

STAR WARS

TALES OF THE JEDI



V-XI: RECONNAISSANCE

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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...

RECONNAISSANCE

THE JEDI DECIDE THAT THE TIME HAS COME TO START ACTIVELY HUNTING FOR THE SITH STOREHOUSE BELIEVED TO BE ON DELVAD AND CAL UDRA IS ORDERED TO TAKE A TEAM OF JEDI TO INFILTRATE THE ESTATE OF THE ELUSIVE RUNN FAMILY ON THE SEABED OF THAT WORLD...

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

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1 .

Jedi Master Varn Udra was studying a holographic in the company of a second jedi knight map of the Narthis Sector when his son entered the room that had been configured for mission briefings aboard the remote Dorn Station that was now the Republic's last toe hold in the sector since it had declared independence. "Ah Cal." he said when he saw the young jedi knight standing near the door, "Do come in. Jedi Antress and I was just reviewing our tactical situation."

"Our tactical situation is that the Founding Families control the entire sector beyond this station." Cal replied. The Founding Families he referred to were the descendants of the first survey team to explore the sector for the Republic three centuries earlier. Having built up massive wealth and manoeuvred themselves into positions of authority they had been perfectly placed to engineer the sector's declaration of independence that left them in almost total control. But there was more to their ambitions than just controlling a sector of barely a dozen Republic systems in a relatively unimportant region of the galaxy. During the original exploration mission the survey team had discovered that the Sith had once occupied several worlds in the sector and left behind a storehouse of their knowledge that the Founding Families had since dedicated themselves to gaining access to. The declaration of independence was merely a way of keeping the Republic out of the way while they did so. But although the Republic's armed forces could not take action without a clear threat the Jedi Order had all the authority it needed to pursue leads relating to the Sith and their forbidden knowledge.

"But we have next to no knowledge about how far along the Founding Families are with their plan." Whillam Antress replied. Whillam was an experienced jedi knight with decades of service to the Jedi Order behind him and although he had never reached the rank of master he served as second in command to Cal's father just as he had done to Varn's predecessor, Jedi Master Ben Karas who had died at the hands of former Jedi Knight Kyle Jenner. Kyle had somehow discovered the Founding Families' plan but rather than alert the rest of the Jedi Order and try to stop them he had fallen to the Dark Side and attempted to beat them to their goal.

"Worryingly though we do know that Gayal Karn has begun to experiment with her powers." Varn added and Cal tensed at the mention of the young woman he had been romantically involved with. Gayal Crassis as she was technically called since her marriage of convenience to the elderly head of one of the Founding Families was the eldest daughter of the head of one another and her wayward history had been discovered to be a result of her being Force sensitive. The research that the Founding Families had carried out suggested that a certain degree of ability to manipulate the Force was required to access the Sith storehouse, so this made Gayal critical to their plan and they had provided her with all the knowledge they had been able to gather from around the sector in the hope that she would discover the means of accessing it.

"There's no proof that she's able to access the storehouse." Cal replied.

"Maybe not." Whillam said, "But frankly our intelligence regarding the storehouse is almost non-existent."

"Lorna Fayl indicated that it is on Delvad." Cal said. Lorna Fayl had been the head of another of the Founding Families and had attempted to recruit Cal and his younger sister and padawan learner Lara to their cause. This had backfired massively however and before she could reveal any more information to the jedi the other Families had acted to remove her from power and she had not been seen since.

"A planet like Delvad has many places to hide something." Whillam pointed out, "Ocean covers most of its surface and it is impossible to penetrate these using conventional means."

"But we do know its down there somewhere. That counts for something." Cal said.

"Yes I think it's safe to assume that Lorna was telling you the truth when she told you it was on Delvad." Varn replied, "It's the only planet in the sector where every one of the Founding Families maintains a presence."

"The Runn family are nautolan." Cal said, "They never leave."

"Which makes it likely that their estate is the most likely place for you to start searching for clues." Whillam said and Cal's eyes widened.

Surprise.

Varn smiled at his son's reaction.

"Cal it's time we started doing something other than reacting to what the Founding Families do." he said, "I'm sending a team of six jedi to Delvad to locate this storehouse. If possible you are to destroy it. Otherwise just let us know where it is and we'll launch a full scale assault on it."

"So I'll be in command?" Cal asked.

"Yes, you will. Cal You and Lara have got more experience of Delvad than any other jedi under my command." Varn replied, "You're the logical choice to lead the mission."

"So do I get to chose my team?" Cal replied.

"No." Whillam said, "Master Udra and I have determined the optimum unit. You and your padawan will go for your experience and you will take Jedi Khal and his padawan with you for support." this made sense to Cal.

The shistavanen wolfman Vrish Khal was regarded as a battle master, an expert in combat matters and it was highly likely that this mission would require his skills.

"You said six." Cal said, "Who are the other two?"

"I have asked Jedi Blake and Tyshon to join you." Varn told him.

Tarris Blake and the diminutive Tyshon were both Jedi shadows, Jedi who had dedicated themselves exclusively to hunting down everything to do with the Dark Side. Their order required a fanatical dedication to the Jedi Code and both displayed this trait clearly. Tarris had hunted Cal and Lara when they were declared renegades while Tyshon had remained on board Dorn Station alone for two centuries trying to locate the source of the Dark Side influence he had sensed here. But the Jedi shadows operated independently of the Jedi Order's normal command structure and Varn could not order them to accompany Cal on the mission.

"Join you we shall." a voice called out from the doorway and the three Jedi all looked around to see Tarris and Tyshon entering the room.

"We had been discussing such a mission ourselves." Tarris added, "Had Master Udra not asked us to join yours we would have been going to Delvad soon anyway."

"I'd like Seth with us as well." Cal said to his father.

"Jedi Ashran is a pilot." Whillam commented, "What use would he be for an underwater operation?"

"He can keep our ship clear until we call for back up." Cal replied, "If we're going to drop in on the Runns then I think they'll notice a starship hovering right above them."

"Very well then." Varn said, "You may tell Jedi Ashran to join you as well."

"So when do we leave?" Cal then asked.

"As soon as you can gather the rest of your team and load your ship with the equipment you need." Varn replied, "Now go. And may the Force be with you."

When Cal and Lara had been sent to the Narthis Sector the Jedi Order had assigned them the delaya-class courier *Bright Hope*. Fast, manoeuvrable and well protected the vessel had served them well and it was the logical choice to take them to Delvad. An LB-class labour droid was loading equipment aboard the ship when Lara entered the hangar accompanied by a dog on a lead.

"We don't have any scuba gear in Ghost's size." Cal commented when he saw the dog.

"Then he can wait on the ship with Shorty there." Lara replied, looking at the massive labour droid and at the sound of its name the machine looked back towards her, "I wasn't asking you to stop Shorty." she said and the droid got back to work.

