

FAIL-SAFE

A short story by Josh Bender

Coruscant Opera, Coruscant

Various patrons entered the stalls as the actors prepared for their show to begin. A middle-aged man approached a seat adjacent to another middle-aged man. Felix, the first middle-aged man was tan with black hair and a scar below his right eye. His demeanor was that of a military man, one from the backwater planets. “What play is this?” he asked in a gruff, almost Concord Dawn-esque accent to Colt, the pale blonde-haired fellow, who looked more like a well-off politician than a soldier.

“*The Moon in my Darkness*,” the blonde-haired man replied in a smooth Alderaanian accent of his own. “It’s a fairly good play, if I say so myself. But I’m much more interested in Dyolf Knip’s later works.”

“Whatever,” Felix said, sitting next to him. “Why’d you choose this place anyways?”

“This is the perfect spot to relay information to our own players,” Colt replied. “And you of all people should know when to hide behind cover.”

“Don’t talk to me about military tactics Colt,” Felix said. “I’ve fought more battles in space than you have on the senate floor.”

“There’s no need to see who has the larger blaster here Felix,” Colt said, knowing that Felix was getting defensive. Today was an extremely stressful day for the both of them. Today would either make or break their careers.

“How long do we have to sit around here?” Felix asked. Colt knew that Felix was an impatient man. As a former soldier for the Mandalorian army, Felix had had his share of battles against other Mandalorians vying for control of the clans. Colt himself had never seen conflict, like Felix said, the only battles he fought were in the senate, but not even he could ever hope to win a battle against the incumbents.

“About seven hours,” Colt replied. Felix shifted uncomfortably in his seat.

“S-seven hours?!” he exclaimed. “What kind of play is this?”

“For one, it’s an opera,” Colt informed him. “And two, this is the perfect alibi if anyone was to uncover the plans.”

“No one *should* uncover the plans,” Felix assured.

“Correct, but either way, better safe than sorry.” Colt chuckled. “Besides, I think you’ll enjoy the play. It’s about coming to terms with your actions.”

“Regardless, it’s an opera,” Felix replied. “That means there’s singing.”

“Operas have more than just singing,” Colt said. “In fact the second act is free from singing, a pure action sequence.” Felix scoffed. “Trust me, you’ll like it.”

“What does the boss think about this?” Felix asked.

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“He paid for our tickets,” Colt replied. Suddenly the lights went out. “And now the play begins,” he said as he pulled a datapad from his pocket. As much as he wanted to watch the play, he needed to work. The backlight from his datapad was drowned out by the vibrant colors reverberating around him allowing him to work in peace. He quickly typed away, giving the signal to start the operation. He put the datapad back and relaxed, waiting for a reply. The music began to build up. Colt shifted in his seat just as a loud booming scream filled the auditorium. Suddenly every spotlight shone upon the stage, revealing a lone man on it. As the actor took a deep breath, the datapad in Colt’s pocket vibrated. He snuck a peak and noted the message. He turned to Felix. He didn’t need to say a thing; Felix saw it in his face. The plan had just begun.

Republic Outpost, Naboo

Captain Gilmore sat in his office, located in the intelligence wing of the base, bored as usual. Ever since his transfer to Naboo, he had yet to see anything compared to the action on Dantooine. If this was as exciting as commissioned work was going to get, he’d consider quitting for mercenary work. No sooner as that thought entered his head did the light on his communication console flash. He pressed the button, expecting a person to appear. Instead, he was treated to a garbled image. “Voice check,” the hologram said. “Do you recognize my voice?”

“Of course, you are General Auga,” Gilmore answered. The image cleared up, revealing a middle-aged man. Gilmore was surprised to hear the General, considering he had been away on Coruscant. “To what do I owe the pleasure?” he asked.

“Cut the small talk,” Auga said, “I need you to issue an immediate lockdown of the base and transmit emergency code ‘RAV’ to flight squadron 52.” Gilmore looked stunned. “RAV” was a serious transmission, meaning only the worst could have happened. Chancellor Dilligaf was dead, and killed by the hands of the Volta no less.

“How did it happen?” he asked, holding back tears.

“I don’t want to say much over this line,” Auga answered, “but our fears have been realized.” Gilmore typed away on the console.

“I need you to say the password,” he informed the General. Only Auga was capable of activating the code.

“General Roger Auga, code 56 91, initiate code ‘RAV’,” he said. The console flashed green, signifying that the password was accepted. “Now Gilmore, activate the lockdown and get to the emergency shelter.” Gilmore saluted the hologram as it disappeared. He took a deep breath and wiped his eyes. He may have been crushed that Dilligaf had died, but there was nothing he could do to change that. The Volta had struck right at the heart of the Republic. He now had to worry about what was about to transpire. He quickly typed in the lockdown activation code and initiated it. As soon as the code was accepted, the entire base’s power supply shut off. The lights were replaced by the red blinking ones signifying the lockdown was in effect. An alarm sounded, which meant that all non-essential personnel, including Gilmore, were to evacuate to the emergency shelter, while soldiers were to remain on standby in case of an attack. Gilmore grabbed his stuff and began the trek to the shelter.

***Bravo 52*, Flight squadron 52**

Every crewman aboard *Bravo 52*, a *Kubrick*-class cruiser, sat at their posts, either working diligently or just wasting time. Major Kann, captain of the cruiser and the squadron, sat at the helm. He didn't really care how his men went about. All that mattered to him was how much longer he had to keep the squadron out until they could return to base. The communications officer sat alone, watching *The Moon in my Darkness*, a ten-act opera from the mind of Dyolf Kinp. The officer was a big fan of Dyolf's and was glad to know that his communications relay was able to receive it, this one being his favorite. It was right at the start of the second act where the main character was attacked by police officers and now was on the run. Before the chase could begin, the opera was interrupted by an image of General Auga.

"This is an automated message," the hologram said, "flight plan 'RAV' has been initialized. Please follow the instructions that have been enclosed with your captain." The hologram disappeared and returned to the opera, now in the middle of the act. Like the tune playing, the officer didn't have the time to dilly dally. He turned the holonet off and approached Kann.

"Major," the officer said, "we just received an automated message from base. Flight plan 'RAV' has been initialized." The Major opened up his console and looked up the flight plan. His eyes widened as he read it over in his head.

"Did you say 'RAV'?" the Major asked once he finished. The officer nodded. Kann looked over the flight plan a second time, making sure he had it correctly. He then activated his comlink so everyone in the ship could hear him. "Attention crew," he spoke, "flight plan 'RAV' has been initialized." He steadied himself for what he was about to say next. "Flight plan 'RAV' is as follows." He took a deep breath. "'RAV': In the event that the Volta have successfully assassinated the Chancellor, all squadrons that receive this flight plan are to go to the planet Voltar via sub-light travel and launch an attack on the target provided within the following documents. Use everything at your discretion. Each member of the ship will receive individual instructions on what to do." He sat back down and turned off the comlink. He then pressed a button on his console to transmit the crew's orders. The communications officer returned to his post and read his instructions. He then entered 1496 into the system to block all incoming communications while transmitting the flight plan to any Republic ship that entered their zone of communication. The pilot entered the coordinates into his navigation computer and began the move forward with the rest of the squadron. Everyone was shocked that the Volta would be so bold to kill their leader, but now it was the Republic's turn to strike back.

Republic Outpost

Gilmor walked through the empty halls of the barracks, cursing his luck. The base was built in a "u" shape. The intelligence wing, where he worked, was located on the right wing. The emergency shelter was on the left. During a lockdown, the exits to the outside were sealed and he had forgotten that the lobby, the most direct route to the shelter, was under repair. That left him having to take a detour through the barracks. As he walked, he could hear the faint noise of *The Moon in My Darkness* playing in one of the rooms. He entered a soldier's dormitory and found a working holonet receiver playing the opera. He picked it up and watched it for a

moment, now in the middle of the second act. While he watched the actor climb into a spaceship to escape, he quickly realized something was amiss. In a time of crisis, the Republic would have not only cancelled the opera, but would have cut all holonet communication save for military communications. He picked up the receiver and made another detour to General Auga's office, the sound of loud drumming noise--simulating blasterfire--echoed throughout the hall.

As he approached the office, he noticed that the door was wide open. Gilmor knew that Auga was to seal his door during the lockdown, less some Volta scum were to intercept him during an attack. He turned off the receiver and slowly walked to the door. He peered inside. Auga was at his desk, a cigar in his mouth and a hand going through his thinning brown hair. He appeared calm, even though the Chancellor had been murdered and a war was about to engulf the galaxy. "General?" Gilmor asked. Auga turned his attention from the window and looked at Gilmor.

"Captain," Auga said, "shouldn't you be in the shelter by now?" He then motioned for Gilmor to come inside. Gilmor cautiously entered the general's domain. Auga stood up and walked to the door. "What's that in your hand?" he asked as he noticed the holonet receiver.

"Something I needed to show you," he answered. As he turned on the receiver, Auga walked past him and shut the door. With a push of a few buttons the door was sealed shut. Auga heard the familiar sound of a bass playing, signifying the start of the opera's fifth act. Auga turned and looked at the receiver.

"I thought the lockdown called for all communications devices to be confiscated," he said.

"I found it in the barracks sir," Gilmor answered. "But don't you think something is wrong here? If there was an attack on Republic soil, all non-military holonet communications would have been cut. Yet, right here, on this very receiver, *The Moon in My Darkness* is playing live." Auga watched the opera for a few seconds as the ship the actor was in crashed into the stage. He took a puff from his cigar.

