

STAR WARS

TALES OF THE JEDI



IV-II: SCAPEGOAT

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...

SCAPEGOAT

WITH CAL AND LARA NOW REDEEMED IN THE EYES OF THE JEDI ORDER AND THE REPUBLIC, ATTENTION TURNS TOWARDS TRACKING DOWN THE REAL GUILPIT FOR KRAUS TREVAN'S MURDER. BUT FOR SHILL SECURITY AND THE FOUNDING FAMILIES, THIS IS NOT SOMETHING THEY ARE KEEN TO SEE HAPPEN...

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

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1 .

Corporal Corlay Shill of the Freedom Warriors, the non Force sensitive soldiers who provided support to the Jedi Order's military operations was cleaning her equipment when the door to her room unexpectedly opened to reveal a pair of armed Freedom Warriors.

"Don't move!" one yelled, his rifle held so that it could be brought into a firing position at a moment's notice but not yet aimed at Corlay.

"What the kriff?" she exclaimed.

"At ease." A voice said from behind the two soldiers standing in the doorway and a third Freedom Warrior made his way between them, "Corporal Shill we need you to come with us for a while." He said.

"What's this all about sergeant?" she asked.

"Master Karas has received orders to keep you isolated for a while." The sergeant replied.

"Am I under arrest? What am I supposed to have done?" Corlay asked as she set down her tools.

"No you're not under arrest. Not yet. But for now you really need to come with us." The sergeant told her.

Jedi Master Ben Karas clutched a lightsaber behind his back as he and his padawan, a young woman called Keana Vreyes walked across the courtyard of the enclave on Moldas.

Excitement.

Master Karas frowned as he sensed his padawan's feelings.

"This is not something to be relished." He said to her, "What we are about to do must only be done when there is a clear need."

"I know master. I'm sorry. But surely every time it is done makes the ultimate goal easier to achieve?" she replied.

"Or alternatively it brings us one step closer to disaster." Master Karas responded just as they reached the guarded door of a building. The two Freedom Warriors on guard recognised Master Karas instantly and stepped aside while one of them unsealed the door. Then the Jedi master and his apprentice proceeded inside.

"Ah, visitors." A voice said from within the darkness inside and Keana felt a shiver run down her spine, "So what will the subject of the lecture be today Ben?"

"There shall be no lecture Hargood." Master Karas said and the figure said meditating on the floor got up and turned to face him.

"Is that so?" he asked, "Then I assume that my skills are needed?" and then he held out his hand and smiled, "In which case you know what it is that I need."

Master Karas then held up the lightsaber.

"You will get this only when I say so." He said, "Until then Keana will keep hold of it." And he passed the weapon to his apprentice.

"Thank you master." She said.

"Do not forget my padawan, the Dark Side is never to be underestimated." Master Karas warned her.

Lieutenant Erin Shill ran her hand along the hull of her starfighter as she inspected the work that had been carried out on it.

"Seems okay." She said to one of the other pilots from her squadron, "But I'll need to take it out for a test flight to be certain."

"Yeah, I was thinking the same." The other pilot responded then he went quiet for a moment before adding, "What's going on?" and Erin turned around to see the duros Captain De Kuun walking towards them past the lined up Republic navy vessels in the hangar of Aurek Station. Though it was not unusual to see him in the hangar since his own gunship squadron was also housed here it was unusual to see him flanked by a squad of marines in full battle armour.

"Lieutenant Shill." The duros called out.

"Yes sir?" Erin replied.

"Lieutenant you are being relieved of duty." De Kuun told her, "The marines will escort you to your quarters where you will remain until further notice."

"My quarters? Captain what's going on?" Erin asked.

"A situation has arisen that requires you be confined. Now are you going to come quietly or do these troops need to use force?"

"That's okay, I'll come along without a fuss." Erin said and she lifted her arms as one of the marines advanced to take her sidearm from her.

"Thank you for your co-operation lieutenant." Captain De Kuun said.

Jedi Knight Cal Udra stood alongside his padawan learner and younger sister Lara as they watched the jedi vessels entering the docking bay. The ships were a mix of transports and starfighters that were bringing not only as many jedi as possible from Moldas but also a sizeable force of Freedom Warriors. When the need arose the Jedi Order could field a significant military force and right now it was felt that that was what was needed.

"Just let me do the talking." Cal said to his sister as the jedi began to disembark from their ships.

"Right, because Master Karas likes you so much better than me." Lara responded.

"Exactly." Cal said and then he spotted Master Karas and called out to him, "Master!"

"Good day Jedi Udra." Master Karas said.

"Good day master." Cal replied, "If you'd like to follow us Tarris and Seth have prepared a briefing."

"Of course." Master Karas said, "Lead the way." Then he paused and looked at Lara.

Expectation.

Impatience.

"Something bothers you Padawan Udra?" he asked and Cal winced.

"Lara is just eager to get this mission underway." Cal said, "We both have a lot invested in this personally."

"Somehow I do not think that is what is foremost in her thoughts." Master Karas replied, "What troubles you padawan?"

"Oh I was just wondering if maybe you were going to apologise for accusing me of being a murderer." Lara said. But before Master Karas could respond both Cal and Lara sensed something cold and sinister and they turned towards one of the jedi vessels in time to see Keana exiting in the company of a figure in dark robes, his face concealed by a hood. But neither of the two young jedi needed to be able to see his face to realise who it was.

"Hargood Nollar." Cal said softly.

"Indeed Jedi Udra." Master Karas said, "Perhaps now you see how seriously I take this."

The briefing room already contained a small group of sector rangers, Republic military personnel and two men in jedi robes when Cal and Lara led Master Karas and the other jedi into it. These two jedi were Seth Ashran, another jedi from their enclave on Moldas who had reached the sector a few days earlier simply by virtue of having been deployed closer while the second was an older man called Tarris Blake. Tarris was a member of the reclusive group known as jedi shadows. Regarded as fanatics by some they dedicated themselves to eradicating the influence of the Dark Side wherever they found it. Unlike the other jedi present Tarris was not answerable to Master Karas.

"Well now that we have everyone here I shall allow Jedi Udra to explain the situation to you all." Tarris said and with a wave of his hand all of the doors to the room dropped shut and the lights dimmed. At the same time a holographic projector at the centre of the room activated and created a three dimensional image of a human woman.

"This is Belle Shill." Cal said, "She is the twin sister of Han Shill, CEO of Shill Security. Shill Security is easily the most powerful private military company in the sector. For the past twenty years or so they have come out of nowhere to provide most of the security needs of the Founding Families. Those are the families descended from the original explorers of this sector for those of you who didn't know. Belle handles most of Shill Security's covert actions and on the side she also murders jedi." And then the display changed to show an image of a man in jedi robes, "Kraus Trevan was killed by Belle in the Phillos system in an attack that was blamed on my padawan." And Cal glanced at Master Karas who did not visibly react, "Today we are going to locate Belle Shill and if possible arrest her for that crime. Alternatively the use of lethal force will be considered acceptable to prevent her from escaping. This is a very dangerous individual we are dealing with."

