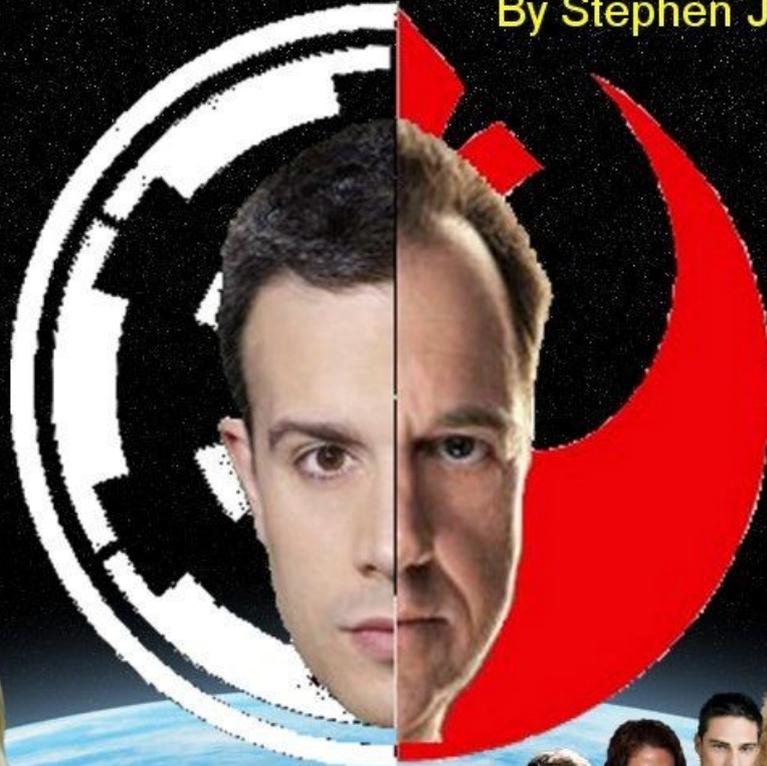


STAR WARS

9-01: Safe Keeping

By Stephen J Dutton



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Civil war turns father against son

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

ONE SUCH GROUP IS LEAD BY THE EXILED NOBLEMAN VORN LARCUS III WHO, WITH THE HELP OF THE SMUGGLER MAGE 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...

SAFE KEEPING

WITH THE DESCENDANTS OF THE FOUNDING FAMILIES IN THE SECTOR GARM LARCUS MUST RACE TO RECOVER AN ANCIENT FAMILY HEIRLOOM BEFORE IT CAN FALL INTO THE WRONG HANDS. MATTERS ARE COMPLICATED THOUGH BY THE FACT THAT THE ITEM IN QUESTION IS NOT EASILY ACCESSIBLE...

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

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1.

"Colonel Larcus, could you please explain what is going on aboard my space station?" General Kain, leader of the Alliance to Restore the Republic in the sector asked when Lieutenant Colonel Vorn Larcus approached him. A break in at Vorn's quarters had led to the death of a fleet trooper and the culprits remained at large. This had coincided with a second break in aboard the *lucrehulk-class Golden Empress* where the quarters of Vorn's daughter Lyssa, the ship's commanding officer, had also been broken into.

"General I'm afraid that my family's history may be catching up with me." Vorn replied.

"Elaborate please colonel." the general said.

"Well it seems that four thousand years ago one of my ancestors brought a Sith pendant to the sector with her. Now a group of people whose families have dedicated themselves to gathering together Sith artefacts in an attempt to gain their power have come looking for it." Vorn explained.

"They collect Sith artefacts? Do we have Imperial agents here?" General Kain asked, obviously concerned about the implications of having Imperial spies at large in his headquarters.

"No general, I don't think so. The information I have is limited but I've been told that these people have been working for thousands of years to try and unlock the secrets of the Sith." Vorn answered.

"And do they have this pendant?"

"No general, I didn't bring it with me when I joined the Alliance but that's something I'd like to discuss with you. I want your permission to go and retrieve it." Vorn said.

"My permission? Where is it exactly?" the general said.

"The Empire will have seized it." Vorn told him, "But they may not have known what it was."

"Won't your son have alerted them to its nature?" General Kain said but Vorn shook his head.

"No, I didn't take the story seriously when my father told me. If I had then I'd have made sure to bring it with me, but I didn't bother to tell my children about it so that means Garm can't have alerted his superiors in the ISB."

"I don't suppose you know what this pendant actually does do you colonel?"

"No sir. But given that it was made by the Sith and people who know more about it than I do are willing to kill for it tells me that it's dangerous."

"Very well Colonel Larcus. Take your team to retrieve the item." General Kain ordered.

"I'll need help locating it. A slicer. Is Lieutenant Pay available?" Vorn asked and the general nodded.

"I'll have him meet you at your ship." he said, "Anything else?"

"No, that's all I can think of general."

"Very well. Carry on Colonel Larcus." General Kain ordered.

The YT-1300 class freighter *Silver Hawk* was docked in the main hangar of the rebel headquarters and its crew as well as the rest of Vorn's field team were busy preparing it for launch when he arrived.

"Well?" Mace Grayle, the ship's owner said when he and his engineer Tobis saw Vorn approaching.

"The general said 'yes'." Vorn replied, "We'll go to Estran, locate where the Empire has stashed the pendant and then retrieve it. How close are we to being able to launch?" and Mace looked at Tobis.

"Oh, err." the engineer said, "The ship is, err, ready."

"Excellent. In that case all we have to do is wait for the one other person that will be coming with us. An old friend."

"Who?" Mace asked just before a familiar voice called out across the hangar.

"Colonel Larcus!" Lieutenant Geran Pay of Alliance Intelligence shouted, waving towards the trio of men standing beneath the *Silver Hawk*. Geran was an expert slicer and had assisted Vorn's team on several occasions when they needed to gain access to secure computer systems.

"Geran." Vorn responded, "Thanks for getting here so quickly."

"I keep a bag of things ready just in case I'm called on to go on a field assignment." Geran replied, smiling, "Frankly I find them quite exciting. One thing though, the general didn't tell me what this mission was about. What are we doing?"

"Looking for some lost jewellery." Vorn said and Geran's face fell.

"No seriously, what do you need me for?" he said, assuming that the comment was a joke.

"Looking for lost jewellery." Mace said, "Although the jewellery in question is cursed and could destroy the entire galaxy if it falls into the wrong hands."

"We have reason to believe that the Empire has a pendant made by the Sith in storage." Vorn explained, "We need to recover it as soon as possible. There is also a third party, or group that appears to be interested in it that must not be allowed to get to it first."

"Just out of curiosity, where did this pendant come from?" Geran asked.

"Oh, it's mine." Vorn told him, "Now come on, we don't have all day."

Accompanied by a pair of disguised mandalorians, Verren Karn watched as the *Silver Hawk* exited the hangar.

"Verren." a voice hissed and he looked around to see his associate Harlen Drud creeping towards him. Like Verren the dark skinned man was accompanied by a mandalorian that was disguised, as they were, as rebel crewmen.

"Harlen, you made it." he said.

"Yes, though it took some doing to find a shuttle that we could stow away on when the ship was supposed to be on lock down. Fortunately they were still operating medical flights, so we arranged for a work crew to be exposed to toxic gas that would require them to be evacuated here for medical help and hopped aboard the medevac ship. What's going on here?"

