

"Core beacon?" Rylee said and the troops in the gunship began to laugh.

"Don't worry princess, I was just messing with you there." Flack said, "Your father has actually promised us all a bonus for getting you back to him safe, sound and unmolested. That includes Crayne by the way. So if there is any romantic interest between the pair of you it would be best to keep a lid on it. Our orders are to kill him if he makes a move on you."

Rylee glared at Flack angrily.

"That wasn't funny." she said.

"Sure it was. Now time to hide these." Flack said and he held up the key and the computer spike.

"Fine, give them to me." Rylee said and she opened one of her hands.

"No, not there princess. That close and the key will open the binders. Besides, the guards might pick them up on their scan. These need to be inside you so open wide." Flack said and he held the two small devices up in

front of Rylee's face.

"You're kidding. How am I supposed to keep those hidden in my mouth? They-" she said but before she could finish Flack pushed the two devices into her open mouth.

"Now hand me the mask." he said, holding out his hand towards Grub and the other soldier passed him a surgical mask, "This is the last of it princess." he said as he wrapped the elastic loops either side of the mask around Rylee's ears so that it covered her nose and mouth as well as the sides of her face, concealed the bulges in her cheeks where the key and computer spike were pressing against the inside of her mouth, "Now they won't see anything but you should still be able to spit out the key whenever you want. Understand?" Flack told Rylee and she nodded, "Good. Now whatever you do, don't swallow that key. Apart from how difficult and unpleasant it will be for you to retrieve it, we can't wait around while it passes through your digestive system."

"Don't worry." Cuthbert added, "It'll be a piece of cake." and then he slapped Rylee on the back, causing her to glare at him as she narrowly avoided swallowing either the key or the computer spike.

3.

Two guards in body armour stood on the landing platform that stuck out from the cliff side and formed the only access point to the prison. Both men carried blaster carbines and they raised these as Flack and his men led the bound and masked Rylee down the access ramp of the gunship when it opened. In addition to this an automated turret mounted above the landing platform moved to track the new arrivals. All of the soldiers carried their weapons but these remained holstered and slung so as not to appear threatening to the guards or whoever was controlling the turret.

"We're here to claim the bounty on this fugitive." Flack announced.

"Let me see." one of the armoured guards said and he walked up to Rylee, extending a hand towards her. However, as he got close he recoiled at the smell coming from her and waved his hand back and forth in front of his own face, "Get her inside." he said, stepping out of the way.

"See princess?" Flack whispered to Rylee, "No-one's going to touch you if they can help it."

Entering the structure of the prison, Rylee and Flack's men found themselves inside a spartan chamber that was manned by four more guards, one of whom stood behind a computer console. The room showed signs of disrepair, a number of the lighting panels were not functioning and a duct running across the ceiling was obviously held in place with tape. This was not uncommon for prison facilities, even in the Core Worlds money was not lavished on convicts.

"Where are you taking this thing?" the man behind the console said, staring in disgust at Rylee as he smelt the odour coming from her.

"We're here for the bounty." Flack said and he handed a datapad to the man while keeping hold of Rylee with his other hand.

"I don't see any charges on this." the guard said as he examined the information on the datapad and Flack smiled.

"That's because it's all a little embarrassing for some rather important people." he said, "The princess here is a joy girl who is in the habit of drugging rich clients so that she can help herself to their credits, various items of value and on at least three occasions a starship. There is a senator keen to see her brought to justice without his name being mentioned. The warrant number checks out though."

"I see it was issued in the Outer Rim. It will take some time for us get confirmation." the guard said and Flack nodded.

"We can wait." he said.

"What's the mask for?" another of the guards asked, looking at the surgical mask Rylee wore without getting too close to her.

"Oh she's a feisty one." Flack said, "Bites and spits and since quite a number of her clients needed to be treated with antibiotics after intimate encounters with her we thought it best to make sure she couldn't infect any of us with anything nasty." Rylee glared at Flack for a moment, offended by the suggestion that she was a carrier of such diseases.

"Plan A was just to glue her mouth shut." one of the Pugh twins said.

"Why didn't you?" a guard asked and the other twin smiled before he replied.

"She's a woman. There isn't a glue in the galaxy strong enough to keep her mouth shut." he said and the guards and soldiers all laughed.

"Well she needs to be strip searched but I'm not touching her. I'll get a droid down here to do it." the guard behind the console said and Rylee tensed. Being searched by a droid might mean that she would not be manhandled in the same way as if one of the guards carried out the search but it would still mean having her clothes removed in front of a room filled with men.

