

STAR WARS

TALES OF THE JEDI



V-VII: PURGE

BY STEPHEN J DUTTON



ELEVEN FAMILIES.
TWELVE GENERATIONS.
ONE EVIL.

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THREE HUNDRED YEARS AGO A SMALL GROUP OF INTREPID EXPLORERS SURVEYED THE NARTHIS SECTOR AND SOON IT BECAME ANOTHER PART OF THE GALACTIC REPUBLIC. THE DESCENDANTS OF MOST OF THESE EXPLORERS STILL RESIDE IN THE SECTOR, WHERE THEY HAVE BECOME BOTH FAMOUS AND WEALTHY. BUT DID THE ORIGINAL EXPLORERS DIVULGE EVERYTHING THEY DISCOVERED, OR HAVE THEIR FAMILIES BEEN HIDING SOME DARK SECRET EVER SINCE? NOW A JEDI KNIGHT HAS VANISHED WITHOUT TRACE AND THE INVESTIGATION WILL BRING ANOTHER FAMILY TO THE SECTOR. FROM NOW ON NOTHING WILL BE THE SAME...

PURGE

THE NARTHIS SECTOR HAS DECLARED ITS INDEPENDENCE FROM THE REPUBLIC BUT THE REPUBLIC STILL CONTROLS AUREK STATION, THE SECTOR'S PRIMARY HYPERSPACE NAVIGATION BEACON. NOW A FORCE OF WARSHIPS SURROUNDS THE STATION WHILE ITS OCCUPANTS ATTEMPT TO FIND SOMEWHERE ELSE TO USE AS A BASE TO CARRY ON THE FIGHT...

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<http://thehazugfiles.uk/Index.html>

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1.

For several years now Corlay Shill had lived amongst the Jedi in their enclave on Moldas as a part of the freedom warriors, the non-Force sensitive troops that support the Jedi in their military actions. Throughout all of this time she had behaved like any other loyal freedom warrior in public while at the same time feeding intelligence to the rest of her family in the neighbouring Narthis Sector. There the Shill family operated a private military company that served the group of immensely wealthy families known as the Founding Families. These were all descended from the crew of the original survey mission that had charted the Narthis Sector for the Republic. Like Corlay herself, these families led double lives. Openly they were loyal Republic citizens eager to develop the Narthis Sector for the benefit of everyone who lived there. But in reality they had spent the three hundred years since the survey mission hunting for the knowledge that would get them into a secret library of Sith knowledge that the survey crew had discovered. It was obvious to them that sooner or later the Jedi Order would become involved and it was for that reason that Corlay had been sent to infiltrate the freedom warriors. It had been intended that she would undermine any action the Jedi eventually took and now that time appeared to be at hand. The Founding Families manipulated events so that the Narthis Sector had just declared its independence from the Republic and inevitably the Jedi would move against them, so now Corlay moved to pre-empt the Jedi.

The building that Corlay headed for was set away from the other structures of the enclave for good reason. This was where all of the freedom warriors' heavy weapons were kept, including a large store of missiles and other explosives. These were guarded of course, but given the building's location within the Jedi enclave that was supposedly secured against infiltration there were only two guards, both of them freedom warriors.

Perhaps if a Jedi had been assigned to guard duty then they would have sensed the apprehension from Corlay as she approached despite her practice in hiding her feelings from them. But as it was the two guards did not react as one of their own approached. Corlay smiled at the guards as she opened the armoured blast door and proceeded inside. Closing the door behind her Corlay first headed for the section holding explosives and then towards the supply of man portable anti-armour missiles. These were available in two types, firstly were single use disposable weapons or, alternatively there were the reusable launchers and it was one of these that Corlay selected. Taking one launcher from its storage rack she then proceeded to load as many rounds of ammunition as possible into a back pack. Then she headed back towards the entrance, drawing her sidearm as she went.

Reaching the door, she raised her weapon and held her access key up. She was ready to face the two freedom warriors outside, planning to take each out with a single shot. But when the door opened neither of the guards were still at their posts, instead there was an entire squad of them standing several metres away and taking aim at her.

"Corporal Shill, drop your weapons!" a voice that Corlay recognised as that of Master Sergeant Jerad Gall yelled at her.

Corlay turned her pulse wave blaster towards the sergeant but with so many other armed freedom warriors facing her she held her fire and let go of the weapon, allowing it to fall to the floor.

"Now drop the launcher as well and get down." Jerad shouted and Corlay smiled.

"Sounds good to me." she replied and as she dived to the ground she reached into her pocket for the transmitter linked to the explosive charge she had set inside the armoury.

The explosion sent a ball of flame into the sky and caught the other freedom warriors unaware. Although Corlay was significantly closer, it was the others that caught brunt of the blast and were blown off their feet. Her original plan had been to cause as much mayhem as possible with the missile launcher before departing, but now that it was clear that the Jedi had already suspected her of being a traitor she decided that departing immediately would be more advisable now. Therefore, taking advantage of the confusion, Corlay leapt back to her feet and after scooping up her discarded pulse wave blaster ran towards the landing field. At the landing field there were several starships lined up outside while more were stored inside various hangars and she ran for one that looked ready to launch, a small courier designed primarily for speed. A single technician was at work inside this vessel who looked round when he heard Corlay's approach she calmly shot him in the head and let his body roll down the access ramp onto the ground. Tossing the missile launcher and ammunition aside she then headed for the cockpit and climbed into the pilot's seat. It was as she was strapping herself into the seat she saw the first sign of the Jedi themselves when the youthful Jedi Dac Yale along with the more senior Shistavanen battle master Vrish Khal and his Padawan Pedrus Ketam came running across the landing field towards the courier. Smiling, Corlay took the control column in her hand and released the safety covers from the triggers to the ship's weapons.

Danger.

The three Jedi sensed Corlay's intentions before she opened fire and all three had already dived out of the way by the time she fired her first volley. However, Corlay intended to do more than just kill three Jedi, she

needed to secure her escape and that would not happen if she could be caught and shot down before making it to the safety of hyperspace. Engaging the courier's repulsorlifts she lifted the ship a metre or so off the ground and turned it slowly on the spot, keeping the triggers pulled back to unleash a stream of energy blasts as rapidly as the courier's cannons would cycle. These slammed into both starships and hangars alike and the landing field was filled with the sound of explosions as the unshielded craft and structures were destroyed.

A quick glance back towards the Jedi told Corlay that they were all still active and moving towards her. Deciding that the damage she had inflicted was enough to keep the Jedi from pursuing her for some time Corlay ceased fire and opened up the throttle to her repulsorlifts. In an instant the courier shot upwards and in just under two minutes the blue sky darkened to the black of space.

Aurek Station was the primary navigation beacon in the Narthis Sector and it also served as the seat of the Republic's power, being the base for most of the naval units deployed to the sector as well as the sector rangers and three Jedi knights. The station's administrator, a Bothan by the name of Ishtel Varr'kay was at present a most unhappy individual. The declaration by Trent Narthis of the Narthis family and recently elected Republic senator that the Narthis Sector was declaring its independence from the Republic had been rapidly followed by an order from the new sector government for the Republic to evacuate its personnel from the station.

"This is intolerable!" Ishtel exclaimed to the others at the meeting. In front of him were six representatives of the Jedi Order, the two Jedi permanently assigned to the Narthis Sector, Cal Udra, his younger sister and Padawan Lara, their parents Varn and Neari and Aunt Elle who had all arrived to get a first hand report on the Founding Families now that Varn had been given control over all of the Jedi in this region of space. The sixth Jedi who had arrived some months earlier named Tarris Blake was someone Ishtel had never quite understood the role of. In addition to the Jedi were Jule Raser, the most senior sector ranger in the sector and the Duros naval officer Captain Kuwar De Kuun who commanded the sector's naval forces. In addition to these individuals who were all physically present there were two others present only as holograms. These were Lieutenant Commander Austin Veers who commanded the frigate *Perseverance* that was currently moored in close proximity to the station and Colonel Arion Jeck who commanded the peacekeeping garrison on the war-torn world of Tepillos, "This station is Republic property in interstellar space. Even if the sector has seceded from the Republic there is no justification for abandoning it."