"Vorn Larcus didn't have the pendant." Verren said.

"Then it must be aboard the *Golden Empress* after all. Stang, I was almost into that safe when we were stopped." Harlen replied.

"No it's not. Larcus left it behind when he defected, I heard him say so himself. Now the Empire has it, probably stashed away in some vault." Verren said and Harlen looked at him seriously.

"If he knows why we came here then his family must have been doing what ours have been doing as well." he said.

"I don't think so." Verren replied, "He only knows that we came for the pendant because he managed to get hold of my datapad. Don't worry though, there's nothing else on there that could lead anyone to any of us. I may not have found the pendant but I did manage to plant a listening device in Larcus's quarters and I overheard everything he had to say. Him and Charity Crassis."

"How? Surely she's been dead for thousands of years." Harlen pointed out.

"Of course she has. But the traitorous bitch has the foresight to record a message for her descendants warning them about us and telling them only to seek help from the Jedi Order, in particular the Udra family." Verren told him and Harlen snorted.

"No danger of that." he said.

"Perhaps not, but as it happens there is someone called Udra in this sector and from the way Vorn's people talked about her I'd say that she's one of the Empire's pet Force users. We're going to have to be careful about her." Verren told him, "The main problem is that Larcus now has a head start on us. You may have noticed that his ship just left, well I think that he's heading to Estran to find that pendant and you can bet that if he does find it he'll make sure that it's put somewhere that we'll never be able to get at it. Got any ideas for how we get back to the others? You managed to get off the *Golden Empress* while it was on lock down after all."

Harlen then looked around the hangar. With the crew of the space station still hunting for them, the *Silver Hawk* had been a special case in being allowed to depart while the other ships remained grounded.

However, as a military base there were a lot of well-armed vessels present in the hangar and this gave Harlen an idea.

"They obviously aren't going to open the doors for us while they're on lock down." he said, grinning, "So I suggest we make them override it." and then he pointed across the hangar to where several UT-60D U-wings were parked. The support gunships were designed to deliver troops to a combat zone and then provide them with fire support from the air and as part of this role they were equipped not only with a hyperdrive to give them interstellar range but also a pair of powerful forward firing laser cannons, "One of those will be our way out." he added.

"But how do we make them open the doors?" Verren asked.

"We create a situation where the only way to solve it is to vent all of the atmosphere into space as rapidly as possible." Harlen answered.

"A fire." one of the mandalorians commented.

"Exactly." Harlen said, nodding, "We start a fire, a nice big one right here in the hangar. Then when the rebels vent the atmosphere we fly right out.

"We can rig some incendiaries." a mandalorian said and Harlen nodded again.

"Do it." he told them, "Verren and I will secure us a ship and get it ready for launch."

The explosion took place among a cluster of TIE fighters that the rebellion used for training purposes. A crude rewiring of the electronics was used to place two electrical contacts close together within the blaster gas system of one of the fighters and the gas feed switched on. Then at a command sent from a mandalorian's comlink there was a simple spark between the contacts that ignited the gas and the fighter blew apart. Thanks to the careful placement of several drums of highly flammable liquid behind the TIE fighters this explosion was magnified into a fireball that expanded to envelope the entire group of captured Imperial starfighters and klaxons started to howl.

"What's happening?" General Kain demanded as alarms also started to sound in the space station's command and control centre.

"Fire in main hangar general." one of the technicians present responded, "Hangar control is reporting evacuation in progress, requesting permission to vent the atmosphere to prevent the fire from spreading." "Do it." General Kain ordered.

"Look." Verren said and he pointed through the cockpit canopy to where the hangar's internal doors were sliding shut and sealing them inside the burning hangar.

"This is it." Harlen responded and he hurriedly began to start up the U-wing's engines.

All of a sudden the outer hangar doors opened with the magnetic field that usually contained the atmosphere deactivated, thus exposing the hangar to the vacuum of space. The difference in pressure between the hangar and the vacuum outside blew all of the air out into space and the flames along with it. Most of the equipment in the hangar, including all of the spacecraft within it were either secured in place or weighed too much for the force of the air evacuating the hangar to drag them out into space as well. This meant that the U-wing gunship that Harlen, Verren and the mandalorians were inside needed its engines to get it moving and Harlen powered up the ship's repulsorlifts and the ship rose up off the deck. Before the rebel flight controllers could react to this, the U-wing accelerated out of the hangar into space. Outside of the space station the U-wing's repulsorlifts became useless and the gunship drifted through space momentarily before Harlen switched over to its ion drive and it sped away from the space station.

It was impossible for this exit to go unnoticed and rebel fighter patrols immediately turned to intercept the fleeing U-wing.

"Attention U-wing," one of the rebel pilots transmitted to the gunship, "your departure is unauthorised. Power down and prepare to be boarded."

"They're catching up with us." Verren commented as he watched the sensor readouts that showed the rebel patrol heading towards them.

"Just a little longer." Harlen responded and then there was an alarm sound from the console.

"They're locking weapons." one of the mandalorians said, "Should we open fire?"

"Our guns are pointing the other way." Verren reminded the mandalorian.

"Any moment now." Harlen added as he watched the navigation computer carefully and then when it displayed a green light he smiled, "Now!" he exclaimed and the stars outside the U-wing's cockpit canopy blurred into the lights of hyperspace as the ship made the jump to faster than light travel, rapidly leaving the rebel headquarters behind.

Verren breathed a sigh of relief as he looked at the sensor readouts again.

"No signs of pursuit. We made it." he said.

2.

Since the death of Emperor Palpatine the resources of the Empire had become stretched more thinly than they had been at any time since the end of the Clone Wars but as the sector capital the planet of Estran was still protected by a large number of Imperial warships and when the *Silver Hawk* dropped out of hyperspace no less than four Imperial-class star destroyers were visible patrolling space in close proximity to Estran rather than merely docked at the massive orbiting headquarters of the Imperial Navy's sector group. Fortunately the massive warships had no interest in enforcing customs regulations, leaving that to the many smaller customs vessels also patrolling near Estran and the sheer number of ships arriving at and leaving Estran's space meant that only a handful could be searched.

"Wow." Cass Grayle, Mace's adopted daughter said when she saw the destroyers moving in formation, "Are they expecting trouble dad?"

"If they are then we're not the cause of it for once." Mace replied from beside her, "Now take over. I want you to take us down. You know the beacon to follow."

Cass smiled excitedly. Even before Mace had formally adopted her he had been teaching her to pilot spacecraft and she relished every opportunity to practice her skills. But her face fell when Mace got up to leave.

"Dad, where are you going?" she asked.

"To tell the others that we'll be landing soon." he replied, "Oh and to get a drink as well. So don't make our atmospheric entry too bumpy because I'll make you clean up anything I spill."

When he entered the *Silver Hawk's* lounge area Mace found Vorn sat with a drink in his hand as he read from a datapad while Tobis sat at the far end of the table with his girlfriend Jaysica who also happened to be the demolition and security expert of Vorn's unit and both of these were watching as Geran worked on a portable computer close to them.

"We'll be landing soon." Mace announced and the rebels looked up at him.

"Hold on," Geran said, "who's flying the ship?"