"The droids aren't working." another of the guards commented.

"Fine, just get her in the scanner and then to the processing cells then." the guard behind the console said,

"We can deal with the search after we've confirmed the warrant."

A pair of guards then took Rylee away from Flack, dragging her across the room to what looked like a free standing archway that they pushed her inside.

"Scan commencing. One of them said as both looked at the screen fixed to the side of the archway. The ultrasonic scanner passed waves of high frequency sound over Rylee and she felt a slight vibration from it, suggesting that it was yet another piece of equipment in the prison that needed repair. Able to penetrate clothing but not metallic objects or flesh, the scanner produced an image of Rylee's body and she looked away from the two guards, knowing that they were staring closely at what amounted to a low resolution image of her naked.

"She's clean." one of the guards said, "Well, not exactly clean but-"

"Just get her out of here." the guard behind the console ordered and the two guards then pulled Rylee from

the scanner and began to drag her away.

"What about us?" Flack asked.

"Until the warrant is cleared I will have to ask you to wait in your ship. You'll be contacted as soon as payment is authorised." the guard behind the console answered and Flack nodded.

"Okay boys lets do as the man said. There's work to be done and it can't be done with us hanging around here." he said.

Escorted through the prison to the processing section, Rylee had to endure a stream of lurid remarks from the guards about how they intended to be present for when she was strip searched and hosed clean before being admitted to the prison's general population and it was a relief to her when they reached one of the holding cells used for new arrivals and she was shoved inside. The only features of the cell were the restraints connected to various points on the walls all around the room and for a moment she was concerned that she would be secured using some of these. However, the guards obviously felt that her binders were sufficient and they instead retreated from the room, leaving her alone as they shut the door behind them.

The cell was in the same state of repair as all of the other areas of the prison that she had seen so far and the lighting panels flickered at random intervals. There was still light to see by though and so Rylee decided to waste no more time in moving on to the next stage of the plan.

Spitting the electronic skeleton key and computer spike out of her mouth was easy, the surgical mask rested against her face but did not apply any pressure so both of the devices simply dropped out from under it and fell to the floor at her feet. Rylee then backed away to make sure that she did not accidentally crush either device at this critical moment as she knelt down to pick them up. Taking hold of the skeleton key was enough to bring it close enough to the magnetic locking mechanism of Rylee's binders and all three locks promptly sprang open and released her, causing Rylee to breathe a sigh of relief. Her next move was to discard both the surgical mask and the filthy overalls that continued to irritate her skin wherever they came in contact with her flesh, pulling them off and tossing them across the cell. Rylee now found that she had cause to be glad of the bodyglove that Flack had given her to wear, the close fitting garment had been undetectable under the overalls but now meant that she did not need to choose between keeping the overalls on or running around the prison in her underwear.

Hurrying to the cell door Rylee held the key to the lock and smiled as the door slid upwards almost immediately. Then she peered out into the corridor and checked that it was empty. Seeing no guards she darted out of the cell, doing her best to remember the way to the security control section from the internal plan of the prison that Flack had shown her. As was to be expected in a prison there were a number of surveillance cameras located in its corridors but in the processing section of the facility these were of a type that had a narrow field of view and made up for this by rotating to cover a wider area. This meant that Rylee could avoid being caught by them by waiting until the cameras pointed away from her before dashing beneath them.

Peering around what she expected to be the last corner before reaching the security section Rylee saw a large set of doors ahead of her that were clearly marked with the words 'SECURITY SECTION' in the aurebesh script and she smiled. However, before she could run towards this door she heard voices and ducked back as a pair of guards came around another corner and started walking towards her. If they continued on their current course then they would walk right past Rylee and she knew that they would see her. Looking around she looked up at a nearby security camera that was slowly rotating away from her. The camera was nearing the limit of its rotation and would soon start to turn back towards the length of corridor she had just come down. This presented her with a dilemma, if she stayed where she was or went around the corner then the guards would see her but if she tried to retreat then she would enter the field of view of the camera.

There was the hiss of a door opening from around the corridor and Rylee risked another look around it, just in time to see the two guard stepping through another doorway that stood between her and the door to the security section. The moment that the second guard disappeared through this doorway Rylee leapt around the corner to avoid the camera and crept towards the large doors ahead of her, breathing a sigh of relief as the doorway that the guards had passed through closed again with another hiss, allowing her to sprint the last few metres to the door to the security section without worrying about the guards turning around and seeing her.

