

STAR WARS

TALES OF THE JEDI



IV-VIII: GLORY

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...

GLORY

THREE CENTURIES EARLIER THE EXPLORATION SHIP SHINING GLORY SURVEYED THE NARTHIS SECTOR. NOW FORMER JEDI KNIGHT KYLE JENNER SEEKS TO UNCOVER WHAT SECRETS IT MAY STILL HOLD...

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1 .

Kyle Jenner brought his ship out of hyperspace on the fringe of the Crassis system, positioned to take advantage of the outer planets as shields against detection. Then he scanned the area, searching for any signs of other vessels heading towards the primary world of the system. Crassis Major was the capital world of the sector and that made approaching it difficult for a wanted fugitive like Kyle. However, the former Jedi knight had a number of tricks up his sleeve and right now he intended to make use of one.

He found what he wanted not far from his current location, a commercial liner called the *Starlight Endeavour* that was heading for Crassis Major and he laid in a course towards it.

"*Starlight Endeavour* this is *Destiny's Shadow*." Kyle transmitted using a tight beam communication mode, "I am in need of assistance."

There was a short pause while the message was considered by the liner.

"*Destiny's Shadow* this is *Starlight Endeavour*. We are not an emergency aide vessel."

A hint of a smile appeared on Kyle's face. He was well aware that commercial ships on a schedule often avoided answering distress signals, but he also knew that they were legally obliged to do so.

"*Starlight Endeavour*, I'd rather not have to summon a defence force rescue ship." Kyle transmitted, "They're bound to waste my time with a lot of pointless questions about how I got stuck out here."

Then there was another pause and Kyle noticed on his sensor display that the liner had changed course towards him.

"Standby *Destiny's Shadow*. We're on our way."

When the liner docked with Kyle's ship he was ready and waiting at the docking port. Then as soon as the light above the hatch indicated that the seal was complete he opened it. On the other side he found a group of six crewmen from the liner waiting for him. Four of them had the look of enlisted men, a pair of engineers and two guards with their weapons drawn. The final two were in the more formal uniforms of officers, one was obviously a doctor while the other came from the liner's command staff.

"I am Commander Bayle." The command officer said, "What is the nature of your emergency?"

"I need a new fusion initiator for my ion drive." Kyle replied, "I need a ride to Crassis Major to get one. You will take me won't you?" and as he said this last part he waved his hand subtly.

"We will take you." Bayle replied. Then he looked at the holdall over Kyle's shoulder, "I'll have to search that bag before you can come aboard though."

"Of course." Kyle replied and he handed the bag to Bayle, "You'll find nothing dangerous in there." He said, focusing on Bayle's mind through the Force.

"There's nothing dangerous in here." Bayle said as he looked into the bag where Kyle's plasma carbine, pulse wave blaster and lightsaber were all clearly visible to him. Thanks to Kyle's influence however, Bayle simply did not notice them and he returned the bag to him.

"Thanks." Kyle said and then with the help of the Force he added, "None of you will even know I'm aboard." And then he calmly walked between the liner's crewmen.

Returning to the bridge, Bayle sat down beside the captain.

"Anything to report Mister Bayle?" the captain asked.

"No sir." Bayle replied, "There was no need for him to come aboard."

"Very well." The captain said, "Helmsman, disconnect us from that ship and lay in a course for Crassis Major. We've wasted enough time here already."

When the liner landed on Crassis Major, Kyle disembarked with the rest of the passengers and queued with them at the customs checkpoint. Here he made use of the Force again.

"You don't need to see my identification." He told the customs agent, "I can move along."

"I don't need to see your identification." The agent replied, "Move along now, I've a queue full of other people to process."

"Thank you." Kyle said with a smile and he walked away.

Outside the starport he paused to look around. Crassis Major was a well-developed world with a transport system capable of taking him to any place on the planet within an hour, but what Kyle sought was very close to where he stood and he simply began to walk through the city's streets.

The timing of his landing could not have been better he realised. The sun was just starting to set and the local public timepieces told him that the building he was heading for would soon be closing. He reached his destination a few minutes before it closed and walked up to the main entrance.

"The museum will be closing soon sir." A droid at the entrance said.

