

STAR WARS

TALES OF THE JEDI



V-VIII: PEACEKEEPERS

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...

PEACEKEEPERS

THE WAR TORN WORLD OF TEPILLOS IS AN UNLIKELY PLACE FOR THE JEDI TO FIND ALLIES IN THEIR FIGHT AGAINST THE FOUNDING FAMILIES. BUT GAL AND LARA ARE DESPATCHED ALONG WITH THE JEDI NEGOTIATOR KARRIE TYRAN TO ATTEMPT JUST THAT. BUT THE JEDI PRESENT THE INSURGENTS WITH AN ALTOGETHER DIFFERENT OPPORTUNITY...

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

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1 .

The world of Tepillos in the Narthis Sector had once been a shining beacon of Republic civilisation, rivalling even the sector capital world of Crassis Major. But a malaise had set in, starting amongst the government and those responsible for running the planet had turned their attention to bettering their own lives regardless of the effects on those who had voted them into power. As the government weakened others stepped into fill the gap extremist groups of every persuasion sprang up to fill the gap. Many of these set about fighting one another, but rather than prompting the government into action it just prompted members of the government to move as much of their property and family off world as they could while the violence grew steadily worse. Eventually all semblance of society broke down and rival armed gangs stalked the streets preying on anyone who had something they wanted.

It was at this point that the Republic stepped in, deploying a force of troops as peacekeepers. The standing orders of these troops were to begin by re-establishing basic law and order before hunting down the various insurgent groups and eliminating them. But the number of troops deployed had never been up to the task and although they had managed to secure and fortify a small area of the capital city known as the Green Zone, they had never been able to restore law and order to the point that Tepillos' own police could take over for themselves again and the troops could begin hunting the insurgents. The fighting may have been lessened by the presence of the Republic troops but true peace never came.

Then came the protest massacres.

An orbiting Republic warship opened fire with its turbolasers at a crowd of thousands of protesters outside the walls of the Green Zone. This had been a result of sabotage to the ship's systems, but before an investigation to show this could be organised by the navy the sector's senator Trent Narthis, a direct descendant of the leader of the original survey mission that had charted the sector three hundred years earlier, declared that the sector was seceding from the Republic and all Republic personnel were expelled. The removal of the Republic troops meant that there was once again a power vacuum on Tepillos and the insurgents stepped in to fill the void once more.

All of this was a part of a grander plan, however. The Narthis family was only one amongst the descendants of the original explorers. Together these were known as the Founding Families and ever since the survey mission they had been working to try and gain access to a storehouse of Sith knowledge they had discovered hidden beneath the waves of the ocean world of Delvad and it had been they who were behind the sabotage that led to the frigate *Perseverance* firing on the protesters. But having Tepillos fall back into a state of civil war was not a part of their plan and a replacement force of peacekeepers had been organised. None of the other worlds in the sector had a military with enough troops to spare for the mission, nor did the mercenary forces operated by the Shill family. But more recently the Crassis family had discovered the control codes for a hidden army of Sith warbots and now hundreds of thousands of these were poised to deploy on Tepillos. Most of these warbots were aboard massive bulk freighters but in order for these to land the starports first needed to be secured. Fortunately the automated factories on the world of Shadowfall where the warbots had been hidden also had hangars that contained ancient Sith personnel carriers. Each of these ships was capable of transporting nine hundred warbots internally and a further hundred and twenty in six externally mounted drop pods.

Sixty of these pods were fired towards the starport in the Green Zone from orbiting transports. Despite the best efforts of what remained of the local planetary police even this fortified section of the city had been over run by armed gangs within three days of the Republic troops being evacuated and now most of the residents were remaining in doors, barricaded in their homes with whatever weapons they could muster for protection. Therefore it was mainly insurgent groups that saw the fiery trails of the drop pods entering the atmosphere and plummeting towards the starport. Knowing that the Republic had abandoned Tepillos and that the other inhabited worlds lacked the will to intervene, many of these insurgents assumed that the trails were the result of relief ships entering the atmosphere to bring emergency supplies to be distributed by the many charities that had attempted to provide aid to the population. Expecting to find easy targets with rich pickings, the insurgents rushed to the starport themselves. But when they arrived they soon discovered their mistake. Rather than unarmed aid workers aboard shuttles laden with supplies, the insurgents found themselves looking at compact drop ships that burst open to allow more than a thousand humanoid warbots come marching. Each of these machines carried a sword in one hand while an energy weapon was built into the other arm. Marching perfectly in step, the warbots all raised their arms with built in weapons and unleashed a volley of fire that ripped through the ranks of the insurgents. A few stood their ground, raising weapons and returning fire. But the warbots featured heavily armoured bodies and the crude weapons available to the insurgents were largely ineffective, only a handful of the warbots suffering even slight damage. The response to this came almost immediately, with the warbots charging at the insurgents and cutting them down with their swords. Even those who attempted to flee were not spared, part of the warbot force deploying to hunt

them down while the rest established a perimeter around the starport that allowed the rest of the army to land.

Less than two hours after the first drop pods landed the Green Zone was once again secure.

The handful of reporters who had remained in the Green Zone when it was abandoned by the Republic forces recorded all of this and also observed how the droids took no hostile action against any civilians they came across and as the Green Zone's inhabitants began to emerge from hiding they found that the warbots would allow them to move and act freely so long as they did not act in a violent manner. All of this was of course broadcast across the sector, with initial reports speculating about where the droid army had come from until Trent Narthis in his role as the head of the sector government appeared at a press conference with an explanation.

"The droid army currently being deployed on Tepillos was recently discovered on the world of Shadowfall." he announced, "The original makers of these droids are long gone, but they left behind all the information needed to activate and control them. It has only been possible for members of the Narthis Sector Defence Forces to gain access to these droids now that we have liberated ourselves from the Republic that, in collusion with the Jedi Order, knew of the army but chose not to make use of it even given the obvious need of the people of Tepillos."

The display screen went blank and Jedi Master Varn Udra looked around the room at the individuals he had gathered together. Many of them were fellow Jedi, including his son Cal and daughter Lara who had been assigned to the Narthis Sector by the Jedi Order when their predecessor had vanished. Other Jedi were newly arrived from the enclave on Moldas that was the official posting of Varn, but when the Narthis Sector had announced its independence from the Republic and laid siege to the sector's primary hyperspace navigation beacon he had given the order for all Republic personnel in the sector and all of the Jedi forces at Moldas to redeploy to the space station they were currently located aboard.