Rylee stood beside the door to the security section so that she would not been seen from the other side before presenting the skeleton key to the lock control panel and there was another brief pause as the device cycled through its list of access codes until finding the right one to open door. As soon as the door opened Rylee looked through it and saw a short, empty corridor on the other side. Darting through the doorway she then paused to study her surroundings more closely as the doors closed behind her.

The information that she had suggested that the security section itself was free from cameras but it did have the benefit of having maps available at various locations and one of these was just inside the door. The

purpose of this map was to indicate assembly points in the event of fires, riots or attacks on the prison but they showed every room and corridor in the security section so Rylee could use this one to plan her next move. The function of each room was not shown on the map, this information considered unimportant to its purpose but Rylee remembered that the main security office was located centrally and this helped her get her bearings. As she studied the map and tried to determine the most efficient route to reach the main security office she heard the sound of approaching footsteps and realised that there was a guard coming. Before they could come into view Rylee rushed to the nearest door, an unmarked one that was immediately beside the map she was looking at and used her skeleton key to open it before leaping through without looking at what was on the other side.

It was only as the door was sliding shut again that Rylee realised what the purpose of this room was and she smiled.

“Jackpot.” she said to herself, smiling as she looked around.

The room was used for storage and in front of her Rylee saw racks from which prison guard uniforms hung as well as sets of body armour. The room was not an armoury, however and there were no weapons evident but Rylee knew that the equipment that was in it would be invaluable to her. Fortunately the prison staff included members from various species and both sexes and so she was able to find a set of uniform overalls in her small size. Boots were more problematic, all of the available pairs being far too large for her. However, she solved this problem by keeping her rubber shoes on her feet as she put on a much bigger pair instead. All that was required then was for her to put on a set of body armour and a helmet and her disguise would be complete. Unfortunately the visors that were fitted to the helmets were transparent, being present only to stop unpleasant substances or small objects being thrown into the faces of guards rather than to protect against blaster fire. This meant that from the front Rylee's face would still be visible but she hoped that by turning away from anyone she encountered she could avoid alerting them to the fact that she was an imposter. Rylee then stood just inside the door and took two deep breaths as she worked up the courage to open the door before she held out the skeleton key and it slid upwards.

After taking a few moments to check the map again Rylee headed in the direction of the main security office, keeping close to the wall so that she could avert her gaze should she encounter anyone. The room that she sought was not on this level so she made her way towards a turbolift and summoned a car. This arrived quickly and she stepped inside but as she turned and pressed the button for her desired level, four above this one a voice called out to her.

“Hold that elevator!”

Panicking, Rylee stepped back away from the control console but just before the door could slide shut a hand reached out and held them open from the outside.

“Didn't you hear what I said?” the man who entered the turbolift said as he pressed the button for the floor above while Rylee folded her arms across her chest to conceal the fact that she was not wearing an identity badge where he was, “Hey,” the guard added as he glared at Rylee, “you're new here aren't you?”

“Just transferred from Alderaan.” Rylee replied, nodding, “I'm still getting used to this armour, I can hardly hear a thing in this helmet.”

“Well you take care and figure it out quickly.” the guard said, turning away from Rylee again, “Ignore an order from the warden and you could end up on the other side in here.”

“I'll be careful.” Rylee said.

“You'll be dead if the prisoners get hold of you.” the guard said and then the turbolift door slid open again as the car reached the next level and the guard got out, leaving Rylee alone again.

Getting out of the turbolift car on the next level, Rylee kept her arms folded as she walk down the corridor and lowered her head as she walked past another guard heading in the opposite direction. A duros, this guard had removed his helmet and was carrying it under his arm. The alien glanced at Rylee as they passed one another but said nothing before they both continued on their way.

4.

The door to the main security control room was not sealed and Rylee did not need her skeleton key to open it. However, as soon as the door opened she saw that there were eight guards on duty in the room.

Thankfully none of them were looking towards the door and one glanced in her direction for just a moment before turning back to her console. Most of the guards were occupied monitoring the feeds from the internal security cameras but it was clear that one of them was responsible for the prison's external defences and Rylee could see an image of the gunship she had arrived on shown on a monitor with a set of cross hairs overlaid on it. Obviously the prison staff were prepared to destroy the vessel if they thought that it was here to cause trouble. There was nothing that Rylee could do about this now though so instead she turned her attention to finding a computer network port.

"Can we help you?" one of the guards asked suddenly, wondering why Rylee had entered the room and Rylee thought quickly to come up with a reason why she was there.

