

# STAR WARS

## TALES OF THE JEDI



### IV-IV: FRATRICIDE

BY STEPHEN J DUTTON



ELEVEN FAMILIES.  
TWELVE GENERATIONS.  
ONE EVIL.

**ELEVEN FAMILIES.  
TWELVE GENERATIONS.  
ONE EVIL.**

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...

**FRATRIGIDE**

VORN TORIN HAS NEVER BEEN HAPPY AS THE YOUNGER BROTHER TO CORVA TORIN, THE HEAD OF THEIR FAMILY. BUT NOW HE SENSES THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEIZE CONTROL EVEN IF THAT MEANS CORVA HAS TO DIE...

Original characters created and story written by Stephen J. Dutton.  
<http://thehazugfiles.uk/Index.html>

Star Wars is the intellectual property of Lucasfilm Ltd. This story is unofficial and Lucasfilm has not approved any of it.

# 1 .

"Vorn are you paying attention to me?" the image on the display screen asked as Vorn Torin stepped out of the pick up angle for the camera mounted on top of it.

"Yes, yes Corva, I'm listening." Vorn replied to the image of his older brother.

"Well it doesn't look like it." Corva said, "In fact it looks more like you're more interested in getting ready to go out."

"That's because I am, but I'm still listening. I can do both at once you know." Vorn said.

"So what did I just tell you to do?" Corva asked and Vorn sighed.

"You said you wanted me to check in with the Karns about their daughter Gayal."

"Good, yes and then I need you to meet us in the Tepillos system in four days time." Corva added and Vorn glared at the camera and scowled.

"Meet you?" he said, "Why can't I just tell you what they have to say? Not that they'll be saying anything."

"Because I'm the older brother Vorn and what I say goes." Corva told him, "Now right now the Druds are looking weak thanks to their failure to annul Gayal's marriage to Erill Crassis and the Karns are too distracted by it all to be doing anything. The Crassis family is in the ascendancy right now and thanks to our cousin being sector senator we've got an opportunity to get closer to them. We've got political power and they think they've got the key to finishing off everything our families have working towards for the past three hundred years. All you have to do is just do as I ask and stop screwing around for once." And then he shut off the communication link and left Vorn staring at a blank screen.

Dal Corun checked the chronometer on the wall behind the bar and frowned. His friend Vorn Torin of the famous Torin family should have been there half an hour ago and Dal was becoming irritated at having to pay for his own drinks. Then he spotted Vorn as the club's doormen stepped aside to let him in and he called out to him.

"Vorn! Over here!" he shouted and Vorn looked back at him and smiled.

It was then that Dal noticed Vorn was not alone. Just behind him was a young woman that Dal recognised as Sial Karn, the middle child of the Karn family and he searched the crowd for any signs of either of her two sisters. Dal and Vorn often used their antics as a form of entertainment, however on this occasion it seemed that Sial was the only one of them present.

"Dal, sorry I'm late." Vorn said as he arrived at the bar beside his friend, "Corva asked me to drop by the Karns on the way and that's where I found her." And he nodded towards Sial.

"Well you're just in time." Dal replied, "I was about to leave. I've gone and left my credit stick at home and I've just about exhausted the change in my pockets."

Vorn smiled and was just pulling his credit stick from his pocket when Sial put her purse on the bar.

"I'll get this one." She said and as she rummaged through her purse she added, "Consider it a thank you for getting me out of the house tonight." Then as she shook her purse in her hunt for her credit stick a compact slug thrower slid out onto the bar and clattered to the floor.

"Kriif Sial!" Vorn hissed as he quickly put his foot on the weapon, "What are you doing with that in there?"

"Its for protection of course." She replied, "Surely you guys must be carrying." And then Dal and Vorn looked at one another before both men opened their jackets to reveal larger handguns concealed beneath them.

"That's what shoulder holsters are for." Dal said as he closed his jacket while Vorn did the same and bent down to pick up Sial's gun before it was noticed by anyone else. Then he looked around again, "So you're on your own tonight then? Apart from us that is." He said.

"Yeah, mom and dad found Keera's latest false ID and took it." Sial replied, "Fortunately I don't need one any more so here I am."

"And what about Gayal?" Dal asked and behind Sial's back he noticed Vorn shaking his head.

"Where have you been?" Sial asked in reply, "Gayal got married."

"Married?" Dal exclaimed, "Who to?"

"Erill Crassis." Sial replied.

"Erill Crassis?" Dal repeated, "But isn't he like sixty years older than her?"

"About." Sial said, "Erill's daughter thinks that Gayal's after his money."

"Yeah, Charity even came out of seclusion to berate her father about it." Vorn added.

"Ah found it." Sial said as she produced her credits stick, "Now how much is a bottle of the best Corellian Whisky that this place has to offer?"

As Sial presented her identification to the bartender Dal took Vorn aside.

"So just to make sure I know what you're up to, are you hoping that her sister isn't the only one who prefers older men?" he asked.

"Hardly." Vorn replied, "I wouldn't say no of course, but she's hardly the sort to settle down with."

"Right then, where are we sitting?" Sial asked as she appeared next to the two men with a bottle of whisky in one hand and Vorn pointed to a table at the far side of the club.

"What shall we drink to?" Sial asked when each of them held a glass of whisky in their hands.

"How about to Vorn's brother letting him have at least some of the evening off?" Dal asked and he grinned at his friend who just frowned back at him briefly.

"Yes, what were you doing visiting my parents?" Sial asked, "You've never been one to want to hang around with them."

"Corva wants an update about Gayal." Vorn replied.

"Don't we all?" Dal added, "I wish I'd been told sooner."

"So why doesn't he just ask them himself?" Sial asked.

"What and pass up the opportunity to remind his little brother who's in charge of their family?" Dal commented and Sial looked at Vorn.

"Really? He gets you to run errands just because he's the older brother? I'd never let Gayal do that to me." She said.

"It's just because he's done nothing as head of our family." Vorn replied, "Even our cousin's managed more by becoming a senator."

"Yes, by beating some cousin of my mom's." Sial said, "Her and dad were really mad at me and Gayal about that. They said we caused Airia to win."

"Well between his brother and his cousin, Vorn here doesn't get much of a say in his family's goings on." Dal said.

"And look where it's got us." Vorn said, "Nowhere. Geth Torin would never have approved." He added, referring to the ancestor who had been the engineer aboard the original survey ship that had charted the Narthis Sector.

"That would be unfortunate." Sial said, "After all, according to rumour Geth Torin dealt with those who crossed him in a particularly permanent manner." And Dal smiled.

"Sial, the Karns are one of the Founding Families as well," he said, "so can you shed any light on what happened to Ban Hollinis? Vorn here doesn't like it when people ask him if Geth killed him."

"Would you?" Vorn asked, "Though I have to say that right now arranging accidents for annoying rivals seems like a very good idea."

"Then it must be time for another drink." Dal said, "It usually is."

"Usually is what?" Sial asked.

"Whenever Vorn starts plotting the demise of his family its time to pour him another drink." Dal said, "He does it every month or so. Every time Corva gives him another vital errand that could be done by a high school dropout, never mind someone who went to one of the sector's finest universities."