"Sit down," he ordered, "and turn that damn thing off." Gilmor walked to an open seat in front of Auga's desk and sat down. Auga took another puff of his cigar. "The only thing I love about the Volta," he said, removing the nub from his mouth and admiring it, "are these cigars they've made." He turned to Gilmor. "Do you know how they make these?" he asked. Gilmor shook his head. "They skin a Krayt dragon and use the thin underskin to wrap a dried plant leaf up. Then, you just light it up and just puff away on it. I don't know how I'd live without these."

"Probably a lot longer," Gilmor said. Auga snorted.

"Probably not," he retorted, "working for the military cuts your life a lot more than a simple cigar or deathstick." He tossed the nub into the trash and grabbed another cigar from his pocket. "War is chaos," he said as he lit it up.

"About that subject," Gilmor said. "Sir, is the Chancellor dead?" Auga looked out the window again.

“Unless something happened to him in the last couple of days, no,” he answered. Gilmor breathed a sigh of relief. His eyes then widened.

“Then activating ‘RAV’ was a mistake,” he said, standing up. “We need to call back the squadron before something bad happens.” He walked to the door and pressed the button to open it. The door didn’t budge. He turned to Auga, who had returned to his seat.

“Sit back down Gilmor,” Auga ordered, “there’s no need to worry about arbitrary things.” Gilmor stepped back, stunned at Auga’s statement.

“Arbitrary things?” he asked. “Sir, we might be starting an unnecessary war here!”

“It’s not unnecessary,” Auga replied. “Sit down and I’ll explain everything.” He motioned for Gilmor to sit back down. Gilmor stood for a moment before returning to his seat.

“What is going on here?” he asked.

“An extermination,” Auga answered smugly. “I’ve just set in motion the genocide of the Volta menace.” He took a puff of his cigar. “Gilmor, from what you’ve seen and heard, do you think the Volta are something the Republic can trust?” Gilmor shifted in his seat.

“From what I’ve seen and heard, of course,” he answered. Auga scoffed.

“Of course,” he said, discouraged. “Gilmor, do you think we are at peace?” Gilmor nodded. “And isn’t peace what all true warriors strive for?” Gilmor nodded once again. “Then we are not at peace.”

“Why not?” Gilmor asked.

“Peace can only be achieved once all opposing forces are out of the picture,” Auga answered, “and the Volta stand in our way. We sit at the height of power, yet we have those bastards nipping at our heels. We need to kick those little dragon lovers away before we can truly be at peace.” Gilmor shifted in his seat again.

“And the wholesome genocide of a nation is the right thing to do?” he asked. Auga took another puff.

“Sometimes you have to do the wrong thing to get the right result,” Auga answered. He looked at the clock on the wall. “Looks like the chancellor will be getting my message any second now.”

“What message?” Gilmor asked.

“One squadron can’t defeat the Volta by themselves,” Auga explained. “So I’ve sent a message to the Chancellor explaining what needs to be done. He’ll understand and send the full might of the Republic to wipe them out.”

Military Council, Coruscant

A collective of twelve men sat around a table in a barren room. The men had a look of anguish and worry on their faces. This was a major catastrophe on their hands and Chancellor Dilligaf was nowhere to be found. He had yet to return from a diplomatic meeting. "We cannot wait any longer," one of the men said, standing up, "we have a crisis on our hands and the chancellor has yet to show his face!" Suddenly the doors opened, revealing the chancellor. He entered the room and walked around the men to his seat in front of the window. He stared out at the morning skyline for a moment before sitting down.

"Someone care to explain to me what the frick is going on here?" Dilligaf asked the council. The members looked about each other, unable to come up with an answer. "No one can?" he then asked, anger rising in his voice, "because I need to know why this office received this message." He pressed a button on his side of the table and a holographic image of General Auga appeared.

"Chancellor Dilligaf and the rest of your military council," the hologram said. "By the time you and the rest of your men receive this message, flight squadron 52 will be on their way to Voltar to launch a surprise attack. You understand that one squadron and whatever reinforcements it picks up along the way will be unable to effectively defeat or survive retaliation from the Volta. I believe that if you send forces to back them up, we can crush the Volta menace before they could retaliate. I implore you to send troops as soon as possible. If not, the consequences will be devastating. The decision is yours Chancellor. Peace for the Republic, and may it last another thousand years." The hologram fizzled away. The council began discussing amongst themselves.

"Chancellor," one of the members said, "where is the Volta ambassador? Surely we should get him involved." Dilligaf looked at him coldly.

"Who are you exactly?" he asked, unaware of most of the names on his own council.

"Lieutenant Divad Grohl of the Republic navy," the man introduced.

"Sir, Corporal Clangk of the Coreillian Air Defense," another man introduced, "I would like to say that our relationship with the Volta is strained, informing them of this attack might push them into retaliation earlier."

"Acknowledged," Dilligaf said, "we need to stop this quickly and quietly. Getting the Volta involved could cause some unnecessary bloodshed. Both of you can be seated. Clangk and Grohl sat down. "Now, any reason why General Auga decided to try and start a war without anyone's knowledge?" he asked. Another man stood up.

"Admiral Roht, military intelligence," the man introduced. "Sir, from my understanding, last month, General Auga was present at the last budget discussion. He was... adamant about the Senate's decision to cut the military's budget." He pressed a button at his side, activating another hologram of Auga.

"We are your last line of defense in this galaxy!" the hologram screamed. "You can't cut back on funding! YOU WILL REGRET THIS!" The hologram shut off.

“General Auga decided to use flight plan ‘RAV’ to back up his threat.” Roht said, clearing his throat before continuing. “‘RAV’ was created in case you, chancellor, were incapacitated.”

“Killed, you mean,” Dilligaf said.

“Well,” Roht said. He cleared his throat once more. “Yes. In the midst of chaos the navy would be able to launch an immediate counter attack.”

“As we can see Roht, I am alive and well,” Dilligaf said. “So how is it that he can give such an order?”

“I cannot say,” Roht answered. “We never assumed someone so high in the military would ever consider committing treason.” Roht cleared his throat as he sat down. Chancellor Dilligaf rubbed his temples in anger.

“Is there any way to get that flight squadron back?” he asked. Grohl stood up.

“Impossible,” he answered. “‘RAV’ calls for a full communication blackout. We are unable to contact them at all.” Dilligaf continued to rub his head. “Auga and Auga only can withdraw the squadron by clearing the voice lock.”

“Send troops to Naboo as soon as possible,” Dilligaf ordered. “And make sure that the Volta ambassador is unable to contact anyone. We don’t want him to escalate this any further.” Grohl opened his mouth to object, but quickly closed it and sat back down. He was angry at how the chancellor was handling this mess, but he knew he couldn’t object to the other twelve’s ideals. Well, and hope to win at least. He looked down at his console and read as the numbers of troops and armaments was listed: A thousand soldiers in two cruisers along with enough artillery to wipe a couple of cities off a planet. They were planning to battle Auga’s men, Republic soldiers.

“A thousand troops?” he asked. “That is enough for a battle! You can’t justify fighting our own men!”

“Auga has his men on battle standby,” Roht explained, “as soon as we touch down, they will attack on sight. We have to be prepared to fight back.” Grohl was clearly angered but again refused to object.

“Roht is right,” Dilligaf said. “As of this moment Auga and his men are traitors to the Republic.” He then stood up. “Captain Grohl, if you are unfit to follow my orders, you may leave.” Grohl didn’t move.

“Chancellor,” Roht said, standing up. “We need to discuss the chance that we cannot pull the squadron back.”

“We’ll cross that bridge when we get to it,” Dilligaf said. “How long until the troops arrive at Naboo?” he asked Grohl. Grohl sat motionless. “Grohl!” he exclaimed, slamming his fist on the table. Grohl jerk up and quickly read over the console.

“An hour,” he answered, “emergency hyperspace lanes have been opened.”

“Good,” Dilligaf replied. “Let’s hope this conflict can end without bloodshed.”

Bravo 52

Major Kann sat in his seat as an automated message from the head of flight squadron 54 confirmed his squad’s entry into the battle fleet. So far they had five squadrons, counting them, and had at least two or three hours until they reached Voltar. With the path they were taking they could pick up at least two more fleets. And that would be enough for them to suppress the Volta long enough so they could drop the annihilation bomb, a large fusion bomb capable of wiping out a large number of people. And dropping enough of those bombs would reduce Voltar to ash, much like the destruction of the Ubese a century before. The Major smiled, knowing that they would be saving not only the Republic, but the galaxy as well, from further harm. He turned to the loadmaster. “What is our target?” he asked.

“A military instillation in the southern hemisphere,” the loadmaster replied.

“How are our defense systems?” Kann then asked. “Will they hold out?”

“Our systems should protect us from anything the Volta throws at us,” the loadmaster boasted. “Our blaster shields should deflect everything.”

“Perfect!” Kann replied. He read over his console again. “Pilot, inform me when we near the point of no return,” he said.

“Yes sir,” the pilot replied. Kann sat back, waiting for the impending battle.

Republic Outpost

Gilmor nervously sat across from the General. This man was a psychopath. He was willingly going to attack a group that had yet to attack them. This was everything that went against the Republic’s morals. Auga took a long puff of the cigar currently in his mouth. “You’re too nervous,” he said to Gilmor, who shifted in his seat, clearing his throat. “You might not see it yet, but we are doing the right thing.”

“The right thing,” Gilmor repeated. “Tell me General, how is attacking an innocent group ‘the right thing?’”

“I wouldn’t call them innocent,” Auga said. “We’ve had a lingering hunch for years that an attack was eminent.” He took puff of his cigar, set it down and picked up a datapad, handing it over to Gilmor. He picked his cigar back up as Gilmor read over the datapad. “A few months ago our hunch became a grim reality. Military productions at various facilities increased, churning out more and more weapons and vehicles. And just last week, the Volta ambassador, Sram Zhu, discussed closing the embassies on Coruscant and Voltar. They are preparing for war.”