"Sorry I'm new." she said, keeping her chest where she ought to have an identity card attached covered as she approached the guard and spying a computer port at the base of his console cluster, "My section commander told me to report here to be issued with a long stand." on hearing this the guards in the command centre all looked up from their consoles and smiled, one of them snorting, "Is something wrong?" Rylee asked.

"Just wait there." the guard she had approached said as they all went back to their duties, ignoring Rylee just as she had hoped.

Rylee reached a hand into her pocket and felt for the computer spike, pulling it out and immediately dropping it to the floor.

"Stang." she muttered as she bent down as if to pick the device up but instead she took hold of it and inserted it into the computer port, at which point it lit up and forced her to conceal it with her foot as she stood up again. None of the guards spoke to Rylee as she waited, looking down at the computer spike and waiting for it flash to indicate that it had completed its task and opened a network port to the troops waiting in the gunship. As soon as the device flashed its readiness Rylee knocked it with the side of her foot to dislodge it from the port and then gently kicked it across the floor.

"Will this take much longer?" she asked.

"Depends on how long you want to stand for." one of the guards replied.

"I don't understand." Rylee said.

"You've been had officer." another guard said, "A long stand. Get it? You were sent here to stand around for a long time."

"A practical joke on the new girl." another added and Rylee sighed as if she had only just understood being the butt of a joke.

"Now I get it." she said.

"Well then you better get back to your duty station or you will really will get it if the warden catches you away from your post." a guard said and Rylee nodded as she hurried out of the room.

"We're in." McGrew said when one of the screens on the flight console changed to resemble one from a prison control station.

"Let me see." Flack said, rushing towards the front of the gunship and sitting in the co-pilot's seat. Then when he saw the prison control interface he smiled, "Well, well. The little princess did her job."

Behind him one of the Pugh twins looked at his brother and held out his hand.

"You owe me twenty credits." he said.

"Did the spike work captain?" McGrew asked as Flack studied the control interface.

"Looks like it." Flack said, "I can see all of the primary command subroutines. All I need to do is figure out how they work. Give a few minutes, if I screw this up then the guards will know something is wrong."

"Do you want me to prep the ship for an emergency take off?" McGrew said but Flack shook his head.

"The ship needs to be prepared for take off but we can't leave if I trigger an alert. We'd never get off the pad before that turret nailed us. Besides, do you want to either go back and explain how come we left the princess behind or spend the rest of your life looking over your shoulder for the boss and one of his termination teams?"

"I get the message captain." McGrew replied.

"In the meantime I want everyone to get ready. Check your weapons. As soon as the riot alarm sounds we need to get back in there." Flack ordered.

Inside the prison security section Rylee had no way of knowing whether or not the computer spike had

successfully given Flack access to the computer network and in addition to this the plan discussed with her had not included anything for her to do once the spike was installed other than return to the processing cells and wait until Flack and his men arrived to collect her. Initially she just headed away from the main security control centre as quickly as she could just in case what she had done was discovered but then she noticed another of the maps on the wall and an idea occurred to her.

She knew that the isolation cells where Morton Crayne was being held were located close to the security section she was in now and she realised that she could just as easily get him out of his cell before returning to the processing area. If she could pull that off then it would save time in the long run by not needing the soldiers in the gunship to release him.

After checking the map for directions Rylee hurried through the corridors of the security section, not knowing how long it would take Flack to release the prisoners from their cells and trigger a security alert. Each time she encountered any of the other staff she covered her chest and averted her gaze to avoid letting them see that she was an imposter. Fortunately they appeared too focused on their duties in the prison to pay her any attention and she managed to reach the exit from the security section leading to the isolation cells without being challenged.

The skeleton key opened the armoured door almost instantaneously and Rylee entered the isolation section. This part of the prison was used to house prisoners who would be at risk of harm from other prisoners if they were put into the general population. In Morton's case it was because it could be discovered that he had become an informer in order to reduce his sentence but there were also prisoners in this section who had worked in law enforcement and also those convicted of crimes considered especially vile even by other criminals and needed to be kept away from them.

The isolation section was subdivided into several cell blocks, each of which was separated from the others by blast doors while they were all monitored from a central command post located just on the other side of the door connecting the isolation section to the security section that was manned by four armed guards.

Rylee tried to remain calm as she stepped in the room and the guards looked at her.

"What do you want?" the guard commander at the control station asked, glaring at her and Rylee wondered if he suspected that she was not who she was trying to fool the guards into thinking she was.

"I have a message for Morton Crayne." she said, "The Jedi are coming to question him and they have requested that-"

"In there." the guard commander said, using his console to open one of the cell block doors, "Third cell on the right." and he looked back down at his console, ignoring Rylee as she walked towards the open blast door.

