

# STAR WARS

## TALES OF THE JEDI



### V-III: TROPHY

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...

**TROPHY**

THE FOUNDING FAMILIES HAVE BEEN GATHERING SITH ARTEFACTS FOR THREE HUNDRED YEARS AND NOW THE CRASSIS FAMILY HAVE LOCATED AN ITEM THAT WAS ONCE THE PERSONAL PROPERTY OF A SITH LORD. THE ONLY PROBLEM IS THAT IT IS IN THE POSSESSION OF CAL UDRA, THE JEDI KNIGHT ASSIGNED TO THE NARTHIS SECTOR. NOW CHARITY CRASSIS FINDS HERSELF HAVING TO STEAL FROM A JEDI WITHOUT GETTING CAUGHT...

Original characters created and story written by Stephen J. Dutton.  
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# 1.

"We saw it father." Luke Crassis announced as he and his wife Salla returned to their family home, a large mansion in the capital city of the planet that drew its name from their ancestors Bail and Leia Crassis who had been part of the survey team to originally chart the sector for the Republic.

"My boy, I saw the news." Luke's elderly father, Erill replied, "Are you both okay?"

"We're both fine." Salla reassured the old man, "That lunatic was mainly interested in Trent after all."

"Yes, but fortunately there were plenty of jedi on hand to chase him off." Luke added and he smiled, "That's why we saw it."

"Slow down. Now what exactly did you see?" Erill asked.

"The lightsaber." Salla replied, "Cal Udra was carrying it on his belt."

"Which would make sense." Luke added, "After all, how else would Charity have been able to see it."

"But are you certain that it is of Sith origin?" Erill asked, "Some jedi have been known to manufacture and carry a second one of their own."

"Charity told me that Kyle Jenner identified it as a Sith weapon." Salla said.

"Assuming that she wasn't lying just to be allowed back here on Crassis Major." Luke pointed out, "We never actually saw Cal activate the thing to see the colour of the blade."

"Also it didn't look much like his regular weapon." Salla replied, "If he was going to make another why not just copy the one he already had?"

"I think for now we need to assume that Charity was being straight with us." Erill said, "And that to the best of her knowledge this lightsaber is indeed of Sith origin. Which means we need to obtain it. For which I believe you said my daughter offered her assistance." he added, looking at Salla.

"But is she really willing to help us obtain it for ourselves?" Salla asked, "Even if the lightsaber is genuine, she could still mess up its retrieval on purpose."

"As I see it, it doesn't matter if she's willing or not." Luke told her, "She'll help us or she'll never be allowed to set foot on Crassis Major again."

Charity Crassis did not live in the family mansion with her father and older brother's family. Instead she maintained an apartment elsewhere in the city and it was here that Luke went to find her.

"Hello Charity." he announced as he walked into her apartment accompanied by a pair of mandalorian bodyguards. As was typical when away from the Crassis estate the mandalorians dispensed with their traditional armour for formal suits that they never quite looked comfortable wearing.

"What are you doing here?" Charity demanded as she leapt to her feet and spun around to face him, "And more to the point how did you get in?"

"Oh now Charity," Luke replied as he sat down, the mandalorians waiting by the door, "Did you really think that we'd allow you to come back here and not make sure we could get in?" and he held up a copy of Charity's pass key.

"You still haven't told me what you want." she said, looking nervously at the mandalorians.

"You seem agitated. Perhaps you ought to sit down and take the weight off your feet." Luke suggested.

"Agitated? The last time you came barging in here with your mandalorian friends you were here to beat me and order me off the planet."

Luke frowned and leant forwards.

"Now look here Charity, everything that has happened between us was brought on by yourself. You told the other Families about the estate on Lovas so they could attack it." The families that Luke was referring to were the descendants of the other crew members of the survey ship who had remained in the Narthis Sector to exploit their discoveries. Collectively they were known as the Founding Families and publicly at least they worked together. However, more recently the Crassis family had discovered that the Karn family had secretly placed their eldest daughter, Gayal, in a mental institution when they found out she was romantically involved with Cal Udra, the jedi knight assigned to the Narthis Sector and they feared that she would reveal some of their illegal Sith research to him. Normally this would have been of no interest to any of the other families, but a chance find by Erill Crassis revealed that she was Force sensitive and as such valuable for making use of Sith artefacts keyed to respond to such abilities. A force of mandalorians had been despatched to release Gayal and return her to the Crassis household where Erill had made a deal with her, he would protect her in exchange for her help in researching all of the Sith related material they had. The Karn family would of course have been keen to get her back, especially after discovering why she was so useful so in order to prevent this Erill had married Gayal and mistakenly believing that the union was some plot of hers to get access to the Crassis family wealth Charity had told the other families where Gayal was being hidden.

"You threatened everything we are trying to do." Luke continued, "Now if you don't want any part of our plan, that's just fine by me. But when you pull stunts like that you become a threat to us and frankly if you weren't

my sister then I wouldn't have bothered coming at all, I'd just have sent them and they wouldn't have stopped beating you until there was nothing left to beat." and he too looked at the pair of mandalorians.

"So what do you want now?" Charity asked.

"I want you to sit down." Luke said and Charity sat back down and stared at him, "Good. Now if you recall we kindly allowed you back on Crassis Major because you said you could help us obtain a certain artefact."

"That Sith lightsaber Cal Udra's got?" Charity responded.

"Exactly." Luke said, "And now the time has come for you to fulfil your side of our little bargain. Cal Udra seems to be carrying it around with him so you will go to him and you will take it from him. Then you will bring it to us."

"And after that I'll be free to go?" Charity asked.

"If that's what you really want the yes, you can go your own way and we need never have anything to do with one another again. Apart from the allowance I expect you'll still be wanting from father of course." Luke said. Then he took a datapad from his jacket pocket and tossed it onto the table in front of both him and Charity.

"What's that?" she asked.

"Your itinerary." Luke told her, "Shuttle departure time and liner flight number."

"What for?" Charity said and Luke sighed.

"Charity, Cal has already returned to Aurek Station and it could be weeks before he comes back here. So you need to go there and find that lightsaber."

"And then what?" Charity asked.

"There'll be a unit of mandalorians on the station as well." Luke told her, "You can give the lightsaber to them and they'll bring it back to us. Oh and Charity, just one more thing."

"What?" she asked.

"If you screw this up and we don't get that lightsaber then don't bother trying to come back here."

Travel through hyperspace required very precise navigational data to prevent a ship from accidentally flying through the mass shadow of a large object and being forced out of hyperspace if it was lucky or torn apart if it was not. Few vessels had the computing power to calculate or store all the data needed for every possible jump and so instead they relied on the network of navigational beacons that the Republic maintained. Aurek Station was one such beacon, a space station built in the depths of space that served as a transit point that as well as providing the data for dozens of different possible hyperspace journeys was also a place where travellers could stop to rest, refuel or rendezvous with others.