"You are quite correct administrator." Varn said, sensing that the Bothan was more concerned about his own reputation should he become known for abandoning his post than any legal niceties, "However, we must face facts. We have only a handful of ships to protect this station."

"And the *Perseverance* is the only capital ship we have." Austin added.

"Which as a frigate is no match for any of the cruisers that the Crassis Major Defence Forces can field." De Kuun commented.

"So it's certain that the local forces are going along with all of this?" Colonel Jeck asked.

"It's only to be expected." Lara said, "After all the head of the biggest local military is Josh Drud of the Drud family."

"The Founding Families have been infiltrating every organisation that could be a threat to them and subverting them to their cause for three hundred years." Cal added.

"That reminds me," Ishtel said, turning his head towards Captain De Kuun, "what about the traitor?"

"We don't actually have any evidence to charge Lieutenant Erin Shill with treason yet administrator." Jule pointed out.

"According to the Jedi, her twin has inflicted catastrophic damage at their enclave on Moldas." Ishtel replied, "I don't want her loose on my station."

"She is not." Captain De Kuun replied, "I have confined her to her quarters and under guard."

"And when can we expect reinforcements?" Ishtel asked.

"The Republic probably doesn't even know about the declaration of independence yet." Neari said, "It could take a week or more for the signal to reach Coruscant." then she looked at Captain De Kuun, "I believe that there are more naval forces in the sector though." she added.

"Indeed." the Duros answered, "There is another squadron of starfighters on Vayal that I have summoned to support us. But they are unlikely to arrive before tomorrow."

"Then we've got a frigate, six gunships and a dozen fighters until then. Plus our ships of course." Elle said and she looked at the other Jedi who between them had three small vessels that were capable of combat.

"We also have the station's own defences." Austin said, "Though I wouldn't want to bet on them turning the tide against a squadron of cruisers that could arrive at any moment."

Lara leant towards Cal.

"I've got a very feeling about this." she whispered.

As the capital world of the Narthis Sector, Crassis Major had the biggest and most powerful armed forces in

the sector, one that out gunned even the Republic's token force. While the sector had been a part of the Republic this had not been an issue since the local planetary militaries would have acted in support of the Republic's if the need arose. But now that the Narthis Sector had declared itself an independent state the forces of Crassis Major and the other worlds of the sector were arrayed against those of the Republic. Key to this had been General Josh Drud, head of the Crassis Major Defence Forces and of the Drud family. Though the Founding Families had initially looked upon his decision to remain with the defence force when his father passed away rather than resign to take over the day to day running of the family, instead leaving that to his younger brother Heddren, they could not deny that his decision had allowed him to subtly guide the defence force's personnel to be loyal to the Narthis Sector over the Republic. Had this not happened then it was likely that any military action would have been delayed while elements opposed to the declaration of independence were removed from their positions.

However, when Josh entered the bridge of the cruiser that was to serve as his task force's flagship the entire bridge crew snapped to attention.

"At ease." Josh said and the crew went back to their duties while Josh approached the ship's captain, "What is our status?" he asked the woman.

"All stations have reported operational general." she replied, "And the other ships of the squadron have confirmed readiness as well."

"Are the jump co-ordinates for Aurek Station laid in?" Josh asked.

"Yes general, though I do not understand why we are not targeting the forces on Tepillos first. Their commander is responsible for the bombardment of our people and-"

"Arion Jeck will be brought to justice captain." Josh interrupted. This was a reference to the events that had led up to the Narthis Sector seceding from the Republic. A member of the Shill family had successfully made it appear that the Republic had used military force against unarmed protesters on Tepillos and as such the commander of the garrison there had rapidly become a figure of hate across the sector with demands being made in the media to put him on trial, "However, before we can start arresting people for war crimes we need to establish a secure border and that is not possible with a Republic space station occupying the primary shipping route through the sector."

"Of course general." the captain replied, bowing her head slightly, "I understand."

"Good." Josh said, "Now I want you to signal the fleet to make the jump to hyperspace, but before that I want you to signal our people aboard Aurek Station."

"And what is the message general?"

"Tell them 'Now.'" Josh said.

2.

Erin Shill sat in her quarters waiting to find out what would happen to her. Like her twin sister Corlay she had joined the Republic's navy so that she could act as an agent for the Founding Families. However, unlike her sister Erin had been detained before she could carry out any sabotage.

The sound of a sudden impact on the door to her quarters startled Erin and she looked towards the door, wondering if someone was about to come and start questioning her regarding the Founding Families' plans. She had been taught how to avoid betraying her feelings to jedi but until now had only used this skill in casual encounters where she was not the focus of attention and was uncertain how she would hold out if a jedi interrogated her directly. But when the door opened it was neither a jedi nor one of the sector ranger guards standing there. In fact behind the black clad figure in the doorway Erin could see one of her guards slumped against the wall opposite.

"Let's go." the figure said, beckoning Erin towards the door.

"Where to?" Erin asked as she got up.

"The hangar." the figure said, "You need to rejoin your squadron Lieutenant."

"You mean they're on their way here already?" Erin said, rushing towards the doorway where she saw that the figure in black was not alone, three other individuals covered entirely in black were also waiting in the corridor and she guessed that they were a special operations team from her family's company.

"Led by the general himself." the figure in black replied and he handed Erin a pulse wave blaster taken from one of the two sector ranger guards. The bodies of the guards were then dragged into Erin's quarters and left there while she and the special operations team headed for the hangar where Aurek Station's fighter squadron was housed.

Rather than head straight for the fighters and risk exposing themselves to the large ground crew at work in the hangar carrying out final checks on the navy vessels Erin and the special operations team headed for the locker room where the pilots changed into and out of their flight suits. Erin let the special operations team lead the way, darting from cover to cover without being seen or heard by anyone close by until they reached the door to the locker room and checked inside using a small probe extended around the door frame.

"Hello?" a woman's voice called out when the door opened and Erin recognised it as one of her former fellow fighter pilots. Then she looked at the special operations agent with the probe and nodded when he held up one finger to indicate that the woman was alone. Erin then tucked her pulse wave blaster into the back of her belt and walked calmly into the locker room, "Lieutenant? What are you doing here?" the woman asked.

"De Kuun let me out." Erin replied as she moved closer to the other pilot, "He says we need everyone that can fly a ship."

"I need to check this out." the other woman said and she began to walk towards the intercom panel. But she failed to appreciate that this brought her within arms reach of Erin who lashed out and struck her throat hard. Gasping for breath the woman staggered back, clutching at her neck and Erin leapt forwards to strike again, She grabbed the dazed woman by her hair and before she could resist pulled her down and slammed her forehead against the deck. There was a 'Crack!' as the woman's skull hit the deck and when her head was lifted up again there was a smear of blood underneath. Repeating this twice more to be certain that the woman was not going to get back up again Erin then let go and began to strip the body.

A few minutes later Erin emerged from the locker room wearing the dead pilot's flight suit and more significantly her helmet as well so that her facial features were concealed. She nodded to the special operations team and without a word they turned around and ran off down the corridor. Erin had no idea of what their orders were from this point on, but she guessed that it would be best for her to be off the station when they carried them out and so she turned in the opposite direction and headed for the nearby hangar.