"Thanks." She said as she hurried through the doorway in to the corridor that connected all of the cells in the block.

There was a security camera at the far end of the corridor that covered the entire block but Rylee knew that the individual cells did not have surveillance in them and so she would be safe to communicate with Morton inside his. Having been told which cell Morton was in she counted the cells doors and then held her skeleton key to the third one on her right. Once again the key functioned as intended and the door slid upwards to reveal Morton sat at the far end of his cell, reading from an old fashioned printed magazine.

"Aren't you a little short for a prison guard?" he said, glancing at Rylee as she entered his cell.

"It's me, Rylee. I'm here to rescue you." Rylee said, taking off her helmet so that Morton would have a better view of her, "And by the way this is a standard issue prison uniform so there are guards my height."

"Rylee!" Morton exclaimed, "How did you get here? And why? I didn't think that you'd-"

"My father wants to be certain that you can't tell the Jedi anything about me." Rylee interrupted, "I've got a team of mercenaries waiting aboard a gunship outside."

"How many? You'd need a full platoon to assault this place." Morton said.

"Seven." Rylee replied.

"Seven?" Morton exclaimed, "How the hell do you think that you can break me out of here with just seven soldiers? Seven Jedi knights maybe, but I doubt you've got any of them at your beck and call. Or do you?"

"No, just ordinary men. But they have access to the prison's computer networks. They're going to open all the cell doors and let all of the prisoners out at once."

Morton smiled and nodded.

"The guards normally only let a few out at a time for exercise." he said, "There'll be a full scale riot and the guards will be overwhelmed. But how are you going to get me out here past the guards out there?"

"Ah. I hadn't thought about that." Rylee replied.

5.

In the isolation section's command post the guard commander saw on his status board the door to Morton Crayne's cell was still open and he frowned.

"Crayne's cell is still open." he said, "You two go and check it out. If that girl's in trouble then I want it sorting before it goes on my record."

The guard commander opened the blast door again and two of his guards went through, making their way directly to Morton's open cell and they went inside.

"What's going on here?" one demanded, "How long does it take to-" and then he realised that not only did he not recognise Rylee now that he could see her entire face without her helmet on but she was not wearing a standard prison ID badge and he immediately went for his sidearm.

Seeing this Morton leapt up and lunged at the guard, wrestling him to the floor and doing his best to seize control of the blaster he had drawn. The other guard also began to draw his blaster and Rylee hurled herself at him, knocking him sideways into the wall behind him. The guard dropped his blaster as he fell and Rylee found that it was within her reach when both she and it hit the floor. Grabbing hold of the weapon she rolled over and pointed it at the guard who was already getting back to his feet.

"Get back!" she snapped, "Get back or I'll shoot."

However, the guard appeared not to believe her and he advanced with his arms held out in front of him. Rylee tightened her grip on the blaster but she found that she could not bring herself to pull the trigger and shoot the man, paying others to commit murder being far easier than doing it for herself. Luckily for her Morton saw what was happening and as he continued to fight with the other guard for control of his blaster he pushed the weapon towards the guard advancing on Rylee and squeezed his hands around the one the guard was using to hold his weapon. In doing this the guard's finger was pushed back on the trigger and there was a sudden flash of blue light as the blaster discharged on its stun setting and the guard advancing on Rylee suddenly collapsed.

"The guards' weapons are set on stun. Now help me with this guy." Morton called out to the startled Rylee and she turned her stolen blaster on the first guard and fired. Again the flash of the discharge was blue rather than red and the guard went limp as the shot hit him, his armour unable to absorb all of the energy at this close range.

"I thought it would kill him." Rylee said as Morton stood back up and picked up the blaster from the stunned guard at his feet.

"They can be set for kill and at longer ranges that's what it will take to get through their armour." he said, "But for now I think that these two nerf herders have just given us a way out of here."

"I think I've got it." Flack said.

"You can open the cell doors?" McGrew replied and Flack nodded.

"Cell and cell block doors. All twelve thousand prisoners in the standard and high security wings will be let out at the same time and be able to mix with one another. I'm keeping the isolation cells sealed though, I don't want some sociopath heading in there and slicing up Crayne before we can break him out." he explained and then he looked to the rear of the gunship, "Is everyone set?" he asked.

"Whenever you are captain." Grub answered and Flack brought his finger down on the button to trigger the override inserted into the prison's computer network.

