

# STAR WARS

## TALES OF THE JEDI



### V-IX: EXECUTION

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...

**EXECUTION**

BETRAYED BY THE INSURGENTS THEY WENT TO MEET WITH AND CAPTURED BY THE FOUNDING FAMILIES, CAL, LARA AND KARRIE MUST NOW ESCAPE AND FIND THEIR WAY OFF TEPILLOS. THEIR CHANCES OF THIS ARE GREATLY HELPED WHEN GAYAL GRASSIS INTERVENES TO HELP HER FORMER LOVER...

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

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# 1.

"I told you so."

The words were spoken by Lara Udra, padawan learner to her older brother Cal who was at this moment tied to the chair next to the one she had been tied to. A third jedi, Karrie Tyran, was tied to another chair on the far side of Cal. The three jedi had come to the war torn world of Tepillos to try and negotiate with the insurgent groups for information that the jedi could use against the forces that had taken control of the Narthis Sector. These forces were a mix of local militaries, mercenary groups and most significantly a large force of Sith made warbots. All of these were under the control of a small group of families that were descended from the crew of the survey ship that had originally surveyed the sector and ah since become known as the Founding Families. However, the plan had not gone as originally intended and the jedi had been tricked and abducted by the very insurgents they had hoped to negotiate with and brought face to face with two of the leaders of the mercenary forces operating on behalf of the Founding Families.

One of these was a man called Han Shill, CEO of the private military company called Shill Security that had provided most of the security for the Founding Families before the declaration of independence. The Udras had encountered Han on numerous occasions and for a time he had behaved as if he was an ally to them. The second man had never pretended to be anything other than an enemy however. Kaylor Mott was a mandalorian and his people had a long standing grudge against the jedi. Dressed in his traditional armour Kaylor had removed only his helmet that he now had tucked under his arm.

In addition to these two men facing the jedi was a third figure, the leader of the insurgent group and like Kaylor he had good reason to hate the jedi. Drinto Huladra was a stennes shifter, a species that drained the Force from other sentient beings and were able to use this to effectively vanish in crowds. Like the mandalorians the stennes shifters had a history of conflict with the Jedi Order and the handful of survivors were now scattered across the galaxy.

"Told us what?" Cal asked, turning his head so that he could look at his sister.

"I told you I had a bad feeling about this." Lara replied.

"My dear Lara," Han said as he walked closer to her, "from what I've heard this is all your fault anyway."

"How do you figure that out?" Lara responded, frowning.

"Well you're the one that was carrying the grenade launcher right?" Han asked, "The one I kindly supplied you and your brother with a case full of ammunition for when the Jedi Order refused to."

Cal sighed.

"The rounds were tagged." he said.

"The rounds were tagged." Han repeated, "Every time either of you has fired one of the grenades I supplied you with it sent out a subspace signal that told me exactly where you were."

Meanwhile Karrie kept her attention focused on Drinto.

"The Founding Families do not have your best interests at heart." she said calmly, "They care only for-

"They care only for themselves. Yes, I know." Drinto interrupted, "And because they don't want the hassle of running Tepillos themselves I've offered to do it for them. You three are the proof that I have something to offer them. Besides, after what the jedi did to my people do you really think that I'd ally myself with you?"

"So what's going to happen to us then?" Cal asked, looking at Han rather than Drinto.

"Yeah," Lara added, "shouldn't you be explaining the entirety of your evil scheme to us before we miraculously escape and defeat you?"

Han smiled.

"Would you like to wait while I grow a villainous moustache to twirl as well?" he asked.

"You are spies." Kaylor suddenly said from the doorway, "You have been caught trying to incite treason against the sector government and after a fair trial-

"A show trial." Cal muttered with a scowl.

"-you'll be taken out and shot." Kaylor finished, ignoring Cal's comment.

Lara looked up at Han who was at that moment looking back down at her and smiling.

"You could just untie us." she said, projecting the words directly into his mind.

"I could just untie you." Han repeated and he reached down for one of the knots in the syntherope binding Lara to her chair, but rather than undoing it he pulled it tighter.

"Ow!" Lara exclaimed, "That hurts."

"Consider it a lesson not to try and use mind tricks on me little girl." Han told her and then he looked around, "Okay, let's leave them here and get on with our work. We've got a government to build." and then Drinto Han and Kaylor all left the room and the hatch slid shut behind them leaving the three jedi alone in the room.

All three of them immediately began to study their surroundings, searching for anything that may have been left in the room that they could make use of to escape. However, their captors seemed to have done a thorough job and apart from the chairs that the jedi were tied to, there were no objects that were not fixed

down in the room at all. In addition the chairs that the jedi were bound to all had solid backs and their hands were tied so that they were trapped between them and the chairs meaning that even if they positioned themselves back to back then they could not reach any of the knots to untie one another. But even though the room had been emptied of any objects that the jedi could use to help them escape, their captors had overlooked the room itself.

"Lara look over there." Cal said, staring at a section of a wall that had a vertical reinforcing girder set into it.

"What do you see?" Karrie asked as she too looked towards the girder.

"A girder." Lara said, "But that's not important right now."

"Oh yes it is." Cal said, smiling, "Check out the right hand side of it."

"What, the rusty bit?" Lara asked and then she smiled too, "Wait, I'll just see if I can-" and she tried to bounce in her chair to get it to move towards the girder.

"No don't." Cal told her, "Just stay calm and quiet too if that's possible." and he closed his eyes.

"Hey! I can be quiet. You act like I'm always making noise when I'm not." Lara said angrily.

"Even though you are." Karrie said.

"Just get on with it." Lara hissed and Cal focused his thoughts on his sister, reaching out through the Force.

Slowly Lara's chair rose up off the floor a few centimetres and then began to drift through the air towards the girder. Meanwhile Lara looked around, keeping a careful watch on her position.

"Okay that's it." she said as she brushed up against the wall and Cal lowered her back to the floor.

Lara leant as far over as she could, pressing herself up against the girder before rubbing up and down against it.

"Syntherope is very durable." Karrie commented, "The rust may not-

"I can at least try." Lara interrupted before she stopped rubbing against the girder and glared at Karrie, "And don't say that there is not try or when it comes to untying you I'll pick 'do not'. Okay?"

"I was about to point out that the results of your actions might not be visible instantly." Karrie replied.

"Oh. Okay." Lara said before she began rubbing against the girder again.

It took some time and effort from Lara, but eventually there was a snapping sound as the syntherope coiled around her body gave way and dropped around her waist. But Lara was not free yet, her wrists were still bound behind her back while her ankles were still tied to the front legs of her chair. However, she was now able to move her arms enough get her wrists against the same rough edge of the girder that she had used to cut through the syntherope around her body and once again began to rub against it until her wrists were free.

"Got it!" she exclaimed.

"Shush!" Cal hissed, "There could be someone listening."