Then one of the Freedom Warriors raised his hand as he looked around at the number of people in the room.

"Isn't this a little much to arrest one person?" he asked.

"We don't know exactly where Belle will be." Cal told him, "She tends to stay out of the limelight if she can so we will be launching raids both at her home and at the main offices of Shill Security and that is why we need such a large force. We can't be certain how involved Shill Security itself has been with the death of Jedi Trevan so at the same time Agent Raser of the sector rangers and her officers will be executing a search warrant on the company's offices. Given the nature of their work we have to be prepared for very heavy

resistance.” Then Cal paused before he continued, “Now there are two other members of the Shill family who may be known to you. Corlay Shill is a Freedom Warrior while her twin sister Erin is a Republic Navy officer here on Aurek Station. Now for the time being we’ve been able to isolate both of them, but we can’t guarantee that Belle and Han Shill aren’t aware that we’re coming. So good luck and may the Force be with us.”

2.

Han Shill paced up and down as he waited for his communicator to connect with the person he was calling. "Come on Belle, pick it up." He muttered to himself.

"Hello?" a woman's voice said when the call was eventually answered.

"Belle at last." Han said, "What took so long?"

"I went for a run." Belle replied.

"I tried your PTP link as well. What's up with that?" Han asked.

"I don't know. I was going to drop round to the tech guys later this morning."

"Well don't." Han replied, "Look Belle we've got trouble, big trouble."

"Oh everything's always so problematic to you." Belle said, "I'm telling you if I'd been born eight minutes earlier I wouldn't be so panicky."

"Gayal's back." Han said simply.

"Oh what a load of poo." Belle responded, "Where I stuck her she's never getting out of."

"Belle take a look at the news for once. That old fart Erill Crassis figured out where you and Heddren Drud stashed her and sent a force of mandalorians of all people to release her. Now he's turned the Crassis family's security over to the mandalorians entirely and married Gayal to stop anyone getting her away from him. Apparently she's Force sensitive and you know what that means to whoever has her." Han explained.

"Oh kriff." Belle said. Then she added, "Look don't worry. I'll find her and make sure that-"

"That's not the worst of it Belle." Han interrupted, "When the authorities found out she was back that jedi shadow and the head of the local sector rangers went to see her and she told them both how it was you that killed that jedi and kidnapped her."

"Where did you hear that?" Belle asked.

"Luke Crassis." Han answered, "Apparently his father's quite happy to anger everyone by bringing Gayal back here and kicking us out but he's still on board for the whole project. This was his way of helping us out."

"And he couldn't have done that by keeping Gayal shut away somewhere that the Republic would never have found her? What an amateur."

"Look Belle we can discuss what we're going to do about Gayal later, but for now I need you to get out of there and find somewhere to lay low. I've tried contacting both Corlay and Erin but neither of them is answering. For all I know they've both been arrested." Han said and then he suddenly looked around as there was the sound of an alarm, "I need to go." He said and he shut off the communicator and rushed to his office door, "What's going on?" he demanded as he stood in the on the walkway overlooking a room filled with control stations. This was the command centre for all of Shill Security's operations, from where data could be gathered in real time from every unit deployed around the sector.

"Security breach in the parking lot." One of the controllers called out, "The alarm was triggered by one of the duty guards but I can't raise him now."

"Put the parking lot on the screen." Han ordered and he looked at the wall dominated by display screens. A large number of these promptly changed from the feeds from units in the field to form a large image of the headquarters' parking lot. Visible in the background were several troop carriers while soldiers in body armour could be seen making their way between parked vehicles towards the turbolift cluster. Ominously these soldiers were led by figures in hooded robes.

"Breach at the main doors!" another controller called out and some of the displays now changed to show the unmistakable uniforms of sector rangers as they rushed into the lobby with weapons drawn. Once again there was a hooded figure accompanying them.

"Intruders in the hangar!" a third voice warned and again the display screens changed to show a Republic airborne gunship offloading troops in the building's internal hangar. Then there was the sound of a powerful repulsorlift engine from behind Han and he looked around to see another gunship now hovering outside the windows of his office and as he watched the side door slid open to reveal a figure in dark robes staring back at him. Then the figure reached out with a hand and the windows exploded inwards.

Han recoiled instinctively bring his arms up to shield his face from the flying debris and when he lowered them he saw Hargood leap from the gunship accompanied by Keana and they both landed gracefully in his office.

"Han Shill." Hargood called out, "Order your people to stand down. Now."

"And if I don't?" Han replied, his hand moving towards the blaster holstered on his belt.

"I was hoping you'd say that." Hargood replied and he reached out with his hand again, aiming it towards Han's throat.

Immediately Han felt his throat tighten as if he was being choked and his feet lifted off the floor. Suspended in midair Han grabbed at his throat, gasping for breath as Hargood stared at him.

"Hargood no!" Keana cried out and he looked round at her.

"If I kill him the rest will surrender." He said.

"Maybe. But Tarris Blake will drag you back to Coruscant in chains." Keana replied and Hargood opened his fingers and lowered his arm. In an instant Han felt himself able to breathe again and dropped back to the floor, landing in a heap as he sucked in deep lungfuls of air.

It was then that the main doors to the command centre burst open and Freedom Warriors led by several Jedi burst in.

"Everyone back away from their terminals!" Master Karas yelled, "Everyone here is under arrest." The he spotted Han Shill in the doorway of his office and pointing it out to Tarris the pair of them ascended the stairs to the walkway and headed for the office.

"Han Shill." Tarris said, "You will tell us where your sister Belle is currently located."

"Like hell I will." Han replied as he got back to his feet and when his hand moved closer to his blaster the two Jedi both raised their lightsabers as a warning, but kept them inactive for now, "What right do you have to come bursting in here and assaulting my employees?" he asked and then he rubbed his throat.

Master Karas glanced back towards the turbolift as Agent Jule Raser emerged from it with another of her sector rangers.

"I think I will leave that to Agent Raser to explain." Master Karas replied.

Seeing the Jedi and Han stood together, Jule also proceeded up to the walkway and as she walked up to Han she produced a compact datapad.

"Han Shill, CEO of Shill Security." she said, holding out the datapad, "We have a warrant to search these premises for one Belle Shill and any data regarding involvement with the killing of the Jedi knight Kraus Trevan."

"A warrant issued by a court sitting in secret no doubt." Han said as he inspected the datapad and the legal notice displayed on its screen.

"We are aware of your contacts within the courts." Jule replied.

"I thought that Lara Udra was responsible for the death of the Jedi." Han said looking down at the Freedom Warriors now lining up and searching the Shill Security control staff.

"The Udras have been cleared of all wrongdoing." Tarris replied.

"Then where are they?" Han asked, "I'd have thought they'd both want to be involved in this little operation of yours."

"Oh they are Mister Shill." Master Karas told him, "But they preferred to be elsewhere instead."

Belle frowned when her communicator suddenly became silent and she considered her twin brother's warning to leave. But before she could decide on a course of action she heard the sound of a repulsorlift engine from outside her apartment. Rushing to the door that led to her balcony she looked upwards to see a gunship hovering overhead.

