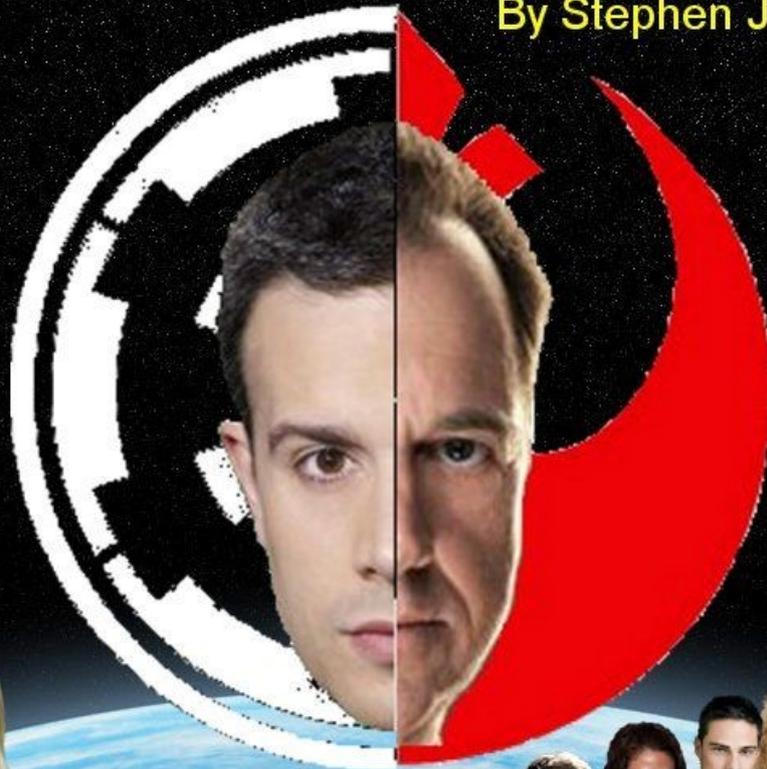


STAR WARS

6-07: Too Good to be Forgotten

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 MACE GRAYLE, CAPTAIN OF THE FREIGHTER THE *SILVER HAWK* TAKE THE FIGHT TO THE EMPIRE.

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

TOO GOOD TO BE FORGOTTEN

LEFT BEHIND WHEN THE ALLIANCE FORCES EVACUATE TRETOR, MACE GRAYLE AND THARUN VERSER ARE TASKED WITH TRACKING DOWN THE AGENT WHO LED THE REBELS INTO THE IMPERIAL TRAP. BUT WHEN THE AGENT'S MOTIVATION COMES TO LIGHT THEIR MISSION TAKES ON A NEW FOCUS...

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

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1.

Though Tretor was on the outskirts of the sector, the main shopping mall in the capital offered almost the full range of goods that would be expected on the capital world of Estran or even some of the Core Worlds. Mace Grayle, captain and owner of the YT-1300 freighter *Silver Hawk* had stopped outside a store that offered home entertainment devices and was looking through the window as if interested in purchasing one of them. In truth he was more interested in the images shown on some of the video and holographic players. The players had all been set to show broadcast news channels and although the sound had been muted it was obvious from the images alone that they were reporting on the massive Imperial troop movements on the planet. Mace grinned when he saw the image on some of the players change to show an Imperial cruiser flying at a relatively low altitude over the ground and firing on one of the planetary shield generator stations. Mace had been amongst the team that seized control of the cruiser while it was landed for repairs but he had left just before it took off and the footage he was watching indicated that his friends still aboard the warship, including the woman he intended to marry, had made good their escape.

"Anything good on captain?" a familiar voice said from behind Mace and he looked around to see his fellow rebel Tharun Verser standing there. Like Mace, Tharun was disguised in an Imperial military uniform. Mace wore an officer's uniform with captain's markings that could easily have been from either the army or the navy, whereas Tharun's uniform was clearly that of an army sergeant. Mace double checked to see who was close enough to overhear what he said and then he answered.

"The Empire's trying to make a big deal of their defence of the planet." he said, "But too many people saw us swipe the *Rancor's Claw* for them to cover it up completely."

Tharun grinned as well when he heard this.

"So the major got away then?" he said and Mace nodded.

"Back to explain to his daughter why he left her husband here on Tretor." Mace said.

"Yeah, Lyssa's going to be pretty upset when I don't go home with him." Tharun commented, "But I'll smooth things over with her when I get back." and he held up the bag he was carrying.

Mace frowned.

"What did you get?" he asked.

"Well I found the local guide books you asked for and the same place was selling a bunch of trashy romance novels off cheap and since Lyssa likes reading them I thought I'd get her a set."

"Discount book. So romantic." Mace said. Then he held out a hand, "Give me one of those guidebooks." he said.

"Sure." Tharun replied as he rummaged through the bag, "But how come we can't just ask the locals for information?" he asked and Mace pointed to another of the video players showing a news program. The image on this one showed people in civilian clothing being led to armoured transports by Imperial troops.

"It wasn't just us that the Empire set up," he told Tharun, "they've gone after the local resistance in a big way as well. Anyone left will have gone to ground and we've no way of contacting them."

"So how do we find Merret?" Tharun asked.

Merret was a member of the local resistance and he was the individual who had provided the Alliance with the false intelligence that had lured a significant rebel force out into the open where the Empire had sought to destroy it. However, thanks to the actions of the rebel field team assigned to the *Silver Hawk* the Empire's plan had failed and the vast majority of the rebels had managed to escape. However, Merret had yet to be confronted about his betrayal and that was why Mace and Tharun had remained behind. If possible they were to arrest Merret for treason and return with him to the Alliance's main base in the sector, but if necessary they were to deliver his punishment in a swift and summary fashion.

"Merret's in COMPNOR." Mace replied. The Committee for the Preservation of the New Order was a galaxy wide organisation that drew together Imperial loyalists so that they could work for the betterment of the Empire and its leader, the self declared Emperor Palpatine. The organisation was a mix of political pressure group, elite social club and even part of the executive branch of the Imperial government itself. The infamous Imperial Security Bureau was a part of COMPNOR, "In fact he's pretty well known in local circles from what I gather. Unless the Empire wants to admit that a rebel agent was able to infiltrate the organisation then they'll have to leave him right where he is."

"Yeah, can't have the ISB arresting one of their own." Tharun commented and Mace frowned, "What's wrong?" Tharun asked.

Mace turned back to the video and holographic players in the store window.

"There aren't any ISB agents in any of these reports." he said and Tharun frowned as well.

"How can that be?" he asked, "An operation like this must involve them."

"The inquisitor." Mace said, smiling.

"Huh?"

"Cass told me that she and the others saw that inquisitor who's been hanging around the sector in the command centre they infiltrated. Inquisitors work for Imperial Intelligence and-

"Intelligence and the ISB are rivals. This operation is part of a turf war between the two agencies." Tharun said before Mace could finish.

"Exactly." Mace said, "So it's possible that Intel are looking to use Merret as a mole against the ISB."

"If that's the case then they'll be watching him like a hawk captain." Tharun pointed out.

"Don't worry sergeant, I'm sure that we'll do just fine. Remember, I know where he works." then Mace looked at a different section of the store the two rebels were stood outside, "Now how much of the money the major gave us is left?"

"About six hundred credits." Tharun replied, "Why?"

"Because I want to buy that." Mace said and he pointed to a video game console set up in the store.

"I don't know captain, the major may not like us buying toys with his money."