"But if Corva died wouldn't control of his family fall to his children?" Sial asked, looking at Vorn.

"Ha-ha." Dal commented, "You'd be being bossed about by your twelve year old nephew then." And Vorn frowned.

"Actually I'd be in control until he turned sixteen." Vorn replied and as he sipped at his drink he added, "Assuming he ever did."

"You wouldn't really do it though would you?" Sial asked Vorn, "I mean killing your brother and his children just to get control of your family?"

"Of course he wouldn't." Dal responded before Vorn could, "No matter how much he complains Vorn just doesn't have it in him to be that ruthless."

Vorn staggered slightly as he returned to his apartment. The evening at the club had come to an end when he and Dal had been forced to distract the security staff while Sial slipped away after having broken the nose of another woman that she had taken a disliking to.

"News." He said out loud and he sat down heavily on the couch as a large portion of the wall in front of him flickered and a large video screen showing a news broadcast replaced the featureless surface.

The images were of the planet Tepillos, formerly an affluent world now brought to its knees by decades of economic collapse and civil war. An old friend of Vorn's now lived on the planet, working to deliver much needed aid to those in need of it and Vorn himself had provided a great deal of money to his friend's cause. Through this friend Vorn had heard many tales of just how dangerous the planet could be and he was glad

that when he travelled there he got to stay in the Green Zone, the heavily fortified area under the direct control of the sizeable Republic military force stationed there for peacekeeping purposes.

*Vorn just doesn't have it in him to be so ruthless.*

Dal's words suddenly popped back into Vorn's head as he watched the footage of a group of white armoured Republic soldiers establishing a cordon around the remains of a building that had been destroyed by an insurgent's bomb.

Tepillos is a very dangerous place, he thought to himself. Then, Corva will be on Tepillos in four days. Slowly a plan began to form in Vorn's mind and by the time he was finished he knew that in less than a week he would be the head of his family and he would be the one giving the orders.

## 2.

Though she was not the head of the Torin family, Airia Torin lived in a manner that befitted a Republic senator and Vorn had to stop his speeder at a security checkpoint at the main gate to the mansion when he arrived there early the next morning.

"Vorn." He said to the guard who approached his vehicle. Shill Security provided the guards, a private military company that had provided all of the Founding Families' security needs for the past twenty years. It was only a few weeks earlier that this had changed when the Crassis family instead hired its own force of mandalorian mercenaries to protect them. As a result of this long standing arrangement all Shill Security agents were taught to recognise senior members of the Founding Families and members of the family they protected in particular.

"We don't need to see his identification." The guard told his comrades and then he waved Vorn through the gates, "Move along, move along." And Vorn drove towards the house.

"Good morning Mister Torin sir." A GG-series hospitality droid said as it walked down the steps in front of the mansion to meet Vorn when he got out of his speeder, "The senator has been informed of your arrival and will see you shortly."

Vorn frowned, technically he was senior in the family hierarchy to his cousin Airia, but she was the one making him wait.

Not for much longer, he thought to himself.

"Can I least get something to drink Genie?" he asked.

"Of course sir. Please come this way." The droid replied and then it led him to a lounge where there was already a bottle of liquor and a pair of glasses placed on a table. Vorn poured himself a glass and sat down to wait while the droid left the room.

"The senator will see you now sir." Genie's voice called out from the doorway and Vorn got to his feet as his cousin followed the droid into the lounge.

"A bit early for that isn't it?" Airia said with a frown when she saw the drink in his hand.

"Ah, well you were busy and Genie was so eager to make me feel at home." Vorn replied.

"Yes, she can be a little too welcoming at times." Airia replied as she wandered to the table and picked up the bottle to pour herself a drink as well, "Stang Vorn! How much have you had?" she asked when she saw the amount that remained.

"I can handle it." He replied rather than tell her how he had in fact poured a significant amount of the very expensive drink into a plant pot, "It's not like you pay for it anyway. You get it on your senatorial expense account."

"Yes, democracy does have its plus points." Airia said, "Now what do you want Vorn?"

"I'm not keeping you from anything am I?" Vorn asked.

"I'm reviewing petitions from constituents." She answered.

"So no then."

"No. They're all pointless and dull." Airia said, "Now answer my question. What do you want?"

"It's what Corva wants really." Vorn replied.

"Of course it is. He couldn't ask me himself so he sends his little brother instead. So tell me cousin, what does the esteemed head of our family want from me, a mere Republic senator?"

"Operational deployment plans for the Republic garrison on Tepillos and access codes for the planetary defence net."

"Kriff Vorn!" Airia snapped, "What the hell does he want those for? You do realise that that's all highly classified data?"

"If it wasn't then I, I mean he wouldn't have asked me to come to you for it." Vorn replied.

"But what does he want it for?" Airia asked again.

"Because our people on Tepillos have found a haul of sith artefacts and Corva wants to get them, off world without the Republic or jedi finding out." Vorn explained.

"So call that smuggler. Ren Distler's moved plenty of artefacts for us." Airia replied but Vorn shook his head.

"Corva also doesn't want any of the other families finding out just yet." He said and Airia frowned.

"So we're keeping secrets from them as well? Right now that doesn't seem terribly wise. After what the Crassis family just pulled-"

"It's because of what the Crassis family did." Vorn interrupted, "Corva wants to be able to get us closer to them. He thinks that the combination of your office and their having a Force sensitive in the form of Gayal



Karn means that we can dominate the others when the time comes. Which may be soon, you know that. So we need to move quickly if we're going to present the artefacts to Erill Crassis before the others even know we have them."

"So how does he plan to get them off Tepillos?" Airia asked, "Even knowing where the Republic's forces are going to be, someone is going to notice you loading up a starship."

"Not if you land it outside the Green Zone." Vorn said.

"Outside the Green Zone? But that's crazy! For Corva to set down anywhere as dangerous as that is bound to draw attention." Airia exclaimed.

"Not when he's delivering emergency aid to a recognised relief organisation." Vorn said.

"Ah, your friend Jondo."

"Yes, Jondo. We'll offload some supplies to him and then we'll use the same crew to load the artefacts.

Those people are so desperate that they won't tell anyone about what they did just in case nobody will hire them again. They won't even talk about it with Jondo just in case Lynn finds out." Vorn explained.

"Lynn? Oh yes, that's Jondo's girlfriend isn't it?" Airia asked.

"The very same." Vorn answered, "Fortunately she hates us. She sees plots by the Founding Families behind everything. Jondo's never told her that I've been funding a large part of his operation for years. So do I get the information or not?"

Airia frowned.

"Follow me." Airia said and she led Vorn out of the lounge and through to the room that served as her office. It was instantly recognisable by all the trappings of patriotism that decorated it, the flag of the republic stood in one corner while a copy of the seal was emblazoned on the front of her desk. Finally the walls were decorated with images of Airia with influential people not only from the Narthis Sector, but also in the higher echelons of the Republic. Most prominent among these was a picture of her standing beside the Supreme Chancellor himself.