"Oh kriff." She said as a pair of synthrope lines were released from it and she dived back from the door just as Cal and Lara dropped onto the balcony.

Cal stepped forwards first and slashed at the balcony door, slicing off the lock and then delivering a strong kick that sent the doors flying open.

"Stay where you are Belle!" he yelled at her.

Belle was rarely unarmed, but the tight clothing she wore to exercise in gave her nowhere to conceal a weapon and the pack she carried her compact pulse wave blaster in while out running was by the front door and well out of reach. However, her clothing also gave her total freedom of movement while at the same time denying an opponent any easy ways of grabbing hold of her. On the other hand a Jedi's robes offered numerous places where they could be gripped and used to hold or throw their wearer.

Grabbing hold of a stack of magazines from a nearby table Belle hurled them at Cal and Lara, they were too light and flexible to be effective as weapons but that was not Belle's intention. Instead they spread out as they flew through the air and blocked the Jedi's view as she sprinted towards them. Cal raised a hand and used the Force to knock all of the flying objects aside but by that time Belle was in position to strike and she dived between the two Jedi to prevent either being able to risk swinging their lightsabers at her without possibly striking one another. Then as she landed she rolled onto her back and lashed out with both legs at the same time, striking both Jedi at the back of their knees and bringing them to the floor as well.

Before either of them could recover Belle reached out and grabbed hold of Lara's robes at her collar and dragged her closer, twisting the fabric in her hands to tighten it around Lara's neck. Lara attempted to lift her lightsaber over her head to attack Belle, but the other woman had anticipated this move and she rolled Lara over in a move that offered her the choice of either shutting down the weapon or impaling herself on its blade. Lara chose to shut it off and as she landed on top of it the lightsaber slipped from her grasp. Before Cal could intervene Belle then pulled Lara to her feet, using the padawan as a shield to protect her. A sudden flash from the apartment door heralded the arrival of Cal and Lara's backup as a thermal charge was used to instantly remove the door from its frame and a group of four Freedom Warriors burst in and aimed their weapons at Belle.

"Let her go Belle." Cal ordered, "There's no way out of this."

"Oh but I think there is." Belle replied, "But I can't have your little sister slowing me down." And then she pushed Lara towards Cal and at the same time leapt towards the Freedom Warriors.

There was the dull 'thud' of a pulse wave weapon firing, but Belle moved too quickly for the Freedom Warriors to be able to accurately target her before she reached them. Her first move was to grasp the rifle of one of the soldiers by its barrel and she first pulled it towards her and then forced it back again, angling it upwards so that the stock struck its owner in the face. Stunned the man let go of the rifle and Belle swung it around to strike the man next to him, a Freedom Warrior with sergeant's markings on his uniform.

A 'snap-hiss' sound from behind her told Belle that Lara had retrieved and reactivated her lightsaber and she knew that it would be just moments before both Jedi were on her. Ducking beneath the two remaining Freedom Warrior's rifles she turned the one she held around to grip it properly and opened fire, aiming up into the torso of one of them and grinned as he was thrown backwards by the impact of the spatial distortion, knowing that at point blank range not even the man's armoured vest would be enough to prevent his internal organs from being ripped apart by the hit. Then another kick brought the final Freedom Warrior to the floor and Belle jumped back to her feet, rushing through the door just before Cal or Lara could reach her.

Cal went to follow Belle from the apartment, but knowing that at least one of the Jedi would try this she had halted after just a few paces and turned around to lie in wait with her rifle trained on the doorway. Cal saw her just in time and ducked back inside as Belle fired a short burst that blasted chunks from the wall just behind where he would have been had he not retreated in time. Belle then backed away, heading for the turbolift and firing the rifle on semi automatic to dissuade anyone inside the apartment from trying to follow her.

"Sergeant Gall, are you okay?" Cal asked as he helped the dazed Freedom Warrior sergeant back to his feet.

"I think so." He replied as he picked up his rifle, "Just a bit of a headache thanks to my helmet."

"Shouldn't we get after her?" Lara asked Cal and the sergeant, pointing towards the doorway.

"Be my guest." Cal replied as another pulse wave blast struck the doorframe.

Only when she reached the turbolift did Belle cease fire and she tossed the rifle aside as she jumped into it and shut the door. Seeing their chance, Cal and Lara then burst out into the hallway, holding their lightsabers out in front of them to parry any further pulse wave shots and they were just in time to see Belle blow a kiss in their direction as the turbolift door close.

"She's getting away!" Lara exclaimed.

"Not yet she's not." Cal said and he ran to the turbolift and began to hack at the door with his lightsaber, cutting a hole in it large enough for him to get through and he jumped into the shaft.

Inside the turbolift Belle jumped as she heard the unexpected sound of part of the door hitting the top of the turbolift. Then when she heard a softer 'thud' she knew that someone was on top of it and could guess what was about to come next. Sure enough the blade of a lightsaber was thrust through the roof and began to cut a hole in it. With no where to hide, Belle instead backed away from where the hole was being cut and climbed up onto the handrail that ran around the inside of the turbolift.

When the lightsaber blade finished cutting the hole in the roof the section cut loose dropped to the floor with a loud 'clang!' and then a moment later Cal dropped in through the hole. Even before he hit the floor Belle jumped from the rail, landing right on top of him and smashing him against the far wall. She grabbed Cal's weapon arm by the wrist and banged it against the wall as well to force him to drop it and then for a moment both of them paused and looked one another in the face.

"You really know how to show a girl a good time don't you?" Belle said and then she leant forwards and kissed him before the turbolift came to a halt and the door opened to reveal the lobby, "Got to go lover boy." Belle then said and she dropped back, keeping hold of Cal and hurling him over her into the wall on the other side of the turbolift. Stunned by this, Cal could do nothing as Belle then ran from the turbolift and out of the building's front door.

Shortly after a second turbolift car arrived in the lobby and when the door opened Lara and the three surviving Freedom Warriors emerged.

"Cal what happened?" Lara asked as she saw Cal picking himself back up and then calling his lightsaber back to his hand with the Force.

"She got away." He replied, frowning. Then Lara frowned too as she looked straight at him.

"Is that lipstick on your face?" she asked.

Being dressed for exercising Belle was able to run through the streets of the city without attracting attention. However, she knew that her description would likely be being distributed amongst law enforcement and she needed to change her appearance. Acquiring at least one weapon would also be of use.

A solution to both these problems presented itself when Belle was running down a street that led across bridge over a river and up ahead she saw a woman in a police uniform heading towards her. Belle stopped at the end of the bridge and then called out.

"Officer! Come quickly, there's a woman being attacked down here!" and she pointed down to the path beside the river.

As expected the policewoman broke into a run and came charging towards Belle. Then when she reached the end of the bridge she looked where Belle had been pointing.

"Where?" she asked when she saw nothing.