"Come now Tharun, that's not a toy. It's a tactical combat simulator." Mace said and Tharun smiled.

"Then I suppose it would be a dereliction of duty not to buy it." he said.

Merret worked in a museum and it was here that Mace had come to meet him when he had made his claims about being able to provide them with vital intelligence. On that occasion Mace and a female rebel had infiltrated a COMPNOR function being held after closing hours, whereas now he and Tharun approached the building in broad daylight. Accompanying the pair was an R5 astromech droid that belonged to the *Silver Hawk's* engineer. Like the other droids owned by the rebel team it had been left aboard the freighter when the rebels launched their attack on the Imperial cruiser.

"So this is where that slimo Merret works then is it?" Tharun asked and the droid made a rude sounding noise.

"I'm guessing that Harvey just said that if it wasn't then I wouldn't have brought you here." Mace said.

"I don't know." Tharun replied, "Lyssa could have bribed you. She's always saying that I need more culture."

"Well no, your wife hasn't bribed me. Merret has an office on the second floor. I'm guessing that we'll find him there now." Mace said.

"And if he's not in?" Tharun asked.

"Then Harvey bypasses the lock and we wait." Mace said, "He's bound to show up sooner or later."

"He'll show up sooner or later? That's your plan? I've got a bad feeling about this." Tharun responded as they reached the main entrance.

"Weapons are forbidden in the museum." a droid standing outside the doors said, "You will need to surrender your sidearms."

Both Mace and Tharun were carrying standard issue blaster pistols holstered on their hips, worn in the standard manner for members of the Imperial military.

"I am an officer of the Imperial army and I do not surrender my weapon to anyone." Mace told the droid,

"Now stand aside before I have you deactivated permanently."

"My programming prohibits-" the droid on the door began before Harvey let out a sudden string of chirps and whistles and the other droid turned its attention to the astromech, "I assure you that my visual sensors are fully functional." it said, "No exceptions are made for serving members of the military."

"Perhaps we should try a different route." Tharun suggested quietly, but Mace smiled as he saw a pair of uniformed museum employees rushing towards them.

"No need sergeant." he said, "I think all this is about to be sorted out." then he scowled at the museum employees, "You there!" he barked, "Are you going to get this useless bucket of bolts out of our way or do I need to have my man scrap it here and now?"

"Useless?" the droid exclaimed, "I am programmed with the full history of every exhibit in the museum and-

"I'm terribly sorry sir." one of the visibly concerned employees replied before the droid could finish its sentence and he rushed up to it and held up his identity card in front of its visual receptors, "Command override." he said, "Allow access."

"Access permitted. Enjoy your visit to the museum." the droid said as if it had no memory of the last few minutes and it stepped aside.

"There you are." the employee added as both of them also stepped out of the rebels' path, "and once again I'm terribly sorry for the misunderstanding."

"Just don't let it happen again." Mace said as he walked past without making eye contact.

"Oops, sorry." Tharun commented as he accidentally bumped into the other one on his way past and then Harvey produced another rude sound as the droid followed the two rebels into the museum.

Once inside the rebels were confronted with numerous signs and displays pointing to various exhibits that had been advertised outside as well as to more mundane locations such as the gift shop and food hall. But Mace was more interested in the turbolift that he knew would take them straight up to the second floor.

"Over here." he said, "And if anyone asks we're here to see the Confederacy Exhibits in the east wing."

"Got it." Tharun replied as they headed for the turbolift.

The first turbolift car to arrive was empty and the rebels darted inside and closed the door before anyone else could get in with them.

"What are you grinning at?" Mace asked when he saw the expression on Tharun's face.

"Just thinking about how useful that ID card that guy waved at the droid was." Tharun replied and then he held up the card that he had been able to remove unnoticed from the second employee's belt.

"Good work sergeant." Mace said before pressing the button for the second floor.

In a building the size of the museum there was plenty of room for both exhibits and offices on one floor and so when the rebels stepped out of it they found themselves in an area almost identical to the lobby downstairs.

"Okay, the offices are over here." Mace said, remembering the route that Merret had taken when he had escorted Mace to his office, "There's a security door, but it's unguarded. I was going to try and bluff our way through it but we may as well find out if that card works."

"Sure thing." Tharun said and when they reached the door he held the stolen identity card up to the sensor set into the wall beside it, "Here goes." he said and then he grinned as there was a chime and the door opened, "I told you it would work." he added.

"Just get inside before anyone spots us." Mace told him and they quickly darted through the open doorway with Harvey following close behind them.

"What do we do if anyone asks what we're doing back here?" Tharun asked as he looked down corridor beyond the door that had a far plainer style than the public areas of the museum he had seen so far.

"We just frown and order them out of the way on pain of being shipped off to the spice mines of Kessel."

Mace said, "Now follow me."

"Okay, got it. Shout and bully. I can do that."

Though they did encounter a few museum staff along the way the rebels made it to Merret's office without being challenged, apparently the mix of their uniforms and blasters was enough to dissuade anyone from challenging them. When they reached their destination the door was closed.

"I suppose we ought to knock." Mace said and he was just about to knock on the door when he paused.

"What's wrong?" Tharun asked, looking around to see if they were being watched.

"He might recognise my voice." Mace replied softly, "You do it."

"Sure." Tharun said, swapping places with Mace and he knocked on the door, "Mister Merret are you in there?" he called out but there was no reply and after waiting a few seconds he knocked again, "Mister Merret it's the Imperial army, we have orders to speak to you." but again there was no reply, "Okay, I'm guessing he's not in there." Tharun said as he stepped back from the door.

"Okay Harvey, now it's your turn." Mace said and he pointed to a nearby computer port set into the wall. Extending a probe the little droid plugged itself into the port and connected to the museum's service network. Then, chirping as it manipulated the system the droid searched for the door control programs and triggered the door to Merret's office which promptly opened with a 'hiss'.

"Okay, inside." Mace said and he and Tharun dashed into the darkened office. As soon as he was through Tharun placed his hand at the top of the doorway to block the door from dropping shut when Harvey was unplugged from the computer and he beckoned for the droid to hurry up.

"Come on short stuff, I can't stand like this all day." he said and Harvey made an abrupt sound in reply, "Why do I get the feeling I was just insulted?" Tharun asked looking at Mace.

"Just get that door shut." Mace replied as he pulled a glow rod from his pocket and as soon as Tharun let go of the door he turned it on so that they were not plunged into total darkness in the windowless office.

"So how long do you reckon he'll be?" Tharun asked as he searched his pockets for his own glow rod.

"Well since his computer's right here I suggest we have Harvey check his diary." Mace answered, shining his glow rod towards the terminal on Merret's desk, "Plus there could be some useful information on it." and he stood back to let Harvey past.

As the droid searched the files on Merret's computer Mace heard the sound of voices coming from the corridor outside and his eyes widened.

"Merret!" he hissed, "Get your blaster ready and turn out your light."

2.

Mace and Tharun positioned themselves either side of the door and turned out their glow rods, leaving them in darkness. Then the office was flooded with light as the door opened and Merret stepped through. Instantly Mace hit the button to close the door while Tharun grabbed hold of Merret and pushed him across the office just as Mace turned on the main lights.

"Who the hell are you?" Merret demanded as he glared at Tharun.

"We're the people you set up." Tharun replied.

"Don't you remember me?" Mace added, removing his cap and Merret's eyes widened as he remembered bringing Mace to his office a few nights earlier.

"Oh kriff, look I'm sorry. I had no choice." Merret pleaded.