Twelve aurek-class fighters were lined up close to the door that Erin entered the hangar through and she saw pilots climbing into them as she approached. Subconsciously she headed for her usual starfighter but stopped herself just in time. The pilot who's uniform she now wore flew a different fighter and it would arouse suspicion if Erin headed to the wrong one. Fortunately she knew exactly which fighter all of her squadron's pilots flew and she changed direction towards the correct one. As she passed her own she glanced towards the cockpit and saw that one of the reserve pilots was currently climbing into it, meaning that if she had continued to head for her own fighter she would have come face to face with him and likely been found out when he asked what she was doing.

Just as Erin reached the correct fighter and began to climb the ladder propped up against the side of the fuselage a klaxon sounded and the man who was ordinarily her second in command but who was now acting as the squadron's leader called out to the other pilots with his helmet under his arm.

"Okay we've got incoming." he shouted, "Now you know the drill, stay in formation and wait for the command to attack. Then we all go in together. Good hunting."

"Yes sir!" the other pilots yelled back at him, though Erin made sure to stay silent as she climbed into the cockpit and waited while one of the ground crew removed the ladder. Clearance to launch came very quickly and as Erin was moving her fighter into position she noticed the crews of six gunships rushing towards their vessels on the other side of the hangar. However, her main focus remained the other fighters in her squadron.

"Go." a voice said via her fighter's communications and Erin accelerated out of the hangar, switching from repulsorlifts to the fighter's ion drive. However, unlike the other fighters of the squadron she did not bring her ion drive up to full power, instead allowing her fighter to begin to fall behind the others.

Far ahead of the fighter squadron there was a succession of flashes of light as half a dozen large warships dropped out of hyperspace.

"Eight, what's your problem?" the squadron leader asked when noticing that Erin was falling behind just as he was about to give the order to attack but still not realising that it was her piloting the fighter.

"No problem." Erin replied, adjusting her communications to distort her voice and then she brought her weapons on line.

"Repeat that eight. What's wrong?" the squadron leader responded right before Erin opened fire with her laser cannons and his fighter vanished in a ball of flame.

There were panicked transmissions from several of the other fighters, unable to understand what had just happened and Erin took advantage of the confusion to roll her fighter to one side, firing continuously so that she sprayed as many of the other fighters as possible with laser blasts.

"What's going on out there?" Administrator Ishtel demanded when the main display in Aurek Station's command centre showed the transponder signals of one starfighter after another vanishing, "Those cruisers aren't in range yet."

"It appears that one of the fighters is firing on the others." Varn responded from where he was watching events as they unfolded and he looked around to where Jule stood close by, "Perhaps you should check in with your men guarding Lieutenant Shill." he said.

Jule nodded and activated a nearby intercom panel that was capable of communicating with sector rangers throughout the station.

"This is Agent Raser, units six eight and six nine status check." she said and when there was no reply Varn took out his point to point communicator.

"Elle," he said, "there's a problem with the sector rangers guarding Erin Shill. Take a marine squad and check it out."

Danger.

Varn felt a sudden tremor in the Force just as a nearby turbolift door slid open and out of the corner of his eye he noticed a small cylindrical object come flying out of it.

"Grenade!" he yelled just before the explosive went off.

"Holding at two hundred thousand kilometres general." the captain of Josh's flagship told him, "Shall I scramble fighters?"

"What are the Republic forces doing?" he replied and the captain looked at the comscan display.

"They have one frigate and six gunships deployed." she said, "Plus two fighter squadrons. Wait no, one of their ships appears to be firing on the others."

"A starfighter?" Josh asked and the captain nodded.

"Aurek-class. Launched from the station I'd say." she said.

"Then mark that vessel as friendly and be prepared to allow it to dock." Josh said, "Now what about the other Republic ships? Are they moving to attack?"

"Not yet general and the station hasn't locked onto us yet either."

Josh smiled.

"Good. Then that means that they're having some internal problems." he said, "Order the fleet to deploy but maintain our distance for now. Remember, we want that station intact."

Rather than a lethal type, the grenade was a flashbang, designed to produce a sudden burst of light and sound that would disorientate the occupants of the command centre without risking a hull rupture or damaging the control systems. Immediately following the detonation of the grenade the four members of the Shill Security special operations burst into the command centre and opened fire, specifically picking out the stunned security personnel.

However, they had not planned on there being a jedi master in the command centre. Using the Force to shield himself against the effects of the grenade he had his lightsaber in his hand before the first commando appeared. Charging towards the intruders, he activated his lightsaber just as he came within reach and with a single swing of his weapon he sliced the closest commando in half before using the Force to impart a telekinetic pull on a second that ripped his weapon from his grip before Varn slammed the pommel of his

lightsaber into the man's face to produce a 'crunch' as he crushed the man's nose.

The other two commandos fell back, knowing that taking on a jedi at close quarters would end only one way and as they did so the door to the command centre's second turbolift opened to reveal a further eight black clad commandos who all opened fire in Varn's direction.

Varn blocked some of the energy blasts with his lightsaber but there was too much weapon fire for him to defend against indefinitely and so he instead dived for cover behind a nearby control console. Ordinarily the commandos would have continued to fire, blasting through the console, but on this occasion they had been ordered to limit all damage to the station and so they ceased fire and began to circle around for a clear line of fire.

Four of the fighters in her squadron had been destroyed and a further three were crippled, leaving the remainder scattered and out of formation when a flash of turbolaser fire passed close by Erin's fighter. Turning her head she saw that the *Perseverance* had turned its turrets towards her and opened fire. The frigate still held its original position however, as did the fighter squadron that it had deployed. Clearly Lieutenant Commander Veers was too smart to abandon his position just to chase after one rogue starfighter. But the drawback to this was that the frigate was deployed too far away to effectively target her with its anti-starfighter guns and so had to rely on the heavier turbolasers that were not designed for engaging such a small and manoeuvrable target and for a moment Erin wondered why the frigate was bothering with her at all. Then the answer came in the form of a missile warning from her console and she remembered Captain De Kuun and his gunship squadron.

The six heavily armed gunships had followed the fighter squadron out of the hangar and were now closing on Erin from behind. Each carried a proton torpedo launcher and light turbolaser that combined impressive firepower with the ability to target something as nimble as Erin's fighter. Erin took evasive action as De Kuun's own gunship launched a torpedo at her, banking sharply towards the tumbling remains of one of the starfighters she had destroyed. A proximity alarm sounded as Erin came dangerously close to this wreckage but this was exactly what Erin wanted and as she saw the wreckage pass over her cockpit canopy barely a metre away she pulled up rapidly before levelling out again and putting the wreckage right between her and the torpedo. Just as Erin had planned the torpedo promptly slammed into the already burning wreckage and detonated, throwing fragments in all directions. Using the blast for cover Erin turned towards the cruisers that had just emerged from hyperspace and accelerated towards them. Just as she hoped one of them began to open its hangar doors for her as soon as it became apparent that she was approaching them.

3.

Cal and Lara sat in the cockpit of their delaya-class courier, the *Bright Hope*, waiting for the order to launch. "You know control is very quiet." Lara commented, "What do you suppose is going on out there?" "Not much." Cal replied, "If we were needed then I'm sure that dad and Administrator Varr'kay would let us know."

I need help.

The message from within the Force came with a strong sense of urgency and both of the young Jedi felt the familiar presence of their father accompanying it.

"Trouble." Lara said.

"Let's go." Cal added, leaping up out of his seat and running for the *Bright Hope's* access ramp with Lara following close behind. Cal came to a halt at the bottom of the ramp and waved at one of the two starstorm-class ships docked beside the *Bright Hope*. This was Tarris Blake's vessel and the Jedi shadow was visible through the cockpit canopy. Curious as to why the Udras had abandoned their vessel Tarris got out of his seat and hurried out of his ship.