“General, we should call the squadron back and let the Senate discuss this with the Volta’s government,” Gilmor pleaded.

“The only thing the Chancellor and Senate are willing to discuss is how much they will cut the military and medical budget,” Auga retorted. “This is the time for action, not discussion.” Gilmore sighed and handed the datapad to Auga when an alarm sounded. Auga turned to his security console. Two Republic cruisers orbited the planet, shuttling troops to the surface. “Looks like Dilligaf sent troops to take me in,” he remarked.

“Then let them,” Gilmore said.

“I just need to buy more time,” Auga said as he activated communications to the rest of the base. “Attention all troops,” he said over the loudspeaker, “this is General Auga. Today, the Volta attacked our capitol and murdered our beloved Chancellor. They now approach us, disguised as Republic soldiers. Attack anyone who comes towards the base. I repeat, let no one in.”

“You’re mad,” Gilmore said.

“No,” Auga said, taking another drag of his cigar, “I’m just doing my job.”

The Republic troops trudged through the dense jungle of the Naboo landscape. As they broke through the tree line and approached the base, they noticed Auga’s men along the top of the wall, three on the left, two on the right, both sides ready for a battle. The turrets at the sides of the gate activated and turned their attention to the Republic troops, who quickly retreated to the safety of the jungle. “Wait for the artillery!” a commander ordered. Auga’s men fired from the wall into the jungle, pinning the Republic down. One of the soldiers on the wall noticed a couple of soldiers with their backs turned to the battle. He aimed down his sights and as soon as one of them turned around was met with a face full of blaster.

“I thought we were on the same side!” a Republic soldier exclaimed as he dragged his fallen comrade.

“Auga turned them against us,” another soldier said. Before long, a *PI-55* artillery cannon rolled down the path, stopping short of the tree line. Two engineers fiddled with the controls and aimed for the gate. The cannon fired a blast of plasma at the gate, which crumpled from the blast. The turrets sparked and exploded. The Republic soldiers then emerged from the trees and fired upon the distracted soldiers on the wall. Auga’s men quickly retreated down the wall and behind the hangers on either side of the base.

Auga looked at the carnage outside from his window. “I didn’t expect them to be so resourceful,” he remarked.

“You’re a wanted man,” Gilmore said, “they’re willing to bring you in with force.”

The Republic troops pushed through the destroyed gate and awaited the impending skirmish inside. But there was no one. The Republic walked cautiously as the cannon rolled into the base. Two of Auga’s men sat around the corner of the right hanger wielding an anti-air rocket and waited for the cannon to pass. They aimed the launcher at the *PI-55*’s targeting console as it finally came into their sights. They pulled the trigger and fired a missile at the console. The missile struck the cannon, not only disabling the targeting function, but also

blowing out one of the treads. The Republic soldiers used the disabled cannon as cover as three of Auga's men appeared from behind a crate near the entrance of the base and opened fire. Four Republic soldiers ran towards the right hanger and rounded the corner, encountering the missile team. The soldiers fired on the unsuspecting team, quickly taking them out. Three more of Auga's men approached the firefight from the medical wing and attacked. Three more Republic soldiers came to the aid of the soldiers at the hanger to the left. The squad of seven overpowered the men behind the crates, quickly taking them out. The three soldiers over at the right hanger broke into the hanger, only to find an unfinished tank and a sign that read "thirty days without a Gungan incident".

"If we can get an engineering team in here, we could use this tank," a soldier suggested.

"It's better to just wait for our own tanks," another soldier informed. The soldiers turned back around, only to find another squad of Auga's men pointing their guns at them. Auga's men quickly fired, eliminating the squad of three.

"Get this tank up and running men!" one of the soldiers said into his comlink. Another squad of two appeared from the med wing and joined up with the other squad of three holding back the Republic troops. The now squad of five pushed forward, forcing the Republic to retreat back to the safety of the *PI-55*. The engineering team made it into the hanger housing the unfinished tank. "How long until you can get it up and running?" the soldier from before asked.

"A few hours," one of the engineers answered.

"Try an hour," the soldier said. "I overheard that these Volta scum are bringing in tanks soon. The engineering team got to work quickly while the squad checked to see if the hanger door was secure. They then set themselves up at the back entrance, ready to mow down any Volta who tried to stop them. As the two sides of this battle at the base prepared for another attack, they both knew that this was going to be a long hour.

Volta embassy, Coruscant

Sram Zhu, the Volta ambassador, paced back and forth in his office. "How dare they black out my communications to Voltar!" he exclaimed to his secretary. "Get Dilligaf on the line," he ordered. The secretary made a quick bow and walked over to her desk.

"He is offline as well," she informed him. Zhu stopped pacing and turned to her.

"Completely?" he asked. She nodded. Before anything else could be said, two Republic soldiers entered the office. "Excuse me," he said, disgusted, "this is a Volta instillation."

"Forgive the intrusion," one of the soldiers said, giving a quick bow. "I am Haress and this is my cohort, Kobalt. We were sent by Dilligaf's office to repair your communication system." Haress removed the satchel from his shoulder and set it on the ground. "The planet has been experiencing some power failures. Last surge took out the communications relay. We've repaired most of the system, but we need to ensure your connection is working correctly."

“Well, it isn’t” Zhu replied. “So if you’re going to work, work quickly. I’d like to contact my superiors sometime today.”

“Of course sir,” Haress said. He and Kobalt bowed before leaving the office. The two walked through the lobby to the stairwell. “Your communications relay is down here, correct?” he asked a Volta guard stationed at the door.

“Yes,” the guard replied, “do you need an escort or something?”

“No, we work faster alone,” Haress answered. The two of them entered the stairwell. “Everything’s going to plan,” he whispered as they descended to the basement. “Dilligaf cut the communications just like they predicted.” Kobalt opened his satchel to examine the explosives inside. He reached in and fiddled around with some of the wires. “Don’t mess with those,” Haress said, slapping Kobalt’s hand away. “Knowing you, those things would go off with you just touching them.” Kobalt scoffed as they reached the basement door. The door slid open to reveal a barren, dusty room. Situated around the perimeter was an enclosed area housing massive durasteel pillars that supported the embassy. In the center was the console to the communications relay, as well as the power generator, security system and the rest of the embassy’s systems. The two walked across the concrete floor towards the central console.

“Okay,” Haress said as he opened his satchel and removed a slicer kit, “as soon as I pull the plug, you’ll have about a minute or so to bypass the security lock.” Kobalt nodded as he grabbed the kit from Haress’ hand. Haress opened the console’s panel and examined the wires, looking for the main power line. Kobalt approached the lock. He turned to Haress and nodded to show he was ready. Haress gripped the power cord and yanked it, killing power to the embassy. Kobalt quickly attached the slicer kit to the lock and pressed a few buttons waiting for the device to work. The lock suddenly retracted, letting him in. As the gate shut behind him, Haress plugged the power cord back in, and the power returned, locking the gate behind Kobalt. Kobalt opened up his satchel and removed one of the bombs. “Start setting them up,” Haress ordered as he typed a message to his superior. “We’ve only got an hour before all chaos breaks loose.”

Coruscant Opera

The fourth act had just ended, providing the audience (and actors) with a short break. They had at least sat through three hours of the play, another four to go. “I don’t get it,” Felix said as he stretched his legs, “is he dead or not?”

“He’s dead,” Colt replied.

“Then how was he walking around in his home all that time?” Felix then asked.

“He’s been dead since the end of the second act, but he didn’t know until the end of the third act,” Colt explained. Before he had a chance to explain further, his datapad vibrated. He removed the datapad and read the message carefully. “Well, looks like the infiltration team got inside without a problem.”

“Good to hear,” Felix said. “I thought those buggers would have torn the place apart.” Colt knew what he meant, if Haress and Kobalt weren’t off shooting and/or blowing a place up, they were planning on doing it. Hiring them wasn’t tough at all. Just hand them the cash and a list of explosive supplies and they were on the case. Colt was a little skeptic to use homemade explosives, but it did help to delay investigators in the long run. The sound of music beginning to play informed the patrons to return to their seats before the show resumed. Colt and Felix sat down as the lights dimmed. “How much time is left?” Felix asked.

“About four hours,” Colt replied.

“I meant the mission,” Felix said.

“Oh, if everything goes well, two or three hours,” Colt replied. The electronic jingle of credits being deposited filled the room. Colt put a finger to his mouth and returned his attention to the play.

One hour later...

Bravo 52

Major Kann sat in his seat, his leg bouncing in anticipation for the upcoming battle. They had just passed the point of no return. From here on out, they could only move forward. He pressed a button on his communicator to speak with all the squadrons at his disposal. “Attention all captains,” he announced, “we are about to make history. Our mission is to attack Voltar head on and annihilate their Republic hating hides. When we arrive at Voltar, all squadrons are to defend their lead vessels as they approach their targets. Captains, once you arrive at your designated target, maintain atmospheric ascension and release your annihilation bomb above five-thousand feet. Once the bomb has been deployed, retreat to open space and use emergency military hyperlanes to return to Coruscant for further instructions.” Kann took a deep breath. Before he could continue his speech, an alarm sounded.

“Sir, I got an *Orca*-class cruiser on radar!” the radar technician exclaimed. Kann smiled, knowing the battle had just begun.

“Fire on the cruiser,” Kann ordered. “We need to get to Voltar as soon as possible!” Kann watched as every ship fired upon his cruiser, quickly destroying it. “All ships we must push forward,” he said. “The Republic is depending on us!”

Military Council

Dilligaf sat in his seat, his patience had worn thin. They had been unable to intercept the fleet or capture Auga in the last hour. Time was running out.