The station itself consisted of a large circular section at the top several thousand metres across and four towers extending downwards. Charity stared at this as her liner approached the structure, lining itself up with one of the docking arms used by larger vessels. Then after disembarking she found herself some suitably luxurious accommodation and checked in and used the station's computer network to look up Cal Udra. As the Jedi knight assigned to the Narthis Sector, Charity expected to find a listing for Cal in the directory but looking him up by either his first name or family name revealed nothing. She even checked for the name 'Lara' just in case his younger sister and padawan learner had had her named used for their listing. Given the bickering between the pair that Charity had witnessed she could easily believe that Lara would do such a thing to annoy her older brother, just as Charity herself would do the same to upstage Luke. But she still came up without an address and pondered how she was supposed to find someone in a city sized space station who apparently did not want to be found.

"Where are you Cal Udra?" she said to herself and then she remembered the third Jedi she had encountered. He had been considerably older than either Cal or Lara and although neither had referred to him as 'master' he was definitely more senior than either of the Udras. Tarris Blake was the name Charity remembered and she entered that into the station directory's search system. Almost immediately the system gave her an address and communication data and Charity was surprised to see that it was in one of the more upmarket sections of Aurek Station. Not the most expensive by any stretch of the imagination but it was better than she had expected members of the Jedi Order to be using. Initially she reached for the button that would signal the apartment registered to the Jedi but then she paused, wondering if a comm call was really the best way to go about contacting Cal. Finally she decided that a personal visit would be more productive, as well as giving her more time to consider what she was going to say to him. As a Jedi knight, Charity knew that Cal could sense certain emotional responses and this included any attempt to deceive him. Many members of the Founding Families were sufficiently practised liars with strong enough wills that they could prevent their thoughts being read or manipulated but Charity had always tried to keep as far removed from their schemes as she could and that meant that this was a skill she lacked. When she spoke with Cal she needed to be careful that everything she told him was true. From a certain point of view at least.

Then she looked at her luggage and considered her options once more.

"What does one wear to try and distract a Jedi?" she said.

## 2.

"I was informed you were going to evaluate hypothetical tactical situations." Tarris Blake said as he stood in the doorway to one of the smaller rooms in the large apartment he shared with Cal and Lara Udra. It was supposed to be a bedroom, but given that the spacious lounge had been converted into a training area this room had been made into a compact lounge instead, allowing the jedi to relax between missions and training.

"I am." Lara replied and she pointed to the wall mounted video screen, "See, that woman with the red hair is playing a jedi knight and Cal and I list everything she does that's utter nonsense."

"Excuse me." Cal said as he arrived with a bowl of snack food and drinks on a tray. Squeezing past Tarris he set the tray down and sat beside his sister. As soon as he caught the scent of the food the dog that had been lay close by suddenly sat up and began staring at Lara.

"Oh no Ghost," she said, "don't you try any of that dog hypnosis on me. You've been fed."

"Jedi Udra," Tarris said to Cal, "are you really intending to just sit and watch this rather than train?"

"Yes we are." Cal replied, "We've been training almost non-stop since Master Karas was killed and we're exhausted. We need time to rest. If Kyle Jenner is sighted again we'll be ready."

"But to watch such-" Tarris began and then he frowned and looked at the screen as something caught his attention, "Is she standing on the ceiling?"

"Yep." Lara replied, "Apparently her mastery of the Force allows her to negate gravity."

Still frowning Tarris moved to sit on the couch with Cal and Lara.

"Is this how the people of this sector see our order?" he asked.

"No, just the producers of the show." Cal replied.

"We've met the actress and she's actually really nice." Lara added, "She even helped me out when I was fighting pirates."

"Not by walking on the ceiling though." Cal pointed out.

"So you just sit and watch this even though you know it's nonsense?" Tarris asked.

"Well we did try turning it into a drinking game." Cal said.

"A drinking game?"

"Yes." Cal replied, "Each time she does something impossible we take a shot."

Tarris frowned again.

"And what happened?" he asked.

"We ran out of drink in about an hour." Lara said.

Just then there was a chiming sound from the front door to their apartment.

"Shorty! Door!" Lara shouted and a large labour droid that had been sat motionless in a corner of the training area suddenly stood up and lumbered towards the door.

"Lara, what are you doing?" Cal asked

"Let Shorty get it. I want to see if the datapad holding the map to a secret fortune really is a fake created by-" Lara began.

"But Shorty can't talk." Cal pointed out as he got to his feet to go and answer the door himself, "How is he supposed to-" but then the jedi all heard a female voice from the front door as the labour droid opened it.

"Hello? Is Cal here?"

"I know that voice." Cal said.

"So do I." Lara added as they both darted to the doorway leading to the training area to confirm their suspicions.

"Charity?" Cal said when he saw Charity Crassis standing at the front door, "What are you doing here?" then he looked at the droid blocking her path, "Shorty let her in." he added and the droid stepped aside.

"Thanks." Charity said as she slid past Shorty, "I was just on the station and I thought I'd drop by and say thanks for rescuing me from that lunatic. I know I wasn't terribly pleasant about it when it happened."

"That's saying something." Lara muttered, remembering how charity had complained almost continuously about the lack of amenities aboard their disabled ship while they waited for Tarris to come and rescue them.

"And I was thinking that you may like to join me for dinner." Charity added.

"Well I don't see why not." Cal replied, "I'll jut go get my cloak." and he headed for his room.

"Excuse me, I just need a quick word with my brother." Lara added before darting after Cal and closing the bedroom door behind her.

"Are you insane?" she exclaimed once the door was closed, keeping her voice low enough that anyone outside was unlikely to hear it.

"What do you mean?" Cal asked.

"I mean a member of the Founding Families suddenly turns up on our doorstep in a dress that's too low at the top and too high at the bottom and invites you of all people to dinner and you're not suspicious?"

Cal frowned.

"Me of all people?" he replied.

"You know as well as I do that the Founding Families always have an ulterior motive Cal. We know they're after Sith lore and they know we know it. So why is one right here, right now? She's up to something Cal."

"Lara, from what we know Charity has remained apart from the Crassis family's plots But maybe I can use her to help get inside information. Information I can use to get Gayal back maybe. Besides, what's the worst that can happen?"

"You end up with another psycho girlfriend from the Founding Families?" Lara replied.

*Anger.*

Cal glared at Lara and then just pushed past her.

"Cal I'm sorry." she said, "But I've got a bad feeling about this. She's up to something."

Ignoring this, Cal opened the door and exited his bedroom.

"All ready." he said to Charity as he walked towards her, smiling.

"Great. I know the perfect place." Charity replied.