"Jedi Udra, what is wrong?" he asked.

"Dad's in trouble." Cal told him, "He just sent out a call for help."

"Are your feelings on this certain?" Tarris said.

"Oh yes." Lara said, "It was definitely him and he doesn't call for help lightly."

"Then let us hurry. There is no time to waste." Tarris replied and all three Jedi ran towards the turbolifts, leaving behind them several confused hangar crew who had not expected the Jedi to leave their ships.

The commandos moved across the command centre in a line side by side to cover as much of it as they could. Whenever they came across a member of the command staff they either shot them or delivered a blow from their rifle butts to further incapacitate them. Meanwhile Varn remained out of sight while he waited for the commandos to get close enough for him to be able to attack. But before that happened he sensed the approach of someone more familiar to him and he heard the sound of a turbolift door opening.

The commandos turned in time to see Tarris Blake step out of the turbolift and for Cal and Lara to then position themselves either side of him. Cal and Lara both ignited their lightsabers while Tarris just held his out horizontally in front of him. Then he activated the weapon and there were two 'snap-hiss' sounds as a glowing blade extended from each end of the lightsaber.

"You cannot win." Tarris told the commandos, "Surrender now."

"Open fire!" the leader of the commandos yelled in response.

Without any hint of emotion Tarris began to spin his lightsaber in front of him, producing a circular barrier that the pulse wave blasts burst against as the rapidly spinning lightsaber blades struck the projected spatial distortions. At the same time Cal and Lara split up, heading in opposite directions to try and draw fire away from Tarris while simultaneously forcing the commandos to further divide their attention.

Varn sensed this and he emerged from his hiding place and ignited his lightsaber as he leapt over an intervening console to skewer one of the commandos.

With nine commandos remaining to face four Jedi they split into pairs and fired sustained bursts from their pulse wave rifles to force the Jedi to use their lightsabers defensively rather than offensively. This then left a single commando to manoeuvre into a more favourable position from which to attack. But the appearance of the extra Jedi had delayed the commandos long enough that the command staff were beginning to recover their senses and as this final commando took aim at Cal the next blast of pulse wave fire did not come from his rifle, but rather from Jule's pistol. However, she had not yet fully recovered and her aim was still impaired so rather than hitting the commando between his shoulder blades as she had intended it instead clipped his shoulder. This was still enough to break the bones in his shoulder and upper arm, causing him to cry out in pain as he was spun around by the force of the impact. But even as he dropped his rifle he was already reaching for his own sidearm, a simple beam rod. Aiming this at Jule the commando fired before she could get off another shot, but Lara saw what was happening and was in position to leap into the path of the beam. Unlike the spatial distortions fired by pulse wave weapons the laser beam fired by the beam rod was not simply blocked by the lightsaber blade that Lara put in its path, it was deflected away and by twisting her lightsaber slightly she was able to direct it towards one of the commandos firing on her father. The beam hit the base of the man's neck and he simply collapsed in a heap without making a sound.

This was all the opportunity that the Jedi master needed and without needing to worry about being caught in a cross fire he charged the only commando still facing him, swatting the blasts from his rifle aside with minimal effort until he was close enough to strike the man down with a single diagonal stroke of his lightsaber.

Meanwhile Cal decided to copy Jule. Though he and Lara both owned pulse wave blasters they had not had

time to fetch them from their cabins on the Bright Hope when they sensed Varn's call for help and so each of them was armed only with their lightsabers. However, close to Cal was the body of one of the station's security staff and in the holster on his belt was a semi automatic pistol. Reaching out through the Force, Cal summoned the weapon to his grip and pointed it at one of the commandos facing him and pulled the trigger twice in rapid succession. Unfortunately the weapon was loaded with fragmenting ammunition specifically issued to avoid the risk of punching through the hull and this meant that they were also incapable of piercing the armoured vest that the commando wore. Seeing how ineffectual his attacks had been Cal lifted the pistol slightly and fired again, pulling the trigger repeatedly until the weapon locked open as the last round of ammunition in its limited magazine was expended. Being only moderately proficient with slugthrowers as well being distracted by having to defend against the pulse wave blasts being aimed towards him, most of Cal's shots missed their target. But one hit the side of the commando's head and broke up just as it was designed to do, tearing a chunk of flesh from his face and sending fragments through his skull into his brain, killing him almost instantly.

Tarris on the other hand opted for a more subtle means of attack. Reaching out through the Force he found the minds of the two commandos attempting to keep him pinned down, a task made more difficult by his double bladed lightsaber that allowed him to parry strikes on average twice as fast as the other jedi were capable of. Once he had found the men in the Force he sent out a simple suggestion.

Left.

Instantly both of the commandos reacted as if he were moving to the left, adjusting their aim to follow and Tarris took immediate advantage of this by leaping to the right. Using the Force to enhance his jump, Tarris landed between the two commandos and with a single turn of his lightsaber at neck height he decapitated both of them at the same time.

With only four commandos now remaining and one of them injured they decided that the time had come to withdraw and reconsider their strategy. With one of the two turbolifts accessible from the command centre blocked by jedi there was only one way out and they began to back towards it, moving in pairs while the other two provided covering fire. But just as the first commando reached the turbolift the door slid open without him needing to use the control panel and Neari stepped into the command centre with her lightsaber glowing brightly.

"Not leaving already were you?" she asked with a smile.

Grinding to a halt as they found their escape route blocked, the commandos now found themselves surrounded. The injured man turned and raised his beam rod but Tarris was already within striking distance and he effortlessly sliced through his wrist before bringing his lightsaber's second blade up and driving it through the commando's chest.

"Grenades!" one of the surviving commandos snapped and all three reached to their webbing and plucked grenades from it. But unlike the stun grenade they had used to subdue the station's command staff these were clearly more dangerous types. Then as all three commandos held up the grenades, their safety levers held in place only thanks to the commandos' grips their leader addressed the jedi, "Now back off unless you fancy dying along with us." he said.

"Do as he says." Varn said, shutting off his lightsaber and relaxing, "Neari, get out of their way."

"Dad, are you serious?" Lara asked, "We can't just let them go."

"It is not a padawan's place to defy a jedi master." Tarris said sternly, following Varn's example by deactivating his weapon and stepping away from the commandos. Then Cal and Neari also followed suit.

"Cal." Lara said, looking towards her brother, "You know we can't just let them go."

"Lara do as dad says. Stand down." Cal told her and she frowned before deactivating her lightsaber.

"Good." the lead commando said, "Now no one better think about following us." and the commandos began edging towards the turbolift, Neari backing further out of their way. Once all the commandos were inside the turbolift their leader reached for the control panel and selected a destination, causing the door to slide shut. But the moment his finger touched the button Varn reached out through the Force and plucked another grenade from the webbing of one of the commandos, another stun grenade in this case.

The three commandos watched in horror as the safety lever flew off the grenade and it dropped to the floor, trapped inside the turbolift with them. Seconds later it went off and the sudden pressure wave in the confined space hurled all three against the turbolift walls and in their severely disorientated state all three released their grips on the grenades they held.

Back the command centre the jedi heard the dull 'crump' of the stun grenade.

"Down!" Varn yelled and all the jedi dived away from the turbolift door just as the blast wave from the three grenades released by the commandos struck and ripped it from its frame, hurling it across the command centre. Then Varn looked around at the other jedi, "Cal, Lara, help your mother see to these people." he said, indicating the surviving command staff before looking directly at Tarris, "And perhaps we ought to see what we can do about supporting our ships out there." he said and then he and Tarris headed for the consoles from where Aurek Station's defence systems were managed.

"Captain, station shields are going up and they're starting targeting sweeps." the flagship's comscan operator called out.

"That can't be." Josh said, staring at the display in disbelief just as the door to the bridge opened and Erin walked in.