Airia sat at her desk and immediately a holographic display activated in front of her.

"Stay over there and don't say anything." She told Vorn, "If the Colonel knows you're here he won't give me anything." And then as Vorn headed for a seat at the far side of the room Airia activated her encrypted official communication system.

The image of a woman in a Republic army uniform appeared on the display, floating over Airia's desk.

"Yes senator?" she said.

"I need to speak with Colonel Jeck." Airia replied, avoiding eye contact with the soldier as a way of suggesting that she did not see her as worth her time dealing with.

"I'll have to see if-" the woman began.

"Now." Airia interrupted.

"Yes senator." The woman replied and for a few seconds the display changed to a military emblem as the call was transferred.

"Yes senator?" the image of Colonel Jeck said as the image changed again, now showing the bald headed officer, "And if you don't mind I'm rather busy."

"Of course colonel, I'll make this quick." Airia said, now looking directly at the display, "I need a copy of your deployment schedule for the next two weeks and the access codes for the Tepillos defence net."

Colonel Jeck frowned.

"May I ask why senator?" he said.

"I've been asked to prepare a report for the Republic's Defence Oversight Committee." Airia lied, "They want to know how effective your force is at meeting its goals."

The image of Colonel Jeck hesitated.

"Is there a problem with my instructions colonel?" Airia asked.

"The information you have requested is classified senator." Colonel Jeck replied.

"Are you saying that the committee cannot be trusted colonel? Or is it me perhaps?"

"Of course not senator. But if may be allowed to suggest an alternative, I could provide you with schedules for deployments already completed."

"No colonel, the committee has specifically asked for the schedules for the upcoming two weeks and that is what you will supply me with." Airia said sternly, glaring at the floating image.

"But what do they need with the defence codes?" the colonel asked.

"Colonel Jeck, the Defence Oversight Committee does not answer to you. On the other hand you can be summoned before the committee to answer before it. Which I guarantee will happen if you do not give me what I am asking for promptly. Now I find you lack of compliance disturbing colonel and I assure you that the committee is not as forgiving as I am. In other words, just do it colonel." Airia said and she terminated the connection, "There," she said to Vorn, "that should do it."

"Do what?" Vorn asked in response, "He didn't give you anything you asked for." And Airia smiled. "Ah but my dear cousin, he will. You just don't have the experience in dealing with low-level functionaries. Colonel Jeck will give me absolutely everything we want. He's far too loyal to the Republic to do anything else." She said and then her computer chimed to indicate that she had received a message on an official channel, "And here it is." She said, bringing up a list of messages and pointing to the one that had just arrived from Tepillos. Then she plugged a mem-stik into the computer and copied the information to it. "Thank you." Vorn said as he caught the mem-stik Airia tossed to him, "You've done a great service to our family."

"That would sound so much more impressive if Corva could tell me himself every so often." Airia responded.

Back at his apartment Vorn looked at the mem-stik and smiled. Eliminating his older brother Corva was straight forward, Vorn could do it any time he wanted simply by destroying the space yacht he and his wife spent their time wandering the sector in but getting away with it was another matter and the data on the mem-stik would allow him to do just that. Knowing exactly where the Republic troops would be deployed would allow him to plan the attack as far from them as possible, while having access to the Tepillos planetary defence net would mean that he could fool the planetary sensors into not registering the approach of his brother's ship. That way no one would notice if it failed to take off again. Of course he still needed to get his older brother to where he could be killed. Right now there was no indication that Corva would be landing anywhere other than in the Green Zone that was swarming with Republic troops. Setting the mem-stik down without examining its contents he activated his personal subspace transceiver and sat down on the couch.

"Come on big brother, where are you?" he said as the large wall mounted screen switched on. The screen then showed an image of a red-haired woman. This was Deesa Torin, Corva's wife.

"What do you want Vorn?" she asked.

"Dee, I need to speak to Corva." Vorn replied.

"He's asleep Vorn. So was I." Deesa said, "We're about nine hours behind you."

"Well he'll want to be woken up for this." Vorn said, "It's about Tepillos and it's important."

Deesa sighed.

"I'll go get him." she said and she vanished from the image. Moments later Corva appeared in her place.

"What's wrong Vorn?" he asked.

"Nothing." Vorn replied, "Not unless you think there's a problem with us getting hold of a genuine book of sith teachings for next to nothing."

"You're kidding." Corva exclaimed, "How?" and Vorn grinned.

"My old friend Jondo on Tepillos." He said, "One of the down and outs he helps out with that girlfriend of his wandered in to his office with it."

"He doesn't know what it is does he?" Corva said, "Because we can't allow him to—"

"Don't worry, he doesn't have a clue. Hardly anyone can even recognise the sith language, let alone read it and he isn't one of them. But he does know that I'm interested in curiosities like that and so he offered to exchange it for some relief supplies. Say fifty tonnes. I figured that since we'll be on Tepillos anyway we might as well make some grand gesture. But there is just one small problem."

"Oh I've got a bad feeling about this." Corva said, "Go on, tell me."

"Well there's no way that he'll be able to get the book into the Green Zone. There's a whole load of metal decorating the cover apparently so the guards would spot it in an instant." Vorn explained.

"And all it takes is one to run a check on any symbols to realise that it's contraband." Corva added, "So what are you planning?"

"Easy, you'll just have to land outside the Green Zone." Vorn said and Corva gasped.

"Are you insane!" he snapped, "I'm not landing outside the Green Zone. Luke and Salla Crassis tried just flying over the city outside it and almost got killed."

"Think about what we could have here Corva." Vorn said, "You want to impress Erill Crassis without alerting any of the others and I'm telling you that there's a sith book that right now no-one but us knows about. If we tell Erill we've got a translation then he's bound to want Gayal to take a look at it. That gives you influence Corva, more than just our cousin being senator. After all Airia could try and cut us out if she wanted to. Anyway, don't you have some of Han Shill's people aboard? If it really worries you I'll make sure that there's more waiting when you land. Trust me Corva, you'll not come to any harm."

"We're in the Teras system right now." Corva said, "There's nowhere here that can supply us with what we need in the timescale I want to work on."

"You'll be coming via Aurek Station right?" Vorn asked.

"Of course, I'm not risking looping round outside Republic space."



"Then I'll arrange for a shipment of relief supplies to be waiting for you there. Does two days sound okay?"  
"That should be perfect." Corva said, "But you'll need to head to Tepillos earlier than planned to arrange a safe landing place."  
"I know. I'm going to leave just as soon as I've sorted out the supplies." Vorn said, "And I'll see you in three days."

Corva Torin continued to stare at the screen even after the link to his brother on Crassis Major was severed and he smiled.

"Good news then?" Deesa asked from the hatchway.

"Potentially." Corva replied.

"Something's bothering you isn't it?" Deesa said, leaning over her husband from behind his chair and wrapping her arms around him.

"It's Vorn." Corva said, "I've never known him this eager to help. I'm trying to figure out what he could be up to."

"Oh you know your brother." Deesa said, "There's probably money in it for him somewhere." And then she kissed her husband on the cheek, "Or maybe your good nature is rubbing off on him at last."

