

STAR WARS

TALES OF THE JEDI



II-X: LURE

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...

LURE

FRUSTRATED BY THE ACTIONS OF GAL AND LARA UDRA, INSURGENTS ON TEPILLOS DECIDE TO DEAL WITH THE JEDI PERMANENTLY...

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

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1 .

Drinto Huladra looked at the information purchased about events in the Green Zone, including a brief note of several bodies taken there. Bodies of some of Drinto's men.

"All dead?" he said, even though the report was quite clear about this.

"All of them." His spine-headed rodian subordinate replied.

Drinto tossed the datapad across the desk.

"How can this be? They signalled us that the jedi were secure. They were about to bring them back here to me."

Drinto's insurgent group had recently been on the verge of scoring a major victory by capturing both the jedi assigned to the Narthis Sector. But at some point between his men ambushing the jedi and bringing them back to the capital city the group had stopped checking in. Now it seemed that they had been wiped out by the jedi.

"The jedi were present in large numbers. More of them must have arrived to effect a rescue."

"Damn them!" Drinto exclaimed, "If we are to make any progress here we need to get rid of them. There aren't enough Republic troops present to control this world, they need the jedi's help."

"There are only two left right now." Another voice said from across the room and Drinto and his subordinate looked to where a red-skinned zeltron female sat below a window set high up in the wall. The woman's name was Kassa and she was the infomERCHANT that Drinto had paid for the information on the datapad.

"But those two can summon an army of jedi knights and freedom warriors if they need to."

"Precisely my point." Kassa said and she stood up, strode across the room and leant over the desk towards Drinto, "Look, you're vulnerable to the jedi. You know it and so does your little monkey-lizard here. But the reason the jedi can descend so quickly is that there are a pair of them—"

"Three." the rodian corrected Kassa, "There are three jedi in the sector."

"The old man digging holes around thousand year old ruins on Atch doesn't count." The zeltron replied, glancing at the man before focusing on Drinto once more, "You have two jedi who can be here with just a few hours notice and they can easily summon reinforcements from the enclave on Moldas. But the order is stretched pretty thin in the region. Hell, they had to bring Cal and Lara Udra in all the way from Coruscant to pick up the slack left when Kyle Jenner did his disappearing act. If you gave your little revolution a break for a while and instead concentrated on getting rid of the jedi permanently then in the long run you'd have a much better shot at achieving what you want."

"What if the order sends more jedi to replace them?" the rodian asked.

"Then you're no worse off than now. But at least you'll have the satisfaction of having dealt with two of them. Right?" and Kassa stared at Drinto.

Drinto smiled. Kassa was well aware that he was a stennes shifter, a subspecies of a distant offshoot of humanity that had the ability to conceal themselves by blending into crowds. This ability was based in the Force and this, along with their ability to drain Force energy used in their presence had long ago contributed towards the jedi order seeing them as a threat and launching a major purge of the species, driving them to near extinction. The few surviving members still held a burning hatred for the jedi. In truth Drinto had little enthusiasm for the cause of the insurgents on Tepillos, but he knew an opportunity to cause trouble for the jedi and their precious Republic when he saw it.

"So what would you suggest?" Drinto asked.

"Make sure you don't make too big a deal of it." Kassa replied, "No leaving their mutilated corpses on display or anything graphic like that. Just kill them and be done with it. Publicly of course, so people know its you but quick and easy. Its less likely the other jedi will come after you that way. But make it look like you're calling them out and your best vanishing trick won't hide you from them for long."

"This is ridiculous!" the rodian snapped, "Surely you're not considering this?"

Drinto held up his hand for silence.

"So do you have any suggestions on how we might arrange for the jedi to come to an untimely end Miss Kassa? They are notoriously difficult to kill."

Kassa smiled.

"How much is it worth?" she asked.

Jedi Knight Cal Udra watched as thick duracrete was poured into the hole in the cavern floor. Until recently this had been a lake that had served as the sole water source for the beings that lived in the cavern. At one time the sith had built a city down here and when insurgents drove a large number of beings to seek shelter

underground they had occupied the abandoned buildings. Unfortunately the lake had also been the mass grave of the ancient sith inhabitants and their long forgotten hatred and rage had lived on in the Force within the lake itself. The bodies were gone now of course, Cal's superiors in the Jedi Order had seen to that. But just in case the lake itself was also being made to vanish. An engineering team from the Army of the Republic had been brought in to not only fill in the lake, but also to set up a system whereby the groundwater that had formed the lake to begin with could be piped into the underground city for its inhabitants. Only a handful remained at the moment, the rest having been scared of by the sudden invasion by a large force of Jedi and supporting freedom warriors. But their numbers were growing as more of them returned to their homes to see what was left.

"So how much longer are we going to be stuck here?" a female voice asked and Cal turned towards his younger sister and padawan learner Lara.

"Well?" Cal then said to the Republic engineer directing the operation.

"We're about done filling this in commander." The man answered, "But the pumps still need setting up and testing."

"Then we're done here." Cal replied, "The only reason Master Karas had us stay behind was to make sure nothing went wrong while the lake was being filled in. Plumbing is your problem captain."

"Is that why we stayed down here?" Lara asked, "I thought Master Karas was hoping we'd fall in and get buried under a few tonnes of duracrete. I mean what is his problem with us? Everyone else seems to know, but no-one will tell me."

She will turn against you.

The warning delivered to Cal echoed in his mind, though at least now it was not as strong as it had been the first time and it was no longer accompanied by a vision of what looked to be an older version of himself duelling with his sister. The combination of vision and message had unsettled Cal and he had briefly considered consulting with his superiors in the Jedi Order. However, the warning had come to him while he was knee deep in the Dark Side infused waters of the lake so he had instead decided to do his best to ignore it. The Dark Side was not known for its honesty, especially if the warning was accompanied by a vivid premonition of a sort Cal had never experienced before and it was his belief that it was just the Dark Side's way of trying to drive a wedge between him and his sister. It would be an understatement to say that Cal had been displeased with her assignment as his padawan, but he had since grown more accustomed to the idea.

"It beats me." He replied, "Now come on, let's get out of here. If we stay down here much longer I'm worried we'll end up with the vitamin D deficiency the locals all had."

"You maybe." Lara said, "But mom always said I was her little ray of sunshine so I think I'm pretty safe."

"She lied." Cal said as the pair began to walk away from the dry lake, "She does it quite a bit."

"Name one time mom's lied." Lara said.

"Okay, how about when she said having baby sister was better than a dog?" Cal said and as he spotted Lara forming a fist he extended a finger and quickly added, "Punch me and I'll tell on you."

Lara sighed and relaxed.

Lynn Kerr had run an emergency aid group on Tepillos for more than a decade now and during that time she had seen little change in the ongoing struggle between the Republic, local government and the host of insurgent groups fighting for dominance. She knew exactly who she blamed of course, the Founding Families. This was a group of families that were descended from the original explorers of the Narthis Sector and as far as she was concerned it was their ongoing quest for ever greater wealth that had not only triggered the original collapse of the Tepillos government, but also perpetuated the civil war.

She was alone in her office in the disused hotel that served as a headquarters when she heard someone entering through the front door.

"Jondo is that you?" she called out, walking to the door to see if her partner had returned from collecting supplies from the Green Zone starport. But rather than Jondo she saw an elderly female twi'lek with pale blue skin standing in the main doorway, her lekku head tails both badly scarred from injuries clearly inflicted long ago.

"Are you Lynn Kerr?" the twi'lek woman asked.

"I am." Lynn replied, "How may I help you?"

"Miss Kerr, my people are suffering. We need you to get us help."

"Of course, come this way please." Lynn said and she waved the twi'lek into her office, "now what is your name?" she asked as the woman sat down.

"Nia Thassno. You may call me Nia."

"Can I get you a drink Nia?"

"No thank you."

"Very well, now tell me what you need. My group can supply a wide range of emergency supplies and—"

"Miss Kerr we need protection." Nia interrupted.

"I'm sorry." Lynn replied after a brief pause, "We're not the police."

"The police can't be trusted."

"I know." Lynn said, well aware of the amount of corruption in all levels of local government, "But if you go to the Green Zone, then—"

"They won't let people like me in there Miss Kerr. Even if they would they wouldn't listen to what I have to say. It's the Families you see, they have influence even with the Republic commander."