"Thanks for the pick up general." she said, standing at attention and saluting Josh.

"What's going on over there?" he replied as he returned the salute, "I was told we had four special operations teams aboard the station."

"Well I only saw the one that busted me out." Erin told him, "But considering the number of jedi that are running around over there right now, I doubt four teams will be enough."

"I thought the jedi were holed up on Tepillos with the peacekeepers." the captain said, but Erin shook her head.

"They came rushing right back to liaise with Administrator Varr'kay." Erin told her, "Unfortunately that fool De Kuun had me arrested before I could get word to anyone."

"No matter. You took care of most of your squadron." Josh said.

"Yeah, I almost feel bad about that. Some of them were decent people." Erin replied, "Even if they were Republic boot lickers."

"What are your orders general?" the captain asked.

"We have plenty of time." Josh said, "Maintain our distance but have the ships spread out to surround the station. We'll let their ships burn fuel while we conserve ours. But no one is to get into or out of that station until I give the word."

4.

Administrator Varr'kay was the only one of Aurek Station's senior staff to remain in the command centre even as the effects of the stun grenade wore off, the others being taken to the closest medical facility to be checked out just in case there was any longer lasting damage inflicted while other crew members took their place. Even Jule was helped away by Neari with a marine master sergeant replacing her as the most qualified in internal security. The bothan refused all offers of help however, insisting that he was fine. Though all of the Jedi sensed his deception and concluded that he feared having his authority undermined in his absence. As before, relevant personnel not present in person were connected via holographic transmission. In this case this meant Austin and Captain De Kuun, Colonel Jeck being cut off by jamming from the cruisers blockading the station.

"So what can you tell us Sergeant Keltan?" Tarris asked, looking at the marine.

"Those commandos must have already been aboard the station when those cruisers arrived." he replied.

"Wedge is right." Cal agreed, "Who knows how many teams Han Shill infiltrated here over the years?"

"I've got Elle conducting sweeps with the sergeant's men right now." Varn said.

"But Aurek Station is huge." Ishtel said, "Searching everywhere would take an army. We need those troops from Tepillos now."

"Yeah, because I'm sure that those cruisers will let troop transports dock without trying to do anything like shoot them down." Lara replied with a frown.

"She's right." Cal said, "We don't have the men for a full search and we're not likely to get any reinforcements any time soon."

"But what are those cruisers waiting for?" Lara asked and Varn sighed.

"They must want the station intact." he said.

"Well that's good isn't it? It means they won't fire on us." Ishtel said.

"It means they'll wait for our fighters and gunships to exhaust their fuel and life support and then attack while they're refuelling." Austin told him, "They'll take out the *Perseverance* and rush the station. Those six ships could have a thousand troops on each. More if they aren't worried about some of them having to sleep on the floor."

"Even one ship load would overwhelm us." Wedge said.

"Then we have no choice." Varn said reluctantly, "We have to abandon Aurek Station."

"And go where?" Captain De Kuun asked, "If we abandon the sector now the Republic may not allow us to return."

"But they must." Ishtel exclaimed.

"Not necessarily." Varn replied, "The senate could decide that the Narthis Sector's declaration of independence was perfectly legal. After all, without any proof of how the events that led to it were staged the Republic looks like the villain here."

"Then we cannot leave." Ishtel insisted.

"We have to." Cal said. But then he looked at Lara and smiled, "Though I think I know the perfect place for us to hide and it's right here in this sector."

"Oh no." Lara said, "I've got a bad feeling about this."

"Where are you thinking of?" Captain De Kuun asked, but before Cal could tell him Tarris spoke up instead.

"Where he and his padawan hid from us for six months." he said, "Dorn Station."

Dorn Station was a space station on the fringe of the Narthis Sector. Built by aliens around a thousand years earlier, the Republic had attempted to convert it into another navigation beacon but failed when mysterious accidents plagued the project.

"Dorn Station?" Ishtel exclaimed, "But the Republic efforts to-"

Lara snorted.

"The Republic didn't know what they were dealing with." she interrupted, "Trust us, Dorn Station is a damned sight safer than here right now."

"We still haven't considered how to bypass the blockade." Austin commented, "Our ships won't be able to protect an entire convoy of transports from those cruisers."

"Then we need to open up a gap in the blockade right as we're about to leave." Varn said.

"Attacking any of the cruisers will draw in the others and open a gap." Captain De Kuun said, "But we would inevitably lose several ships in the process."

"We need to infiltrate one of them and sabotage it." Cal said, "If we take out their weapons and communications then they won't be able to fire on us or alert the others to reposition themselves. We'd be best hitting the flagship though, that will put the rest off balance if they do realise something's wrong."

"And I'm guessing that was right where Lieutenant Shill headed." Austin said.

"But who would undertake such a mission?" Ishtel asked.

"My men are capable of it." Wedge replied.

"No." Varn responded, "We need your marines here to keep the station secure until we're ready to leave."

"This should be a jedi mission." Tarris said.

"Lara and I will go." Cal said and Lara's eyes widened.

"We will?" she asked.

"A padawan follows where their master goes." Tarris told her.

"Fine." Lara said, folding her arms, "I'm in. But how do you suggest getting to the flagship brother dear?" she then asked and her face fell when Cal just smiled, "Oh I've got a very bad feeling about this." she added.

The jedi gathered just inside the airlock along with Wedge as Cal and Lara completed their final preparations to exit the station. Cal wore a plain white vacuum suit while Lara's was bright pink, colours intended to make it easy for them to be identified in a search and rescue situation but of less use when attempting a covert boarding action.

"Haven't you jedi ever heard of camouflage?" Wedge asked.

"It won't matter when we're behind those things." Cal replied and he pointed to a irregular shaped sheet of metal that had simple handholds welded to it. In addition there were two pulse wave rifles, one mounting an underslung grenade launcher had been attached with tape.

"A jedi should have no need of such crude and random weaponry." Tarris commented as Lara slung a bandolier of grenades over her shoulder.

"Hey, my aim's not that bad." she replied, "So don't go saying anything about 'random'."

"Maybe not." Cal replied, "But your memory is. It's my turn for the grenade launcher. Now hand it over." and he held out his hand. Lara frowned and reluctantly removed the bandolier before handing it to him, "Thanks." he said as he slung it over his shoulder. With the bandolier in place Cal and Lara completed the procedure of donning their vacuum suits by putting on their helmets. Before Lara lowered her visor she turned to her parents.

"Look after Ghost for me." she said.

"He's my dog. They'll look after him for me." Cal responded.

"Just get out of here." Neri said.

"And may the Force be with you." Varn added.

"Thanks." Cal replied before looking at the sheet of metal, "Okay Lara, give me a hand with this."

In order to be big enough to hide both Cal and Lara the metal sheet was of a size that barely fit inside the airlock with them and it was left to the jedi remaining in the corridor to run the decompression cycle from outside it before the outer door slid open and the jedi looked out into space.

"So the flagship's that way?" Lara asked and Cal nodded.

"About two hundred and fifty thousand kilometres away." he said, "This could take some time."

The jedi stood at the very edge of the airlock and held the metal sheet out in front of them before pushing off. Slowly the two jedi drifted away from the station, keeping the metal sheet held out in front of them. At their current rate of travel they could not hope to reach their target in a reasonable time before their life support ran out and they suffocated, so as they continued to drift through space one of the gunships of Captain De Kuun's squadron flew in close and Cal latched onto it using the Force to pull them both close enough to take hold.

"We're set." Lara said, using the transmitter built into her suit to communicate with the gunship's crew.

"Copy that. A-gee field expanded. Standby." the pilot responded and all of a sudden the gunship accelerated directly towards the enemy flagship at a rate that if not for the expanded artificial gravity field would have ripped the jedi off the hull while crushing their bodies to pulp. After just a few seconds of this the gunship stopped accelerating and the jedi let go.

