

# STAR WARS

## TALES OF THE JEDI



### V-XII: AWAKENING

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...

**AWAKENING**

HAVING LOCATED THE SITH STOREHOUSE AND BEEN REUNITED WITH GAYAL, CAL NOW FACES THE TASK OF ESCAPING FROM THE RUNN ESTATE. BUT WITH THE RUNN FAMILY AND THEIR DEFENDERS ALERTED TO THE PRESENCE OF THE JEDI, LEAVING IS NOT AN EASY THING TO DO...

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

"Looks like we're not the first ones here Gayal." Cal Udra, until recently the Jedi knight assigned to the Narthis Sector said as the beam of the flash light held by the young woman standing immediately behind him illuminated the long dead corpse of a twi'lek in the passageway.

"Cal I think we should go back." she replied, "I don't like this."

Cal paused for a moment, considering their situation. Along with five other Jedi, including his own younger sister and padawan learner Lara, Cal had been sent to the estate of the nautolan Runn family located on the seabed of the planet Delvad. The Runns, along with several other families descended from the crew of the original survey ship to chart the Narthis Sector had become known as the Founding Families and it had become known to the Jedi Order that they had spent the centuries since the sector was first explored scouring it for the means to enter a hidden storehouse of Sith knowledge that the survey team had discovered. However, before the Jedi could gain enough evidence for the Republic to take action the Founding Families had used their economic and political power to declare the sector independent, thus putting them beyond the reach of the Republic. The Jedi Order on the other hand operated differently and now that they were freed of the legal niceties of probable cause for entering the home of Republic citizens they were able to take whatever action they saw fit to prevent the spread of Sith knowledge. The mission to the Runns' home on Delvad had been intended to determine where exactly on the planet the storehouse was located. But somewhat unexpectedly Cal seemed to have discovered it located beneath the home of the Runns themselves.

The good news appeared to be that the Founding Families had yet to be able to gain access to the storehouse, which was where Gayal came in. After their first meeting two years earlier Cal had discovered that she was Force sensitive. At first the pair had been able to hide this from her family, along with their developing personal relationship. But the deception did not last forever and eventually Gayal's relationship with Cal had come to light, resulting in her being committed to an asylum by her parents to keep her out of the way. But when another of the Founding Families had discovered her abilities they had rescued her, knowing as well as the others that all evidence pointed towards a Force sensitive individual being required to gain access to the storehouse. This rescue, along with Gayal's marriage to the head of the family that rescued her from the asylum had triggered a rift between the Founding Families but that was now healed and with access to all the knowledge collected by the Founding Families over the last three centuries Gayal's powers were growing stronger.

"No. I want to see more of what's down here." Cal replied and he continued to creep forwards.

*Think Cal. You have achieved your goal. Now all you have to do is leave and tell the Jedi Order where the storehouse is.*

The voice that spoke to Cal through the Force was that of his old superior, Jedi Master Ben Karas, who had been killed several months earlier by Cal's predecessor in the Narthis Sector following his fall to the Dark Side. In life Master Karas had never seemed to like either Cal or Lara and Cal was at a loss to explain why he should be communicating with him from beyond the grave.

But Master Karas' voice was not the only one talking to Cal through the Force.

*No, come closer. Why come all this way only to turn back unless you are afraid? Will you give into your fears young Jedi?*

Keeping his pulse wave rifle and its underslung grenade launcher pointing down the passageway Cal edged closer to the body and crouched down beside it. Despite being located in a passageway located beneath the ocean floor the body was a dried up and mummified husk and Cal could not reconcile these two facts. What remained of the twi'lek's clothing appeared to have been scorched and there were no identifying marks anywhere. But then the beam from the flash light reflected off something strapped around one of its wrists and he reached out for it. He winced as he took hold of the object and there was a snapping sound as the twi'lek's hand simply broke off.

"Careful Cal." Gayal said.

"I don't think he's going to wake up." Cal replied as he examined what the dead twi'lek had had strapped to its wrist. The object turned out to be a metallic chronometer and now that it was free of the body Cal could see writing on the back, "How's your twi'lek?" he asked, glancing at Gayal.

"Dreadful. How's yours?" she replied.

"Not great, but I'll give it a go." Cal said as he tried to decipher the engraving.

The lettering used in the engraving was from the universal Aurebesh alphabet so Cal had no trouble reading the words, but understanding their meaning was somewhat harder until he realised that at least one of them was a proper name that he had heard before, "Ban." he said.

"What?" Gayal asked.

"Ban, as in Ban Hollinis." Cal told her, "The first officer of the Starlight Glory."

"The ship that brought my ancestors here?" Gayal said, "But he died three hundred years ago."

"And it seems that your ancestors never thought to clean up the body and dispose of it properly." Cal said and he looked up, staring further down the passageway, "Shine the light that way." he told Gayal and she raised the flash light so that its beam pointed straight down the passageway. Just within the limit of the beam's effective range Cal saw that the passageway ended in a polished stone wall, into which were numerous carved Sith runes that seemed to glow when struck by the light of the beam.

*Just a little closer. You're almost there.*

"And now we know why." Cal said, looking back down at the body at his feet, "They could hardly advertise the fact that he died outside a Sith library they want for themselves now could they?"

"So how did he die?" Gayal asked, "Do you think Geth Torin really murdered him?"

"Not unless he somehow managed to desiccate the corpse so thoroughly that it remained in this state all this time." Cal said as he slipped the watch into the pocket of the servant's uniform he was disguised in, "No, I've got a very bad feeling about how he died."

*He died because he was weak and unworthy to live any longer.*

Both Cal and Gayal heard the sinister voice and Cal got to his feet.

"Maybe we shouldn't go any further." he said.

"Come in." the woman sat at the computer terminal in the luxurious living quarters that the Runn family had provided to her in their home. Natalay Shill was also descended from one of the original survey team, but her ancestry and even existence was not public knowledge. Her ancestor, the mercenary Rodge Kenner, had left the sector after the survey mission and supposedly died without leaving any heirs. In truth he had survived and since then his family had been building an army in secret to provide the Founding Families with the manpower they had always known they would need when they inevitably came into conflict with the Jedi Order. Natalay had sent her four children to the Narthis Sector years earlier, but had only arrived there herself in the past six months. Now she was on Delvad to watch over Gayal, knowing that the young woman's loyalties were not necessarily with the Founding Families. Fortunately she cared for her sisters enough that threats to harm them were enough to keep her in line, at least they were temporarily.

Turning around as the door to her quarters opened Natalay expected to see one of the household's serving staff entering with her dinner. The Runn family had invited her to dine with them but she preferred to allow her hosts their privacy while she worked. However, rather than a servant Natalay found herself looking at a guard in the uniform of the private military company that her son was CEO of, Shill Security.

"I'm sorry to disturb you Miss Shill, but we may have a problem."

"Define 'problem'." Natalay replied sternly.

"An optical sensor has been triggered in sector six." the guard said and Natalay frowned.

"That's here in the residential sector. Where's the alarm?" she asked.

"The storeroom miss." the guard said and Natalay sighed, knowing that the storeroom that the guard was referring to was one filled with Sith artefacts that the Runn family had come into possession of over the last three centuries.

"Has Gayal requested something be taken to her?" she said.

"That's the other thing." the guard replied, "We tried contacting the two agents you left to keep an eye on her and neither of them is responding."