"Sorry." Lara replied softly as she bent down to untie her ankles. When Lara was finally free she rushed over to her brother and began to untie him, "So what's the plan now?" she asked, remembering to keep her voice low.

"First you untie Karrie while I check the door." Cal replied and as soon as he was freed he darted to the doorway and placed a hand up against it. Then he frowned.

"What's wrong?" Karrie asked when she noticed the expression on his face.

"This door." he replied, "It's cold."

"Cold?" Lara asked, "Let me see." and she dashed to her brother's side.

"Padawan Udra." Karrie said, "Could you perhaps finish untying me first?"

"What? Oh yeah, I'll be just a moment." Lara answered and she placed her own hand against the door,

"You're right. It is cold." she added, looking at Cal.

"And do you feel that?" Cal asked, rocking back and forth.

"Movement?" Lara responded and Cal nodded.

"I don't think that this is a room in a building." he told her.

"A starship? Then that means there could be a vacuum on the other side of this door." Lara said.

"That would make it difficult for us to escape." Cal said in agreement, "But I doubt that any insurgent group has access to a starship and if it belonged to the Founding Families then I think that the artificial gravity system would be working sufficiently well that we would feel any motion."

"So what are you saying?" Lara asked.

"He's saying that we're on a ship at sea." Karrie said from her chair and then she looked at Cal, "Am I correct?" she added.

"Yes you are." Cal replied, nodding, "That may explain the corrosion over there." and he pointed back to the rusted girder.

"So how does this help us escape?" Lara said.

"Hopefully it means that all we need to do is reach the deck and we can jump overboard and swim to freedom." Cal said.

"Swimming would be much easier if I wasn't still tied to this chair." Karrie pointed out.

"Oops. Silly me." Lara said and she rushed back over to Karrie to untie her.

While she was doing this Cal continued to inspect the door. As far as he could tell it was a standard powered

door that had been hastily converted to a secure cell door by the simple means of removing the control panel and then welding a metal plate over the exposed electronics to prevent them from being manipulated. With now way out of the room visible to Cal he instead chose to make use of his ability to sense the Force. He could sense the minds of numerous people close by, presumably the insurgent crew of the ship as well as Han and Kaylor along with any of their own men that they had brought with them.

But in particular there were two minds present just beyond the door and since Cal was not concerned that either of them would be Force sensitive he studied them both as closely as he could. Both individuals lacked the fanaticism or rage that he had come to expect of insurgents, meaning that they were most likely troops that Han and Kaylor had brought with them and would have been chosen for their strength of character to make them as difficult to influence as possible. But then a third presence approached the door and as Cal reached out to this he gasped.

*Surprise.*

"Cal what's wrong?" Lara asked as both she and Karrie sensed his reaction.

"Outside the door." Cal replied, "It's-" and then the door suddenly slid open.

"Gayal." Lara said when she saw the young woman standing in the corridor, "I've got a bad feeling about this."



## 2.

"Get back!" a voice called out from behind the woman and a pair of men in Shill Security uniforms pushed past her, both having seen Cal standing just inside the door rather than still being tied to a chair.

"No!" the woman snapped and she pushed one of the guards through the door.

Cal reacted quickly, side stepping the tumbling guard and instead lunging for the other while he was still trying to draw his sidearm. The guards were both armoured and without a weapon Cal had little chance of harming him. But he was able to seize the guard by his wrist and pushed him back into the wall behind him, keeping his hand away from his holster.

Meanwhile Lara took advantage of the other guard's distraction and reached out through the Force to pluck the pulse wave blaster from his holster, summoning it to her own hand. Flicking off the safety catch she pulled the trigger once and the artificial spatial distortion it fired slammed into the side of the guard's helmet, splitting it and his skull wide open.

Outside the door the woman Lara had referred to as Gayal reached into a pocket concealed in her dress and produced a narrow dagger that she then drove into the gap between the remaining guard's chest plate and helmet. There was a spurt of blood as Gayal removed the dagger and Cal felt the guard go limp as he made a gurgling sound, anything more being made impossible by the hole in his throat.

Cal let the guard drop to the floor and at that moment Gayal leapt at him, wrapping her arms around him tightly as she kissed him.

"I feel a disturbance." Lara commented with a frown.

"Are you certain padawan?" Karrie responded, "The Force seems calm to me."

"Not in the Force. In my stomach. Yuck. I think I'm going to be sick." Lara said as Cal finally pushed Gayal away.

"Who is this woman?" Karrie asked as Cal dragged the dead guard into the cell and dropped him on the floor.

"Karrie Tyran, meeting Gayal Crassis." Lara said as she walked up to Gayal, "Used to be Gayal Crassis until she married and eighty year old billionaire. Though I'm guessing she doesn't greet her husband with quite the same enthusiasm she greeted Cal with."

"I'm here to rescue you." Gayal replied

"Well we don't want your help." Lara said.

"Perhaps you prefer it here in your cell." Gayal responded.

"No. No we don't." Cal said and he looked at his sister, "Do we Lara?"

"No. Thank you for saving us." Lara replied, sighing.

"Well I'm only returning the favour." Gayal added to Cal, "After all you rescued me from the hold of a ship when we first met."

"I don't mean to hurry anyone, but perhaps we ought to get out of here before someone comes by and notices that the guards are dead." Karrie suggested.

"Good idea." Gayal replied, "Come on, I'll show you where your things are being kept."

"But you're coming with us right?" Cal asked as the jedi all exited the cell and Lara closed the door behind them.

"Of course I am." Gayal replied as she began to lead them down the narrow corridor, "Cal, I've only ever wanted to be with you. You know that don't you?"

"Feeling that disturbance yet?" Lara whispered to Karrie.

"Starting to, yes." Karrie replied.

"Yes I know that you didn't have any choice but to marry Erill." Cal said, "And it'll be good to be with you again."

"Jedi Udra," Karrie said, "remember that we are not here so that you can conduct personal affairs."

"No, we're here to negotiate with insurgents that have already decided to ally themselves with the Founding Families anyway. However, if we can get Gayal away from them then they lose their only means of getting into that Sith library." Cal replied. The library in question was a storehouse of Sith knowledge that the original survey team had discovered and for the last three centuries had been trying to gain access to. Getting inside seemed to require some knowledge of the Force and so when it was discovered that Gayal was Force sensitive she had become the logical person to try and had been provided with all of the knowledge that the Families had managed to acquire so that she might be able to find out how to get inside.

"What are you doing here anyway?" Lara asked Gayal.

"Tepillos is littered with Sith artefacts." Gayal replied, "So Erill brought me here to take a look at the ones Han Shill's men were seizing."

"So that's what was in that bag." Cal said, remembering a large bag carried by members of a patrol that he and Lara had ambushed, "Those troops must have been looting Sith artefacts."

"Hang on a moment." Lara then said to Gayal, "Did you just say that Erill brought you here? As in came here

with you?"