"We're clear." Cal transmitted and the gunship rolled aside, leaving the jedi to continue hurtling towards the cruiser while hiding behind the sheet of metal. To the comscan operators of the enemy vessel they looked like nothing more than drifting debris. As the jedi drew closer they began to sense the presence of the cruiser's crew in the Force and Cal and Lara both let go of the metal sheet's handholds and ripped their rifles from where they were taped to it and let the sheet drift on in front of them.

"Take hold of me." Cal said and grabbed hold of him. Then with his own free hand Cal reached out through the Force towards the cruiser they were heading towards and directed a telekinetic push towards it. The cruiser was far too massive for the amount of power Cal was channelling for it to be knocked out of position but the Force could not change the laws of physics and when the telekinetic push could not move the cruiser it instead rebounded to push back on Cal, slowing both him and Lara down. The deceleration was nothing like the hundreds of gees of acceleration the gunship had produced but Cal had allowed a much greater distance for slowing down and by maintaining his use of telekinesis he steadily reduced their speed until the kilometre long cruiser was right overhead.

"There's a hatch." Lara said, looking towards an hatchway in the underside of the cruiser towards the stern of the ship, "Think we can make it?"

"I think so." Cal replied, "But we'll have to focus hard. Both of us. I'll guide us in, you just make sure we don't get pulped slowing down."

Lara nodded and wrapped her arms and legs tightly around Cal before letting go with her hand and holding it out in front of them both. Then Cal pulled them in the direction of the hatch before pushing against it to slow themselves down as rapidly as possible while simultaneously Lara wrapped them in a bubble of telekinetic power to mimic the artificial gravity field as best she could to limit the force of deceleration they felt. Even with this bubble in place the pressure on them both was tremendous and their vision blurred as they began to black out. Only their jedi powers allowed them to remain conscious.

"Now!" Cal snapped as they flew past the hatchway and both jedi reached out and grabbed hold a handrail that ran around the hatch, bringing them to a sudden relative halt.

"Finally." Lara gasped, "I don't think I could have taken much more of that."

"We're almost done." Cal replied, slinging his rifle and drawing his lightsaber. Igniting the weapon he slashed it across the locking mechanism of the hatch and it suddenly slid open to reveal a cargo handling airlock,

"Ladies first." he said with a smile.

Inside the cruiser the two jedi remained in their vacuum suits. This meant that when the time came to abandon the ship they would not have to waste time searching for them and also that the ship's command staff could not try to stop them by decompressing sections of the ship.

"Where first?" Lara asked.

"Main antenna." Cal replied, "We should be able to jam their comms from there. Then we'll take out the power feed to the weapons. And remember, no one knows we're here yet so let's try and keep it that way."

"Replay that gunship's manoeuvre." Erin said, pointing to the sensor display.

"What's wrong?" Josh asked.

"I've just got a bad feeling about it." Erin replied, "It didn't look right for a ship supposedly fly a CAP." and Josh looked at the captain and nodded.

"Do it." he ordered.

The screen in front of them then showed the trace of the gunship as it accelerated away from Aurek Station before it turned away.

"Can you extend a line along its course while it was accelerating?" Erin asked and with a few taps of her console the captain placed a line on the display that reached out towards the cruiser.

"Straight at us." Josh said.

"A mock attack run." the captain said, "Nothing to worry about. A gunship like that isn't a serious threat to us."

"No." Erin said, "Play it again, only slower this time."

The trace was replayed at half speed and Erin watched it closely.

"There!" she snapped, "See? It stopped accelerating before it broke off. That's not an attack run, that's a catapult launch."

"A what?" Josh asked, unfamiliar with what Erin was describing.

"It's when you use the acceleration of a ship to hurl a projectile." the captain said.

"And I'll bet that if you recheck your sensor readings you'll find an innocent looking object drifting right towards us after that." Erin said before looking at Josh, "General, company's coming and only jedi would be able to pull off being hurled through space like that."

5.

Cal and Lara kept to the lower decks to begin with. This was the section of the ship where most of the equipment necessary to maintaining the habitable environment inside it was located and this tended to be controlled from elsewhere. However, both Jedi remained alert for the possibility of discovery and held their rifles at the ready. Their Jedi senses could warn them of the approach of any living being but it was likely that there were also droids aboard and these would be much harder to detect.

Cal let off a sudden blast from his rifle and a maintenance droid exploded in a shower of sparks.

"You think it had chance to tell anyone about us?" Lara asked as they carried on past the wreckage.

"I doubt it." her brother replied, "It's unlikely that it was linked to the main computer. But we better hurry anyway just in-" and then there was a klaxon and a rumbling from up ahead, "Of course I could be wrong. Run!"

The two Jedi set off running down the corridor and as they rounded a corner they saw a blast door sliding shut.

"We can make it." Lara exclaimed as she continued to run.

"No we can't." Cal replied and he ground to a halt just as the blast door slammed shut.

"Oh great. Now what do we do?" Lara asked looking around for inspiration. Then she caught sight of an air vent, "What about the ventilation system?" she suggested.

"Didn't you review the specs of this ship before we left?" Cal asked in reply.

"Err, I thought I'd copy from you." Lara replied and Cal sighed.

"Well if you had, you'd know that the ventilation system aboard this ship is narrower than standard. Even you couldn't fit through unless you took off that suit."

"Okay, so given that I don't want to spend the rest of the mission naked what do we do?"

"Easy." Cal said, "I doubt that whoever's in command of this ship will want to risk leaving us loose down here so they'll send someone to deal with us and when they open the door to get at us we'll be able to get out."

"Won't they be expecting Jedi and be ready to deal with us though?" Lara asked and Cal grinned.

"Jedi maybe. But Jedi with a grenade launcher? I doubt it." he said.

The marine force that made its way down into the lower levels was well armed. In addition to their standard pulse wave pistols they had each been issued with a automatic rifle loaded with fragmenting ammunition. Their plan to deal with Jedi was simple, fire as many rounds as possible towards them and overwhelm them with the sheer weight of fire. Upon reaching the blast door sealing off the section where the intruders were believed to be they positioned themselves to the sides of the corridor and dropped to their knees to present the smallest targets possible.

"In position. Open the blast door." the unit leader transmitted and there was a heavy sounding 'clunk' as the bolts holding the blast door shut released and the door began to open. But the moment the gap between the two halves was wide enough there was a sudden 'Bloop!' as Cal fired his grenade launcher, sending an explosive round through the gap and into the section corridor where the marines were located, "Everybody-" the squad leader began but before he could get any further the grenade detonated and filled the corridor with fragments and flames.

"Okay move!" Cal snapped and he and Lara rushed through the still widening gap and surveyed the effects of the grenade. Before them the marines lay either dead or critically injured and none still held their weapons, "Right then, let's keep going before anyone realises what's happened here." Cal added and he and Lara continued to run.

"Captain I'm getting a beacon signal." one of the communication specialists on the bridge called out.

"Where from?" the captain replied.

"Err, it seems to have been from us captain. But it's gone now."

"Let me see." Josh said and he hurried over to the specialist and looked at his display.

"This signal isn't used by us general. It could be a Jedi code." the specialist told him.

"No. I know that one." Josh replied and he looked at Erin, "It's from that case of grenades your brother gave to Cal and Lara Udra."

"The ones he had bugged?" Erin said and Josh nodded.

"The very same. Captain I think your men are dead and we have two Jedi loose in the ship armed with a grenade launcher." he said.

An emergency access shaft was the first exit from the level Cal and Lara were on that they came to.

"Clear." Lara said as she leant inside and pointed her rifle up the shaft, "Looks like it goes up eight or nine levels."