"That's alright." Kyle replied, "There's only one exhibit I want to see." And he handed over just enough coins to cover the entrance fee.

"Enjoy your visit." The droid said as it printed out a ticket from within its body and handed it to Kyle.

"Thank you. I will." Kyle said before walking away.

The museum was divided up into sections according to the time period of the exhibits that they contained. The bulk of these dated back to before the Republic had come here, with examples of artefacts created by the species native to the sector. But what Kyle wanted to see was not as old as these, in fact it was one of only a handful of artefacts on display from its time period that related to the Narthis Sector at all and it dominated the gallery given over to this period of the sector's history.

All of the exhibits in the museum featured bronze plaques to identify and briefly describe them and this one was no exception. However, this particular exhibit was so large that there were instead several plaques at intervals bearing this information. The ironic thing was that despite having so many identifying plaques, none of them were needed because everyone who came from the sector knew exactly what it was.

The starship *Shining Glory* was the first ship to have charted the Narthis Sector for the Galactic Republic three hundred years earlier.

Unlike most of the other exhibits it was possible to walk right up to the *Shining Glory* and touch it. A starship that was designed to fly through space while resisting micro meteor impacts, sudden changes in velocity and repeated atmospheric entries was not going to be damaged by museum visitors poking its hull, no matter how many of them did it.

The ship was one of the main attractions of the museum and so even with closing time fast approaching there were still a number of people looking at it and since he would rather remain as un-noticed as he could Kyle instead turned his attention to the other exhibits in the room. Because it was not possible for visitors to the museum to actually go aboard the *Starlight Glory*, there were several holographic representations of the ship that allowed them to view its interior in a virtual form but Kyle preferred to look at the more old fashioned two dimensional images that lined the walls of the room.

Most of these images were photographs taken during the survey mission, though one particular one that caught Kyle's attention was taken before the ship left the Core Worlds. This showed the crew of the *Shining Glory* lined up in front of the vessel. Most of the beings in the picture had become fabulously wealthy by exploiting their discoveries in the Narthis Sector and even today the descendants of most of them remained here, now known as the Founding Families. There were some in the photograph that had not given rise to any such dynasties though. Ban Hollis was one of only two non-humans amongst the crew and the twi'lek had not survived the mission. Officially there had been an accident at some point that had taken his life, but there were persistent claims that he had in fact been murdered by one of his fellow crewmembers. Trent Callan and Koman Delvad had both decided that remaining in the Narthis Sector was not for them and had returned to the Core Worlds to make the most of their discoveries. Trent had started a shipping business that his family still owned today; while Koman had taken back biological samples that he had marketed to various companies. Until recently his family had retained links with the sector and the Founding Families as well. However the last member of the family to follow in her ancestor's footsteps, a woman by the name of Keleen Delvad had been killed less than a year earlier. That left only Rodge Kenner. Rodge was the most mysterious member of the crew. Little was known about his life before the survey mission, though a twin brother was pictured alongside him and afterwards he vanished from history altogether. The prevailing view was that he returned to his life as a mercenary and died without leaving an heir.

But it was the Founding Families themselves that concerned Kyle now. During his time as the Jedi knight assigned to the Narthis Sector he had come to realise that the original survey mission had found more than they had told the Republic about. Just after the Great Hyperspace War against the Sith Empire a thousand years ago a surviving group of Sith had fled to the region now known as the Narthis Sector and attempted to rebuild their empire here. The lack of such an empire by the time the *Shining Glory* had arrived proved that it had failed to take root, but the Sith had left behind them a great many artefacts that Kyle knew the Founding Families had been amassing in secret. But what escaped him was a motivation for this. The Jedi Order seized or destroyed any such artefacts they discovered so there was a thriving black market for them, but the Founding Families already had many times the wealth that selling their collections would bring so Kyle had discounted that as a motive. The only credible motive that Kyle could think of was that the Founding Families sought to actually use the artefacts they were collecting, just as he was planning with the artefacts he too was gathering up. This of course meant that both he and the Founding Families needed to learn how the artefacts worked and Kyle suspected that they, like him were hunting for the knowledge they needed to do this.