"Oh we believe you don't we sergeant?" Mace responded, "You had no choice. Why should we believe you?"

"They've got my family!" Merret snapped.

"They?" Tharun commented.

"The Empire. Who else?" Merret said, "I got home from work last week and they were all gone. I don't know how the Empire found me but they took my family and threatened to charge them all as accessories to treason unless I co-operated."

"You've got kids then?" Mace asked.

"Yes, yes I've got kids. Three of them." Merret replied.

"So if we add in your wife that makes four people." Mace said.

"Yes, that's right. I did it to save them." Merret said, nodding.

"Two mon calamari cruisers have about ten thousand crew between them." Tharun said, scowling, "Plus a division of ground troops of about that number again. That makes twenty thousand lives snuffed out just to save four if your scheme had gone to plan. Lucky we were able to figure out you were full of poodoo and warn them." then he looked at Mace, "I say we vape this nerf herder here and now." he added.

"No please!" Merret cried out.

"Tharun wait!" Mace snapped as Tharun reached out to grab Merret by his collar, "We're taking him with us."

"But you can't." Merret pleaded, "The Empire's plan went wrong. If I disappear now my family are as good as dead."

"See captain?" Tharun said, "If we kill him then we're doing his family a favour. The Empire may just let them go."

"No." Mace said, "He comes with us." then he paused before adding, "And we're going to get his family back as well."

The expected Imperial Intelligence tail was a droid positioned on the roof of the building opposite the museum. Tharun exited the building first and watched while Merret exited a short while after with Mace and Harvey following him to make sure he did not try to escape through a different exit. This was when the droid revealed itself, moving via repulsorlifts to get a better position from which to observe Merret as he walked down the street.

"You see that captain?" Tharun asked, using his comlink to communicate with Mace.

"I got it. Looks like a Prowler one thousand." Mace replied, "Too fast to out run and small enough to follow Merret wherever he goes without getting in the way."

"So how do we handle this? We can't exactly just shoot the thing out of the air without giving ourselves away. But if we leave it following Merret we're bound to get spotted as well." Tharun pointed out.

"I know, I'm thinking." Mace responded. Then he looked down at Harvey, "Okay, I've got an idea." he said.

Merret stopped at a news stand and appeared to be examining the various digital and physical copies of various publications when Tharun walked past him calmly.

"Count to twenty then follow me." he whispered and without a word Merret waited while he counted in his head and then followed Tharun. The former mercenary's army uniform made him easy for Merret to pick out in the crowd of civilians and he had no problem in trailing him as far as an underground repulsorway. This rather antiquated method of public transportation made use of repulsorlift fields to push people along a frictionless tunnel at a steady rate until they stepped off at their destination. As he walked down the approach ramp he noticed Mace and Harvey positioned next to a computer port and smiled.

Behind Merret the miniature probe droid flew into the tunnel after him and passed by Mace and Harvey without noticing them.

"Okay Harvey, now." Mace said as the droid reached the edge of the repulsorway's field and Harvey chirped. All of a sudden there was an alarm as the repulsorway's own repulsorlift field was destabilised by Harvey.

Interacting with the field propelling the probe droid, the repulsorway acted to hurl the machine straight across and into the far wall where it promptly burst into flames as it smashed and another, much louder alarm sounded as the repulsorway's field shut down entirely and a recorded message called out a warning to evacuate.

"Come on." Tharun said as he rushed back down the repulsorway and grabbed hold of Merret, "Let's get out of here before someone sends another of those things after you."

"Captain Grayle." the golden coloured protocol droid said from the top of the access ramp as Mace and Tharun walked up it. Merret was between them with Tharun holding his arm tightly, the former mercenary not trusting the local rebel who had betrayed the Alliance even if he believed it was to save the lives of his family, "I am so glad to see you back here safely. Frankly I don't think that this position is entirely secure." The Silver Hawk had been landed in a narrow ravine where it was shielded from sensor scans and not in a location where surface traffic was likely to stumble across it.

"We'll be fine for a while yet Jeeves." Mace replied, "At least we will while I change into some normal clothes. Tharun, keep an eye on our guest and get him a drink. Me too while you're at it."

When Mace returned to the *Silver Hawk's* lounge area wearing his normal clothing and with the military issue sidearm replaced by a more compact but heavier hitting heavy blaster pistol he found Merret and Tharun sat on opposite sides of the table.

"He hasn't said a word captain." Tharun commented.

"Would you have listened?" Merret asked in reply.

"I didn't just sell out twenty thousand innocent people." Tharun said, sneering.

Mace approached the table without speaking and picked up the cup of caf that Tharun had made for him and winced.

"Not sweet enough." he said as he headed for the kitchen units for some sweeteners. Then he looked at Merret, "So tell me what happened." he said, "All of it."

"I already told you. Imperial Intelligence told me that the only way to save my-" Merret began but Mace held up a hand for him to stop.

"I said all of it." he said, "That means from the moment you first found out, or suspected even that you'd been made."

"I don't know, I just came home from work and the house was a mess. It looked like someone had lifted off the roof, hit it with a turbolaser and then put the roof back on. Everything was smashed, even the kids' toys." Merret said.

"Sounds like an intel search squad." Tharun commented, "Leave no stone unturned and no plate unbroken."

"So what did you do then?" Mace asked.

"I thought we'd been robbed, but I couldn't exactly call the cops in case they found anything incriminating. So I decided to call my in laws to see if my wife had contacted them. But when I tried making the call my comm unit connected with someone else instead. Someone I'd never seen before and he told me to go to the door. That's when I found two guys from Imperial Intelligence waiting in my front yard. They were even in uniform, they didn't care about me knowing who they were."

"So they told you that they had your family then?" Mace asked and Merret nodded.

"They showed me a datapad they said was linked to a camera in their station house. It showed my wife and kids in a holding cell and they said they already knew I was involved in the rebellion. That's when they gave me the choice, work for them or my family would be executed with me."

"And when are you supposed to get them back?" Tharun asked.

"What?" Merret replied.

"Your wife and kids. I mean the Alliance is gone now, so when do you get them back?" Tharun said.

"I – I don't know." Merret said, "I asked, but they wouldn't tell me. They said they only ask questions, not answer them. You – you don't think that they're already dead do you?"

"It's a possibility." Tharun commented and Merret's jaw dropped.

"But they promised." he said.

"The Empire promises a lot of poodoo." Mace said, "That's why we're all where we are now."

"When did you last hear from these intel guys?" Tharun asked.

"Right after the party." Merret answered, referring to the official function thrown by COMPNOR, "They wanted to make certain that you'd got the information they had me plant."

"They wouldn't just abandon him." Tharun said to Mace.

"No they wouldn't." Mace agreed, "But for now they don't know where he is, taking out the droid tailing him will have seen to that. But we need to know more about where his family is being held and I think that some intelligence agents are the best people to get that information from." then he looked back at Merret, "Time for you to go home I think." he said.

"Home? But what for?" Merret asked.

"Because that's the logical place for Imperial Intelligence to start looking for you. The agents who were

controlling you will probably come back to explain what they want from you next and when they do we'll be there to take care of them."

Merret frowned.

"But what if they're already watching the house?" he asked, "How will you get in without being seen?"

"We don't need to." Mace reassured him, "Tharun and I will wait close by and join you when the agents make themselves known to you."

"So you want me to signal you when they arrive then?" Merret said.

"That could tip them off." Tharun commented.

"I know." Mace replied, "That's why he'll take Penny with him. She can tell us when the agents appear and show us what they look like as well. Then we'll decide how best to proceed."