Corva frowned.

"On Vorn?" he said, "I doubt it."

"Yeah I know, it sounded stupid the moment I said it. But what can you do about it?"

"Well for a start I'm not going to trust our security to him. I'll speak to Han about having a few more men on hand just in case." Corva replied.

### 3.

Vorn landed his personal starfighter at a small landing strip that catered mainly to atmospheric craft. By flying himself here rather than taking a commercial flight he had been able to test out the access codes he had obtained from Airia. Before the planetary defence network had had chance to register the presence of his vessel Vorn had instructed it to simply ignore him and the result was that he had not been contacted by air traffic control at all on his way down. As far as the Republic was concerned, Vorn Torin was not on Tepillos.

With more of his plan falling into place, Vorn still needed to find someone that he could rely on to actually carry out the attack on his brother. As much as Vorn relished the idea of killing him personally, the risk of him being injured or killed himself was too great and so he planned to let someone else take the risk in his place. Luckily for Vorn, Tepillos was a very violent planet. Despite the presence of thousands of Republic troops dozens, if not hundreds of armed insurgent groups existed across the planet and for some of these the only ideology they followed was that of personal profit. Unfortunately however, Vorn had no idea how to contact any of them. On the other hand he knew someone who did and now he was going to pay him a visit.

Jondo Veltros had spoken of his charitable activities on Tepillos to Vorn on many occasions and in a rare instance of altruism Vorn had not only agreed to supply funds to his friend's group but also put him in touch with other members of the Founding Families. All this meant that Jondo was heavily indebted to him. The only problem came in the form of Jondo's intermittent girlfriend Lynn Kerr. What Vorn had told Airia about her hating the Founding Families for pretty much anything she could was entirely true, meaning that the pragmatic Jondo had no choice but to conceal the sources of the funding he always seemed to be able to come up with. This meant that for Vorn to simply wander into the former hotel that Jondo and Lynn used as their base of operations would be unwise in the extreme, Lynn would never allow his presence on the planet to remain a secret.

This left Vorn with having to wait for Jondo to come out of the building without Lynn. Fortunately Jondo often left the relative safety of the old hotel to deliver aid to those who could not make it to the building for help and he often travelled alone. Vorn waited in a rented speeder, an old and battered vehicle that would not stand out and was a far cry from the luxury sport models he typically drove on Crassis Major. If anyone noticed him waiting down the road from the old hotel building then none of them said anything about it, though Vorn was ready with his blaster should anyone decide that he was a tempting target for a robbery. Vorn sat up suddenly when he heard the sound of a heavy-duty repulsorlift engine and a repulsortruck exited the hotel's parking lot, the markings on its sides identifying it as an aid vehicle. Most importantly Vorn saw that sat in the driver's seat was his friend Jondo and Vorn started up his own speeder.

Vorn followed the truck as it headed towards the Green Zone and it occurred to him that Jondo could be on his way to collect a supply shipment and he berated himself for not having contacted Jondo before coming to meet with him. But just as it looked as if Jondo was about to drive up to one of the security checkpoints surrounding the Green Zone the truck instead turned away from it, instead heading towards one of the local residential districts.

The truck came to a stop near a market place and Jondo got out along with a second individual, a member of the almost human looking vultan species who had had a mass of cartilage in place of the hair on his head. Both figures wore brightly coloured vests that made them stand out even as a crowd began to gather around the truck and Vorn noticed that these vests looked to be armoured. Obviously Jondo did not consider his status as an aid worker as sufficient protection against attack here on Tepillos.

Putting on a hat and a pair of sunglasses to conceal his features, Vorn got out of his speeder and made his way towards the gathering crowd. As he walked towards them he saw Jondo and the vultan open up the back of the truck and the vultan climbed up inside the vehicle so that he could pass its contents to Jondo. In turn Jondo began to hand out packages to everyone around him. People all around Vorn tried to push their way closer to the truck and Vorn felt someone pressing up against him. Cautiously he glanced down to see a scrawny looking man dipping his hand into one of Vorn's pockets.

"Looking for this?" Vorn hissed as he jabbed the muzzle of his blaster into the man's ribs and the would-be pickpocket gasped. Under normal circumstances Vorn would simply have shot the man and left his body in the street. However, such an action would undoubtedly trigger a panic and Vorn did not want to be caught in the middle of a panicking crowd. So for now at least the pickpocket would get to live.

"I – I didn't-" the man stammered.

"Just get out of here." Vorn said, snarling and as the pickpocket turned and fled a smile spread across his face.

Then he heard groans coming from the direction of the truck.

"No more." Jondo said, "That's all we have for today."

"You're lying! There's more in the truck." A voice cried out from the front of the crowd.

"That's medicine for the hospital." The vultan replied.

"No it's food! Give it to us!" the same man yelled and from under his clothing he produced a metal bar that he raised above his head.

"Get back!" Jondo snapped, producing a weapon of his own but in this case it was a small slug pistol that he pointed directly at the man with the bar. Instantly the man halted and lowered his weapon before backing away, "Close it up." Jondo told the vultan as the rest of the crowd began to disperse as well.

"So would you have shot that guy?" Vorn said when enough of the crowd had left to allow him to walk right up to Jondo and his friend smiled, recognising him behind his glasses and hat.

"I don't know. So far I've never been pushed as far as pulling the trigger." Jondo answered as he returned the weapon to its holster. Then he looked Vorn in the face, "So what brings you out here unannounced?"

"I need a favour." Vorn replied, "I've got a job needs doing and I think you can help me out with it. I need some people.

"Look, we've hardly got any staff and if Lynn found out I was letting you-" Jondo began.

"No." Vorn interrupted, "I'm not interested in your people. The sorts of people I need aren't those who do charitable work. I need to know how to get in touch with one of the insurgent groups operating here. One that's more interested in money than any sort of ideology."

"You mean criminals masquerading as revolutionaries?" Jondo asked, "Why on Coruscant would you want anything to do with them?"

"Because I have a job that needs doing and I don't want my workers asking any awkward questions." Vorn replied.

"You mean like 'Is this even legal?'" Jondo said.

"What, don't you think that some people are just waiting for an opportunity to do an honest day's work?" Vorn asked.

"Yes. But I've got a bad feeling that what you're talking about is anything but legal." Jondo answered.

"I'll pay." Vorn said, "A nice big donation to your little operation here. How does two hundred thousand credits sound?" and he held out a credit stick, "Or perhaps I could ask Lynn instead." He added.

"Stay the kriff away from her!" Jondo hissed as he snatched the credit stick from Vorn. Then he waved it out in front of him, "This better be good." He said.

"Have I ever let you down?" Vorn asked and Jondo frowned.

"No." he admitted.

"In fact I'd say that I've been exceedingly helpful over the years. My name has opened doors to you Jondo and now I'm calling in the favour."

"I've taken your money haven't I?" Jondo replied, "I'll get you a name by tonight. Someone that won't ask you any bothersome questions or try to take you hostage instead. Where are you staying?"

"There's a landing field in a settlement about ten kilometres south of here." Vorn said, "I've got a room there." And Jondo's eyes widened.