"Cass." Mace replied.

"That kid. Can she even fly straight?" Geran exclaimed and he looked around at the other rebels.

"I may have had my doubts about bringing her along at first but she is shaping up to be a responsible young lady able to take good care of herself." Vorn said.

"Yes but can she actually fly?" Geran said.

"Captain Grayle's been teaching her." Jaysica replied.

"She, err, she's pretty good." Tobis added.

At that moment the former mercenary Tharun Verser entered the lounge from the corridor that led to the *Silver Hawk's* crew cabins and when he saw Mace making himself a drink he came to a halt and looked around.

"Cass is flying isn't she?" he said.

"Yeah, I thought I'd give her a go." Mace replied and Tharun suddenly disappeared again before he reappeared a few moments later, now tightening the strap of a blast helmet under his chin.

"Don't mean to insult anyone captain," he said, "but the kid's landings can be a bit bumpy."

"How much is a bit?" Geran asked nervously as the final member of Vorn's team entered the room. Though she was more than thirty years younger than Vorn, Kara was also his wife in addition to serving as the team's medic and she smiled when she saw Tharun's helmet.

"Cass is flying isn't she?" she said.

"Yes." Mace said as he took a sip from his drink, "But she'll be fine. I'm sure of it."

"You might want to put on the helmet from your vacc suit just in case though lieutenant." Tharun suggested.

"That's okay Tharun." Kara replied as she walked towards Vorn, "I have an alternative means of avoiding turbulence." and then she sat down in Vorn's lap before adding, "It's called getting the boss to hold me really tight." and then she kissed him, "Isn't that right boss?"

"I did vow to protect you." Vorn replied.

"So what are you reading there boss?" Kara asked, glancing at his datapad.

"Oh just some of my father's old journals." Vorn answered, "I wanted to make sure that there weren't any more dangerous family secrets that I discounted because I thought they were a joke." then he looked across the table to Geran, "So how are you getting on with getting us into the Imperial network?" he asked.

"Obviously I won't know for certain until I can log in and try this out but I think I've got a tool that will let us sort through the logs of seized goods."

"I want a drink before we land." Jaysica said all of a sudden and she got up and walked across the lounge to where Mace and Tharun both stood beside the caf maker.

"Careful there little lady." Tharun commented.

"I know what I'm doing." Jaysica replied, glaring at him and then the ship shuddered slightly.

"Sorry about that everyone." Cass's voice announced over the intercom, "We just hit an air pocket. I'm steering us around the ones up ahead though so there's no need to worry."

"See?" Jaysica commented as she removed her drink from the caf maker, "I didn't spill a drop."

Turning back towards the table Jaysica lifted her drink towards her mouth but before she could get it to her lips she suddenly got the toe of one foot caught behind her other ankle and she tripped. Letting go of the cup of hot caf as she reached out to break her fall, the steaming hot beverage flew through the air towards the table where it landed right on the keyboard of Geran's computer and splashed him with hot caf.

"Yeow!" he cried out as he jumped out of his chair while sparks flew from his computer.

"Oh nice work klutz." Kara said, "Now the computer we need is fried."

"Never mind the computer being fried, it feels like I'm being boiled alive." Geran said.

"It was an accident." Jaysica said.

"Yes, I'm sure it was." Vorn replied, "Geran go and get cleaned up. We'll see what damage has been done to your computer when you get back."

"We're on final approach." Cass's voice then announced and Vorn slid Kara off his lap.

"Okay this is it." he said as he got to his feet, "Everyone gear up." and then he looked at Tharun and the blast helmet he was wearing before he added, "And try to look inconspicuous."

When the U-wing emerged from hyperspace it was still outside the limits of any solar system. The U-wing was not alone this far into interstellar space though and a large transport ship was waiting for them.

"Harlen Drud calling Narthis One." Harlen transmitted, knowing that there was no-one close enough to listen in on the conversation, "I am on approach in a stolen U-wing. Requesting permission to dock."

"Permission granted sir." a voice from the larger vessel responded, "The others are waiting for you."

The transport lacked an internal hangar so Harlen had to dock the U-wing at an external port. Then as soon as he and Verren stepped through the air lock they made their way to a meeting room in the heart of the ship that was decorated in a luxurious manner. In here they found four other people waiting for them, one woman and three men, one of whom was obviously a mandalorian from the armour he wore. From their near identical appearance it was obvious that the other two men were closely related to one another

"So where is the pendant?" the woman asked.

"I don't have it on me Asha." Verren replied as he and Harlen sat down, "But we know what happened to it."

"Don't hold back." one of the brothers said.

"Yes, do tell." the other added.

"The Empire has it." Harlen said the faces of Asha and the two brothers fell while the mandalorian remained as emotionless as before.

"Don't worry." Verren reassured them, "The pendant was among Vorn Larcus's belongings that were seized by the Empire when he defected to the rebellion. There's no indication that they knew what it was. Stang, even Vorn didn't know what it was."

"At least until he got hold of your datapad." Harlen pointed out.

"The Alliance has your datapad?" one of the brothers said.

"What exactly do they have?" the other added.

"Den, Karlo," Verren replied, addressing the brothers by name, "I'm not stupid enough to take a datapad with anything compromising on it out into the galaxy. They have a picture of the pendant and that's it."

"It's still more than they had before." Den said.

"Do they appreciate it's significance?" Karlo added.

"Charity Crassis left a message for her family warning them to keep it safe." Verren said, "She also told them to seek out the Udra family if we came looking for it."

"Something that is no longer an issue." Asha said, "The jedi are no more. Their fire is gone from the galaxy."

"We hope." Harlen said, "An Udra is in the sector. She's an Imperial agent."

"Then she's not a problem." Karlo said.

"No she's not." Den agreed, "Rebels would never approach an Imperial agent for help."

"We still need to find out where the pendant is being kept." Den said.

"And come up with a way of retrieving it." Karlo added and Asha smiled.

"I think that the answer to both of these challenges is the same." she said, "We will use the one resource our families have never been short of. Money."

"I don't think that the pendant is for sale." Verren said.

"Maybe not." Asha replied, "But people are, especially in these troubled times. We will find someone who we can be sure has access to the information we seek and offer them a bribe too big to turn down. A million credits will open a lot of doors to us."

"And who puts up this million?" Harlen asked.

"I will pay it all even if none of the rest of you are willing to chip in." Asha answered."

"Don't worry Asha, I'll cover a share as well." Verren said, glancing at Harlen.

"Then it's agreed." Karlo said.

"We pay of an Imperial officer in exchange for the pendant." Den said. Then he looked at his brother and added, "I'm sure that my brother will agree that the Shill family will also contribute towards this endeavour equally."

"Of course." Karlo replied.

Asha then looked at the mandalorian.

"And you Mister Mott, what do you think?" she asked.

"You'll get my share too." he said.

"I meant do you have any opinion on the idea." Asha said.

"Does it involve killing anyone?" Mott asked in reply.

"Only if we decide to try getting our money back I expect." Karlo said.

"Then talk to me when it does." Mott answered.

3.

The antenna array was located towards the edge of the landing field and beyond it the Imperial air base was clearly visible. Vorn and his team of rebels stayed low, not wanting to be seen by any of the security droids and sentries that patrolled the base perimeter to deter intruders while Geran set up a compact antenna of his own.