This suspicion was what had brought Kyle here today. Everything that the original survey team had found would have been logged in the computer of their ship, even if it was later deleted. Therefore, what Kyle planned was to gain access to this computer and see if he could acquire a complete record of the survey mission, including what the Founding Families had chosen to withhold from the Republic.

“Attention.” A voice called out over the museum’s public address system, “The museum is now closed. All visitors should proceed to the exit immediately. Thank you for visiting, your custom is appreciated.”

Kyle looked around and watched as the other visitors in the room began to leave. One of them looked right at him as he walked past, but with a wave of his hand Kyle used the Force to get the man to ignore his presence entirely. When the last of the other visitors was out of sight Kyle then turned his attention back to the *Shining Glory* itself. The survey ship had been designed to sustain a crew of a dozen for several months in unexplored space and this required a considerable amount of room. The ship was more than ninety metres in length and it was only natural that a vessel of this size would have several ways in. The most obvious of these were the ramps and hatches on the lowest level, intended to allow the crew to disembark while the ship was landed. But Kyle wanted something that would not give away his presence if a member of the museum staff happened to come along while he was inside. Therefore Kyle took one last look around him before letting the Force flow through him and leaping into the air.

Landing safely on the *Shining Glory*’s upper hull Kyle spotted a hatchway that would be out of sight from floor level and he headed right for it, slipping his lightsaber from his bag as he went. Double-checking that he was not being observed, Kyle pressed the emitter of his lightsaber against the hatch’s lock before igniting it. The hatch muffled the distinctive ‘snap-hiss’ of the blade extending and much to Kyle’s disappointment it remained closed. Had there been any power in the mechanism that controlled the hatch it would have slid open the moment that the lock ceased to function, but either the museum had specifically disabled that system or after three hundred years of being on display even the reserve batteries for the hatch had been drained of power. Instead Kyle took advantage of the hand-sized hole that his lightsaber had punched through the hatch, reaching in and using it as a handhold as he pulled the hatch open and looked down into the ship. As he expected after the failure of the hatch to open Kyle saw that the interior of the *Shining Glory* was in darkness and so as he climbed down through the hatch he kept his lightsaber active so that the light cast by its blade allowed him to see.

Kyle had committed as much of one of the holographic projections of the *Shining Glory*’s interior to memory as he could and he first headed for the cockpit. This located at the very front of the ship and consisted of three crew stations positioned close to one another and surrounded by a transparent bubble canopy that allowed light from the museum gallery to illuminate it. With this external light source available Kyle turned off his lightsaber before he sat down, relying on the relative darkness of the cockpit to conceal him.

“Did you just see that?” one of the museum security staff said, pointing at the image on a monitor as he looked at a comrade.

“See what?” the other guard asked.

“I thought I just saw a light in that old ship.”

“You’re imagining it. That thing’s been shut down for years.”

“I don’t think so. We better go check it out. I’ve got a bad feeling about this.”

2.

Like the mechanism that controlled the hatch, the computer system of the *Shining Glory* had no power. However, Kyle was able to bring a single console online by breaking open the casing and disconnecting the power lines before wiring them to the power cell for his pulse wave blaster. As Kyle had guessed, this console was the astrogator's station and it contained a log of the hyperspace jumps performed by the *Shining Glory* from the moment it left the Core Worlds right up until it travelled to the Crassis system to be placed on display in the museum.

A tremor in the Force caused Kyle to look up from his seat and he saw a pair of museum security guards entering the gallery outside and he slid out of his seat and retreated to the back of the bridge where he would be better hidden.

"See? Nothing. You were imagining it."

"Just humour me for a few minutes would you?" the guard that had noticed the light via the security feed said.

"Okay. Five minutes. But there's no-one here." The second guard replied.

The first guard walked up to the *Shining Glory* and looked along its hull. Then he sniffed the air.

"Do you smell that?" he asked.

"Smell what?" the second guard responded.

"Something acrid. Like burned plastic." The first said and he stepped back and looked up, "Let's get a ladder, I want to take a look on top of this thing." He added.