"You mean you're not even staying in the Green Zone? Oh now I know you're up to no good. This better not come back on me." He said.

"Hey, it's me." Vorn said before he returned to his speeder.

As he started up the vehicle he spotted a familiar figure walking away from him, it was the pickpocket and a smile spread across his face. The worthless fool had attempted to rob Vorn, a member of one of the Founding Families and if not for Vorn's desire to keep a low profile he would have handed out the punishment that the man deserved. Now though there was much less of a crowd.

Vorn set off at a slow crawl, keeping the pickpocket in sight. Then when the man rounded a corner Vorn accelerated slightly to make sure that he did not escape. Turning the corner Vorn saw that this street was empty and he knew that this was his chance. He pressed down on the accelerator and the speeder lurched forwards, gaining speed. Hearing the sudden increase in the engine noise the pickpocket turned around and his jaw dropped when he saw the landspeeder hurtling towards him he turned again and tried to run. But the speeder was already travelling too fast and the battered vehicle slammed into the pickpocket, sending him bouncing over the top of the vehicle until he landed heavily on the ground behind it. Vorn braked and looked out of the rear window to see the pickpocket lying motionless on the ground. It was of course possible that he was merely injured, but given the response time and general quality of the medical services on Tepillos injured was as good as dead and so after taking one last look around to make sure that there had been no witnesses Vorn drove away, heading back towards his rented room.



## 4.

One thing that Vorn noticed about the differences between Crassis Major and Tepillos was the women. On Crassis Major he could easily find himself paying over ten thousand credits for a good one that would do exactly as he wanted, but here on war torn Tepillos he spend just a fraction of that and get several who were extremely eager to earn it.

As it happened there were three of them asleep in Vorn's bed when he heard the sound of a heavy-duty repulsorlift engine in the courtyard outside and he went to the window to investigate. Sure enough he saw Jondo get out and head into the building. In preparation for Jondo coming up to his room Vorn picked up his trousers from the floor and put them on. He was just about to add a shirt when there was a knock at his door. Just in case there was someone else in addition to Jondo outside he picked up his blaster before he answered the door.

"Jondo come in." he said, nodding his head into the room.

"Thanks I-" Jondo replied, stopping mid sentence when he saw the three women. One of them opened her eyes and sat up, holding the sheets over her body.

"Who's your cute friend?" she asked Vorn.

"Never mind now." Vorn replied, "Just wait there."

"Whatever." She said as she lay back down again.

"How old are they?" Jondo asked quietly, frowning as he noticed how young all three women looked.

"You know it may sound strange but I don't normally check IDs." Vorn replied, "Now do you have what I asked for?"

"Sure." Jondo answered and he held out a sheet of folded paper. Vorn took it and unfolded it.

"I don't see a name." He said as he read the address Jondo had written down.

"These people don't do names." Jondo replied, "To be honest I can't even guarantee that they'll be willing to help you with whatever it is you're up to."

"But I can definitely find them here right?" Vorn aside and he held up the paper.

"Yes." Jondo said, nodding, "Every now and again we get someone in looking for medical help who's run across that lot. Sometimes they've been poisoned by some drug they've been sold by them and other times they've been targeted for reprisal for something. Other times people were just in the wrong place at the wrong time and got caught in the crossfire. But they all agree that this group aren't interested in political power."

"Thanks." Vorn said and then he looked round to the bed, "You know," he added, "if you've got time then I'm sure there's an extra room available here. You can borrow one of them for a while if you want." And then he called out to the young women in his bed, "Come on ladies, line up so my friend can take his pick."

"No!" Jondo exclaimed, "Look, I'll be in trouble enough if Lynn suspects I've been talking to you. I'm not even going to think about how she'd react if I spent the night with one of."

"Your loss." Vorn replied with a shrug, "Anyway, thanks for this and if it all works out I'll see that you get a nice bonus. Trust me I'll have plenty."

"Compared to most people you already do." Jondo said and then he looked towards the bed again, "Of a lot of things." And then he waved briefly before turning around and walking off down the hallway. Closing the door behind him, Vorn turned around and grinned at the three women.

"Well what are you waiting for?" he asked, "Line up ladies, I want to pick out which of you is next."

The address provided by Jondo led Vorn to a surprisingly tidy area of the city. None of the vacant buildings appeared to have been ransacked or burned down and Vorn guessed that this meant that the insurgents he was hunting for had scared off other criminals with the threat of reprisal, either genuine or merely implied by their presence. In either case it was looking to Vorn as if the information from Jondo was good.

The precise address was located down a street too narrow for Vorn's speeder so he was forced to leave the vehicle on the main road nearby. However, given the state of the neighbourhood he was not overly concerned that he would return to find it stolen. Now on foot, he then proceeded down the alleyway until he reached a door marked only with a number that matched the address he was looking for and he stopped to knock.

The door began to slid sideways, but it halted after just a few centimetres and Vorn saw a woman peering out through the gap.

"Who are you? What do you want?" she asked.

"My name's Vorn. I have a job needs doing and I was told that there are people here looking for paid work."

"We have jobs. Go away." The woman said and she was just about to close the door when Vorn held up a roll of bank notes.

"I bet mine pays better." He said and then the woman stepped back from the door, vanishing into the gloom on the other side. Then the door slid fully open and two men stepped out. One grabbed hold of the money and snatched it away from Vorn while the second grabbed Vorn himself and shoved him through the open doorway.

"Looks real." The man who had taken the money said to the woman, "I'd say about five or six grand."

"Ten actually." Vorn said as the second man lifted his arms to search him, "There are some bigger values in the middle.

"He's carrying." The man said, pulling first Vorn's pulse wave blaster and then his vibroblade from where he concealed them.

"Tepillos is a dangerous place." Vorn said.

"Not around here it isn't." the woman replied as she took the money and flipped through the notes, looking for any obvious forgeries and also to check whether Vorn was telling the truth about there being larger denomination notes mixed in with the more prominent ones. Then she nodded to the two men, "Okay take him to the boss." She said.

"You heard the lady." The one who had just searched Vorn said and he shoved him forwards before both men took hold of his arms and pulled him towards another doorway. Behind them the woman followed. The doorway led into a large room that contained several tables. On each of these was the evidence of some illegal activity; one was piled high with packages of pills that Vorn guessed were not licensed medication while another had numerous weapons lined up on it.

"Mister Strill, someone to see you." The woman called out and an older man turned to face them, "He had this." She added as she walked up to the older man she had addressed as Strill and handed him the cash, "He was armed as well."

"This is a lot of money to be carrying." Strill said, "More than anyone local would carry. Plus those clothes don't look local either. They're too new and clean."

"He says he's come to offer us a job." The woman told Strill.

"I work for myself." Strill responded, looking directly at Vorn.

"Then consider me a customer rather than an employer." Vorn said, "I wish to hire the services of you and your people."

"To do what?" Strill said, but before Vorn could reply he tucked the money into his pocket and added, "No wait, don't bother. I'm not interested." Then he looked at one of the men holding Vorn, "Take him away and deal with him. I don't want him bothering us again."