This caught Lynn's attention. Even Jondo rarely listened to her theories about what the Founding Families were up to on Tepillos.

"Tell me." Lynn said.

"When the police stopped patrolling our neighbourhood we banded together and formed our own group,"

Nia said. She was running a great risk saying this, what she was describing was the starting point of an insurgent group. Many had begun as vigilante groups initially, "and we were successful at keeping the

peace where we lived. The other groups left us alone because we didn't bother them. But now that's changed."

Lynn frowned.

"What happened?" she asked, "Is it your own group that has—"

"No. Our people are still our protectors, but now outside groups have turned their eyes towards us. We have things they want you see, businesses can still operate where we live so there is money to be made."

"You mean extortion?"

"Yes. Contraband also, pressuring people to distribute black market goods to their customers. At first our defence group was able to drive them off, but now they have obtained more advanced weapons from off world. Plus the training to use them."

"The Founding Families?" Lynn said, scowling and Nia nodded, "But what do you expect me to do?" Lynn asked.

"We know you are close to the Jedi. You were seen with the previous one and you were one of the first to speak with the new ones when they arrived here. The Families do not control the Jedi Order, so they can still be trusted to help us. Please bring them to us. They are our only hope."

"So what now?" Lara asked as she and Cal continued to walk through the almost deserted streets of the underground city. They were almost to the cavern exit now and they could just about see the natural daylight shining down the short passageway leading to the surface.

"Now," Cal responded, "we head back to Aurek Station. I've had quite enough of Tepillos to last me a while."

"Me too." Lara said, "Even our—" then she paused as a pair of Republic troopers came rushing towards the Jedi, "Uh-oh. Cal I've got a bad feeling about this."

"So do I." Cal replied, "Running soldiers is rarely a good sign."

The soldiers came to a halt in front of the Jedi and saluted.

"At ease." Cal said, "Now what is it trooper?"

"There's an urgent message for you from Colonel Jeck." One of the troopers announced, "He tried contacting you directly but—"

"Yes I know." Cal interrupted, "This cavern's playing havoc with our communications. Now did he happen to mention what he wants?"

"Hopefully he's asking when we'll be shifting our ship from his airbase." Lara commented.

"Sorry miss, he didn't say." The trooper replied, "But he didn't sound too happy."

"Well we're on our way back to the Green Zone now anyway." Cal said, "We can find out what he wants in person."

2.

"I'm not your answering service you know." Colonel Arion Jeck said when he saw Cal and Lara enter his command centre, "Even if it has been a relatively quiet day."

"So I see." Cal said, looking at the tactical display that showed less than dozen a handful of violent incidents in progress, "But what is this message?"

"Its from that do-gooder woman." The colonel said, "The one that keeps demanding my men escort her and her boyfriend into the most dangerous parts of the city. Apparently she wants to speak with you, says it's urgent."

"I don't suppose she said what it was about?" Lara asked.

"No, apparently I can't be trusted with such important information. Never mind that I'm in charge of every Republic soldier on the planet. But whatever it is, its important enough to have brought her here."

"Into the Green Zone?" Cal asked.

"That's right, she's waiting for you in the hotel on Eighth Street."

The Eighth Street hotel was not a luxury establishment but there were few of those remaining on Tepillos, even in the Green Zone. Mainly it was occupied by journalists here to report on the civil war or contractors looking to supply the Republic or local government with anything that could be profitable. Lynn Kerr was waiting for the jedi in the lobby, browsing through a magazine that had been there for longer than either Cal or Lara had been in the Narthis Sector, presumably left behind by an earlier guest and retained by the hotel owing to a lack of alternatives.

"Ah you're here at last." She said, smiling and standing up as the Udras approached, "I was starting to wonder if you were coming."

"Well whatever it is you want, you were willing to bring Colonel Jeck into it." Cal said.

"Even if you wouldn't tell him what it is." Lara then added as they all sat down.

"I'm sorry for the secrecy." Lynn said, "But my information suggests that the Republic forces can't be relied upon. The Founding Families-"

Cal and Lara both sighed.

"This is another conspiracy theory isn't it?" Lara asked.

"Its no theory." Lynn said sternly, glaring back at Lara, "I can take you to the beings that the Founding families are trying to intimidate."

"How?" Cal asked, "Lynn, the Founding Families aren't coming here without obvious security and I don't see any of them around. In fact we've recently encountered Luke Crassis right here on Tepillos and he's long gone. Probably back on Crassis Major already."

"Then come with me." Lynn said, "The Founding Families are supplying arms to the insurgents and I can take you to their victims." And she stood up.

"Are we going to go along with this poodoo?" Lara whispered to Cal.

"She seems serious." He replied, "And this time she's actually making a specific allegation. Come on, you know as well as I do that the Founding families are up to something. Maybe this will help us find out what." And then Cal stood up to follow Lynn from the hotel.

After watching Lynn and the two jedi leave the hotel, one of the staff headed for a door marked 'PRIVATE' and went through. From there he headed directly for a storage locker that contained assorted cleaning supplies. Moving a box to expose a communication line junction box the man took a modified point-to-point communication link from his pocket and plugged it into the junction box.

"They're on their way." He said flatly and then without waiting for a reply he removed the PTP link and concealed the junction box again before heading back to work.

The sniper had chosen his position well in advance, located on the rooftop parking lot of a supermarket. The building itself was still in use but beings rarely came up to the roof anymore since the locals could not afford private transportation. The roof offered a commanding view of an area of open ground located between the supermarket, several other stores and the residential buildings on the far side. At one time this area had been a park, but the plants had long since died off to leave behind only a bare patch of featureless dirt.

While his spotter sat down and began to survey the area through a set of wide scan binocs the sniper began to set up his weapon. It was a projectile weapon with a slightly higher calibre than most infantry rifles

and attached to the top was an advanced scope, but what really made this weapon special was the ammunition it fired. Rather than the conventional metal slugs common to most slugthrowers and magnetic accelerators this rifle used ammunition that featured a small rocket motor in the base, known as rocket assisted projectiles or RAPs for short. Fired conventionally but at a relatively low velocity the motor would ignite after launch to boost and maintain velocity over greater ranges, up to four times that of the most modern blasters. Combined with a guidance system built into the scope, the rifle was an effective smart weapon. The disadvantage of such weapons was the cost and complexity of their ammunition and they were only ever built in small numbers and generally sold as curiosities.

However, to a trained assassin they could be a lethal tool.

"They're on their way." The spotter said, placing a finger to the communication earpiece he wore. In reply the sniper said nothing, simply rolling out a mat and taking up a position with his rifle aimed towards the open ground, without actually sticking out over the edge of the roof.

It was not long before there was the sound of an engine and a lightweight landspeeder came floating into the kill zone and there was a soft 'click' as he sniper released his safety catch. First out of the landspeeder when it came to a halt was Lynn Kerr from the driver's position, followed a moment later by Cal Udra from the other side of the vehicle. Both the sniper and spotter then watched as Cal turned back towards the vehicle and folded down his seat so that Lara could exit from the back.

"Okay that's all of them." The spotter said, "Take the shot whenever you want."

The sniper lined up his scope on Cal's chest and just as the jedi began to turn again he squeezed the trigger.

A slight tremor in the Force alerted Cal to the imminent attack and he already had his lightsaber in his hand when he heard the 'pop' of a low velocity projectile being fired.

"It's a trap! Get down!" Cal yelled as with a 'snap-hiss' his lightsaber came to life.

He saw the flash as the projectile's rocket motor ignited, but rather than follow his own advice and dive for cover he instead brought up his lightsaber between him and the projectile.

The explosion as the projectile struck the bright blue lightsaber blade was tiny, though accompanied by the combustion of unburned fuel inside the projectile that produced a brief but significant flash.

There was a second 'snap-hiss' as Lara also ignited her weapon and stood shoulder to shoulder with Cal while Lynn covered behind the speeder.

"Where's the shooter?" Lara asked.

"I didn't see him." Cal replied, "Just the round as it came at me. It was either a gyrojet or a RAP."

"So it could be guided and have come from anywhere." Lara said.

"Exactly. So keep your eyes open for another."

Cal and Lara both looked around.

Fear.