"That's less than a third of the way." Cal replied, "But I suppose it'll just have to do for now." and he and his sister slung their rifles and began to climb the ladder running up the shaft.

They climbed as far as the top of the shaft and cautiously climbed out.

"Okay, since you know the layout of this ship by heart which way so we go now?" Lara asked softly.

"That way." Cal replied, pointing upwards, "And that way as well." and he pointed towards the rear of the ship.

"Huh?" Lara said.

"The crew know we're aboard and by now they may even know exactly who we are." Cal explained, "So since there are two of us and we have two separate targets we may as well split up and take one each. I'll take out the antenna and you disable the power to the weapon systems. The conduit should be easy to recognise, the weapons will draw more power than anything other than the hyperdrive."

"Got it." Lara said with a nod and after taking a quick look around she ran off in the direction Cal had indicated.

Cal waited until his sister had disappeared from view before he then set off towards the nearest turbolift shaft that he knew would take him all the way up to the antenna array that was mounted on the upper hull of the cruiser. Unlike the mainly automated lower levels there was a significant number of crewmen on the level Cal was now on and he repeatedly had to double back to avoid being seen when he sensed their approach. This was nothing that Cal had not expected, but what was concerning to him was that as well as crewmen going about their duty in small numbers he was also starting to encounter marine security forces in larger groups and he started to wonder whether sending Lara off on her own had been the right thing to do.

All of a sudden there was a hissing sound from ahead as the door to the turbolift Cal was heading for slid open and a pair of the ship's engineers emerged. Cal was caught in the open when this happened and all it would take was for one of the pair to look to their side and they would see him. Reaching out through the Force, Cal waved his hand and implanted the suggestion that wherever the two engineers were going it was in the opposite direction and he breathed a sigh of relief as sure enough they both turned away from him and headed off talking casually. Taking advantage of this Cal sprinted down the corridor and into the turbolift before one of the engineers suddenly noticed that they were going in the wrong direction, prompting them to turn around just as the turbolift door slid shut again.

In the turbolift Cal was about to select the uppermost deck of the cruiser as his destination when he considered his situation. When the turbolift halted he would have no control over the opening of the turbolift door and if there was someone stood right outside then Cal would have nowhere he could hide. Therefore, rather than select the deck he actually wanted, Cal chose the one below and as the turbolift began to move he looked upwards and with a wave of his hand used the Force to open the emergency hatch in the ceiling that he then jumped through.

As it happened Cal was just in time as the turbolift came to a halt on an intervening floor and a security patrol entered it, watched by Cal as he held the emergency hatch open a few centimetres and peered through the gap. Then security patrol got out of the turbolift a few decks below where Cal needed it to stop and then it finished its journey empty with Cal still sat on its roof. When the turbolift halted again Cal jumped up onto the narrow ledge formed at the doorway of the deck immediately above, the one that he wanted to reach and with him pressed up against the door he reached out through the Force to see what he could find.

He sensed the presence of several crewmen, all preoccupied with their work and Cal took a deep breath before using the barrel of his rifle and its attached grenade launcher to trip the optical sensor that would tell the door control that the turbolift had arrived. Immediately the door right in front of Cal slid open and he stepped through, bringing his rifle up to his shoulder.

At first the crewmen in the main communications suite continued with their work with their backs to the turbolift but as Cal crept forwards one of them noticed a reflection in his console and he gasped as he whirled around in his seat.

Fear.

"Nobody move!" Cal snapped as he felt the man's reaction in the Force, "Get your hands up."

Startled the crewmen raised their hands. None of them were quite sure what to think of Cal, they had received the alerts about Jedi intruders but wearing a vacuum suit and wielding a pulse wave rifle Cal did not look like their opinion of how a Jedi knight should appear. Cal glanced around quickly and noticed a door to the side of the room and edged towards it before opening it. As expected he found that it was nothing but a storage locker and as he had hoped it looked just large enough for the men in front of him.

"Okay," he said, "Now slowly, everyone get up and get in the closet." and he waved the muzzle of his rifle towards the door.

Nervously and with their hands still raised the men got from their seats and moved into the storeroom. Then Cal slung his rifle over his shoulder and with a wave of his hand Cal closed the door, shutting the crewmen inside. Before any of them could use the internal controls to open the door again Cal drew and ignited his lightsaber that he then moved around the edge of the door, melting it to its frame and making sure that only by bringing in cutting gear could it be opened again. Then, shutting off his lightsaber, Cal turned his attention

to the communications equipment that filled the room. In particular Cal looked for the consoles that managed outgoing subspace and radio transmissions. At each of these consoles Cal removed the access panel beneath it and located the data handling circuit. These both received their input from the cruiser's internal communications network and then fed it outwards to the antennas. Selecting the input data lines, Cal used his knife to cut through them. Each line consisted of four individual optical fibres, power, reference, receive data and transmit data and Cal bared a length about as long as his finger of each of the data lines before he aligned them pointing towards one another and twisted them together. Then before they could slip apart again he reactivated his lightsaber and used the heat given off by the blade when touched to the lines to melt them together before putting everything back how it had been before he had opened up the access covers. By doing this Cal knew that any signal sent would simply be bounced straight back to wherever it had originated from, but any automated test based on echoing data would not indicate any problem. Repeating this for the other system, Cal then returned to the turbolift and summoned it, leaving the crewmen hammering on the door of the storeroom to be let out.

6.

Lara also found herself having to avoid crewmen as she sought out the power feed to the cruiser's weapon systems. But despite being just a padawan compared to Cal being a fully fledged jedi knight, Lara had learned the ability to wrap herself in the Force in a manner that made it much more difficult for someone not Force sensitive to notice her. Therefore, as well as being able to misdirect crewmen who appeared likely to discover her, Lara was also able to simply slip past them unnoticed.

Even with efficient cooling systems in place the area around the cruiser's main reactors was significantly warmer than other areas and Lara found herself sweating in her vacuum suit. Fortunately the somewhat unpleasant heat meant that the area was unmanned and all that Lara had to concern herself with were the reactor maintenance droids. These droids were heavily armoured and had only limited programming that meant Lara was able to move past them without worrying about them reporting anything she did unless she actually tried to approach the reactor itself and that did not interest her at all.

What Lara sought were the energy lines used to carry power to various parts of the ship. Most of these were bundled together into larger shared conduits. But the sheer requirements of certain systems made this impractical and the cruiser's engines, shields and energy weapons each had their own dedicated conduits. Those for the sublight ion drives were the only ones to extend out of the back of the reactor towards the rear of the ship whereas the other three emerged from the front and so Lara studied these more closely. As Cal had reminded her the largest would inevitably be for the cruiser's hyperdrive engines, the energy needed to tear open a portal into hyperspace for a vessel this size requiring more power than many modern cities. After that would come the power supply for the dozens of weapon emplacements that were dotted across the cruiser's hull, each one capable of ripping open the armoured hull of a starship or blasting massive holes in the surface of planets should they be turned towards one.

Lara slung her rifle and drew her lightsaber. With one swing she would be able to slice through the power conduit that supplied the cruiser's weapons and then her task would be done. Looking up at the conduit as she ignited her weapon, Lara was about to strike when all of a sudden an electronic voice called out to her. "Surrender jedi!"

Spinning around on the spot Lara found herself facing a line of four droids that were worryingly familiar. Months earlier she had seen an army of them on an isolated world where they had remained undisturbed for the millennium since the death of their maker, the Sith lord known only as The Artisan.

Each of the elite Sith warbots aimed an arm towards her one which was mounted a twin barrelled pulse wave weapon, but more worryingly were the Sith swords that they carried in their other hands. The blades of these weapons were enhanced using ancient Sith alchemy and not even a lightsaber blade could cut through one.