"Yes Mister Strill." One said and Vorn felt the two of them pull at him.

Knowing that they intended to kill him, Vorn acted. Over the years he had honed his combat skills both by formal tuition by members of Shill Security and also somewhat less officially but no less effectively in various street brawls he had been involved in and so he knew just what to do.

First he thrust an elbow back into the stomach of one of the men holding him, forcing the man not only to double over in pain but also to release his grip. With his hand then free Vorn struck at the second man holding him before he could react by striking him in his throat. The blow was not quite as hard as Vorn had hoped for and rather than collapsing the man's airway it only made him also let go of Vorn as he staggered backwards, lifting his hands to instinctively grasp at his neck. Seeing his weapons sticking out of the man's waistband Vorn reached out with both hands and grabbed hold of them. As he took hold of the vibroblade's grip in one hand he flicked the activation switch and in addition to the high pitched whine of the blade in motion there was a sudden shriek from the man as it sliced into him. Vorn pulled on both weapons, dragging the still active vibroblade upwards so that it sliced open the man's torso as far as the bottom of his ribcage. As the man collapsed into a pool of his own blood and entrails Vorn jumped aside just in time to avoid a shotgun blast fired by one of Strill's bodyguards. Using the tables for cover Vorn darted closer to Strill and fired his blaster. He did not aim at any of the armed insurgents in particular, instead just firing as rapidly as he could to force his opponents to cease fire on him and take cover. The ruse worked and the insurgents' gunfire came to a halt.

Seeing his opportunity Vorn leapt over the table he was using for cover and landed right in front of Strill and the woman who had brought him here. Vorn kicked the woman in the face, producing a 'crunch' and sending her flying backwards before he dropped to knees beside Strill and held out both his weapons towards him.

"I've a blade at your throat and a blaster to your head." Vorn said sternly, "So are you going to come and work for me or do I need to ask your successor?"

Strill smiled nervously.



"I believe we can negotiate." He said before he gave a wave and the other insurgents in the room relaxed, lowering their weapons and standing up in the open. Slowly both Strill and Vorn got to their feet as well, Vorn keeping his blaster held against Strill, "So what do you want us to do?" Strill asked.

"I need you to kill a man. Well, a man and those around him." Vorn said and Strill moved his eyes to look around without moving his head and risking having it cut or blasted off.

"I'd say you're pretty good at that yourself." He said.

"For this job my hands need to remain clean." Vorn said.

"So who's the target?" Strill asked.

"Have you ever heard of the Torin family?" Vorn asked in reply.

"Of course, who hasn't?" Strill responded.

"Good." Vorn said, "Because you're going to kill its head for me."

"That's impossible. All of the Founding Families are surrounded by impenetrable security." Strill said as Vorn returned his vibroblade to its sheath and lowered his blaster, though this second weapon remained in his hand just in case any of the insurgents tried anything.

Vorn shook his head slowly.

"No it isn't." he said, "Not when you know how to lure them here to Tepillos with only a handful of bodyguards and outside the Green Zone."

"Someone did come close to taking down some of the Crassis family a year or so ago." One of Strill's men pointed out.

"Yeah, another agreed. It took the intervention of the jedi to get them back." Another added.

"And I assure you, the jedi won't be coming to help Corva Torin." Vorn said.

"Supposing we do this." Strill said to Vorn, "Then what? What do you get out of this?"

"Respect." Vorn said, "Plus wealth. Wealth that will make the money I'll be paying you look like pocket change."

"And how much would that be?" Strill asked.

"Oh I think a million credits has a nice ring to it, don't you?" Vorn replied and Strill could not conceal his shock.

"A – A million." He stammered.

"In cash or goods." Vorn said, "I think you'll find that I can obtain some items that you'd find particularly useful but don't have access to. Blasters for example, the latest military specification, not pulse waves like this one." And he held up his blaster.

"A million credits sounds pretty good to me boss." The woman said.

"It sounds like your subordinates are ready to agree." Vorn said, staring at Strill, "So what do you say?"

"We're in." Strill replied, "But there's one more thing I need to know."

"Go on." Vorn said.

"I like to know who I'm working with. So who are you?" Strill asked.

"The name's Vorn. Vorn Torin."

## 5.

Vorn couldn't have his brother's starship landing at any of the regular starports. Even those outside the Green Zone maintained at least a basic level of security, plus of course their communication equipment could be used to alert the Republic's peacekeeping forces. However, prior to the start of the civil war on Tepillos it had been an advanced urban world just like Crassis Major, in fact it had been considered second only to that world in its importance to the sector. That meant that there had once been many other places where starships could land and many of those still existed. Private shipping companies and wealthy individuals who owned their own starships had all maintained private landing sites for their own use away from crowded commercial starports. Plus there had been government-operated facilities that allowed senior government officers and the military to operate according to their own schedules. Since the civil war practically all of these had become defunct. Most business had moved off world when the fighting started and even now only a limited amount was returning, while those individuals who had owned their own starships had used them to flee to safer worlds and abandoned their homes here. Meanwhile the government had lost almost all need for its own starports, its ministers made use of the Republic facilities in the Green Zone and there was no longer a standing military that required air support or transport. Now Vorn had Strill's men investigating as many of these places as they could, searching for one that was as far as possible from any Republic help and that could still be used to handle a starship.

The solution came in the form of an old search and rescue station located a considerable distance outside the capital city. Though this had been designed only to handle atmospheric craft its size meant that it could just about allow an Empress Teta-class space yacht like the one Corva Torin owned to land there. Another bonus was the presence of transmission equipment that had been long forgotten about. By plugging a portable computer that had been pre-loaded with the defence access codes into this Vorn found himself able to see exactly what the Republic military was seeing.

"Mind telling me how even you managed to get hold of those codes?" Strill asked as he peered over Vorn's shoulder at the computer display, "Somehow I doubt that even you have the influence to obtain them from the military."

"Quite true." Vorn replied, "Even when I take over the family I won't have that sort of pull. Fortunately though, I know someone who does." Then he pointed to a dot on the defence net's sensor readouts, just beyond the atmosphere of Tepillos, "That's them." He said and he tapped at the keyboard.

"What are you doing?" Strill asked.

"Just watch that sensor blip." Vorn said and as he typed the dot suddenly vanished.

"What happened?" Strill asked, leaning closer to the display and frowning.

"I told the defence net to ignore the return associated with the transponder from my brother's starship." Vorn told him, "Even if a controller was looking right at the screen when it happened they'll just assume that his ship moved back out of sensor range. Now I just need to use our antenna to let Corva know to land here." And Vorn reached out for a microphone that was connected to the antenna, "Corva? Corva are you there?" he transmitted on the frequency that the Torin family used for private communication.

"Vorn at last." Corva's voice responded, "We were just starting to wonder whether something had happened to you."

"Oh I'm fine, we're all fine here. How are you?"

"Growing impatient Vorn." Corva said sternly.

"Well you'll be glad to know that the planetary defence network is ignoring you and we've found you a nice private spot to touch down at. Just follow this transmission and it'll lead you right to us."