Cal frowned.

"Erill Crassis is in no fit state to go anywhere." he said.

"He wasn't." Gayal replied, "But he got better."

"It was my understanding that Erill Crassis had a terminal and untreatable condition." Karrie said.

"He did." Gayal answered.

"Gayal, what did you do?" Lara asked.

"I found references to a healing talisman on Atch." Gayal explained, "So Ren Distler took me and Luke Crassis there with a bunch of mandalorians to find it. We did and now Erill's better."

"Sith magic does not lend itself to healing." Karrie pointed out, "At least not without great cost."

"I didn't know that at the time." Gayal replied.

*Fear.*

*Guilt.*

"At the time?" Cal repeated when he sensed her reaction, "Gayal, what happened?"

Gayal stopped and looked around, realising that all three of the Jedi were staring at her.

"Erill killed Ren." she said, "He placed the talisman to his chest and it sucked all the life out of him, transferring it to Erill."

"You killed Ren?" Lara said.

"Erill killed him." Cal responded.

"But your girlfriend there gave him the means Cal. If Erill had died then maybe we wouldn't have been in this mess right now." Lara said.

"No," Gayal responded, "even if Erill was dead then Luke would still have control of the droid army thanks to the access codes in the lightsaber Charity stole from Cal."

"Charity?" Cal said. Charity Crassis was the daughter of Erill and younger sister to Luke. Thanks to Gayal's marriage, Charity was also her step daughter despite being two years older, "No, mandalorians took the lightsaber and what's this about access codes inside it?"

Gayal sighed.

"Cal, the lightsaber had a small data drive inside. It fried when Erill and Luke tried to access it, but enough data survived to allow them to take control of the droids on Shadowfall. And Charity was sent to take the lightsaber from you. The mandalorians were just a means of letting her do it without you suspecting her. She played you because she wanted to be back in her family's good books after setting me up to be kidnapped."

*Anger.*

"Be careful Jedi Udra." Karrie said when she sensed Cal's reaction to being told that he had been played for a fool and allowed a vital resource to fall into the hands of their enemies.

"Where's Erill now?" he asked sternly.

"He's here on the ship." Gayal replied, "On the bridge probably. Why?"

"Because he's not leaving here alive." Cal said.

Erill Crassis did his best to look out of the bridge windows at the ocean but there was a storm raging outside and all he could see was the rain as it lashed against them and it was only the sheer bulk of the ocean going transport ship that prevented it from being tossed around by the waves. Erill did not look anything like the frail old man that he had been until recently. Instead his almost white hair had regained its dark colour and he stood and walked unaided and without the need for his personal valet droid to drag around an oxygen cylinder for him to use when he became short of breath.

"How long until this clears?" Kaylor asked one of the insurgent crew.

"Getting nervous?" Han asked the mandalorian.

"This storm limits our ability to summon reinforcements." Kaylor replied, "Mister and Missus Crassis are vulnerable here."

"Where is my dear Gayal anyway?" Erill said, turning away from the windows.

"She was busy looking at all that junk your men brought aboard." Drinto told him. The stennes shifter found Erill to be an unknown quantity. He looked perfectly normal and although Gayal was Force sensitive Erill was not supposed to be. However, whenever Drinto was in close proximity he could sense an unusual amount of Force energy within him. Worryingly to Drinto the energy made him think of somewhere dark and cold and he had decided that although he was now allied to Founding Families he did not like the strange man one bit.

"Junk?" Erill replied, "Unless you and your men are capable of understanding the importance of what we are gathering then our alliance is doomed to failure. Do you understand me Drinto?"

"Of course, I meant no offence." Drinto replied.

"Of course you didn't." Erill said, "But remember who is in charge here."

Just then one of Han's men came rushing into the room and began to talk quietly to Han and Han's eyes widened.

"We've got a problem." he announced.

"What's wrong?" Erill asked.

"One of my men just found those two mandalorians we left guarding the jedi dead and all of the jedi gone." Han told him.

"Find them." Erill hissed, "Find them and kill them. Never mind trying to recapture them. I want them dead. And someone bring Gayal to me. If the jedi find out she's aboard they'll try and kidnap her for certain."

"I'll go and find the jedi." Kaylor said to Han, "You go and find Missus Crassis." and Han nodded in reply.

"Cal revenge is not the jedi way." Karrie said as the jedi checked their belongings. After their capture all of their equipment had been taken to a hold that was filled with crates that according to their markings contained small arms and light support weapons, enough to equip a full company of troops and the jedi guessed that they were probably intended to rearm Drinto's insurgent group.

"This isn't revenge." Cal replied, loading his rifle and double checking the safety, "This is justice. Erill Crassis is a murderer. Now it would be nice if we could arrest him and take him to face a proper trial but I doubt that we'd be able to get him off this ship."

"Cal's right." Gayal added, "Erill is well protected. You won't be able to get close enough to take him prisoner, but if you take his guards by surprise then you may get a shot at him before they can react."

"You know what?" Lara responded as she picked up her rifle, "I think that's the first sensible thing I've ever heard you say."

"Lara that weapon is tagged." Karrie said, looking at the grenade launcher mounted beneath the rifle's barrel.

"No, the ammunition is tagged." Lara corrected her before she began to wander amongst the crates, "And I'm hoping that – Ah, yes here we go. The Founding Families were planning on giving grenade launchers to their new friends so I may as well liberate some of the ammunition for our use." and then she opened up one of the crates and began to load grenade rounds into her bandolier, abandoning those already in it just in case they were amongst those that had been supplied by Han rather than those she and Cal had obtained more recently through regular channels.

"So how are you planning on carrying out this execution then Jedi Udra?" Karrie asked. Unlike the other two jedi the only weapon she carried was her lightsaber and she showed no interest in taking anything from the stockpile of arms all around her to supplement this, unlike Gayal who was busy procuring herself a sidearm and rifle.

"Easy." Cal replied, "Gayal will lead us to the bridge and we'll take out Erill."

"And after that?" Karrie added, "Have you given any thought to how we are to escape or are you intending to lead us on a suicide mission?"

"Shorty." Lara said.

"Who?" Gayal asked.

"Shorty is our droid." Cal told her, "An LB-series labour droid. Right now he's waiting for us aboard the *Bright Hope*. All we have to do is signal him to engage the autopilot and set it to fly the ship right to us. Then he can lower us a line and we can all get out of here."

Gayal frowned.

"Have you seen the conditions out there?" she asked, "I don't fancy the idea of trying to climb aboard a hovering starship with a storm raging all around us."

"Gayal, you and I jumped across the vacuum of space to reach the *Bright Hope*. Trust me, I'm not about to let you get washed into the sea now." Cal answered.

"I don't know. I've still got a bad feeling about this plan." Gayal replied.

"Perhaps you'd prefer to stay here after helping us kill your husband?" Lara commented.