"So that thing will let him patch into the Imperial network?" Mace asked Tobis.

"Err, well. It should. Err, assuming that he can spoof the wireless system into thinking that he is, err, using a remote Imperial terminal." Tobis answered.

"And also assuming that the equipment wasn't damaged by being saturated with caf." Geran added.

"I've already told you that was an accident." Jaysica said, "Cass flew us through that turbulence."

"Hey, I wasn't the one hurling hot caf around." Cass protested.

"We were through the kriffing turbulence." Kara exclaimed.

"Quiet!" Tharun hissed.

"Thank you sergeant." Vorn added.

"Patrol." Tharun said as he watched a unit of four stormtroopers accompanied by a hovering security droid walking just inside the perimeter fence.

Do they know we're here?" Cass asked nervously.

"I've not even tried slicing into their antenna yet." Geran replied.

"Possibly." Tharun added, "We may appear on some of their sensors but we're a good fifty or sixty metres outside their perimeter so as long as we don't do anything stupid like fire off a concussion missile launcher or try to get over the fence they'll ignore us."

"Oh, err, they may also detect the slicing attempt." Tobis pointed out and Geran frowned.

"Seriously?" he said, "You think I'm that careless?"

"No he just doesn't want to admit that his girlfriend may have broken your computer." Kara said.

"I don't see why we couldn't have had Harvey do this." Jaysica commented, looking at the portable computer and antenna that Geran had brought along.

"Because that would mean us having to break into the base to find a port for an astromech droid to plug into. This way we can do the job from out here" Vorn replied, "There'll be plenty for the droids to do when we get back to the *Silver Hawk*."

"Besides," Geran added, "I'm better than any droid."

"Patrol's heading away now." Tharun said.

"I guess they weren't interested in us then." Mace said.

"Lieutenant are you ready yet?" Vorn asked and he looked at Geran.

"Just about. Now let's see how up to date the Empire's computer security is." Geran replied and he jabbed at his computer's keyboard. The slicer then just stared at the screen of his computer, watching as streams of numbers moved up it.

"Well?" Vorn asked.

"I'm in." Geran replied, "Now I just need to convince the system that I'm supposed to be." and he began to type, "There!" he suddenly exclaimed, "Now the Empire thinks we're one of those destroyers in orbit. That should make things much easier."

"How?" Cass asked.

"Because the amount of data we need to sort through is massive." Geran replied, "We're not just talking about cloning a datapad here, the Empire has hundreds of storehouses of seized items on this continent alone. What I've done is spoof their network into thinking that one of the destroyers has requested a fully directory and manifest of them all so now the mainframe in the capital will be sending that information here where that antenna over there thinks that it's sending it all up to the waiting destroyer."

"When in fact it's going to the *Silver Hawk*." Mace interrupted.

"Precisely." Geran said.

"Which reminds me." Vorn said as he took out his comlink and activated the device, "Jeeves are you there?" he transmitted.

"Oh yes Lieutenant Colonel Larcus sir." the voice of his protocol droid responded, "I have been waiting most anxiously for your signal. Harvey indicates that he has fixed the damage done to the *Silver Hawk*'s landing gear when young Miss Cass buckled it on landing." and Cass winced when this was mentioned.

"Jeeves you should be receiving a data stream any moment now. I need you to tell Harvey to search through it. He has the details of what we're looking for. Ideally I'd like to know where it is by the time we get back to the ship."

"Of course sir. I shall pass on your instructions." Jeeves replied.

"Good. Vorn out." Vorn said and then he shut off the comlink and looked at Geran, "How are we doing?" he asked.

"The transfer has started. From the file size I estimate it should take about another three minutes." Geran told him.

"This is too easy." Tharun said, "Can you really get into the Imperial network that easily?"

"I can yes." Geran replied, "Of course the advantage is that we're not asking for anything especially restricted. This sort of stuff is passed around between all sorts of departments." then his face fell, "Uh-oh." he added.

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

"What's happening? Isn't the program working?" Jaysica asked.

"It's working alright." Geran said, "But it's working too well. The entire network thinks that your ship is one of the orbiting star destroyers. The problem is that someone is trying to send it orders and those orders are now being sent to the *Silver Hawk* instead."

"But won't that mean we'll get copies of the orders for a star destroyer? That's good isn't it?" Jaysica said.

"Oh, err, no." Tobis said, "We, err, we won't get copies. We'll get the only copy. The star destroyer won't get anything."

"And the Empire will know that their transmission is not going up to the star destroyer." Mace added.

"Signal's gone!" Geran snapped and he hurriedly began to pick up his equipment.

"Dad, what's going on?" Cass said.

"The Empire broke the link. They'll be trying to find out how we got in." Mace told her.

"Which means we need to be somewhere else. Quick." Tharun added.

"What do you know about Lord Vorn Larcus?" Asha asked the Imperial officer who now sat at the end of the table in a private room in a dingy cantina. This particular establishment had a reputation as somewhere that Imperial personnel came for entertainment that was not always strictly legal and its proprietor was known to be active in many criminal enterprises. Either side of Asha were the other heads of the so-called Founding Families and all of them stared intently at the man in the military uniform who snorted when asked the question.

"Traitor. Terrorist. Seditious." he answered and the people at the other end of the table exchanged looks and smiled at one another.

"There is another aspect of Lord Larcus you may not be aware of captain." Asha said, "He is also a thief. I'm not talking about his habit of stealing from the Empire, I'm saying that he is a common thief who has stolen from my family. Specifically he took this item of great sentimental value." and then she triggered a holo projector that created an image of the pendant the Families were hunting above the centre of the table.

"All this is about a necklace?" the captain said.

"A necklace that has been in my family for five thousand years captain." Asha said, "Vorn Larcus stole this from us shortly before he deserted to join the rebellion."

"Then you're probably not getting it back. The rebels will have melted it down for its metal content and precious stones." the officer said.

"On the contrary," Den said, "we don't think the rebels ever had it."

"We think the Empire has it." Karlo added.

"And why would you think that?" the officer asked.

"There was a tracking device fitting to the pendant." Verren said, "A precaution taken in secret when it was supposedly leant to Vorn Larcus. That confirmed that the object was still here on Estran after Vorn Larcus left. After going to the effort of stealing it he then abandoned it."

"I want your help in locating and retrieving the pendant captain." Asha said.

"It's been four years since Larcus defected. Why now?" the officer responded and Asha smiled at him.

"Circumstances change captain." she said, "Your circumstances for example. How much money do you owe to Odras Balve? Five thousand credits isn't it? We all know that the Empire is collapsing and very soon you may not have a job to provide you with the income you need to keep up your payments."

"On the other hand," Harlen continued as he got to his feet and walked around the table with a case in his hand, "you could find yourself an alternate source of income." and he placed the case on the table right in front of the officer before opening it to reveal a large amount of physical cash, "That's two hundred thousand credits just in case you are wondering." Harlen told the startled officer, "Enough to pay off your debts and buy you passage to any other planet in the galaxy."

"Or buy a ship and go where you want." Verren added.

"Tell me what you need." the Imperial officer said, a smile spreading across his face.

"We need you to locate the facility where the items seized from Vorn Larcus's estate are being stored."