Numerous beings were now huddled against buildings; terrified that another shot would be fired at any moment and that they could be hit even if it was by accident. Another flash of light caught Cal's attention and he spun to face the nearby supermarket. But his had not come from another projectile but from sunlight reflecting off a polished surface.

The lenses of a set of wide scan binocs.

"Lara they're on the roof of the supermarket." Cal whispered, turning his head again to hide the fact that he had spotted the two men, "One sniper plus a spotter."

"I see them." Lara replied just as quietly, "How do you want to handle this?"

"Ideally I'd like to call in air support, but they'd hear it coming and be long gone. How long would it take you to reach the wall below them?"

"About three seconds. Pity we don't have the grenade launcher with us. A couple of smoke rounds up there would help. Hell, I'd even settle for our blasters."

"Lynn, I need the keys to your speeder." Cal said, "Just start up the engine and stay down where you are."

"But why? What are you going to do?" Lynn asked nervously. This was not the first time she had been shot at, but it was something she had never got used to.

"Just trust me." Cal said, "The speeder won't get a scratch."

Lara glared at Cal briefly, knowing that there was a real chance that the speeder would be written off if this went wrong. Carefully Cal edged around the vehicle to stand by the driver's door just as Lynn started the engine again.

"Be ready with a link." Cal said as he shut off his lightsaber and got into the speeder.

"Ready." Lara said and she took a single pace away from the vehicle.

"What the kriff are they playing at?" the spotter muttered.

"I can't take the shot." The sniper said, "They'll see us."

All of a sudden the landspeeder's engine roared and Cal accelerated the vehicle directly towards the supermarket. Simultaneously Lara set off into a run in the same direction.

"They've made us!" the spotter snapped as he got up to run.

The landspeeder's engine pitch changed suddenly as Cal increased altitude but braked sharply, bringing the vehicle to a halt just in front of the supermarket but about three metres off the ground, the limit for Lynn's landspeeder.

Using the Force to give her a boost, Lara leapt up onto the roof of the landspeeder and then immediately made a second leap up onto the roof of the supermarket with her lightsaber still glowing brightly in her grip.

"Hello boys! Not leaving already are we?" she said with a grin.

Without pausing to pick up any of their equipment, even the valuable RAP rifle the two men began to run.

Lara's free hand went to her waist as she set off in pursuit and activated the PTP she carried.

"Stairs at the back!" she snapped, letting Cal know where the two men were heading and she heard the sound of the landspeeder in motion once more.

The two men reached the stairwell ahead of Lara, but the gap between them had closed considerably. Lara considered the possibility of vaulting over the safety rail to get ahead of the two men, but that would then allow them to double back to the roof and the plan required her to stay behind them. This became obvious to the two men when the door at the base of the stairs that led out into the street suddenly slid open before they reached it and Cal rushed through with his lightsaber at the ready.

"Jedi Knight!" he yelled, a hand held up to the two men as they ground to a halt and looked around to see Lara blocking their way back up the stairs.

"Kriff you jedi!" the spotter yelled and from his pocket he produced a pistol. Cal dived forwards just as the weapon was fired and the burst of magnetically accelerated projectiles shot through the open doorway.

Leaping back to his feet, Cal swung his lightsaber in a wide upward arc and there was a scream accompanied by the smell of burnt flesh as he literally disarmed his assailant by severing his arm at the elbow.

Believing Cal's attention to be wholly focused on his spotter, the sniper lunged at the jedi. But Cal was ready and as he stepped out of the way he held his lightsaber out beside him. The sniper gasped briefly as the energy blade sliced through his chest and he stumbled and collapsed in a heap on the floor as the spotter cradled his mutilated arm and looked on in horror.

"Want to give it another go?" Cal said, glaring at the injured man. In response the spotter just glared at him and so Cal looked up at Lara as she calmly finished descending the stairs, "Call it in." he said, "Tell the colonel we have a prisoner for him."

3.

Though Cal and Lara expected Colonel Jeck to send a unit to clear up the mess left after their fight with the insurgent sniper team they did not expect just how strongly he would choose to react until they saw the first of the armoured vehicles approaching.

"A tank?" Lara exclaimed as she saw the massive armoured fighting machine rumbling towards her, "What the hell do we need a tank for?"

The tank drove into the centre of the open ground and halted, its main gun elevated slightly but apart from that the vehicle remained still. Behind it a trio of troop carriers began to unload their passengers, a platoon of Republic soldiers in full battle armour who took up positions all around their vehicles, including the tank and held their weapons ready for use. The handful of locals who had not fled the scene now backed away, clearly unsure about the presence of such a powerful force. The final surprise came when three of the disembarked soldiers instead walked towards the two jedi and they spotted the rank markings on the leader's armour just before he removed his helmet.

"I didn't expect you to come here personally colonel." Cal said.

"Yeah, well I just had to see it for myself." Colonel Jeck replied, "A sniper armed with a RAP rifle has been an ongoing problem for my men and I wanted to be sure that he was dead."

"Oh he's dead alright." Lara said, "Cal saw to that. We left the body in the stairwell around there." And she pointed towards the side of the supermarket, "But what's with the tank? We expected you to send a few men in gunships."

"I didn't want to take the chance that there could be a larger insurgent force nearby." Colonel Jeck replied, "And that tank gives me the firepower to flatten any building around here in a single shot. I was tempted to bring a squadron of them, but I knew that wouldn't look too good in the media." The he looked down to the spotter who was lying face down on the ground between Cal and Lara, his one remaining hand placed on the back of his head, "So this is the prisoner then I take it?"

Cal and Lara both smiled.

"As promised." Lara said.

"He hasn't said anything." Cal added, "Not even a name."

"Don't worry." The colonel said, "We'll figure out who he is soon enough." And he waved the two soldiers accompanying him to pick up the spotter, "Take him away." He said. Then he looked back at the jedi, "So is there anything else?" he asked.

"The rifle's in the back of the speeder." Cal said, pointing to Lynn's speeder where the aid worker could be seen nervously watching the Republic troops all around her, "Along with the rest of their gear. Is it all right if we drop it in to you later?"

"Sure. I don't think we'll need any of it to secure a conviction." Colonel Jeck answered, "But why do you want it?"

"I want to get to the bottom of who set us up here." Cal said, "So its possible that there'll be something amongst those belongings that could give us a clue."

"Very well." Colonel Jeck said before putting his helmet back on, then with his voice distorted by his armour he added, "We'll head back to the Green Zone with the prisoner. Call us if you need help."

Cal nodded and then watched as the colonel and his men returned to the personnel carriers. Then there was more rumbling as the armoured column began to move.

"Are you serious?" Lara yelled over the noise of the powerful engines, "We're staying here?"

"Do you have a better idea?" Cal replied.

"Yes. What we were meaning to do before people started shooting at us. We go home and put our feet up for a while. You can hang that RAP rifle on our wall as a trophy. Until Master Karas finds out and makes us take it down of course."

Cal smiled.

"Oh I intend to do that anyway." He said, "But whoever that sniper worked for knew we were coming here. So that means we have a lead back to an insurgent group."

"Really? Where?"

Cal just looked at Lynn.

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

The cantina owner looked warily at the two jedi as they entered his establishment with Lynn, especially since Cal had the RAP rifle slung over his shoulder. Years of experience had taught him that armed men entering a premises could be bad news, but it had also taught him not to challenge them.

"So who had you bring us here?" Cal asked Lynn as they all sat down at a table in a corner and he waved for service.

"We were supposed to be meeting with a twi'lek woman who came to the hotel this morning." Lynn replied, "But I'm really not happy discussing this. I can operate here because I'm not seen as an informer. If the locals start to think that-

"She could be in trouble." Lara said, "Big trouble."

Lynn frowned.

"How do you figure that out?" she asked but before either jedi could answer one of the serving staff arrived.

"What can I get you?" she asked.

"Three cafs." Cal replied, "Milk and sweeteners separate."

The waitress nodded as she made a note of the order and then walked away.

"She could be in trouble because we don't know why she asked you to bring us here." Lara then said to Lynn, keeping her voice low.

"Lara's right." Cal added, "Maybe this twi'lek knew this was a trap when she spoke to you. But maybe the insurgents who ambushed us used coercion to get the information out of her. So what can you tell us?"

The waitress returned with a tray that she placed on the table before she left again and each of the three at the table took a cup. Lynn sighed.