"Can't wait." Cal said and then he looked back around at where Lara still stood in the doorway to his bedroom, "Padawan, while I am gone I want you to practice form seven. If we are to encounter Kyle Jenner again you will need to be able to protect yourself." and then he linked arms with Charity and they left the room, the door sliding shut behind them.

"Oh Cal." Lara said, sighing and she began to walk back towards the lounge.

"Where are you going Padawan Udra?" Tarris asked.

"To watch the show." Lara said, pointing to the lounge.

"Your master gave you an order." Tarris replied, drawing his lightsaber, "Now, form seven. Defend yourself." and there was a 'snap-hiss' as he activated his weapon.

As Cal and Charity walked away from his apartment neither paid any attention to a figure standing further along the corridor apparently studying a deck plan mounted on the wall when in fact he was looking at the compact display screen he had stuck to it that showed him the feed from the camera pointed towards the apartment door. Then as Cal and Charity entered a turbolift and disappeared from view once more the man who did not seem fully comfortable in his suit took out a point to point communicator and activated it.

"Two, this is number six, she's made contact."

"Copy that six. Be seeing you."

Cal tried to watch Charity closely, observing her for any behaviour that appeared abnormal. Of course he had little to base any opinion of what was abnormal for her on, but he hoped that he would be able to sense such behaviour through the Force in terms of an emotional response that differed from what she was attempting to portray.

"I wish every guy I went out with paid me this much attention." Charity said suddenly, "Most of my dates just concentrate on staring at just one or two parts of me."

"What?" Cal responded, surprised and irritated that she had been able to pick up on his attention. But Charity just smiled.

"Never mind." she said, "Feel free to stare. Anyway, we're here now, look."

As far as Cal could tell, the restaurant that Charity had picked out was staffed entirely by droids. In addition, rather than grouping the diners together in one large area, each table was located in its own private room, meaning that each group had total privacy.

"I've always liked this place." Charity said as she sat down, "You can be guaranteed to be able to enjoy a meal without a bunch of reporters trying to take your picture all the time."

"Looks like they've cut a few corners on the menus though." Cal commented as the droid assigned to their room handed him a copy of the menu before leaving the pair alone.

"What do you mean?" Charity asked.

"Well there aren't any prices listed at all." Cal told her and she laughed.

"Oh sorry." she said, "I thought you were joking. This is the sort of place where if you have to ask how much something is then you probably can't afford it. They don't even bring you a bill at the end."

"So how do they get paid?" Cal asked.

"Oh you just give them account details and they take it straight from your bank."

"And what if your account turns out to not have enough money in it?" Cal asked and Charity smiled.

"You see how the menu states that this is the list of dishes for human and near human consumption?" she asked and Cal nodded.

"Yes." he replied, "What about it?"

"Well some people say that for some species the menu has human meat on it." Charity said and Cal gasped.

"You're kidding." he exclaimed and Charity laughed.

"Of course I am." she said, "I thought you jedi could tell when people were lying."

"Not always." Cal said, "Unfortunately."

"That's very useful to know." Charity replied, "Now I think I'll have this starter, this main course and this for dessert." and she tapped the menu, transmitting her order directly to the kitchens. Cal then indicated a starter and main course and then frowned, "What's wrong?" Charity asked.

"I can't decide on what I want for dessert." he replied.

"Really?" Because the way you look down my dress each time I lean forwards I'd say it was something not on the menu." and Cal's eyes widened.

"I-I-" he responded.

"Oh that's okay. Like I said, I'm used to it." Charity said and then she took Cal's menu from him and pressed it to indicate a choice, "There, now I've chosen for you. Something nice and sweet. Just like me." and she smiled.

"So aren't you worried about how your family will react to your spending time with me?" Cal asked, trying desperately to change the subject and Charity snorted.

"Oh they're all far too wrapped up in their little schemes to bother about me. I'm not exactly what you'd call welcome at family get togethers."

"But you must be aware that they don't exactly like me or any other jedi. None of the Founding Families do."

"Especially the Karns you mean?" Charity responded, "Cal, if you're after me to get a message to Gayal then I'm afraid you're out of luck. I'm not allowed anywhere near the estate on Lovas where she lives."

Then there was a chime from the door and it slid open to reveal a group of serving droids carrying the first course of their meals.

"Anyway enough of this." Charity said, "Our food's here."

"If I find a ring that belonged to a previous customer I'm keeping it." Cal commented.

"You mean you wouldn't give it to me even though I'm paying for dinner? Some gentleman you are."

### 3.

"I'm back." Cal called out when he returned to the apartment after dinner and Ghost rushed up to him, tail wagging.

"You're early." Lara said, "I thought she'd have her claws well into you by now and we wouldn't see you until morning."

"Did you discover anything about the Crassis family useful Jedi Udra?" Tarris added as he and Lara continued to circle one another in the padded exercise area, their lightsabers both active.

"Well if Charity is to be believed then she's not part of their inner circle." Cal replied.

"Ha!" Lara responded.

"I didn't sense any dishonesty from her." Cal said.

Lara then shut down her lightsaber and turned to face her brother.

"That's not saying much though is it Cal?" she said, "The Founding Families seem pretty keen on raising their kids to not give much away. Oh and to be complete psychos."

"Well it's done with now." Cal said, walking towards his room, "I didn't manage to get anything out of her and if she was after anything from me then she sure didn't get it."

"Not on a first date huh?" Lara commented just as her brother disappeared from view. Then she looked at Tarris, "Do you get the feeling that this is far from over?" she asked.

Tarris shut off his lightsaber and Lara thought he was about reply when all of a sudden he knocked her legs out from underneath her and as she landed on her back he looked down at her and spoke.

"You are unwise to lower your defences." he told her and she frowned.

While Cal had expected people to be waiting for him when he returned to his apartment after dinner, Charity had assumed that her hotel room would be empty when she returned to it. However, when she walked through the door she found herself confronted by three large men, one of whom she recognised as Kaylor Mott, the leader of the mandalorian mercenaries that her father had hired to handle all of the Crassis family's security needs. Surprisingly all three men wore the traditional mandalorian battle armour rather than the formal clothing the Crassis family provided them so that they could blend in better in normal settings.

"What are you doing here?" Charity demanded.

"Mister Crassis demands an update." Kaylor replied, "So we came to get one."

"Looking like that? I'm surprised that the hotel hasn't called station security." Charity replied.

"We disabled the security monitors." Kaylor explained, "My men are experts at such things."

"Things like breaking and entering?" Charity said, "Supposing Cal had come back with me?"

"Then we would have taken the item we were sent here to retrieve and departed with it." Kaylor said. Then he looked at the communication terminal, "That is set up." he told Charity, "Tell your brother what you have achieved."

"Okay." Charity replied with a frown and she stormed across the room to sit down beside the console and activated it. Immediately a translucent three dimensional image of her brother appeared, looking as if he was sat in another of the chairs clustered around the console.