To help minimise the number of guards required to maintain order in the prison, prisoners were permitted to leave their cells only for a short period of time each day so that they could exercise. By varying these times between different cell blocks most of them could operate with just a handful of guards to respond to any problems within individual cells instead of having to maintain a full presence in every block. Therefore, when the door to every cell in the general population wings opened at the same time there were just a few guards in each block to try and keep several hundred prisoners in their cells.

Initially the prisoners remained in their cells, expecting the doors to slid shut once more but as some of them began to hear the guards outside calling the security section in a state of panic they realised that they were no longer locked in. The guards drew their weapons as the first of the prisoners began to emerge from their cells, ordering them back inside and that was when the first casualty occurred. A prisoner charged from his cell onto the landing carrying a chair from inside his cell. This was lightweight and made of plastic but it was still the best weapon he had available to him and he swung it at a guard who was right outside the cell. The suddenness of the attack caught the guard by surprise and he dropped his blaster as the chair struck him before tumbling over the rail of the landing he was stood on. The guard screamed instinctively as he fell only to be caught by the netting placed at regular intervals between the landings to prevent prisoners from killing

themselves by throwing themselves off higher level landings. The casualty came when the prisoner then picked up the blaster and turned it towards another guard. This second guard saw what the prisoner was doing and quickly switched his own blaster to a lethal setting for engaging an armed opponent and opened fire. The blast hit the prisoner in the centre of his torso and he fell backwards, also toppling over the rail so that his corpse landed beside the guard he had attacked.

By now though the prisoners knew that something was wrong and they came pouring out of their cells and started to mob the panicking guards.

In the security section's main command centre the staff were suddenly inundated with calls for assistance just as all of the feeds from the surveillance cameras failed, leaving them blind to what was happening elsewhere in the prison. It was standard procedure for guards to fall back out of a cell block if there was a riot and then seal it off so that gas could be pumped in to subdue the rioters. However, with the doors between cell blocks also jammed open this was not possible and so the guards were forced to keep retreating.

"Seal all cells and blocks." the guard commander in the control centre ordered but one of his subordinates looked back at him with fear on his ace.

"I can't sir. I'm locked out. We don't have any control over the cell blocks." he exclaimed.

"Then sound the alarm." the commander ordered, "I want all guards to assemble with full armour and weaponry. One way or another we're going to bring this facility back under control."

The klaxon that sounded throughout the prison was loud enough to be heard inside the gunship and Flack grabbed his nearby blaster rifle.

"That's it. Let's go!" he snapped and the seven mercenary soldiers rushed out of the gunship as fast as they could manage.

"Halt!" a guard on the landing pad yelled as the gun turret swung around to face them as well, "Where do you think you're going?"

"We heard the alarm. What's happening?" Flack demanded.

"There's been a failure in the security system. All available guards are moving to secure the facility now." the guard told him.

"That sounds like a break out." Flack said, "If there are prisoners on the loose in there then I want to make sure that ours isn't one of them. Let us past and we'll make sure that she's kept secure."

The guard looked at Flack, unconvinced of the need to let the mercenaries into the prison with their weapons.

"Wait, I need to call this in." he said and he took out his comlink, relaying Flack's request to the command centre.

"They want to guard their prisoner?" the commander responded, "Fine. Let them in. If they can keep the processing section secure then that's one part of the prison we don't need to worry about."

The guard on the landing platform then took a step back and looked at Flack.

"In you go." he said.

6.

Morton was crouched beside one of the stunned guards and in the process of removing his body armour when the alarm sounded and both he and Rylee looked out of the cell.

"Is that your friends?" Morton asked and Rylee nodded.

"I hope so." she said.

"Good. Then that should make this easier." Morton said, turning his attention back to the unconscious guard.

"A disguise won't help. The guards out there will be expecting three of them, not two to come out of this cell."

Rylee pointed out.

"It's not a disguise. I just want his armour. Then I'm going to take you hostage." Morton replied as he pulled the armour vest from the guard and put it on, "Now get rid of your own armour. You don't need it and the lack of an ID card might give you away."

Rylee nodded as she removed her armoured vest and then Morton walked up behind her, wrapping his free hand around her from behind and grabbing hold of her chest.

"Higher Mister Crayne." Rylee said sternly.

"Sorry." Morton replied as he moved his hand up and then he led Rylee out of the cell with his blaster held to the side of her head.

The door to the control station was closed as Rylee and Morton walked up to it, knowing that they were in full view of the camera at the far end of the corridor.

"Okay time to use that key of yours again." Morton said and without him letting go of her she held out the skeleton key to open the door.