“Sir,” Roht said, standing up, “we need to discuss our fall-back plan.”

“I thought this *was* our fall-back,” Grohl said.

“Grohl, I don’t want any more lip from you,” Dilligaf said. Grohl placed his hands on the table and went to stand up, but stopped and returned them to his sides. “Now Roht,” Dilligaf

said, returning to the matter at hand. “What are you proposing we do in our short amount of time?”

“Auga has already sent the squadron, as well as seven other squadrons, to Voltar,” Roht said. “We’ve got little hope to stop the fleet from completing their mission.” He paused for a moment. “Sir, if we use the emergency military hyperspace lanes, we can send our fleet to Voltar as well.”

“Are you mad?!” Grohl exclaimed. “I refuse to send anymore of my troops for this mess!”

“Then leave this office!” Dilligaf screamed. “I’m tired of your bickering! This is war whether you like it or not!” He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. “Divad Grohl, I hereby suspend you from your military duties pending an official meeting of termination.” Two guards approached Grohl and grabbed him by the arms. “Detain him until this crisis is over,” he ordered the guards. The guards nodded and started to drag Grohl away.

“You’ll regret this!” Grohl exclaimed as the door slid shut. Dilligaf sighed and rubbed his temples.

“Send the troops to Voltar,” he ordered.

Coruscant Security Force Headquarters, Coruscant

Mical Tarkin, head of the Coruscant Security Force sat at his desk, trying to throw a tiny ball into a cup. He kept failing at the simple task and soon gave up around the fiftieth try. He leaned back in his chair, bored.

“Sir?” his comlink buzzed, “we have a situation down here.”

“How bad is it?” Mical asked, wondering what could be so wrong.

“We’ve got a bounty hunter carrying documents on some high ranking Republic officials,” the man on the line answered. “We think she’s a spy.” Mical stood up and straightened himself up. He always tried to look nice for the ladies. He exited his office and made the trek to the holding cells. He walked to the two men guarding the cell and saluted them.

“I’ll take it from here,” he said. “Just give me the files.”

“Yes sir,” one of the guards said, handing the datapad to Mical. The two guards then left the area for Mical to do his work. Mical was skilled at interrogation. He had a way to strike fear even into the toughest man. As he entered the room he examined his foe. She was a tall, blonde-haired, blue-eyed bounty hunter. Judging from how she sat with her back straight and hands placed in her lap she had some military training. He looked over to the other room and spotted her weapons and armor. This woman was loaded. He quickly straightened out his blonde hair and turned back to the woman. “So Miss Mauss,” he said, reading over her file. “How did you come into possession of these Republic files?”

“I prefer Nara,” the bounty hunter said in a cold tone. Mical looked over the file again.

“Do you know a General Roger Auga?” he asked. Nara didn’t answer. Mical set the datapad down. “Listen Nara, I can only help you if you help me, if you don’t help me, then I can’t stop the Senate from executing you for treason.” Nara didn’t respond to his threat. He began to read through the datapad again.

“If you keep reading it, they’ll execute you as well,” Nara threatened. Mical sat down across from her and stared into her cold, emotionless eyes.

“You were a Republic soldier before becoming a bounty hunter, correct?” he asked, already knowing the question.

“Yes,” she answered.

“And your name is Nara Mauss, right?” he then asked, still staring into her eyes.

“Yes,” she answered again. He noted how her eyes contracted the same way each time.

“What was your last bounty for?” he asked. Her lips tightened for a moment. The next thing she’d say would most likely be a lie.

“Your typical crime lord,” she answered. Her eyes contracted differently, signaling that she was lying.

“Nara, you’ve got to tell the truth here,” he said. “What was your last bounty for?” Nara didn’t respond.

“Mandalorians,” she finally answered. “I was paid to exterminate a Mandalorian base.” She was telling the truth that time.

“Where was it?” he asked.

“Sebes, in the outer rim,” she answered. Mical knew the planet. The Republic had known of its proximity to nearby Republic controlled planets but the Military council had objected to attacking it. “While I was there, I found a mainframe filled with Republic documents. I nabbed some of the more recent ones and fled.”

“So you think the Mandalorians are planning to attack the Republic?” he asked.

“No,” she answered. She was telling the truth. “I think the Republic is planning something themselves.” She was still telling the truth.

“The Republic’s working with the Mandalorians?” Mical said, skeptical, “Come on Nara, but you have to admit the idea sounds, sketchy.”

“I thought so at first too,” she said. “But those files talk in detail about some sort of attack on-”

“Voltar,” Mical interjected, reading the datapad. “By the Force, someone is planning on attacking the Volta.”

“You haven’t heard anything about an attack?” she asked.

“No, but it’s funny,” he answered. “Today I received a couple complaints about how the embassy district had lost communications for a while. I called the various ambassadors and every one of them responded, except for the Volta ambassador. I couldn’t reach him.” He wiped the sweat from his brow and quickly read through the documents. “Some of these are encrypted,” he said.

“I tried cracking the code,” Nara said. “But it came out jumbled. The clearance is for someone with a military council title and above.”

“Dilligaf’s military council!” Mical exclaimed. “By the Force these monsters are in the council as well!”

“We’d need someone on the council to crack the code,” Nara explained. “Their security clearance would unscramble the encryption.”

“The council’s in session by now,” Mical said, thinking. He needed to warn Dilligaf immediately before the plan could succeed. Suddenly, there was a knock on the door. The door slid open to reveal another security officer.

“Sir,” the guard said, giving a quick salute, “there’s a Mr. Grohl on the line for you. He says it’s urgent.” What a coincidence, Grohl was one the military council. Mical left the room and headed to the communicator.

“Mical Tarkin,” he said, picking up the receiver.

“Mical,” Grohl said. “They almost didn’t let me talk to anyone. Listen, Mical, I’m being held in the Senatorial holding cells.”

“Wait, the senatorial holding cells?” Mical said, confused. “What’s going on Divad?”

“Dilligaf’s gone crazy,” Grohl explained. “The council’s pushed him into attacking Voltar!” Mical’s eyes widened as he heard those last words. The plan was already in motion. “I refused to take part and Dilligaf had me arrested.”

“Do you want me to bail you out?” Mical asked. This was going great. He could have Grohl use his clearance to decode the encryption.

“They won’t let me out,” Grohl answered. “I just need you to contact my wife, she’s out of the house but I need her to contact my lawyer.”

“Okay Divad,” Mical said. “I’ll try to reach her.”

“Thanks man,” Grohl said. “May the Force be with you.”

“May the Force be with you,” Mical said before hanging up. He closed his eyes and wondered how he could get Grohl out of the Senatorial holding cells.

Republic Outpost

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Auga watched the carnage from his window, a smile on his chain-smoking mouth. The tanks had broken through the defensive wall and forced his troops into the central office. Of course that would spell defeat in any other situation but he knew the Republic needed him alive. Those tanks couldn't fire without the fear of injuring or even killing him. He took a long drag from his cigar. Gilmor sat in his chair, clutching the holonet receiver in his hands. He looked at Auga, whose back was turned at the moment, making it an opportune time to press the record button. He cleared his throat as the receiver beeped. He knew both of them were going to die in this base, he needed people to know what had happened here. He placed the holo-vid on the table behind Auga's cigar box.

"Are the tanks scaring you Divad?" Auga asked as he turned around to face him.

"J-just a little," Gilmor replied, nervous that he'd been caught.

"Take one of my cigars," Auga said, pointing at the box. "The toxins in it will slow your nerves." Gilmor opened the box, lifting the one of the cigars from it. The cigar felt heavy in his fingers as he brought it to his mouth. He clamped his teeth on the leathery skin and brought the lighter to the cigar. Just as he flicked the lighter, he heard the sound of glass shattering and then a bolt pierced the window, striking the cigar and blowing it to pieces. Gilmor froze and looked at the shatter cigar in his mouth. Before he could react, Auga tackled him to the floor.

"Bastards," Auga said, rolling off of Gilmor. "Don't you know that killing me will ruin your chances of ever stopping this attack?!" he screamed towards the broken window.

"Maybe they realize they don't need you anymore," Gilmor suggested.

"Nonsense," Auga retorted, "only I can send the squadron back." He stood up and brushed himself off. "They need me to say into the communicator 'This is General Roger Auga, override code 7-2-5, repeal flight plan 'RAV','" he explained boastfully.

"That's all?" Gilmor asked, glancing at the holo-vid projector. The little red light flickered, signifying that it was still recording.

"Of course," Auga replied. "But like I said, they need my voice and my voice only." Gilmor smiled. He already knew they voice lock could be opened via holo-vid. Now all he needed to do was get out of the office and back to the communication room. And Auga still had the pass code locked away in his brain. Another blaster bolt struck the wall. Auga hit the floor again. "For fricks sake!" he exclaimed. "These men need to be taught a lesson." He crawled to his shelf and dragged his heavy repeater rifle from the bottom shelf. "Help check the power pack," he ordered to Gilmor. Gilmor reluctantly crawled over to the rifle and helped drag it to the window. They lifted onto its stand and Gilmor took hold of the power pack. As Auga adjusted the stand's height, Gilmor switched the power on and turned the dial to fifty percent. Auga took a quick peek out the window and fired blindly at the soldiers below.

The stream of blaster fire rained down on the soldiers below wounding most of the remaining survivors. Those who were not dead quickly took cover behind the tanks. "Preparing

to fire on turret,” a tank operator informed. The captain peered around the tank and noticed Auga’s head peeking out from behind the gun.