"Right here." Belle replied and she struck the policewoman in the throat with a blow strong enough that it produced an audible 'crunch' as her windpipe was crushed. Belle then dragged the choking policewoman down to the path and then under the bridge, snatching her sidearm from its holster before the policewoman could draw it in some last desperate act to defend herself against Belle.

When the policewoman finally lost consciousness Belle got to work quickly, stripping her uniform from her and putting it on herself. Again her current clothing proved advantageous as it was sufficiently tight fitting that Belle had no need to remove anything other than her shoes to be able to put it on. Finally she tossed her shoes into the river and then rolled the body of the policewoman in after it. Then with her disguise complete and an earpiece connected to a point-to-point communicator operating on police frequencies in her ear Belle calmly walked back up the street and headed in the opposite direction to her apartment.

3.

"Ben is this a good time?" a female jedi knight asked as Master Karas discussed the search of Shill Security's headquarters with Jule and Tarris.

"Of course Karrie, what have you found?" Master Karas asked in return and he felt a slight tremor in the Force caused by Tarris' irritation at such informality between them.

"Absolutely nothing." Karrie told him, "Dac's reviewed the basic computer system architecture and he says that there's a massive section of restricted material that needs special clearance even from here. The access codes from the staff operating the terminals at the time aren't enough to get us in." and the jedi all looked across Han's office to where he sat behind his desk under the watchful eyes of Hargood and one of the sector rangers.

"How about you tell us what we need to know?" Hargood said to him.

"Or how about I just wait for my lawyer to get here?" Han replied, grinning at Hargood.

Anger.

Hargood reached down and dragged Han from his chair, lifting him up so that they were face to face.

"Now listen here-" he began.

"Release him!" Tarris yelled. Then he looked at Master Karas, "It would seem that he is not a capable of control as you would have me believe." He said.

"Put him down." Master Karas said to Hargood and the fallen jedi did as he was told, snarling at Han for good measure. "Though it would count in your favour if you did as he asked." Master Karas then told Han.

"Actually I think I'll wait for my lawyer to get here." Han replied.

"But you haven't called one." Karrie pointed out.

"No matter, look. Here he is." Han said and he looked out of the office and to the entrance to the control room where a dark skinned man with a shaven head had just appeared. Dressed in what were obviously expensive clothes he stopped to speak with one of the Freedom Warriors who challenged him and was then pointed towards the office. Calmly the man walked between the assorted soldiers, law enforcement agents and jedi up the stairs to the walkway and then to Han's office.

"Good morning gentlemen." He said, "And ladies." He added when he noticed Jule and Karrie, "My name is Heddren Drud and I am Mister Shill's legal representative."

"Yes, I'm sure we all recognise the head of the Drud family." Karrie replied.

"Not quite correct Jedi Tyran." Tarris told her, "Mister Drud is not the head of his family, though his public behaviour often gives this impression. I believe that it is his older brother Josh who is in fact the family head. Is that correct Mister Drud?"

"My family hierarchy is not why I am here." Heddren said, "I am here to inform you all that papers are being lodged as I speak to order the withdrawal of all jedi and Republic forces from my client's property and that an action for damages will be launched."

"Mister Drud we are here quite legally." Jule replied and she held out the warrant.

"This names Belle Shill as a suspect, not my client." Heddren said.

"It also allows us to search her place of work for evidence of her actions." Master Karas replied.

"So it does. But where exactly is Belle's office?" Heddren asked and he looked at Han.

"She doesn't have one." Han said, "My sister has no formal management or decision making role in this company."

The jedi standing with Heddren exchanged glances, all noticing that Han had used the word 'formal' to qualify Belle's role without having to take the risk of lying in front of a room full of jedi who may sense his deception. By keeping Belle's role strictly informal he had allowed himself room to manoeuvre, "However," Han went on, "she is still employed by Shill Security and I will take whatever action is needed to resolve this. My internal investigation department is quite capable of dealing with her."

"You're saying that you'd help hunt your own sister?" Karrie asked him.

"If she really is the murderer that warrant says she is then yes." Han answered, "Shill Security is licensed to undertake bounty hunting operations and we will accept the bounty on Belle."

Just then there was a chiming sound from Heddren's pocket and the lawyer produced a PTP link that he held up his head and then smiled.

"I think you should hear this Agent Raser." He said, passing her the device. Jule took it and put it her ear before her face fell.

"I understand sir." She said and then she returned the PTP link to Heddren, "That was Judge Kotor." She

told the assembled jedi, "He's ordered us to withdraw pending a decision on whether the warrant is legal. Apparently he's buying the line that this is not Belle's place of work." From his seat Han just grinned.

"Well let's just hope that Cal and Lara had better luck." Karrie said.

"Cal got beaten up by a girl." Lara said to the three other padawans that gathered around her. The force that raided the headquarters of Shill Security had withdrawn to the starport warehouse that had been their staging area for the raid and found Cal and Lara's team already there, with medics seeing to their injuries.

"Oh very funny." Cal said, hearing the remark, "Belle's a trained killer."

"Yes and you're supposed to be a jedi knight brother dear." Lara replied, "A jedi who's more than ten years younger than her and who has an advantage of fifteen centimetres or so and about twenty kilos on her. Oh and there's still traces of her lipstick on your face."

"Lipstick?" one of the other padawans asked.

"Yeah, Cal and Belle made out in the turbolift Pedrus." Lara told him. Then she looked at Keana, "So how did the raid go?" she asked and then when she noticed the stern expression on Keana's face she turned to the two male padawans, "I take it not well?"

"No." the oldest replied, "In addition to not being able to get into any of Shill Security's restricted files Han's lawyer turned up and had a judge rule the warrant out of order."

"Rich, you're kidding." Lara said and she turned back to Keana again, "Is that true?"

"The warrant was fine." Keana replied, "I don't know how the judge can have overturned it. Or how Han's lawyer even knew to turn up at the building."

"The Founding Families have eyes and ears everywhere." Lara said, "Plus they've got deep pockets. I wouldn't be surprised if that judge just earned himself a big bonus payment."

"You're saying that he's corrupt?" Pedrus asked.

"Probably." Lara replied, "Even if he's not then he may be worried about crossing the Founding Families, especially since one of them is the sector's senator."

"Is it true that Hargood Nollar almost killed Han Shill and that it took both Master Karas and jedi Blake to drag him off?" Pedrus asked suddenly.

Annoyance.

"No it is not." Keana said, "Hargood didn't hurt anyone and he released Han as soon as he was ordered to."

"Looks like Pedrus hit a nerve there Keana." Rich commented as all the padawans noticed her reaction.

"Hargood deserves a chance that's all." Keana said, "All of you act as if he's a sith or something and he's not."

"Well all I can say," Lara added, "is that I hope no one tells him to let go of Belle if he's the one who gets to her first."

The uniforms of the Shill Security special forces team were all brand new and Han smiled as he prepared to address them.