"Penny? Who's Penny?" Merret asked and Mace turned to Jeeves.

"Jeeves, where's Penny?" he asked the protocol droid.

"I believe that she is in Miss Jaysica's cabin Captain Grayle sir." Jeeves answered and Mace then looked towards the crew cabins.

"Penny!" he yelled, "Come on out here, we need you." and moments later a tiny boxlike mouse droid emerged from one of the cabins and rolled into the lounge, chirping.

"She wishes to know what your orders are sir." Jeeves translated.

"Merret," Mace said, "meet Penny. She'll be your date for this evening." and the mouse droid chirped again.

3.

Hiding the stolen speeder about a kilometre from Merret's home, Mace and Tharun escorted the local resistance member most of the rest of the way.

"Okay, we'll split up here." Mace said, looking around, "Do you understand what you need to do?"

"Yes, I think so." Merret replied.

"Don't just think so." Tharun told him, "You do or you don't. Go through it."

"Okay, I go home and take the droid out of the bag. Then I just need to wait for Imperial Intelligence to make contact with me and she'll signal you and let you in through the back door. Then you'll overpower the agents and find out where my family is being held."

"Good, that's right." Mace said, "Now go."

He and Tharun then watched as Merret headed for home while they waited in the street, doing their best to keep out of sight. In civilian clothing now there was the chance that the locals could become suspicious and contact the authorities, but they did not stand out as much as they would have done wearing military uniforms in public.

Meanwhile Merret walked directly home, doing his best not to look as if he was constantly searching for anyone watching him although he suspected that someone was. When he reached his house he dashed up to the front door, opened it and darted inside before closing and locking the door behind him. Then he paused to remove Penny from the bag Mace had given him. Setting the droid down at his feet he heard it chirp once before it raced off, moving from room to room to determine the layout of the house and transmitting everything it saw back to Mace.

With nothing to do now but wait Merret headed into the lounge and sat down on the couch, staring blankly into space.

"Here, I'm tired with standing. We'll sit down while we wait." Mace said and he walked over to a nearby low wall and promptly sat down on it while he continued to watch the feed from Penny on his datapad.

"Works for me." Tharun replied, following Mace and setting down his bag. Then he began fumbling around inside it.

"Tharun, what are you doing?" Mace asked, "You can't get a blaster out here, someone may see."

"I'm not after a blaster." Tharun replied, "I'm after this." and he produced a small printed book, one of the ones he had bought for his wife and Mace frowned.

"What are you doing with that?" he asked.

"Well Lyssa likes this stuff so I thought if I read one then-" Tharun began.

"Then you'd look like you were trying to care about what she cares about." Mace finished.

"Exactly." Tharun replied and he opened up the book and began to read.

"So is it any good?" Mace asked.

"Gods no." Tharun answered, "Here, listen to this." and he cleared his throat before reading out loud from the book, "Hold me like you did by the lake on Naboo, so long ago when there was nothing but our love." then he lowered the book, "I mean, who writes poodoo like this?"

"Beats me." Mace replied, sighing, "All I can say is you must really love the major's daughter to be reading that."

"You'll get used to it when you marry Captain Mayan." Tharun said, "Which I'm guessing is going to be soon."

"Actually we haven't set a date yet." Mace answered, "Malia didn't just happen to have a dress in storage like Kara did when she married the major."

"So what about the big deployment?" Tharun asked, "Aren't you going to get it done before that?"

"What big deployment?" Mace asked.

"Haven't you heard? There's a rumour going around that most of our sector's fleet is going to be redeployed for some big operation." Tharun told him, "Tell Kash said-"

"You're basing this on a rumour you heard from that iotran in Captain Myrell's team?" Mace interrupted,

"Malia's said nothing to me about any deployment." Then came a bleeping from his datapad.

"What's wrong?" Tharun asked.

"Nothing I think." Mace told him, "But someone just came to the door of Merret's house."

Merret paused when he saw who was standing at his door through the camera mounted outside. The two men wore the uniform of Imperial Intelligence and although he had been warned to expect their arrival he still felt his stomach churn, remembering the night that they had first visited him.

"Who's there?" he asked via the intercom.

"You know who we are Merret." one of the agents said sternly, "Now open up."

Merret looked around, worried that Penny would be visible and alert the agents to the trap Mace and Tharun had planned. But the droid was nowhere to be seen and so reluctantly he opened the door.

"So why make us wait?" the first agent to step through the door asked, pushing Merret out of the way and looking around, "Who else is here?"

"No – No one." Merret replied, "Honest."

"Of course there isn't." the second agent said, "We'd know if there was wouldn't we?"

"Yes we would." the first agent responded, "As far as you're concerned Merret we know every move you make. Now sit down."

Merret returned to the couch while the two agents each selected a different location to sit down so that it was impossible for him to look at them both at once. This was a simple technique to try and keep him off balance Merret knew, if he tried talking to one then the one he was looking away from would speak and force him to turn. But as he looked at each agent in turn Merret suddenly noticed Penny rolling past his field of view but hidden from the two agents as the droid headed for the back door.

Penny went all the way to the back door and from inside the droid's casing a manipulator arm extended, reaching up for the controls to the door. But rather than just open the door, something that the agents may hear, Penny waited.

Mace and Tharun moved briskly towards Merret's house, but avoided breaking into an open run to avoid attracting too much attention. As they walked along the street where Merret lived they searched it for any indication that there were more intelligence agents waiting somewhere outside. Seeing nothing, the pair walked down the path beside Merret's house that led to his back yard, ducking down to make sure that they would not be seen if the intelligence agents inside the house happened to be right inside any of the windows they passed under. Behind the house they made their way to the back door and crouched down either side of it. Only then did Tharun open up the bag he carried again. For himself he took out his usual sidearm and given that the objective was to take the agents alive he flicked the selector to 'stun' as he kicked the bag to Mace. Unlike Tharun, Mace took an unconventional weapon from the bag. A short, bulky carbine, the weapon possessed a flared barrel. This was a decksweeper blaster, designed to project an expanding stun blast rather than a concentrated bolt and was ideal for short range firefights such as boarding actions. Mace had originally obtained the weapon to defend the *Silver Hawk* from pirates, but since joining the rebellion he had found it useful for other activities as well. When Mace nodded at Tharun to indicate that he was ready the former mercenary nodded back and then tapped on the back door with his fingers.

This was the signal that Penny had been waiting for and as soon as the soft tapping was heard the droid opened the door.

As expected the sudden 'hiss' of the opening door attracted the attention of the two agents and they leapt to their feet, both drawing their weapons.

"Who is it Merret?" one of them demanded.

"I – I don't know, I swear!" Merret replied.

"Come on out." the agent then called out as he advanced towards the kitchen. But while the agents were moving slowly and carefully both Mace and Tharun moved quickly across the kitchen and Mace pressed himself up against the wall, "I said come on out!" the agent shouted before Mace held the decksweeper around the door frame and fired without looking. There was a sudden flash of blue light as the pulse expanded and enveloped a cone shaped volume ahead of the weapon in disabling energy. The pulse covered not only both Imperial Intelligence agents but also Merret himself and all three men fell backwards together.

"I think I got them." Mace said to Tharun with a smile, "Go check."

The drawback with a weapon like a decksweeper, in addition to its limited range was the limited rate of fire and for a few seconds at least Tharun was the only one of them holding a serviceable weapon. Holding this out in front of him, Tharun leapt through the door into the lounge where he was confronted by both Imperial agents and Merret lying where they had fallen. The agents were on the floor almost right at Tharun's feet while Merret was slumped across the couch.