“Don’t fire!” the captain screamed into his comlink. “Auga’s manning that gun! We need him alive!” The order came too late however. The tank fired upon the window, blowing the room apart and toppling the ceiling upon Auga and Gilmore’s location. “Damn it!” the captain screamed. “I said to cease fire!” He stepped from behind cover and viewed the blown apart building. Suddenly, a group of soldier emerged from inside the building, their arms raised in the air. “Don’t shoot!” the captain ordered as he rushed to the surrendering men. “Is Auga alive?” he asked one of the men.

“We have nothing to say to you Volta scum,” one of the soldiers answered. “Just take us prisoner and do your worst.”

“I *am* Republic!” the captain said. “Damn it, Auga’s got to be in there.” He motioned for two men to follow him into the building.

Gilmore opened his eyes, his ears ringing from the explosion and ceiling cave in. He looked around, trying to find Auga. Auga was situated at the wall, blood running down his mouth. Gilmore tried to stand up, but his leg was trapped under rubble.

“They surrendered,” Auga struggled to say. “Those lousy cowards surrendered.”

“The battle’s lost,” Gilmore replied, removing the debris. “It’s time to end this Roger. Let’s send the squadron home.”

“No,” Auga said. “This isn’t my choice.”

“What are you saying?” Gilmore asked, almost free.

“Even if I was to give in, there are others that are doing their part to make this war happen,” Auga answered, pulling a hold-out blaster from his side. “You’re a good man Gilmore,” he said as he put the gun in his mouth.

“Sir, no!” Gilmore screamed as he stood up. By the time he lifted his foot, Auga had already pulled the trigger. The blast echoed through the room. Gilmore looked on as Auga’s body slumped over. He cautiously stepped over towards the remains of the desk and felt around for the receiver. His hopes rose as his hand grazed the receiver and he quickly grabbed hold of it, removing it from the debris. He looked towards the door, luckily for him the wall had been blown open in the blast. He stumbled over to the hole in the wall and peered out. The hallway had been damaged, but not as bad as the office. He slipped out and started down the hall, when he spotted three Republic soldiers coming for him.

“Where’s Auga?” the captain asked as they approached Gilmore.

“Dead,” Gilmore answered, “suicide.”

“Damn,” one of the soldiers said. “He was our only chance to stop this war!”

“Not quite,” Gilmore interjected. “Auga may have been the only one to break the voice lock, but we don’t need him in person.”

“What are you getting at?” the captain said, confused. Gilmore showed them the holonet receiver. He pressed a button, and the image rewound until he stopped it at the right moment.

“They need me to say into the communicator ‘This is General Roger Auga, override code 7-2-5, repeal flight plan ‘RAV’,” the hologram of Auga said.

“We just need to play that into the communicator over in the intelligence wing,” Gilmore explained.

“You lucky bastard,” the captain said, a large smile engulfing his entire face. “We still got this!” He then turned around. “Come on! Let’s get to the intelligence wing!”

“Sir,” one of the soldiers interrupted, stopping the captain in his tracks. “The intelligence wing was damaged during the battle. It’s inoperable.”

“Damn!” the captain then said, punching the wall. “Will nothing go right today?”

“Can we get to your cruiser?” Gilmore asked. “We can relay the recording to Dilligaf’s council from there.”

“You’re a genius,” the captain said, his smile returning to his face. “Come on, we need to get to the cruiser!”

Volta Embassy

Haress pulled the plug once again, giving time for Kobalt to get through the gate. “All set?” Haress asked. Kobalt nodded as he slung his empty bag over his shoulder. “Time for us to see what the Volta are up to,” he said as he plugged his comlink into the console. After he fiddled with the controls for a bit, a holographic image of a balding man appeared.

“Ambassador Zhu, come in,” the hologram spoke, “this is High General Prigden. Republic forces have invaded our sector and will reach the planet in less than fifteen minutes! Ambassador, if you receive this message, evacuate the embassy and get all Volta citizens to Krayteria. If the embassy has already been compromised, evacuate all you can to our secondary safe-world.”

Haress smiled as he disconnected the comlink. “Looks like Auga’s men arrived right on time.” Kobalt took out his comlink and plugged it into one of the bombs. After a minute of pushing buttons, he threw his comlink on the ground. “Whoa, whoa, calm down there,” Haress said as he picked up the damaged comlink. “What’s the problem?” He plugged the comlink back into the bomb and attempted to activate it. After another minute he set the comlink down and closed his eyes. “Airek,” he said as he looked at Kobalt, “did you remember to connect the delay switch to the detonator?” Kobalt thought for a moment before shaking his head. “Damn it Airek!” Haress screamed, kicking the comlink against the wall, “I gave you all frikin’ night to

work on these! What were you doing, choking the Wookiee?” He closed his eyes again and took a deep breath.

“We can fix this,” he reassured himself. He walked over and picked up the barely functioning unit and plugged it back in one last time. He pressed buttons until the bomb flickered on, counting down from fifteen minutes. “That’s plenty of time,” he said as he carefully set the bomb down. “Hopefully we placed enough bombs in here to cause a chain reaction.” He picked up his own bag and placed it on his shoulder. “Come on Kobalt, let’s get out of here.” The two left the basement and began running up the stairs. As soon as they reached the lobby they slowed their pace to a brisk walk and made their way to the exit. Just as they approached the open doors, the two guards blocked their path

“Ambassador Zhu would like to speak to you,” the soldier said sternly. Haress looked towards the second floor and then to Kobalt. They then turned around and walked towards the ambassador’s office.

“Tell me why I still don’t have a connection to Voltar,” Zhu said as Haress and Kobalt entered the room. Haress shifted in place.

“It should be working fine,” Haress answered. Zhu press a button on his holovid, revealing a static image.

“Doesn’t look like it to me,” Zhu retorted. Haress closed his eyes and began to think. He quickly opened them and walked over to the holovid.

“You need to reset the server,” he lied as he pressed a couple of buttons. The static image disappeared and was replaced with a “resetting...” message. “This should take about five to ten minutes,” he explained, “we’ll head back to our com tower and reset it over there as well.” He walked back to Kobalt’s side, giving him a quick wink before turning around. Zhu looked at the holovid and then towards the two.

“Get out of this embassy,” Zhu said. Haress and Kobalt bowed and went on their way to the exit. After they departed the embassy, the two stepped into their speeder and drove off to the nearby Diplomat Square. The speeder landed at a spot where the two of them could watch the impending fireworks.

“Our piece is done,” Haress said. “Now it’s time for the other players to do their part upon this grand stage.”

Senatorial holding cells, Coruscant

On a normal day, the holding cells in the Senatorial building would be used to hold the criminals up for trial, but today, Divad Grohl sat in one of the cells, contemplating his next move. He had yet to hear from his lawyer or his wife and Grohl began to wonder if Dilligaf had arrested her as well. He stood up and walked over to the guard’s direction. “Has my wife or lawyer tried to contact me?” he asked, worried.

“No sir,” the guard said. Suddenly Mical Tarkin entered the room. Alongside him was Nara Mauss, apparently handcuffed. “Can I help you?” the guard asked, staring at Nara.

“Mical Tarkin,” Mical introduced. “I’m here to deliver this prisoner to her court hearing.”

“I was unaware of any hearings today,” the guard said as motioned for his partner to check the console. “What was her hearing number?”

“It should be one-one-three-eight,” Mical answered. Divad noticed Nara was busy trying to break her cuffs. Before he could say anything, she succeeded in breaking free and grabbed a hold-out blaster from Mical’s holster. She spun around and shot one of the guards in the chest. Mical quickly grabbed the other guard by the throat and choked him out. He brought the man to the ground and checked his pulse. “He’s good,” he said.

“By the Force,” Grohl stammered, “she just killed that man!”

“Don’t worry,” Nara reassured him, “I just stunned him. He’ll be fine.” She checked the blaster. “Oh,” she said, her face reddening, “in about sixteen hours, give or take.”

“Sixteen—Mical, who is this?” he asked. “And where’s my lawyer? Or my wife?”

“They’re fine,” Mical answered. “This is Nara Mauss, a bounty hunter.”

“Bounty hunter,” Grohl repeated in disbelief. “What do you need a bounty hunter for?”

“I don’t,” Mical informed him, “you could say she came to me.”

“Listen,” Nara said, interrupting them. “We can discuss anything you two want to as soon as we get the hell out of here.”

“She’s right,” Mical said, “Grohl, we need you to read something for us. It’s encrypted and only your security clearance can unlock it.”

“What are you guys talking about?” Grohl said, confused.

“The attack on Voltar was *planned* by someone in Dilligaf’s council,” Mical explained. Suddenly, the guard that Mical had dealt with awoke, and quickly pressed the silent alarm. Nara quickly shot him as well.

“Damn,” she said. “There goes our plan.” Mical thought for a moment.

“Let’s get out of here fast, we can read the files in my apartment,” Mical suggested. “It should be the safest place to.”

“We’ll need to go a different way though,” Nara said. “They’ll be covering our entrance.”

“We’ll go out the south entrance than,” Mical suggested. The three of them then ran into the stairwell and climbed up the stairs out into the crowded lobby, where a party was going on.

“We’re not going to get out of here,” Grohl whispered.

“Just remain calm,” Mical whispered back. “The Hutt cartel is having a banquet for all of their members. Walk—don’t run—to the exit. No one will notice us.” The three then walked through the various patrons until they reached the exit. They continued to walk until they got to Mical’s speeder. They departed into a fleet of speeders just as Republic forces arrived.

Military Council

Dilligaf had yet to receive word about Auga. Time had run out, Auga and only Auga could send that fleet back. “Corporal,” Dilligaf said, regret deep inside his voice, “inform the troops that once they reach Voltar to engage the forces there.”

“Our forces?” Klangk asked.