Dorn Station had been built by a now extinct alien civilisation a thousand years earlier and later occupied when the Sith arrived in the sector. After the fall of the Sith the station had laid empty until it was discovered by Republic scouts eight hundred years later and the Republic had attempted to turn it into another hyperspace beacon for the sector. This attempt had met with failure however and after several unexplained accidents the station had once again been abandoned. This time though, a single individual had remained aboard. The accidents had drawn the attention of a Jedi shadow, one of an order of Jedi who dedicated themselves to hunting down and eradicating all traces of the Dark Side and its followers. Suspecting the involvement of the Dark Side in the accidents Tyshon had come aboard to find the source of the corruption but failed to do so before the Republic gave up on the station and he had taken the decision to remain behind alone. It was only when Cal and Lara Udra had come to the station that it had been discovered that one of the Sith lords who had come to the sector a thousand years ago had been able to preserve his spirit within the station's computer and was the cause of the so-called accidents. Fortunately between the three of them they had been able to trap the Sith spirit in a part of the computer system where he could no longer interact with the physical world. Now Dorn Station represented a safe haven in the Narthis Sector for the Jedi and Republic forces, being far off any commonly used hyperspace route.

"As you can see," Varn announced, "not only have the Founding Families begun to deploy their Sith droids openly, but they are also using them to cement the idea of the Republic and Jedi as uncaring in the locals' minds."

"Just how many of those droids are there?" a man in a Republic army uniform asked. He was Colonel Arion Jeck and until recently had commanded the peacekeeping garrison on Tepillos.

"Lara and I saw thousands of them stored on Shadowfall." Cal told him.

"And that was just one room." Lara commented, "If those reports are right about the number that have been landed on Tepillos then there must have been more."

"That could be the entire army, or maybe just a fraction of it." Cal added.

"More than that will they have." a voice called out from the back of the room and most of the other occupants looked around at the tiny green figure making its way in. This was Tyshon and he had been giving advice to the Republic engineers on bringing Dorn Station's systems back on line.

"Jedi Tyshon, I was not expecting you to be present." Varn said.

"Ah, know enough the engineers do. Here my presence is needed I sense." Tyshon replied.

"How do you know that the Founding Families have more war droids?" another Republic military officer asked. The duros was Captain De Kuun and he commanded the limited naval forces in the sector.

"Ah, simple logic it is. Too few are the sector's forces to repel a full scale attack should one be made by the Republic. Only when this droid army they acquired did they move openly. Therefore, large enough to repel an attack it must be and waste them all on Tepillos they will not."

"Nevertheless, Tepillos is a vital world." another Jedi said. This man was called Tarris Blake and like Tyshon he was a Jedi shadow. Originally he had come to the sector to hunt Cal and Lara when Lara was suspected of murdering a fellow Jedi but when she had been shown to be innocent the undeniable influence of the Dark

Side in the sector had persuaded him to remain, "The violence on Tepillos was most likely caused by the influence of Sith artefacts left there. We should remember that there is an entire Sith city hidden beneath the surface of the planet. In addition, Trent Narthis has made a great deal of the Republic's supposed unwillingness to bring peace to the world. If the Founding Families cannot do this either then they will look incompetent to the sector's inhabitants and will lose support."

"I can take a company of my best men in." Colonel Jeck said, "We'll cause enough trouble to keep those droids occupied for as long as needed. Plus we can do something about that city. A few well placed charges will make sure that it stays buried."

"No." Varn announced, "I appreciate your enthusiasm colonel, but for now only the Jedi may take action."

"Err, why is that dad?" Lara asked, looking at the non-Jedi present.

"Because for the moment at least the Narthis Sector's declaration of independence is considered valid by the Republic." Varn replied, "This means that the senate has not authorised any military action. The Jedi Order on the other hand recognises the threat of an empire built on Sith teachings and has given me a free hand to act."

Then a woman in the uniform of a sector ranger, the Republic's interstellar police force raised her hand. Jule Raser was the most senior sector ranger in the sector, commanding her limited staff from Aurek Station prior to the siege.

"Just to clarify," she began, "but are you talking about supporting the insurgents?" and there were murmurs from several others in the room.

"Would that include arming them?" Colonel Jeck asked, clearly concerned about the consequences of supplying weapons that could later be turned on his men.

"No, the insurgents will receive no support from us." Varn stated clearly, "However, as Jedi we have a duty to try and bring peace to Tepillos and that may involve negotiating with the insurgents directly. Hopefully such negotiations will allow us to gather intelligence on the droid army from their experiences."

"Basically we'll be looking to the insurgents to support us." Cal added, looking at the colonel, "Then once the Republic is back in charge they can either lay down their arms or it's back to being hunted by you and your men."

"A job that will be significantly easier if we have been able to gather information on their operations while negotiating with them." Lara added and then she looked at her father, "So who gets to go and risk their lives talking to terrorists?" she asked and Varn smiled.

"This task will require an expert negotiator." Varn replied and Lara leant towards her brother.

"Karrie's got the job." she whispered and she glanced at a female Jedi sat close by. Karrie Tyran was a Jedi peacemaker who had years of experience in negotiating with mutually hostile groups to bring them together.

"Therefore Jedi Tyran is best qualified to lead this mission." Varn finished and Lara smiled at Cal.

"In addition I will be deploying Jedi Cal Udra and his padawan." Varn added and Lara's face fell.

"Us?" she responded, "But why?"

"Because you two have contacts on Tepillos that will make contacting the insurgents faster and easier." Varn replied sternly, "And the sooner we can begin operations on Tepillos the more of the Founding Families' droid army we can force them to deploy there, diverting it from where it can do them more good in defending the sector and the less likely they will be able to start searching the hidden city."

"Oh I've got a very bad feeling about this." Lara said.

2.

Drinto Huladra looked out of the window at the warbot patrol in the streets below. For all of his childhood the stennes shifter had been told of how the Jedi Order had purged Stennaros of his kind because the galaxy feared their ability to feed off the Force as it was expended by those around them. Driven by a hatred of both the Jedi and the Republic that supported them he had made his way to Tepillos where he had joined one of the insurgent groups as a means of undermining the Republic's authority as much as he could. His natural ability to hide himself in a crowd had proven useful on many occasions and he had rapidly risen to lead his group. The sudden secession of the Narthis Sector had caught Drinto by surprise but he had been quick to take advantage of the departure of the Republic's peacekeeping force. Fortunately for his followers he had decided against striking at the Green Zone, thus sparing them from being slaughtered by the warbots. Now though the warbot army was starting to expand out of the Green Zone and, unlike the Republic, the Founding Families had seen fit to deploy a force large enough to control the entire city. Drinto was well aware that the events on Tepillos that had prompted the declaration were not the spontaneous demonstrations of public outrage that the media had portrayed them as, rather that there had been agents moving around Tepillos to provoke them. For all his hatred of the Republic, Drinto did not believe that their forces had actually used an orbital bombardment on a crowd of unarmed protesters either and behind all this Drinto sensed the actions of the Founding Families, meaning that they had succeeded where he had failed and ripped not only Tepillos, but the entire Narthis Sector away from the Republic.

"There are more of them heading this way from the west." a voice said from behind Drinto and he turned to see one of his men standing in the doorway with a rifle slung over his shoulder.

"Tell everyone to stay hidden." Drinto replied.