"Well I suppose there will be enough room, even with all our passengers." Cal replied, "And speaking of which, here come Vrish and Pedrus." he added, nodding towards the shistavanen Jedi and his young human padawan.

"Think Pedrus will be able to handle this?" Lara asked. Pedrus Ketan was younger than Lara and was known to have confidence issues.

"There will be four Jedi knights on this mission Lara." Cal reminded her, "I'm sure he'll be fine."

"Maybe." Lara replied, "But I've got a bad feeling about this."

"We're going deep into enemy territory." Cal said, "If that doesn't give you a bad feeling then I'd have a bad feeling about you." and then he called out to the two approaching Jedi, "Supplies are almost loaded and everyone else is aboard." he told them, "We leave in five minutes."

Vrish and Pedrus picked up their pace, dashing up the *Bright Hope's* access ramp ahead of Cal and Lara who waited until Shorty was carrying the last crate aboard to head up the ramp themselves. Once aboard they headed for the cockpit where Cal sat in the pilot's seat and Lara sat beside him while he prepared the ship for take off.

"Okay everyone, we're about to take off." he announced over the intercom, "Flight time to Delvad will be approximately forty-four hours. Final mission briefing will begin one hour before that."

Gayal's eyes opened as the sound of the submersible making contact with the docking port at the Runn estate echoed through its hull.

"Good, you're awake." the woman sat opposite her said. This was Natalay Shill and like Gayal she was descended from one of the original survey team, though her heritage or even existence was not publicly known of.

"This is a bad idea." Gayal said, "I'm not ready."

"Gayal, you have studied artefacts and documents from all of the other Founding Families. The Runns have the only collection left that you have not seen. After you've taken a look at them, then you'll be ready I'm sure."

"And if I'm not?" Gayal asked.

"I can be patient." Natalay told her, "But remember, if I suspect that you're stalling then I can make things rather unpleasant for anyone you care about."

Then there was a hiss as the docking seals were secured and the hatch slid open. Standing on the other

side were two members of the aquatic nautolan species, Ket Runn and his wife Fial. The artificially maintained climate of both the submersible and the Runn estate was quite warm, but when Gayal looked at these two beings she felt a shiver run down her spine.

“Gayal.” Ket said with a smile, “It is so glad to meet you at long last.”

“Yes we have heard so much about you.” Fial added, “Welcome to our humble home.”

2.

The trip from Dorn Station to Delvad was uneventful and the Jedi gathered together in the *Bright Hope's* crew lounge an hour before they were due to drop out of hyperspace for the final time. Here Cal had set up a holographic projector that he used to display an image of the ocean-covered world.

"This is Delvad." Cal announced, "As I'm sure you know it's almost entirely covered in ocean and is regarded as the playground of the rich. Of the Founding Families the Runns live here permanently while the others all possess homes such as this." and Cal altered the display to show a large structure that floated above the waves on repulsorlifts.

"So we will be boarding one of these artificial islands?" Pedrus asked.

"No such luck." Lara replied.

"Unfortunately the Runns don't have one of these." Cal added, "Their estate is a fixed location on the seabed. That's why we've brought the scuba gear. Now the estate is deep down, more than a hundred metres, so we'll be using hardshell suits over our wetsuits. We'll drop to the seabed and either locate a suitable entrance we can use or alternatively make one ourselves."

"Such a suit in my size there is not." Tyshon commented.

"Ah." Cal replied, "Yes, I know that. Unfortunately the only solution was for us to rig up a pressurised container that we can carry you in."

"We're carrying him in a can?" Lara exclaimed.

"Yes you could put it that way." Cal said, "But I'm afraid that there was no other-"

"No explanation needed there is." Tyshon interrupted.

"Thank you." Cal replied, "Now unfortunately there is no floor plan of the estate available. Even if we could risk breaking into the planetary planning system I doubt that the Founding Families would leave that sort of information just lying around. So once inside we'll have to find a suitable terminal and try to download one. Then we'll decide where looks most promising to start looking for clues."

"Do you think that the Sith library is on the Runn estate?" Vrish asked.

"We can't be sure." Cal replied, "The repulsor islands most of the families have are mobile and the information we have about what areas of the planet are restricted to undersea travel show numerous places that it could be. But we're counting on there being a clue at the Runn estate. Now as well as looking for the library's whereabouts we can use this opportunity to get our hands on any other Sith artefacts the Runns may have lying around. Given that they aren't known for their hospitality to outsiders I wouldn't be surprised to find that they had a lot right out in the open."

"What about him?" Lara asked, Looking at Seth "I know you didn't bring him here to go swimming."

"No, I'll be keeping your escape ship handy while you're all splashing about down there." Seth replied.

"Seth will pilot the *Bright Hope* in." Cal explained, "Then when we've deployed he'll take the ship back into space and run silent until we call for a pick up."

"Do you plan for us to leave the same way we will enter the estate?" Tarris asked.

"No." Cal replied, shaking his head, "The Runns are nautolan so they can survive underwater but they have staff from species that aren't so even if there are no underwater speeders available there'll be emergency escape pods that can carry us back to the surface." and then he looked around as the other Jedi looked back in silence, "Well it looks like there are no more questions so I suggest we start suiting up. Those things take some time to put on."

"Or climb into our boxes, as the case may be." Lara muttered.

Rather than be shown to quarters, Gayal was escorted by the Runns and several of their staff to a large room with walls lined with shelves on which numerous books and ancient looking artefacts were on display, many of them protected by transparent cases. To one side of the room was a wooden table that had several chairs arranged around it and a small light and a compact built in computer terminal positioned in front of each one, suggesting that it was intended as a place for study. Meanwhile the rest of the room featured luxuriously padded seating arranged in a ring so that anyone sat down could easily face anyone else sat in the same area.

"This is our library." Ket announced, extending his arms, "As you can see we have gathered here the prizes of our collection of Sith related artefacts and information gathered by the Runn family over the last three hundred years. Many of them have been in our possession since the time the *Starlight Glory* brought our ancestors here."

"We have far more of course." Fial went on, "But those items are in storage elsewhere. But if you need access to anything not here you will find it listed in our computer system and you may request that it be brought to you."

"That all sounds quite acceptable." Natalay said, "And of course no item will be removed from your property

without your express permission.”

“Is there anything else you will need?” Fial asked Gayal, but the young woman was not paying attention. Instead she was looking at a particular section of wall on the far side of the room. Rather than the shelves that covered the rest of the walls this particular section was covered in a large carved metal plate that bore hieroglyphs that Gayal recognised as being Sith in origin. However, the way in which the symbols were arranged made no sense to her.

I know you are there.

Come closer.

Gayal gasped.

“What’s that?” she asked, “I know the writing is Sith but I don’t understand it.”