"I've got a bad feeling about this." Natalay said, getting to her feet and rushing to a long case that she had brought with her. Opening it up she first removed a pulse wave blaster in a holster that she checked before clipping to her belt. Then she took out a long sword in an ornate scabbard and drew it to reveal the narrow jet black blade that was engraved with Sith runes. Returning this to its scabbard and hooking that to her belt as well she turned back to the guard, "Take me to the security control room." she said, "I think the Jedi are here."

## 2.

Tarris Blake and Tyshon were both Jedi shadows. They had dedicated themselves to hunting down and eradicating all traces of the Dark Side in the galaxy and so both had gladly volunteered to join the team sent to infiltrate the Runns' home by Cal's father, Jedi Master Varn Udra, who had replaced Master Karas as the most senior Jedi for this region of space. When the infiltration team had split into three pairs after gaining entry to the Runns' estate they had headed for an area marked as storage for spare parts on the map they had found, their suspicions being raised by the fact that it was located within the residential section of the undersea estate rather than one of the maintenance areas. Using their powers to break into the room they had discovered that their instincts had been correct when in the light cast by their lightsabers they found themselves looking at one of the largest collections of Sith artefacts that either of them had ever seen.

"Worrying it is that without our knowledge anyone could amass so many items of Sith origin." Tyshon said, the diminutive green Jedi looking at a collection of statues lined up along a wall.

"They are trinkets." Tarris replied with a snarl. The human Jedi shadow was stood beside a dark stone column that had rows of figures in armour carved into it, "None of them relevant to why we are here."

"To destroy the influence of the Dark Side we have come here." Tyshon reminded him and a smile appeared on Tarris' face as he turned his lightsaber sideways and with a flick of his thumb there was a 'snap-hiss' as a second blade extended from the inactive end of the lightsaber's grip. Spinning on the spot, Tarris struck the column with two rapid diagonal sweeps of his weapon that sliced it into three and caused the upper two sections to simply slide to the floor where they broke into hundreds of pieces on impact.

"As one mind we are." Tyshon then added as he too chose to make use of his lightsaber to prevent the Runn family from making any further use of their collection. Unlike Tarris' double bladed weapon, Tyshon's was a more conventional pattern. But when he leapt into the air and flew in an arc close by the statues he was able to slice several of them in half in one go.

"Show me." Natalay said as she strode into the security control room behind the guard who had fetched her from her quarters.

"Here." one of the staff on duty in the control room said, pointing to a display he had been watching carefully, "I've got an optical trigger from the storeroom but my console indicates that the power is off in there."

"So whoever it is, they aren't using the regular lights." Natalay commented and then she turned her attention to the other consoles and display, "Are there any other anomalies? No matter how minor, I want to know."

"An engineering team hasn't clocked off." another guard told her, "They're only ten minutes late but they ought to have reported in if their inspection was going to over run."

"Where were they working?" Natalay asked.

"In the geothermal shaft, checking the pipes for fractures."

"Under the seabed." Natalay said to herself, "Right where you'd expect to find something hidden away if you were looking for it."

"There's the two guards in the main lounge with Missus Crassis as well." the guard that had gone to fetch Natalay said.

"Has anyone gone to check on them in person?" she asked.

"No Miss. We wanted to check with you first, just in case it was something you already knew about."

"Okay, then I need four teams putting together." Natalay said, "Send the first to the storeroom. Tell them not to go inside, just set up in the corridor and wait until we've got more information. The second is to head for the main lounge and confirm that Gayal is still present and number three will head to the power plant, even if nothing's happened to that engineering team I want them found."

"And the fourth?" one of the guards asked.

"We have uninvited guests." Natalay said, "I want to know how they managed to get inside a building that is over a hundred metres below the sea without anyone noticing them." then something occurred to her and she walked over to the nearest intercom panel, "Kitchen." she said and the voice activated system instantly connected her to the kitchen.

"Kitchen here." a voice announced over the intercom.

"This is Natalay Shill. I need to ask for my meal to be sent to me at the security control room." Natalay told them.

"I'm sorry? Your meal was sent to your quarters more than half an hour ago. Did you not receive it?"

"Never mind." Natalay replied before shutting off the intercom and looking at the guards in the room with her, "Warn all agents that we may have Jedi intruders disguised as household staff. Make sure they check identities of everyone."

Also wearing the uniform of a member of the household staff over her wetsuit, Lara Udra sat alone in the

main computer core. The technician who had been on duty when she arrived was technically still in the room but given that Lara had beaten him unconscious with the metal cover from the meal on the serving trolley she had pushed into the room she was not worried about him attempting to interfere with her work.

Given that the technician had already been logged into the household computer system when Lara had launched her surprise attack she had not had to worry about finding a way to access it herself. However, even though the technician was cleared for all of the technical data regarding the Runn estate he had no clearance at all for the massive numbers of personal files that the Runn family had amassed over the centuries. The best that Lara could do was see that there were particular sets of files that existed but that she was refused permission to access.

This was not a dead loss however, as she proved by creating a duplicate of one of the secured files that the technician's access level still allowed him to take copies of them. Hoping that one of the Republic's slicers would be able to gain access to the files if she could just manage to deliver them, Lara was about to search the technician for any mem-sticks he may happen to be carrying when something else caught her attention. A nearby display indicated the computer usage of each section of the estate and the amount of processing power and memory being used by the security section had just increased massively. The amount remained tiny in comparison to what the state of the art network and individual terminals could provide, but it was far more than that section had been using just a few minutes earlier.

"Uh-oh." she said to herself, "I've got a very bad feeling about this." and then she reached for her point to point communications link, "Cal!" she exclaimed into the device, "I think we've got trouble. Security section has just gone into overdrive. Company's coming."

The third and final pair of Jedi sent to infiltrate the Runn estate was the Shistavanen battle master Vrish Khal and his inexperienced Padawan Pedrus Ketam. They had managed to get into the geothermal power plant that acted as a reserve source of power should the main fusion reactors fail. Given that this required a shaft sunk several thousand metres into the seabed it had seemed a logical place to hide something that the Runns did not want found and so Vrish and his Padawan had come to search it. They had been forced to kill a pair of engineers who had been leaving the shaft just as the Jedi arrived to prevent the alarm from being raised, but now they were descending into the shaft using a turbolift intended to allow engineers to inspect and repair the pipes used to carry water down and steam back up. There were many levels in the inspection system at what appeared to the Jedi to be regular intervals. All of these were connected together by the turbolift shaft as well as an emergency ladder and each of these required the Jedi to leave the turbolift to conduct a search before moving down to the next level.

Each level consisted of just a single open space in which a repair crew could work and by the simple means of tapping the walls at frequent intervals with the hilts of their lightsabers the Jedi were able to confirm that the walls were solid in a short space of time. However, while they did nothing to wedge the door of the turbolift open while they searched and just as they were coming to the end of searching a level the door suddenly slid shut and the turbolift began to rise without them.

"Master! The turbolift." Pedrus exclaimed.

"I see it Pedrus." Vrish replied.

"But whoever has called it will discover the bodies." Pedrus said. The Jedi had left the bodies of the two engineers inside the turbolift and when the doors opened for the summoner they would be instantly visible.

"Then we must leave now." Vrish said, "Whoever discovers the bodies may think that we sent them down in the turbolift to conceal them, not that we are down here as well."

"But how are we to get out of here Master?" Pedrus asked and Vrish pointed to the shaft containing the emergency ladder, "We're hundreds of metres down." the Padawan said.