"Ah Charity," he said, "how did dinner go? Since I see the family account has just been billed for almost four thousand credits I'm going to assume it went well and you have the lightsaber. So if you'll just give it to Mister Mott then-

"I don't have it." Charity interrupted and Luke's image sighed.

"That is disappointing." he said.

"Well what did you expect?" Charity asked, "That he'd just hand it over to me? Or perhaps that I'd be able to steal it out from under his nose and he wouldn't even notice? He's a kriffing jedi Luke. They notice when you're pulling stunts like that."

"Remember our deal Charity. You get the lightsaber and we overlook your previous transgressions. Otherwise you don't get to come back. Trust me, I'll have your account frozen and you'll find it difficult trying to walk all the way back here from Aurek Station."

"I just need more time Luke. Let me get closer to him and I'll have him eating out of my hands I promise." Luke frowned.

"Charity, you seem very keen to be close to Cal. You're not developing feelings for him are you?"

"What me? No way." Charity replied, "You told me what happened to Gayal and I don't fancy the idea of being measured for a straight jacket."

"Well we need that lightsaber Charity and since you've failed to get it I'm obviously going to have give you a hand." Luke said.

"I told you I can get it. I just need more time." Charity protested.

"Time is a luxury you don't have. I want that lightsaber as soon as possible."



"Okay then big brother, what do you suggest I do? And you better not be about to suggest I try seducing him."

"Nothing so crude." Luke replied, "I want you to offer him something he actually wants." and as Charity scowled he added, "I want you to offer him access to the computer systems of the other Founding Families." "But I don't have that information." Charity pointed out, "And I'm pretty certain that you don't either. So why would Cal believe me?"

"Because it is something too good for him to ignore. With the ability to access the computer systems of the Founding Families the jedi could expose all their activities over the last three hundred years."

"And I suppose you've got an equally good plan for what happens when he turns up expecting me to hand over this information." Charity replied.

"That's when Mister Mott here and his associates will step in." Luke said, "You'll pretend that you made the claim under duress and that they're holding you hostage. Then when the oh so noble Cal Udra tries to free you, you'll steal the lightsaber."

"Oh great." Charity said, "So that then leaves me facing an angry jedi and I bet these goons won't be under orders to help me." and she looked in the direction of the mandalorians.

"I've already thought of that sister dear. Mister Mott's team will not be wearing their normal armour. Instead they'll appear as just any typical muscle for hire group. You will take the lightsaber from Cal and then they will take it from you. You will appear innocent and more importantly there will be no connection to us."

"What about the jedi?" Kaylor asked.

"Only kill him if you have no alternative." Luke said, "Alive he's a witness to say that this was nothing to do with us, but a dead jedi attracts far too much attention."

"Cal!" Lara yelled as she yanked the pillow out from under his head and then struck him with it just as he was waking up.

"What?" Cal replied, sitting up and frowning as he rubbed his head.

"Your new girlfriend's calling." Lara told him, "Oh and Tarris looks real annoyed. I think a second date is too much like attachment for his liking. The jedi code only allows for one night stands you know."

"So for that I get brain damage from a pillow?" Cal asked while he got out of bed.

"If you ask me you got that a long time ago. About the time you started dating."

"Don't say it." Cal interrupted, "Seriously Lara, you really need to stop bringing up Gayal at every opportunity." and then he walked out into the main room of the apartment where a computer and communication terminal was located at one side, away from the padded exercise area.

"Hi Cal, sorry I didn't mean to wake you." Charity said, her image on the display screen smiling.

"Wake me?" Cal replied.

"Your sister told me you were asleep." Charity said, "Plus of course there's your hair."

"My hair?" Cal said, confused and then he placed a hand on his head and realised that his hair was stood up on one side where it had been resting against the pillow, "Stang." he hissed, doing his best to smooth down his hair and Charity giggled.

"Look Cal I need to see you again." she said, "I've got something really important to discuss with you." Cal sighed.

"Look Charity." Cal responded, "Dinner was fine but I really don't think that."

"It concerns the Founding Families. Most of them anyway." Charity said before Cal could finish, "But feel free to keep going about why I'm not relationship material. That's always fun."

"Sorry." Cal replied, embarrassed, "I misunderstood. What can you tell me?"

"Cal I've got a full list of computer networks and passwords for all the Families other than my own on a datapad. I was able to download it from my father's intelligence files on his own personal computer. That's every nasty little secret they've had for three hundred years. It'd take you decades to find them on your own and by the time you found a slicer good enough to get you in the data would have been deleted automatically."

Cal paused. Access to the Founding Families' computer systems was something that really could bring them all down in one go. Even without direct access to the Crassis family's network there was a fair chance that at least one of the other families would have the same information about them on their own system. The data gathered over three hundred years of collecting and researching forbidden artefacts could only be properly organised by an extensive computer library and all that the Jedi Order needed was proof that each family had one such artefact in their possession to justify a full search of every property they owned.

But there was one detail that Cal needed to be sure of before going any further.

"And what do you get in return Charity?" Cal asked.

"Freedom." she replied, "No more looking over my shoulder and wondering when my brother is going to show up and start bossing me around again."

"So why not just come on over and-"

"Cal, I think I'm being watched." Charity said, "And after dinner last night I wouldn't be surprised if you were

as well. I think that the Founding Families suspect what I've got and want it back. I need you to come and get it. But come alone, if they were sure of what I had they'd have already tried to take it back but if we can make our meeting look innocent then maybe they'll leave us alone long enough for you to get the information to safety."

"I'll be there as soon as I can." Cal replied before Charity terminated the call. Then he looked up at where Lara and Tarris were watching him.

"It's a trap." Lara said.

"Perhaps young padawan." Tarris added, "But set by whom? And what do they hope to gain?"

"Apart from Charity wanting to get her hooks into Cal?" Lara asked, but both Cal and Tarris ignored her.

"I suppose it is possible that the Crassis family is trying to test Charity's loyalty to them." Cal said, "Plus, if she really does have details of where the Founding Families have hidden all their dirty little secrets then our job is done. We'll find out exactly where that Sith library is hidden and be able to seize every last artefact they've already found."

"And probably link them to a transport load of other crimes." Lara added with a smile. Then the smile vanished, "But what about the trap?"

"Oh don't worry about me little sister. I can take care of myself, remember I'll be well armed."

"I suppose a lightsaber and blaster will make most beings think twice." Lara commented.

"Two lightsabers." Cal corrected her.

"You're not taking that antique out with you again are you?" Lara asked in reply and Cal shrugged.

"I just get the feeling that its important somehow. I want it where I can see it." he said.

"It was built by a Sith." Tarris reminded him, "It should be destroyed."

"Oh don't worry about me being corrupted by it." Cal replied, "On the odd occasion I've actually activated it, it hasn't felt any different to my own. In the Force that is. After a thousand years hooked to a corpse I think that the Dark Side gave up on it and left."