“That’s because it’s a fake.” Ket said, “Something my ancestor Yann Runn came up with when he first had this place built when the sector was only just being settled by the Republic.”

“But I can sense something there.” Gayal replied and the Runns looked at one another and smiled.

“How wonderful!” Fiat exclaimed, “My dear child, behind that wall is the place we do not speak of. The place that you must go.”

“The Sith Library.” Gayal said and she felt a sudden tremor that made her shiver.

“You see?” Ket said, “It calls out. It wants to be found and used. But we must be careful who we allow to try and enter it. The last individual to try did not succeed.”

“And what happened to them?” Gayal asked nervously, afraid that she would not like the answer.

“If you go in there then perhaps you can tell us.” Ket told her and Gayal decided that she had been right. She did not like the answer.

The *Bright Hope* emerged from hyperspace as close as possible to Delvad. Alone in the cockpit, Seth saw that there were several large warships orbiting the planet that looked like a shiny blue marble in space. Each of these ships bore the markings of the Crassis Major Defence Force and Seth banked to avoid them, pushing the *Bright Hope*'s sublight engines as hard as he could to get the ship into the atmosphere before any of the orbiting warships could react to its presence here.

Meanwhile in the cargo hold to the rear of the ship the other Jedi were preparing to deploy. All but Tyshon wore a wetsuit that had had all identifying marks removed from it and with the assistance of Shorty were climbing into bulky armoured diving suits. These suits consisted of rigid interconnected sections designed to keep the interior volume constant no matter how the wearer moved. Such suits could be complex to use since if the wearer attempted to move in a way that the suit was not designed to follow it could seize up until the wearer was able to free it but it allowed diving to take place at any depth that would not crush the suit without the need to decompress afterwards. Such a system did not allow the wearer to use their hands of course, no armoured gauntlet that was capable of withstanding the pressure of the ocean depths would allow any dexterity at all. Therefore to counter this the sleeves of the suits were overly long, enclosing the wearer's hands entirely. Instead the wearer would also wear a pair of gloves fitted with motion sensors that was connected to the suit and any hand movements would be duplicated by a pair of robotic hands mounted on the outside of the suit. Testing this system Lara held up her arm in front of the bubble like faceplate and flexed her fingers inside the suit, watching as the robotic hand copied her movements exactly.

“You better not be about to ask me to pull your finger.” Cal said, standing still while Shorty lifted the back plate of his suit into position and sealed it in place, “Because if you are then you can ride in one of those as well.” and he glanced in the direction of a stack of equipment cases. Most of these held the equipment and weapons that the Jedi expected to need when they reached the Runn estate. But one of them was open to expose a padded interior and oxygen cylinder. This was the case in which Tyshon would ride.

“So how will we get to the Runn estate?” Pedrus asked.

“Seth will take us in low enough that we can just jump through the loading hatch into the water.” Cal told him, “Then we’ll just sink to the bottom and walk towards the structure.”

“That’s it?” Lara said, “We just drop and walk?”

“If we try using any form of propulsion we’d risk showing up on their sonar.” Cal told her, “We need to stay absolutely silent even after we hit the bottom.”

“You do not expect any active sensors?” Vrish asked and Cal shook his head.

“No. Given how much the Runns seem to value their privacy I don’t see them wanting to use anything that would broadcast their presence.”

“Stand by.” Seth’s voice announce over the intercom and Cal looked at Shorty.

“Okay Shorty, open the door.” he said and the droid nodded once before it strode over to the controls to the cargo hatch and opened it.

Immediately the hold was filled with the sound of air rushing beneath the *Bright Hope*'s hull and peering through the open hatchway Pedrus saw the ocean beneath them.

“Careful.” Lara warned him, “Fall at this height and speed and your suit will smash wide open when you hit the water.”

"I suddenly have a bad feeling about this." the other padawan replied.

"Get used to it." Lara said, "Cal's always coming up with stupid ways to get me in trouble. Especially where his ex-girlfriend's concerned."

"Shut up and grab your gear." Cal told Lara before he carefully walked over to the equipment cases just as Tyshon climbed into his and closed it from the inside.

"Ten seconds." Seth announced and the sound of the *Bright Hope's* repulsorlift engines changed as he slowed the ship down to a complete stop, hovering several metres above the ocean surface.

"Okay go." Cal said, walking to the edge of the cargo hatch and simply stepping off into thin air where he promptly dropped straight down until hitting the water with a splash and sending water up into the air high enough that some of it entered the *Bright Hope* through the open hatch.

One by one the other jedi followed him, stepping out of the hatch and letting themselves fall into the water. When the last of them was gone Shorty also walked over to the hatch and looked through, checking to make sure that none of the jedi was on the surface and signalling that they were in distress. Satisfied that everything was as it should be, the droid returned to the control panel and sealed the hatch.

"May the Force be with you." Seth said to himself in the cockpit when he saw his console indicate that the hatch was again closed and then he transferred as much power to the repulsorlifts as he could to get the *Bright Hope* clear before anyone could notice it and get suspicious.

Meanwhile the five jedi in their diving suits and Tyshon sealed up inside the carrying case allowed themselves to slowly drift with the current as they continued to sink towards the seabed. Although they were located on the day side of the planet, light from the sun could not penetrate the ocean as deep as the jedi needed to go and after a short time they were plunged into near total darkness. Being designed for use at such depths their suits were equipped with built in lighting systems, but they refrained from activating these for now just in case they gave away their presence to the Runns. Descending even deeper, light began to return in the form of luminescent lifeforms but the tiny localised lights that these lifeforms produced was not enough to convince the jedi that it was now safe for them to activate their own lights.

All waited patiently as they continued to fall until finally they made contact with the seabed. Most landed on soft, sandy ground that produced plumes of sand around them, invisible in the near absolute darkness, but Pedrus had the misfortune to land with one foot on a rock resulting in him toppling sideways.

"Oof! He exclaimed as he landed and kicked up a massive cloud of sand from the seabed. Then he froze, as he and the others waited to see if there would be any reaction from the Runn estate. When none came Cal finally activated his diving suit's lights, the compact units mounted either side of the bubble like faceplate projecting bright beams of light through the darkness of the ocean. The other jedi began to follow suit and when Vrish saw where his padawan had landed he strode over to help him back to his feet. Meanwhile Cal looked towards the Runns' seabed home. The large structure was visible because of the lights shining from behind the thickly armoured viewports located in numerous places. Looking around at the other jedi Cal saw that all were now ready and he waved for them to follow him before heading directly for the building.

3.

Gayal had expected Natalay to remain with her as she studied the contents of the Runns' library but instead the woman had left her under the watchful eye of two of their hosts' regular security staff. Both of these women were employees of Shill Security, the private military company that had been operated by Natalay's twin son and daughter, Han and Belle and that was now regarded as a major part of the sector's unified military along with several other mercenary groups and the combined local defence forces of each former Republic world in the sector. Both women stood in silence by the door and stared at Gayal while she sat reading and she was almost certain that she could sense their eyeballs moving in their sockets to watch each movement she made.