"Lara give it a rest." Cal said before he turned to Gayal, "Okay I'll lead the way. You stay right behind me and tell me where to go. We'll need to access the ship's communications first and then hit the bridge.

Understood?" and Gayal nodded in return.



### 3.

The main hold of the transport vessel was filled with items that Shill Security troops had looted from museums and private collections in the time that they had been active here on Tepillos. Each item had been tagged with information on where it had been retrieved from and anything available to indicate its history. All the items had then been sorted by appearance and laid out on long tables. All of this had been done to make Gayal's task of determining which of the objects were genuine Sith artefacts and which were either cunning fakes or just items that had been innocently mistaken for being of Sith origin easier. But when Han entered the hold he found that Gayal was no where to be seen. There were however three insurgents in the hold standing watch over this precious cargo and so Han approached them.

"Where is she?" he asked.

"Who?" one of the insurgents replied and Han scowled.

"Gayal Crassis. The woman you three were supposed to be watching over while she checked all of this stuff out." he said sternly.

"She left." the same insurgent replied, "She came in, went over to that table there for about a minute or so and then walked out without saying a word. Our orders didn't say anything about following her everywhere she went. For all we know she was heading for the refresher."

Han turned and looked at the table that the insurgent had pointed out. Then he wandered closer to it, halting when he saw that there were rows of bladed weapons laid out on it and that there was a loose tag where something had been removed from the table and its tag taken off and left behind. Then he rushed right up to the table and saw that according to the tag a bronze dagger had been removed and he remembered that he had been told that one of the guards assigned to watch the jedi had been stabbed in the neck with a narrow blade.

"This is Han Shill." Han said into his point to point communicator, setting it to broadcast to every one of his men in range, "Does anyone have eyes on Gayal Crassis?"

After gathering a small force of his fellow mandalorians Kaylor had headed straight for the cell where the bodies of the two dead guards were just being cleared away.

"You." he said to one of the ship's crew, "What is there in that direction?" and he pointed down the corridor in the opposite direction to where he and his men had come from.

"The engine room is that way." the woman told him, "Though that's just on the lower decks."

"And what about above them?" Kaylor asked.

"More storage space." she answered, "It's where we're keeping all the new weapons. Then there's crew quarters above that but they're mainly empty right now."

Kaylor paused to think. When the jedi had been brought aboard all of their equipment had been placed in storage and Kaylor remembered hearing that it had been taken to the same hold as the weapons intended to arm the Founding Families' new insurgent allies were being kept in. Then he looked back the bodies of the two men he had left here to guard the jedi. They had been chosen for their apparent strong will, but the simple fact that they were now dead and the jedi were gone suggested that they may have been prone to being influenced by mind tricks after all and if the jedi could get them to open the door then they could just as easily have got them to divulge where their possessions were being kept.

"That's where they'll be heading." Kaylor told his men, "Follow me." and he strode off down the corridor in the direction that the escaping jedi had gone.

Kaylor and his men kept their rifles tucked into his shoulder from where it would take only moments to bring the weapons into action and this provoked looks of alarm from the handful of crewmen they encountered on the way to the hold as they ducked out of the way to allow the heavily armed and armoured mercenaries to get past them in the narrow corridors of the ship.

Then just as Kaylor rounded the final corner before the entrance to the hold he spotted a familiar robed figure just as it began to emerge from the hold.

"Jedi!" he snapped, dropping to one knee and firing a burst of pulse wave fire down the corridor. Around him the other mandalorians took up firing positions as well and the corridor was filled with weapon fire directed at Cal as he retreated back into the hold, defiantly firing a short burst of pulse wave blasts of his own,

"Advance." Kaylor ordered, waving his men forwards and the mandalorians began to close in on the entrance to the cargo hold. As they moved Kaylor noticed that one of his men was reaching for a grenade, understandable given the effectiveness of such weapons in a confined space but Kaylor remembered what the crewman had told him about the contents of the hold, "No." Kaylor told the other mandalorian, "That could trigger a chain reaction that would take out half the ship. Does anyone have a stun grenade?"

"Here." another mandalorian replied.

"Then stand by to use it." Kaylor told him, "On my command only." and then he took up a position beside the

the open doorway to the hold and he placed his hand over the control panel for the door, "Now." he said and the mandalorian with the stun grenade pulled out the pin and tossed it through the doorway. The moment that Kaylor saw the grenade pass through the doorway he slammed his hand down on the control panel and there was a sudden hiss as the door dropped shut, guaranteeing that the jedi would not be able to use their telekinetic abilities to send the grenade back at his men.

"Mandos!" Cal yelled and he fired his rifle.

Inside the hold Cal, Gayal and Lara all hid themselves behind crates when Cal retreated back from the door with a shout. Meanwhile Karrie drew her lightsaber and slid closer to the doorway, positioning herself against the wall beside it just in time to see the stun grenade it was tossed into the hold.

"Grenade!" she yelled. She was just about to give the explosive a shove using the Force in the hope that she could get it back into the corridor before it went off but the door dropped shut before she could manage this and she instantly knew what the mandalorians were planning. Once the grenade had detonated they would open the door again and rush the jedi while they were still suffering from the effects of the grenade. Karrie activated her lightsaber as she leapt forwards, kicking the grenade away from the door before she swung her lightsaber at it. Her weapon was angled downwards and the tip of the blade made contact with the door where its base met the frame and melted the two together as she swept the blade sideways right before the hold was filled with an overpowering light and sound as the grenade went off.

Even by focusing all his concentration into resisting the blast Cal still found himself momentarily disorientated but the effect on the others was even more pronounced. None of them was skilled in resisting a powerful stun blast like the one produced by the grenade and all three of Cal's companions collapsed, clutching at their heads. The blast left a ringing in Cal's ears but he could still hear the sound of the door's motor as the mandalorians attempted to gain access to the hold. But Karrie's efforts had succeeded in welding the door firmly shut and this gave Cal the chance to act.

"Lara." he said as he dashed to his sister's side. Though she lacked the ability to resist the grenade's effects fully she had reacted quick enough to duck behind the crate she was using for cover and close her eyes and cover her ears. This had saved her from the worst effects of the grenade, though she was still somewhat dazed, "Lara are you okay? Can you stand?" he asked and she nodded.

"Did you get the number of that truck that just ran me over?" she asked as she pulled herself to her feet and Cal smiled.

"Go check on Karrie." he said, "I'll see if Gayal's okay."

"Right." Lara responded, "She may need mouth to mouth."

Ignoring his sister's barb Cal went to check on Gayal who had also taken cover but had not been able to protect herself beyond this and she was badly disorientated.

"Gayal, come on. We've got to get out of here." he said as he lifted her to her feet.