There was a ladder kept in a storeroom adjoining the gallery it took less than a minute to erect it against the side of the *Shining Glory*. The first guard then climbed up onto the upper hull of the starship and looked along its length.

"Stang!" he exclaimed and his hand went to the stun baton hanging from his belt.

"What's wrong?" the second guard asked.

"Someone's broken into the ship, that's what's wrong." The first replied as he advanced on the open hatchway.

"Hang on I'm coming up." The second guard said as he climbed up the ladder and the first turned around to face him.

"We better call this in." he said and he reached for the point to point communicator he had clipped to his jacket, "Control this is three eight, we have a security breach in the Founding Exhibit. It looks like-" and then he was cut off as his chest suddenly exploded, a plasma bolt ripping him apart. The second guard stared in horror as what remained of his comrade fell onto the *Shining Glory's* hull and then he gazed at the figure climbing up out of the open hatchway, a large individual wearing an ominous hooded robe.

Moving as quickly as he could the guard climbed back down the ladder and ran for the nearest exit, well aware that his stun baton was no match for the plasma carbine that the intruder had just used to murder his comrade. However, as he was just a few steps away from safety he felt his throat tighten suddenly and he grasped at it as he began to choke. But his struggle was in vain as Kyle maintained his grip through the Force and the guard collapsed.

"Three eight what's going on down there?" a voice demanded from the dead guard's PTP link, "Three eight can you read me?" and then an alarm began to sound.

Kyle knew that it would be only a few minutes before the police arrived and although he was confident that he could deal with almost any number of them, he could guarantee that no damage would be inflicted on the *Shining Glory*. Therefore, it was vital that he escape as quickly as possible.

Jumping back inside the *Shining Glory* he ran to the cockpit and ignited his lightsaber again, unconcerned about the light it produced now that the museum's security already knew that he was there. He swung the blade at the console he had been able to activate to slice it open so that the memory core was exposed.

Then he reached down and simply ripped this out before stuffing it into his holdall. The astrogation log was only one part of what he had come for however, although it told him where the survey team had gone and how long they spent at each destination it could not give him any clues regarding what they had found at any particular place. For that he needed to look elsewhere.

The *Shining Glory's* main computer core was located at the opposite end of the ship near the engines and so Kyle hastily made his way towards the engineering section. Here he found a heavy door barring his way and he guessed that attempting to open it normally would be a waste of his time. Therefore he resorted to his lightsaber again, using the energy blade to cut a hole big enough for him to climb through. After this the

only remaining hatch that stood between him and the computer core was opened manually and once he was through this he found himself looking at the core itself.

The computer core of the *Shining Glory* was larger than was typical for a vessel of this size. Part of this was explained by the amount of tasks that it had been required to carry out simultaneously and also by the fact that the original survey team had been forced to make economies when outfitting their ship and this had been cheaper than a more compact equivalent. Fortunately for Kyle he did not require the entire computer though. All he needed were the hard drives, or more precisely the precious data they hopefully still contained. The drives were designed to be interchangeable and this meant that they had to be easily accessible. In this case there was a simple lightweight metal panel covering the drives and Kyle focused his mind on this as he placed a hand flat against it. Then he pulled his hand back, channelling the Force through him and the metal cover was torn free. Swinging his arm, Kyle hurled this into the darkness and he heard it clatter against a wall and then the deck. Holding up his lightsaber he then peered into the core. Much to his relief the drives appeared to all be present and with his free hand he began to rip them from their sockets before stuffing them into his holdall. Not bothering to try and cover his tracks now that there were two corpses outside the ship that proved he had been there, Kyle then headed for the nearest hatchway. This was a cargo ramp located just forward of the engineering section that was just as inoperative as the hatch on the upper hull. However, in this case Kyle was assisted by gravity and as he sliced through each locking bolt and piston the ramp's own weight dropped it open, a loud 'Clang!' echoing around the gallery as it struck the floor beneath the ship.

Kyle then ran down the ramp just in time to find himself confronted by not only a pair of museum security guards with stun batons but also two police officers with sidearms.

"Halt!" one of the police officers called out as both aimed their weapons.