Gayal got to her feet and walked towards the door but as she drew closer the two guards stepped close together to block her path.

"Get out of my way." Gayal told them.

"Our orders are to keep you here." one of the two women replied.

"I need to use the refresher." Gayal said, "Or do your orders mention anything about me pissing myself?"

"We'll have to check with Mister Runn or Miss Shill." the guard told her and began to reach for her point to point communication link.

Gayal snarled, glaring at the guard.

I'm only be going to be gone for five kriffing minutes.

"Okay miss. Five minutes it is." the guard said and Gayal smirked.

"Thank you." she commented as the guards stepped out of her way. It was only as she had left the library and was walking down the hallway outside that she realised that she had not spoken the words out loud.

As the Jedi got closer to the Runns' home they were able to see it more clearly. Because of the location it had been built in its structure was vastly different to any of the mansions occupied by the other Founding Families. Where those were highly ornate and often featured several smaller out buildings, the Runns' home was by necessity more utilitarian, armoured to protect it from the immense pressure of the water around it compared to the atmosphere inside that was maintained at the standard for sea level and with all parts of the structure connected directly together so that it was not necessary for an individual to leave it in order to get to any other part of the home. Getting closer still the Jedi saw that there were clusters of lights mounted around many of the viewports but that they were inactive at present. This was not surprising. The combination of illuminated interior and dark ocean outside would turn the viewports into mirrors. But if the interior lighting level was lowered and exterior lights engaged then it would be possible to view the seabed.

But the feature that caught Cal's attention was a section of the structure that was raised up above the seabed and that extended out from the main body for what looked like more than a hundred metres. This was narrow for most of its length but flared out at the end to form a disc and from under this disc a circle of light shone out onto the seabed below.

Cal realised that he had found their way in.

Waving for the other Jedi to follow him, Cal headed towards this projected light and as he got even closer he saw that his instinct had been correct. There was a hole in the underside of the disc through which the residence could be accessed without the need to try and subvert any security system or risk damaging the superstructure. Cal stood directly beneath this opening and leant back. No movement was visible in the chamber directly above him so he took a deep breath and allowed the Force to flow through him before leaping straight up.

The weight and bulk of his diving suit, combined with the density of the water round him made the jump a difficult one even boosted by the Force. But Cal erupted from the water and landed on the deck beside the opening, his landing producing a loud 'Clang!' that made him wince.

Moments later he heard the sound of displacing water and turned to see his sister appear and land just beside him. Then Tarris, Vrish and finally Pedrus followed them up through the opening.

"Okay we're in." Cal said using his diving suit's built in PTP link to communicate with the others now that he was not worried about external hydrophones picking up the noise.

"Why are there no guards?" Pedrus asked as he turned to look around.

"Why bother?" Lara replied, "Who'd think to attack the Runns in their own home like this? A particularly anti-capitalist shoal of fish?"

Pedrus then reached for the latches that would release the seal of his diving suit.

"No don't!" Cal snapped.

"Why not?" Pedrus asked.

"Check your depth gauge my apprentice." Vrish told him and as Pedrus looked at the dial built into his sleeve the Shistavanen added, "In order to prevent the water from the moon pool flooding this room it is kept at the

same pressure as the ocean outside.

"Then how do we get out of here?" Pedrus asked.

"The corridor." Tarris said, looking along the corridor that led towards the main structure of the residence,

"See those shield emitters built into the walls every few metres? Each one represents a change in pressure held in place by a magnetic shield."

"So walking along it decompresses us?" Lara asked and Cal nodded.

"A bit each time." he replied, "Even nautolans would have to decompress after all. Now let's get moving. We need to get to the other end before we can dump these suits and unpack our gear."

Gayal had just returned to the library and was walking back to the table where she had been working when she felt a sudden tremor in the Force and she stumbled.

"Are you alright miss?" one of the guards asked, stepping forwards.

The initial tremor was followed by several more but none of them resonated with Gayal in the same way that the first one did.

"Cal." she muttered.

"Miss? I didn't catch that." the guard said as she neared Gayal.

"I'm fine." Gayal replied, "Go back to your post and leave me to get on with my work."

4.

The chamber at the far end of the corridor beyond the last of the pressure equalising force fields was used to store diving equipment belonging to the Runn family, obviously for the use of their staff rather than themselves and it was here that the Jedi climbed out of their own diving suits and began to unpack their equipment. Each of the Jedi had a PTP link and a lightsaber, while Vrish and the Udras also carried pulse wave blasters. For extra support both Cal and Lara carried pulse wave rifles as well, the example carried by Cal being fitted with an underslung grenade launcher.

"Now you checked the ammo for that didn't you big brother?" Lara asked, looking at the grenade launcher. "Don't worry." Cal replied, "I got rid of all the rounds tagged by Shill Security and got all new ones from Colonel Jeck."

"There is a computer terminal over here." Tarris announced and he walked over to inspect it.

"Is it hooked up to a network?" Cal asked as the other Jedi also gathered around the terminal.

"It would appear so." Tarris replied, "But I cannot locate anything obviously related to the Sith, nor is there a floor plan."

"Know the layout of their own home the Runns do." Tyshon commented, "A map they do not need."

"And their guests would only need to know about the areas the Runns wanted them to." Vrish added, "Which is unlikely to include any part of the complex that we are interested in."

"Unless there was an emergency." Lara said.

"But who would have the time to access a computer network in an emergency?" Pedrus asked.

"No one obviously." Lara said, "So they'd need something like that." and she pointed to a printed map fixed to the wall. The other Jedi turned to face this map and saw that it divided the residence up into several sections each identified by a different colour depending on its function.

"These look like private quarters." Cal said, indicating an area with numerous mid sized rooms located on the exterior of the structure from where they could include viewports for their occupants.

"And I'm guessing that all this stuff over here in grey is to with life support and fusion reactors." Lara added.

"But where would information about the Sith be kept?" Pedrus asked.

"Perhaps what is not on the map we should look for." Tyshon suggested, "Secrets when hidden work best."

"Here." Tarris said and he pointed to a section that was marked as 'Auxiliary Parts Storage' but was located away from the service areas of the residence, "Why would maintenance supplies be kept in such proximity to the quarters of the Runn family themselves? Over here by the workshops and servants quarters makes much more sense."

"By the reactors would be a useful location as well." Vrish added, "It would appear that this facility uses geothermal power as a reserve in case the fusion plants fail. This would require shafts to be sunk into the seabed."

"And concealing information about the Sith under the seabed would make sense." Cal added, nodding in agreement.