Meanwhile Lara went to see how badly affected Karrie was. Unlike any of the others she had been caught out in the open when the grenade went off and the shockwave had enveloped her completely. Had the grenade been a lethal type then she would have undoubtedly been torn apart, but the stun grenade produced no significant shrapnel and instead she had just been rendered unconscious. Kneeling beside Karrie, Lara took a med aid from her belt. The compact first aid kit contained a variety of medicines, including stimulants that Lara used to rouse Karrie.

Gasping as she was forcibly awakened, Karrie sat upright and blinked her eyes.

"What happened?" she asked before she remembered sealing the door and kicking the grenade out of the way, "And why does it sound like someone's pounding on my head with a hammer?"

"Because the mandos are trying to get in through the door you welded shut." Lara told her, "I don't suppose you've got a plan for what we do next have you?"

"Easy." Cal said loudly and both Karrie and Lara flinched, "We get out of here before those mandos can get through that door."

"And how exactly do we manage that brother dear?" Lara asked, "The only door out of here is sealed shut and had who knows how many mandos right outside it."

"Actually there is another way out." Cal replied and he looked upwards.

"Oh you have got to be kidding me." Lara said as she too tilted her head back.

The cargo hold extended upwards as far as the deck of the transport ship and its ceiling was formed by a set of massive sliding doors. At the side of the hold a single set of ladders led up to these doors though there was no obvious way of operating the mechanism that would open them. However, a closed and locked door meant very little to three jedi armed with lightsabers.

"Well I suppose we could try cutting through the wall." Cal suggested, "But at least this way we know where we're going to end up."

"Yeah, on the deck where everyone can see us." Lara commented.

"Your master is correct." Karrie told Lara, "And it is not your place to question him anyway."

"Exactly." Cal added with a grin as Lara scowled at him, "Now get going."

"Why me?" Lara asked.

"Because I'll be carrying Gayal and I want Karrie below me just in case I slip." Cal said and Lara frowned again before walking over to the base of the ladder and starting to climb.

Gayal just groaned as Cal slung her over his shoulder and carried her to the ladder before following his sister up it while in turn Karrie followed him, keeping her attention focused on Cal just in case he either dropped Gayal or fell himself.

Lara climbed right to the top of the ladder before she drew her lightsaber and there was a 'snap-hiss' as she activated the weapon. Carefully she pushed the blade of the lightsaber up through the heavy cargo door and began to move it in a square pattern, creating a hole about a metre across above her. The lightsaber blade left a gap a few centimetres wide as Lara cut through the door and through this came a stream of water that poured down into the hold.

"Lara what's going on?" Cal called out as he felt the first drops of water on his head, "You've not cut through below the water line have you?"

"How could I when I'm cutting through the roof nerf herder?" Lara responded.

"It's fresh water." Karrie then pointed out, "It must be rain."

"Oh great." Lara said, "Now we get rained on as well." then she paused cutting the door, leaving just a small section to be cut before the hole would be complete, "Lookout below." she then called out before she made one last swing that cut the square of metal loose and it promptly dropped straight down. Looking up, Karrie reached out her hand and gave a small wave, releasing a brief telekinetic push that changed the metal square's vertical trajectory into one that took it further away from the ladder and those climbing it. Moments later there was a sudden 'Clang!' from below as it struck the floor of the hold and the Jedi continued to climb.

"Here." Kaylor said as he held his hand at the base of the door and felt the residual heat from where Karrie's lightsaber had melted the metal. Then he paused to think. A volley of pulse wave fire would probably shatter the crude weld but at the same time the impact of the spatial distortions would also most likely warp the door itself and wedge it in place. Therefore the only solution seemed to be to separate the part of the door that was welded to the frame, "Go get a cutting torch." he ordered, "And hurry up about it. I don't trust those Jedi to be left in a room full of weapons."

While one of his men rushed off to fetch a cutting torch Kaylor and the remaining Mandalorians waited, watching the door in anticipation of breaching it. Fortunately the engineering section of the ship was relatively close and the other Mandalorian soon returned in the company of one of the crew equipped with a fusion cutter.

"Cut across here." Kaylor ordered, tracing a line across the door with his finger and then there came the sound of something heavy hitting the floor on the other side of the door, "Quickly," he added.

Nodding, the crewman crouched down and put on a pair of darkened goggles at the same time as he placed the fusion cutter against the door. The Mandalorians averted their eyes as he began cutting through the door, but even looking away they saw the bright light given off by the powerful plasma stream as it effortlessly sliced through the metal.

The moment that the cut was complete and the crewman shut off the fusion cutter Kaylor reached out and pulled him out of the way of the door. Then he stepped forwards and lashed out at the control panel. The door promptly hissed open and Kaylor leapt through into the hold, lifting his rifle up to his shoulder. But inside he saw no Jedi as he looked around, instead there was just the sound of running water as rain poured in through a hole in the cargo doors up above while a chunk of metal the same size as the hole lay on the floor not far from Kaylor.

"This is Kaylor." he signalled using his point to point communication link, "The Jedi have gone outside."

## 4.

Emerging onto the deck of the transport ship the jedi found themselves located behind the central tower where the vessel was controlled from. There were numerous viewports on the rear of the tower, but the jedi were not concerned about being seen. It was night and the thick cloud and stormy weather blotted out any moon or starlight leaving the light spilling out of the viewports as the only source of illumination. This meant that anyone trying look out of any of them would see only their own reflection as the radical difference in light levels turned them into one way mirrors that still allowed the jedi to see whenever anyone walked past the viewports.

"Quickly." Cal said, "We need to get to that tower." and with Gayal still over his shoulder he began to move in the direction of the control tower.

"Why?" Lara asked as she followed him, pulling up the hood of her cloak for extra protection from the storm.

"Because that is where the communications equipment is likely to be located." Karrie told her, "Unless you were planning on swimming to shore through this." and she pointed to the massive waves all around the ship.

"Okay I get it. Tower it is." Lara said.

"Han what is going on aboard this ship?" Erill asked when Han reappeared on the bridge.

"Not only are the jedi loose but I can't find Gayal either." he replied.

"Gayal?" Erill exclaimed and he frowned, "Han, her safe recovery is vital. I don't care what other sacrifices have to be made, we must have her back."

"We're thirty kilometres from the nearest land." Drinto said, "Seventy from the nearest settlement. I wouldn't worry about the jedi going anywhere with that young lady. Even they couldn't survive swimming in a storm like this."

"Maybe not. But they could do a lot of damage if we don't catch them quickly." Han replied.

"Mister Huladra." one of the bridge crew called out with a hand pressed against the headset he wore, "The mandalorian commander reports that the jedi have gone out onto the deck."

"Secure all hatches." Drinto ordered.

"Make sure all lights are extinguished as well." Han added, "Right now we're the only ones who can see outside."

Erill nodded in agreement, knowing that Han was quite correct. The bridge was only dimly illuminated by the various display screens. But almost every other room was fully lit for the convenience of the crew that in this case had exactly the opposite effect.