"Indeed we are. But if you have an alternative then I am willing to consider it."

"How many?" Cal asked. He had received his sister's warning just as he and Gayal were leaving the hidden passageway and returning to the lounge and the pair were just about to close the panel behind them.

"I don't know. But it looks like the security command centre is talking to all their staff. Cal, they've highlighted three areas of interest and they include the reserve power plant and storage area Tarris and Tyshon headed for."

"How many of you are there here?" Gayal asked when she overheard this but Cal ignored her for now.

"Lara, what's the third location?"

"I don't know. Some lounge in the middle of the residential area it looks like." his sister told him.

"Okay, that's where I am right now. Lara, I'm with Gayal."

"Oh surprise, surprise." Lara interrupted before Cal went on.

"And the Sith library we're looking for is right here." he added.

"Holy kriff!" Lara exclaimed, "Cal you've got to tell the others."

"No, what I've got to do right now is avoid getting caught." Cal replied, "Lara, I need you to warn the others as well. Then I need all of you right here as soon as possible. We may just be able to end all of this right here

and right now. Cal out.” and then he shut off the PTP link and looked at Gayal, “Help with those bodies.” he said, pointing to the two dead guards.

“Where are we going to put them?” she asked.

“In there.” Cal answered, looking at the passageway leading to the Sith storehouse. Then they both rushed over to the doorway and grabbed one of the bodies by the arms and began to drag it to the open panel, dumping it unceremoniously in the darkened passage. They repeated this for the second body and then Cal looked at Gayal again, “Okay, now you need to shut me in here as well.” he told her.

“You’re kidding me.” she responded, “Cal, I can’t lock you in here.”

“Actually I don’t think that this panel locks.” Cal pointed out, “But its the only way you’ve got a chance of avoiding suspicion Gayal. Just tell that someone called the guards away and they told you to wait for them here.”

“Cal, I’ve got a bad feeling about this.” Gayal replied.

“I have faith in you Gayal. Have faith in yourself as well.” Cal said and then he reached out to place his hands on the back of the panel. Gayal did likewise from the other side and together they slid the panel shut again, this time producing much less noise than when they had opened it. As the panel closed completely Cal was plunged into almost total darkness with only a tiny amount of light finding its way around the panel and he remembered that Gayal still had his flash light. He reached for his lightsaber and was just about to activate the weapon when he suddenly considered the possibility that some light could escape around the edges of the panel in the same way that some light was able to get inside the passageway. Keeping the lightsaber in his hand anyway he instead resolved himself to having to wait in the dark.

*You did the right thing Cal.*

Cal sighed, hoping that Master Karas was right.

Meanwhile on the other side of the panel in the lounge Gayal returned to the table and the assorted documents laid out on it, just in time for a pair of armoured Shill Security agents to burst in through the doorway.

“What’s happening?” Gayal exclaimed, feigning surprise.

“Where are the guards Miss Shill left here with you?” one of the agents asked and Gayal noticed that there were more of them in the hallway outside.

“I don’t know.” Gayal lied, “They got a call on their links and left. They said they’d be right back but that was about ten minutes ago.”

The agent reached for the PTP link clipped to the front of his armour.

“Missus Crassis is secure.” he said into the device, “There’s no sign of the guards though. She says they were called away.”

“Understood.” Natalay’s voice responded, “Leave two men there to watch her. Under no circumstances are they to leave her alone. Then take the rest of your men to the main dining room. The Runn family is there right now. You are to make sure that they are safe and not leave their side until either they or I order it. Do you understand?”

“Yes Miss Shill.” the agent replied and then the channel went dead, “Okay you and you, wait here and under no circumstances leave your post.” he ordered, pointing to two of his men, “Everyone else with me. We have to secure the Runns.” and then leaving to of his men behind to guard Gayal he led the rest away from the lounge.

What had been a neatly ordered room when the two jedi shadows had entered it was now strewn with the wreckage of irreplaceable artefacts as well as the shelves and cases used to store them. The two jedi had made good use of their skills with their lightsabers to destroy everything they came across. They had already destroyed a good third of what the room held and showed no signs of giving up when Tarris’ PTP link sounded.

“It’s me Lara.” Lara’s voice said excitedly.

“Indeed.” Tarris replied, “There are no clues to the location of the Sith storehouse here. Have you located it in the computer?”

“No. But Cal went running off after Gayal and he’s found it in some lounge.” Lara told him and Tarris and Tyshon looked at one another.

“Is he sure?” Tarris asked.

“Oh you better believe he is.” Lara replied, “He wants everyone to meet him there to figure out what to do.”

“Unimportant this place when compared to the main Sith library it is.” Tyshon commented.

“We will head there immediately.” Tarris said to Lara, “Can you give us directions?”

“Sure. But you’ve got trouble heading your way.” Lara warned him, “I think someone’s figured out we’re here because they’re mobilising all the security staff they’ve got.”

Tyshon was closest to the only door out of the storeroom and he dashed towards it and placed a hand up against the metal.

*Anger.*

*Hatred.*

"Outside they are right now. Many of them." he said, "Their darkness I sense."

"Padawan Udra, we are already trapped." Tarris said, "Can you tell us what is in any of the adjacent rooms?"

"Sure." Lara replied, "I've got full access to technical data right here. But I still haven't warned Vrish and Pedrus yet."

"No signs of them coming in for us there are." Tyshon said and Tarris nodded.

"Our position is secure for now." he told Lara, "It may be that they fear damage to the contents of this room. Warn Jedi Khal and his padawan before finding us a way out."

"Got it." Lara said and as the channel went dead Tarris looked at Tyshon.

"Her master is too soft with her." he said.

"Her brother he is. Understandable it is." Tyshon replied.

"Which is why the code forbids such attachment." Tarris pointed out, "I sense that she may be his undoing."



### 3.

Although the signals from Lara's PTP link were able to penetrate the structure of the Runn estate they could not get through the amount of rock that lay between her and Vrish. The battle master was still far below the seabed and although unknown to Lara he was making his way back up via the emergency ladder there was only silence when she tried to communicate with him. The obvious solution was for her to go to the power plant herself and warn Vrish and Pedrus in person. But if she did that then she would not have access to the computer when she then had to help Tarris and Tyshon find a way out of the storeroom.

"I should have brought my datapad." she said to herself. Before looking around at the still unconscious technician, "But I bet you've got one." she added and she dashed over to the man and began to rifle through the various pockets in his overalls, "A-ha!" she exclaimed as she found a compact datapad in one of his larger pockets and turned it on. Unlike the main computer that only allowed her access to some information, everything on the datapad was visible to Lara as far as she could tell and she went straight to the section on technical readouts. Just as she hoped this included a full floor plan of the estate that she could lay additional technical data over such as the routes taken by power and communication lines and air vents, "Thanks buddy. This is just what I need." she said, slapping the cheek of the technician as he lay on the floor, "I'm almost sorry I knocked you out."

Tucking the datapad into one of the pockets on her own disguise, Lara then collected her pulse wave rifle and pistol from where she had left them before returning them to their hiding place under the serving trolley she had used to keep them out of sight on her way here. Confident that her disguise was complete she then opened the door and pushed the trolley back out into the corridor outside.

When the turbolift door slid open to reveal the bodies of the two engineers the security team instinctively raised their weapons and pointed them into the turbolift just in case a Jedi knight was about to leap out at them. Then a moment later one of the agents crept forwards and checked each body in turn.