"What about the main computer core?" Lara asked, "I mean just because there's nothing accessible from that terminal over there doesn't mean that there wouldn't be information stored digitally elsewhere."

"More general information about this place access to the core would give us as well." Tyshon pointed out.

"So we have three possible targets and there are six of us." Cal said, "That suggests three teams of two.

Lara and I will take the computer, Vrish and Pedrus you take the power plant and Tarris and Tyshon can head for that storage area. Maintain communication silence at all times unless there's an emergency or if you find what we're looking for. Then I suggest we all meet up at this point here that looks like a vehicle hangar. Understood?" and the other Jedi just nodded, "Okay then let's get going." Cal said and the Jedi quietly began to leave the room, each pair splitting off to head for their own destination.

Gayal stared at the screen in front of her that listed the available information about the document she was reading. She could see exactly where it had been found and the circumstances surrounding its discovery but all that meant nothing to her right now. She knew that Cal was somewhere close by but no alarms had sounded and despite the guards' efforts to look as if their full attention was on the task of keeping Gayal under surveillance she could tell that after spending so much time stood by the door with nothing else to do they were not fully alert.

Checking to see how closely the guards were watching her, Gayal then tilted her computer display so that only she could see any of what was on it. At first she wondered whether the guards had noticed this, but if they had neither of them seemed to think it significant. Then she closed down the artefact database system and instead tried to access the security system.

Tyshon advanced ahead of Tarris. Given that reaching the bizarrely located storage area required that they

go through the area of the residence where they were most likely to encounter either members of the Runn family or their servants or guards the two Jedi shadows opted to take advantage of the technical requirements of the residence's location on the seabed. Maintaining a controlled environment at a suitable atmospheric pressure and temperature meant that air required cleaning to prevent dangerous levels of carbon dioxide from building up and this in turn meant that air had to be pumped to each section of the residence and then drawn back to the life support system to be recycled and treated. Therefore, every section of the residence was connected by a network of ventilation ducts and to the two Jedi shadows these offered a covert means of moving around unseen.

Being only sixty-five centimetres tall Tyshon was just about small enough to be able to stand up straight in the ventilation duct while Tarris was forced to crawl along behind him. Luckily for Tarris, wearing a wetsuit instead of his normal robes meant that he did not need to worry about snagging on anything and making a sound as he tore himself free.

"Voices from ahead I hear." Tyshon whispered, holding up a hand and Tarris slid his hand to where his lightsaber was connected to his belt. Tarris' weapon was bulkier than most Jedi's. In effect it was two lightsabers connected together at the hilt to allow them to function as a single weapon capable of projecting a blade from each end simultaneously. Though such a weapon was next to useless within the confines of the duct, with a single turn of his wrist Tarris could slice through its walls and be ready to defend himself in moments.

Carefully Tyshon moved further forwards with his own lightsaber in his hand. However, like Tarris he kept the weapon inactive to make sure that the glow and distinctive humming sound would not give his presence away. There was a vent not far up ahead of the Jedi's position and the voices that Tyshon could hear were coming from the other side of this vent. Tyshon stayed back from the vent itself so that anyone who happened to look up at it would not see him staring back at them. He heard talking again and although he did not understand most of what was being said he did recognise the language as one spoken by Nautolans and sure enough Ket Runn came into view, walking around a table until he reached an empty chair and sat down. Turning his attention to the other around the table Tyshon saw that Fial was also sat down at the far end while on either side between the pair were four much younger Nautolans being served food by a pair of formally dressed Twi'lek servants. Tyshon smiled at this, knowing that the Runn family would be sitting down for a meal together if they had even the slightest suspicion that their home had been invaded by a Jedi raiding party and he backed away from the vent and returned to where Tarris was waiting for him.

"Well?" the other Jedi asked softly.

"Another way around we should find." Tyshon answered, "For the owners of this place, dinner time it is. Leave them to eat in peace we should."

Backing up in the duct was more difficult than moving forwards for Tarris, but again the wetsuit made his passage easier than it could have been and as soon as he reached a junction Tyshon was able to select an alternate duct for them to follow.

Tyshon's new route took the two Jedi shadows around the dining area and as far as a small private lounge. But the duct did not appear to extend as far as the storage area that they were searching for.

"Strange that something so innocent as a storage room for spare parts would be isolated from the ventilation system." Tarris noted.

"Unless a specially controlled environment it requires." Tyshon replied, "Such as where delicate artefacts one would keep." then he walked right up to the vent at the end of the section of duct they were in and unleashed a telekinetic blast of Force energy powerful enough to tear it free before using the same power to catch the dislodged piece of metal before it could hit the floor and alert anyone nearby to something amiss. Lowering the vent to the floor Tyshon then jumped out of the resulting hole and looked around.

"No one here there is." he said before Tarris slid out of the vent as well.

Landing on his feet Tarris stared at one of the lounge walls.

"Do you sense that?" he asked and Tyshon.

"Strong the Dark Side is here." he said, "More to what is beyond that wall than just spare parts there is."

Tarris walked over to the door and paused while he reached out through the Force to see if there was anyone in the hallway outside. He sensed nothing but still drew his lightsaber before opening the door, the Founding Families had only been able to declare the Narthis Sector independent because they had control over a massive army of Sith warbots and the electronic minds of such machines had no presence in the Force. But the hallway outside turned out to be as empty as the Jedi shadow had hoped it would be and he slipped out of the lounge and made his way to the next door along. This was much larger than the door to the lounge and lacked any form of control panel to open it.

"Wanting casual visitors in there the owners do not." Tyshon said.

"Maybe not." Tarris replied, "But since when has a closed door ever stopped a member of our order?"

Tyshon smiled.

"Heard it said I have that if in difficulty a closed door you should make. Then to open it one of us will soon come." he replied as he stood beside Tarris.

Both jedi held out an arm towards the door as they focused their minds on it. Then in unison they envisioned the door moving and there was a grinding sound from the motor as the rising door forced its shaft to turn without any power running through it. They made sure to lift the door slowly, alert for any pressure levers that could alert someone to the door being open. Then when the gap beneath the door was big enough for Tyshon to be able to walk underneath both jedi suddenly lunged forwards, rolling under the door just before it came slamming back down.

The room in which the jedi shadows now stood was in total darkness and both reached for their lightsabers, igniting them for illumination. At which point their suspicions that the room was not used for the storage of spare parts was confirmed.

5.

Unlike the store room that Tarris and Tyshon had headed for, the residence's power plant was not located anywhere close to the area inhabited by the Runn family or their guests and this allowed Vrish and Pedrus to use the network of service corridors to head towards their target. Every so often they would sense the approach of someone, normally a technician checking to make sure that the structure and systems of the residence were functioning normally but there were also a few servants heading to wait on their masters or security guards patrolling. Fortunately the network of tunnels was so widespread that there were frequent junctions and exits and all the Jedi had to do was duck into one of these before Vrish made use of his powers to focus the attention of whoever happened to come along elsewhere.