"Congratulations on passing our special forces test program." He said, "You are now among the elite of this sector's fighting forces." Then he paused just long enough to activate a display screen behind him and an image of Belle appeared on it, "This is your first target." He told them, "Belle Shill may be a long standing employee of this company and my sister, but she is accused of violating the trust placed in her and now it is up to you to bring her to justice. Capturing her alive is preferable, but given the nature of the crimes she has committed and the skills she is known to possess you are authorised to use whatever force is needed to bring her down. Now go and draw what equipment you need and study her profile. I don't want the honour of Shill Security being lowered any further by hearing how some jedi knight got her first. Dismissed."

Then as the team left the room Han walked over to the corner where Heddren and Jule waited.

"There you go Agent Raser," he said to Jule, "those men will find my sister and you'll have your suspect."

"I'm sure that you can now see how serious my client is about bringing her to justice Agent Raser." Heddren added.

"Oh yes, that was a very fine speech. Very inspiring." Jule replied, "Now I must get going. You're not the only ones hunting for Belle you know." And she followed the special forces team from the room.

When she was gone Heddren looked at Han.

"So those troops-" he began.

"Useless all of them." Han interrupted, "Bottom of the class for special forces selection. Every last one of them is totally expendable. Which will come in handy when Belle kills them all."

4.

The first thing Belle did when she reached one of her personal safe houses was take a shower, making use of some wash in hair dye to change her hair colour from blonde to jet black. Then she used the safe house's computer terminal to access Shill Security's system of orbiting surveillance satellites and directed one towards the headquarters of Shill Security itself. Belle had correctly guessed that the alarm she had heard over the communication line was warning of a raid on Shill Security simultaneous with the one on her apartment and she needed to know if the building was still occupied or not. The visual feed from the satellite showed no signs of the vehicles necessary to deploy a strike force large enough to secure the building and Belle determined that any Republic forces were now gone. Leaving the satellite feed running she then activated the nearby desktop communicator and attempted to make contact with her brother.

"Han, it's me." Belle said as soon as the connection was made with his private communication line, one that no one but he could activate.

"Belle where are you?" Han asked in response.

"At the safe house on sixth. The jedi only sent Cal and Lara and a handful of Freedom Warriors to my place. Getting out was easy."

"Good. Look the Druds have been able to quash the warrant they had for searching the office, but I doubt that will last long. In the meantime we've got to give them a reason to back off."

"I've got a bad feeling about this." Belle said, "What are you planning?"

"I've put together a team to hunt you." Han replied.

"Are you a total nerf herder?"

"Don't worry. I found the biggest bunch of laserbrains I could find on the payroll and publicly appointed them as special forces. Now I'm going to send them after you and I need you to take them out. Make it nice and public. That will buy us some time with the Republic."

"If they're that stupid then you better warn them that I've dyed my hair. I've gone for black." Belle said.

"Got it." Han said, "I'll send them out in about an hour or so, I don't want to make it obvious that I know where you are. Get ready for their arrival and make sure you've got your exit strategy ready." And then he shut off the channel.

The warehouse was now being converted into a command centre to coordinate the actions of the various organisations involved in the manhunt for Belle and when Cal and Lara approached the large holographic map of the city that had just been set up they found all of the more senior jedi already gathered around it. "Any word yet?" Cal asked and a much older man with a bald head pointed towards one of the rivers that ran through the city on the map.

"Local police pulled a body from this river about fifteen minutes ago." He said.

"Not Belle surely?" Lara said, "I don't think we laid a finger on her."

"No not Belle." Master Karas replied, "The woman that Jedi Antess is referring to has been identified a policewoman."

"So she challenged Belle and it cost her her life." Lara said.

"No." the older jedi said, "The woman's uniform and weapon were missing and we believe that Belle attacked her to steal them."

"The local police are understandably upset." Karrie added, "I've assured of their full co-operation, including extra officers volunteering to come in while technically off duty."

"Well you can add another squad of troops to the search party." Jule called out as she arrived, "Han Shill just gave orders for a unit of his special forces to join the hunt."

"I don't like that." Cal said, "No matter what Han Shill says I'm still certain that he's up to his neck in this."

"Oh I agree with that wholeheartedly brother." Lara added.

"And how do you propose to prove this Jedi Udra?" Tarris asked him and Cal smiled.

"Easy." He said, "While this special forces team is supposedly trailing Belle, I'll be trailing them."

"A special forces unit may well notice you trailing them and act on it." A wolf like shistavanen jedi pointed out, "And if they decide to attack they may be competent enough to kill you."

"You're a battle master Jedi Khal." Master Karas said, "What would you suggest?"

"The addition of an extra jedi. Ideally one with considerable skills at tracking from a distance." Khal replied.

"On the other hand that weakens our numbers here." Seth pointed out, "If that special forces team is just to throw us off then they may decide to lead any of us following them as far from Belle as possible."

"Only if they know we're there." Cal said.

"We should not overlook the fact that Shill Security is probably monitoring our activities in the same way that we are planning to monitor theirs." Khal added, "If they have not already set up observation of this warehouse then they will likely do so soon. We should assume that any Jedi leaving would be seen."

"So how do we stop that happening?" Lara asked.

"We do not." Khal replied, "You and your master may leave on your own without attracting that much attention. It would look like a simple patrol."

Lara cringed.

"Please don't call him my master." She said and both Master Karas and Tarris glared at her sternly.

"Then we simply select a suitable Jedi to follow later. One whose departure would not suggest a significant deployment." Kahl said.

"Such as who?" Master Karas asked.

"There are two Jedi who meet the criteria." Kahl answered, "Both are excellent trackers and both can be seen to leave without causing suspicion. The first is Jedi Blake. His status as a shadow means that he can be expected to act on his own. Providing he does not leave with Cal and Lara it can be made to look as if he is departing."

"Jedi Blake is also of great use here helping to direct our operations." Master Karas pointed out, "Who is the second?"

"Jedi Nollar." Kahl replied.

"Hargood Nollar is not a Jedi knight." Tarris commented, "He has fallen to the Dark Side."

"Which is why his departure can be explained." Kahl explained, "If he leaves escorted then it will seem as if he is being sent back to Moldas now that the raid on Shill Security had been completed."

Tarris turned to Master Karas.

"You cannot be considering this." He said, "To release that man into public is unthinkable. He should never have even been brought with you. You saw how he acted during the raid."

Master Karas paused as he considered what to do.

The Udra family will serve the Sith.

He could not help but remember the warning he had received through the Force at the time Cal and Lara had first arrived in the Narthis Sector. He had of course passed this on to the Jedi Council back on Coruscant, but no one there had shared his concerns about Cal and Lara until the latter was accused of murder and her brother helped her escape. Now even though Cal and Lara had been vindicated the warning returned to haunt him. However, although Hargood Nollar had fallen to the influence of the Dark Side this had been prompted by the deaths of his family at the hands of the Sith and he focused his rage and hatred at them. Then he took a deep breath and looked at Cal.

"Jedi Udra," he said, "you and your padawan will leave the warehouse. Check to see if you are being followed and lose any tail you find then locate the special forces team that Shill Security is deploying. In addition you are to alert Hargood Nollar to follow you. I will assign my own padawan to escort him so that it appears he is being returned to our enclave on Moldas. You are to remain in wireless contact and Hargood is not to be trusted with a weapon unless absolutely necessary. Do you understand?"