"Hidden?" the man replied, "But there are only a handful of-"

"There are thousands more." Drinto interrupted, "We may only see a handful, but take any action against them and we will bring an army down upon us. I am the leader here and I say we will stay hidden. I think that there is more going on here than meets the eye and I want to know what it is before we start taking stupid risks."

The delaya-class courier *Bright Hope* had been assigned to Cal and Lara when they were first deployed to the Narthis Sector. The seventy metre long vessel was fast, highly manoeuvrable and well armed and shielded, making it able to move rapidly around the sector as well as handle itself in combat. It was also of a class common enough that Cal and Lara could pilot it all the way to Tepillos without worrying about it being recognised instantly. In addition to the relative anonymity of their ship, Cal and Lara were well aware that the sensors on Tepillos covered only a small area around the Green Zone and their range did not extend beyond a high orbital distance. Therefore Cal chose to bring the *Bright Hope* out of hyperspace further away than normal and travel the remaining distance at sublight speeds, steering the ship away from the Green Zone with the intention of landing it outside the capital city entirely.

As Cal flew the ship Lara sat in the co-pilot's seat watching as Tepillos grew bigger through the canopy.

"What do you think she thinks of us?" Lara asked, looking out of the doorway at the rear of the cockpit and down the corridor that ran most of the length of the ship.

"Who? Karrie?" Cal replied.

"Yes Karrie." Lara said as she turned to look at her brother instead, "She was very close to Master Karas and he hated us."

Jedi Master Ben Karas had been in command of the Jedi enclave on Moldas prior to their father. He had never displayed much confidence in either Cal or Lara right up to his death at the hands of the fallen Jedi Kyle Jenner.

"He didn't hate us Lara. Hate leads to the Dark Side."

"Well he sure didn't like us." Lara said.

"You especially." Cal added in agreement and Lara frowned.

"Well do you think Karrie doesn't like us either?" she asked.

"Why wouldn't I?" Karrie's voice suddenly said from the doorway and Lara winced. Karrie then entered the cockpit and sat in the seat immediately behind Lara's.

"I, err – I-" Lara began before Cal cut in.

"Lara is concerned that your relationship with Master Karas may mean that you share his poor opinion of us." he said.

"Jedi Udra," Karrie replied, "so long as you are diligent in your duties I can guarantee that I will treat you fairly. Just as Master Karas did." and Lara winced again, certain that the comment had been direct more at her than Cal, "Besides," Karrie went on, "if I determine that neither of you are suitable to continue to be a part of this mission I can always count on this vessel's most loyal and dedicated crew member." and then she

looked down at the dog that had just wandered into the cockpit and sat down to chew on a toy it had brought with it.

"Yes, Ghost is very good at his job." Cal said with a smile, "Much better than some people I can think of." and he glanced at Lara who just scowled back at him.

"Oh so you two can make jokes but not me?" Lara asked, "How is that fair?"

"If you ever become a jedi knight you can make jokes as well." Cal told her, "Until then try to stay a good and quiet little padawan."

It was then that an alarm sounded and all three jedi turned their attention to the control consoles.

"What's wrong?" Karrie asked.

"Nothing." Cal replied, "I just set up the systems to alert me if we were scanned and we just were."

"But I thought you were taking us in around the scanners." Lara said.

"I am, but there are ships in orbit as well and we're coming up on one." Cal said.

"A warship?" Karrie said.

"Of sorts." Cal answered and he smiled, "It's an old Sith troop carrier. It's a thousand years out of date so even if it does open fire I doubt we'll have much trouble in getting away."

"Shall I charge the weapons?" Lara asked but Cal shook his head.

"No, we're not here to engage in a space battle and if we prepare for one then that's just what we'll get. That troop carrier may not be much of a threat, but there are more modern ships out there that I'd rather not tangle with. Raise the shields though, just in case."

Karrie smiled when she heard this, impressed that Cal was not jeopardising their true purpose here by rushing to battle.

Just as Cal had expected the troop carrier did not react as the *Bright Hope* flew past and entered the atmosphere. Cal noticed that there was less air traffic than there had been on previous visits to Tepillos, though the *Bright Hope* was still far from being the only ship around. Understandably most of the others were heading to or from the main starport in the Green Zone, with just a few like the *Bright Hope* going elsewhere. But if the heading of the jedi vessel had raised any curiosity amongst air traffic control officials they were not taking any obvious action and Cal was able to guide the *Bright Hope* to a quiet clearing outside the city that was just large enough to take the *Bright Hope*.

Following touch down both Cal and Lara headed for their cabins and Karrie was disappointed to see that both of them emerged with pulse wave blasters holstered on their legs and carrying pulse wave rifles as well, the particular example Lara held being fitted with an underslung grenade launcher for which she had a bandolier of ammunition across her chest beneath her cloak.

"Are those really necessary?" Karrie said, looking at the weapons.

"Yes." Lara replied, nodding before she added, "In fact if we'd had more time to plan this I'd have asked Colonel Jeck if he had any bigger guns he could lend us. Or maybe a tank."

Karrie sighed.

"You're being ridiculous." she said.

"Yes she is." Cal agreed and he looked at his sister, "Lara, you know you don't know how to drive a tank so what good would it be?"

Cal then approached the massive labour droid stood beside the controls to the access ramp.

"Okay Shorty, open it up." he said and the droid activated the controls to lower the ramp. Barking, Ghost rushed down the ramp ahead of his jedi owners, coming to a halt near the nose of the *Bright Hope* and looking back towards them.

"Ghost back in the ship." Lara called out and the dog ran back up the ramp towards her, "Good boy." Lara added, patting the dog.

"Shorty watch the ship." Cal told the droid that looked back at him silently, the LB-series being incapable of speech, "Don't open the door unless it's one of us. Understood?" and the droid nodded once, "Good." Cal said as he turned to Karrie and Lara, "now let's get going. We're on foot from here."

3.

"Lynn what are you doing?" Jondo Veltros asked. Jondo and Lynn Kerr had spent many years on Tepillos. Neither of them was native to the world but they had dedicated their lives to delivering relief supplies to those affected by the civil unrest.

"There are even more of them now." Lynn replied as she watched a platoon of Sith warbots marching along the street outside the former hotel that she and Jondo ran their charity from. Following this force she saw something that she had not seen before, this group of warbots was accompanied by organic troops as well, "And look at this. The Founding Families are finally showing themselves." Lynn added with a scowl.

"What?" Jondo asked as he dashed to the window and stood beside Lynn while he too looked out into the street. There he saw the warbots marching in step and a small group of armoured men following behind them. The armour of all of these men was clearly marked with the logo of Shill Security.

"See?" Lynn said to Jondo, "I told you that all Trent Narthis was interested in when he declared the sector independent was grabbing control for himself."