"Copy that Vorn, we've isolated your signal and should be with you in five minutes. Corva out." And then the channel went silent.

Vorn set the microphone down, but left the transmitter active so that Corva could find the landing site.

Turning back to his computer he accessed the planetary defence net again.

"What are you doing now?" Strill asked.

"Removing my ship from the sensor logs and programming the defence network to ignore it just like my brother's ship." Vorn replied, "When the Republic eventually finds out what's happened here I'd rather they didn't know that I was here at the time. Now go tell your men to get ready. Corva could be here at any moment."

Corva looked at his wife after ending the communication with Vorn.

"Any idea what he's got planned yet?" Deesa asked.

"Nothing." Corva answered, "But those landing co-ordinates are well outside the Green Zone."  
"Well then," Deesa added with a smile, "it's a good job that Han sent us those extra men you asked for."  
"Yes it is." Corva replied, smiling back at his wife, "Now hang on, I'm taking us down."

The first indication that Corva's ship was approaching was the sound of its repulsorlift engines from high overhead. The woman who had answered the door to Vorn at the gang's hideout stood at the edge of the landing zone along with a trio of large men, none of who were visibly armed but all carried compact handguns under their clothing. These four people all looked skywards when they heard the approach of the starship, searching for it amongst the clouds.

"Is that it?" one of the men asked.

"I think so." The woman replied and she touched the earpiece connected to her point to point communicator, "I think they're here Mister Strill." She said.

"Good. Do you remember what to do?" Strill responded.

"Yeah, I remember. When Corva Torin comes out of the ship we shoot him and rush the entrance. We hold there to keep the ship on the ground and the door open for the others to move in and clear it."

"Good." Strill said, "Now keep comms silent unless there's an emergency." Then the channel went quiet and from their vantage point in the control room both Strill and Vorn looked out over the landing area.

"I see them." Vorn said and then he backed away from the window, wanting to keep out of sight of his brother if possible.

Outside Strill's people waited as the space yacht came in to land, rotating so that its access ramp faced this welcoming party and all of them held up their arms to protect their faces as the down blast from the repulsorlift engines threw small pieces of debris from the unmaintained landing pad into the air.

Moments after the ship touched down the sound of the engines began to subside and there was a hiss as the access ramp opened.

"Get ready." The woman whispered, but when four figures came walking down the ramp not one of them matched the image of Corva Torin that Vorn had shown to Strill and his gang. Instead all four were muscular men who wore prominent armoured vests marked with the logo of Shill Security. In addition all four were openly armed, two with just sidearms while the other two also carried rifles held so that they were not aimed at anyone but so that they could be quickly brought into use.

"Where is Vorn Torin?" one of the security agents demanded as he looked around.

"Where is Corva Torin?" the woman responded.

"Safe aboard his ship." The security agent replied, "Which is right where he will remain until we have the item and are ready to leave. I presume you are the loading crew? I was expecting more of you."

"They're on their way and I was told to expect Corva Torin." The woman replied.

Remaining back from the window to conceal his presence, Vorn watched as Strill and Corva's people talked, neither side willing to give way.

"I've got a bad feeling about this." Strill said, "Four guards. Isn't that what you said was his entire compliment?"

"It is normally." Vorn replied, "Perhaps he's suspicious. He could have added some more."

"How many more?" Strill asked and Vorn shrugged.

"That ship is designed to hold seven in luxury, but Corva's downgraded some of the cabins for his security and service staff. They travel three to a room. If he's reworked the entire ship without telling me then he could have easily added a dozen more."

"So we could be facing up to sixteen?" Strill exclaimed, "Oh kriff. Why couldn't you think of this poodoo earlier?"

"Never mind." Vorn replied, "Tell your people down there to get my brother's guards to come up here to collect what I promised him."

"I get it." Strill replied, "Then we ambush them right?"

"Right. I'm guessing that at least one will stay by the ship, but at least two will come up here and that means two less to deal with down there." Vorn said.

"Got it." Strill added and he activated his PTP link, "We need to get some of those guys away from the ship." He transmitted, knowing that only the woman standing beside the Shill Security agents would hear him through her earpiece, "Tell them that you'll take them to Vorn Torin and that he has what their boss wants." And then he stood with Vorn to watch what happened next.

Sure enough the woman assigned to meet Corva's ship pointed towards the control building Strill and Vorn occupied and the lead security agent nodded and began gesturing to his men. Then while one of the rifle

armed guards remained at the base of the access ramp the other three accompanied the woman as she led them towards the control tower, leaving her own two men standing close to the bottom of the ramp as well.

“Okay we need to be ready.” Vorn said and he picked up the holdall he had used to carry his portable computer in and set it down on an otherwise empty table and he checked his blaster, “Just go along with what I say,” he added, “and be ready to move when I do.”

In response Strill nodded and slid his own blaster from its holster, concealing it behind his back just before the woman entered with the trio of Shill Security agents.

“Mister Torin,” their leader announced when he saw Vorn, “your brother had sent us to take possession of the item you discussed.

“Of course.” Vorn replied, “It’s in that bag.” And he pointed to the holdall on the table.

Nodding once the security agent strode across the room towards the holdall while the other two remained close to the door. Making it appear as if he was merely moving out of the security agent’s way, Vorn edged closer to these other two.

Upon reaching the table the security agent reached out for the holdall, intending to open it to check the contents but as he pulled it towards him he noticed how light it was and frowned.

“This is empty.” He said as he opened up the bag and saw that as he suspected there was nothing inside. At the same time the other two agents both turned to look at Vorn, but as they did so he was already drawing his blaster and he fired before the man right beside even saw his gun. Hit at point blank range in his chest the agent fell backwards, his armoured vest unable to block the compact spatial distortion that turned his insides to liquid. The guard with the rifle turned and began to bring his weapon up, aiming for Vorn. But although the three security agents had been caught by surprise by Vorn’s action Strill had been waiting for it and he had already taken aim. There were three sharp ‘cracks’ as he fired. The armoured vest the guard wore stopped the first bullet, but the second found a weak point and punched through before the third just missed the vest itself and buried itself in the man’s neck.

This left only the leader and Vorn turned his blaster towards the man. Having been checking out the holdall had prevented him from having his sidearm in his hand and even now he was attempting to draw it. But given that Vorn already has his weapon in his hand he had the advantage and just as the security agent’s weapon was clearing its holster Vorn shot him in the head and he collapsed in a heap.

“Okay this is it.” Vorn said as he reached down the scoop up the dropped pulse wave rifle, “Tell your people to move in.”

## 6.

Down by the access ramp the security agent frowned as he heard the three sudden sounds from the direction of the control tower.

"What was that?" he asked, glancing at the two men who the woman had left behind.

"I didn't hear anything." One of them replied.

"Well it sounded like gunfire to me." The agent replied and he brought his rifle up to his shoulder and made use of the optical sight mounted on top of the weapon to study the control tower. Then he gasped as he saw Vorn aiming his former comrade's rifle right back at him. Unsure about firing on a member of the Founding Families without being ordered to the guard hesitated and that hesitation cost him his life as Vorn took his shot. The spatial distortion blasted through the control tower window and then blew the guard off his feet, his rifle being plucked out of the air by one of Strill's men before it even hit the ramp.