Harlen said, "Then we need you to provide Mister Mott and some of his people access to that facility."

"Mandalorians?" the officer said, looking at the armoured figure standing in the corner behind the seated individuals on the opposite side of the table.

"Yes, mandalorians. Don't worry captain they will only be taking this one item, they aren't about to start looting an entire warehouse." Verren said and the officer shrugged his shoulders.

"Take whatever you want." he said as he closed the case full of cash and pulled it towards him, "I don't care." but then Harlen placed a hand on the case before the officer could pick it up and leave with it.

"When the task is complete captain." he said, "Mister Mott will deliver your payment when you have carried out your end of the bargain."

In another room of the cantina its owner, Odras Balve watched the feed from the hidden surveillance camera in the meeting room.. Upon mention of Vorn Larcus, Odras took more notice and paid careful attention what the beings who had hired the meeting room had to say about the man that Odras had done business with in the past. A career criminal, Odras knew that Vorn was not a thief by any measure. He recalled the way that the man had done his best to stand up for those less fortunate while he had served in Estran's Parliament and this had been a prime motivator behind his being expelled and forced to flee to the Rebel Alliance. Then the group reached the point where they offered their bribe of two hundred thousand credits to the Imperial officer and Odras snarled. The officer had been a customer of his for several years and the relationship had been a profitable one for Odras. However, just as the heads of the Founding Families had pointed out to the officer their payment would allow him to pay off his entire debt and no longer amass the further interest intended to keep him debt for as long as possible and make more money for Odras. Alternatively and much more likely as Odras saw it, the officer could simply use the money to leave Estran and the sector entirely, thus escaping without even paying off his debt to Odras as it stood at present.

"Interesting." Odras said to the wookiee bodyguard standing behind him, "These people think that they can take away my customers? I think I ought to do something about this."

The wookiee then growled and Odras smiled.

"No, killing them all may be gratifying in the short term but I'd rather just teach them that throwing massive amounts of cash around isn't necessarily going to get them what they want." Odras replied and then he turned to the computer terminal built into his desk and smiled, "Ah yes, the *Silver Hawk* is here on Estran. I think I ought to have a word with our good friend Mace."

4.

Returning to the *Silver Hawk*, the rebels hurried up the freighter's access ramp and found a golden coloured protocol droid waiting for them in the lounge.

"Lieutenant Colonel Larcus sir, thank the maker that you are back." Jeeves said, "I was so concerned when the feed was so abruptly terminated."

"The Empire would have got a fix on our location if we hadn't." Geran commented.

"Jeeves, has Harvey been searching the data we were able to transfer?" Vorn asked.

"Oh yes sir, but I'm afraid that he has been unable to locate the pendant you are seeking." Jeeves replied and it was at that point that Tobis' R5 astromech droid rolled into the lounge from the direction of the ship's workshop and let out a rude sounding noise, "Really Harvey, there is no need to put it that way. Besides you can't be certain that you would have been able to find the pendant if you were able to plug into the Imperial network yourself."

"So we don't have the data we need and the method planned for obtaining it has been compromised." Kara said as she sat down, "So what's our next plan of action boss?"

"Frankly I don't know." Vorn said, "We don't know exactly how much these Founding Families know about the pendant but I'm guessing that if they've managed to evade arrest by the Republic and the Empire for four thousand years then they're smart enough to be able to figure out that I don't have what they're looking for and it's only a small leap for them to realise what happened to it."

"They may already have guessed." a voice said from the direction of the ship's access ramp and the rebels spun around to see Odras Balve and his bodyguard standing there.

"Balve, what the kriff are you doing on my ship?" Mace demanded, his hand resting on his blaster.

"Your ship Mace? The *Silver Hawk* is technically part of your collateral to me for what you owe. Unless you're offering me something else to settle it." Odras said and he glanced in the direction of the female rebels.

"What are you doing here Balve?" Mace said, "Normally I'd expect you to send some of your goons."

"I just thought I'd drop by for a mug of caf." Odras said as he sat down beside Cass and smiled at her, "You were a waitress weren't you?" he added.

"Cass get away from him." Mace said.

"You don't need to tell me twice." his daughter responded as she slid around the table to get away from Odras.

"I'll get you a caf." Kara said, getting up and heading for the kitchen unit.

"Just tell us why you're really here Balve." Mace said.

"Actually I'm here with information about some people who have an interest in Lord Larcus." Odras said, looking at Vorn.

"Lord Torr isn't making another attempt to have me arrested is he?" Vorn asked.

"No, these are people I've never met before. I don't think that they're local but from what I've found out they have a very poor opinion of you." Odras told him.

"I hope you've not been torturing people with your mind probe." Vorn said.

"No, no not the mind probe." Odras reassured him, "This was done with good honest eavesdropping. It seems that these people are accusing you of having stolen a pendant from them. They say it was fitted with a tracking device that allowed them to determine that the Empire confiscated it along with everything else you left behind when you decided to join the rebellion." then he smiled as Kara set a mug of caf down in front of him.

"Enjoy it." she said, smiling back as she stared at the crime lord, "I dare you."

"I think I'll just let it cool down a bit first." he said, sliding the mug away from him across the table. Then he looked back at Vorn, "As I was saying, these people know that the Empire has the pendant and are making arrangements to take it from storage."

"What sort of arrangements?" Mace asked.

"Bribing an Imperial officer. An army captain by the name of Tennell who until now has been a good and loyal customer of mine." Odras said.

"You mean he owes you a lot of money." Kara said.

"Not as much as your friend Mace does." Odras replied, "But now it looks like he intends for us to part ways and I want to make sure that he understands that this is not something I take lightly." Odras then took a datapad from his jacket and placed it on the table, "This gives you everything you need to know about Captain Tennell." he said, "I don't know why this pendant is so important to so many people but I'm sure that you're resourceful enough to make sure that he doesn't get it to your rivals without bringing your trouble to my door. Now I must be going so I will bid you a good evening." and Odras then got up from the couch and headed for the access ramp, his bodyguard following him from the ship.

"We need to start locking that door behind us." Mace said, looking at Vorn.

"Oh I agree." he said, nodding.

"Nerf herder didn't even drink his caf." Kara said before she picked up the mug and took a drink herself.

"Eww Kara!" Jaysica exclaimed, "What about whatever you put in it?"

"It's just caf." Kara replied, "I didn't know that he wouldn't order someone other than you take a drink first. I couldn't risk poisoning the boss or Cass."

Meanwhile Geran picked up the datapad Odras had left for them and activated the device.

"There's a lot on here." he said, "Full name, serial number, home address. Financial details. Looks like your friend built up a pretty detailed database on his customer."

"Yeah, Odras Balve doesn't like to leave things half done." Mace said, "But he's not my friend. He's no-one's friend but himself."

"That may be, but he's come through for us before and he may have done so again." Vorn said, "Though I find it highly suspicious that he did so without being asked and without asking for payment. Now perhaps we should focus our attention on this Captain Tennell and figure out a way of getting to the pendant before he can give it to the Founding Families."

Captain Tennell turned when he heard a sudden 'crash' to see a pair of technicians now arguing with a young woman in an Imperial uniform who was protesting her innocence at having knocked over their tool cart.

Deciding that this disturbance was nothing to do with him, Captain Tennell continued on his way towards his duty station and immediately came close to tripping over a mouse droid himself.