"She said that the insurgents were being armed by the Founding Families and that their local defence group was being over run."

"Yeah, we heard the little conspiracy theory." Lara said, "Now what about the twi'lek herself? How about a description for starters?"

"Blue skinned, elderly and her lekku were scarred."

"Hmmm." Lara said as she sipped her drink, "There's a fairly large twi'lek population in the capital city. That might not give us much to go on."

"But it's better than nothing." Cal said, "Perhaps if we combine it with what else we have then we'll get the information we need."

"But what else do we have?" Lara asked, "Apart from an expensive rifle and some fancy ammo for it?"

"The stairwell." Cal replied, "It was unlocked. Now given that the parking lot is clearly out of use wouldn't you think that the store owners would lock it to keep out riff raff?"

"You mean like snipers?" Lara commented.

"I was thinking about more petty crooks. Vandals, drunks and death stick users."

"Okay I get you." Lara said, "So what are you suggesting?"

"I'm suggesting we go ask the supermarket manager why a sniper team was able to set up on his roof without being noticed."

"What about me?" Lynn asked, "Can I get out of here now?"

"Oh no." Cal replied, "We need you to identify the twi'lek when we catch up with her. So until then you're staying right here with us."

Fear.

The manager of the supermarket was clearly unhappy about the presence of the jedi in his store from the moment he saw them enter. He was a duros who towered over both jedi, but his feelings were easy to read.

"How may I help you honoured jedi?" he asked nervously.

"You can start by telling us how come an insurgent sniper team ended up on your roof." Lara said.

"Perhaps you'd rather we did this in private." Cal then added as he looked around at the other staff members staring towards them. There were no customers, the combination of the fight with the insurgents and the arrival of the armoured Republic force had scared them all off for now. This of course meant that the manager could not claim to be busy and had little choice but to answer the jedi's questions.

"Of course. My office is this way." The duros replied and he led them off the shop floor to an upstairs office that overlooked the tills, "Can I offer you a-" he began but Cal interrupted him.

"Just answer my padawan's question please." He said, "Two insurgents gained access to your roof without any signs of a break in."

"Anyone can get in. This is not a secure-"

Deception.

"Oh, he's lying!" Lara snapped.

"Indeed he is. Rather badly too." Cal replied to her and then he looked at the duros. Removing the RAP rifle from over his shoulder and taking the accelerator pistol from his pocket, Cal slammed both weapons down onto the manager's desk, "I've had both of these fired at me today by beings that were on top of your building mister, err mister."

"Detch." Lara said, "Its on his badge."

"Oh yes." Cal said, "Mister Detch. Now how about you give me an honest answer before we find out how long it will take Colonel Jeck and his men to turn around and come right back here and park their tanks outside your business for a day or so?"

"Alright!" Detch replied hastily, "The door to the stairwell is normally kept locked and access is by a numbered keypad."

"I didn't see a keypad by the door." Cal commented.

"Because there isn't one." Detch said, "The system is old, very old. It dates back to before the civil war and the insurgencies. The keypad is a program on several of our store datapads. You take one out and patch in either using a hardline or wirelessly."

"So can you account for these store datapads?" Lara asked.

"Of course. I have one and three of my department heads have one each also. But I checked the door when I started this morning, as I do every morning and it was locked. I swear."

"Then if you didn't open it, one of your staff must have." Lara said, "Where are they? The ones with these datapads I mean?"

Detch looked through the office window and down to the shop floor below, raising a hand to point out the staff members who had the access program on their datapads.

"That's strange." He said suddenly, "Where is Nia going?"

"Nia?" Lyn said suddenly, "Nia Thassno? Is she a twi'lek by any chance?" and she and the Udras all rushed to look through the window themselves, "That's her!" Lynn exclaimed.

"Let's go!" Cal snapped and pausing to pick up the weapons on the table he and Lara ran from the office.

4.

“Jedi knight!” Cal yelled as they emerged from the supermarket to see Nia running across the open area of dirt, “Nia Thassno stay where you are!”

“Oh does that ever work?” Lara snapped as she ran past her brother and after the twi’lek.

“It might one day.” Cal replied as he followed her, the RAP rifle once again slung over his shoulder.

Nia had the advantage of being on home ground and had knowledge of the streets and alleyways between buildings. Making the most of this she ducked down the first narrow passageway between buildings she came to. The jedi ran after her and got to the passage themselves just in time to see her slam shut a gate across their path before she continued to flee. Still in the lead, Lara plucked her lightsaber from her belt and activated it. Grinding to a halt in front of the gate she swung it twice, once near the top and once at the bottom of the gate to sever the vertical bars and cut a hole large enough for her to pass through. Cal on the other hand felt a sudden tug as he tried to slip through the hole in the gate as the rifle over his shoulder caught on what remained of it.

“Keep after her!” he snapped as he attempted to disentangle himself and the weapon from the gate.

The passage turned out to be just one of many that ran between a host of run down buildings, primarily small residences that were tightly packed together. But Lara could hear the footfalls of Nia as she fled and even out of sight, she had a pretty good idea of where to go.

“Jedi! Jedi!” Lara suddenly heard Nia calling out and then there was the sound of metal trash can lids banging. This sound spread and Lara realised that it had been a crude signal to the locals to warn them of her presence. Now they were banging their own trash can lids to spread the warning even further. Of course the sound also served to drown out the sound of Nia’s footfalls.

Slowing down, Lara advanced cautiously and reached out through the Force. She hoped that she would be able to pick up on Nia’s fear of being caught, but all around her she could sense the anger and hatred of the people who lived in this place and the combination of so many negative feelings produced a blanket of Dark Side energy that effectively served to conceal the twi’lek from the young jedi. Not one to simply give up however, Lara continued to move through the maze of alleyways and narrow streets. Here and there she caught sight of a being moving, but each time it turned out to just be one of the locals who had been banging their trash can lid and now wanted to get out of sight of Lara just in case she turned on them instead.

However, one of the locals made the mistake of remaining outside his home, glaring at Lara as she walked down the street.

“Go back where you came from.” He said to her, but Lara just looked back at him and smiled.

“You want to tell me where she went don’t you?” she said.

“Like hell I do. You can-“

“You want to tell me.” Lara repeated, accompanying the instruction with a subtle wave of her hand. The man stopped speaking and raised a hand to point down an alleyway on the opposite side of the street. Lara just smiled and ran towards it, leaving the bemused man still standing outside his home.

In the alleyway the sound of banging trash can lids was muffled and Lara heard movement from down another alleyway running off from the side of this one.

“Got you.” She muttered to herself and she advanced towards the source of the sound.

This side passage was blocked by a sheet of metal running across it and there Lara saw Nia attempting to scabble over it without success, “Nowhere to run.” Lara called out and as she stood at the junction of the two alleys she lowered her lightsaber to her side.

Nia slid back down the barrier and glared at Lara.

Anger.

Hatred.

What happened next came as a surprise to Lara. Rather than give up or continue in her efforts to escape Nia bent down and scooped up a loose block of ferrocete and hurled at Lara. The thrown block struck Lara on the side of her head and she staggered backwards, dropping her lightsaber and then collapsing to the ground. Nia took a quick look around and spotted a length of metal pipe, just under a metre long and she now picked this up. Letting out a scream of defiance the twi’lek raised the pipe above her head and charged at Lara as she lay prone and vulnerable.

The scream continued as she brought the bar down, aiming for Lara’s head. But her defiance turned to pain when there was a ‘snap-hiss’, a flash of blue light and she was left staring at the blackened stumps where her hands used to be.

"Get away from her you nerf herder!" Cal yelled and now it was Nia's turn to stagger backwards and collapse. Cal shut off his lightsaber and crouched down beside his sister, "Are you okay?" he asked. "I'm bleeding." Was all Lara could think to say as she looked at the blood on her hand that had come from her head.

"Don't worry." Cal said, "I'm sure you'll be fine. You'll last long enough to get back to the Green Zone anyway. The colonel's people can patch you up there."

Lara then looked Cal in the eyes and frowned.

"How did you track her?" she asked, "The Dark Side as too strong for me to pick her out."

Cal smiled.

"I didn't." he said, "You're right, the Dark Side is quite strong around here."

"Then how-"

"I tracked you." Cal told her, "Do you really think I can't find my baby sister in the Force?" and Lara just smiled, "Perhaps we should get your head seen to pretty quickly." Cal then added when she made no effort to strike him.