"Fully Master Karas." Cal replied.

Excitement.

Rich looked up from the datapad he was reading as Lara rushed into the room where the other padawans were waiting.

"What's got you so worked up Lara?" he asked.

"Cal and I are going hunting." She replied as she picked up her blaster and connected its holster to her belt.

"Master Karas is sending you after Belle?" Pedrus asked, "Where is she?"

"We don't know yet." Lara told him, "But apparently Han Shill is sending out a squad of troops to hunt for her and Cal thinks that we can use them to figure out what the Shills are up to. If they're faking then the troops will just try and fake hunting for Belle."

"And if they're not?" Rich asked and Lara smiled.

"Then they'll lead us right to her." She replied.

"That's a stupid plan." Keana said from the corner and Lara turned towards her, grinning.

"I'm so glad you said that." She said, "Because your master wants you to go along as well. You'll be holding Hargood's leash." And Rich also grinned as Keana's face fell.

"Hargood?" Pedrus said, "But aren't you worried about taking him with you? What if he turns on you?"

Anger.

"Hargood wouldn't do that." Keana said sternly.

"Might want to watch your feelings there." Rich commented, "Despite being the oldest of us I know I'm the most junior as well, but even I could spot how you reacted to what Pedrus said."

"Then maybe Pedrus should learn to watch his manners." Keana said, "You're right about one thing though, you are the most junior of us and I'm the most senior. That means I've a much better idea of what it means to be a Jedi and Hargood just needs a chance to prove himself."

From a window Master Karas watched as his Padawan left with Hargood.

"Am I doing the right thing my old master?" he asked as he sensed a presence in the Force and a shimmering figure appeared beside him.

"I remember Hargood Nollar well Ben." The spirit replied, "He was a good man once and there is still good in him. That is why you keep him around isn't it? Or is it just sentimentality? Are you too attached to your old friend to let him go?"

"I am starting to think that the man who was my friend died with his family." Master Karas said.

"In that case you could always ask that Jedi shadow to deal with him."

"No." Master Karas said, "If nothing else Keana would never forgive me. She still believes that he can be saved."

The spirit smiled.

"Then let us both hope that the Force agrees with her." He said.

"Ben who are you talking to?" Karrie's voice suddenly called out from the doorway and Master Karas turned and smiled at her.

"No one." He said, "Just talking to myself."

"Well I think you're needed out here. Tarris and Whillam have conflicting views on how to proceed that even my diplomatic skills can't solve." She told him.

"That bad huh? Then I've got a bad feeling about this one."

"Sir the observation team is calling again." One of the control centre staff told Han.

"Thanks, patch it through to my office." He replied and he headed from the control room to his office where several droids were still working on cleaning up the fragments of his destroyed window and installing a new one. This meant that the room was somewhat draughty, but it still offered far more privacy than the control room.

"Go ahead." Han said as he sat down.

"Sir we've just spotted two more Jedi leaving the warehouse." One of the men Han had sent to spy on the Republic forces told him, "From the information you provided I'd say that it was Hargood Nollar and Keana Vreyes."

"Where are they heading?" Han asked.

"Towards the starport."

"So Master Karas is sending his attack dog back home." Han said to himself, leaning back in his chair.

"Sir?" the man on the other end of the link said.

"Oh I was just considering how the Jedi are taking one of their most powerful assets out of play." Han replied and then he frowned, remembering how it was less than ten minutes since Cal and Lara had been seen leaving the warehouse as well.

"Sir are you still there?"

"Yes I'm here." Han said, "But I've got a bad feeling about this. Did you see where Cal and Lara Udra headed earlier?"

"North sir."

North, Han thought to himself, the safe house where Belle was hiding was north of the warehouse occupied by the Jedi, but if they knew that she was there then they would have sent more than just the two Jedi she had already escaped once today. By adding a more senior Jedi with proven combat skills perhaps. But at the same time why sneak them out a few at a time? The only possible answer was that they suspected that the Jedi were being watched and did not want to reveal what they were up to. Which meant that they did not trust Han, which was reasonable given that he was doing his best to deceive them. However, if they had discovered the safe house's location and also that Belle was inside then they could have simply headed straight there by speeder faster than Han could get a warning to her so there had to be another reason. Then it hit Han. The Jedi did not trust him; therefore it was only natural that they would want to monitor what he was doing and that meant getting a team in place to watch him just as he had one watching them.

"Very clever." He muttered to himself.

"I'm sorry I didn't catch that sir."

"Never mind." Han said, "Just keep watching for any more activity. Headquarters out." And he shut off his communicator and headed back to the control room, "I need a counter surveillance sweep carrying out right away." He announced.

"I'll have a team to your office right away sir." One of the control staff replied.

"No, not my office." Han said, "The building. I think that someone is watching the building."

Cal felt a shiver run down his spine as he sensed a dark presence in the Force and he spun around to see Hargood and Keana standing behind him in the vacant office that overlooked the Shill Security headquarters.

"Any activity?" Keana asked.

"No." Cal replied as he turned around again, "The special forces team seems to be just waiting on the rooftop pad in that transport."

"And what of your padawan?" Hargood asked as he walked over to stand beside Cal and stare at the building opposite.

"Waiting with the speeder on the roof of this building." He said, "When those troops move we'll be ready to go after them."

"And how do you plan on us reaching the roof in time to follow them"? Hargood asked.

"We won't." Cal replied, "There's another office on the other side of the building that has had one of the windows removed. When I give the word Lara will position the speeder beside it and we'll just jump across unseen from over there." And he pointed to Shill Security's headquarters.

"Very good." Hargood said, "So now all we need to do is wait for them to make their move."

5.

Han looked at the datapad that had been handed to him.

"Are you certain?" he asked as he looked at the image shown on it, the results of a thermal scan of a nearby building.

"Yes sir. That entire floor is supposed to be empty while its being renovated and our scans clearly show three individuals in an office facing this building."

"Only three?" Han asked.

"Yes sir. Three of them all in the same room. But there was one more anomaly."

"What?" Han said.

"A heat signature from what looks like a repulsorlift engine on the roof. It's been there for some time and hasn't moved. It's as if someone is keeping a speeder at the ready for a quick getaway."

"Thank you. You are dismissed." Han said.

"Shall I take a team out to clear these people out?" his employee asked.

"No." Han replied, "I'll figure out what to do about them. You may leave."

"Yes sir." The employee replied before leaving the office.

Han looked at the results of the scans again. It looked as if the Jedi were hoping that he would lead them right to Belle. Right now Han had little choice but to do just that as well. Heddren had contacted him to let him know that the Republic was looking to have the search warrant for Shill Security's headquarters ruled valid once more and so Han had to do something quickly. But the presence of the Jedi could tip the balance when the fake special forces team made its attempt to capture Belle and Han could not risk her being caught.

But then it occurred to him that his problems would be over if she were to die.