"Stang!" he exclaimed as the tiny machine let out a shrill cry of alarm, "Worthless droids." and then he stepped over the droid and continued to walk down the corridor, not noticing that the mouse droid had now turned around and was following after him.

"That's him." Geran said when the footage being transmitted by the modified mouse droid was received back at the *Silver Hawk*.

"Did that datapad include detailed pictures of his ass then?" Tharun commented as he looked at the computer screen and saw the image of Captain Tennell from behind.

"We saw his face a few seconds ago." Cass replied from beside Geran before curling her lip, "Trust me this is his good side."

"So the klutz actually managed to get Penny into position then?" Kara asked from across the room and Geran nodded.

"Yes, her mouse droid is following the captain now." he said.

"Are you certain that he won't notice he's being followed?" Cass said.

"By a mouse droid? No chance. Trust me kid, you could move a regiment's worth of equipment past sentries provided it was all being carried by mouse droids. No one cares what they do." Tharun said and then he looked at Kara, "Right lieutenant?" he asked, "That was how Tobis came up with his plan to capture that cruiser you, he and Jaysica were being held prisoner on wasn't it? Remember, you ended up in a-

"I order you never to mention that again sergeant." Kara interrupted and Tharun saluted her.

"Yes mom." he said and Kara scowled at him.

"Colonel Larcus." Geran then called out and Vorn came out of his cabin.

"What's happening?" he asked.

"Tobis and Jaysica delivered the droid and now she's trailing Captain Tennell." Geran told him, "Assuming that the information we got from Odras Balve is accurate then he'll be at his desk any minute now. Ah, here we go. He's there."

Captain Tennell sat down at his desk in the large open plan work area where several data processing officers worked and activated his computer. Ordinarily he would begin a work shift by checking his messages for any urgent requests or instructions from his superiors, but this was not an ordinary shift at all. If all went well then it would be his last one.

Looking at his datapad, the captain called up the inventory of seized goods and input the information that the Founding Families had given him. Though he had a good description of the item they were looking for the inventory was not as detailed and so the key search detail was the name of the individual they had been taken from, Vorn Larcus.

As it happened the Imperial government on Estran had taken steps to seize a lot of property from the former Lord Vorn Larcus following his defection. Strangely the database listed a large number of items that had been left in place at the Larcus home. These appeared to be furnishings, leaving the still sealed house perfectly liveable as far as Captain Tennell could tell the exception had been granted at the request of the local government. He smiled at this, guessing that some local official had seen the opportunity to make use of Vorn Larcus's home while he was not there. There was no mention of any jewellery being left in place however, so Captain Tennell turned his attention to the property that had been removed instead. He found

that there had been property seized from several different locations including a number of private safe deposit boxes held in bank vaults and this opened up the possibility that this could have been distributed between different Imperial storage locations. However, fortune was with him and according to the records everything seized from the Larcus estate had been transferred to just one facility that was located on the fringes of the capital.

The captain copied the details of the seized goods log to his datapad and then logged out of the database. Without bothering to turn off his computer he then got to his feet and turned towards the exit. Once again he came close to tripping over a mouse droid and he went to kick it but before his foot could make contact with the machine it squealed and rolled away.

"Something wrong?" the officer at the adjacent desk asked.

"No." Captain Tennell replied, "It's just that that's the second time today I've almost tripped over a mouse droid."

"Was it the same one? It could be following you." the other officer said, "I've heard it said that the ISB uses them to spy on people."

"The ISB has no jurisdiction over the army." Captain Tennell said before he suddenly started to wonder whether the droid had been spying on him while he was accessing the seized property database. If the Founding Families had bribed someone else in the building then perhaps they were already being told where the property seized from Vorn Larcus had been taken.

"Hey!" the other officer yelled as Captain Tennell broke into a sudden run, "Where are you going?"

"Refresher. Emergency." Captain Tennell responded as he was leaving the room.

In truth Captain Tennell was heading for the building's armoury. As a support officer he did not normally carry a blaster but he like any other officer was entitled to draw one for personal protection when leaving the building and all he had to do was hand over his identification and sign for the weapon while one of the armoury droids retrieved a sidearm for him from the stocks held. In this case the weapon was an SE-14 blaster pistol and two power packs. Not as common as the ubiquitous DH-17, the SE-14 at least had the advantage of being slightly smaller and lighter and Captain Tennell checked the weapon before attaching the holster to his belt.

"How long will you require this weapon for?" the droid asked. The question was a mere formality but Captain Tennell was still somewhat nervous about answering it.

"By shift end." he said, glancing at the wall mounted chronometer. The statement was a lie of course, Captain Tennell had no intention of ever coming back to the building to return the blaster but by the time that it was logged as having been stolen he would be a sector away picking out a space yacht that would take him wherever he wanted to go.

"Confirmed." the droid said, "The weapon will be logged as overdue at nineteen hundred hours standard."

Both wearing Imperial uniforms, Jaysica and Tobis waited in the building's canteen while Jaysica's mouse droid Penny trailed Captain Tennell. Tobis had his datapad in his lap and the same feed that was being sent to the *Silver Hawk* was also being picked up on this device.

"Oh, err, he's going." Tobis said suddenly when he saw the captain heading back in the direction of the parking lot.

"Already?" Jaysica said as she held a spoonful of ice cream close to her mouth, "But I'm not finished."

"Oh, err, I think the colonel will want us back." Tobis replied and Jaysica frowned.

"Oh very well." she said as Tobis held out his hand to help her to her feet.

Knowing that Penny would be following Captain Tennell to the parking lot the two rebels also made this their destination so that they could collect the tiny droid. This involved taking a turbolift down to the lower levels of the building and when the turbolift doors slid open they were surprised to find that Captain Tennell was also taking this particular turbolift car down to the parking lot.

"Well?" he snapped as the two rebels stared at him, "Are you getting in or not? I'm in a hurry."

"What, oh, err." Tobis stammered

"Of course we are." Jaysica said and she shoved Tobis forwards into the turbolift. However, she used too much force and Tobis stumbled into Captain Tennell.

"Watch what you're doing!" he yelled and then there was a chirping sound from the corner. Looking down Jaysica saw Penny tucked away in the corner where the little droid would not be noticed and she smiled at the machine, "Kriffing mouse droid's been following me around all day." the captain commented as the turbolift doors slid shut. Then he noticed the uniforms worn by the rebels and addressed Tobis directly, "You're from maintenance, when are you going to sort these droids out?"

"Err." Tobis responded, uncertain of what to say.

"Oh never mind." Captain Tennell said, "After today it doesn't matter to me."

The turbolift soon reached the parking lot and Captain Tennell exited.

"Should we go after him Tobis?" Jaysica asked, "Perhaps we could stop him before he gets the information to those people after the colonel."

“Err, I'm not sure we'd get him out of here.” Tobis replied, “Look.” and he looked towards the vehicle exit from the parking lot where the gate was guarded by stormtroopers who had just stopped a vehicle that was in the process of leaving and ordered its occupant to open the trunk for inspection.

“In that case we should be getting back to the ship.” Jaysica said and she looked down at her droid, “Come on Penny, we're finished here, you've done your job perfectly.” and the droid chirped in response.

5.