"Yet you still attach significance to it." Tarris said, reminding Cal of his own recent statement.

"Yes I do. I think it's going to have some practical use and I don't want to be caught without it if I'm suddenly confronted with the right moment. Let's not forget that if not for that Sith lightsaber Kyle Jenner would have sliced me in two."

"As you wish." Tarris said, "But I warn you that I have nothing but bad feelings about the weapon. Many jedi have fallen to the Dark Side because of artefacts they mistakenly thought they could master."

"In addition to a brace of lightsabers might I suggest flowers and candy?" Lara said and Cal frowned.

"Why?" he asked.

"Well if you and her are being watched then you do want to make it look like a date don't you?" Lara replied.

## 4.

Like the restaurant that Charity had taken Cal to, the hotel where she was staying was amongst the most luxurious on Aurek Station and Cal could not help but notice several of the guests staring at him as they wondered why someone dressed as plainly as he was would be there, especially since he was holding both a box of candy and a bunch of flowers that were clearly worth far less than most of them would spend on the pen they would use to write the card accompanying such gifts.

The hotel occupied several decks of the station and Charity's room was not on the level Cal entered it from so he headed for the nearest turbolift. However, before its door could slide shut one of the hotel staff arrived and held it open.

"Since you are clearly not one of our guests, may I ask what you are doing here sir?" he asked, clearly suspicious about Cal's presence.

For a moment Cal considered just identifying himself as a jedi knight and explaining that he was here on official business. But then he had second thoughts, he had not noticed anyone observing him so far and so the fewer people who knew he was here the better and he tucked the box of candy under his arm to leave one hand free.

"There's no need to hold me up further." he told the hotel employee, waving his hand in front of the man's face, "You can let me get on with my business."

"There's no need for me to hold you up any further." the man replied, "I'll let you get on with your business." and he stepped back from the turbolift door, letting it slide shut and the turbolift began to move, taking Cal to the floor where Charity's suite of rooms was located.

Walking right up to the door to Charity's suite Cal pressed the button to activate the communicator set into the wall beside it.

"Hello?" Charity's voice asked, though the compact display screen remained blank.

"Charity it's me, Cal." Cal replied.

"Come on in Cal, close the door behind you." Charity said and the door slid open automatically.

Cal entered the hotel suite, closing the door behind him and then heading past the doors either side of him in the short hallway that led to the main area of the suite where he expected to find Charity waiting for him.

"I know these aren't much, but to keep up the pretence I brought you some flowers and-" Cal began as he approached the lounge area but he stopped suddenly when he saw what was waiting for him. Charity was indeed sat waiting for him on a couch, dressed in her usual expensive style, but what Cal had not expected and more worryingly had failed to detect through the Force were the four men dressed entirely in black with no part of their flesh visible thanks to the overalls, masks and goggles they wore making it impossible to even identify their species. More significant though were the pulse wave blasters that each of them carried. Then as Cal tried to study each one for any clues about who they were or what they were doing in Charity's suite he heard movement from behind him as two more of the black clad figures emerged from the rooms he had only just walked past.

"I'm sorry Cal. They arrived right before you did." Charity said.

"Get over here and sit beside her." one of the figures in black said, only Charity recognising the voice as that of Kaylor Mott and he used his weapon to point to the couch beside her.

Cal sighed and set the gifts he had brought with him down on a table beside him and he slowly began to approach Charity.

"I suppose it's only fair to warn you," he said out loud, not addressing his comments to any of the figures in black in particular, "that you don't know who you're dealing with. Leave now and I won't even bother trying to stop you."

"Why? Who do you think you are in those robes, some sort of jedi?" one of the figures behind Cal responded and Cal grinned.

"As a matter of fact." he said just as he reached Charity, "That's just what I am." and all of a sudden he reached under his robe and drew his lightsaber, then there was a 'snap-hiss' as he ignited it, "Charity get behind me!" he snapped, pulling Charity off the couch and pushing her behind him. Then he looked at the black-clad figures now surrounding them both, "So how does my offer sound now?" he asked.

"Cal should you be taunting them like that?" Charity asked.

"I'd just rather give them the chance to leave before anyone gets hurt." Cal replied. Then something struck him about Charity's demeanour, "I must say though," he added, "you seem to be taking all of this very well. I can't sense much fear in you at all."

"Really? Well don't forget I knew you were coming here and I've already been kidnapped once, remember?" "Even so, I'm impressed. Just keep right behind me no matter what. Understood?" Cal asked and Charity nodded.

Around them the masked figures remained at a distance, all aiming their pulse wave blasters towards Cal but

apparently unwilling to use the weapons just yet. Cal hoped it was because they were under the impression that they would be ineffective against a Jedi armed with a lightsaber, yet at the same time he sensed no fear from any of them either. For men that looked to be just petty thugs they were particularly strong-willed. Then Cal considered the coincidence of a break in just after Charity had called him to say that she had in her possession a datapad containing everything there was to know about the Founding Families' computer networks and it occurred to Cal where he had encountered individuals who were able to remain so calm in stressful situations before.

Shill Security.

The Founding Families used a private military company to protect their members and property known as Shill Security. Only the Crassis family had formed their own security force since their falling out with the other families, but the others all used that one company. Shill Security had been suspected of carrying out illegal activities on behalf of the Founding Families, but the only person there had been any proof against had been Belle Shill who had then been killed by her own twin brother Han who was the company's CEO. With no further lines of inquiry available the company had been allowed to continue operating, however if Cal could prove that any of these individuals were employees of Shill Security then the Republic would be able to move against it as well, throwing the Founding Families' operations into further disarray.

"Charity." Cal said softly, "Turn."

"What?" Charity replied.

"Turn. I need to look around and you need to stay behind me. Just call out if any of them do anything."

"Okay. Wait no. Left or right?"

"What?" Cal asked.

"Are you going left or right?"

"Oh. Err, right."

"Okay. Wait no. My right or your right?"

"They're the same." Cal replied, frowning even though Charity could not see the expression.

"They are?"

"Will you just trust me? Now turn." Cal hissed and simultaneously he and Charity began to shuffle in a tight circle. As the figure that Charity knew to be Kaylor came into view directly ahead of her, meaning that Cal had his back to him, he tapped his weapon and nodded gently.

"Cal!" Charity screamed as Kaylor raised his pulse wave blaster. Charity promptly ducked while Cal spun around and held up his lightsaber just as Kaylor fired. The shot was fired straight at Cal and he easily parried it with his lightsaber, the blade bursting the spatial distortion before it could strike him. Charity then sprang back to her feet and as she did so she reached into Cal's robes.

"Charity, what are you doing?" he exclaimed as he felt her hand slide around his belt. Then before he could stop her she pulled the Sith lightsaber free and held it out in front of her, fumbling with the controls.