"Clear." Tharun called out, lowering his blaster and Mace peered into the lounge as well and he smiled.

"I told you it would work." he said, "Now give me a hand with these guys. When they come round I want us to be ready."

4.

The shock of a bucket of icy cold water being dumped over them brought both agents back to consciousness with a start and the first thing that each of them realised that they had been stripped of their uniforms and bound to chairs, their protest at having the water dumped over them muffled by the tape over their mouths. "Good evening gentlemen." Mace said from across the room, "I believe that you may be able to help my with some enquiries I'm making." then he looked at Tharun, "If you wouldn't mind sergeant." he said. "Yes captain." Tharun replied, tossing the now empty bucket away before ripping the tape from the agents' mouths.

"Now how about you tell me where I can find the Merret family." Mace said with a smile.

"You rebel scum!" one of the agents snapped, "You'll get nothing from us."

"Oh now that is a pity. Isn't it sergeant?" Mace said and he looked at Tharun.

"A real shame captain. Just when I had such high hopes that they'd co-operate. Perhaps we can be more persuasive." Tharun replied.

"So it comes down to this does it?" the second agent asked, "You think you can just beat answers out of us?" and he snorted, "You rebels really are savages. You're no better than the ISB."

"Oh no, I know all about how your agency trains you to resist torture." Mace said, "But I was hoping that maybe we could all be civilised about this. You see you two are irrelevant really, all I want is Mister Merret's family back and one way or another that's what I'm going to get." then he turned round and picked up several silver coloured cylinders and a metal box that had wires trailing from it, "These are your code cylinders," he went on, holding up the cylinders, "and this is your landspeeder's data recorder. Now I'm willing to bet that the data recorder will tell me where you've been recently, like oh I don't know, to wherever the Merret's are being held and the cylinders will get me inside. Now if you'd just like to tell me everything you know about the facility then I'll see to it that the Empire finds out where you are quickly. Otherwise the pair of you will be waiting some time for someone to come and untie you."

"You're forgetting one thing." the first agent said, "Our superiors know we came here. They'll be sending some to check up on us within the hour when we don't check in."

Mace smiled.

"Then it's a pity that while you were both out cold we moved you from the house. I'm afraid that all your friends will find is a house that's been abandoned."

The agent leaned forwards as far as his bonds would allow.

"You'll get nothing from me nerf herder." he hissed and Mace sighed.

"The I suppose we'll just have to get Harvey to get us the information we need." he said.

"What about these two?" Tharun asked.

"Leave them here. Tape their mouths again though, I don't want them found until we're a few parsecs away." Mace told him.

"And if no one finds them?"

Mace shrugged.

"Not my problem." he replied.

Back aboard the *Silver Hawk* Mace handed the data recorder and rank cylinders to Jeeves.

"Here you go Jeeves." he said, "I need Harvey to crack these open. I want to know the location of the Imperial Intelligence facility where the Merrets are being held and also I want us to be able to walk right in there."

"But Captain Grayle sir, the odds of penetrating the security of an Imperial Intelligence facility are approximately-" the droid protested before Tharun interrupted.

"Never tell us the odds." he said, "We're just not interested."

"Well really." Jeeves said despite the fact that neither of the two rebels were listening. Instead they both sat down and began to inspect the games console that Mace had purchased.

"So that's it?" Merret asked impatiently, "My family is in some Imperial dungeon and you two are going to sit here playing video games?"

Mace and Tharun looked at one another then looked up at Merret.

"Firstly," Mace said, "we aren't playing video games as you put it. We're waiting for Harvey to provide us with intelligence that we're going to need before we go rushing off storming into random buildings looking for your family."

"And secondly you should have just alerted us to the fact that the Empire had your family in the first place rather than setting us up for the fall instead." Tharun added, "Oh and I wouldn't place any bets on that being forgotten about. I'm sure there'll be plenty of questions for you when we get you back to headquarters."

Merret's jaw dropped.

"What sort of questions?" he asked, "What do you think they'll do with me?"

"Probably just stick you on some safe world somewhere." Mace replied.

"Unless they decide to shoot you." Tharun added, "We were given that option by the major if taking you back proved too much hassle. Hassle like having to break into a top secret Imperial building."

Merret sat down silently, staring at Mace and Tharun as they went back to inspecting the games console.

"Looks like a good bundle of games came with it captain." Tharun commented, lining up several data slugs that had come with the device.

Just then there was a sudden shrill bleeping and Harvey rolled into the lounge, followed by Jeeves.

"Harvey I am not being over cautious." Jeeves called out after the astromech droid, "You haven't decoded all of that drive yet, who knows what else is contained inside it." Harvey produced a rude sounding noise, "Well there's no need to adopt that sort of language." Jeeves replied and then the protocol droid looked at Mace and Tharun, "I'm sorry sirs, but Harvey insists that I tell you he has successfully located the building where the two intelligence agents were operating from. Although I maintain that we can't be certain that their landspeeder was not just parked somewhere else without further-"

"What about the rank cylinders Jeeves?" Mace asked and Harvey chirped excitedly in response.

"What did he say?" Tharun asked, looking at Jeeves.

"Harvey indicates that given his previous experience in hacking Imperial rank cylinders he has already been able to overwrite the details of the agents who owned them with yours and Captain Grayle's Sergeant Vereser sir." Jeeves replied, "Though personally I doubt his skill in such matters." and Harvey produced another rude sounding noise, "Oh switch off!" Jeeves snapped, slapping the astromech droid on the top of its conical head.

"So what's your plan now then?" Merret asked and Mace took a deep breath. Before looking at Tharun.

"The usual?" he said and Tharun grinned.

"I think so captain." he replied.

"I don't get it. What's the usual?" Merret asked.

"Basically we walk in there and shoot the place up." Tharun said, "Easy."

"And what do I do?" Merret then asked.

"You stay here." Mace replied, "We have rank cylinders for two."

Merret frowned.

"So just the two of you against a building full of Intelligence agents? I've got a very bad feeling about this." he said.

5.

The agent whose uniform Tharun wore had been of similar build to him but significantly shorter. This mattered little with the trouser where the bottom of the legs were concealed under his boots, but the tunic was visibly too short for him. To get around this he simply left it off, instead wearing a shirt of his own that was in the correct style and carrying the tunic under his own. To any observer it appeared that he had simply removed it for some reason. On the other hand Mace's disguise was a good fit, though he too left off his tunic, replacing it with a civilian jacket as the pair approached the building where the Imperial Intelligence field office was located while the two rebels established the layout of the area.

The field office was located in an anonymous looking building that bore no Imperial markings at all. Many such offices were located within buildings that were used primarily by other departments of the Imperial government, typically something innocent such as the Imperial Space Rescue Service or even the Communications Bureau and as such the buildings would be marked in the style of those bodies. Therefore the lack of markings suggested that the whole of the building was given over to either Imperial Intelligence itself or some front organisation they had set up. One feature that did stand out was the large number of antennas located on the roof of the building, though without close examination it would be impossible for anyone to know that they had anything to do with intelligence gathering and there were any number of innocent explanations for why a building would require so many.

"The agents came and went in uniform." Mace commented as he studied the building from the far end of the street, "There must be a way in and out not visible from the street."

"Probably a tunnel that emerges close by captain." Tharun said, "There'd have been plenty of time to construct it when the city was rebuilt after the Clone Wars."

"Be careful." Mace said, "Don't call me 'captain' on this run. From here on in just call me 'Mace'. Got it?"