"They're dead." he said even though the condition of the bodies was obvious just by looking at them. Then he activated his PTP link, "We have two engineers down in the reserve power plant." he reported, "No signs that a lightsaber was used though, I'd say that someone killed them with their bare hands."

"Has anyone reported seeing anything?" Natalay asked in response.

"No miss. The engineering staff were pretty surprised to see us come bursting in." the agent told Natalay.

"Then the Jedi must still be in there." she said and the agent looked around.

"There aren't many hiding places in here." he said.

"The shaft lieutenant. They're down the shaft. Now keep your men right there for now. I'm on my way to join you."

The security team immediately turned towards the hatch leading to the emergency ladder shaft, aiming their weapons towards it.

"Not too close." the officer warned as some began to advance, "Deploy back here and hold your fire until you can actually see a target. Remember, a Jedi fights best at close quarters so it's best to keep as far from them as possible."

The moon pool that granted direct access to the ocean outside lay at the end of a long corridor that used a series of force fields to establish zones of steadily increasing pressure enabling a person to transit from one to another in stages rather than suddenly being subjected to the pressures of the ocean depths or suffering sudden decompression when leaving the water. But the security team sent to discover how the Jedi had gained access to the estate did not need to go all the way to the moon pool. They found what they needed at the other end of the corridor, amongst the diving equipment stored for use by guests of the Runns or their staff. Several sets of rigid diving suits able to withstand the extreme pressure outside were kept on hand close to the moon pool, but right now the storage area contained more of these suits than were listed on the manifest and the excess were not only far cheaper than the versions owned by the mega-rich Runn family but had obviously all been used recently.

"We have five suits here." the platoon leader reported using his PTP to communicate with Natalay, "Though if the Jedi brought any members of aquatic species with them-"

"No." Natalay interrupted, "We know the species of every Jedi that was assigned to the enclave at Moldas under Master Karas and none of them were aquatic. Well done lieutenant, now at least we know how many Jedi we are dealing with."

"Yes Miss Shill." the sergeant replied with a grin, "What are your orders?"

"Have your men disable those suits lieutenant. All of them. I suggest you remove the faceplates from each and take them to the security office. Then divide your force into fire teams and sweep the entire estate. We have two locations where we suspect the Jedi to be and if they're acting individually that still leaves three

unaccounted for. I want them found.”

“Yes Miss Shill.” the officer replied before shutting off his PTP link and looking at his men, “Okay, you heard the commander, let's make sure no one's using these suits to get out of here.”

Obediently the security team began to remove the protective faceplates from each suit, both those worn by the Jedi and those owned by the Runns to ensure that they could not be stolen. However, as they worked not one of the team bothered to check any of the armoured equipment canisters that the Jedi had used to bring their weapons to the estate. Had they done so then they would have rapidly discovered that one of them was rigged with life support to function as a carried transport for an individual much smaller than a normal humanoid who could fit into the diving suits and realised that there was a sixth Jedi.

Lara did her best to look as if she belonged as she headed for the lounge where Cal had found Gayal. The butt of her rifle stuck out from under the sheet covering the trolley she was pushing along, but by making sure that it stuck out from behind and with the occasional use of the Force to distract other servants that she encountered she was able to successfully keep it concealed from view. The result of this was that she was ignored by those she passed, all of them more interested in carrying out their own tasks than risking the anger of their employers by stopping to talk to her. However, this changed when a group of four armoured security agents appeared at the end of the hallway she was walking along and turned towards her.

“Stay there.” one of them ordered as the patrol headed towards her. Each member of the patrol wore fully body armour and all but one carried a pulse wave blaster in their hands rather than the holsters that were attached to their belts. The final member of the team had his sidearm holstered and instead carried a belt fed machine gun that Lara hoped was loaded with ammunition other than hard tipped armour piercing rounds that could in theory rupture the hull off the estate. No matter how risky it may appear the reason for using such a weapon was obvious however, the barrage of projectiles that the machine gun could fire was ideally suited to overwhelming a Jedi relying on a lightsaber to parry energy blasts.

“What's wrong?” Lara asked innocently, “I was just taking this meal to the guest quarters. There's a VIP-”

“Where is your identification?” the team leader demanded.

“You don't need to see my identification.” Lara replied, projecting the statement into his mind. Unfortunately the attempt to manipulate the man's mind did not have the desired effect.

“Seize her!” he snapped and the other two pistol-armed agents stepped forwards.

Reacting quickly, Lara slid her lightsaber from her pocket and ignited it with a 'snap-hiss'. Though the security team had suspected that she may not have been all she appeared this sudden act still took them by surprise and the moment's delay this caused them was all Lara needed.

Though the two agents with pulse wave blasters were closer to her Lara knew that the one armed with the machine gun was a much bigger threat and so she reached out through the Force, focusing on the man's weapon rather than the man himself and she ripped it from his grasp. Only then as the machine gun was flying through the air towards her did Lara strike directly at the others, slashing her lightsaber across the chest of one and causing him to scream out in pain for a moment before he died.

It was then that the team leader opened fire, but Lara had seen him raise his weapon and was ready. Rather than attempt to parry the energy blast and risk leaving her vulnerable to attack from the other two agents she rolled aside and let the shot slam into the wall behind where she had been stood. At the same time she lashed out with her foot and kicked the other nearby agent in the side of his knee with enough force to knock his leg out from under him, causing him to collapse in a heap.

The unit's leader adjusted his aim and fired again but this time Lara had her lightsaber in place to parry the shot, the spatial distortion bursting as it struck the energy field surrounding the blade. Gripping her lightsaber with just one hand, Lara still had one hand free to reach out towards the trolley and using the Force she called her rifle to her grip. With a flick of her thumb she switched the fire selector to automatic and returned fire with a sustained burst. The weapon was designed for use while held in two hands and Lara could not hold it steady with just one, but the continuous stream of fire coupled with the point blank range at which she was operating negated this and both the unit leader and agent who was rapidly trying to draw his sidearm to make up for the loss of his machine gun were struck repeatedly, their armour ineffective against the multiple hits from such close range.

Emptying the rifle's power cell, Lara then shut off her lightsaber and was about to fetch her equipment belt that held her spare ammunition from under the trolley when she noticed the final surviving agent roll over to face her and point his weapon in her direction. Too far away to try kicking the man again, Lara instead hurled her rifle at him. The empty weapon bounced off his helmet harmlessly but the impact still spoiled his aim and gave Lara the chance to roll across the floor to where one of the other agents had dropped his own sidearm. Picking the weapon up Lara turned it on the agent just as he was pointing his weapon back at her and the pair both paused as they stared down the barrels of one another's weapons.

“Drop it!” Lara snapped, “You know I'm faster.” but the agent kept his weapon trained on her.

Lara reached out through the Force, intended to try and influence him into dropping the pulse wave blaster.

But just as she made a connection with his mind she sensed his intention to fire and a split second before he

could Lara fired first.

The blast hit the agent in his head, shattering the faceplate of his helmet before splitting his skull open inside it and he slumped to the floor.

"Stang." Lara exclaimed as she pushed her self away from the expanding pool of blood and tissue now leaking out of the helmet before she got back to her feet. Knowing that her disguise was no longer enough to avoid attracting attention Lara retrieved both her equipment belt from under the trolley and rifle from where it had landed before continuing towards the lounge where Cal was waiting for her.