"Wait, I think I know how to turn this on." she said before all of a sudden there was a 'snap-hiss' as the bright red blade extended, thankfully heading away from Charity rather than impaling her on it. However, the blade did punch its way into a couch and Charity squealed as she raised the weapon and sliced it in two.

"Oh, there goes my security deposit." she said.

"Charity what are you playing at?" Cal demanded.

"I saw it on your belt. Now we have two lightsabers to defend ourselves with." she replied, "There doesn't seem to be much to working."

"Charity, that is a lethal weapon and it takes a great deal of practice to use properly. Now turn it off and put it back where you got it from." Cal told her.

One of the men in black now facing Charity took a step forwards and Charity thrust the lightsaber towards him.

"No you don't!" she yelled as he halted before getting close enough for her to be able to reach him with even the tip of the blade and she smiled, "There, see? I can watch your back much better with this."

Cal glanced around the room at the black-clad men and as far as he could tell the fact that Charity was now also wielding a lightsaber did not appear to be concerning them in the slightest. Many beings could be overawed by the sight of a single lightsaber in the hands of a trained user but these men were facing two of them, even if one was being waved about by an amateur, and were still perfectly clam about their situation.

"I've got a very bad feeling about this." he muttered.

"Why?" Charity replied.

"I don't know. But we need to get out of here. Be ready to move for the door when I tell you. But please just shut down that lightsaber, you don't know what you've got there." Cal told her.

"But how can you get us out of here on your own?" Charity asked.

"Just trust me. Now get ready to move." Cal said as he took one hand off his lightsaber.

"Okay. Just say when." Charity said.

"Now!" Cal snapped almost straight away and at the same time he whipped his own pulse wave blaster out from underneath his cloak and began firing. Initially he targeted the figures between himself and Charity and

the door out of the suite, but after the first few shots made them all dive for cover he swung the weapon around to fire at the others. None of his shots were well aimed, instead he was relying on the volume of fire to simply get his opponents out of the way while he and Charity made for the relative safety of the corridor outside.

Cal heard the sound of a lightsaber shutting down and the red glow from the Sith weapon vanished as Charity began to run towards the door. Then Cal shut off his own lightsaber and broke into a run as well, still firing his pulse wave blaster in all directions to keep the figures in black from trying to stop them. Ahead of Cal, Charity stumbled just as he was catching up with her but she managed to get back to her feet without any help from Cal.

"Keep going!" he snapped as he turned to let off another quick spread of pulse wave blasts that kept the figures in black from pursuing them. This left Charity to reach the door first, slamming her hand down on the control to open it before diving into the corridor, Cal following soon after and closing the door behind him. As both of them stood in the corridor pausing while they caught their breath Cal noticed a small number of other hotel guests staring at them.

"Jedi business." he told them as he returned his lightsaber to his belt, "Move along." Then he quickly checked his pulse wave blaster and seeing that the power cell was almost totally discharged he ejected it and inserted a fresh one as quickly as he could. Finally he looked at Charity, "Okay hand it over Charity." he told her.

"Hand what over?" she asked in response.

"The lightsaber." Cal told her, "You don't need it and I want it back."

"Oh dear." Charity said, "Cal I'm sorry."

"Oh I've got a bad feeling about this." he said, frowning, "You dropped it when you fell didn't you?" and Charity nodded.

## 5.

Inside the hotel suite Kaylor looked at his men.

"Let's see how she did shall we?" he said before striding over to the spot where Charity had stumbled and he crouched down and looked around. Not far away, right where Charity would have been looking when she fell was a chair and Kaylor noticed that there was definitely something underneath it. Reaching under the chair for himself he found that there was something cylindrical there and he took hold of it. Removing the object he saw that it was exactly what he had hoped it would be – the Sith lightsaber. Kaylor had been watching Charity closely as she ran and her fall had appeared fake, something that Cal may have noticed had he not been preoccupied with shooting at the mandalorians who were not genuine trying to harm either the Jedi or Charity in any case. Just to be sure of what he had in his hand Kaylor flicked the activation switch and with a 'snap-hiss' a bright red blade extended from the grip in his hand.

"This is it." he said, "This is what Mister Crassis wants."

"But how do we get it to him?" one of his men asked, "That Jedi is probably waiting right outside that door for us to come out."

"Easy." Kaylor answered, "We have a lightsaber so we get to make our own door."

"Go get security." Cal told Charity.

"But what about you?" she asked in reply.

"I need to stay here and keep those guys inside your room."

"Suite." Charity corrected him, "I don't rent rooms, only suites."

"Whatever. This is the only way in or out isn't it?"

"Yes but-"

"So I want to make sure that they can't get away. Charity I don't think that those guys are burglars. I think they targeted you to try and stop you talking to me. But I need to be able to take them alive to question them and for that I'll need help. So go tell security and they can call Lara and Tarris. Then we'll find out just what's going on here."

*Fear.*

*Surprise.*

Cal felt the sudden tremor in the Force and paused.

"Cal what's wrong?" Charity asked.

"Call it a hunch." he replied and he reached for the control to the door.

"Cal no!" Charity exclaimed but she was unable to prevent Cal from opening it and she flinched. However, there was only silence from inside the suite and Cal crept through the door, swapping his pulse wave blaster for his lightsaber and igniting it.

"Well I think someone found the lightsaber." Cal said as he looked at the large hole someone had cut in the floor of the lounge to the room below, "Stay here." he told Charity, "Call security and tell them what's going on."

"But what are you going to do?" Charity asked and Cal smiled.

"I'm going to get my lightsaber back." he replied before jumping down into the hole.

Landing in the room below Cal saw that he was in another suite similar to the one occupied by Charity above. He also saw that there were two bodies lying on the floor of this one. Rushing to them he checked both for any signs of life but found nothing. Both appeared to have been shot at close range with pulse wave weapons like those the figures in black had been armed with. The door to the suite was wide open and it was obvious to Cal that the men responsible for these deaths were already gone.

In her suite above, Charity peered down through the hole and watched as Cal vanished from view. After giving him about a minute to get clear of the hole she went over to the communication terminal and activated it, selecting a long range subspace channel. Then she entered a communication address that she knew would be answered quickly.

"Hello?" Luke asked when his image appeared on the screen.

"Well those goons of yours have it." Charity said, "But Cal's gone after them so I wouldn't be too sure that it'll reach you."

"Why Charity," Luke said with a smile, "you sound almost as if you're hoping the Jedi will be successful. Just remember our deal though, if you can't deliver the lightsaber then there's no place here for you." and the screen went blank as Luke broke the connection.

Frowning, Charity reactivated the communicator.

"Security," she said, "I need to report a break in."