Fear.

Vrish sensed his padawan's agitation growing the further they went and eventually he came to a halt and turned to face him.

"What concerns you so my apprentice?" he asked.

"I'm sorry master." Pedrus answered, "But I cannot avoid thinking of how we are surrounded by our enemies and I sense the presence of the Dark Side."

"I sense it too young one." Vrish replied, "But you must have faith, both in yourself and in your comrades.

There are five other Jedi here and none of them have the same fear you do. Not even Padawan Udra who is no more senior than you are."

"But Lara has more experience of such missions master." Pedrus pointed out.

"Now yes, but at the time she would have undertaken her first deep penetration mission and if she had been as worried as you are right now I suspect that her master would still be teasing her about it. Their relationship is a complicated one at best. Now follow me my apprentice and control your feelings, they are distracting me."

"Yes master." Pedrus replied as Vrish carried on along the corridor.

A short time later the cool air of the service corridor began to become noticeably warmer and Vrish reached for his lightsaber.

"We must be especially cautious from now on." he said softly, "The power plant will undoubtedly be permanently manned to make sure no fault goes unnoticed." and in response Pedrus nodded and drew his own lightsaber, though both Jedi kept their weapons inactive.

With a flick of his wrist Vrish used the Force to open the door at the end of the corridor while he was still several metres away from it. This allowed him to observe the room beyond it without instantly exposing himself.

From what he could see from within the service corridor it led to a single large chamber that was dominated by three brightly glowing columns of plasma held in place by magnetic energy shields. These were the hearts of the fusion reactors that provided power to the entire complex and understandably the occupants of the room had their attention focused on these rather than worrying about a single small door in an insignificant corner of the room.

"Keep close to the walls." Vrish said softly, "And stay close. Hopefully our clothing will help us blend in." he added in reference to the plain black wetsuits they both still wore. Though the engineering staff mainly wore overalls they were also dark in colour and at a glance the wetsuit would pass. Especially if backed up by the skills of a Jedi knight.

Vrish walked out of the service corridor as casually as he could, worried that moving too slowly may attract attention. He picked a direction at random and headed that way, keeping to the outer edge of the room while the engineering teams were either looking away from him and Pedrus or had their view of the Jedi obscured by the fusion cores. After a short distance Vrish saw a sign mounted above a large door and came to a halt.

"There." he said, looking at the sign without pointing just in case the gesture was noticed and when Pedrus looked in the same direction he saw that it read, 'AUXILARY POWER PLANT', "That will be the access to the geothermal shaft." Vrish went on and he began to walk towards the door.

The door opened easily when Vrish touched the control panel and no alarms sounded to suggest that he had done anything considered out of the ordinary and after he and Pedrus had stepped through it closed again just as simply. Once again the two Jedi found themselves in a room that was centred around a power plant. This time rather than bright columns of plasma however, there was instead a bulky water pump designed to draw water out of the ocean and force it down a pipe running down in a shaft bored deep into the planet's crust. As the temperature increased the water would boil and become steam that would then rise up through a second pipe and be used to drive a turbine to generate power. Though not providing the same output as even a single fusion reactor the system was efficient and would provide enough power to keep critical systems running if the primary power plant failed. In fitting with its function as a reserve energy source the geothermal plant was staffed by only one droid plugged into the monitoring console

Given that the pipes carrying both water and steam had to travel several thousand metres down in order to reach the temperatures required to efficiently boil the water it was necessary to maintain a series of inspection chambers every few hundred metres. This meant that if any of the pipes were damaged only a relatively short section need be replaced and it could be done in place rather than having to raise the entire assembly up and risk damaging it even further. Access to these was by means of a turbolift shaft located on the other side of the room and keeping an eye on the droid just in case it turned its head towards them the Jedi made their way towards this.

However, just as they were nearing the turbolift they heard the sound of it in motion and realised that there was someone coming up towards them. Vrish looked around and saw that there was no where for him to hide so instead he lunged for the door just as it was opening and slammed into one of the pair of surprised technicians inside the turbolift. Lashing out he struck the other technician in his throat to prevent him from raising the alarm with the droid before Pedrus could dart into the turbolift car as well and close the door behind him.

This now left the two Jedi trapped in the confines of the turbolift car with the technicians. Using a lightsaber in such a confined space risked not only damaging the turbolift car itself but also there was the danger of accidentally striking the wrong person and with no time for Vrish to draw his pulse wave blaster the Jedi resorted to unarmed combat. Pedrus had little experience in this, but he nevertheless grappled with the technician Vrish had struck in the neck to prevent him from coming to his companion's aide while the battle master dealt with him.

A blow under the technician's chin jilted his head back hard enough to produce a loud 'Crack!' as it struck the back of the turbolift car. Then Vrish pulled the stunned man forwards, bending him over so that the Jedi could tuck the man's head beneath his arm and twisted it hard enough to produce a 'crunch' as his neck broke.

Fear.

Panic.

Seeing what had happened to the other technician the man grappling with Pedrus became desperate and he unexpectedly head butted the padawan, stunning him long enough for the man to slip free of his grasp. The man's hand then reached for his belt where several tools were attached and he removed a large wrench that he was just lifting above his head to swing at Pedrus when Vrish intervened to save his padawan. The Jedi battle master grabbed the arm the technician was using to hold his improvised weapon in both hands and applied enough force at the elbow to bend it the wrong way, producing both the sound of tearing flesh and a scream made all the louder by the confines of the turbolift car. Then as the wrench slipped free of the technician's grasp Vrish struck at the man's throat again. This time the blow came in from the side and was much stronger than the first and the man's scream was abruptly cut off as his windpipe was crushed and he slumped to the floor of the turbolift, choking before a final blow from Vrish knocked him unconscious before the damage inflicted to his throat finally caused him to suffocate.

"Quickly," Vrish said to Pedrus, "we must go before these two are missed."

"Where to master?" Pedrus asked as he looked at the turbolift's control panel. The different floors were marked by number only and there was no indication of what may be on each.

"The level below us." Vrish replied, "We will descend one level at a time until we reach the bottom. It is possible that there are hidden levels between the ones we can see here so we will need to time how long it takes to move between each one." and then Pedrus pressed the button for the first level below them and the turbolift car began to move.

6.

Cal and Lara had been planning to take a somewhat roundabout route to the main computer core rather than the most direct one that would have taken them through the residential areas of the estate but one of the first locations they came across turned out to be the laundry. Staffed entirely by low level droids, the laundry facility served not only the Runn family but also all of their staff, most of whom permanently resided on the estate as well and this meant that the laundry was well stocked with freshly cleaned and pressed servants' uniforms. "Do you think any of those droids would object if we helped ourselves?" Cal whispered as he and Lara peered into the laundry from the corridor.