Using her Force powers to avoid all contact with staff and guards Lara soon made it to the lounge and just as her brother had when he had approached the entrance to the lounge she saw the two agents standing guard from the hallway outside. However, rather than two agents in formal uniforms these guards wore battle armour identical to that worn by the patrol that had stopped her in the corridor. Ducking back out of sight Lara took out her PTP link and activated it.

"Cal." she said into it softly, "Are you there?"

"Right here." Cal's voice responded just as quietly, "Where are you?"

"In the hall outside. I see two guards in full armour. Where are you?"

"Hiding behind the false wall panel leading to the Sith library."

"So do you have a plan?" Lara asked.

"Of course I do. There's not much to do in here other than think about how to get out." Cal replied.

"Okay so do you need me to do anything big brother or do you expect me to sit here and bear witness to your greatness?" Lara said.

"I'll distract the guards." Cal told her, "You just be ready to react. But watch out for Gayal, she's in the lounge as well."

"Figures." Lara said, snorting, "Okay Cal, we can start whenever you're ready."

"Standby." Cal responded and then the channel went dead.

## 4.

Behind the panel Cal pushed against it gently, building the pressure until he felt it shift and then released it. The effect was to produce a soft knocking sound that was audible from the lounge doorway where the two armoured agents stood guard.

"What was that?" one asked.

"What was what?" Gayal asked in response, having heard the sound herself but unaware that Cal had done it deliberately.

"There was a sound from over here." the guard replied, walking towards the panel.

"What's behind there?" the other guard said, "Maybe it's just the vents. You know how they can be down here."

"The vents run along that wall over there." the first guard replied as he continued towards the panel.

Concerned, Gayal moved to stand between the guard and the panel.

"You're imagining it." she said, trying to reproduce the effect she had had on the original two guards when she had been able to compel them to let her leave the room unaccompanied. But the guard simply stepped around her and walked right up to the panel, placing his hands against it and feeling it shift.

"Hey this moves." he said as he pushed the panel aside.

There was a sudden 'snap-hiss' as Cal ignited his lightsaber and sprang from behind the panel the moment he was revealed and he thrust the blade right through the guard's chest.

"Holy kriff!" the second guard exclaimed as he reached for his sidearm. But the sound of Cal's lightsaber igniting was repeated from the hallway and as the guard turned to look he felt the searing pain of his hand being sliced off at the wrist just as he was drawing the weapon.

As he staggered back into the lounge, clutching at the cauterized stump of his arm Gayal saw an opportunity and took it. Picking up a lamp from a nearby table she swung it at the guard but although she struck him over the back of his head the helmet he wore protected him fully and all that happened was that he lashed out in response, striking Gayal in the face and knocking her backwards.

Cal had already been moving towards the guard and when this happened he leapt forwards to catch Gayal with one arm while at the same time he swung his lightsaber in an arc that sliced the guard's head from his shoulders.

"Gayal are you okay?" Cal asked as he shut off his lightsaber

"I'll be fine." Gayal said, touching her nose and then feeling the blood now running from it, "I think. How do I look?"

"Like a rancor." Lara said without thinking and both Cal and Gayal glared at her, "Wow. Tough crowd." Lara added and then she looked directly at her brother, "Okay Cal, so now what?"

"We need to hold this place." he replied and it was then that Lara felt a shiver run her spine and she looked at the open panel.

"It's back there isn't it?" she asked, moving slowly closer.

*Yes. Closer. Maybe if your master will not accept what I have to offer then you may be persuaded instead.*

Lara froze and looked at Cal again.

*Fear.*

"Yes, I heard it as well." Cal said when he sensed his sister's reaction, "But whatever it is I don't think that it can hurt us."

"Oh yeah? What about that Sith spirit that got itself trapped in a computer?" Lara asked in response, referring to a Sith lord who had been able to preserve his consciousness in the main computer of the remote Dorn Station.

*You had help to defeat that spirit. Help that is available here as well.*

Cal was briefly surprised at this comment from Master Karas. As far as Cal knew the Jedi master had not known of Tyshon's existence before he died. But then he realised that if Master Karas was able to communicate with him from within the Force then he must be at least partially aware of what was happening around Cal and he could have been observing the team for some time.

"We need the others." Cal said, "Maybe between us we can figure something out. Then we'll take that escape pod I saw down the hall to the surface and signal for a pick up."

"I couldn't get hold of Vrish or Pedrus." Lara said, "And Tarris and Tyshon are waiting in a storeroom for me to help them escape."

"Can you do that from here?" Cal asked and Lara nodded, producing the datapad she had taken from the technician in the computer core.

"Good." Cal said, "Then you help Tarris and Tyshon and I'll head for the power plant to check on Vrish and Pedrus."

"Wait, you're not leaving me with her are you?" Gayal asked, looking at Lara and frowning, "The last time you

did that I got kidnapped and spent six months in a padded cell.”

“Being framed for murder was no picnic for me you know.” Lara replied before she turned back towards Cal,

“How will you get there? she asked, “These disguises don't work any more.”

Cal looked down at the two dead guards, more interested in their armour.

“They look about my size.” he said, “And their armour is damaged in different places. Between them we should be able to make up a complete set.”

After what seemed like an eternity of climbing Vrish and Pedrus reached the top of the emergency ladder.

“Not so fast Pedrus.” Vrish warned his apprentice as the padawan was about to open the hatch leading from the shaft back into the geothermal power plant's control room, “We are not alone.” and he slid in front of Pedrus, drawing his lightsaber before opening the hatch.

Outside the control room was now in darkness but Vrish could sense the presence of lifeforms all around him, attempting to conceal themselves. Knowing that they were lying in wait specifically for him, Vrish stepped out of the ladder shaft and looked around.

“You obviously don't know much about jedi if you think you can ambush me that easily.” he said before he ignited his lightsaber and the pale light it cast out revealed a row of armoured figures on either side of the jedi, all with their weapons lowered.

“Oh they aren't here to ambush you at all.” Natalay said as she stepped in through the doorway, “They're just here to see how a jedi should be dealt with.”

Vrish looked at Natalay and studied her. He could tell that she had a disciplined mind and there was an air of confidence about her but there was nothing to suggest that she was capable of defeating Vrish in direct combat.

“Stand aside.” he told her.

“Make me.” Natalay replied and her hand drifted towards the scabbard at her waist.

“Stay back.” Vrish whispered to Pedrus and then he charged at Natalay, leaping into the air with the intention of bringing his lightsaber down on her to end the duel before it could even properly begin. But where many beings would panic, Natalay retained her composure and drew her sword, raising it up above her and holding it horizontally so that as Vrish descended with the expectation of his lightsaber slicing through her primitive weapon the blade was perfectly placed to parry his strike.

Only at the last moment did Vrish sense the Dark Side that infused Natalay's sword and by that time it was too late for him to do anything other than watch as his lightsaber blade connected with the sword but failed to even make a scratch on it.

Natalay then leapt aside as the shistavanen landed beside her and spun to face her.

“A sword of the Sith.” he hissed, “But who are you to be trusted with such a rare and valuable weapon?” and then he struck again, slicing sideways at waist height in the hope of cutting Natalay in half. But once again she was ready and she parried his attack.

“My name is Natalay Shill.” she replied, “Direct descendant of Rodge Kenner and this sword has been in my family since he found it here three hundred years ago. I've studied the combat moves of the jedi since I was a child and after half a century I know every trick you have.”