Kaylor Mott and his men had studied the layout of the hotel carefully before breaking into Charity's suite and they knew by heart every way in and out. The conventional exits were of no use to them, these would require them to move through lobbies monitored by staff around the clock rather than just the automated cameras that they had already rigged to show only empty corridors when they entered them and from there out into a crowded public area of the station. Instead as soon as they left the suite below Charity's they turned towards the service section of the hotel, normally accessible only by staff. However, to the security expert that Kaylor had included in his team the simple locks on the doors meant nothing and Kaylor knew that once in the service sector they would have access to the exits leading to the less populated parts of Aurek Station. The corridors of the hotel were not altogether empty however and although the sight of six armed and masked men charging towards them was enough to get both staff and guests out of the way of the mandalorians without them needing to use their weapons even once more it did provoke strong emotional responses.

*Fear.*

*Surprise.*

*Anger.*

All these feelings were easily detectable through the Force and Cal used them as he would a trail of footprints in the ground to track the movements of the mandalorians.

As expected it took the team security expert only seconds to break through the lock on the door to the service sector, the hotel management not expecting that anyone would want to break into that part of their establishment and the mandalorians ducked out of sight.

At first this was enough to throw Cal off the trail and he ground to a halt in the more public corridor as he tried to find them through the Force.

But then just as they were creeping along a service corridor past the hotel laundry the mandalorians encountered a member of the staff.

"Who are you?" he demanded, apparently oblivious to the weapons they held, "What are you doing here?" and he reached for the tiny communicator pinned to his chest and Kaylor reacted swiftly, punching him in the face and then slamming his head against a bulkhead.

*Pain.*

The sudden jolt was like a flare in the Force and as Cal turned he sudden saw the door to the service sector and knew immediately where the men who had taken his lightsaber had gone. A single swing of his own blade destroyed the lock and the door slid open, allowing Cal to dart through and continue the chase. He found the injured hotel employee sat slumped against a wall. The man was still conscious however and he pointed towards a door.

"That way." he groaned and Cal nodded before heading for the door, but when it slid open Cal found himself looking out of the hotel complex and into a massive service shaft surrounded by a network of walkways and staircases that appeared to go on for hundreds of metres both up and down.

"Oh I've got a bad feeling about this." Cal said as he looked over the edge of the walkway he was now stood on and tried to see where the men with his lightsaber were now.

Though Cal did not know exactly where the men were heading for he guessed that it would be somewhere below his current location. The hotel was in a large tower located on the top of Aurek Station and apart from a handful of private docking bays located above that he doubted they would be using, the only places for a starship to dock were further down, either in the hangars of the main circular section or the docking ports located even further down and so he focused his search efforts in that direction. Unfortunately the men were not only keeping away from the edge of the walkway but also had enough of a lead that Cal could neither hear them nor sense them through the Force. Then he lifted his head and a solution presented itself.

The walkways on each level circled the shaft entirely and Cal could see what was on the walkway opposite. Therefore it followed that if he crossed to the far side of the shaft he would be able to see the men on the levels below him right now. Smiling, Cal broke into a run and headed for the other side of the shaft, periodically looking down to see if the men were visible yet. The drawback with Cal's idea was that he was in fact putting more distance between himself and the men he was chasing, moving around the shaft while they were presumably continuing to head down. However, with no other option coming to mind at present Cal had to settle for the only idea he had.

Given that it was intended to be used only occasionally the shaft had only the most basic lighting installed and being dressed from head to foot in black meant that they men Cal was hunting were difficult to spot in the gloom. But by letting the Force flow through him and magnify his senses Cal was able to pick out the six running figures as they descended a staircase that was just as Cal had guessed almost directly below the door from the hotel. It appeared that they had a had start on him of a dozen or more decks by now and that would only increase if Cal ran back to the side of the shaft he had started from. Therefore, Cal decided to take a short cut.

Keeping focused on the men as they ran Cal climbed up onto the safety rail, clinging on to a vertical support with one hand so that he did not fall even as he stood up straight on the top of the rail with his lightsaber in

the other. Cal then took a handful of deep breaths as he cleared his mind and focused entirely on what he needed to do. Then, letting the Force flow through him and guide him Cal threw himself into the shaft. To Cal it seemed as if the air was roaring as he dropped and he spread out his arms and legs, slowing his descent. Using the Force he guided himself towards the far side of the shaft where the six men were still making their way further down, apparently oblivious to what Cal was doing. However, Cal knew that this was something that would not last long and he readied himself for a fight.

Cal hit the walkway at the far side of the shaft just behind the last of the six masked men, seizing the safety railings with his free hand and instantly activating his lightsaber. The sound of the 'snap-hiss' was lost amongst the sound of his impact that was enough for the men to all turn towards him.

"Get him!" Kaylor yelled, firing his pulse wave blaster at the newly arrived Jedi. But Cal was ready for this and with a single swing of his lightsaber he not only burst the spatial distortion before it could blast him back off the railing but also sliced through one of the masked men who toppled over the railing and fell screaming to his death hundreds of metres below in the dark.

But Kaylor had spotted the vulnerability of Cal's position and as a second of his men was cut down he lowered his aim and fired not at Cal but at the railing he was standing on. His next shot struck the vertical support that Cal was holding onto. The blast ripped through the hollow metal tube and sent vibrations up it to where Cal gripped it, transmitting those same vibrations into his arm. Though this was not enough to make Cal let go the physical damage to the support was more serious. Cal's weight was now only held by the top of the support and he felt it start to bend.

Now focused more on remaining upright than battling the four remaining masked men Cal felt someone suddenly grab hold of his ankle and pull. Before he could attempt to stab at this opponent with his lightsaber he felt his feet slip from the railing. Unable to keep his grip on the smooth vertical tube Cal's hand just slid straight down until it reached the break and came free. Falling uncontrollably, Cal's head struck the safety rail and his vision blurred as he struggled to remain conscious. Then a black gloved fist flew towards his face and slammed into it as Kaylor struck while he was still disorientated. Cal tried to place his lightsaber between the two of them but Kaylor saw what he was attempting to do and he struck again, this time using the butt of his pulse wave blaster to hit the back of Cal's hand and he was forced to let go of his lightsaber. The moment he let go of the grip the blade shut down and the inactive weapon dropped to the walkway and rolled away. Cal reached out with his other hand, trying to get to it before it could reach the edge of the walkway but once again Kaylor was quicker and the Mandalorian gave the lightsaber a hard kick that sent it flying over the edge of the walkway and down the shaft.

"Move!" Kaylor barked and while Cal was still struggling to get back to his feet the four masked men broke into a run, heading to the closest exit from the shaft. Cal drew on the Force to help clear his head and glanced over the side of the safety rail, just in case he could see his lightsaber tumbling downwards. But when he saw nothing he instead drew his pulse wave blaster, the only weapon now remaining to him and set off after his opponents. Reaching the door Cal attempted to open it but there was only a grinding sound as the motor tried in vain to move the weight of the door. It had opened and closed exactly as it was supposed to just seconds earlier when the masked men had gone through and that left only one other possibility.