Drinto was furious. The sniper had been a good man, one of the few in his group that he did not consider to be expendable and now he was lying dead in a morgue.

"Don't worry," his rodian subordinate, who had brought him the message said, "the jedi will not be able to link them to us."

"They took Varis alive you fool!" Drinto yelled, "We need to figure out who he knows about and get them into hiding."

"I've already given instructions about that." The rodian replied, "But they weren't known to many of us anyway."

Before Drinto could respond the door suddenly slid open and a human woman rushed through.

"They've got Nia!" she exclaimed, "The jedi got her!"

"How is this possible?" the rodian demanded, "There's no way Varis broke that quickly."

"I don't know." The woman replied, "All I know is that the jedi turned up where she worked and arrested her. They had to chase her for several blocks, but it seems one of the locals helped them find her."

"A local helped?" Drinto asked in amazement, the people under his command went to great lengths to make certain that the locals knew what would happen to them if they collaborated with the authorities or any of their rivals.

"Yes." The woman said, "But don't worry about him, we dealt with him just as soon as the jedi left with Nia."

"But how did this happen?" the rodian said.

"It happened because Nia was sloppy." Drinto said, "which means by giving her the task you were sloppy as well and now its cost us our best sniper and a weapon that we cannot easily replace either. I'm thinking perhaps I need a new deputy."

"But Drinto-" the rodian exclaimed, but before he could finish Drinto drew his pistol and put a bullet between the rodian's eyes.

"How would you like the job?" he asked the human woman standing in front of him and gazing at the body on the floor.

Colonel Jeck stood up when Cal and Lara entered his office.

"Ah there you are." He said cheerfully, "I was hoping you'd drop by."

"We wanted to see if you've got anything out of the prisoners." Cal replied as he and Lara sat down, followed by the colonel.

"They're both still with the medics." The colonel said, "Apparently the doctors are concerned about the possibility of infection where you sliced bits off them. 'Burnt particulate matter beneath the cauterised areas' or something."

"Well you can thank Cal for that." Lara said.

"You should." Cal responded, "I was just in time to stop that twi'lek smashing your head in." then he looked back towards Colonel Jeck, "So the investigation's got no further then?" he asked.

"So far there isn't one." The colonel answered, "The sniper's already dead so we're listing all his killings as solved and from your testimony alone we've enough to convict the human of attempted murder. I'll refer him to the sector rangers of course, but it's an open and shut case. Seems a waste but due process has to been seen as a bit more than 'Ready, aim, fire.'"

"If it's alright with you we'd like to look into the twi'lek." Cal said, "She was the one that went to Lynn Kerr in the first place."

"Of course." The colonel replied, "But what's Miss Kerr's role in all of this?"

"She's just a useful idiot." Lara said. Then when Cal looked at her she added, "Well she is isn't she? She's got all these theories about how the Founding Families are responsible for absolutely everything that goes wrong around here, so when someone walks up to her with a tall tale to tell she falls for it immediately." "Maybe," Cal said, "but on this occasion she's been more useful to us than the insurgents. We've one dead and two in custody and thanks to us knowing where she worked we also know from her employer where she lived. I want to start there."

It was just after dark when Cal and Lara were dropped off near to the address given as Nia's home. It was a mid sized building that was divided into several apartments and by the standards of Tepillos it looked neat and tidy from the outside.

"Looks like being in the insurgency pays." Lara said, "This is a mansion by local standards. No graffiti or anything."

"Yes, well I suppose being able to threaten vandals with physical violence by an armed mob helps keep them at bay." Cal replied and he used the key taken from amongst Nia's belongings to open the main door to the building.

In the hallway inside there was an entrance to a turbolift and a staircase beside it as well as the front doors to the two apartments on this floor. As Cal and Lara entered there was a chiming from the turbolift and the doors opened to reveal two individuals, one human and the other a pale skinned twi'lek each one holding a box.

"Jedi!" the human snapped and he hurled the box he carried at Cal.

As Cal dodged the box Lara drew her lightsaber and activated it, then almost immediately after she held the blade up to deflect an archaic laser beam fired from a rod-shaped weapon produced by the twi'lek.

Both the human and the twi'lek fled up the nearby staircase and as Cal drew his own lightsaber the two jedi set off after them.

"Why does everybody keep running away from us?" Lara said mockingly.

It was two flights of stairs up that the fleeing pair rushed into an apartment with a door that was wide open and Cal noticed that the number above the doorway matched that of Nia's apartment.

"Jedi right behind us!" he heard the human yell and he felt a disturbance in the Force.

"Get back!" he snapped and he grabbed hold of Lara before she could rush into the apartment after them and pulled her back. Almost immediately there was a booming sound as a shotgun was fired through the open doorway, spraying projectiles across the far wall, "Go!" Cal then yelled and before whoever had the shotgun could fire again both jedi dived through the doorway and into the apartment.

The wielder of the shotgun was another twi'lek and using the Force Cal ripped the weapon from his grasp and let it drop to the floor at his feet. At the same time Lara swung her lightsaber at the twi'lek from the lift as he attempted to aim his beam rod at her once more and he let out a brief scream as he died.

Now two humans and a barabel faced the jedi and the humans reached for weapons they had concealed.

Lara rolled as bullets flew towards her, the gunman continuing to fire at the rapidly moving jedi until his weapon gave a 'click' as it ran out of ammunition. Even as he was reaching for a replacement magazine Lara was close enough to kick one of his knees and eh man collapsed, his weapon tumbling from his grasp. Then as he reached to reclaim it Lara thrust her lightsaber through his chest.

The second human was better armed, having a more modern compact pulse wave blaster rather than a projectile weapon like most of the insurgents carried. But like the slugthrower of his comrade such weapons were cursed by a limited ammunition capacity and after the man had watched all of his shots blocked by Cal's lightsaber he simply tossed the weapon aside and instead dived towards the dropped shotgun, knowing that the spread of its pellets would not be so easy for the jedi to defeat. But Cal expected this and was ready to react immediately. Making use of the Force again he pushed the shotgun across the floor, keeping it well out of reach. Then as the insurgent slid past him Cal swung his lightsaber and sliced along the length of his body. The lifeless body continued to slide until it struck a nearby wall where it lay in a heap. Now Cal and Lara found themselves staring down the barabel.

The massive reptile scowled at the jedi as they circled him, one hand clutching the strap of a large holdall.

"Just give up." Lara said, "Put down the bag and come with us."

The barabel let out a hiss and with his free hand scooped up a nearby chair and hurled it towards Lara, who gave a yelp as she dived out of its path.

"I've got him!" Cal yelled and he leapt forwards. But the barabel was surprisingly quick and it swung the holdall out at Cal and knocked him back again, making him lose his grip on his lightsaber. The weapon deactivated as soon as it left Cal's hand and it rolled across the floor out of reach. Cal raised his hand, intending to call the lightsaber back to his grip, but his concentration was broken when the barabel took hold of him and lifted him off the floor at the same time as it slung the holdall back over its shoulder.

"Cal!" Lara exclaimed, seeing her brother with one of the barabel's arms wrapped around his neck while his legs kicked frantically.

Cal tried using his fists and feet to strike at the barabel, but the alien's thick hide provided more than enough protection against such blows. As Lara watched, unsure of what to do, she saw Cal fumble at his belt for a moment before he looked in her direction.

"Lightsaber." He gasped and he held out his hand towards her. In response Lara shut off her weapon and tossed it to her brother who caught it effortlessly. There was a 'snap-hiss' as Cal reactivated the lightsaber and then a roar of pain as he pressed it against the thick scaly arm around his throat. Immediately the barabel released its grip and Cal dropped to the floor, gasping for air. Cradling its injured arm and with the holdall the barabel charged at the nearest window and leapt at it. There was the sound of breaking glass as the massive alien smashed his way through and both Cal and Lara rushed to look out into the street below. There, just about visible in the darkness they saw the barabel pick itself up off the ground and after it turned briefly to make an obscene gesture towards the Jedi it ran off into the night.

Still breathing heavily Cal looked at his sister.

"Use your PTP link to call the colonel." He said.

"What's wrong with yours?" Lara asked in reply.

"I slipped it into the barabel's bag." Cal answered, "With any luck we'll be able to track him with it."