“Even a padawan knows that one cannot become a jedi just by reading how.” Vrish said and he moved as if he was about to aim a strike at Natalay's head before turning his blade aside at the last moment to aim for her shoulder instead. But Natalay had expected such a feint and though she placed her sword high to parry the faked attack at the same time she slid a knife from her sleeve and thrust it into Vrish's arm.

The knife cut deeply and although Vrish was able to ignore the pain there was nothing he could do about the physical injury other than switch his fighting style to favour only the other arm. But this was exactly what Natalay had been counting on and now she face him with a weapon in each hand. The ancient mix of science and sorcery that the Sith had used to manufacture her sword made it impervious to Vrish's lightsaber and was thus the perfect weapon for blocking each of his strikes and every time he found his blade locked with hers, Natalay would strike with the knife again. Despite his injury however, Vrish was still agile and each time Natalay struck with her knife he was able to retreat or sidestep out of the way before launching another attack. But this too was part of Natalay's plan and when she was confident that Vrish had made the mistake of focusing on the knife to the exclusion of everything else she responded by sliding a foot between his legs, tripping him when he tried to get out of the way of the knife. Natalay turned her sword as he fell and the blade sliced through the jedi's uninjured arm before he landed flat on his back. Vrish stared in disbelief at the bloody stump of his arm, pressing his other hand against it even as blood continued to pump from the other limb as well and he looked up at Natalay.

“You cannot win.” he told her at the same time as he reached out through the Force for his padawan with one final order for him.

*Hide.*

“That may be your opinion,” Natalay replied, “but your confidence hasn't done you any good.” and then she brought down her sword, impaling Vrish through his heart, “Check the shaft.” Natalay ordered as she

withdrew her sword and then wiped it clean on her sleeve.

Immediately a squad of troops rushed towards the hatch leading to the emergency ladder shaft and they

looked inside. When they saw nothing the first of them stepped through and peered down the shaft.

"It's clear," he called out as he retreated without bothering to look up at where Pedrus was clinging to a pipe running across the ceiling.

Just then Natalay's PTP link sounded and she activated it.

"Miss Shill," a voice exclaimed before she could speak, "we've got a team down in sector five. It looks like a Jedi's work."

"Understood," she replied, "Keep searching, I want them found. I'm on my way to deal with whoever's holed up in the storeroom. Keep me updated." and then she shut off her PTP and as she was putting it away looked at one of her men, "Clean this up," she told him, pointing to the body of Vrish.

Lara studied the technical readouts of the estate carefully, looking for a way that Tarris and Tyshon could escape from the storeroom without having to face the heavily armed platoon of mercenaries waiting for them in the corridor outside. Unfortunately the room maintained a suitable environment for preventing damage to the artefacts stored there by continuously recycling the air through a localised filter system rather than feeding it back to the central life support system. This meant that there were no ventilation shafts that the Jedi shadows could use to escape and limited their options to finding a section of wall that they could cut through with their lightsabers to make their own exit. But so far Lara still had not found them a way out. It appeared that the storeroom was intended to be able to survive the destruction of the rest of the estate and this meant that its walls were thick and heavily armoured. Just the thickness alone meant that a lightsaber blade could not penetrate all the way to the other side. Hacking through in stages may still have been possible, but it would be time consuming and there was no telling how long the troops outside would continue to wait.

"There's got to be a way," Lara said in frustration as she kept searching for anywhere that the walls, ceiling or floor may not be quite as thick.

"There is always a way Padawan," Tarris responded via his PTP link, "One only needs to look in the right place."

"And here the right place is I think," Tyshon added and Tarris looked around to see the other Jedi staring at the air recycling system. Rather than having to recycle the air in real time, the system simply stored the cleaned air and released it as needed to maintain the correct level of pressure and this meant that the system required storage tanks to hold the excess gases in compressed form, "With these chaos can we bring to order," Tyshon added.

"Yes, I agree," Tarris said in agreement. Then he rushed over to the gas tanks and one by one he began to disconnect them. He did this in an orderly manner, sealing each tank before he separated it from the recycling system so that its internal pressure was maintained. Then Tyshon reached out through the Force to lift the tanks and move them slowly through the air to rest on a table that was now strewn with the remains of smashed Sith idols. Each cylinder was laid across the table so that its base pointed towards the door and the valve away from it.

"The door I shall handle," Tyshon said when the last of the cylinders was in place and he indicated a ledge located above the doorway, "Your responsibility the cylinders shall be," and Tarris nodded before moving to take up a position near the cylinder valves. Meanwhile Tyshon headed for the doorway. The two Jedi shadows had used their Force powers to lift the door enough to allow them access to the storeroom but for what they had planned that was not an option. Instead Tyshon used his lightsaber to remove the deactivate control panel beside it and reached inside to pinch two of the exposed wires together.

Then came a sudden hiss as the door slid open and Tarris swung his lightsaber at the valve of the nearest gas cylinder to him. Slicing the valve clean off, there was a blast of escaping gas and the cylinder was propelled towards the now open doorway. The cylinder flew out into the hallway and struck the wall opposite before bouncing off along the hallway and ploughing right into some of the waiting guards while the remaining gas formed a cloud of mist around the door. Meanwhile Tarris repeated this for more of the cylinders, sending one after another into the hallway like crude artillery that scattered the guards outside and filled it with a dense mist.

It was into this mist that Tarris then charged, only the two glowing blades of his lightsaber visible as he began to hack his way through the guards.

"There he is! Bring him down!" an officer on the other side of the cloud called out to a nearby machine gunned agent. But even as the machine gunner was raising his weapon there was a defiant cry as Tyshon leapt through the open doorway, his lightsaber blade spinning as he did before landing right in front of the machine gunner and slicing his weapon in half before striking down the gunner as well.

"Not alone he is," Tyshon said to the startled officer before lunging at him.

## 5.

With his lightsaber hidden in a pouch on his belt and his features hidden by the faceplate of his helmet, Cal headed directly for the geothermal power plant, keeping a hand close to the pulse wave blaster at his waist just in case. Since he had yet to see any of the Shill Security troops in possession of a pulse wave rifle he had left the one he had brought to the estate with his sister who had accepted it gleefully thanks to the underslung grenade launcher it was fitted with unlike her own rifle. He was able to approach the geothermal plant even easier than Vrish and Pedrus had managed, calmly striding through the main fusion reactor control room until he reached the secondary power plant and he came to a sudden halt when he saw what was happening.

Two armoured agents were bundling Vrish Khal up in a plastic sheet, having gone through his possessions and laid them out beside his corpse. But of Pedrus there was no sign and through the Force Cal could sense something that did not make sense for experienced troops who were just clearing up a body.

*Fear.*

"What happened here?" Cal asked the two agents as he walked closer to them, studying the layout of the room.

"Miss Shill nailed one of the jedi." one of the guards replied, "Rammed her sword right through him. Look." and the guard pointed to the wound on Vrish's chest.

"Any get away?" Cal asked.

"No, he was alone." the guard replied, "Miss Shill left us to clean up while she went to deal with whoever's hiding in the storeroom in sector six."

"I see." Cal replied nodding as he slid his pulse wave blaster from its holster and calmly shot the man in the head.

"Holy kriff!" the second guard exclaimed as he watched his partner slump across Vrish's body before reaching for his own sidearm. But his delay cost him and before he could even lay a hand on his weapon Cal had already lined his up on the man's chest and he fired again, the energy blast ripping open the agent's armour and smashing through his ribcage into his chest.