"It'll take more than a few clockwork toy soldiers to stop me." Lara replied before launching herself at the droids, aiming for one at the end of the line. Standing its ground against her the droid opened fire but the blasts from its weapons simply burst when they struck Lara's lightsaber blade and Lara was soon within reach of the droid. However, the machine reacted quickly enough to bring up its own sword blade and parried her attempt to decapitate it. The other three droids then formed a circle around Lara and in turn began to strike at her with their swords. Each attack was slow and predictable but they all came from different directions and Lara was forced to turn to defend against each one before turning again as the next droid attacked. The droids' plan was simple, they would wait for Lara to tire and then attempt to disable and disarm her so she could be handed over to Josh Drud as their orders required or if necessary they would kill her as they were allowed to do if there was no other choice.

"Oh come on!" Lara exclaimed as she blocked yet another blow and spun to face the following attack from the droid to her right, "Stop trying to fight me and just fight me. Enough of this back and forth poodoo." But the droids ignored her, remaining silent and continuing with their strategy. However, despite the four Sith swords surrounding her Lara was still able to sense the approach of a familiar presence in the Force.

"Lara get down!" Cal yelled as he raised his rifle and Lara dropped to the deck.

Ordinarily the warbots would have stepped forwards to attack while Lara was vulnerable but Cal's yell alerted them to another threat and they turned to face him just as he opened fire with his rifle. Unlike lightsabers, Sith swords could not burst the spatial distortions fired by pulse wave weapons and when the warbot Cal targeted attempted this the sword was torn from its grip by the first blast before the next two blew large holes in its armoured torso.

Seeing the warbots now take aim at her brother Lara swung her lightsaber in a horizontal arc and before any of the warbots realised what was happening she had cut the legs out from under two of them, bringing both fighting machines crashing to the deck with their arms flailing about. Lara then rolled across the floor away from the two crippled droids, remaining low while her brother targeted the last fully functional warbot. Cal charged forwards as he fired his rifle, first blowing the warbot's sword arm off at the elbow before a blast slammed into its head and ripped it from its shoulders.

Casting aside its sword, one of the legless warbots rolled onto its front and tried to crawl after Lara but Cal was able to shout out a warning to her.

"Lara! Lookout behind you!" he yelled and Lara turned her head just in time to see the droid aim its built in pulse wave blasters at her. Simultaneously she held out her lightsaber to block the energy blast and with her free hand drew her pulse wave pistol. Pointing this at the warbot's head she pulled the trigger and the machine's faceplate exploded before it slumped forwards motionless.

The final droid also took aim at Lara, but a Cal was already close enough to intervene and he stamped down on the arm that the weapon was mounted on before pressing the muzzle of his rifle to its head.

"So you were made by a Sith lord a thousand years ago then were you?" Cal said, "I guess that means your warranty expired centuries ago." and he pulled the trigger.

"Really Cal?" Lara asked as she got to her feet.

"What's wrong?" Cal replied.

"'You're warranty expired centuries ago'? That makes you sound like a lame action hero."

Cal frowned.

"I'm still the hero who saved my baby sister from four killer warbots." he told her before looking up at the power conduit for the cruiser's weapons, "Now let's blow this thing and go home." he added and Lara smiled.

"I'm right on it bro." she said before leaping upwards with her lightsaber held up above her. As planned the blade sliced through the conduit and the power distribution lines it contained, producing a sudden shower of sparks and cutting off all power to the cruiser's weapons.

"Captain! We've lost power to weapons!" the gunnery controller cried out as his console status displays turned red.

"The jedi." Josh hissed.

"They must have got to the reactor." Erin added.

"Sensor contacts. Multiple launches from Aurek Station!" a comscan operator called out, "All Republic vessels are heading straight for us."

"Do we have any weapons left?" the captain demanded.

"Just the missiles." the gunnery controller replied.

"Then open fire." the captain ordered, "Target the frigate first, then the personnel transports."

"We should launch fighters as well." Erin said and Josh added.

"Give the word captain. Scramble." he said.

"Firing solution achieved." the gunnery controller called out, "Missiles firing." and through the bridge viewport the fiery trails of multiple missile launches appeared as the cruiser's vertically aligned missile tubes were fired. But moments later it became apparent that something was wrong as the missiles carried on going straight up relative to the cruiser rather than arcing around towards the *Perseverance*.

"What's happening?" the captain demanded.

"Nothing wrong with the launch." the gunnery controller replied, "But I can't get control of the missiles. There seems to be something wrong with the targeting data we're sending to them."

"Our fighters can't stop those ships without support." Josh exclaimed, "Tell the other cruisers to move to intercept."

However, when the comscan operators attempted to contact the other ships of the blockade there was a sudden high pitched electronic squeal from the communications system as their own transmission was fed back to them and they ripped the headsets from their heads.

"Those kriffing jedi have taken our communications as well!" Erin snapped, "We're on our own here general."

Hurrying back to the hatchway they had used to gain access to the cruiser Cal and Lara were no longer worried about being discovered and they fired on anyone who got in their way. These blasts were enough to get most of the crew out of their way, with only a handful of marines or the occasional warbot even attempting to block their retreat. Upon reaching the airlock they lowered the visors of their helmets and opened the inner door. With the damage done to the outer door keeping the airlock open to space there was a sudden rush of escaping air. But the two jedi made no attempt to fight this and instead hurled themselves out into space, watching the cruiser as they tumbled further away from it.

Reaching out through the Force, Cal latched onto Lara and pulled them both towards one another, grabbing hold of her as soon as she was in reach.

"So now what?" Lara asked and Cal looked towards Aurek Station.

There he saw a swarm of ships from fighters and transports up to the frigate *Perseverance* racing towards the cruiser the two jedi had just left. Fighters began to race from the cruiser's hangar, but even as they were emerging Captain De Kuun's gunships opened fire with their turbolasers and the fighters began to explode even before they were fully clear of the cruiser.

"I think the navy has things in hand." Cal replied.

"And what about us? Are we supposed to walk to Dorn Station?"

"Oh no." Cal said with a smile as at the same time he sense familiar presences in the Force he also saw a familiar starship divert towards them.

The Bright Hope swooped in and slowed to a relative stop close to where Cal and Lara drifted in space and an airlock door slid open to reveal a bulk labour droid that reached out an arm towards them.

"Shorty!" Lara exclaimed.

"Together." Cal told her as he saw fighters now being launched by other cruisers, "Mom and dad are flying the ship, but they can't afford to wait too long." and he and Lara both reached out through the Force to latch onto the labour droid before pulling themselves towards the Bright Hope.

As soon as they were within reach Shorty dragged Cal and Lara into the airlock, sealing it behind them. The Bright Hope's system's immediately began to pump air into the airlock and the inner door slid open as soon as the process was complete.

"Ghost! God boy." Lara exclaimed as they were met by a dog wagging its tail in the corridor outside.

"Come on!" Cal said, waving Lara after him as he ran for the ship's cockpit and Lara and Ghost followed him to where they found Varn and Neri flying the ship.

"Strap in." Varn said from the pilot's station, "We're almost clear."

"Jump co-ordinates are locked in for Tepillos." Neri added, "We'll hook up with Colonel Jeck's troops there and head for Dorn Station via Xyros and Vedra."

"What about them? Where are they going?" Lara asked, pointing through the cockpit canopy to a ship unidentifiable at this range that was heading in a different direction.

"That's your Aunt Elle." Varn replied, "I've sent her back to Moldas to let them know where we're going. She'll bring the rest of them back here to join us. All of the jedi and all of the freedom warriors. If the Founding Families want to declare war on us then I'm not going to take it lying down."

And then the stars outside turned into the blur of hyperspace as Varn engaged the *Bright Hope's* hyperdrive.