5.

There was a splash of water as the barabel jumped through the open inspection hatch and into the sewer. "Where are the others?" a man who had been waiting there asked when he realised that the barabel was alone.

"Dead." The barabel hissed, "Jedi sssurpissed usss. Only this one essscapesss."

"Well do you at least have the stuff?"

"Yesss. All here, nothing left for jedi."

"Good, then lets go. The boss is waiting for us."

A gunship carrying Colonel Jeck and a unit of soldiers arrived first, setting down just long enough to deploy its passengers before it took off again and began to circle the area.

"I suppose we should have secured this place as soon as we took the twi'lek woman into custody." He said as he walked in through the apartment door and saw the mess left behind by the insurgents who had been clearing it.

"Well we didn't know just how fast the insurgents were going to move." Cal replied, "But on the bright side there doesn't seem to be anything that could incriminate anyone but her around here. Maps and sketches of the Green Zone plus a few images of your patrols."

"That barabel got away with a bag full of stuff though." Lara commented, "Maybe all the good stuff was in there."

"Perhaps." Cal replied, "But that's not all he's carrying is it?"

"Have you found the link colonel?" Lara then asked.

"Not yet." The colonel replied, "The PTP network isn't very good out here, so I've ordered the pilot of my gunship to search for it. He's sending sweeping the frequency bands now to see if we can spot the signal."

"That should work." Cal said, "I set it to transmit before I stuffed it into the barabel's bag, so it should be easy enough to spot. I charged it a couple of days ago so there should be plenty of power left, a day or so by my guess."

"Well I've prepped a full company of elite troops for when we find it." Colonel Jeck said, "I'm hoping we'll finally get the chance to strike at the heart of one of the insurgent groups."

"Where are they?" Lara asked.

"In orbit." The colonel answered, "I was concerned that the insurgents would notice a major troop build up and just scatter like they usually do, so I put them where they couldn't be seen. They can do a combat drop in under four minutes if we need them."

The holdall was dumped onto the floor by the barabel and then tipped over to allow he contents to spill out. "Thisss isss all." He said and several other insurgents began to route through what had been in the bag. For the most part this consisted of data storage devices, varying from mem-sticks to removable hard drives but there were also several archaic hand written notebooks containing lists of potential targets, insurgent contacts and supplies.

"What's this?" one of the insurgents said as he found a PTP link amongst the contents of the bag and he held it up for the others to see.

"It's a PTP link." Another replied.

"I know that, but what's it doing in here? Surely Nia would have had hers on her when she was caught. She shouldn't have had a second one." Then he looked up at the barabel and asked, "Was this in her apartment?"

"Thisss one doesss not know. Thisss one did not pack bag."

Another insurgent looked at the device.

"Its transmitting." He said.

"Oh kriff!" the one holding the device snapped, "The jedi must be tracking it." And he dropped the PTP link to the floor and was about to stamp on it when another pulled him bag.

"Don't do it!" he exclaimed, "If the jedi are monitoring the signal they'll know we're here when it suddenly cuts out."

"What do we do with then?"

"Get it out of here. Far out of here."

"Colonel I've found it." the pilot said when the signal from Cal's PTP suddenly appeared on his instrument panel.

"Show me." The colonel replied as he and the Udras stood together in the cramped gunship interior and looked for themselves."

"Its in motion." The pilot said, "Moving north at high speed."

"Well I bet it can't outrun us." Cal said, looking at the colonel who nodded.

"Get after it." He said to the pilot, "Don't let that signal get away."

"Yes sir."

The gunship banked as its pilot switched from its circular flight pattern to head directly for the fast moving signal. Moving at low altitude but high speed over the buildings of the capital city the gunship was soon directly above the source of the signal and the bright beams of the gunship's floodlights illuminated a man on a speeder bike speeding towards the edge of the city. Colonel Jeck frowned and activated the gunship's communications system.

"Republic Army." He announced, his voice amplified and broadcast over externally mounted speakers, "Halt that vehicle immediately."

The rider of the speeder bike ignored the order and continued to race through the darkened city streets, the illumination provided by the floodlights all that was lighting his way. When it became obvious that the man was not going to stop the colonel turned back to the pilot.

"Open fire." He commanded.

"No wait!" Cal snapped, "Colonel we want him alive."

Then what do you suggest?" Colonel Jeck asked.

"Get us down there." Cal answered, indicating himself and Lara, "We can stop him."

"We can?" Lara commented.

"Yes we can." Cal said, "Colonel we just need to get in front of that bike."

"Very well. Pilot, get us ahead of that vehicle and come to a dead stop at ten metres." Then he looked back and Cal and asked, "Will that altitude do?"

"It'll be fine." Cal replied.

The pilot did as he was ordered and accelerated past the fleeing speeder bike before coming to a dead halt about ten metres off the ground. As soon as the vehicle came to a halt Cal and Lara leapt from an open side door and landed in the street below, directly ahead of the speeder bike.

"Bike or rider?" Cal said.

"What?" Lara replied.

"Do you want the bike or the rider?"

"Bike." Lara answered, "I may not be quick enough for the rider."

"Okay then. Get ready because here he comes."

With both the floodlight beams and their lightsabers to give away their positions the insurgent had no trouble in seeing the two jedi standing in the road ahead of him and he aimed to pass between them at top speed. But as he neared Lara suddenly jumped forwards with her lightsaber held out beside her and sliced off the forward control veins of his speeder bike. The insurgent screamed as he lost control moments before he felt himself being pulled off the stricken and burning vehicle by Cal using the Force to lift him into the air. As soon as the insurgent was pulled free the speeder bike ploughed into the ground beneath him and exploded. By this point the vehicle was far enough from the jedi that they were well clear of the blast, but Cal had been forced to retain most of the rider's forward motion to prevent him from being crushed and so he was close enough that shrapnel from the exploding speeder bike tore into him.

Cal set the body of the insurgent down in the street away from the burning wreck of the speeder bike and he and Lara rushed up to him.

"Well there goes our lead." Cal said.

"Maybe so," Lara replied, "but there's one good thing."

"What?"

"Look." Lara said and she stepped closer to the wrecked speeder bike and bent down to pick something up,

"We've got your PTP link back." And she smiled as she handed the hopelessly smashed device back to Cal.

The sound of the gunship's engines increased as the vehicle descended to ground level and the Udras dashed back towards it.

"No luck." Cal said to Colonel Jeck who was stood in the doorway.

"So now what?" the colonel asked as he led out his hand to help Lara into the gunship.

"Thank you." She said.

"Pilot where did you first pick up the signal?" Cal called out and he headed for the cockpit.

"Right here." The pilot replied and he adjusted the gunship's navigational display to show a close up of the area where he had detected the transmission from Cal's PTP link.

"And how far in range was it?" Cal then asked.

"Cal what are you-" Lara began before Colonel Jeck interrupted.

"I think I know." He said.

"It was well within range of our systems." The pilot said.

"So it just appeared from no-where." Cal said and he looked around at his sister, "Get it now?" he asked.

"The signal was masked." Lara said.

"Exactly." Cal replied, "Quite possibly because it was either in a shielded building or underground. But when the insurgents discovered it they wanted to get rid of as quick as they could."

"Its not much of a lead." The colonel said.

"The insurgents are there." Cal said, "I can feel it."

"Then that's where we need to be. Pilot-"

"No." Cal interrupted the colonel, "We can't risk scaring them off. You wait here while Lara and I head in on foot. We'll signal you if we find anything and you can call in your troops from space."

"Very well." Colonel Jeck said, "Is there anything you need?"

"Just one thing. A new PTP link if you've got one to spare, mine's a bit broken."

6.

With map coordinates transferred to Cal's datapad the two Jedi made their way through the city streets, deserted at this time of night by a population too afraid to go out after dark. Even the petty criminals that plagued most large cities in the galaxy were nowhere to be found, aware that they were more likely to encounter a well-armed roving band of insurgents or Republic troops than a likely victim.

"You could at least have let the colonel give us a ride part of the way." Lara complained, but Cal shook his head.

"At the first sign of trouble the insurgents will run. You know that." he replied, "But with just the two of us we have a much better chance of finding them."

The place where the signal from Cal's PTP link had first been detected loomed ahead of the Jedi, a black silhouette set against the night sky and it was easy to see how the signal had been distorted until it was removed from here. The building was a water treatment works and complicated patterns of pipes and storage tanks were dotted all over its exterior.