Kyle brought his lightsaber up just in time as one of them fired, a tiny projectile being magnetically accelerated towards him and when he blocked the shot there was a brief flash that indicated to Kyle that the police officers were equipped with weapons designed to incapacitate a target using an electrically charged round not that dissimilar to the batons held by the security guards. But while the individuals attempting to block his escape were attempting to do so without causing permanent harm to him, Kyle had not such qualms.

He reached out with one hand and unleashed a blast of energy via the Force that hurled all four off their feet. Then he ran directly towards them, slashing at them with his lightsaber as he moved. A police officer screamed as her hand was severed, taking with it the pistol that she attempted to point at Kyle, while a quick sweep across the chest of a security guard killed him without a sound.

The two police officers to have challenged Kyle inside the Founding Exhibit had been from a standard patrol, hence their relatively light weaponry. But the security camera footage of the first two guards being killed had shown Kyle's lightsaber and so more heavily armed officers had been despatched as well. The pair of armoured airspeeders touched down in front of the museum, much to the interest of passers by who stopped to watch as a squad of heavily armed and armoured police officers disembarked from each of the vehicles. At the same time two figures came running out of the museum. One of these was a human woman in formal clothing while the other was a duros in a security uniform.

"Captain!" the woman called out to the officer in charge of the police tactical unit, "I'm Haylana Urran, the manager of the museum and this is my chief of security Mann De Hoss."

"Captain Stowl." The senior police officer replied, "So what can you tell me?"

"My men suspected a security breach in the Founding Exhibit." De Hoss told him, "And when they responded they were ambushed by a human wielding a lightsaber and a plasma weapon."

"That's when we called the police." Haylana added, "There's one of your patrols in there now."

"Then they need to get out." Stowl said, "You need to clear that entire building."

"But I've still got more than thirty staff in there." Haylana said.

"Look Miss Urran, the individual you've described sounds like Kyle Jenner. Do you know who that is?" Stowl said but Haylana shook her head, "Well he used to be a Jedi knight until he went off the deep end. Now there's a shoot on sight order out on him that came straight from the Jedi Order itself. We're not even supposed to try and approach him. Now we've put a call into the Jedi, but they're on Aurek Station and it'll take them about an hour to get here. Until then we need everyone as far from that killer as possible."

It was then that there was the sound of breaking glass from the direction of the museum and Stowl and the two museum staff turned to see what was going on.

"It's Jenner!" Stowl yelled as he saw the figure in dark robes wielding a lightsaber leap from the window he had just hurled a chair through and land in front of the police team still spreading out, "Open fire!" However, before his men could execute the order Kyle struck first.

Extending his hand towards the police officers Kyle focused on their load carrying equipment, or more precisely on the assorted smoke, stun and gas grenades they carried and he pulled them all towards him simultaneously. To speed up the process of removing grenades from their webbing and then using them the tactical team secured them by using plastic ties to hold the ring-shaped safety pins to the webbing. This meant that pulling the grenades away automatically pulled out the pins.

Kyle released the grenades as soon as they were free of the police officers' webbing and simply let them drop to the ground while he dived for cover behind a nearby fountain. Many of the police officers also tried to retreat away from the grenades before their timers could run down, but most were still caught in the immediate blast area when they detonated almost in unison.

The noise was deafening and even on the far side of the street people dropped to their knees and clamped their hands over their ears. Meanwhile as the gas and smoke grenades burst open they produced a massive choking cloud around the police line and Kyle Jenner made maximum use of this to run in the opposite direction.

Shutting off his lightsaber he concealed it under his cloak so that he looked just like any one of the others fleeing from the chaos he had created in front of the museum. Then as he ran around a corner he evaluated the traffic before simply stepping out into the street.

There was a blaring sound from a speeder's horn as the vehicle came to an abrupt halt as the driver sought to avoid running Kyle over, not realising that her deceleration was assisted by a telekinetic push from Kyle. "Hey just what do you think you're playing at?" the woman demanded angrily as she jumped out of the speeder but Kyle ignored her, instead just striding up to her, "Well did you hear me? I asked what you-" and then she was suddenly cut off as Kyle delivered a single powerful punch to her face that knocked her off her feet while he got into her speeder and drove off.

3.