“No, Voltar’s” Dilligaf said. Klangk nodded, knowing the chancellor’s decision was a tough one. But it was for the good of the Republic. The Volta would not stop until the Republic was wiped out. Perhaps Auga had the right idea.

“Sir,” a secretary said as she entered the room, “I have a Captain Gilmor on the emergency holonet channel. He says he has urgent news.” Dilligaf pressed a button on his console to reveal an image of Gilmor.

“Chancellor,” Gilmor said, “you need to recall the squadron at once!”

“What squadron are you talking about?” Dilligaf asked. He was unaware of how much Gilmor knew.

“You don’t have to lie to me,” Gilmor answered. “Sir, I was with Auga during this conflict. I know the override code to return the squadron.”

“Captain Gilmor,” Roht interrupted, “you are aware that Auga is the only person who can call these troops back. Is he not cooperating?”

“Auga’s dead,” Gilmor answered. The council members began to panic. “But we don’t need him any longer.” He pulled his holonet receiver from his pocket and pressed a button, revealing an image of Auga.

“This is General Roger Auga,” the hologram spoke, “override code 7-2-5, repeal flight plan ‘RAV.’” The panic subsided as they heard Auga’s posthumous message.

“How did you get that?” Dilligaf asked.

“I recorded everything he said,” Gilmor explained. “I was lucky enough to get him to say it. I’m having the message sent to your office.”

“Thank you Gilmor,” Klangk said. “You’ve just saved the galaxy.” The image of Gilmor faded, leaving the council to wait for the message.

“Sir, sending the message might not work,” Roht said. “If we wookieebacked the signal from our embassy on Voltar, we could ensure that the fleet would receive the message.”

“But that would require dropping the block on the Volta embassy’s communications,” Klangk mentioned.

“Do it,” Dilligaf said, “we need to prevent anymore blood from spilling.” Roht typed away at the communication controls and prepared to send the message.

Bravo 52, Voltar sector

Kann sat relaxed in his seat. The fleet had successfully reached Voltar and was engaging Volta forces. One of the cruisers, the *Empirical*, had its target not far from Bravo’s target, so the two had joined forces. As they neared the planet, the amount of Volta fighters increased, determined to repel the Republic. Kann watched as his fighters engaged the Volta. The Republic fighters had strong shields but even so, the Volta’s *Dragon*-class fighters were faster and could deal more damage.

Suddenly, Kann spotted a Volta fighter flanking the starboard of the *Empirical*, which by that time had been left defenseless. It launched a torpedo towards the *Empirical*’s hull. “Evasive maneuvers!” he screamed, hoping to get out of the impending explosion. The pilot drifted to the left but it was too late. The torpedo struck the loading bay of the *Empirical*, detonating the annihilation bomb inside. A bright flash filled the space surrounding the squadron, followed by a giant shockwave, striking everything within. *Bravo 52* rocked violently as equipment sparked and blew itself apart. Kann braced himself for the ship’s own annihilation bomb to go off. He was ejected from his seat and struck his head on the ground, knocking him out cold.

Volta embassy

Zhu paced back and forth. The communications still weren’t up. “This day just couldn’t get any worse, could it?” he rhetorically asked his secretary. Almost instantly, the holonet activated, revealing the face of Prigden.

“Ambassador Zhu,” the message began, “this is High General Prigen. The Republic has attacked Voltar. You must gather all Volta citizens and evacuate to Krayteria, where Imporator Sarda’s son, Erdnaw is waiting. If the embassy has been compromised, please evacuate to our other safeplanet and contact Erdnaw once out of Republic space.” The message repeated multiple times as Zhu stood dumbfounded. He quickly spun around and faced his secretary.

“Get the shuttles ready,” he ordered her. “Get all Volta citizens off of this planet. I need to speak to the Chancellor.” He motioned for his two bodyguards to follow him as he walked to the exit. The secretary then pressed the button to sound the evacuation alarm.

Outside, Haress and Kobalt sat in their speeder. Kobalt was busy cleaning his rifle as Haress watched the embassy attentively. “Frick,” he said as he saw the ambassador leave the embassy, “what is Zhu doing?” Suddenly, a red light began to flash by the entrance. “The bombs couldn’t have gone off yet,” he then said as he checked his comlink. “There’s less than a minute left.” He looked at Kobalt. “Your damn bombs go off prematurely like you!” he chuckled. Kobalt rolled his eyes and continued to clean his rifle. “No, it’s not the bombs. There would have been an explosion by now.” He looked at the timer again. Twenty seconds left. He reached behind his

seat and pulled out a bottle of wine. "May the Republic last another thousand years," he said as he went to open the bottle. Three... two... one... nothing happened. Haress checked the comlink again. It was at 0:00. "Come on," he pleaded. He reached in the back and pulled out one of the spare detonators. He pressed the trigger, expecting a spark to emit from the exposed wires. Nothing happened. "This can't be happening. The embassy was supposed to explode!" He punched the speeder controls. "What are we going to do?" He buried his face his arms. Kobalt looked at his rifle and loaded a cell into it. Haress lifted his head at the sound of the rifle charging up. "Kobalt," he said as he looked at him. "That's it!" He pulled his rifle out and loaded it. "We've got a mission to complete Kobalt, let's do it." He started up the speeder and flew it towards the embassy's entrance.

"The embassy is under a lockdown," the guard said as Haress and Kobalt stepped out of the speeder. "No Republics are allowed in at this time."

"You could say we're on... official business," Haress said as Kobalt aimed and shot the guard. The guard crumpled to the ground as Haress shot the door controls. The main doors slid open to reveal a crowd of Volta citizens. Kobalt smiled as he aimed his gun. A young woman turned around and saw the two as they switched their guns to auto-fire. Her scream was drowned out as Haress and Kobalt opened fire on the crowd. People screamed and ran towards the shuttle bay, clogging the small entrance. Kobalt laughed as he shot into crowd at the door, while Haress focused on the guards as they came into view. The door to the shuttle bay quickly shut, leaving the two of them alone. They stood in the center and admired their work. "Well Kobalt," Haress said as he rested his gun on his shoulder. "I think we can safely say we completed our mission." Before they could do anything else, gunfire erupted from the second floor. "Poodoo," he said as they ran to cover, "there goes our clean getaway." He checked his rifle. "I got two charges left, you?" Kobalt nodded his head. "We still got the bombs down there," Haress thought out loud. "Maybe we can still use them."

Kobalt peaked over the cover and saw Volta soldiers coming down the stairs. If they didn't act fast, they'd be unable to get to the stairwell. He took a deep breath and grabbed Haress, holding him in an embrace. "What's the big idea?" Haress asked. Before he had a chance to say anything else, Kobalt screamed and strafed to the basement, using his own body as a shield for Haress. Kobalt's back was riddled with the Volta's special brand of ammunition, Ossid. It was a metal found only on Voltar, capable of piercing the hide of a Kryat dragon. Kobalt's body armor was no match for the solid slugs. They jammed into his back with disturbing force. He staggered the last few steps to the door and collapsed in the stairwell. Haress quickly shot the door control, causing it to auto-lock, buying them some time.

"By the Force," he said as he picked Kobalt up and sat him against the wall. "I can't believe you did that!" Kobalt smiled and coughed up blood. "I'll get down there and manually detonate the charges," he told him as he removed a thermal detonator from his satchel. "You can't let them take you alive," he said as he placed it in Kobalt's hand. Haress heard the soldier's outside the door, trying to pry it open. He tapped Kobalt on the cheek. "May the Republic last another thousand years," he said as he ran down the stairs. As he neared the basement door he heard an explosion above. He closed his eyes for a moment and then quickly got back to work, running into the basement. Once inside, he ran up to one of the bombs and fiddled with the

detonator. He dropped the bomb in anger, unable to get it to explode. He could hear the soldier's footsteps echo in the stairwell. He didn't have enough time. He shot open the maintenance gate and ran to the next bomb, ignoring the alarm he triggered. They had reached the door. The detonator was faulty on that one too. The door slid open. Time was up. "Sing about this!" he screamed, firing at the bomb by his feet. Suddenly, multiple explosions filled the room. The support pillars were severely damaged in the blast. With the weight of the embassy on top of it, the pillar gave way and the embassy came crashing to the undercity below.

Mical Tarkin's apartment, Coruscant

Mical, Nara and Divad entered the small, dinky apartment with haste, closing and locking the door behind them. "Nice place," Nara said sarcastically. "I especially love the pungent odor of cheese soup, my favorite."

"I'm not home often okay?" Mical said, opening the window. "Long nights and quick naps in my office are my sort of thing." He scrunched his eyebrows as his eyes set upon the pillar of smoke in the distance. "What could that be?" he muttered.

"I expected better," Grohl said, "I mean you always seem the professional type. What would your mother say?"

"My mother lives all the way in Ansion," Mical answered. "So I don't think she cares either way. Now can we stop talking about my place and start reading those files?" Mical searched his pockets. "Frick," he said, kicking an old food tray, "I left the datapad at the office!"

"No matter," Nara said, removing her left glove. "I got it right here." She showed them the back of her hand, revealing a round circle jutting from it.

"Is that a biopad?" Grohl asked. Nara nodded.

"Makes it easier to store information while on assignment," she said. "Plus it has much better security than a computer system." She pressed her right thumb on the device, causing a hologram to appear. She pressed buttons on the hologram until she got to the stolen files. "I need you scan your identification," she told Grohl. He pulled out his id card and waved it through the hologram. The biopad beeped and the files opened up. Nara skimmed through the files. "There's isn't much here," she said. "Only says for a General Auga to attack Voltar and for a Dilyn Haress to attack the embassy."

"Auga was the one who sent the troops to Voltar, so that part's right," Grohl informed them. "But I've never heard of a Haress. Whoever wrote this made sure to hide their involvement."