"This looks like the place." Cal said, "All that metal must have interfered with the signal. Plus they could have brought it here using the sewers. There are enough metal ducts and cables beneath the streets to block my PTP."

"So what now?" Lara asked, "Do we just walk up to the main door and ask to be let in?"

"Well that's one choice. But I think that the workers here are probably part of the insurgency. This is actually a pretty good place to set a base. It has power and armed guards don't look out of place in the open. We'll need to watch our step. To start with I want to find a way past the fence."

"Practically has a sign up saying 'Evil super villains hideout.'" Lara commented, "Do you think one of those fluid tanks has mutant sea predators with blasters grafted into their flesh in it?"

"Pay attention. We need a way in."

"Well how about just jumping it?"

Cal looked at the fence. Topped with rolls of spiked wire and standing about four metres tall it was a formidable barrier to most would-be intruders. But then again, most intruders would not be Jedi.

"I think so." He said, "But we'll find somewhere more out of the way to do it. Okay?"

They found a section of the fence that was hidden from sight of the building by the rusting hulk of a vehicle that had once been used for moving some sort of fluids around, though any indication of what that may have been was long since lost to the corrosion. Simultaneously Cal and Lara leapt up and somersaulted over the fence, landing on their feet between it and the ruined transport. Then they darted to the end of the wreck and peered around, searching for any indication that they had been detected. Sensing nothing they ran towards the main building itself and pressed themselves up against the wall.

"Okay this should do." Cal said as he took another look around, "I can't sense anyone on the other side, we'll go in here."

"But there's no door big brother." Lara replied.

Cal smiled and drew his lightsaber.

"This is why I'm I charge." He said and he pressed the emitter of his lightsaber against the wall before activating it. There was the familiar 'snap-hiss', but the bright blue flash that normally accompanied the weapon's ignition was missing, the glowing blade hidden entirely within the wall of the building.

"I'm actually impressed." Lara said as Cal slowly dragged his lightsaber in a circle, "I'm still not calling you 'master' though." She added.

"It would be kind of weird. You are my baby sister after all."

Lara frowned.

"Got it." Cal said and after shutting off his lightsaber he stepped away from the wall, "Now give me a hand with this." Cal and Lara then both raised a hand, pointing it towards the circle of ferrocrete resting in the hole cut by Cal and they concentrated on it. There was a grinding sound as slowly the ferrocrete disc was pulled back out of the hole and then a soft 'thud' as they let go of it and let it fall to the ground. With the way now clear both Jedi darted through the hole and stood just inside the building, igniting their lightsabers as they waited to see if there was any reaction from its occupants. Still apparently undetected they shut off their weapons and proceeded deeper into the building.

With a wave of his hand Cal made sure that the workers continued to watch their control stations rather than turn and see him and Lara as they crept past the treatment plant's control centre and headed for the ladders leading down to the actual processing plant below. As they crouched by the open hatchway and

looked down the Jedi spotted a pair of men with rifles slung over their shoulders and another in each hand, held by built-in carry handles. Cal and Lara looked at one another and smiled.

"Guards don't need three rifles each." Cal whispered, "I suggest we follow them to see where they go."

"Ladies first." Lara said softly and she leapt down the ladder. Cal sighed and then jumped after her.

They followed the two armed men from a distance through the maze-like processing plant, ever alert to the possibility that someone could emerge from behind one of the myriad clusters of pipes at any moment. The men led the two Jedi to what had once been an office but now seemed to be an armoury. Racks of rifles could be seen through the large windows while the centre of the room held several sealed crates with military markings on them.

"Cal this is the jackpot." Lara whispered as they watched the men placing the rifles they carried back in the racks with the others, "There are enough weapons there to equip a—" and then she suddenly stopped, her eyes widening.

"What's wrong?" Cal asked, glancing around.

"Remember I said I thought I encountered a stennes shifter trying to make missiles from repulsor toys?" Lara said.

"Yes. He escaped into a crowd, like they do."

"Well I think he's here." Lara said.

Cal looked around again, searching through the Force for anything abnormal, such as a being that could feed off others' use of it.

"That could be a problem." Cal said, "If you can sense him, then just maybe—"

"He can sense me." Lara finished.

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

Drinto felt a shiver run down his spine.

"Are you okay?" the woman now serving as his deputy asked.

"They're here." He muttered.

"Who? Who's here?"

"The Jedi." Drinto replied, louder this time, "Raise the alarm!"

"Intruders! Intruders! The Jedi are here!"

Neither Cal nor Lara could tell exactly where the shouted warning was coming from, given that it was repeated and echoed around the building but the implication was clear.

"Cal I think they know we're here." Lara said.

"I think so too." Cal replied.

"So what now?"

"First we deal with these weapons." Cal said, "We can't risk the insurgents using them."

"Especially against us."

"Exactly. Then we look for somewhere we can get a clear signal out to the colonel. We need to tell him to send in the troops."

"Okay. Destroy the guns and send for help. Then what?"

"Then we find that stennes shifter. I get the feeling he's at the heart of this group."

Cal and Lara burst into the armoury to confront the two men who having only just returned rifles to storage there were now removing one each from the racks and preparing them for use. Cal cut down the first startled insurgent with a single swing of his lightsaber before jumping out of the way as the other swung the butt of his rifle at him. Lara stepped forwards and before the insurgent could turn his attention to her she thrust her lightsaber through his chest and he collapsed at her feet.

"Right then." Cal said as he looked at the weapons arrayed around them, "Let's get to work."

The rifles were easy to deal with. Cal and Lara simply walked along the racks with their lightsabers held out beside them and sliced through the receivers of each weapon, rendering them instantly useless. The crates were a different matter however; they held an assortment of explosive weapons from grenades to anti-armour missiles. Disabling these would be somewhat more difficult to do safely. Cal was just considering how to go about it when he spotted Lara pulling what looked to be oversized bullets from one of the crates and stuffing them into her robes.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"They're forty-five millimetre." Lara said, holding up one of the grenade projectiles, "They'll fit our launcher."

"Good point." Cal replied, "Give me some too." And he stepped closer to take some himself.

With their pockets laden with the projectiles the Jedi next turned their attention to the question of how to make the rest of the stockpile safe without brining the entire building down upon them.

"Where's a combat engineering unit when you need one?" Lara commented.

"It would still take hours to dispose of this lot." Cal replied and then he smiled.

"What?" Lara asked.

"We don't dispose of it." Cal replied, "We use it."

"Now you're talking." Lara said with a grin and she picked up a shoulder fired rocket launcher.

"Not like that." Cal said, placing a hand on the launcher himself, "I mean we rig up some of these smoke grenades to go off next time the door is opened. If the room's full of smoke the insurgents won't be able to get at their weapons, but we won't trigger the lot off."

"What about the air conditioning?" Lara asked, "They'll be able to suck the smoke out of the air."

"You disable it." Cal told her, "The fire suppression system too. It doesn't need to be neat, just make sure the smoke is staying put. I'll rig the grenades."

Lara did as she was told and set to work on disabling both the fire suppression and air conditioning systems in the armoury by using her lightsaber to weld vents shut and destroy sensors.

While she was doing this Cal took a pair of smoke grenades from one of the crates and removed the pins with his teeth, spitting them onto the floor as he held the grenades compressed.

"Okay I'm ready." He announced, "Now get out the door."

Lara nodded and darted out of the armoury, holding her lightsaber up in front of her and keeping watch. Cal followed her and as soon as he was through the door he turned and tossed both grenades back into the armoury. Then, before the grenades went off he shut the door, sealing the armoury.

"There." he said, "Now when the door opens again the insurgents will be in for a little surprise."

"Okay, now what?" Lara asked.

"The roof." Cal replied and when he then the sound of approaching footsteps he added, "Quickly."

"The Jedi are near the armoury."

"Don't let them inside." Drinto responded when he heard the signal, "Arm yourselves."

"It's alright, they're heading away from it. We're right there now. We'll be after them as soon as we've-" and then the transmission was suddenly interrupted by the sound of a door opening followed several cries of alarm.

Scowling, Drinto slammed his PTP link down on the desk and looked at his deputy.

"Come with me." he said to her, "We're going Jedi hunting."