Jondo did not reply right away. Over the years he had become used to Lynn blaming all of the sector's ills on the Founding Families but right now it was difficult to deny that one of their number had very cleverly manoeuvred them all into a position of great power in the sector, dominating both the government and military. What Lynn did not know however, was that Jondo's fundraising activities had made use of his own contacts within the Founding Families and their charity relied on them for most of its funding.

"The city is more peaceful than I can remember it ever being though." he said eventually.

"It's an invasion." Lynn said, "The people of this world have just become slaves and they'll probably even thank the kriffing Founding Families for it."

Then there was the sound of breaking glass coming from elsewhere in the hotel and both Jondo and Lynn spun around.

"Jondo." Lynn hissed, "Someone's inside."

"I heard." Jondo replied and he slid his hand into his pocket and produced a compact slugthrower pistol, "Stay behind me."

Jondo then crept towards the source of the sound with Lynn following close behind. This was not the first time that someone had broken into the old hotel and right now both of them suspected that this would be another event like the previous ones, the intruder would be hoping to gain access to the stock of medications that was kept on the premises. Normally Jondo and Lynn would have called the police and left the intruder to try to break into the secure vault where such things were kept, but right now neither of them had any confidence that help would be coming any time soon. The sounds that they heard came from a room downstairs from their previous location, suggesting that the intruder had simply walked up to a window and ripped the boarding off to gain entry to the building. This meant that they were likely to be armed with a tool that could be used as a weapon and Jondo hoped that his tiny pistol would be enough to convince them to retreat.

As Jondo approached the door to the room where the noise had come from he raised his pistol to shoulder height.

"I'm armed." he called out, "Step out where I can see you." and then he gasped as he saw a pair of hooded figures step into the doorway and point pulse wave rifles back towards them.

"Put that thing away Jondo." Cal said as he lowered first his rifle and then his hood, "Before my apprentice accidentally fires a grenade at you."

"Cal? Lara?" Jondo exclaimed as he lowered his pistol, "What are you doing here?"

"Helping me." Karrie said as she also stepped into view, "Hello Mister Veltros, Miss Kerr, my name is Karrie Tyran and I'm here to help."

"Help with what?" Lynn asked, "We don't actually have many supplies left for you to give out and you don't look like you brought any with you."

"No, we're not here to help you run your charity." Karrie replied.

"We need to speak with some of the insurgents." Cal added, "And we know that you can find people who can put us in touch."

"I can tell you exactly where they are." Lynn said.

"Great. Where?" Lara asked.

"The morgue." Lynn answered and then she turned and walked away.

"Those droids have been pretty thorough." Jondo explained as the jedi all turned to look in his direction, "Any insurgent that dared show his face is dead. The droids didn't take any prisoners and I doubt that their masters are going to be any more lenient than their machines. But why do you want to meet with insurgents? Surely you're not thinking of arming them against the droids? Most of the population seem pretty happy to have peace around here for once."

"The Founding Families are not your allies." Karrie said, "They will remake the Sith Empire here in the Narthis Sector and the only peace that the population will know after that is the peace of slavery."

Jondo glanced over his shoulder to ensure that Lynn was not in earshot.

"You're sounding like Lynn." he replied.

"Karrie's right Jondo." Cal told him, "Those are Sith warbots out there and they're just the start of what the Founding Families are hoping to get hold of."

"Then the Republic-" Jondo began and Lara snorted.

"The Republic can't make up its mind what to do." she said, interrupting him, "Until we can show that Trent's declaration of independence wasn't all it was cracked up to be the Republic's military won't get involved."

"Then what are you doing here?" Jondo asked, frowning.

"Fortunately the Jedi Order takes a larger view of things when anything to do with the Sith is involved. Our father brought every jedi and freedom warrior from Moldas." Cal told him, "Now are there any insurgents left that we may be able to get in touch with? We're hoping that some of them may be able to provide us with intelligence that we can use to strike at this droid army."

Jondo paused to think.

"Possibly." he replied, "I doubt all of them attacked the Green Zone and I've never heard of any of them hanging around long enough for a stand up firefight when they can run away instead."

"How long would it take you to find out?" Karrie asked and Jondo shrugged.

"By tomorrow maybe? I've got some deliveries to make, not many mind you thanks to our line of supply being interrupted recently. But I'll ask at the clinics and food banks whether there are still any groups active in the city. You're welcome to stay here until then if you want though. We've got plenty of room."

Following Drinto's order to avoid engaging the droids and just report on their activities he began receiving regular messages from his followers and sympathisers in the city, even a handful from individuals in the Green Zone whose loyalty to him would last only so long as he continued to pay them off in cash, valuables or the narcotics that they had become dependent upon. Everywhere the story was the same, where the droid army went it conquered. Some insurgent groups had survived by copying Drinto's group and avoiding contact at all costs while new groups appeared to be forming from the fragmented remains of those who had tried moving openly against the warbots.

But of greater interest to Drinto was the news that living troops had begun to appear alongside the droids as well. So far all of these wore uniforms bearing Shill Security logos rather than those from any of the sector's local defence forces that according to news reports were being merged into a single sector-wide military under the command of General Josh Drud of the Drud family. Drinto viewed the reports of these troops with great interest and he began to spot a pattern. The Shill Security troops were being deployed to conduct searches and there were reports of them removing items from all manner of different places, including private residences in the Green Zone itself and there had been at least one individual killed trying to prevent them from doing this. Unfortunately there were no solid reports of what it was that they were confiscating, however whatever it was Drinto was sure that if he could obtain something that they wanted then there was the possibility that he could do a deal with the Founding Families that would work very well for him.

"Where are you going?" Karrie asked when she saw Cal and Lara checking their weapons before concealing them under their cloaks.

"Out to take a look around while it's dark." Lara replied.

"We are supposed to wait here for Jondo and Lynn to return." Karrie said, "You assured them that we would watch over their remaining supplies."

"And that's just what you'll be doing." Cal said, "But I for one don't like the idea of just sitting around when for all we know there's an entire brigade of Sith warbots surrounding this place. So Lara and I are going out to see what's going on outside."

"Who knows," Lara added, "maybe we'll find something important that we can blow up. We're here to cause trouble for the Founding Families after all, not sit around waiting to be attacked."

"Your father gave me command of this mission." Karrie pointed out.

"He put you in charge of talking to the insurgents." Cal replied, "He told us to get you to them safely. Us going out there meets both of those criteria. It maintains our security and we may just run into some insurgents we can invite back here for a chat. How does that sound to you?"

Karrie sighed.

"Very well Jedi Udra." she said, "I may not agree with Jedi actions but I can see you are set on them. In which case I shall wish you good luck and may the Force be with you."

"The Force and a forty-five millimetre grenade launcher." Lara said with a grin.

The two jedi looked out of the hotel, waiting for the street outside to be clear before slipping out of the building unseen. If there was an ambush waiting for them, Cal and Lara wanted to minimise the risk of Jondo

and Lynn being associated with them. Fortunately the city's population had become used to avoiding being outside after dark and despite the presence of the large droid army they were still sticking with this habit, leaving the way clear for Cal and Lara to dash from the hotel and into the shadows of the buildings across the street.