The stormtroopers on guard in the parking lot were there to prevent equipment from being stolen, not to check on the contents of electronic storage devices and so they did not detain Captain Tennell for more than a few moments while they looked in the back of his speeder.

"Move along. Move along." was all one of them said as he was cleared to go and the barrier in front of him rose to allow him to drive out into the street.

Still concerned that his supposed benefactors may already be on their way to the storage facility Captain Tennell decided not to return home to pack or even contact them before heading there himself. Not wishing to attract any unwarranted attention from local law enforcement he drove through the city cautiously rather than risk having his speeder flagged by the traffic surveillance system for violating the maximum speed limits. Then when the storage facility finally came into view he pulled his speeder over to the side of the road and got out for a better look.. The building was intended for both short and long term storage of property that was not particularly dangerous, therefore security was not as tight as it was on a military base where all manner of destructive ordnance was kept.

This was not to say that the facility was totally unprotected though and Captain Tennell saw a security droid marching around the inside of the fence. The captain smiled when he saw this, knowing that the droid would not be moving in such a mundane manner if there had already been a security breach and he reached back into his speeder with one hand to where a portable communicator sat on the dashboard while the other took out his datapad and called up the contact details he had been given for Asha Fayl.

"Ah captain, you have good news for me I take it." Asha's voice said as soon as Captain Tennell entered the details into his communicator.

"Did you think otherwise?" he replied.

"Of course not. If we did not have every faith in your ability then we would not have hired you. Now where is my pendant?"

"There's storage facility located in the west district just outside the capital." Captain Tennell told her, "I'm there right now.

"Do you have my pendant?" Asha asked, wondering whether the captain had already been inside the facility.

"No, I'm not stepping foot inside that place until your people get here with my money. Until then your precious pendant stays right where it is."

"They are on their way now captain." Asha told him, "They ought to be with you within the hour and then you will get what you have earned." and then the channel went silent as she deactivated her own communicator.

All wearing Imperial uniforms and travelling in two rented speeders Vorn and his team made their own way towards the storage facility.

"So what can you tell us about this place?" Vorn asked Geran as they drove.

"Intelligence hasn't bothered with it much." Geran replied, "It's not been used to store anything that's interested the Alliance before now. There are believed to be some contraband goods inside but we're talking about narcotics waiting to be destroyed or censored entertainment, nothing of military value. Most of it is just the private possessions of people like you though, those who have crossed the Empire and had everything taken."

"So no point in looting the place then?" Kara said and Geran shook his head.

"No, I'd advise that we just get in, find the pendant and then get out again as quickly as we can." he said,

"There are a few security droids but nothing special. Our fake IDs will get us through the doors easily."

"Whoa!" Mace exclaimed as he braked suddenly when the speeder holding the other four rebels came to an abrupt halt in front of theirs and Vorn took out his comlink.

"What's wrong?" he transmitted.

"Sorry about that colonel." Tharun responded, "But Captain Tennell is right ahead of us."

Vorn looked out of the speeder and saw a solitary uniformed figure standing by the side of the road next to another speeder and he smiled.

"Okay this is our opportunity." he said, "With any luck the Founding Families haven't got here as well. We'll impersonate Imperial personnel and arrest this Captain Tennell before they get here."

"Got it colonel. But what about afterwards?" Tharun asked.

"We'll take him back to headquarters with us. He's had inside access to the Imperial computer network so he may have useful intelligence." Vorn answered, glancing at Geran, "Okay, there's a chance that he might recognise me so Mace will carry out the supposed arrest and Tharun, Tobis and Cass will back him up. Everyone else be ready to move if things go wrong."

Mace then got out of the speeder and Kara climbed into the driver's seat instead, ready to set off at a

moment's notice. At the same time Tharun, Tobis and Cass got out of the other speeder. Of the four only Tharun and Tobis carried blasters openly, their having standard issue military models while Mace and Cass kept theirs out of sight tucked into their belts behind them as they all walked towards Captain Tennell. The captain noticed the four rebels walking down the otherwise empty street and frowned, certain that one of them was familiar. Then he remembered having seen Tobis in the turbolift and he knew that something was wrong. Guessing that the four were from a security unit that had been monitoring him while he had been accessing the seized property database and were now acting to take him into custody, Tennell reached for his blaster.

"Don't do it!" Mace called out as he waved at Cass to duck while Tharun and Tobis both drew their sidearms. However, the captain was not dissuaded from his chosen course of action and he took aim at Mace.

Tharun was quicker on the draw though and a bright red blaster bolt flew past Captain Tennell's head close enough that the heat made him gasp in pain and dive out of the way rather than return fire.

"Move!" Mace snapped as he reached behind his back and produced his DH-44 heavy blaster pistol while Cass drew her sporting model.

At the same time Vorn and the other rebels leapt out of their speeders with blasters in their hands. Unlike the four rebels who had approached the Imperial captain, those waiting in the speeders had no need to look like ordinary members of the Imperial military and so they were still armed with an assortment of blaster rifles and carbines rather than pistols. Vorn and the other team members pointed their weapons down the street towards Captain Tennell as he scrambled behind his speeder for cover while Geran ran across the street towards the main gate of the storage facility.

"Lieutenant Geran. Imperial Navy." he announced to the security droid that was now attempting to process what was occurring outside the gates. No-one had presented any identification to the droid yet and since everyone involved was wearing a military uniform it was unable to single out any targets. However, now that Geran was identifying himself as an officer in the Imperial Navy and his credentials appeared to be valid the droid tagged the other rebels as friendly targets. The machine did not open fire on Captain Tennell yet, however. The fighting remained outside the fence surrounding the storage facility and so the droid's programming did not yet allow it to take any action beyond standing ready to protect the facility it was guarding.

"Delete records and return to your duties." Geran ordered and the droid lowered its weapons just moments before it exploded.

Geran threw himself to the ground as an airspeeder descended overhead and then half a dozen armoured figures leapt out using rocket packs to control their descent.

"Mandalorians!" Vorn as he turned his rifle towards them and unleashed a burst that shot one of them out of the sky.

Of the remaining five mandalorians three landed at the end of the street behind the rebels' speeders and opened fire on them while the other two shot through the air towards Captain Tennell. As they flew over Mace's team these two mandalorians unleashed bursts of fire from their own rifles that forced the rebels to scatter.

"Dad, what's happening?" Cass exclaimed as she took cover in a doorway.

"It's a trap." Mace replied, "While we were focused on Tennell these guys got the drop on us."

The two mandalorians then landed either side of Captain Tennell and each grabbed one of his arms before they took off again and carried him over the fence surrounding the storage facility. This immediately prompted the facility's security droids to begin to close in on the mandalorians and one came walking around a corner, aiming its blaster at the armoured figures. The mandalorians were ready for this though and the droid walked into a storm of blaster bolts that blew it apart while the mandalorians pulled Captain Tennell towards the entrance to the storage facility.

In the street behind them Tharun made a dash for the speeder he had driven here while Vorn's team continued to exchange fire with the mandalorians at the end of the street. From inside the speeder Tharun took his own blaster rifle, a heavy model Blastech A-280 that was fitted with an underslung grenade launcher and he aimed this skywards before launching an explosive projectile at the speeder that had just delivered the mandalorians.