"Sure thing, err, Mace." Tharun replied.

Then Mace sighed.

"We should have brought Harvey with us." he said, "That little droid could have got us a floor plan."

"Yeah, but he'd have slowed us down inside. Especially if we run into trouble." Tharun pointed out.

"Then I suppose we do this the old fashioned way." Mace said, "The mark one eyeball. Let's go."

Mace and Tharun set off towards the Imperial Intelligence field office. But rather than just walk right up to it and head inside they remained on the opposite side of the street, studying the buildings surrounding it, hoping to see some sign that there was a connecting entrance to the Intelligence field office. The neighbouring buildings were mainly offices and had limited numbers of people going in or out at any time and disturbingly none seemed to have any large doors that could the access to a secret Imperial Intelligence facility.

"This is pointless cap- Mace." Tharun said, "Unless we know what we're looking for we won't now if we've seen it."

"Yes it would be easier if the Empire would invest in some big signs saying 'secret base here'." Mace commented.

"Hang on." Tharun said suddenly, tapping Mace on the shoulder, "Look at the side of that building there." and he pointed to an office building that was identified by signs on the outside as a legal firm.

"You think Imperial Intelligence is masquerading as lawyers?" Mace asked.

"No. Imperial Intelligence is too civilised for that. I mean look at the vent up at the top." Tharun said.

"Looks like an air conditioning outlet to me." Mace said, "Pumping out hot air."

"Same here." Tharun responded, "But see how it goes all the way down to the ground? Why not just take it inside the building itself unless-"

"Unless it doesn't belong to that building. It belongs to something else." Mace interrupted.

"Like an Imperial Intelligence field office that's hidden underneath all these buildings. Harvey got the co-ordinates right but they were only in two dimensions."

"There must be another way in other than just for vehicles." Mace said.

"You mean like a turbolift shaft in one of these office buildings?" Tharun asked with a smile.

"Exactly. Probably only accessible to someone with the correct key. A key like an Imperial Intelligence code access cylinder. Come on, this way."

"Where are we heading?" Tharun asked.

"To the building with the antennas on its roof. If any of them malfunctioned then the intelligence guys would need to send someone up to take a look after all."

The two rebels entered the building with the antenna arrays on its roof and headed straight for the turbolift cluster located at the rear of the main lobby, bypassing the reception desk. There they discovered that in addition to the turbolifts available for general use there was one shaft marked with a discrete sign beside the

door that read 'STAFF ONLY' and the rebels looked at one another and smiled. Without speaking Mace glanced over his shoulder as he reached into his jacket and produced one of the code cylinders taken from the Imperial agents and held it up against the control panel beside the door to this turbolift. Instantly there was a chime and the door slide open.

"Well isn't that nice?" Tharun asked rhetorically, "It just happens that Imperial Intelligence agents are considered staff here."

"Plus we now know that Harvey didn't screw up these cylinders." Mace added as they both stepped inside the empty turbolift. The panel inside looked to be a standard turbolift control and waving the rank cylinder against it produced no response.

"I guess you only need to get into the turbolift for access." Mace said, "So Tharun what floor do you think we should pick?"

Tharun looked at the labels beside each button on the panel. Apart from basic titles of floor number or in the case of the uppermost button the word 'ROOF' there was no indication of what awaited the rebels on each floor. Thought it was clear that the field office was indeed located entirely below ground level.

"My guess is that there'll be administration levels closest to the surface and detention will be towards the bottom." Tharun said, "Imperial Intelligence may not be as bloodthirsty as the ISB, but they'll want to make it easier to evacuate their own staff than prisoners in the event of a fire."

"I'll go with the lowest level but one then." Mace said, "There could be a service level under the detention section."

"Makes sense." Tharun replied as Mace first pressed the button and then swapped his jacket for the uniform tunic.

When the turbolift doors slid open again it was to reveal an empty corridor that was clearly designed for use by the Empire, the hexagonal cross section of the corridor gave away the use of standard Imperial building modules. However, when they stepped out of the turbolift the two rebels found themselves in a totally empty corridor. Not only were they alone but there were also no signs to indicate what the purpose of the level was. "This is good." Mace said as they walked away, following the corridor in a randomly picked direction, "No signs means that escaped prisoners wouldn't know where they were or how to get out."

"Too bad it means we don't know where we are either." Tharun added.

"You there!" a voice suddenly called out from behind them, "Who are you?"

"Oh I've got a bad feeling about this." Mace said softly and then he and Tharun turned around to see a tall slightly built agent striding towards them. Worryingly the man's rank badges indicated that he was of superior rank to the two agents whose badges and uniforms the rebels were using, "Agent Fox." Mace replied to the man confidently, "And this is Agent Dana. We're new."

"And what are you doing down here?" the genuine agent asked as he continued to approach, halting right in front of the two rebels.

"We're heading for the detention section." Mace replied, "We need to interrogate the prisoners in cell one-one-three-eight." and the agent frowned.

"Then you're going the wrong way." he said, "The cell block is that way." and he pointed in the opposite direction, "You'll need to learn your way around if you're going to last long here." and then he glared at Tharun, "And you need to maintain a professional appearance as well. You were issued with that tunic for a reason, now put it on properly."

"Ah." Tharun replied.

"That's an order mister." the agent said sternly, "Now do it."

"Okay." Tharun said reluctantly and he pulled on the tunic, revealing that it ended barely below his waist and a considerable distance up his arms. As the agent stared at him in disbelief Tharun smiled, "You asked." he said and then he head butted then man in the face. As the agent fell backwards and collapsed Tharun followed this blow up with a kick aimed just below his ribcage that produced a sudden expulsion of air as the breath was forced from the agent's lungs leaving him unable to cry out as Tharun dropped to his knees and grabbed hold of him. With an arm wrapped around the agent's throat Tharun squeezed, cutting off the flow of air. At the same time he placed his free hand at the side of the man's head and twisted until he heard a distinct 'Snap!' and the agent went limp.

"That was a close call." Mace said, looking around just in case anyone else was present to have witnessed what had happened.

"At least now I'll have a jacket that fits." Tharun said as he quickly removed the tunic from the dead agent and pulled it on. Then Mace laughed when Tharun stood up frowning as he found out that the slim build of the dead agent meant that although his tunic was the correct length it would not close at the front.

"Too much blue sauce on your bantha breakfast biscuits perhaps?" Mace said, "Or are you putting on weight so your pregnant wife doesn't feel as fat?"

Tharun frowned.

"Ha ha. Very funny." he replied as he removed the tunic once more and tossed onto the corpse, "Now what do we do with this?" he asked, looking down at the dead agent.

“Over here.” Mace replied, “There's a vent we can stick him in.” and he dashed over to a grill set into the wall close to the ceiling.

“That won't hide him for long.” Tharun warned as he began to drag the body towards the vent that Mace was removing the cover from.

“It doesn't need to.” Mace pointed out, “We'll be out of here long before anyone finds him.”

Lifting the corpse up to the level of the vent and pushing it inside proved awkward. Not only was the dead man deceptively heavy but he had to be forced into the narrow vent and both mace and Tharun found themselves out of breath by the time they were done.

“Okay, that's that sorted.” Mace said, “Now before you snapped his neck that guy was kind enough to tell us where the detention block is so I suggest we go there now.”

6.

