



No Prisoners (Star Wars: The Clone Wars)

By Karen Traviss

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Dispatched to a distant world to aid a local dictator facing a revolution, Hallena finds herself surrounded by angry freedom fighters and questioning the Republic's methods—and motives. Summoned to rescue the missing operative who is also his secret love, Pellaeon—sworn to protect the Republic over all—is torn between duty and desire. And Ahsoka, sent in with Rex and six untested clone troopers to extract Hallena, encounters a new and different Jedi philosophy, which shakes the foundation of her upbringing to the core. As danger and intrigue intensify, the loyalties and convictions of all involved will be tested. . . .

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Karen Traviss is the #1 New York Times bestselling author of three previous Star Wars: Republic Commando novels: *Hard Contact*, *Triple Zero*, and *True Colors*; three Star Wars: Legacy of the Force novels: *Bloodlines*, *Revelation*, and *Sacrifice*; as well as *City of Pearl*, *Crossing the Line*, *The World Before*, *Matriarch*, *Ally*, and *Judge*. A former defense correspondent and TV and newspaper journalist, Traviss has also worked as a police press officer, an advertising copywriter, and a journalism lecturer. Her short stories have appeared in *Asimov's*, *Realms of Fantasy*, *On Spec*, and *Star Wars Insider*. She lives in Devizes, England.

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Chapter One

JanFathal has been a loyal member of the Republic for as long as I can remember. Let's not allow a little thing like internal strife to get in the way of that. I'm afraid the Fathalians' wish for democratic change will have to wait until the war is over, because right now we need to keep that planet. –Armand Isard, Director of Republic Intelligence

ATHAR, CAPITAL OF JANFATHAL, OUTER RIM

The dust that blew in from the plains was pale gray, as fine and as clogging as ferrocrete powder.

It was a small wonder that the locals kept their windows and doors tightly shuttered at this time of year. Hallena kept her kerchief over her mouth and nose, but the dust still managed to work its way into her eyes. Her vision blurred; blinking didn't clear it. She was forced to shelter in a doorway on the main square while she tried to rub the stuff out of her eyes.

Now she understood why the Athari were so prone to spitting in the streets. They were very good at it, too—accurate, discreet, and almost elegant in their technique. Since she'd arrived a few days ago, Hallena had learned to dodge the streams and even manage an occasional well-aimed squirt of her own. *Fit in. Go gray—blend in with the population, like you've been here all your life . . .*

It was just like wine-tasting in a smart Coruscant tapcaf, except the flavor filling her mouth was the flat mineral bitterness of dust coating her tongue, not a rich, fruity Ondo Lava—*Is this stuff toxic?*

Swirl. Lean a little. Aim. Spit hard.

Hallena put a bit of force behind it. Sometimes it was more difficult than it looked. She was aware of someone walking toward her, head lowered against a steady wind that never seemed to drop, and then she realized why Gilad always warned her when they sailed his personal yacht to test the wind direction before dumping liquid overboard.

Splat.

“Aw, *terrific*,” said a male voice. “Lady, can't you even spit straight?”

She had to shield her face with her hand. Sharper, bigger fragments of dust stung her eyes. Her gaze traveled up from a dark, wet patch on the leg of a pair of tan pants to the indignant face of their owner.

“Sorry.” She was careful to maintain the right accent. “Let me clean that up.”

“You looking for the carpet shop?”

Ah. She knew the response she had to give. She felt better already.

“I hear it’s closed midweek.”

The man was in his forties, thin- faced and balding. He stared into her eyes for a moment, then winked. The simple code had been confirmed. This was her contact.

“Galdovar,” she said. It probably wasn’t his real name, and she didn’t care if it was or not. All that mattered was that he was the man she was supposed to meet; and that was all she was going to trust. He wasn’t a random stranger she’d spat upon. Trust didn’t come easy in her line of work. Trust got you killed. That was why she placed it solely in herself, and why her hand was still resting on the blaster hidden in the folds of her coat. “You’d better be, anyway.”

“I am, so at least I got my pants ruined by the right woman. Come on. Let’s get inside.” He indicated the far end of the deserted road with a discreet nod of his head, then looked down at the damp patch on his leg. “Original way to identify yourself, Agent Devis.”

“No, I really *did* miss the spot,” she said. Now it worried her that she hadn’t been alert to anyone following her or watching her. It was basic intelligence procedure, as unconscious as breathing; situational awareness. “How long have you been watching me?”

“A few minutes.”

Stang. If he’d been a sniper . . .