"Oh kriff it!" Cal snapped, slamming a hand against it as he realised that the stolen Sith lightsaber had been used to fuse the sides of the door to its frame.



## 6.

"Where have you been?" Lara asked when Cal returned to the apartment and slumped down in the first chair he came to, "We've already seen Charity to a shuttle to take her back home. She told us about the guys taking the datapad and your precious trophy but you weren't answering any signals."

"Yeah, well I was probably out of range." Cal replied.

"So what happened?" Lara asked, "Do you have the datapad?"

"No, no I don't." Cal told her, "The men who attacked Charity and I managed to escape with both the datapad and the lightsaber."

"You kept up the chase for some time though." Lara said, "So how did they manage to escape brother dear?"

"By using the lightsaber they stole to weld a door shut about ten minutes after leaving the hotel." Cal answered and Lara frowned.

"Ten minutes? But you've been gone hours." she said.

"Of course I have." Cal replied, "I had to go all the way to the bottom of the shaft to get this back." and then he placed the broken remains of his own lightsaber on the table in front of him.

"Wow, that's really broken." Lara said and then as she sensed the approach of Tarris she turned, smiling and added, "Have you seen-"

"Your master's damaged lightsaber can be repaired." he interrupted, "And I would suggest that he does so soon."

"Why, what's wrong?" Lara asked.

"I have just received word from Jedi Antess on Moldas. He is filling in until a replacement for Master Karas can be appointed." Tarris replied.

"And what did he have to say?" Cal said.

"The fallen jedi Hargood Nollar has escaped from his confinement." Tarris said, "Jedi Antess informed me that it appears Master Karas' padawan took Nollar's lightsaber and then helped him to escape."

"But why?" Lara said, frowning, "She can't think that she can control him, can she?"

"She's after revenge." Cal said, "Remember that she thought Master Karas ought to have brought Hargood along to help deal with Kyle Jenner? Well my guess is that she's heading back here with him in tow to kill Kyle. I think he's the one in control of her."

"So rather than one fallen jedi we're now dealing with three?" Lara said, "Oh I've got a very bad feeling about this."

Erill was sat at his desk when Luke entered his office accompanied by Kaylor, Charity and Salla.

"Here it is father." Luke announced, holding up the Sith lightsaber, "Mister Mott delivered it about an hour ago."

Erill smiled at the mandalorian.

"Ah Luke my boy, I can always count on you to come up with a solution." he said and then he turned towards Charity, "And you my dear daughter, I can't tell you how much it means to me that you have finally joined us in our endeavour."

"Oh no, I'm not in this for your revolution." Charity replied, "I just want to be able to get on with my life."

Erill nodded.

"As you wish. You may go if you wish, someone will show you out." he said before turning back towards Luke while his daughter hurried from the room, "Now let me see our prize." he added.

Luke advanced towards his father and handed him the lightsaber.

"I'd be careful with that." Salla warned him, "Even after a thousand years it still has-" and then there was a 'snap-hiss' as Erill activated the lightsaber, its blade extending straight up, "-power." Salla finished.

"So I see." Erill said, shutting down the lightsaber.

"Now tell him the rest." Salla said to her husband.

"The rest? What rest?" Erill asked.

"Take a look at the base father." Luke said and Erill turned the lightsaber end on so that he could see the hilt of the weapon. Then he shook his head.

"I don't see anything." he said, "Apart from the charging port of course."

"Perhaps I should let you explain Mister Mott." Luke said, "It was your men that discovered it after all."

"As you wish sir." Kaylor replied and he stepped forwards, facing Erill, "My men and I inspected the weapon on the flight back here." he began, "We of course found the charging port and thought it may be useful to be able to provide you with a way of recharging it if necessary. That was when my technical specialist noticed the abnormality."

"Abnormality?" Erill asked, "What abnormality?"

"A conventional charging port requires two connections sir." Kaylor replied, "A power feed and a reference."

"Yes, yes, I am familiar with the basics of electronics." Erill interrupted, "Just tell me what is so special about this." and he held up the lightsaber.

"That particular weapon has a third connection inside the port." Kaylor replied and Erill stared at the weapon, "It's very small and was visible only when closely examined it, but there is definitely a third distinct connection."

"Are you all suggesting what I think you are?" Erill asked, looking around.

"What?" Salla said, "That a thousand years ago some Sith lord decided to turn his lightsaber into a data repository simply by adding a single wire data bus to the charging port?"

"Have you tested it?" Erill asked, smiling as he gazed at the lightsaber.

"Not yet father." Luke replied, "We knew that you'd want to see it as soon as possible."

"But our technical people have been able to whip up this based on what we already know about Sith technology." Salla added and she produced a cable that at one end was fitted with a type of power jack at one end and a standard computer data connector at the other. Luke took the cable from his wife and returned to his father's desk, using the cable to connect the lightsaber to his father's desktop computer. Straight away the computer recognised the presence of an external data storage device and began to communicate with it, causing a file directory to appear on the screen of Erill's computer. The translation software that all the Founding families used automatically translated this from Sith to Basic.

"Marvellous!" Erill exclaimed, "But what is all of this?" and Luke began to search through the files.

"This looks like a star chart here." he said, opening one of the files and sending it to the holographic projector built into the desk so that the chart appeared in the middle of the office.

"Yes," Erill said, "a star chart that looks like it's based around Shadowfall."

"There are manufacturing specifications for war droids on here as well." Luke commented, adding a schematic of a Sith war droid to the projection and then a scrolling list of numbers.

"What are those numbers?" Salla asked.

"Look like access codes to me." Kaylor said.

"Access codes to a factory making Sith war droids?" Salla said, her eyes widening.

"Possibly one that has a great many of them already stockpiled there." Luke added.

"How many?" Erill asked.

"If these records are anything to go by then there could be millions of them." Luke replied.

"An army." Kaylor said.

"An army bigger than all those in the sector combined entirely under our control." Erill said, smiling.

All of a sudden there was a shower of sparks from the cable connecting the lightsaber to the computer and the holographic display flickered out.

"Luke, what happened?" Salla exclaimed.

"Something wasn't quite right with the connection." he replied, picking up the lightsaber and trying to extract the connector. However, he found it fused.

"Can it be fixed?" Erill asked and Kaylor stepped forwards to examine the weapon.

"The lightsaber, yes." he replied, "It's just a matter of fitting a new charging socket. But I wouldn't count on being able to access that storage drive again. It's probably fried."

"But we were so close!" Salla said.

"We still have some of it." Luke replied, "We know where the factory is and all of the codes that went through the computer are still in its memory." then he looked at Erill, "Father, I think I ought to head to Shadowfall as soon as possible."