Though like the rest of the level there was no sign to indicate what lay behind it, the armoured blast door of the detention section gave away the fact that the rebels had found what they were looking for. The door was not sealed though and the four triangular sections slid apart as soon as Mace pressed the control beside it. Right inside was a control station manned by a single intelligence officer while four guards from IntSec, Imperial Intelligence's in house security force stood watch around the room. In addition the two rebels noticed several security cameras and automated laser traps positioned at locations that ensured no part of the room was left unprotected.

"What do you want?" the officer at the control station asked.

"Merret." Mace replied, "We've orders to question the members of the entire family."

"I've not been told about any interrogation." the control officer said, watching suspiciously as Tharun separated from Mace and began to make his way around the control station.

"Well I've got my orders right here." Mace said, holding up his datapad and then he frowned as he looked down at the display, "That's odd." he said.

"Let me guess," the control officer said, "it's not working, right?"

"Right." Mace replied, "Take a look for yourself and he held out the datapad. Then as the officer instinctively leant over for a better look at the device. However, just as he was leaning over Mace swung the datapad up suddenly and struck him under the jaw with it, "Now!" he yelled at the same time, drawing his blaster.

Focused on Mace, the four IntSec guards did not notice as Tharun was able to draw his sidearm faster than they managed and there was the sudden flash of blaster fire as he shot the closest in the side of the head, the energy bolt punching right through the man's armoured helmet. But the moment that Tharun fired the detention section's internal sensors detected it and two things happened. First an alarm sounded while more significantly the laser traps activated and started searching for targets.

Mace dropped to the floor just in time to avoid a shot that flew over his head and slammed into the blast door behind him before he fired two rapid shots into a pair of cameras. Meanwhile Tharun continued to target the living guards, shooting a second one dead while they were still turning to face him.

Another guard ran around the control station, aiming his blaster down at where Mace had disappeared to. But in the time he took to move Mace was able to crawl further around the control station and aiming his blaster around the side of it he fired several more shots in rapid succession that took the guard off his feet as they hit him one after another.

The final guard screamed as a shot fired by Tharun struck his leg and he fell, his return fire randomly blasting chunks from the wall behind the rebel as he took cover from the laser traps and destroyed another. This gave Mace the time he needed to lean around the other side of the control station to target the guard who noticed his presence a moment too late and Mace's first shot finished him off.

However, even with the IntSec guards now dead the blaster fire continued as the laser traps attempted to track the rebels.

"Tharun!" Mace yelled, "You hit the traps while I'll take the cameras guiding those things."

"Got it captain." Tharun replied. Then as he quickly fired a shot that disabled another of the traps he added, "I assume it's alright to call you captain again now." But Mace did not reply, instead he focused on firing his blaster up at the two cameras visible from his position and both exploded with showers of sparks.

Seeing this Tharun leapt to his feet and ran, heading for the blind spot now created where none of the remaining cameras could see him. Firing as he went he took out two more of the laser traps, now leaving just four still firing. Then Mace fired again, knocking out the last of the cameras and the laser traps all ceased fire for a moment while they switched from the optical tracking of the surveillance cameras to their own internal motion detectors. These were much shorter ranged and less reliable since they would have difficulty detecting a target that remained in one place, which is exactly what Tharun did.

"Okay I've got them now captain." he said as he slowly turned around and raised his blaster, hoping that the motion detectors would not pick up on this. There was a flash of red as he fired, followed by the explosion of another of the traps. But the heat of the blaster bolt fooled one of the remaining traps into thinking it had just detected movement and it opened fire, forcing Tharun to take cover.

"Three left." Mace said.

"I know." Tharun replied, "I've got the two at the mouth of the corridor to the left. Can you get the one straight ahead?"

"I think so." Mace replied.

"Okay. Ready, set, go!" Tharun yelled and both rebels leapt up simultaneously, the movement from two different sources confusing the simple motion detectors just long enough that Mace and Tharun were able to open fire and disable two of the three traps. With only one of the traps remaining now the two rebels paused.

"I thought you had that one." Mace said.

"I was kind of hoping it would target you long enough for me to take it out." Tharun replied, "Any chance you'd like to jump up and down a few times?"

"None." Mace replied, "Come up with a better plan sergeant. That's an order."

Tharun looked around and saw the body of one of the IntSec guards laying close by. Smiling he slowly reached out and grabbed hold of the dead man's ankle before dragging him closer. The body was still warm enough that the motion detector picked up the movement and opened fire, but the blaster bolts that struck the corpse could do it no more damage and although it had more scorch marks than it had had when the guard died it was still intact when Tharun had it beside him.

"Okay let's see how tough this guy's body armour is." Tharun said as he lifted the corpse up in front of him.

Then he got to his feet, standing with the body between him and the final laser trap. Instantly the trap opened fire, sending one shot after another into the already dead guard. Tharun meanwhile leant around the body and took aim. Then with a single shot he destroyed the final trap, at which point he allowed the dead guard's body to drop back to the floor.

"Nice work." Mace said as he slowly got to his feet as well.

"Hey, it's me." Tharun replied.

With the weapon fire having now ceased the two rebels became aware of the chirping sound coming from the control station's communication panel.

"What's going on down there?" a voice demanded and all of a sudden the officer that Mace had struck with his datapad reached up from the floor and activated the communications system.

"We're under attack!" he yelled, "Send security!"

Mace quickly raised his blaster and before the agent could say anything else he shot the man between his shoulder blades. Then as the voice on the other end of the channel demanded further information Mace put a shot into the communications panel as well.

"Sounded like a boring conversation anyway." he said to Tharun.

"Company's coming." Tharun said and Mace nodded.

"I know. I'll look for Merret's family while you stay here make sure no one can get through that door." he said.

Then as Mace rushed off down the nearest of the three corridors of cells Tharun headed for the blast door. A single shot from his blaster destroyed the control panel beside it and allowed him to pull it away from the wall, creating a hole through which the mechanism of the blast door was visible. Then a second shot destroyed this too, ensuring that the door would not be opening again without the parts first being replaced. While Tharun was doing this Mace ran down the corridor lined with cells, inspecting the display beside each one. He was tempted to open up all of the cells and release every prisoner being held, but this presented him with two problems. Firstly he knew that there was a massive difference between escaping with just four prisoners and escaping with however many dozens were being held in the facility in total. Secondly and perhaps more importantly, he had no idea who any of these people were. Though the Empire persecuted trillions of innocent beings across the galaxy it also controlled genuine threats to the safety of the population and for all Mace knew the first cell he opened could contain a mass murderer he would be setting free to kill again.

All of a sudden he came to a cell where the display simply read 'MERRET' and Mace smiled.

"Found them!" he called out to Tharun before opening the cell door and looking inside. There he saw a woman who was surrounded by three girls in their early to mid teens and when the woman saw him standing outside the cell she pulled her children closer, "My name's Mace Grayle and I'm here to rescue you." Mace said, "Your husband is waiting for you back on our ship."

"My husband?" the woman exclaimed, "But the Imperial agents said he was working for them now."

"Not any more." Mace said, "Now come on, we need to get you out of here." and he beckoned for the woman and her daughters to follow him from the cell.

Returning to the control station Mace saw Tharun waiting with his blaster in his hand.

"Okay we're out of here." Mace said as he continued towards the blast door.

"Can't go that way captain." Tharun said.

"Why not?"

"Well you said to make sure no one came through the door so I blasted the controls that open them."

"So we're trapped here?" Mace asked.

"Oops." Tharun said and Mace frowned.

"Sergeant, I'd expect this of Jaysica." he said.

"There's no need to be insulting." Tharun replied before there came a muffled hammering sound from the other side of the blast door, "Besides, from the sound of it we wouldn't have got very far that way anyhow."