"So which way big brother?" Lara asked as they took another look around.

"That way." Cal replied, "The Green Zone's in that direction and I get the feeling that we'll see more interesting things in areas that have already been secured. But try not to look like someone walking along with a grenade launcher under her cloak okay?"

"Yes I get it. You don't need to keep reminding me. Walk casual. Now lead the way." Lara said before giving Cal a gentle shove.

Walking through the abandoned streets Cal and Lara opened their minds to the Force, hoping that they would be able to detect some hint of what the Shill Security troops were doing in the city. However, all that they seemed to be able to sense was the cold clammy presence of the Dark Side enveloping everything and Lara felt a shudder run down her spine.

"I've got a bad feeling about this Cal." she whispered as they continued, "How come all I can sense is darkness?"

"It must be some side effect of the droids." Cal replied, "Remember that those swords they carry were made using Sith alchemy and from the blood I keep seeing on the ground I'd say that they've been putting those swords to a lot of use recently. That much death related to Sith artefacts."

"Cal listen!" Lara hissed, grabbing hold of Cal's arm and squeezing it tightly and Cal stopped to listen.

"A repulsorlift?" he replied when he heard the sound of an engine in the distance and Lara nodded, "It's stationary." Cal added.

"I don't think that any of the locals would be wasting power by leaving an engine running." Lara said, "More like a military patrol keeping their vehicle ready to move."

"Let's go see what was so interesting that it made them stop in the first place shall we?" Cal said and Lara smiled before they both set off towards the sound of the engine.

The vehicle was an armoured troop carrier with a boxy hull facing away from them that sported a compact turret that mounted what looked like a pulse wave weapon of some sort. The limited nature of the vehicle's armament suggested that it was not intended as a front line combat vehicle but was instead intended to operate in a support role such as an ambulance or internal security vehicle.

Only two soldiers were visible when Cal and Lara peered around the corner, both of them wearing armour with Shill Security markings.

"Looks like Han's men are keeping themselves occupied." Cal said softly.

"What do you suppose they're doing here?" Lara asked.

"Well I think that those two are just keeping watch. There's probably two more in the transport, one to drive and a gunner for that pulse wave cannon." Cal replied and then he looked towards a low structure that was set a short distance back from the road and was surrounded by a wall topped with spikes. Such features were common on Tepillos, a holdover from the early days of the civil unrest when a simple wall was still enough to keep the occupants of a home safe. Now though it appeared that the gates to this particular home had been breached and the rest of the squad of troops from the transport had gone inside for some reason.

"Here they come." Lara said as the first of the troops from inside the house appeared and looked around before he waved his comrades on. As the rest of the soldiers appeared the two jedi saw that about half of them were carrying a heavy bag between them that was about two metres long and had a familiar shape.

"Is that a body?" Lara asked.

"It does look that way." Cal said, "But why would Shill Security troops want to kill the locals? Their droids are available to deal with insurgents without putting any of their own lives at risk."

Just then one of the soldiers carrying the bag slipped, not enough for him to fall but enough that the bag tilted suddenly and as it did so Cal and Lara both saw that it did not flex as a bag containing a corpse would.

"Now that was interesting." Lara said.

"Yes it was. I think we ought to take a look inside that bag." Cal agreed, "Of course if we're going to get over there without that transport gunning us down then we'll need to take it out."

A smile spread across Lara's face.

"I thought you'd never ask." she said as she pulled back her cloak to take out the grenade launcher and remove a grenade from her bandolier. Loading the weapon, Lara lay down to make it as hard as possible for the soldiers to spot her and lined it up on the large hatch at the back of the transport.

As the soldiers neared the vehicle one of the pair left on watch rushed up to the hatch and banged on it twice. Moments later a narrow crack of red light appeared and began to widen as the hatch opened and when Lara decided that the gap was large enough she squeezed the trigger of the grenade launcher.

There was a sudden 'Bloop!' as the grenade was fired and it flew in a low arc straight into the armoured transport before detonating. Normally the lightweight explosive would be unable to damage the armoured vehicle, but by firing it inside Lara made the armoured hull work in her favour rather than against her by

concentrating the blast in the confined interior.

4.

Commanding the droid army from the safety of the Green Zone, Han Shill still operated out of one of the transports that had brought his troops to Tepillos while Colonel Jeck's former headquarters was thoroughly searched to make sure that the withdrawing Republic forces had not left any surprises behind in the form of either booby traps or covert surveillance devices. Yawning, he was just considering turning in for the night the sound of an alarm made his eyes widen and he darted to the console that had produced the sound.

"Report!" he snapped at the operator.

"I have a signal from a tracker bearing a priority code sir." the woman replied.

"Where?" Han asked, "In the Green Zone?"

"No sir. But within the city."

"Do we have any units in the area?"

"Yes sir. There's a retrieval squad located less than a hundred metres from the origin point."

"Get me them. Now." Han ordered and the female technician frantically worked to establish a link with the squad of Shill Security troops.

The armoured transport was now just a flaming wreck as Cal and Lara exchanged pulse wave fire with the squad of troops from Shill Security. The armoured hull of the transport had done a good job of containing the blast inside and although the vehicle was destroyed and its crew killed the damage had not spread as far as any of the soldiers outside, so now the two Jedi faced ten armed and armoured opponents.

"Unit trill herf xesh one one three eight do you read?" the voice of the command centre technician sounded in the squad leader's earpiece.

"Copy that control, I read you." he replied, "Be advised we are under fire and our transport had been destroyed."

"Sergeant this is Han Shill." Han's voice said, "You are under attack by Jedi. Tell your men to focus their fire on a single target and try to surround them. Above all do not let them get close. If maintaining your distance means falling back then do it. I'm on my way and I'm bringing help."

Back in the command centre Han turned to another of the technicians.

"Alert Mister Mott." he said, "Let's see if these Mandalorians are everything that Erill Crassis says they are."

Cal and Lara had positioned themselves a few metres apart, Lara still at the corner while Cal had dashed across the street to where the perimeter wall around a building had long ago collapsed and left behind a low pile of rubble that Cal used for cover. From these positions the two Jedi fired at the Shill Security troops, doing their best to prevent them from being able to find cover.

This tactic resulted in the death of two of the armoured troops as they found themselves unable to find cover from both Jedi in time. But all of a sudden the remainder changed their tactics. Where they had been splitting their fire evenly between the two Jedi, all but one of them suddenly shifted their aim towards Cal while only one continued to fire at Lara and his fire appeared intended more to keep her pinned down than a serious attempt to kill her. Meanwhile across the street Cal ducked as the barrage of pulse wave fire began to blast apart his rubble barrier.

"Lara!" he called out, "Can you put another grenade that way?"