"Co-ordinate with Mister Mott." he told Han, "Sweep the entire ship but make sure that Gayal is returned unharmed."

"Cal? What's happening?" Gayal said as the jedi reached the tower and Cal set her down against it, "Why are we out here?"

"Escaping." Cal replied.

"Cal it's raining." Gayal said and Cal took off his robe before handing it to Gayal.

"Over here." Karrie said from close by and Cal and Lara looked to see her peering into a viewport, "This corridor is empty." she added.

"Allow me." Cal said, drawing and activating his lightsaber. Then just as he plunged it through the bulkhead beside the viewport the lights inside suddenly went out.

"What did you do?" Lara asked, looking up at the now darkened tower.

"Nothing." Cal replied.

"The mandalorians must have broken into the hold and realised that we are out here." Karrie said.

"Well we won't be for much longer." Cal said as he sliced an opening in the tower before stepping inside,

"Okay Gayal, which way to the communications suite?" he asked and she looked around.

"I'm not sure." she said, "I wasn't exactly given a grand tour and a map and all these corridors look the same in the dark."

"Then which way to the bridge?" Cal asked.

"Cal if you just march in there and kill Erill without us having a way off this ship then we're just as dead." Lara said.

"Perhaps your desire for revenge is starting to get the better of you." Karrie said.

"It's not about revenge." Cal said, "There'll be more communications equipment on the bridge that we can use to signal Shorty."

"This way I think." Gayal said, pointing.

"The bridge?" Lara asked.

"No. The communications room." Gayal replied, "We walked past it when Han took me to see the artefacts in the forward hold."

"Then what are we waiting for?" Lara said as she slipped past Cal and Gayal, "The sooner we get to a transmitter the sooner we can get off this floating hunk of junk."

A hatch in the deck close to the prow was thrown open from underneath and a squad of Shill Security agents emerged from it. Each man was armed with a rifle that had a powerful flash light mounted to it. The flash lights allowed the agents to see easily in the dark conditions created by the stormy weather and although the beams would also be visible to the Jedi they were preferred over infra goggles because of the risk of flash blindness from lightning when viewed through any light amplification equipment. The squad split into two equally sized groups and moving in unison they began to head towards the rear of the ship, with one squad advancing along each side of the vessel.

At the same time another squad of identically equipped Shill Security agents appeared from a hatch at the stern. But unlike their comrades at the far end of the ship they did not move far from the hatch. Instead they formed a single line across the width of the deck and faced forwards, making sure that anyone retreating away from the unit heading towards them would run right into this blocking group.

However, as one of the teams made its way past the control tower they came to the hole that had been sliced in its structure and halted.

"Team Esk leader to Shill Aurek." the unit leader signalled, "Breach discovered in port side of command tower. Suspect Jedi team has re-entered vessel."

"Copy that Team Esk." Han's voice responded, "Leave one man to cover the breach and complete your sweep. Alternate forces will search the tower."

Lara continued to lead the way to the communications room, directed by Gayal. Along the way the Jedi sensed the nearby presence of several crew members but none of them came close enough to be able to threaten them and so the communications room was reached without further incident. But the room itself was a different matter. There were three people inside the room, two members of Drinto's crew and a Mandalorian watching over them. Cal peered through the door for a brief moment before retreating back down the corridor to where the others waited out of sight.

"There's a guard." he told them, "Plus two techs."

"Two techs aren't going to be a problem." Lara said.

"They could be." Karrie responded, "Remember this ship is operated by members of a terrorist organisation. They could be every bit as dangerous as that guard."

"Then we need to get the guard out here where I can deal with him." Cal replied.

"And how do we do that?" Lara asked.

"We don't. She does." Cal said and he looked at Gayal.

"Me? But how?" she responded in surprise.

"Just go in there and tell the guard you managed to escape from us." Cal said, "I'll be waiting right outside and when he comes out to investigate I'll take him out."

"Okay, but I've got a bad feeling about this." Gayal replied and she turned towards the communications room. Moving quickly down the corridor Gayal soon reached the communications room and the sound of her approach had already attracted the attention of the Mandalorian guard who turned to face the door and raised his weapon.

"Help me!" Gayal exclaimed, "The Jedi took me hostage but I was able to get away. I think they're right behind me though."

"Get inside." the Mandalorian said as he moved Gayal aside and stepped out into the corridor. But what he had not been expecting was for Cal and Lara to both already be right outside the door, positioned only just out of sight.

Reaching out through the Force, Cal dragged the Mandalorian closer while Lara swung the butt of her rifle like a club and struck the Mandalorian beneath his chin. Dazed, the Mandalorian dropped his rifle and staggered backwards. This gave Cal the chance to activate his lightsaber and he swung it at neck height to decapitate the Mandalorian.

Inside the communications room one of the technicians gasped as he looked round at the sound of the commotion outside and was just in time to see a Mandalorian helmet with a severed head still inside roll past the doorway. In a panic the technician reached for the intercom and Gayal knew that he was about to raise the alarm.

"No!" she cried out, lunging at him as she plucked the Sith dagger from her pocket before plunging it into his back.

Startled by all of this the second technician backed away from Gayal and reached for the pistol he had tucked into his belt. But before he could take aim Cal appeared behind him and impaled him through the chest with his lightsaber.

“Get that body in here quickly.” Cal said as he shut off his lightsaber, “Then lock the door.” then as Karrie and Lara were bringing the body of the mandalorian and his head into the room he sat down and began to adjust the settings.



## 5.

Aboard the *Bright Hope*, the delaya-class courier that had brought the jedi to Tepillos, a dog lay on the floor of the cockpit chewing on a brightly coloured toy.

"Cal to *Bright Hope*. Cal to *Bright Hope*." Cal's voice said at the same time as his face appeared on a display screen. Immediately the dog sat up and began to bark.

Back on the transport ship Cal looked at Lara.

"I think Ghost just answered." he said.

"I doubt that you're about to tell me that your dog is capable of operating your vessel," Karrie commented.

"No, that's about the only thing Lara can do that he can't." Cal replied and Lara frowned and punched his arm, "Ow! That hurt."

"Good. It was supposed to." Lara said. Then she noticed that the display now showed the head of a large droid, "Look." she said, "Here's Shorty."

"Great." Cal said and he turned back to the communications panel, "Shorty, can you hear me?" he asked and being incapable of speech the droid nodded, "Good. Now I need you to activate the auto pilot and set the coordinates I'm sending you now. We're on a ship at sea and we need an extraction. Do you understand?" and once again the droid nodded, "Great. When you get close enough the autopilot can follow our PTP links and hover overhead. Don't engage the landing cycle though, the weather's too bad to risk crashing the ship."

"So how will we get aboard if your ship's not going to land?" Gayal asked.

"Easy." Lara replied, "We'll jump."

With instructions given to Shorty, Cal shut off the communications and then got back to his feet and looked at the body of the mandalorian guard.