From the observation post Cal saw the door to the roof of the Shill Security building open and a single figure came running out holding some sort of rifle. Using the Force to enhance his senses he was surprised to see that this was Han Shill himself and watched as he climbed into the waiting transport just before it rose up off the rooftop landing pad.

"That was Han!" he exclaimed, "Come on, let's move!" and he turned and ran from the office.

As he headed for the office with the missing window Cal signalled Lara and told her to get into position and as he entered the other office he saw the speeder with her at the controls appear just outside. Without breaking his stride Cal leapt through the window and landed in the back of the speeder only moments before Hargood landed in the front beside Lara and then Keana landed beside Cal.

"Drive." Hargood told Lara, "Circle around to the west and put us parallel with that transport."

"Okay got it." Lara replied and the speeder suddenly accelerated as she drove off as fast as she could.

"Won't they see us?" Keana asked. Like the troop transport the speeder that the four Jedi were riding in was built for operation at higher altitudes than most traffic and this allowed them not only to keep up with the transport by flying well above the crowded streets below but also keep it in sight thanks to there being far fewer vehicles this high up. However, to Keana it also meant that they were just as visible to the transport.

"Not if we stay alongside them." Hargood replied, "Their visibility to the side is limited with their doors sealed." Then he extended his hand, "Now I think that there's something you need to give me." He said and he smiled as Keana handed over his lightsaber.

Belle was starting to get impatient waiting for the team to mount its staged attack on her and it came as a relief when she heard the sound of an engine overhead and peered out to see the familiar shape of a Shill Security troop transport approaching. But when she took a closer look through a set of wide-scan binocs she saw her twin brother sitting beside the pilot in the cockpit.

"That's not part of the plan." She said to herself.

People on the crowded street reacted with surprise as the transport swooped down without warning and a pair of masked soldiers dropped on lines to the ground and both fired on Belle's safe house with their rifles. Belle had been ready for this though and had retreated away from the window to avoid being hit by flying glass. Taking cover in an internal doorway she opened fire with a slug pistol, putting two bullets into the head of one of the soldiers and grinning as he fell dead.

"They've stopped." Hargood said when he saw the transport begin to hover and then watched as the first two soldiers dropped down on lines, "Okay get us down." He added, "We need to close the gap now." "Okay here goes." Lara said and she angled the speeder downwards, still keeping it above the level of the surface traffic though so that she could weave through the crowded streets towards the Shill Security transport.

Belle stepped back out of sight and crouched down as more soldiers deployed from the transport. In her ear she had an earpiece connected to a PTP link operating on the same frequency as the ones being used by the assault team so she knew exactly what they were planning.

"Covering fire! Fire team two move in!"

Straight away the weight of fire aimed into the safe house increased as half the soldiers just fired randomly into it, blasting chunks from walls and destroying furniture. This was not intended to kill Belle, instead it was just meant to keep her from being able to return fire while the other troops got into a position to storm the building. The problem for these troops was that they could not enter the building while it was being fired upon and so when the weapon fire ceased Belle knew that they were about to come in after her.

Belle had three grenades in her possession, each one featuring a plastic case that would produce very little fragmentation. These were designed to stun rather than kill, though by adding on a metal case they could become quite lethal. Right now however Belle had no intention of making this modification, she did not want to risk bringing down the ceiling of the house already damaged by pulse wave fire.

A 'crunch' in the room at the front of the house alerted Belle to the presence of someone else in the building with her and she shook her head.

"Now I see why you failed." She muttered to herself and pulling the pin from one of the grenades she tossed it out into the other room and then clamped her hands over her ears while keeping her mouth open.

Despite not producing any significant fragmentation of its own the detonation of the grenade still created a blast wave that propelled debris already created from the weapon fire used to cover the assault team's approach through the air. Inside this was fairly insignificant; the blast itself overwhelming the senses of the assault team, but in the street outside the fire team that had been covering them dove for cover to avoid being struck by the flying debris.

Belle then burst out of the other room, taking advantage of her opponents' confusion and opened fire, putting two shots into each of the five soldiers now lying on the floor. Pausing only to reload her pistol, Belle then headed for the back door.

Han smiled as he saw the devastation his twin sister wrought on his hand picked unit and listened as the squad leader desperately tried to re-establish contact with the assault team element of it. Then from his vantage point in the hovering transport he saw Belle come running out the concealed back door of the safe house, one that he had made sure the special forces team did not know about before deployment.

"She's making a break for it!" Han exclaimed over the communication net, "I think she's heading for the river."

Belle heard this warning via her earpiece of course and for a split second she wondered why Han was telling his troops this, right now there was no way that he could guess where she was heading for. Her plan had in fact been to head towards the nearest starport facility to make it look as if she was hoping to get off world. But then it hit her. The signal was not intended to guide Han's troops after her; it was intended to send her in the direction Han needed her to go. Therefore, when Belle reached the end of the street she turned and ran in the direction of the nearest river.

"Look, they're moving off." Cal said and he pointed to where the formerly hovering transport was now in motion, heading away from them.

"Could they have dealt with Belle already?" Keana asked.

"No." Hargood replied, "We saw those troops deploy by drop lines but the transport didn't set down to pick them up again. She's on the move and they're going after her."

"So we follow them right?" Lara said.

"Unless you want all this be for nothing, yes." Hargood said.

Lara continued on her heading towards the safe house where the fighting had just taken place. As they neared the structure the Jedi saw that the local police department had begun to respond and already two speeders parked outside and the officers moving back the gathering crowd.

"Set us down!" Hargood suddenly yelled and he reached across to the controls.

"Hey!" Lara exclaimed as he shifted the engine into neutral but as the speeder began to slow Hargood simply released his safety harness and leapt out, landing on the pavement and breaking into a run.

"After him!" Cal snapped as he too undid his harness, "We can't let him out of our sight."

However for the time being at least Hargood was not interested in escaping the other jedi, instead rushing to the police perimeter being set up and vaulting over it.

"You there! What are you doing?" one of the police officers demanded before Hargood simply held up his lightsaber and ignited it.

"Official business." He replied, "Back down and back off."

"It's alright officer." Cal said as he too rushed up to the perimeter and ducked underneath the line of tape now strung up between the two police speeders, "If you check with your station house you'll see that we do have the authority to be here." And the frowning officer then backed away, "Hargood what are you playing at?" Cal hissed at the fallen jedi as he crouched by the body of the first soldier killed by Belle and began removing some of his equipment.

"You know that phrase 'leave no man behind'?" Hargood asked.

"Yeah, what of it?" Cal replied.

"Well it's not just about leaving behind your friends to some terrible fate." Hargood said and he then stood up and held out the soldier's PTP link and headset, "It's also about not letting your enemy get hold of important equipment." Then he hooked the PTP link onto his robes and put on the headset.

"Contact north! She's definitely heading for the river." A voice said through the headset and Hargood smiled.

"Looks like we're heading for the river." He said just as Keana and Lara arrived and he started to run. Cal sighed.

"Well you two heard the man." He said, "Let's go."