"I can try." she responded.

"Don't try. Just do it." Cal shouted and as Lara reloaded the grenade launcher she frowned.

"How about I send it towards you?" she yelled before she quickly sent a smoke grenade towards the Shill Security troops. The grenade bounced once before bursting open and a cloud of thick grey smoke began to expand around it. The presence of the smoke did nothing to reduce the amount of fire from the remaining soldiers, in fact if anything they increased their rate of fire to make up for the lack of a clear line of sight with an increased number of randomly placed shots in the hope that at least one would hit something.

Slinging his rifle over his shoulder Cal instead drew his lightsaber and activated it. Then he burst out of his hiding place and rushed back across the street to where Lara waited.

"Come on." he told her as he swatted a pulse wave blast with his lightsaber and burst it before it could hit him, "Let's see how good they are up close."

A smile spread across Lara's face and she too switched her rifle for her lightsaber. Through the Force the two Jedi could sense where the main concentration of their opponents was and with their lightsabers held out in front of them in a defensive posture they both charged into the smoke. The first that the Shill Security troops knew of this was when they saw the two brightly glowing blue lightsaber blades coming towards them through the cloud.

"Fall back!" the squad leader ordered as he realised that the activated lightsabers meant that the Jedi

intended to engage in the hand to hand fighting that he had been given orders to avoid at all costs. Immediately the squad began to move. But this was not a panicked rout, instead they fell back in two alternate groups with one moving while the other laid down covering fire that meant the jedi had to focus on blocking this rather than pressing their assault. But as their retreat continued it was interrupted by the roar of powerful repulsorlift engines coming from overhead as an armoured shuttle swooped down from the sky and a large cargo hatch opened in the underside.

Danger.

Even without the warning from the Force, Cal knew that the arrival of the shuttle meant nothing good for him and Lara and when he looked up he was horrified to see four bulky and all too familiar shapes drop out of the shuttle and head directly for them.

"Mandos!" he yelled.

Kaylor Mott led his men from the front as he often did. All mounted on basilisk war droids he was confident that he and his three men could handle two jedi, the heavily armed and armoured machines combined this firepower and protection with a combination of legs, repulsorlifts and even a limited sublight space drive to provide manoeuvrability that would hopefully give them the advantage. As if to demonstrate this Kaylor fired the laser cannons mounted to his basilisk towards the jedi that had just emerged from the cloud of smoke. Sensing the attack moments before it happened Cal dived into his sister, pushing both of them clear as the energy blast ripped up the surface of the road.

"Stang! Where did they come from?" Lara exclaimed as the two jedi came to a halt and looked up at this newly arrived foe.

"Never mind that right now." Cal said as he grabbed hold of his sister's arm, "We need to get out of here and we need to lose those mandos before we can go back to the hotel." then he pulled Lara back into the cloud of smoke behind them.

From the mandalorians' point of view the blue lightsaber blades were visible for a short time after the jedi entered the cloud before they suddenly vanished as Cal and Lara shut off the weapons they knew would be giving away their position. The heat and particulate matter of the cloud meant that the limited sensors mounted on the basilisks would not be able to detect the jedi while inside it either and so Kaylor resorted to the only option he had left to him.

"Form up." he broadcast to his men, "We'll try and use our repulsorlifts to disperse this cloud. But stay alert, those jedi have got to be hiding in there somewhere and they'll strike as soon as they think they've been discovered."

Signalling their acknowledgement the other mandalorians formed a line either side of Kaylor and their mounts all reared up, directing the blast from their repulsorlifts towards the cloud of smoke. This had the desired effect and the strong wind created began to clear the smoke. But even as the smoke thinned there was no sign at all of either Cal or Lara, both of whom seemed to have disappeared into thin air. But the reason for their disappearance did not stay unexplained for long as the thinning cloud of smoke eventually revealed a manhole in the street that had been hidden by the smoke and the cover to this now lay about a metre away from the hole where it had been ripped out of place by Cal using his telekinetic powers.

"They've gone into the sewers." Kaylor transmitted back to the shuttle that was still circling overhead, "We'll need to dismount to go down there after them so I'm going to need the rest of my men."

"What an amazing new smell you've discovered down here big brother." Lara said.

"Oh shut up. It got us away from those mandos didn't it?" Cal replied.

In the sewers under the streets of the city Cal and Lara carefully picked their way through the filth, both of them holding up their lightsabers both for illumination and also out of concern at the other lifeforms that they could both sense in the tunnels with them.

"How many dianogas do you think there are down here?" Lara asked as she turned to stare at a brief disturbance in the surface of the water nearby.

"Oh I don't know. Possibly hundreds." Cal replied, "But frankly I'd be less concerned about garbage squids and more worried about what happens if we come across a concentration of flammable gas. If levels get high enough then our lightsaber blades may just trigger an explosion."

Lara stopped to think about this.

"You think we ought to swap them for our torches?" she asked.

"I think so." Cal replied and both of them rummaged in their belts until they found the compact flash lights they carried. Activating these they shut off their lightsabers and rather than the pale blue glow of their weapons the two jedi were left with two tiny beams of white light.

"This plan is getting worse all the time." Lara said as she tried shining her flash light downwards and discovered that her field of view was now extremely limited.

"Well we had to change it to avoid being blown up." Cal pointed out, "Pray we don't have to change it any further. Now do you want to lead the way or shall I?"

"Oh you can go first. If there's something big and nasty up ahead I'll let you deal with it."

"Okay. But remember to call out if anything sneaks up behind us. I'd hate for you to be picked off silently like in the movies."

"Hmm, maybe I ought to go in front." Lara said, "No wait, then I'd be the first to be attacked by anything lying in wait for us." then she paused, "Cal, I don't suppose you could in front and behind? You know, use your oh so superior jedi powers to take the point and bring up the rear?"

Cal smiled.

"Sorry baby sister, but creating doppelgangers is very much associated with the Dark Side of the Force." he said and Lara sighed.

"Maybe we should have accepted Kyle's offer of training us. I'm starting to wonder if we picked the wrong side of the Force." then she gave Cal a gentle shove, "Well what are you waiting for?" she asked, "The sooner you start leading us out of here the sooner you'll actually be able to lead us out of here."

5.

Alone in the room he was currently using as his headquarters, Drinto studied a large map of the city on which he was marking the deployments of both droid and Shill Security troops when two of his followers burst into the room.

"What's wrong?" Drinto asked, concerned that they were about to warn him that the Founding Families' forces were moving into assault the building.

"There are jedi in the city." the first of his followers announced, "They attacked a Shill Security patrol before they called in mandalorian reinforcements. The jedi only escaped by going down into the sewers where the mandalorians couldn't take those war droids they ride on."

"It gets better." the second of Drinto's followers announced, "Some guy from one of the aid groups has been asking around about us – Well, any groups like ours really. He's after knowing who's still left because the jedi want to set up a meeting."

Drinto paused.