"Okay, let's get him out of that armour." he said, "I've got an idea how I'm going to get close to Erill."

Cal began to undress while the others removed the mandalorian's armour from his corpse and Lara winced as she pulled his head out of his helmet.

"Yuck." she said as she tossed the head aside and smiled when it landed in a nearby bin.

"Don't get cocky." Gayal said then she too smiled as she looked at Cal.

"What?" he asked.

"It's just that its been a while since I saw you in just your underwear." she replied.

"Oh there's that disturbance again." Lara said.

"Just give me the uniform." Cal said, holding out his hands to Gayal who responded by pulling the armour she held away from him.

"Just give a bit longer to enjoy it." she said before Lara reached out and snatched the armour from her.

"Here." she said, tossing it to her brother, "Put some pants on before we have to watch your girlfriend try to mate with you in front of us."

Quickly Cal began to put on the armour and when he had just the helmet left to put on there was a banging sound at the door.

"What's going on in there?" a voice called out, "Open up."

"Quick!" Cal hissed, "Get those two techs back in their seats and that mando out of sight. Then you all hide as well. I'm going to get rid of them."

Without a word the others acted quickly to prop the dead technicians up in their chair, aligning them so that they faced away from the door and then stuffed the headless corpse of the mandalorian beneath a console. All the time that this was happening the pounding on the door continued.

"Who is this?" Cal called out, "What's your operating number."

"Just open this kriffing door." the voice responded just as Gayal crawled beneath another console while Karrie and Lara pressed themselves up against the wall to either side of the door. Putting on the mandalorian's helmet, Cal then picked up his rifle and opened the door.

In the corridor outside stood a small group of Shill Security agents, all of them armed.

"What's going on in there?" the leader asked.

"Just trying to keep this place secure." Cal replied and he glance at the technicians that he knew to be dead, "I heard that there were jedi on the loose."

"There are." the squad leader said, peering past Cal to where he could see only what looked to be a pair of crewmen sat at their posts, "And I don't know what your commander has trained you to do, but when you're ordered to open a door you better kriffing open it."

"Yes sir." Cal replied, nodding slowly and then he watched as the agents turned and walked away, "Okay it's clear." he added.

"Good." Gayal said as she crawled out from under the console, "For a moment there I thought you'd never get rid of those troops."

"Well if any more come past when we're gone they'll find out something's not right the instant they open the

door." Cal replied.

"In that case perhaps we ought to do something to limit their communications." Lara suggested and she drew her lightsaber.

"I agree." Cal replied with a nod and igniting her lightsaber his sister stepped up to the control console and swung her weapon at them, causing them to explode in showers of sparks, "Okay now let's go get this done." Cal added.

With Drinto by his side Han studied a deck plan of the transport while Erill instead focused on the ship's position and heading, eager to reach their destination. Meanwhile Kaylor was not on the bridge at all. The mandalorian preferred to lead by example and was assisting his men in the search effort for Gayal and the jedi.

"Erill." Gayal's voice suddenly said from the doorway at the rear of the bridge and Erill turned and smiled as he saw her stepping through the doorway in the company of someone who as far as he was concerned was one of Kaylor's men.

"Gayal, there you are my dear." he said, "I was beside myself with worry. When we heard that the jedi were loose and you couldn't be found I feared the worst."

"Yes, where were you?" Han asked as Gayal entered the bridge, "We've had search teams combing the ship."

"Outside it would appear." Drinto commented when he noticed that Gayal's hair and clothing was wet from the storm.

"Cal found me." Gayal replied, "They had me as their prisoner when some of the mandalorians used their stun grenades. The next thing I knew I woke up on deck with the jedi all looking the other way so that's when I gave them the slip. I think they're still out there somewhere."

"No." Han replied as Gayal continued to move slowly across the bridge, followed closely by the mandalorian, "We found evidence that they made their own way back inside. They're somewhere in the tower."

"And you were very lucky to get past them." Erill said.

"Or maybe not." Han added and just as Gayal was about to get within arms reach of Erill he stepped forwards to block her path and grabbed hold of her wrist.

"Han! What are you doing?" Erill demanded as Han began to search Gayal roughly.

"She was no hostage." he replied, "She let the jedi out."

"How can you say that?" Erill asked.

"Because one of the guards was stabbed." Han said and when he found the Sith dagger he held it up so that Erill could see the bloodstained blade and added, "Stabbed with this. She took it from the artefacts we have down in the forwards hold. My guess is she came here to do the same thing to you."

### *Rage.*

Erill's reaction was immediate and he grabbed hold of Gayal for himself, pulling her away from Han and she squealed as he pushed her back over a nearby console and wrapped a hand around her neck.

"You would try and kill me?" he yelled, "I who saved you from a lifetime locked away in a tiny room, alone and forgotten. If not for the fact that we need your abilities I would send you back to that place and leave you to rot. But I warn you Gayal, betray me again and I will find other ways of making you suffer. Your sisters perhaps. I'm sure that I can think of something to do them to make you more co-operative."

"Mister Crassis." Han said, "Placing a hand on the arm Erill was choking Gayal with, "We need her to tell us where the jedi are."

"Yes of course." Erill replied, relaxing his grip. Gayal promptly slid to the floor gasping for breath and rubbing her throat where Erill had gripped it.

"Or maybe we can find them on our own." Drinto said. While Erill had been yelling at Gayal the mandalorian had been edging closer to him and in turn Drinto had been moving closer to the mandalorian and now he reached out rip the helmet from the man's head to reveal Cal's face underneath.

In reaction Cal swung his rifle to strike Drinto with the butt, knocking him clear while Cal was able to raise his weapon and take aim at Erill. But while Cal was focused on Erill, Han struck first and delivered a kick to the side of Cal's knee that knocked his leg out from under him. Falling, Cal instinctively let go of his rifle to try and steady himself and this gave Han and the rest of the bridge crew the opportunity they needed. The crew of insurgents rushed at the jedi, grabbing hold of his limbs between the various spikes that were built into his stolen armour and when he was pinned in place the Shill Security agents who had been standing guard at the door Cal and Gayal had walked through unchallenged both rushed forwards to first disarm Cal and then fasten a set of binders around his wrists. At this point the other crewmen let go of Cal and the Shill Security agents dragged him back to his feet.

"I take it that the loyal warrior who owned that armour can be added to the list of those you've murdered."

Erill said, glaring at Cal. Then a smile spread across his face and he looked down at Gayal, "Though I think I may have just found the perfect way to keep you in line my dear." he said.

"I don't get it." Gayal replied, her voice somewhat hoarse after being choked, "What are you talking about?"

"Why the gallant Jedi Udra of course." Erill replied, "He may have led you astray but I think that I can use him to keep you on the straight and narrow. If you defy me again then I'll simply have Mister Mott and his men begin removing pieces of your beloved jedi to present to you. A finger here or there. Or maybe an ear or an eye if you misbehave too much."