"Oh I don't think so." Lara replied, "But what about our weapons?"

"The kitchens aren't far. I'm sure we can find a covered trolley to hide them on." Cal said, "Now let's go."

The two Jedi then crept into the laundry, seeing no point in making any excess noise and headed directly for the long rack of clean uniforms that ran dominated one side of the room. Then rather than stand in front of this they slipped between the hanging uniforms and stood pressed between them and the wall as they searched for clothing in their sizes, hoping that should any of the residence's more intelligent occupants enter the laundry they would not be looking for anyone hiding behind laundry.

Given the close fitting nature of their wetsuits the Jedi just put their stolen uniforms on over the tops of them. The tunics of the uniforms were not large enough to conceal the Udras' equipment belts but the trousers did feature deep pockets into which they could insert their lightsabers without producing a noticeable bulge.

However, although the uniforms fully covered their torsos, arms and legs they still left their feet exposed.

These were still covered by the black polymer of their wetsuits that at a casual glance would look as if they were wearing shoes but the illusion would not stand up to any serious scrutiny. Fortunately when peering through the hanging uniforms in front of him Cal saw that the laundry also included a shoe cleaning facility with a single droid that was fixed in place taking pairs of shoes from a pile and cleaning them before placing them on shelves by size. These shelves were clearly labelled and the labelling made it easy for Cal to select footwear for himself and his sister. Given that the droids operating the laundry had no minds for Cal to influence he waited until none of them appeared to be looking at anywhere between the shelves of clean shoes and rack of clean uniforms before reaching out through the Force and summoning two pairs of shoes towards his grasp.

"Here." he whispered to Lara as he handed her a pair of shoes and then he grinned at her.

"What?" she asked.

"Your hair." Cal replied.

"What about my -," Lara began as she reached up to feel her hair and then as she felt that it was starting to stand on end she added, "Oh." and began to flatten it back down while her brother continued to smile at her, "It's not my fault," she went on, still keeping her voice low, "this wetsuit is rubbing against the uniform. It's building up a static charge."

"Just keep touching something conductive to dissipate the charge." Cal suggested and then when Lara noticed that he had one hand resting on the metal bar supporting the freshly laundered uniforms she prodded his forehead and he recoiled back as the static built up in her discharged through him.

"Not funny." he hissed.

"Oh yes it was." Lara replied as she finished putting on the shoes.

"Let's just get out of here." Cal said, peering between the uniforms concealing them and seeing that there were no droids looking towards them and he and Lara quietly slipped back out of the laundry into the corridor. For the time being the two Jedi continued to creep through the corridors of the residence trying to avoid being noticed before they could find a way of adequately concealing the weaponry and equipment that would not fit beneath their disguises.

Fortunately for the Jedi the kitchens were located close by but from the sounds drifting into the corridor it appeared that they were fully staffed by living beings.

"Wait here." Cal whispered, handing his equipment belt and the rifle to Lara. The hint of a smile appeared on Lara's face as she took the rifle with its attached grenade launcher and Cal instantly knew what she was thinking, "No." he whispered, "This does not mean that it's your turn to carry the grenade launcher." and Lara's face fell.

Cal then walked into the kitchen. Unlike his movements up to this point he moved with confidence, unafraid of anyone looking at him, though if he noticed anyone's eyes lingering in his direction for too long he deflected their attention with a simple wave of his hand.

"This needs to go to the guest quarters." one of the chefs called out as he stepped back to allow an assistant to place a completed meal on a nearby trolley. Then as luck would have it the chef looked directly at Cal before the Jedi could volunteer and pointed to him, "You." he ordered, "Take this to Miss Shill immediately." Shill. That name sent a sudden shiver down Cal's spine. He knew of four members of the Shill family, Han

and his twin sister Belle had led Shill Security while a third had infiltrated the Republic Navy and the fourth the freedom warriors, the non-Force sensitive soldiers who fought in support of the Jedi Order. The last two posed little threat, but if it was Belle then the trained killer could pose a significant threat to the Jedi, "What? Didn't you hear me? I told you to take this to the guest quarters. Now move!" the chef snapped.

"Yes sir." Cal replied and he took hold of the trolley and turned to wheel it out of the kitchen, halting beside Lara.

"We may have a problem." Cal said.

"A problem? What is it?" Lara asked in response.

"It's something that will make our job much harder." Cal told her, "But that's not important right now. Belle may be here."

"Belle?" Lara hissed, "That psycho witch?"

"This meal is meant for a Miss Shill and I doubt Corlay or Erin would be here as guests. Staff maybe but not guests." Cal said.

"So do we piss in the soup before we serve it to her?" Lara asked and Cal paused.

"I hadn't considered that." he said.

"That's why you need me here big brother. To come up with smart ideas to fix the problems with your hokey plans."

"Hokey?" Cal replied, "Oh never mind. Let's just get our stuff loaded and find the computer. With any luck Belle will never know we were here."

The trolley was exactly what the Jedi needed, consisting of three platforms stacked one above the other that then had a fabric cover draped over that completely obscured the lower two and it was onto these that the Jedi loaded their possessions that would not fit under their uniforms. The long barrels of their rifles still would not fully fit under the cover so the Jedi aligned them so that they stuck out directly towards the rear of the trolley. This meant that they were obscured from behind by Cal as he pushed the trolley along while by keeping the trolley close to the wall Lara was able to position herself on the other side to prevent anyone from seeing them from that angle either.

Positioned like this Cal and Lara calmly walked through the hallways of the Runns' home, heading towards the computer core rather than the guest quarters they had seen marked on the emergency map. Every so often they were passed in a hallway by another servant or a uniformed security guard, but none of them reacted at all to the Jedi either visually or emotionally in a way that Cal or Lara could sense in the Force. However, just as they were reaching a junction in the hallway Cal felt a tremor in the Force that had a familiar feel to it.

"Gayal." he said, coming to a sudden halt with the trolley.

"Oh no." Lara responded, "I've got a bad feeling about this."

"Gayal's here." Cal told her and she winced.

"Oh I just knew you were going to say that." she replied, "Cal we do not have time for any of this. We need to get to the computer core and see if we can use it to find out where the storehouse is."

"Gayal may know." Cal pointed out.

"And she may be guarded by Belle and fifty Sith battle droids."

Cal sighed.

"You're right." he said reluctantly before reaching under the trolley and pulling out his rifle and equipment belt.

"Cal what the kriff are you doing?" Lara exclaimed.

"Going after Gayal." he answered, "You keep going to the computer. If I can get to Gayal I'll take her there to meet you."

"You're going to get yourself killed." Lara said.

"A Jedi does not fear death." Cal said.

"Does he fear getting everyone else around him killed because he can't stand to be dumped by his girlfriend in favour of an old man?"

Anger.