"Freeze!" a guard yelled as soon as the door opened, both the remaining guards in the control station believing that they had seen what was happening on the security monitor and now pointing their weapons towards Rylee and Morton.

"Get back or she dies." Morton said sternly, "Lower your weapons." Neither guard reacted to this threat, both of them still pointing their blasters towards Rylee and Morton, "I'll do it." Morton continued, "And if you try stunning me then this thing is likely to go off and the young lady here will lose her head."

The guards glanced at one another and the superior officer nodded, at which point they both began to lower their weapons. As soon as they did this Morton turned his blaster on them, firing twice in rapid succession.

The blaster flashed red, indicating that Morton had used the weapon on its lethal setting to guarantee that his shots would penetrate the guards' armour even from across the room and both men fell dead before they could return fire.

"Okay Rylee, so now which way to your friends?" Morton asked, still holding onto Rylee.

"The processing section. That way." Rylee said and she pointed to the door that led to the prison's security section.

"That way? That's the security section." Morton replied and Rylee nodded.

"Yes, I came through there." she said.

"And now you expect us to walk right through the part of the prison most likely to be full of guards. I've got a very bad feeling about this." Morton replied.

This time Flack and his men were simply waved through the security checkpoint just inside the entrance to the prison, the checkpoint now being manned by only a single guard after the others had been called away to deal with the released prisoners.

"She was taken to detention cell fourteen." the guard told Flack before he and his men rushed from the checkpoint and found themselves in the processing section of the prison.

This part of the prison was made up not only of cells for newly arrived prisoners but also rooms where they could be interviewed by legal representatives, law enforcement or on rare occasions when visiting rights had been granted friends or family from the outside galaxy. Because this meant that the processing section would sometimes be visited by outsiders there were signs up just within it that pointed the way to different areas that Flack and his men were able to follow without needing to resort to the map the captain had on his datapad.

"Corridor's clear." Dibble said as he led the way around the corner to the corridor where cell fourteen was located. Passing guards in the corridors had not been an issue up to this point since Flack and his men had permission to be in the prison but they would not be able to explain away why they were now removing Rylee from her cell. However, as Flack rushed up to the cell door and peered through the observation slot he frowned, not understanding what he saw.

The cell was empty.

"Stang." he hissed, "The princess hasn't made it back yet."

"Could she have been caught?" one of the Pugh twins suggested but Flack shook his head.

"No. If she had been then the guards would have come after us. She must still be hiding somewhere." he said.

"We can't wait here captain. Sooner or later the guards will get that riot under control and our window of opportunity will be gone." McGrew said.

"I know. We'll have to head for-" Flack began before they heard the sound of footsteps and all of a sudden Rylee appeared around the corner, apparently held hostage and with a blaster to her head, "Let her go sleemo!" Flack yelled as he and his men all took aim.

"Stand down." Rylee called out as she pulled Morton's arm from around her, "Captain Flack this is Morton Crayne. Morton, meet Captain Flack and his men, Pugh, Pugh-"

"You may dispense with the pleasantries princess." Flack interrupted, "We need to get a move on if we're going to pull this off."

"Fine, let's get back to the ship." Rylee said and she started to walk in the direction of the landing pad.

"Where do you think you're going?" Flack asked.

"To the ship." Rylee replied, pointing towards the way out.

"We'll never get off the pad with that turret active." Flack told her, "It isn't networked so the computer spike couldn't deactivate it. We need to take out the main command centre first to take out the turret. We were supposed to do that on the way to rescue him but it appears that you decided to take matters into your own hands."

"I thought it would save time." Rylee replied.

"Not much and you could have jeopardised the entire mission by doing something without us knowing. Now point us to the command centre and we'll finish what we've started." Flack said.

With most of the guards called away, the corridors of the prison leading to the main command centre were empty but Flack and his men halted when it came to the final corridor and aimed their weapons at the entrance to the command centre.

"Pugh and Pugh head down the corridor and cover that direction." Flack ordered and the twins nodded in unison before they sprinted along the corridor past the sealed door. Then they dropped into kneeling positions and aimed away from the command centre just in case any guards approached from that direction, "McGrew and Grub stay put and watch this way. Keep an eye on the princess and her boyfriend as well. Cuthbert and Dibble, with me."

Flack and the other two men then charged down the corridor to the entrance to the main command centre and positioned themselves either side of the doorway. Flack produced an electronic key identical to the one Rylee had used to get around the prison and held it up, at which point Dibble took a grenade from a pouch and pulled out the pin. Flack then presented the key to the lock and as soon as the door slid upwards Dibble hurled the grenade into the command centre.