7.

The stairs leading up to the roof were just ahead and Cal and Lara ran towards them when a large figure emerged to block their way. With a loud hiss it swung a scaled fist at Cal and sent him flying backwards into Lara.

"Oh no." Lara groaned as they picked themselves up and looked at the barabel, "Not him again."

The barabel roared and charged. Both Jedi rolled sideways and the massive alien could not slow down in time to stop before it ran between them. As it turned back around Cal and Lara both jumped back to their feet and called their lightsabers back to their grips, igniting them.

"We do this together." Cal said.

"Got your back bro." Lara replied.

"Now!"

The Jedi and the barabel rushed at one another. The barabel aimed a blow at Lara, but she effortlessly dodged the attack and threw him off balance. Meanwhile Cal swung his lightsaber and sliced through the barabel's side, causing him to roar in pain. In response the barabel spun around and with his tail he knocked Cal off his feet once more and made him drop his lightsaber. The barabel reached out and ripped a length of pipe from the wall, causing water to start flooding into the corridor. He brought the length of pipe down, aiming for Cal's head. But Cal was quick enough to roll away and he dodged each attempt. Taking advantage of the barabel's focus on her brother, Lara struck again and plunged her lightsaber through one of the alien's thick legs. Again it screamed in pain and this was all the distraction Cal needed to be able to use the Force to pull the metal pipe from the barabel's grip and sent it flying down the corridor. Lara then leapt backwards as the barabel swung his tail about behind him, hoping to knock her down as it had been able to do with Cal but without success. Cal called his lightsaber back to his grasp and was about to activate it when the barabel bent down, grabbed him by his collar and lifted him up into the air. He slammed Cal against the wall, knocking the breath from him and was about to do so again when there was a brief blue flash as Lara swung her lightsaber and cut the barabel's head from his shoulders. Immediately the alien's grip on Cal released and he dropped back to the floor where Lara offered him her hand.

"Thanks." He said as she helped him up.

"Like I said," Lara replied, "got your back bro."

There was the sound of running from the way that the Jedi had come and Cal looked towards it.

"Come on." He said, "The roof is right here."

Cal closed the door to the roof as soon as he and Lara were clear and then used his lightsaber to destroy the mechanism and seal it shut.

"Now let's signal the colonel." He said and he took out his PTP link, "Colonel Jeck this is Cal Udra." He signalled, "Enemy located, send them in."

"Tell him the location is marked by red smoke." Lara said and from beneath her robe she produced a smoke grenade marked with a bright red band. Cal frowned, "I took it when you weren't looking." She said and Cal's frown turned to a smile.

"I got this." He said and he took out a fragmentation grenade. Then while Lara set off the smoke grenade he raised the PTP link back to his mouth and said, "Location marked by red smoke colonel."

"Copy that Jedi Udra." The colonel's voice replied, "Reinforcements are en route. ETA now three minutes. Jeck out."

"Three minutes huh?" Lara said as she looked at the door they had come through. There was the sound of banging from the other side as the insurgents who had followed them tried to break it down, "Let's hope that's soon enough."

"Lara, we're Jedi." Cal said as he activated his lightsaber, "We'll be just fine."

The two Jedi stood back from the doorway, their lightsabers glowing brightly as the hammering continued. All of a sudden the sound ceased and Cal and Lara glanced at one another.

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

"Get ready." Cal replied, "I think they're coming." And he flicked the safety off the grenade with his thumb.

There was a brief shower of sparks from the already ruined door control panel as the insurgents short circuited the mechanism from the other side and the door opened to allow them to burst forth onto the roof. Immediately Cal hurled the grenade, aiming it not for the front rank of insurgents but for the open doorway behind them and there were screams as it detonated.

"Now!" Cal yelled and he and Lara charged at the insurgent mob heading for them. Thanks to the destruction of the weapons in the armoury the mob was poorly armed, with most possessing only hand

weapons and those that had slugthrowers or blasters unable to use them from long range for fear of hitting their own people. But what they lacked in weaponry they made up for in numbers and Cal and Lara found themselves being pushed back towards the edge of the roof as they sought to prevent the mob surrounding them.

It was then that the night sky was filled with the sound of powerful engines.

The boxlike shape of the Republic troop transport flew overhead and from its belly members of the elite rocket-jumper corps leapt out, their rocket packs flaring brightly as they descended. The rocket jumpers opened fire before they had even landed, their blast rifles making short work of the insurgents on the roof. "Captain Midre, Republic Rocket-jumper Elite Advance Unit." The leader of the Republic troops who landed on the roof announced as he marched up to Cal and saluted while behind him his troops began removing their bulky rocket packs in preparation for entering the building.

"Excellent timing captain." Cal replied.

"I'd rather you got here sooner." Lara added.

"Young lady," the captain said, "in my experience the cavalry should only ever arrive in the nick of time.

Anything else would be improper."

"Cavalry huh? So where are your horses?"

"Never mind that now." Cal said, "Captain, we need to secure their leader."

"Not a problem commander, my men are at your command."

Drinto and his subordinate came to rapid halt as the body of an insurgent rolled down the stairs ahead of them.

"Get back!" Drinto's subordinate warned him, stepping forwards as a rocket-jumper came rushing down the stairs after the dead insurgent and raised his weapon. There was a flash of light and the woman gave out a brief cry as she was hit. Drinto aimed his pistol at the soldier and fired twice. Both shot found their mark, hitting the soldier dead centre of his chest but all that achieved was to scratch the paintwork of his armoured chest plate. Drinto did the only thing left open to him. He turned and ran in the opposite direction.

As word spread that the suspected leader of the insurgents had been spotted the Republic forces began to close in around him, with Cal and Lara leading the way.

"He's trying to escape." A soldier signalled, "He's heading for the main door."

"Well he won't get out that way. Captain Midre said to Cal, "My ship has set down in front of the building, he'll run right into my men."

"Oh no." Cal exclaimed, "A crowd is just what he needs to escape. Lara come on!" and he and Lara ran off ahead of the soldiers accompanying them.

Drinto felt the tremor in the Force that indicated the nearby presence of Jedi and he looked around just in time to see Cal and Lara rush around a corner and come to a halt.

"Give it up!" Cal called out as he and Lara began to advance, holding their lightsabers out in front of them in a threatening manner.

"There's no way out!" Lara added.

Drinto backed away from the Jedi and stood in front of a window.

"Yes there is." He said and he raised his pistol and fired. Shot after shot echoed down the corridor, but not one struck either Jedi. These were not intended to kill them, just to keep them at a distance. The weapon clicked as it ran out of ammunition and Drinto then lunged sideways to where a fire extinguisher was hung on the wall. Grabbing this he hurled it through the window and then dived through after it.

"No!" Cal yelled and he and Lara rushed to window and stared out, looking down at the ground. There they saw Drinto picking himself up as a group of rocket-jumpers closed in around him, yelling at him to surrender. Drinto raised his hands above his head as the troops as they continue to close in.

"No! Get back from him!" Cal yelled, but it too late. Drinto suddenly sprinted forwards into the midst of the soldiers and promptly vanished.

"Oh stang!" Lara exclaimed as she watched the soldiers looking around, desperately trying to find the individual they knew to be standing amongst them.

Colonel Jeck's gunship arrived shortly after.

"So he escaped?" he asked.

"He slipped right through our fingers colonel." Cal replied, "Pulled a disappearing act before our very eyes."

"Yeah, by the time we got down there he was long gone." Lara added, "It wasn't as if we could risk jumping out after him. If we tried using the Force near him we'd just wind up breaking our necks."

"I wouldn't say it was for nothing though." Colonel Jeck said, looking around at the line of body bags being removed from the building, "I think that we won't be worrying about this particular group for some time, if ever again."

"Their leader still got away though." Lara pointed out, "Stennes shifters are always dangerous."

"Maybe so, but he's just one being." Colonel Jeck replied, "And on his own he's vulnerable. Rival groups will be looking for him as well now he's vulnerable. There is just one thing though."

"What's that colonel?" Cal asked.

"Well my men have taken a look at the insurgent's armoury and they suspect a large number of forty-five millimetre grenades were removed. They found the empty containers. Now I don't need to tell you how dangerous those can be in the wrong hands. Do you have any idea what happened to them?"

"Oh I wouldn't worry about those." Cal said.