"Come on let's go!" the man snapped as he pointed his rifle up the ramp and into the ship and then rushed up to make sure that no one could seal the hatch.

Almost straight away there was pulse wave fire from inside the ship as a pair of guards who had remained inside using it's cargo for cover opened fire and the second of Strill's men was hit without getting off a shot from his pistol.

"Move! Move! Move!" Strill broadcast to his concealed men and immediately they began to rush from their hiding places around the landing pad and towards the starship.

"It's a trap!" Corva exclaimed as he heard the weapons fire from below him and saw a small group of armed men as they emerged from a small building and rushed towards his ship. Then one of them noticed Corva and Deesa in the cockpit and fired his weapon, the bullet bouncing off the canopy without inflicting any damage more significant than a chip where it struck.

"I'm powering up the engines." Deesa responded, "But we'll need to get that hatch shut."

Corva reached out and activated the ship's intercom.

"Why isn't that hatch sealed?" he demanded.

"We have intruders sir." A voice replied, "We've got them contained in the hold, but we can't get to the hatch."

Scowling Corva got up from his seat and headed for the cockpit door.

"Corva, where are you going?" Deesa asked.

"To take back my ship." He replied before he left the cockpit entirely. Corva strode the short distance to the cabin he and his wife shared and went inside. In there he located a compact armoured cabinet and opened it up to reveal a pulse wave rifle and a pair of pulse wave blasters. He took one of the handguns and the rifle and loaded them both before he headed towards the cargo hold.

When he got there he found three of his guards firing through the hatchway into the hold.

"Sir you shouldn't be here." One of them said when they saw Corva.

"This is my ship and I intend to keep it that way." Corva replied, "Now perhaps you can explain what's going on."

"Yes sir, our man outside was taken out by a sniper and the enemy used that opportunity to board the ship. We've kept them from penetrating any deeper, but they're getting reinforcements and we can't push them back."

"And what about the other hatches?" Corva asked.

"All sealed sir." The guard answered.

"And guarded?" Corva asked.

"No sir, I didn't think that-"

"My damned brother is behind this!" Corva snapped, "He knows the access codes. Now get someone to those other hatches before its too late."

Leaving the control tower by a back entrance Strill and Vorn headed towards the starship from behind. Vorn doubted that they would be spotted by approaching from this direction, but just in case he wore a hooded jacket to disguise his features as he led Strill and a group of his men towards a side hatch. Upon reaching it Vorn entered the access code he had memorised into the lock and grinned as the door hissed open.

"Inside, quick!" he hissed as he climbed up into the ship.

Strill followed right behind him, followed by one of his men. But it was then that an internal hatch opened and a pair of guards appeared. Seeing the figure silhouetted in the external hatchway they opened fire in

unison and then man toppled back out of the ship. Vorn swung his rifle around and opened fire, the weapon set to automatic and both guards fell dead as Vorn blasted a row of dents in the bulkhead either side of them as well.

"Looks like they're on to your idea of coming in the back way." Strill commented.

"No matter," Vorn said, "we're already in. Follow me."

"Corva what's happening?" Deesa said into the intercom, but there was no reply. From her seat in the cockpit she could see that the yacht's engines were ready for launch and she was tempted to take off anyway. But having the access ramp to the cargo hold wide open could cause turbulence within the hold that would shift the cargo and make handling difficult. At worst the ship could flip over on launch and crash into the ground.

Then she heard footsteps from behind her and Deesa began to turn around.

"Corva is that-" she began but her jaw dropped when she instead saw Vorn aiming a rifle straight at her and several more armed men behind him.

Vorn rushed forwards and burst into the cockpit, looking around before aiming his rifle at Deesa once more.

"Where is he?" Vorn demanded, "My brother. Where is he?"

Deesa scowled at him.

"Gone to help keep you and your scum friends off our ship." She replied.

"Well I'd say he's not done a very good job of it has he?" Strill commented from the hatchway and then he looked at Vorn, "So what do we do with her?" he asked.

"Secure her." Vorn replied, "We're going to use her to end this."

Two of Strill's men pushed past their leader and pulled Deesa from her chair before forcing her to her knees. Still scowling she kept her attention focused on Vorn even as her arms were pulled back and bound behind her back.

"You'll never get away with this." She said.

Another bullet ricocheted off the bulkhead close to Corva's head and he ducked back around the hatchway. "This isn't working." He said to the guards accompanying him, "We're going to have to take more extreme measures."

"What do you mean sir?" one of the guards replied.

"Do any of you know how to rig an incendiary?" Corva asked and the guards nodded, "Good. Now we need to start a fire in the hold that will keep anyone from making it to this hatch. Then we'll just seal this door and wait for my brother's people withdraw. Then we can seal the outer hatch by remote without them opening it up again. As soon as we hit vacuum we can open the door again to extinguish the fire."

"Yes sir." The closest guard said, "I'll-"

"Corva." Deesa's voice interrupted and Corva looked round to see his wife standing at the end of the passageway with Vorn's vibroblade held against her throat.

"Tell your men to put down their weapons." Vorn said, twisting the blade.

One of Corva's guards lifted his rifle.

"No!" Corva exclaimed and he knocked the rifle aside. Then he slowly lowered his own to the deck and raised his hands, "Do what he says." He added.

Nervously the guards looked at one another and then put their weapons down as well.

"Come on in!" Strill shouted to his men in the hold and several of them appeared behind Corva and his guards.

"Secure them all and then bring my brother outside." Vorn said as he took the blade away from Deesa's throat, "There's just one last thing to do."

Strill came down the access ramp ahead of two of his men who dragged Corva between them. Vorn watched from a short distance away, Deesa kneeling in front of him.

"What do you want doing with their guards?" Strill asked, pointing a thumb back towards the ship.

"We don't need them any more." Vorn replied, "Get rid of them." And Strill nodded. Then while he headed back towards the ship his men dragged Corva over to his wife and forced him to kneel beside her.

Vorn waited as there was gunfire from the direction of the yacht and he smiled.

"Well it looks like Han's short a few men." He said, "I do hope that as head of our family he does a better job of protecting me than he did protecting you."

"So you won't be relying on these insurgent scum then?" Deesa said, glancing at Strill's men.

"Somehow I doubt that they'll fit in with the high society of Crassis Major." Vorn said, "Though I don't doubt



they could have their uses.”

“What is all this about Vorn?” Corva asked, “Why are you doing this?”

“What? Do you think it’s been fun being the younger brother?” Vorn responded, “Always expected to be at your beck and call? Well that ends now dear brother. The family will be mine to lead and I swear that I won’t spend my time drifting amongst the stars and attempting to improve our lot by linking ourselves with whatever other family appears to be ascendant at the time.”

“So you see yourself being at the top do you?” Corva asked, “Well just remember that whoever’s beneath you may have the same idea.” And then he and Deesa looked at one another and smiled before Vorn brought his rifle to his shoulder and fired two shots.