Hargood's confinement had done nothing to reduce his level of physical fitness and the three jedi following him struggled to keep up with him. This was made even more complicated by his attitude towards the passers by who stood in his way. While Cal and both padawans simply yelled warnings and waved at startled and confused citizens to clear a path Hargood made use of his abilities to send out blasts of Force energy that physically pushed people out of his way and Cal winced as he saw them being knocked off their feet. However, there was no arguing with his results and it was not long before the first figure in dark grey combat gear appeared ahead of them. Like Hargood he was using physical means of coercion to get people out his way, but without Hargood's abilities he was instead using the butt of his rifle to clear a path.

"That's one of the Shill Security people!" Keana shouted when she spotted him and Cal frowned at witnessing the man's thuggish behaviour.

"Look!" Lara yelled suddenly and she pointed up into the air where the Shill Security transport was now circling around, "There's Han!" and Cal risked a brief glance into the sky where he saw Han looking back down at him through the transport's canopy.

6.

"I knew it!" Han snapped as he saw the Jedi approaching, "They were watching us."

"Shall I attempt to intercept them sir?" the pilot asked, looking in the direction of the Jedi as well.

"No." Han replied, "I need them to witness this." And then he activated the squad communication net linked to the squad below, "Try to get her onto the bridge." He transmitted before releasing his harness and heading into the back of the transport.

"Sir what am I to do?" the pilot asked him.

"Just circle," Han replied, "and leave the rest to me."

Bystanders screamed when one of the special forces team pursuing Belle opened fire in the street. Fortunately, although he was not up to the standards for a genuine special forces unit the soldier was smart enough not to discharge his weapon directly into the crowds around him and he instead fired upwards, allowing the spatial distortion from his pulse wave rifle to travel into the air until it dissipated of its own accord.

Belle knew that this was a crude attempt to get her to move in the opposite direction to the blast that past harmlessly by her and typically she would have ignored it. But on this occasion she had overheard Han's instruction and knew that he wanted her on the bridge she was rushing towards so she turned onto the bridge and carried on running, expecting Han to issue further instructions at any moment.

However, the communication channel remained silent and so Belle ground to a halt, turning back towards the troopers pursuing her and opened fire. The sharp 'crack' of each shot produced more panic from bystanders and she wondered if it would have been better to attach the silencer she had also retrieved from the safe house.

It was then that Belle noticed another figure heading through the crowd towards her and the both robes he wore and the lightsaber in his hand marked him out as a Jedi. But then she noticed that he was using his powers for pushing people out of his way and she remembered what her younger sister Corlay had told her about the fallen Jedi that was kept confined on Moldas until it was felt that his skills were needed.

"Oh I've got a bad feeling about this." She said to herself right before a pulse wave blast from one of the remaining troopers blew a chunk out of the bridge's safety barrier close beside her.

"Try to take her alive!" Han's voice sounded out over the communication net and Belle saw the troopers let their rifles drop to their sides, held up by their slings and instead draw batons that expanded to about a metre in length with a flick of their wrists.

With bullets still remaining in her pistol Belle simply shot the first two troopers that came running onto the bridge before she too tossed aside her weapon and drew another, in her case a narrow-bladed knife that she thrust into the neck of the first trooper to get within arm's reach. In response the next trooper swung his baton at Belle, but she simply caught the other end of the weapon and jabbed her knife under his arm, pushing it into his chest through the hole in his armoured vest for his other arm.

A kick disabled the next trooper, dropping him to the ground screaming in pain and clutching at his ruined knee while her knife was then used to slice open the side of the final one, cutting across him just under the bottom of his body armour.

"Belle Shill. Put down your weapon." A stern sounding voice called out and Belle looked up to see Hargood now standing at the end of the bridge with his lightsaber glowing as he held it out beside him. Then Cal, Keana and Lara all arrived behind him and activated their lightsabers as well and all four of them stared at her.

"You'll never take me alive Jedi." She said, slipping a compact pulse wave blaster from her pocket.

"That's fine by me." Lara said before the noise of the engines from the transport overhead grew much louder and it descended at the other end of the bridge.

Belle turned to face the vehicle and she saw Han crouched in the side entrance aiming his semi automatic rifle directly at her.

There was a sudden sharp 'crack!' as the rifle fired and Belle jerked.

Pain.

Surprise.

Anger.

The four force users all felt Belle's reaction to the bullet impact and then saw her drop her weapon as she clutched at her chest and staggered backwards, hitting the bridge's safety barrier where it had been shot and she toppled over, falling backwards into the fast flowing water below.

"So you're just leaving then master?" Cal asked as he and Lara stood in what had been the operational command centre in the warehouse and watched the equipment being packed away.

"That is correct Jedi Udra." Master Karas replied, "There is nothing specific to keep us here now and there are matters elsewhere that require our attention."

"But what about Shill Security and the Founding Families?" Lara asked, "Aren't you going to do anything about them?" and Master Karas glared at her, "Sorry, aren't you going to do anything about them master?"

"And what would you suggest padawan?" Master Karas replied, "Without the opportunity to interrogate the late Belle Shill we cannot tie the rest of her family to her actions. Corlay and Erin will both be returned to duty if they wish, while the judge has refused to grant us permission to conduct any further search of Shill Security's offices."

"And what about the Founding Families master?" Cal asked.

"We have even less evidence against them." Master Karas said.

"But what about Lorna Fayl?" Lara asked, "She told us that—"

"Lorna Fayl is insane," Master Karas interrupted, "and I will not dedicate valuable resources on the basis of nothing but the ravings of a mad woman. Neither will you. I am telling you not to pursue any action against the Founding Families without good cause." And then he stared at Cal, "And that includes socialising with the wife of Erill Crassis."

"That is excellent advice Master Karas." Tarris added as he walked up to them, "However, I do not require your permission to take any action I deem necessary and so I will remain in this sector." And then he looked around, "I sense the influence of the Dark Side is growing. Kyle Jenner is still loose and the Founding Families may well be meddling with things that they do not understand. As a Jedi shadow I am honour bound to act."

Han Shill sat on the park bench and looked up at the night sky. Then he felt something cold against his throat and felt someone's breath against his head.

"You kriffing shot me." Belle hissed, "Do you have any idea how painful that was? I think you cracked a rib."

"Calm down Belle." Han replied, "Get that knife off me and sit down." And then he felt the knife blade pull away from his throat just before Belle sat beside on the bench, a hooded cloak concealing her features.

"I take it that it was worth it though?" she asked.

"Well it did feel good." Han replied, "I've wanted to shoot you quite a few times. Especially when we were kids."

Belle frowned.

"That's not funny." She said, "What if you'd killed me?"

"Oh like that was going to happen. Belle, I know you always wear that armoured vest under your clothes and I specifically picked a fragmenting round that couldn't penetrate it."

"And what now?" Belle asked.

"Now you need to keep a low profile." Han said, "The Republic have backed off for the time being and hopefully it will give us the time we need to finish things. After three hundred years Gayal Karn could just be the key we need to complete everything."

"And then we don't need to hide who we really are." Belle added with a smile.