Cal glared at Lara.

"Hey look Cal, I didn't mean-" she began.

"I know exactly what you meant." Cal interrupted, "Now I'm ordering you to locate the computer core and wait there for me and Gayal. Do you understand?"

Lara stared back at him.

"Yes. I understand." she replied and then Cal turned and ran off down one of the hallways to the side.

Watching him leave Lara just shook her head, "Oh I've got a very bad feeling about this." she said to herself before she turned back to the trolley and began to push it towards the computer core.

A knock at the door made the sole occupant of the computer core turn around, somewhat confused. The door was not kept locked and whoever was outside could just open the door and walk in. Then there came a

second knock.

"Who's there?" the technician asked as he got up and walked to the door.

"Room service." a female voice replied just as he got to the door and then open it to reveal Lara standing in the corridor outside with the food trolley in front of her.

"What's this about?" the technician asked, now even more confused.

"Some stuck up nerf herder of a guest decided that their dinner wasn't prepared the exact way they wanted it." Lara replied, "So rather than see it go to waste Mister Runn suggested I bring it down here and see if you wanted first dibs."

The technician frowned.

"The boss said that?" he said.

"Well I'm paraphrasing. But he told me to offer it to you before taking it back to the kitchen.

"Then wheel it in and let me take a look." the technician said as he stepped back to allow Lara in.

"Take a look." she said, waving her hand subtly as she used the Force to make sure he kept his attention focused on the top of the trolley and not on the butt of the pulse wave rifle sticking out from underneath and then she reached forwards to lift up the polished metal cover over the food, "Smells good doesn't it?" she added as she reached out to close the door behind her.

"Sure does." the technician said leaning forwards and that was when Lara struck.

Grabbing the bowl of soup that lay beside the main course she hurled the contents at the technician, hitting him squarely in the face and he staggered back screaming and clutching at his face as the hot liquid burned him. Then Lara grabbed the metal cover again and used it like a weapon, striking the side of his head twice as she swung it back and forth. At this point the technician simply collapsed into unconsciousness and Lara dropped the food cover and pulled her weaponry from under the trolley, not wanting to leave it unattended while she worked. Then she darted to the nearest computer terminal and began to work.

"Okay then, let's see what secrets you're hiding." she said to herself.

With his weaponry displayed openly Cal returned to moving in a way that minimised the risk of anyone seeing him. He darted along each section of hallway and paused at every junction while he made sure that the way was clear for him to make his way along the next section. All the time he followed the presence in the Force that he knew belonged to Gayal until he could sense her just a few metres ahead of him. The problem was that she was not alone. Two other individuals were positioned between Cal and Gayal but the Jedi could not identify either of them. The possibility that one of them was Belle Shill occurred to Cal, though if what he had been told by the chef was correct then she was currently in one of the residence's guest suites and as he crept closer he could not sense the disciplined mind of Belle anywhere near by. Instead the two people blocking his path seemed rather unremarkable and Cal brought his rifle up to his shoulder and took aim.

"Hey! You in there, could you give me a hand with this?" he called out and a pair of female security agents suddenly appeared framed neatly in the doorway ahead of him. Putting his Jedi honed reflexes to use Cal fired his rifle immediately and was already adjusting his aim towards the second target when the spatial distortion from his first shot struck a guard in the chest and blew her off her feet. His second shot came as the other guard was reaching for her concealed weapon rather than retreating out of his line of fire and she was struck in the side of her neck.

"Gayal!" Cal exclaimed as he then rushed into the room, still holding his rifle at the ready just in case he had missed any guards.

"Cal!" Gayal responded when she saw him and he closed the door behind him, "What are you doing here?"

"I'm here to rescue you." he told her.

"Rescue me? Cal I can't leave. If I try to escape again they're going to hurt Sial and Keera."

"Your sisters? They wouldn't do that." Cal said.

"Cal remember how you're dealing with. These people lock their enemies away in asylums or leave them on alien worlds to whatever fate the locals may have in store for them. Plucking out the odd eyeball is nothing to them. Not when they think they're so close to getting in there." Gayal said and she waved at the carved wall panel.

Ah, another visitor. I've been watching you and your friends rushing around this place and wondering if any of you would be coming to see me.

Slowly, Cal turned his head towards the panel when he heard the voice talking to him without there being anyone present to say the words.

"It's back there isn't it?" Cal asked, cautiously making his way towards the panel.

"Cal be careful." Gayal warned him. But although Cal glanced back in her direction he continued to advance on the panel.

Yes. Come closer. Perhaps you are the one I have been waiting for all these years. I can sense you have power. Care to put it to the test?

Lowering his rifle, Cal reached out to touch the wall panel and he felt it shift as he pressed against it.

"This moves." he said to Gayal, "Give me a hand with it." and he leant his rifle up against the wall in the narrow gap between the panel and the adjacent set of shelves.

"Cal no." Gayal pleaded with him, "I can feel what's back there and it scares me."

Listen to her Cal. Do not prove my worst fears right. You know where the Sith library is now, go back to your father and he can destroy it.

Cal gasped when he heard this voice in his mind. Unlike the first one he knew who this belonged to. But he also knew that Master Karas was dead and he chose to ignore the warning.

"I can end this." Cal said to himself.

"What?" Gayal asked.

"Don't worry. I'll protect you." Cal told her, "Look, if I can destroy the Sith library right here and now then the Founding Families won't have any reason to keep you here will they?" and Gayal then rushed to Cal's side, pressing her hands against the panel as well, "Okay, together." Cal said, "Now!" and both he and Gayal pushed the panel sideways. There was a grinding sound as long disused rollers set above and below the panel moved for the first time in almost three hundred years and slowly a gap opened up behind the panel as it slid behind the shelves on the other side from Cal and Gayal.

The passageway hidden behind the wall panel was in darkness. Cal had half expected it to be filled with cobwebs like some ancient tomb from a movie, but there were no arachnids at the bottom of the ocean to spin such webs and so the passageway appeared to be just plain rock as it disappeared into darkness.

"There's a lamp over here on the table." Gayal said, but as she turned to fetch it Cal caught hold of her arm.

"No, I've got a flash light we can use." he said and from his belt he took a compact torch, turned it on and gave it to Gayal, "Here, hold this and shine it ahead of me. I want light in front, not on my back or in my eyes. Understood?" and Gayal nodded.

"Yes, I know what to do." she said as Cal picked up his rifle and then he began to advance down the passageway, Gayal following close behind.

The flash light beam exposed carvings on the walls of the passageway that were clearly of Sith origin but Cal did not pause to study them.

"There's something ahead." Cal whispered when he noticed a shape in the darkness, "Point the light down."

Gayal did as she was told and she screamed as the beam illuminated the mummified remains of a long dead twi'lek and at the same time through the Force, Cal heard the sound of mocking laughter.