Tharun's aim was good and the grenade flew in through the hatchway that had been left open in anticipation of the mandalorians returning. The grenade bounced off the ceiling inside the speeder before landing on the floor of the cockpit and the pilot looked down at it.

"Oh kriff." he said right before the grenade went off and the entire front section of the craft exploded.

Tharun then turned his weapon on the mandalorians and a rapid burst of fire sent one of them sprawling across the road. Before he could move onto the next mandalorian though, the two remaining warriors at the end of the street both turned their attention to him and he was forced to dive behind the speeder as both fired at him.

"Kara! Take the one on the left!" Vorn yelled to his wife as he took advantage of the mandalorians' change in focus.

"On it boss." she replied and the pair of them opened fire simultaneously, Vorn's attack sent a blaster bolt right through the faceplate of his chosen target whereas Kara put a shot into the centre of the chest plate of hers. However, this mandalorian survived, protected by his armour and he triggered his rocket pack to send him shooting up into the air.

Travelling in an arc, the mandalorian passed over the rebels by the speeders and dropped a concussion grenade towards them.

"Fire in the hole!" Tharun shouted as he saw the object fall and guessed what it was.

Throwing themselves away from the grenade, the rebels took cover before it detonated with a loud 'boom!' This gave the flying mandalorian the opportunity to land between the two groups and he unleashed a jet of flame from his arm-mounted flame thrower towards Tobis, forcing him to retreat behind the large waste container he was using for cover. Then the mandalorian turned towards Cass and pointed his flame thrower towards her. However, before he could fire a blaster bolt struck his rocket pack and the warrior was turned into a human torch as the unused fuel inside ignited uncontrollably.

"Cass get away from there." Mace shouted as he fired again at the burning mercenary and Cass ran from the doorway. She fired her sporting pistol at the mandalorian as she ran but the lightweight weapon was unable to penetrate his armour even at close range.

Still burning, the mandalorian began to tear at his armour and he ripped pieces of it off and threw them aside as he tried to get rid of everything that was on fire. But the rebels were not done yet and they all fired at the mandalorian while he was distracted by the flames engulfing him. The mercenary staggered as he was hit multiple times before he fell to the ground and there was sudden silence in the street.

"Is it over?" Geran called out from the gatehouse of the storage facility.

"Yes. Thanks for all the help by the way." Kara said sarcastically.

"Well what do you expect?" Geran responded, "I'm an intelligence officer, not a field agent like you."

"So how about you use that intelligence to tell us where Tennell and those other two mandos went?" Mace said as he looked around and saw no sign of them.

6.

Inside the storage facility the building was divided up into sections by cages piled high with seized goods. Captain Tennell considered how interesting it would have been to be able to spend some time going through some of these cages and see if they contained anything he wanted. However, with rebels fighting mandalorians outside he knew that time was of the essence and finding the pendant was all that mattered now.

"We're looking for storage cage trill herf xesh one-one-three-eight." he told the mandalorians and then he came to a halt, "Here it is." he called out and he used his code cylinder to open the cage.

Inside the cage were numerous cases of items that had belonged to Vorn before the Empire confiscated them and stored them in this facility. Each case was individually labelled and Captain Tennell was able to use the information he had downloaded to find the case that had come from a bank safe deposit box.

"I think it's this one." he said and one of the mandalorians stepped forwards, removing his helmet to reveal the face of Mister Mott.

"Let me see." he said before snatching Captain Tennell's code cylinder from him and using it to open the case. Sure enough inside the case he found the pendant that Charity Crassis had removed from a Sith vault four thousand years earlier and he plucked it out and stuffed it into a pouch on his belt, "Let's go." he told the other mandalorian as he put his helmet back on.

"Wait, what about me? There are security agents right outside." Captain Tennell said.

"Those are not Imperial agents." Mott told him, "They are rebels. Now come with us."

Mott and the other mandalorian pulled Captain Tennell from the cage and gripped him by his arms once again. He knew what to expect next and sure enough the two mandalorians triggered their rocket packs and shot upwards through the hole they had blown in the roof to gain access to the storage facility.

Outside the rebels saw the three figures race upwards. Tharun raised his rifle but before he could take aim they had already gone out of his effective range,

"They're gone." he said.

"Should we go after them?" Cass asked.

"How?" Jaysica replied, looking at what remained of their speeders.

"We need to get out of here." Mace said when he heard the sound of distant sirens as police and fire department vehicles approached the area in response to the various alarms that had been triggered.

"Agreed." Vorn said, nodding, "We'll find another vehicle and head back to the ship before we figure out where we go from here. I'm not willing to let four thousand years of my family keeping that pendant hidden end with me."

The mandalorians landed just over five hundred metres away, the fuel in their rocket packets exhausted prematurely by also carrying the weight of Captain Tennell between them.

"Discard your armour." Mott told the other mandalorian, "It will attract too much attention."

"What about me?" Captain Tennell asked, "I want what's coming to me."

"Don't worry. You'll get it captain." Mott replied as he reached into a large pouch on his belt and then one after another he withdrew several bundles of bank notes that he tossed at the other man, "There you go." he said, "We have the pendant and you have your money. Two hundred thousand credits. Now take it and go."

As the two mandalorians walked away, leaving behind them pieces of their armour and the blaster rifles that were too bulky to conceal Captain Tennell quickly checked the bundles of banknotes he had been given to make sure that they were all genuine and not just a few real notes at the tops and bottoms of the bundles while the bulk of them were nothing but waste paper or plastic. Stuffing the money into his uniform he then hurried away, knowing that he had to get home and retrieve everything he needed before the speeder he had left outside the storage facility was identified by the police.

When he made it to his apartment it took him a few moments to realise that he had set his security alarm before leaving for work but it had not activated upon his return and he froze in place.

"Captain Tennell, I hope you don't object to our availing ourselves of your hospitality while you were out."

Odras Balve said from behind him and as he turned to face the crime lord several of Odras' enforcers appeared in doorways all around Captain Tennell. Two of these stepped forwards and began to search the captain, rapidly discovering the cash he had secreted on him.

"Looks like a couple of hundred grand Mister Balve." one of them said.

"Look, I was just on my way to pay you." Captain Tennell said and Odras smiled.

"I'd like to believe you captain, but you see I know all about that flight you have booked and I thought that I ought to make sure you understood your debt to me." Odras said.

"I have your money. Five grand, you can take it out of that." the captain said, pointing to the money as Odras' enforcer handed it to the crime lord.

"Actually I think I'll keep it all." Odras said, "After all, you won't be needing it after I make you into an example of why people shouldn't think about running out on their debts to me."

"I've got a very bad feeling about this boss." Kara said as she, Vorn and Mace sat down in the *Silver Hawk's* cockpit.

"We can't search the entire capital city." Vorn said, "Let alone the entire planet. Those mandos could be almost anywhere by now."

"Yeah, I get it. We don't have the resources. But do you really think we can trust this guy?" Kara said and Vorn sighed.

"Hopefully once we explain the seriousness of the situation he'll see things from our point of view." he said.

"For the record I'm against this as well. I don't trust him." Mace added.

"Well this is my call." Vorn said as he activated the *Silver Hawk's* communication system and moments later a man's voice spoke.

"Hello?" he said.

"Hello Garm." Vorn replied, "It's your father. We need to talk."