"Wait a minute," she came up to another encrypted file. "I thought that'd decrypt all the files." Grohl got out his id card and swiped it once more. The biopad made an odd noise, meaning the file couldn't be decrypted.

"Your rank isn't high enough," Mical said.

“I can try to decrypt this one myself,” Nara said.

“How?” Grohl asked.

“With my mind,” she answered.

“I should get me one of those,” Mical said, “the biopad I mean.”

“It’s not that easy,” she said, “it’s really taxing on my body. I need to lie down while I do this.”

“Feel free to use my bed,” Mical offered. “It’s never used, so it should be clean. Just hang my clothes up for me. I don’t like wrinkled uniforms.” She walked into the bedroom and shut the door.

“This doesn’t make sense,” Grohl said. “No body in those files is in the military council.”

“Perhaps it’s someone higher up than that?” Mical suggested.

“It can’t be,” Grohl said. “They have to have a military council id. Someone like.” Grohl’s eyes widened.

Military council

Dilligaf stared outside at the pillar of smoke. “I just received word that all cruisers are retreating from the Voltar sector,” Klangk informed everyone. The room erupted in screams of joy. The crisis had been averted. Dilligaf closed his eyes and sighed. “Is there a problem sir?” Klangk asked.

“We may have stopped a war,” he answered, “but we lost a lot of good men today. The Volta also lost men willing to defend their home. To say a war didn’t happen is an understatement. War *did* happen.” Before anything else could be said, the door to the reception area slid open and Ambassador Zhu barged into the room.

“I tried to stop him,” the secretary apologized. Zhu turned to her and pointed a finger at her, telling her to shut up. He turned back around and faced the council.

“How dare you!” he exclaimed, pointing now at Dilligaf. “You invade my planet and try to keep me in the dark! I should-”

“Settle down!” Dilligaf screamed, interrupting him. “We have been aware of the attack on Voltar I’ll admit to that. But we had no part in that. A traitor in my government is to blame for that. We’re sorry that lives were lost today but don’t point fingers at us until you know the whole story.”

“Save your speeches,” Zhu said through gritted teeth. He turned back to Dilligaf’s secretary. “Put my government on the line, Imporator Sarda,” he said. She turned to Dilligaf as if asking for permission. Dilligaf didn’t respond. She pressed a few buttons on her console and an image of Prigdon appeared.

“Chancellor,” Prigden said, “to what do I owe the pleasure for the man who just tried to invade my planet?!” Even though he was just a hologram, the council could see the veins bulging from his forehead.

“General,” Zhu said, running up to Dilligaf’s side, “where is Imporator Sarda?”

“In a safe place,” he answered. “Why are you still here Zhu? I sent you a warning a few hours ago.”

“I only heard about the attack a few minutes ago,” Zhu answered back. “The Republic had been blacking out my communications.”

“If you’ll let me explain sir,” Dilligaf said, “the attack was masterminded by Roger Auga, a General who betrayed both of us. He initialized a fail-safe protocol that involved attacking you. We were able to stop him before he could do any serious damage.”

“Serious damage,” Prigden scoffed. “Our defenses are weakened. My fleet is spread out amongst out territories.”

“I’m sorry that this happened,” Dilligaf said. “If you want we can-”

“No,” Prigden interrupted, “we do not need any assistance from you. We got enough today. Know this chancellor,” he said with a sarcastic tone, “if my people are threatened anymore, you can expect us to retaliate. Zhu, get our people home.” The hologram disappeared, leaving the council alone.

“If you’ll excuse me chancellor,” Zhu said, turning to the window, “I’ll be getting my people off of...” He stopped talking as he too noticed the pillar of smoke in the skyline. “Put my office on the line,” he said, fear in his voice. The secretary typed away on her computer.

“There’s no signal,” she said. She typed some more. Her eyes widened as she read something. “B-by the Force,” she stuttered. She pressed a button bring the holonet news onto the main receiver.

“Again, the Volta embassy has been attacked today,” the new reporter said. “We’ve just received apparent footage of the attack. Viewers beware. You might want to look away.” Suddenly a grainy image of Haress and Kobalt appeared, standing in the middle of the lobby, bodies around them. “From what survivors have said, these two men, who have been identified as two Republic soldiers, came into the embassy and opened fire. When confronted, the two detonated explosive devices-” Dilligaf turned off the feed.

“You,” Zhu said, stunned. “You killed my-” Before he could continue, Dilligaf motioned for the guards, who grabbed Zhu by the arms.

“Take him away,” Dilligaf order.

“Going to finish the job?” Zhu said.

“I’m going to find out how Auga got two Republic soldiers to attack your embassy. I can’t do that with you breathing down my neck. So I don’t give a frick what you do now, but leave this office at once!”

“You lying sack of poodoo!” Zhu said pulling his arms free. “Coruscant will burn because of you!” The doors closed behind him and he walked briskly out the building. His guards awaited him at his speeder.

“Is it true?” one of the guards asked. “Did the Republic blow up the embassy?”

“I’m afraid so,” Zhu answered. “We need to meet with the Hutt cartel. As much as I hate them, we’re going need them to round up the senators and ambassadors for an emergency meeting.”

Bravo 52, Voltar

The ship drifted through the debris of broken and battered ships. Kann sat in his chair, trying to remain conscious. Just as he thought he was to take his last breath, the systems, including the life support, turned on. As Kann came to, his men began to check the systems. “What’s our status?” he asked sitting up.

“Communications are down,” the communications officer informed.

“Radar is picking up sporadic signals,” the radar technician said. “No friendlies detected.”

“Our fuel is low,” the pilot said. “We don’t have enough to attack our target and escape.” Kann scratched his chin.

“Where’s our closest target?” he asked. The navigator searched the database.

“The capital sir,” he answered. The remaining crew began to panic.

“Now listen up,” Kann said, getting everyone’s attention. “I know I said this before, but regardless of our setbacks, today we will accomplish what we set out to do. Today, we bring the Volta to their knees. Today, we protect the galaxy from any more harm. Today, we kill the Volta’s leader like they killed our chancellor. Today we save the Republic!” The crew erupted in thunderous applause. “Pilot, use minimum engine power to get us into the atmosphere,” he ordered. “Turn the engines off as soon as we start descending.” The pilot nodded and pushed the ship forward slowly. As soon as they felt a rumble, signifying that gravity had a hold, he turned off the engines.

“Decent achieved,” the pilot said as the engines powered down.

“Activate engines once the bomb has been dropped over the capital,” Kann informed him. The crew waited anxiously for their time to shine. Suddenly the ship began to shake violently. “What’s going on?” Kann screamed into his comlink.

“Our stabilizers are offline,” the engineer said from the engine room. Suddenly he got a call from the loading bay.

“Sir!” the man on the other end exclaimed. “This is the loading bay! The missiles have been dislodged, they’re sliding all over the-” Suddenly, an explosion rocked the ship.

“There’s been an explosion in the loading bay,” the pilot said.

“The annihilation bomb is still online,” Kann said, “can we still launch the bomb?” he asked.

“Negative,” the loadmaster said. “The bay doors have to be opened manually when we’re without engine power.”

“No life signs detected in the loading bay,” the pilot said. “Someone needs to go down there and do it fast.” Kann stood up and adjusted his uniform.

“Looks like that person’s going to be me,” he said. He walked towards the emergency access hatch and climbed onto the ladder. As he climbed down the shaft, the ship began to shake again. Scared that another missile might go off, he gripped the sides of the ladder and slid down as fast as he could. He landed in the loading bay only to find a completely destroyed room with barely even a floor to support him. Kann crossed the torn-up bay doors, using the warped beams as railings when he could. As soon as he approached the annihilation bomb his jaw dropped in disappointment. The arming console had a chunk of shrapnel in it. Without the ability to activate the, it was almost useless. He pressed the buttons, hoping to get a reaction. The screen flickered for a second before shutting right off. As he tried to pry the shrapnel from the bomb, the room was flooded in a green light, meaning his time was up. He looked through the one of the many holes and saw the capital city of Voltar looming below them. Kann sighed and made his way to the door controls. He reluctantly pulled the switch and watched as the broken bay doors creaked open. He pulled the next switch, freeing the bomb from the rack. The bomb slid down the rack and out the doors. Kann watched as the bomb sailed through the sky to Viscera below, hoping that the impact would set off the bomb. The bomb landed into the square outside of the Imporator’s palace, the perfect place for a bomb of that magnitude to go off. But the bomb didn’t go off. It just sat in the middle of the city square, a crowd was approaching it. He then saw Volta fighters soaring towards the ship. His focus changed back to his surrounds as soon as he smelled the scent of fuel in the air. He turned around and saw a chunk of debris lodged in the fuel line. The fuel, which allowed them to go longer without refueling, was also very flammable when exposed to oxygen.

“Engine’s activating,” Kann heard the pilot say via comlink. “Major, if you can hear this, you’ll want to get back into a pressurized room.” Kann picked up his comlink.

“Cut the power!” he exclaimed. “The fuel line’s been breached! You’ll-” Before he could say anything else, the volatile fuel exploded, causing a chain reaction through the pipes leading to the engine, which quickly combusted, vaporizing the rest of the ship. Kann witnessed it from below as the initial explosion had jettisoned him from the ship. His final thought as he hit the ground with a fatal thud was that he failed the Republic.

Coruscant Opera

As the play was entering its ninth act the lights went up and the music came to an abrupt stop. “Ladies and gentlemen,” the stage manager announced to the crowd, “due to some tragic events, the opera house is closing. We ask that all patrons vacate the premise and return to their homes.”