"The jedi spent years trying to wipe us out." he said, "What could we have that they would want?"

"Manpower? Or information maybe." the first follower suggested.

"No matter." Drinto replied as a smile appeared on his face and he looked directly at the second of his followers, "An opportunity has been presented to us. The jedi want to meet with us and the Founding Families want the jedi. I think that we can turn this to our advantage. Go and find this aid worker and tell him that we are ready to meet with the jedi."

"Of course." the man replied and he turned and left the room. The remaining man was about to follow him when Drinto called out to stop him.

"Wait." he said, "I have a task for you as well."

"You want me to prepare somewhere we can meet the jedi?" he asked.

"No." Drinto replied, shaking his head, "I want you to set up a meeting between myself and whoever is in command of the droid army."

Cal and Lara halted just before a sewer junction when they sensed a presence ahead of them in the tunnels.

"That's no animal." Cal whispered as he sensed that it was sentient beings that were down here with them.

"And whoever it is they're coming closer." Lara replied and Cal nodded in agreement.

"Perhaps we ought to turn out our flash lights." he said, "Maybe they'll go right past." and then he shut off his torch and stuffed it into a pocket while he drew his lightsaber instead. Lara copied this, drawing her lightsaber before she turned off her flash light however so that she could still see to draw the weapon before she plunged them both into darkness.

Waiting in the dark the two jedi reached out through the Force to follow the movements of whoever it was that was down here with them. As they drew closer it became clear that there was in fact more than one person approaching and the sound of them wading through the filthy water became audible at about the same time as their own flash light beams began to light up the tunnel running past the end of the one Cal and Lara were in.

"Get up against the walls." Cal whispered. Though there was currently insufficient light for either of them to see clearly the two jedi knew that the wall was lined with reinforcing girders at regular intervals that would provide cover for them so they both moved to the edge of the tunnel and waited to see if they would pass. As the approaching group got even closer to Cal and Lara they began to hear voices that bore the tell tale distortion of someone wearing helmets and Cal tightened his grip on his lightsaber as he waited for the inevitable.

Torch beams appeared at the end of the tunnel and behind them the shadowy silhouettes of the soldiers carrying them. Most continued to point along the tunnel they were moving down but one of them swung his towards the two jedi, suddenly illuminating both despite their attempt at hiding. An instant after the torch beam exposed his position there was a 'snap-hiss' as Cal activated his lightsaber and he leapt forwards. His first strike impaled the soldier pointing his flash light down the side tunnel, causing it to be dropped into the water below. Then before any of the other soldiers could react Cal swung his lightsaber in an arc and cut down a further two of them.

This left only one soldier left and by this time Cal had been able to identify the armour they wore as mandalorian in origin, seeming to confirm that they were down here specifically to hunt the jedi. With his flash light still gripped in one hand the mandalorian aimed a pulse wave blaster at Cal with the other. But the intervention of Lara saw this arm severed before he could fire and the mandalorian screamed in pain before dropping his flash light and instead reaching for his knife. But Cal was quicker and he drove his lightsaber under the mandalorian's helmet, pushing the glowing blue blade all the way through his skull. The man died without a further sound other than the 'splash' as he landed in water.

"Well that was simple enough." Lara said before there were more voices from along the tunnel.
"Or maybe not. It looks like they had friends." Cal replied as the light from more flash light beams came into view, "Come on, let's get out of here." and he began to pull his sister along the tunnel.

Danger.

From behind them there were sudden shouts and Cal spun on the spot, just in time to block a pulse wave blast that would have struck Lara in the back.

"Thanks." she said as she saw what he had done.

"No problem." he replied and they continued to run, still pursued by the mandalorians.

As they approached another junction, this one larger than the last where several tunnels all joined together before being combined into one much larger tunnel, Lara felt something shift beneath her foot before something brushed upwards along her leg.

"Cal lookout!" she exclaimed as she leapt back just as the dianoga's tentacle burst out from under the water and began to flail around in search of prey.

Cal ducked as the tentacle passed over him and jumped to the side of the tunnel.

"It looks like a large one." he said.

"Do we try and go back?" Lara asked and both she and Cal looked back down the tunnel.

"No, we'd never get past those mandos without them noticing us." he replied, "Look, there are pipes above us. We can use them to get over to the far side of the junction and we'll wait there. You first."

Lara nodded and shut off her lightsaber. Then she jumped straight up and grabbed hold of one of the pipes connected to the roof of the tunnel. It was set too close to the roof for Lara to be able to swing her legs up over and so to move along it she had to move hand over hand instead. She repeatedly looked down, not out of any concern for how high up she was, but instead because the dianoga was still searching for prey by flailing its tentacle around and it would take only one to wrap around her legs to drag her down from the pipe.

"Lara look out!" Cal hissed as a second tentacle broke the surface of the water just beneath Lara and she lifted both feet just in time to avoid it. Then as the tentacle moved aside Lara carried on until she reached a tunnel on the far side of the large junction and dropped down, activating her lightsaber as soon as she landed.

"Okay, now you." she called out back to Cal who promptly turned off his lightsaber and jumped up to grab the same pipe his sister had just used to get across the junction without becoming the dianoga's next meal.

When he finally dropped to the tunnel floor beside Lara he unslung his rifle rather than drawing his lightsaber.

"What's that for?" Lara asked.

"Shooting people." he replied, "When those mandalorians get here I'm hoping that we can deal with them before they get close enough for us to use our lightsabers. Now let's back up a bit further and wait to see what happens."

Lara nodded and after the two jedi took up a position slightly further down the tunnel she swapped her lightsaber for her own pulse wave rifle as well and they both waited in the darkness once more.

It did not take long for the mandalorians to catch up with them however, their torch beams and the sounds of their voices giving them away to the jedi. But both Cal and Lara held their fire even as the first of the mandalorians made his way into the large pool of water at the junction.

All of a sudden there was a scream that was cut off just as suddenly as the mandalorian was dragged beneath the water by the dianoga lying in wait at the bottom of the pool.

"Dianoga!" one of the other mandalorians yelled as he rushed forwards to try and help his comrade, but a second tentacle wrapped itself around his leg beneath the water and he too was suddenly dragged beneath the surface, his arms thrashing about as he tried to escape.

The remaining six mandalorians advanced as far as the junction and directed their flash lights at the surface of the water. But by this time both their comrades had been pulled under and the water was far too dirty for their flash lights to be able to penetrate deep enough to reveal their locations.

"Wait here." one of the mandalorians told the others as he slung his rifle and instead drew a large serrated knife and began to wade out across the pool, shining his flash light across the surface as he searched for any sign of the dianoga or either of the mandalorians it had already dragged beneath the water. A brief movement from across the pool attracted his attention and he turned just in time to see an eye stalk vanish beneath the water.

"Over there!" he yelled and there was a rapid volley of pulse wave fire that tore up the surface of the water as the other mandalorians did their best to shoot the dianoga before it got too deep for their weapons to be able to affect it.