But he wasn’t, and she was fully alert after a moment’s lapse. The building at the end of the road was an office complex with shops and tapcafs. As they entered, the world changed; the deserted streets full of swirling dust that made Athar look like a ghost town gave way to bustling life conducted wholly behind shuttered doors. Athari citizens went about their business under cover during the windy weeks of late autumn.

“Up the stairs,” Galdovar said, gesturing with his thumb.

“Second floor. Union offices.”

Hallena blended seamlessly into the bustle of Fathalians. She spoke Basic with a convincing Athari accent, and—like most of them—her skin was black and her hair dressed in neatly coiled plaits. Nobody had any reason to suspect she was a Republic spy, sent to infiltrate.

She’d been in Athar for less than a week. The place wasn’t quite the same picture that the intelligence briefing had painted. Places seldom were.

“In here?” Hallena gestured, one hand still deep in her pocket.

“In there,” said Galdovar.

“After you.”

No, she wasn't *that* dumb.

The doors parted and she followed him into a routinely time-worn office with pleekwood desks and shelves that had seen better days. The interior doors, though, looked as if they'd been smashed down and repaired; two of the panels were bright new wood, devoid of any patina or termite scarring.

“Burglars?” she asked. “Or are you just slack on building maintenance?”

“Got to look the part,” Galdovar said. “And we know exactly how a union office should look after the authorities have raided it, don't we?”

He was one of those who normally did the raiding. She had to concede the point. Sounds of movement behind the repaired door made her check automatically for a way out if this meeting turned out not to be one she'd bargained on. The only place she felt safe these days was on a Republic warship, and not just because of Gilad; the entire galaxy was in turmoil. The front line didn't end at planetary boundaries, or sometimes even within families.

Hallena walked into a small back office filled mainly by a battered table. If it hadn't been for the two heavily armed men sitting at one side of it—she could spot the outlines of weapons as well as anyone—she might even have swallowed the cover story about this place being an administrative office for the Union of Fabricants, Plastoid Molders, and Allied Trades, Local 61.

“Well, well,” she said. Their eyes locked on hers as if they weren't entirely sure she was genuine. “Unity is strength, people, power to the workers, and all that. So what have you got for me?”

The younger of the two men raised a bleached-blond eyebrow. He didn't offer any introductions. “I'm glad you're getting into character,” he said sourly. “We think the people you're looking for are these two.”

He shoved a holoimage projector across the table, flicking his thumbnail against the controls to activate an image. It was a snatched shot of a man and a woman caught in midstride as they hurried toward a speeder; early thirties, heads covered by factory workers' caps, like thousands of other laborers in the city.

“Merish Hath and her boyfriend, Shil Kaval,” he said. “The usual troublemaking variety of malcontent.”

Hallena studied the image. The JanFathal police couldn't just pick them up and make them disappear, like they usually did. The Regent had held absolute power for thirty years; he wasn't going to get a hard time from his judges because he'd had them all jailed some years ago. But pieces in this particular puzzle were missing.

It was her job to find them.

“We'd like this sorted,” said the younger man. The stark contrast of his eyebrows against his ebony skin was hypnotically weird; and he was obviously more senior in the hierarchy than he looked, or else he was just

massively arrogant. “We don’t want a few million droids landing in our backyard uninvited. The troublemakers we’ve been monitoring have been a lot more active in the last few weeks, like they’re preparing for something.”

“Maybe your Regent should concentrate on building a proper army instead of blowing his budget on internal security.” Hallena took the holoimager and transferred the image to her own device. The more she saw of some of the Republic’s allies, the less weight she gave their strategic value. “So can you get me into their circle, or not? What’s my cover identity?”

“Well, Sister Devis—”

“Tell me you haven’t used that name . . .”

Blond Brows sucked his teeth, clearly annoyed at the interruption. “We might be a long way from Coruscant, ma’am, but we’re not country bumpkins. Your ID says Orla Taman. You’re a union convener from Nuth, which is far enough away to explain why you’re not one of their little cabal, and you’ve been in prison for a few years for your unpatriotic activities. Now you’re out and looking to sow dissent and hasten the glorious revolution.”

Blond Brows passed her an identichip and a few battered personal possessions of the kind that a newly released prisoner might have: an old- style comlink, a few folded sheets of tattered flimsi that looked like a precious letter hidden and re read for years, and a holozine on the virtues of obedient citizenship of the kind that all those freed were given on release to keep them on the straight and narrow.

Hallena looked them over carefully. “Got it.”

“Okay, then we get you into the armaments factory tomorrow morning, and you line up for a job. They take casual labor by the day or week.”

“Do I have an impressive résumé?”