"Point taken." Mace said, "But we still need to find a way out of here."

"Well if there was another door the Imperials would be heading for it right now instead of trying to break down that one." Tharun pointed out.

"So that leaves us stuck several floors below ground." Mace said."

"Below ground?" Merret's wife said, "What do you mean?" and Mace and Tharun realised that Merret's family must not have been allowed to see any of the facility they had been brought to. In all likelihood not one of the prisoners being held here had any idea where 'here' actually was.

"This place is build under a bunch of office buildings." Mace explained, "All the communication gear and ventilations runs up to-" and then he suddenly stopped and smiled as he and Tharun looked at one another and grinned.

"The ventilation shaft." they said simultaneously and then both ran off down different rows of cells, hunting for the access to the main ventilation system they hoped would be somewhere in the detention section.

It was Tharun that found a large grill set into the wall. It was held in place by a large number of security screws that required a very specific tool to remove but this did not surprise Tharun, after all the last thing that the Empire would want was any prisoners who were able to get out of their cells unscrewing the grill and simply climbing to freedom. Fortunately Tharun had a tool that would open almost anything.

"What's going on?" Mace shouted when he heard the first blaster shot.

"Just checking to see what's on the other side of this vent cover." Tharun replied as he fired again until the grill dropped away, its edges smoking from the extreme heat of the blaster shots. Tharun then took out his glow rod and leant into the shaft, aiming the portable light upwards and there he saw exactly what he wanted to see. The shaft went straight up beyond the range of the glow rod and set into one of the walls was a set of handholds that would allow a maintenance engineer to climb it, "It's over here!" Tharun shouted and he began to climb into the shaft.

By the time Mace and Merret's family arrived Tharun was already inside the shaft and hanging onto the handholds on the far side.

"I think they go all the way up." he told Mace.

"Then let's go." Mace replied and he looked at Merret's wife, "Sergeant Verser will go first." he told her, "Then send your daughters and then you. I'll bring up the rear just in case anyone tries coming up after us. Understand?" and the woman nodded.

The door to the detention section exploded inwards when the shaped baradium charges fixed to the outside detonated and burned straight through. This was followed by several small objects being hurled through the hole that exploded a few seconds later, each producing a bright flash and powerful 'Boom!' but no fragmentation. With the way cleared by the stun grenades a squad of armoured IntSec troopers then burst into the detention section. Armed with rifles they spread out to cover the entire room as they checked the body of each of the detention section staff in turn while searching for any signs of those responsible. With the control room secured they then began to head down the corridors of cells, checking each one in turn. When two of the IntSec troopers reached the grill that Tharun had blasted free they came to a halt and as one of them approached it to investigate closer the other activated his comlink.

"Sir, they've gone up the ventilation shaft." he signalled and back in the control room the squad leader turned to one of his subordinates.

"Get someone up to the roof. Now!" he ordered.

The cover to the ventilation shaft on the roof of the building came free with nothing more than a strong shove from Tharun before he climbed out and looked around.

"No one up here. It's safe." he said as he began helping Merret's family from the shaft. When he failed to extend his hand for Mace the other rebel frowned.

"What? No help for me?" he asked as he too climbed out out the shaft on his own.

"You don't need help." Tharun said.

"Now where do we go?" Merret's wife asked, "We can't go back down into the building, the Empire will be waiting for us."

"Now we call for a ride." Mace replied and he took out his comlink, "Jeeves come in. Are you there?" he signalled.

Before landing the troops that had been ambushed the rebels had sabotaged a local tracking station to produce a blind spot that their transports could make use of to deploy a full division of troops without the Empire knowing they were there. Although the overall plan had failed the tracking station had been sabotaged as planned and in the blind spot created by this action the *Silver Hawk* now circled with Harvey at the controls, waiting for a summons from Mace or Tharun.

"Oh yes Captain Grayle sir." Jeeves said in reply to Mace's signal, "I'm so relieved to hear your voice."

"Well tell Harvey we're stuck on the roof of the Imperial Intelligence building and we need a pick up." Mace said, "Just follow this transmission and be ready to let us aboard. Do you understand?"

"Oh of course sir. I understand fully." Jeeves replied and then Harvey let out a short string of chirps, "And Harvey indicates that we will be with you in approximately six minutes."

"Six minutes?" Tharun commented, "Doesn't sound too long." but then there was the sound of a turbolift and the door leading into the building slid open to reveal several IntSec troopers, "On the other hand-" Tharun added.

"Down!" Mace yelled as he opened fire, sending shot after shot into the turbolift car while the IntSec troopers were still bunched up inside.

Merret's family dived for cover, leaving the two rebels to deal with the Imperial troops. Thanks to their being forced to clump together by the small size of the turbolift the IntSec troopers made easy targets and the rapid fire from both rebels cut them down almost without effort. However, this still left the turbolift car intact so before it could be called back down by someone still in the field office concealed below Tharun rushed forwards and grabbed hold of one of the bodies. Then just before the door began to close he dragged the body part way out so that it blocked the doorway and when the door tried to slide shut there was just an alarm. Satisfied that the turbolift was going nowhere Tharun took the opportunity to grab a pair of blaster rifles from the dead troopers and keeping one for himself he gave the other to Mace.

"They won't be coming from that way." Tharun said as he handed over the weapon, "But I wouldn't put it past them to find another way."

"They'll come up through the offices if they have to." Mace said but then there was the sound of a repulsorlift engine and a speeder suddenly rose up from below the roof level of the building. The speeder had only enough room for four occupants including the driver, but this still left room for three agents who promptly started shooting.

One of Merret's daughters screamed and Mace feared that she had been shot. But a quick glimpse in the family's direction proved to him that they were all fine, though one of the agents was keeping them pinned down. Looking back towards the speeder Mace saw its driver bringing the vehicle closer to the roof and one of the agents began to climb onto the side of the vehicle, obviously intending to jump onto the roof. However, a single shot from Mace's newly acquired rifle hit the agent in his leg and he overbalanced, falling from the speeder and screaming loudly as he plummeted to his death.

"Never mind the agents." Tharun said, "Hit the speeder!" and with his weapon set to fully automatic he fired a sustained burst of energy blasts towards it.

The speeder was not intended for combat and each shot that struck it easily punched through the lightweight plating that covered it. One of these struck something vital and the driver visibly panicked as an alarm sounded and smoke began to pour from the speeder's engine. Then it began to spin uncontrollably and all of a sudden it just dropped out of sight.

The sound of powerful repulsorlifts still filled the air though and Mace and Tharun searched for another speeder rising up to attack them. But instead all they saw was the familiar saucer shape of the *Silver Hawk* as it descended towards them.

"Let's go!" Mace yelled as the ship got closer and turned to reveal the open access ramp.

"Quickly!" Merret yelled, waving to his family while holding tight to one of the ramp's supports and his wife and daughters got to their feet and ran as Harvey brought the *Silver Hawk* down over the roof.

Merret pulled his wife and daughters aboard while Mace and Tharun ran after them. Just as they reached the bottom of the ramp they heard shouts from behind them and looking round they saw that more intelligence agents and IntSec guards had indeed come up through the office building and were now spilling out onto the roof. Both rebels opened fire in defiance, spraying energy blasts around as they climbed aboard their ship.

"We're safe!" Mace yelled as they made it to the top of the ramp and he sealed the door behind them, "Let's get out of here!" and in the cockpit Harvey squealed with excitement as the little droid engaged the *Silver Hawk's* engines at full power and it rose into the sky.