Quickly, before it could raise the alarm Cal spun around to face the droid monitoring the geothermal plant and fired a third shot that blasted it apart with a shower of sparks and flash of flame. Then he pulled the helmet from his head.

"Pedrus!" he called out and the padawan emerged from his hiding place, clearly shaken.

"Battle Master Khal." he said, looking down at the body of his former master, "That woman killed him."

"Tragically he's not the only jedi that Belle Shill has killed." Cal replied and Pedrus looked up at him.

"No." he said, "The woman identified herself as Natalay Shill and she said she was a direct descendant of Rodge Kenner. She had a Sith sword that he found."

"Stang!" Cal exclaimed, "How did we miss that one? Of course the Shills are descended from him. Twins, don't you get it?"

"Get what?"

"Rodge Kenner had a twin brother, I've seen a picture of them together before he left to explore the Narthis Sector. Han and Belle are twins and so are Corlay and Erin, it runs in the family. That explains why the Founding Families trusted them to run their security. They were one of them all along."

"But what do we do now?" Pedrus asked.

"Where did this Natalay Shill go?" Cal responded.

"I heard her saying she was going to deal with someone in a storeroom." Pedrus told him.

"That'll be Tarris and Tyshon." Cal said, reaching for his PTP link, "Tarris, Tyshon, are either of you there?" he said into the device but there was no reply and he looked at the bodies of the two guards and then at Pedrus, "Get into a set of that armour." he told the padawan, "I've got a bad feeling that they may need our help."

Natalay heard the sound of fighting as she led her troops towards the storeroom and she realised that the jedi she had hoped would still be hiding inside when she got there had decided to go on the offensive. But what Natalay could not understand was why an entire platoon of some of Shill Security's finest men could not handle a single jedi.

The answer became clearer however, when she rounded a corner to find the hallway ahead filled with mist with just the glow from not one but three lightsaber blades penetrating it. Two of the blades appeared to be from a single weapon and from that she deduced that Tarris Blake, the jedi shadow she had heard about was in front of her.

"Give me that!" she snapped before she snatched a machine gun from one of her men and pointed it into the mist. Pulling back on the trigger, Natalay kept it pulled as she moved the muzzle of the weapon around to spray bullets at random into the cloud, "Well? What are you waiting for?" she said to another nearby machine

gunner and he too opened fire at random.

Inevitably some of these shots struck some of the agents within the cloud as well, but the frangible ammunition with which the weapon was loaded broke up on impact with anything as resilient as the armour all of her troops wore. On the other hand, the unarmoured jedi were not so lucky. Tarris' body jerked under multiple impacts and as Tyshon turned to look at his companion he saw the human jedi stagger, his lightsaber now held by his side before it shut off and was dropped to the floor with Tarris following soon after it.

Tyshon charged towards the source of the gunfire, at first using the armoured Shill Security troops as shields from the barrage of projectiles and then jumping up onto them and leaping from one to another, reaching out through the Force to try and predict where the gaps in the gun fire would be. Only one round hit Tyshon before he suddenly came bounding out of the mist and it barely clipped his upper arm, the impact not enough to cause the bullet to break up and he landed right in front of Natalay and her reinforcements just as the machine guns ran out of ammunition.

"Pay for the death of a good man you will." Tyshon said, his attention fixed squarely on Natalay who as the only unarmoured figure in front of him stood out as someone important.

"I keep hearing things like that from jedi today." she replied as she tossed the now empty and useless machine gun to the floor before drawing her sword, "But so far none of them have been correct." and then she glanced at the troops accompanying her, all of them now aiming their weapons at Tyshon, "Shoot him." she said and the hallway was filled with the sound of pulse wave fire.

Tyshon leapt up and spun in mid air, intending to strike at Natalay as he descended. But Natalay expected this and as Tyshon was flying through the air she dived forwards to position herself where the jedi had been standing a moment earlier, a move made possible only because the troops accompanying her had raised their weapons to try and follow Tyshon's leap. The result of this was that when Tyshon landed he found himself surrounded with Natalay's troops in front of him while Natalay herself as well as several more armoured men who were just now making their way out of the cloud after him behind him.

"Care to surrender jedi?" Natalay asked, "I can't offer you any guarantees about your treatment, but I can guarantee you'll die if you don't."

Tyshon frowned and then shut off his lightsaber before hooking it back on his belt.

"At last some common sense from one of you." Natalay said, "Now hand over the laser sword."

"No. Surrendering I am not." Tyshon replied with a smile, "Focusing I am." and then he let out a sudden blast of telekinetic Force energy in all directions. The shockwave knocked Natalay and all of the armoured agents off their feet and Tyshon reacted immediately by breaking into a run, heading away from Natalay as he ran down the hallway.

Though dazed Natalay saw the jedi making his escape and also a pulse wave blaster lying on the floor nearby where its owner had dropped it and she reached out to grab it. Pointing the weapon down the hallway after Tyshon she pulled the trigger once and the blast struck the diminutive green figure right between his shoulders, hurling him forwards until he came to a halt against a wall and lay still. For a while Natalay kept her weapon trained on the jedi's body as if she expected him to get back up again, but when he failed to do so she relaxed and got back to her own feet.

"Two more jedi down in sector six." she announced using her PTP link, "Note that one of them was too small to fit in a diving suit. He must have been brought in in an equipment case so we still have three jedi unaccounted for."

"Copy that Miss Shill." a voice responded, "We found a technician unconscious in the main computer room. He says that a young human female disguised as one of the household staff attacked him."

"A young human female?" Natalay repeated, "Lara Udra. It must be. In which case her brother Cal must be close by as well and I know exactly where he'll be heading sooner or later."

Once more Cal arrived too late and all that he found was the aftermath of a battle in which the jedi had lost. Given the amount of time that he had spent with both of the jedi shadows it came as a shock to him that anyone could defeat them but the proof of it was right in front of him and he was tempted to draw his lightsaber and take his revenge on those Shill Security troops now clearing up after the fight.

*Revenge is not the jedi way Cal. It is a path to the Dark Side.*

"I know." Cal said in response to the words of Master Karas and Pedrus frowned.

"What?" he asked.

"I was just thinking of something Master Karas once told me." Cal replied as he retreated out of earshot from the guards and then he took out his PTP link, "Lara can you hear me?" he signalled.

"Right here big brother." Lara's voice replied, "Kind of hoping you'll be joining us with the cavalry soon as well. That hole in the wall is damned creepy if you ask me."

"We're not coming." Cal told her.

"What?" Lara exclaimed, "Why not?"

"Lara I've found Pedrus but everyone else is dead."



"Dead? But how? They were all experienced Jedi knights. No wait, let me guess. Belle."

"Lara it's not Belle. It's someone called Natalay Shill who had the time to tell Vrish that the Shills are also descended from the original survey team. Also she's armed with a Sith sword that Rodge Kenner apparently picked up somewhere."

In the lounge Lara looked at Gayal who nodded.

"She's Belle's mother." she said, "She arrived a few months ago."

"So now what then?" Lara then asked Cal.

"Natalay's done here so I'm guessing that she'll be heading back to you and Gayal. Both of you need to get to the escape pod as quickly as possible. We'll meet you there. We're both disguised as Shill Security troops though, so if it comes up you need to make sure you know who it is you're shooting at."

"Understood. We're on our way." Lara replied and then the channel went dead.