"Or maybe I'll just take your head." Lara's voice called out from the doorway and as the occupants of the bridge turned to face in that direction they saw Lara slowly shuffling into the room with her rifle aimed towards Erill while Karrie remained at the door to stand watch with her lightsaber in her hand.

Han took hold of Cal and pulled him in front of Erill, partially blocking Lara's line of sight. No longer needing to restrain Cal, the two guards both reached for their sidearms, but Lara noticed the movement.

"Lay one hand on a weapon and I'll shoot." she said.

"With your brother in the way? I think not." Erill replied.

"Lara take the shot." Cal said.

"I can't." Lara replied.

"Yes you can. Forget about me, just do it."

"Ah, it seems that Jedi Udra is quite dedicated to ridding the galaxy of me." Erill said, "I must say that it's rather nice to see a jedi with a spine for once. But the question remains as to whether your apprentice is willing to risk her master."

"Cal!" Gayal suddenly called out and she jumped up, intending to push him out of the way. But Han reacted quickly and elbowed her in the face, knocking her back to the floor. Then subtly he activated the PTP link on his belt, locking on transmit only.

"Put down the rifle Lara." he said, "Before someone gets hurt."

Kaylor heard Han's instruction to Lara and instantly realised what Han was doing. His words were planned to tell the mandalorian that the jedi were on the bridge and that Erill was at risk though currently unharmed.

"The bridge." he said to the unit of mandalorians with him sternly, "The jedi are there." and they turned around and rushed towards the bridge where their employer needed them.

## 6.

On the bridge Lara continued to aim her rifle towards Erill while Han continued to hold Cal between them to block her line of sight.

"Let him go Han." Lara said.

"And allow you to shoot at us with impunity?" Erill responded, "Never."

Just then there was the sound of armoured footfalls from the corridor outside and Han grinned.

"Well it looks like this is all over." he said.

"Mandalorians." Karrie said, stepping back through the doorway to take her out of the approaching troops' line of fire.

"Now perhaps you'd like to put down that rifle and surrender young lady." Erill said.

Lara glanced over her shoulder.

"Ready?" she asked and Karrie nodded.

"Ready." she replied and Lara opened fire.

The pulse wave rifle was set to fully automatic and Lara held her finger down on the trigger to fire a sustained burst that she spread around the bridge. The initial shot was not aimed at anyone in particular and the bridge crew reacted by ducking for cover. The barrage spatial distortions therefore continued into the windows surrounding much of the bridge and although these were reinforced to withstand the harsh conditions at sea, they exploded outwards, allowing rain to start coming into the bridge. At the same time one of the genuine mandalorians appeared in the doorway. Seeing this, Karrie used her lightsaber to slice through the barrel of the man's rifle before with a wave of her hand she closed and locked the door to the bridge.

"We need to get Cal and get out of here." she said to Lara.

Right then, as if Karrie had planned it there was a roaring sound from outside that was audible even over the sound of the storm and this was accompanied by an intense beam of light that came down from the sky as the *Bright Hope* swooped down through the cloud on autopilot and took up a position above the ship.

"Gayal!" Cal called out, "That's our ride." and then he kicked Han in the face.

Gayal scrambled from where she was crouched and took hold of Cal by his arm, helping him to move across the floor towards the other jedi. But before she could reach them one of the Shill Security agents in turn reached out and grabbed hold of her.

"Cal!" she cried out as the agent dragged her back towards him but still being bound Cal was unable to do anything to help her right away.

Looking back at Gayal, Cal suddenly felt a tremor in the Force just as Karrie used her abilities to exert a telekinetic pull on him that dragged him clear of his captors. As soon as he was within reach Karrie crouched down to lift him up and at the same time sliced the binders from his wrists with her lightsaber. In turn Cal then reached out through the Force to take hold of the rifle that had been taken from him and called it back to him.

"Okay let's move." Lara said, firing another short burst from her rifle to keep the heads of the crew down.

"Not without Gayal." Cal replied.

"We may not have enough time." Karrie said as she heard the door motor judder from behind her as Kaylor and his men tried forcing their way into the bridge.

"I can't leave her." Cal said.

"We can't stay here." Karrie responded as the door to the bridge opened just enough for a mandalorian to be able to push the muzzle of his weapon underneath and there was a sudden blast of pulse wave fire that made Lara leap aside before Karrie aimed her lightsaber towards the gap beneath the door to persuade the mandalorian to back away until his comrades could get the door fully open. At the same time several of the crew took advantage of the break in her fire to return it with the assortment of weapons they were armed with.

"Cal just go!" Gayal shouted.

"You heard her, let's go." Lara added before she held her rifle up above the console she was using for cover and fired another random burst.

Cal scowled.

"Do it." he said and in unison the three jedi leapt to their feet and then dived through the broken windows.

Landing on the walkway that ran around the control tower outside the bridge the jedi then jumped again to land on the very top of the tower from where they looked up at the hovering *Bright Hope*. From here they could see that the access ramp had been lowered and Shorty was standing on it. The droid supported itself by holding onto one of the ramp's hydraulic pistons with one hand while holding out the other towards its owners.

"You first." Cal told Karrie and she nodded as she shut off her lightsaber and returned the weapon to her belt. Then she focused on the hovering starship and let the Force flow through her before channelling it into a

vertical bound that took her all the way up to the *Bright Hope's* ramp where she grabbed hold of Shorty's outstretched arm. The droid reacted by pulling Karrie onto the ramp beside it where she let go to allow the droid to reach back out for the next person to make the jump.

"Okay now you." Cal told Lara and she frowned.

"You are not going back for her." she said, "Gayal said to-"

"I know!" Cal snapped, "Now get up there and I'll be right behind you before Han can send anyone up here after us."

"You better be." Lara said and then she took a deep breath and leapt straight up, copying Karrie's jump almost exactly.

On the roof of the control tower Cal heard shouts from below and he realised that there were some of Erill's mercenaries heading up towards him. Briefly his thoughts turned to Gayal, wondering whether he would get another opportunity to rescue her. Then he looked up at where Lara and Shorty were waiting for him on the *Bright Hope's* access ramp and he jumped straight up.

On the transport ship's bridge Erill watched the *Bright Hope* depart. Behind him Han held his PTP link so that all those around him could hear what was being said to him.

"The jedi escaped sir." one of his agents said, "By the time we reached the roof the last of them had just jumped up to their ship and we don't have the weapons to engage a starship."

"Bring them back down." Erill said without bothering to look around, instead continuing to watch the fleeing jedi vessel, knowing that only the presence of Gayal aboard the ship had prevented the jedi from turning around and strafing the defenceless transport. The *Bright Hope* was continuing to gain altitude and before long it vanished into the cloud. Only then did Erill look away and he turned towards Gayal who stared at him nervously.

"I am very disappointed in you." he said before he walked out of the room.