“And it just got to the good part too. But it looks like the plan worked,” Colt said with a smile. The two stood up and calmly walked out of the opera house, stopping to stare at the pillar of smoke once outside. “Beautiful,” Colt said as Felix checked his comlink, “once the Republic bombs the Volta capitol, there will be no one to stop us.”

“That’s if nothing else goes wrong,” Felix said. “I just received word that a Republic agent attacked a Mandalorian base and stole some data. Colt’s eyes widened. “My superiors have you and your boss on thin ice. We aren’t going to tolerate any more failures.” Colt looked shocked for a moment from the Mandalorian’s threat but quickly composed himself. His comlink beeped. Colt took his attention from Felix for a moment to check it.

“Something’s happening at the Senate chambers,” Colt read. He didn’t mention who was at the Senate, Sram Zhu.

“Your boss must be acting quite displeased at these events,” Felix said. Colt nodded, though he wondered why the Volta ambassador was still alive. “Come,” Felix said, grabbing the senator by the shoulder, “we must see Dilligaf’s rousing speech.” Colt felt an uneasiness wash over him. Felix knew that the chancellor was going to be uninvolved in the entire fiasco. He had a bad feeling about this.

Thirty minutes later...

Senate chambers, Coruscant

“In conclusion,” Zhu said, ending his speech to the room full of senators and ambassadors to various independent planets. “I implore you to retract your request for entry into this backstabbing government. And senators, I ask that you rethink your stance with a government that uses fusion technology to try and destroy thousands of lives without your consent!” The various members began to discuss amongst themselves. Colt stood pale-faced in his booth at the statement. “Yes my fellow councilmen, Chancellor Dilligaf not only sent his military dogs to destroy my government’s embassy but he sanctioned the use of a fusion device on my homeland!”

“Order!” Dilligaf said, interrupting the ambassador. “As we told you in private-”

“Excuse me Chancellor,” the Maynian ambassador interrupted. “But what right do you have in attacking an ally of the Republic?”

“You say ally,” the Corellian senator answered. “But you, and plenty of others here, shortchange the Republic by paying minimum tribute and then sell your exports to the Hutt cartel!”

“So then how long until your government turns its attention on my people?” the ambassador said.

«“The Hutt cartel will not stand for these petty insults,”» the ambassador to the Hutt cartel said, «“nor will we allow our benefactors to be attacked without cause.”»

“Order!” Dilligaf screamed. “Before I was rudely interrupted, I was telling the Volta ambassador here that the attack on Voltar and its embassy was masterminded by a rogue General.”

“Objection!” Gilmor said, approaching the chancellor. “I was with Auga up until his death. He always said others were doing their part as well, but he never mentioned attacking the embassy.”

“That’s because the mastermind stands before you,” Grohl said as he and his friends entered the room, guards in tow. The council gasped at the accusation.

“You-you’re supposed to be detained!” Dilligaf stammered. “And how dare you make such false claims!” He then pointed to the guards. “Arrest them!” The guards stood still.

“These men have seen the proof Dilligaf,” Nara said. “I found these files in Mandalorian territory.”

“Mandalorians?” Dilligaf chuckled, “Why would I ever deal with Mandalorians? You have no proof!”

“Wait chancellor,” Grohl said, “didn’t you just return from a meeting with Mandalorian diplomats? Dilligaf’s eyes widened.

“And Auga said he was at a meeting to discuss Mandalorian raiders in the Outer rim,” Gilmor said.

“Let us see the evidence,” Zhu said, convinced that Dilligaf was hiding something.

“I am the power here, you have no say what they do,” Dilligaf said, trying to maintain composure. “Besides, you’re too involved in this.”

“I say to let them speak,” the Maynian ambassador said. Suddenly, other ambassadors and even some senators started to say the same. Dilligaf stood in the middle of the chant, surprised at the council’s reaction.

“I will have order in this senate!” he screamed. His anger only raised the unanimous voices. Nara took the time to activate her biopad. A large holographic projection appeared in the senate, showing everyone a conversation between a group of men, one being Auga, another, Dilligaf.

“This galaxy thrives on war,” the holographic image of Dilligaf said. “And as we’re all aware, this galaxy has been at peace for too long. Our economy’s failing. Viscera cheated us out of a goldmine years ago. We will kill two mynocks with one stone if we pull this off. We boost

military production and get a hold of the credits Voltar makes off of their Krayt dragon pearls. If we don't strike now, the only stable government in the galaxy will bankrupt itself."

"The Republic cannot afford a long-term war," a holographic nobleman mentioned. "Even so, can I trust that my medical equipment will be used? I'm barely scrapping by as it is."

"Hure, I'll personally make sure the Republic uses only Mederi equipment during the war," Dilligaf said. "We just need some way to start this war without ourselves starting it."

"Leave that to me," the hologram of Auga said, "sometimes you just have to take the bullet for the team." The hologram of Dilligaf looked towards whoever was behind the recorder.

"I trust that you'll keep this information a secret?" he asked the person.

"Our master said as long as you kept up the payments," the off-screen voice answered.

"Good," Dilligaf then said. He raised a glass in the air. "May the Republic last another thousand years," he said as the hologram faded, leaving Dilligaf amongst a now rowdy crowd of politicians. Mical motioned for the guards.

"Leinad Dilligaf," Mical said as the guards handcuffed him, "you are under arrest for treason against the Republic."

"I only did what I had to in order to save this Republic," Dilligaf said as the guards took him away. Mical sighed and turned to Zhu.

"Spare me the apology," he said before Mical could say anything. "This doesn't change a thing. Your government has decimated our people, revenge must be had."

"But this was an act by outside forces!" Grol interjected.

"No, it was *your* chancellor and his men, your men. It doesn't matter, others would see it the same." Zhu retorted. "Besides, it's not in my power whether or not my people go to war, and they decided. We have already sent troops to Naboo."

"That's outrageous!" the Naboo senator shouted. "My planet has done nothing to yours!"

"You forget that not only was Auga from your planet, but he was stationed there as well. It was his men that dropped a bomb on our palace. I think your planet has done enough to warrant it."

"You realize that we can't just let you leave," Mical said. "We have to detain you as an enemy combatant."

"No you won't," Zhu said, waving his index finger. "Because Voltar and its territories have also voted to officially succeed from the Republic. As you know, the Succession Act states 'Any planet or government who votes to succeed from the Republic loses any and all political power within the senatorial council, the former politicians and their people are to be given the freedom to leave Republic space without any conflict.'" Grohl gritted his teeth.

“Damn you,” he said as Zhu turned around and left the chambers. The senate was speechless on what to do next.

Colt turned and quickly left to the main hallway. He needed to get on a shuttle and get back to Alderaan as soon as possible. “Going somewhere Colt?” Felix said, stopping him inches from the turnstile.

“Felix,” Colt said, feeling the barrel of a blaster in his stomach. “I was trying to find you.”

“Likewise,” Felix said, motioning his head to the left. Colt walked down the maintenance hallway out of the view of witnesses. “We’ve had a discussion,” Felix informed.

“Listen, you can back out, I understand.” Colt pleaded. “Just let me go and you’ll never be implicated. I can convince the Security forces that you had no implication at all, that it was an unaffiliated group.”

“We can do that ourselves,” Felix said. “Besides, you’re the only person who knew who I was.” Sweat was cascading down Colt’s face. Felix holstered his weapon.

“You’re not going to kill me?” Colt asked. Felix smiled.

“Of course I am, a blaster’s just too loud,” he answered. He quickly put a hand over Colt’s mouth and drew a blade with his other, driving it just under the ribcage. The blow to the heart was enough to kill Colt without a scream. Felix carried the body by the armpits and dumped it into the garbage chute. Without another word, he withdrew his blade and walked back into the crowd.

A few hours later...

Spaceport, Coruscant

Grohl leaned against the railing overlooking the spaceport, staring at the ships departing amongst the twilight sky. He watched as various politicians departed for their homeplanets and mercenaries were departing for battlefields. “A lot of ships,” he heard a feminine voice remark. He turned around and saw a young black-haired woman staring at the ships as well. Upon locking on her silver eyes, he couldn’t look away. She was dressed head to toe in a strange garb that reminded him of those Outcasts that attacked the Jedi Temple a few years back. She smiled at his dumbfound expression. “I said there’re a lot of ships,” she repeated. Grohl stammered for a few second before he got a hold of himself.

“Oh yeah,” he finally said. “People just want to get out of this hell-hole.” He didn’t know why, but she made him feel younger than he was. Granted he was only thirty-five, but somehow he felt twenty-five.

“You did everything you could,” she cryptically said. “None of this is your fault. Remember that.” Before he could say anything to her, the woman quickly walked away and down the stairwell to the ships. As she walked away, Grohl spotted a metal hilt on her waist. She

was a Jedi. Grohl knew that the Jedi had already refused to get involved with the conflict, so who was that woman? He didn't have much time to dwell on it as Mical entered the port.

"How goes it?" Grohl asked him.

"Not good," Mical answered, shaking his head. "A lot of the ambassadors have either succeeded or won't get involved in the conflict. And the senators," Mical took a deep breath, "well, the senators can't decide on a successor to Dilligaf." He sat down next to Grohl. "These are dark times for the Republic."

"The Republic is done for," Grohl said, sitting down as well. "We barely have an army to face the Volta. Pretty soon, the Volta will be marching into the capital."

"If you think like that, it'll happen," Mical informed. "It isn't your fault." Grohl's eyes widened.

"What did you just say?" he asked.

"I said it wasn't your fault; you did everything you could." At this point, Mical could see that Grohl was starting to get freaked out. "Now come on," he said as he stood up, "we need to get the transports ready. We may have lost Naboo, but if we act fast, we can still hope to save Malestare." Grohl stood up and began to follow Mical, but stopped and looked back out at the sky knowing that out there, the Volta Wars had begun.