“You’re fully proficient in removing metal swarf from factory floors. A genius with a broom.”

It certainly beat passing herself off as a brain surgeon. There was no arcane professional knowledge to bluff through when she was pushing a broom. She didn’t even have to pretend she’d done it before. “Very well. I’ll head back to my modest hovel and go begging for work tomorrow.”

The older man sitting beside Blond Brows spoke for the first time. He looked like a chunk of granite that had been dumped by an avalanche, all square solidity and craggy grayness, the kind of man who would stand firm until time flowed around him.

“If you’re caught,” he said, “they’ll kill you and go to ground, and we’ll have to start all over again. We might not have the time to do that.”

It was the simplest of statements, dazzling in its selfevidence. “Sounds like every job I’ve ever done.” Hallena got up to leave. One hand still rested on her blaster. “I’ll be back in touch when I have something useful for you.”

Maybe. I’ll see how it goes. This is for the Republic.

The granite- and- blondness double act didn't move as she took a step or two backward without turning. For some reason, she felt more wary in this building among nominal allies than outside, surrounded by potential assassins.

If they ever venture out in this wind, of course . . .

Back at her lodgings, a stark and cramped little room above a grocery store, the ubiquitous dust had crept through every gap and left a convenient intruder warning system across every flat surface. Hallena closed the front doors behind her and stood listening for a moment, checking who might be where. When she studied the thin coating of dust, footprints and scuffs had worn a clean path between the side doors to the shop and the owner's living quarters across the passage. The layer on the stairs was still undisturbed, though. Nobody had gone up to her room since she'd left.

She had no real reason to check. It was just habit; careful, wary habit.

The shop doors parted and the elderly female owner stuck her head through the gap, smiling to reveal more gaps than teeth. "Won't last much longer, my dear," she said. "Regular as sunset, that wind. It'll die down by this time tomorrow, and then the rains start."

"I remember," Hallena lied. It sounded as if the woman didn't think she was local. "I used to visit Athar as a kid." *Don't push it, don't get a conversation going.* "I'm going to get a job tomorrow. I'll be out all day."

"You're a bit secretive, you are."

Stang, is she Force- sensitive or something? That risk had never troubled Hallena before, but the war had suddenly made her aware of how many beings there were who could sense her feelings or even try to shape her thoughts. Spies liked to be the ones who did the shaping and sensing. It was the natural order of espionage.

"I've just been released from prison," Hallena said at last, suitably awkward. "It's not something I want to brag about. Don't worry—it's nothing violent or dishonest."

"It never is," the woman said, suddenly serious. "It's always political these days."

Hallena didn't take it any farther. She retreated to her room, and spent the rest of the day tinkering with her comm kit—minimal, concealed within the old comlink, nothing that would make her look too well equipped in this austere world—and observing the activity in the street below through a small clear patch in the grimy transparisteel pane. Yes, the wind seemed to be dropping; a few more people were out on the walkways, some wearing goggles, others with their mouths still covered by scarves, but they seemed to know that respite was coming.

How long am I going to be here?

Hallena was glad she'd never been a sleeper, living undercover for a lifetime until a controller she'd never seen finally called one day and gave her a mission within a society she might have grown to think of as her own. Short bursts of being someone and something else were much more manageable.

I can only live so much of a lie.

Gil Pellaeon knew exactly what she was and accepted her for it. That was a rare source of honest stability in her line of work. She didn't even keep a holimage of him with her: too risky, like any genuine personal possession that might identify her if she was captured. But Gil understood the nature of their relationship—snatched moments, denials, no real prospect of routine, daily, comfortable domestic bliss like other couples—because his job wasn't so different.

Will either of us survive long enough to get out, to retire? Gil . . . no, he loves his ship. I'll have to join him one day. That night, Hallena slept fitfully with her blaster on the nightstand. In the early hours, noise from the street woke her; her dozing brain told her it was drunks outside, typical Coruscant nightlife, but she snapped fully alert into Athar, JanFathal, where wild revelry wasn't routine.

The voice was a scream, a protest, not drunken shrieking. Lights played on the buildings opposite. The crunch and thud of doors being forced open gave way to speeders revving their drives. When Hallena got a glimpse of what was happening from the window, she saw a man and a woman being bundled into a vehicle marked with the livery of Athar's not-so-secret police. One masked officer brought a bludgeon down on the head of the man in one practiced movement as he shoved him into the police speeder. The arrest was suddenly over. The lights swung around; all the vehicles sped off. All that remained was the gaping doors of the house opposite, yellow light streaming onto the pavement, and the complete absence of any neighbors coming out to see what was happening.

They must have heard it all.

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