"Okay now, while they're distracted." Cal whispered and he and Lara both aimed and fired their rifles on fully automatic. The twin bursts of fire slammed into the mandalorians and also struck the sewer tunnel walls around them, ripping free chunks of the ferrocrete. Caught in a tight group and with their attention focused elsewhere the mandalorians were cut down in seconds, leaving only the one standing in the pool remaining and both Cal and Lara turned their rifles to aim at him.

"Don't even think about going for a gun." Cal cautioned him. But the mandalorian ignored him and dropped

his knife into the water before reaching for his sidearm. However, moments after the blade struck the water a tentacle suddenly burst up from below the surface and wrapped itself around the mandalorian's neck before pulling him backwards beneath the water. His helmet came free as he fell and when the surface settled own again it was bobbing up and down, the air trapped inside keeping it afloat.

One of the flash lights mounted beneath a mandalorian rifle was still protruding above the water where it had landed on top of the bodies on the far side and this was now the sole illumination for the junction. However, it was still enough for Cal and Lara to see by.

"Look, over there." Cal commented and he pointed to a set of handholds set into the wall where they had not been visible from the tunnel that the jedi had first arrived here by.

"Where do you suppose they go?" Lara asked.

"They go up," Cal replied and Lara frowned, "and that's good enough for me. All we need to do is use these pipes to get over there and we can get back to the surface and figure out just where we are."

"Plus get away from this smell." Lara added.

6.

Jondo recoiled when he opened the door to Cal and Lara on their return.

"What happened to you?" he asked as he covered his nose and mouth to try and keep out the smell.

"A good question." Karrie added as she and Lynn also stepped into view, "Your faith in Mister Veltros was well placed. He has made contact with the insurgents and managed to arrange a meeting for us. I have been waiting here for you to return so we can go."

"Fine." Cal replied, "Just give us a few minutes to get cleaned up and we can be on our way."

The meeting was scheduled to take place at a small private docking bay that had been abandoned years earlier. For some time after it had been used as a shelter by the homeless but they too had moved on when the fighting in the civil war reached this part of the city and they had never returned.

Jondo brought his truck to a halt a short distance from the docking bay and looked at the three Jedi.

"Okay, this is as far as they said I should bring you." he told them and Karrie nodded.

"This is good enough." she said, "I suggest you return to the hotel, "If we need your help any further then we'll make our own way back there."

"Sure." Jondo said as the Jedi disembarked from the truck and then began to walk towards the docking bay. Cal and Lara moved ahead of Karrie, both holding their rifles under their cloaks and alert for any sign that this was a trap.

"They're already here." Cal said as he sensed the presence of several lifeforms inside the docking bay.

"Hardly surprising Jedi Udra." Karrie replied, "We are late after all. However, I sense no particular apprehension coming from inside so I believe that it is safe for us to continue."

The three Jedi continued towards the docking bay, pausing only at the entrance to call out.

"We are here as arranged." Karrie said loudly.

"No you're not." a voice before she stepped inside first, "You're late."

"We were unavoidably detained." Cal added as he and Lara followed Karrie inside, "But that shouldn't-"

"Cal, gun." Lara interrupted as she saw a figure standing beside a partially dismantled starship refuelling unit that was obviously carrying a weapon.

"Another over there." Cal added when he saw a second figure aiming a weapon towards the Jedi. In each case the weapons were very long and unwieldy for use indoors. Cal recognised them as plasma fusils, an archaic form of energy weapon that the Republic's armed forces had replaced more than a thousand years earlier with the pulse wave weaponry that was now being phased out itself in favour of the new blast rifles and pistols that were similar in many respects to the older plasma weapons. At short range plasma fusils were extremely powerful, but the blasts they fired could be deflected back at the firer by a skilled Jedi with a lightsaber.

"You came heavily armed for a peaceful meeting." Karrie said as an unarmed figure flanked by four more with plasma fusils stepped out of the shadows to stand in front of the Jedi.

"So did you." the man replied, looking at Cal and Lara, "Have lightsabers gone out of style for the Jedi or something?"

"Jedi Udra and his padawan are here purely as my escort." Karrie explained, "We mean no harm and wish to come to an understanding of how we can benefit one another."

The man snorted.

"The Jedi have never been our friends." he replied.

"Then why agree to this meeting?" Cal asked, his rifle still trained on one of the armed insurgents aiming a weapon back at him.

"I didn't." the man replied, "I'm just here to take you to the man who did. Now hand over your weapons."

"No chance." Lara said sternly.

"Padawan, you will do as you are told." Karrie said as she unhooked her lightsaber from her belt and held it out in front of her.

"Well I'm her master and I don't like the idea of us being disarmed." Cal said.

"Then leave. You have accomplished your part of the mission by getting me here safely." Karrie told him, "I will not have you upset the negotiations with your attitude."

"No way." the lead insurgent announced, "All three of you stepped through that door so all three of you come with us."

"Jedi Udra, you and your padawan will disarm." Karrie ordered and Cal sighed.

"Cal what are you doing?" Lara asked as he lowered his rifle.

"What we need to." he told her, "Now hand over your weapons."

Half a dozen insurgents that carried no obvious weapons rushed forwards to collect the Jedi's weapons before just three of them carried the weapons away.

"Okay now tie them up." the leader called out and the remaining insurgents each grabbed the jedi's arms and pulled them behind their backs.

"Hey!" Lara exclaimed as she tried to pull her arms clear.

"Padawan Udra, do not resist. I sense no indication that they intend to do us harm." Karrie said while her wrists were being tied together and Lara just frowned as she and Cal were also bound. As soon as the three jedi were restrained the insurgents behind them pulled black fabric hoods over their heads to prevent them from seeing anything around them.

"Okay, now we'll take you to meet the boss." the lead insurgent said.

"Cal I've got a very bad feeling about this." Lara then said as they were led away.

The insurgents took the jedi to a repulsorlift vehicle of some sort that then set off on a winding trip. The number of turns indicated that the vehicle was a landspeeder or speeder van of some sort that could not fly above the buildings of the city and was also an indication that the insurgents were doing their best to try and confuse the jedi about their heading.

When they finally reached their destination the jedi were helped out of the vehicle and led to somewhere where they were sat in chairs that their ankles and torsos were then tied to.

"Remove their hoods." a voice said and the hoods were pulled from the jedi's heads to reveal the face of a stennes shifter standing beside a doorway.

"You!" Lara exclaimed, "Cal this is the stennes we've been looking for."

"And now you have found me." Drinto replied, "Or rather I have found you."

"We are here to negotiate with you." Karrie said and Drinto smiled.

"Of course you are." he said, "But there are others here for the same purpose and they arrived right before you did." and then he stepped away from the door to allow Han Shill and Kaylor Mott to enter.

"Hello Cal. Hello Lara." Han said, "Fancy meeting you here."