"Okay then," Cal said to Pedrus, "Let's get going." and then he beckoned the padawan to follow him towards the escape pod that had been chosen for their getaway.

When Natalay returned to the lounge she found it abandoned. There was no sign of Gayal though the bodies of the two armoured agents she had left to keep watch over the young woman were sprawled across the floor, both of them missing enough pieces of their armour to make up a complete set and it was immediately obvious to Natalay that Cal was loose somewhere disguised as one of her own men. But more significant than this was the fact that the wall panel concealing the passageway that led to the Sith storehouse was wide open.

"With me." she told her troops, "You'll need lights." and then she advanced towards the open panel in the wall. Standing at the entrance to the passageway her men shone their lights down it but they revealed nothing. Then one of the troops raised his weapon and began to move forwards, "No!" Natalay snapped, pulling him back, "No one is to go in there under any circumstances. Now let's seal this up again. The Jedi have clearly been here and taken Gayal and we can't let them leave after they've seen this."

## 6.

Heading for the escape pod, Gayal and Lara made no attempt to conceal themselves. Instead they just moved as quickly as they could with Lara keeping her rifle at her shoulder and ready for use, letting the Force flow through her so that she would not only have advance warning of anyone they were about to encounter but she would also be able to recognise her brother and Pedrus in an instant.

A short burst of pulse wave fire sent a pair of servants fleeing, while a longer burst made short work of a four man security team that came around a corner not expecting to run right into an armed jedi who had had prior warning of their appearance. This second burst emptied the rifle's power cell and rather than pause to reload Lara swapped the rifle for the one she had slung over her shoulder, the one that lacked a grenade launcher. "What about that?" Gayal asked, pausing by the bodies of the security team and reaching for the machine gun one of them had been armed with.

"Leave it!" Lara snapped, "We need to hurry." and they both continued to run towards the escape pod.

When Lara rounded the final corner she saw two armoured figures standing beside the entrance to the escape pod but their presence in the Force told her that it was her brother and Pedrus and she paused.

"Lara!" Cal called out as he pulled his helmet from his head when he saw her lower her rifle, "It sure is good to be recognised." then when he noticed that she was alone he frowned and added, "Where's Gayal?"

"Right here." Gayal responded as she appeared beside Lara.

"Well come on, I don't want to hang around here a moment longer than necessary." Cal said and Lara and Gayal began to move towards him.

However, just as they started moving there was the sound of footfalls and Gayal and Lara both looked around to see Natalay charging towards them with a squad of armoured soldiers. Lara brought up her rifle but before she could open fire Natalay was close enough to slice the muzzle from it and then follow this strike up with a single thrust that sent the tip of her sword straight through Lara's stomach.

*Rage.*

"No!" Cal yelled as he watched Natalay withdraw her blade and his sister drop to the floor of the hallway while Gayal just looked on in horror.

*Cal no!*

The spirit of Master Karas sensed the anger in Cal and also the build up of Force energy before he released it in a blast that went down the hallway and took everyone standing there off their feet while beside him Pedrus drew and activated his lightsaber. Through the Force, Cal could sense that Lara was still alive but for how long was another matter. What he did know though was that it was imperative that he get her away from this place as soon as he could and reaching out through the Force once more he took hold of Lara and dragged her along the floor towards him, kneeling by her side as she reached his feet.

"Cal." Lara gasped, blood spurting from her mouth, "I kriffed up."

"I've got you." Cal replied, picking his sister up and then looking back down the hallway, "Gayal!" he called out but as Gayal began to get to her feet Natalay reached out and grabbed hold of her, wrapping an arm around her neck to use her as a human shield before drawing her pulse wave blaster and firing it at Cal. Fortunately Pedrus reacted quickly and before she had even pulled the trigger he was already moving to position himself between Cal and Natalay and he was able to parry her shot with his lightsaber.

"We can't stay here." he told Cal.

"I know." Cal replied, looking down at his sister as she lay dying in his arms. Then he looked up and down the hallway at Gayal, "I'm sorry." he called out before climbing into the escape pod, with Pedrus following close behind him.

"After them!" Natalay yelled as her men began getting back to their feet and the armoured troops charged down the corridor. But before any of them could get close enough to prevent it Pedrus activated the escape pod and there was the sound of it being ejected from the estate.

Inside Cal still cradled Lara in his arms, channelling his power into her to try and alleviate her pain.

"Hold on Lara." he said, "We'll soon be safe." and then he slipped a transmitter from a pouch on his belt and activated it.

In orbit above Delvad, Jedi Knight Seth Ashran waited in the cockpit of the *Bright Hope*, the starship that belonged to Cal. To pass the time he threw a brightly coloured ball down the corridor that ran for most of the ship's length for the Udra's dog Ghost to chase after and bring back. But he was interrupted by an alarm as the ship detected a homing beacon.

"Hang on." he said as he turned his seat to face the controls, even though there was no way Cal or Lara could hear him and then he locked to position of the beacon into the *Bright Hope's* navigation system and fired the engines, "Shorty!" he yelled out, "Stand by for a pick up!" and the bulky labour droid that had waited patiently since the jedi team had left the ship to infiltrate the Runn estate suddenly stood up straight in its

position and strode towards the hold.

The *Bright Hope* swooped low over the ocean just as the escape pod broke the surface and Seth brought the ship to a halt directly above it. At the same time Shorty opened the cargo hatch in the underside of the hull and lowered a magnetic winch that scooped up the escape pod and lifted out of the water. Even before the pod was safely in the hold Seth was already accelerating away, well aware that there were fighters from locally based squadrons already moving to intercept them. Fortunately a delayer-class vessel like the *Bright Hope* was fast enough to outrun them.

As soon as the escape pod opened up inside the hold Cal burst out and held Lara out towards Shorty.

"She's hurt bad." he said, "We need to get her to the medical bay."

Obediently Shorty took Lara and turned on the spot before carrying her far more quickly than Cal could have managed to the *Bright Hope's* medical bay while her brother followed as fast as he could.

"Into the medical pod." Cal ordered, "Mom can heal her when we get back to Dorn Station but we need to keep her alive that long."

The bulky droid laid Lara out in the medical pod before Cal set it to place her in medical stasis, preserving her life functions for as long as the pod had power. Then he leant back up to the wall behind and slumped to the floor and wept.

In the lounge Ket Runn and Natalay Shill stood either side of Gayal, holding her in place while the heads of all of the other Founding Families were arrayed in front of them in holographic form.

"The Jedi were here." Ket announced, glaring at the hologram of General Josh Drud who was in overall command of the Narthis Sector's military forces, "They found the storehouse."

"Did they escape?" the young head of the Fayl family, Nissel, asked.

"I killed at least three of them." Natalay said, "Including one who we had no intelligence of before now, a small green humanoid. But Cal Udra and one other escaped."

"His sister? Lara?" Gayal's mother, Faye Karn, asked.

"No." Natalay said, "Cal took her with him but I ran her through with my sword as well. She may already be dead."

"But you summoned us all to this meeting so you could let us know that the Jedi now know where the storehouse is? Meaning that they will inevitably launch an all out attack." Josh said.

"Not quite." Ket said and he smiled, looking at Gayal. Then he looked back at the holograms, "Gayal has told us that she went into the passageway and saw Ban."

"But she's still alive." the hologram of Trent Narthis said.

"Exactly." Natalay replied, "We gathered you together to invite you all here to the Runn estate where it seems that Gayal is now strong enough to gain access to the Sith storehouse for us."