The guards inside the command centre did not have the opportunity to realise that they were under attack before the grenade exploded, at which point the three soldiers in the corridor outside burst into the room and started firing.

Most of the guards had been overcome by the grenade and if not already dead were badly injured or incapacitated. However, one of them had been protected from the blast by his console and moments before he was gunned down he was able to activate the prison's public address system.

"Main command is under attack. It's the bounty hunters from the ship on the launchpad. They-" and then a blaster bolt struck him in the neck and he fell dead instantly.

"Okay princess, now we head back to the ship." Flack shouted as he and his men withdrew from the ruined command centre and they began to run back down the corridor, followed by the Pugh twins who also withdrew from their position.

With the prison guards now alerted to the true nature of Flack and his men the group moved quickly, hoping to get back to their ship before any of the guards could catch up with them. However, there was still the matter of the guard in the security check point and the one on the launchpad. The second of these had made his way inside the prison and joined with his comrade in the checkpoint so that they could try and stop Flack and his men together, taking cover behind the control station and pointing their weapons at the door leading to the processing section.

"Open fire!" the guard from the checkpoint yelled as soon as the door slid open again, before anyone had even stepped through it and Flack's men took cover as volleys of bright red energy bolts came through the doorway towards them.

"Looks like they aren't messing around with stun settings." Morton commented.

"They've seen our armour. They probably realise that a stun bolt wouldn't low us down." Flack replied.

"Why not just use another grenade?" Rylee asked.

"Because if it collapses the floor in there then getting out to the landing pad is going to get much more

complicated princess.” Flack replied, “We need to do this the daring way. I’ll lay down cover.” Flack then pointed his rifle through the open doorway and fired it on fully automatic, sending a stream of energy blasts back towards the guards. Standing up he kept his rifle level so that he fired over the heads of Cuthbert and Grub as they kept low while they advanced through the doorway before they too opened fire on the guards.

One of the two guards risked exposing himself just long enough to fire another shot towards the door and in doing so he was hit by one of the volleys of blaster fire coming back towards him. However, his shot clipped Cuthbert in his leg and he cried out in pain as he collapsed.

“I’ll get him.” McGrew called out and he started to move forwards before Flack stopped him.

“No, stay back. We take out the guard then we’ll get him aboard the ship.” he said.

In the meantime Grub came to a halt and ceased fire, instead taking aim at the guard’s hiding place and waiting for him to reappear. Flack also ceased fire at this point and, no longer under fire, the guard leant around the console to take another shot. This was just what Grub had been waiting for though and the moment he saw the guard he fired his rifle again, the single shot hitting him in the chest.

“Clear!” Grub yelled.

“Let’s move! Someone pick up Cuthbert.” Flack ordered and the group all rushed through the checkpoint, the Pugh twins lifting up Cuthbert between them and carrying him all the way back to the gunship.

“Take off in ten seconds. Everyone hang on to something.” McGrew announced as he sat down in the pilot’s seat.

“Company.” Dibble added as he spotted a group of guards rushing out onto the landing pad just as he was closing the gunship’s rear hatch. However, the guards possessed only personal arms, not the heavy weapons they needed to rapidly disable a starship and when McGrew engaged its shields the gunship became invulnerable to their attacks. Moments later and with blaster bolts still bouncing off its shields the gunship rose up into the air and sped away.

“Well it seems like we’re clear.” Morton said, smiling at Rylee, “Thanks for coming to rescue me. I was picturing spending a long time in that cell.”

“That’s why we needed to come and rescue you.” Rylee replied, “There is one thing we should discuss though Morton.”

“Anything.” Morton said.

“When you grabbed me by the chest in your cell.” Rylee said as she walked right up to him.

“Oh that.” Morton said.

“Yes that.” Rylee said and at that moment she brought her knee up sharply between his legs and Morton collapsed on the spot, “Do it again and my father’s orders are for the damage to be more permanent.” Rylee added.

Alone in her chambers on the space station Rylee felt more comfortable in the clothing and surroundings that she was used to.

“Come in.” she said when the door intercom chimed and the door opened to allow the warrior who commanded the troops used by her family to enter.

“You asked to see me.” he said and Rylee smiled.

“Yes I did. I need your help with something.”

“Of course. What?”

“When I was in the prison I wanted to shoot a guard but I froze at the last moment. If not for Morton then the guard would have probably been able to take his weapon back and I may have been caught. I need to overcome that. I want you to teach me how to fight and teach me how to kill.” Rylee said.

“That should be possible.” the warrior replied.