The speeder got Kyle as far as the nearest starport without any sign of pursuit and he abandoned the vehicle before vaulting over the perimeter fence. With the *Destiny's Shadow* still waiting for him on the fringes of the system Kyle now needed a way off-planet and this was the best place to find a suitable vessel. Hyperdrive capability was irrelevant to Kyle's requirements, what he needed was a ship with sublight speeds that would allow him to outrun any ship that the defence force could send after him. As far as Kyle was concerned the most logical solution was to take a ship from the defence force itself and with this in mind he headed towards the hangar that he knew from his days as the sector's jedi knight was used by them. As he approached the hangar he saw a row of starfighters lined up inside and considered taking one of them. However, the drawback to such a vessel was the lack of a docking port. The *Destiny's Shadow* lacked sufficient cargo space for him to be able to fly a starfighter into its hold and that meant that he would have to perform a space walk to cross between ships. Without first locating an environmental suit in his size and spending the time to put it on, this would be a risky proposition.

Fortunately for Kyle the starfighters were not the only defence force vessels in the hangar. There was a pair of armed freighters that were used as supply ships and right at the back a single teroch-class gunship. Kyle immediately focused his attention on the gunship, though it normally required a crew of seven to operate he was confident that he could pilot within the system by himself and it possessed the speed he needed to keep ahead of anything else that could be sent after him.

Calmly Kyle just walked into the hangar and headed for the gunship, making sure that every one of the defence force personnel working in there just happened to look away as he walked past them. It was only when Kyle climbed into the cockpit and began to start up the ship that the occupants of the hangar realised what was happening and by then it was too late. The hatch of the gunship was sealed and no amount of hammering on it would open it up, while the handful of armed guards had weapons that posed no threat as the gunship took off and flew out of the hangar before rapidly climbing skywards.

When the *Destiny's Shadow* next dropped out of hyperspace it was in interstellar space. This placed Kyle billions of kilometres from any shipping that could report his location but still allowed him to pick up local broadcasts while he took his time to study what he had obtained from the museum. At some point prior to the *Shining Glory* being placed on display in the museum exhibit someone had obviously been through the drives to remove information that they did not want being found. However, the being or beings that had done this had figured without Kyle's ingenuity. Kyle did not need to know exactly what had been discovered, he just needed clues regarding where and when discoveries had been made and for this all he had to do was compare the navigational log with the survey results files and take note of where the ship had been when entries later deleted had been made.

"Delvad." He said to himself as he looked at the navigational log for the largest blank spot in the survey results.

Delvad was an oceanic world, with only a handful of landmasses. Since the Narthis Sector had been colonised it had become a place where the wealthy resided on private estates that hovered above the ocean on artificial islands held up by repulsorlift generators. These were mobile and could be relocated almost anywhere on the planet that the owners desired. All of the Founding Families maintained property there, in fact it was the only planet in the sector where all of them had estates and it suddenly struck Kyle how convenient for them this was. By manipulating their control over early settlement patterns the Founding Families had made sure that only a few people made their homes on Delvad and yet had also made it entirely natural that all of them could be found there. But the question that remained in Kyle's mind was were they looking for something that they thought could be found on Delvad, or were they protecting something that they had already found there?

Delvad's ocean covered surface made it a difficult world to search. Kyle himself had abandoned his jedi starfighter there when he made the decision to leave the Order and it had only been pure chance that had seen it discovered by fishermen. But if something had remained hidden there for three hundred years it was unlikely that someone would stumble across it by accident. But scanning the world from orbit or even the air was unlikely to produce results either, the ocean would act as a shield against detection and it was inevitable that the Founding Families would have already conducted such scans if they were still searching for something.

No matter which way Kyle looked at it he needed more information and that could only come from the Founding Families themselves. Heading for the cockpit of his ship, Kyle set a course for the Delvad system.

Kyle brought his ship into orbit around Delvad, rather than leaving it further out in the system like he had done when travelling to Crassis Major. From here he could run a sensor sweep of the surface. Although this would not tell him anything about what was hidden beneath the ocean it would allow him to pick a suitable target.

Having been to Delvad before Kyle had amassed enough data to be able to identify the repulsorlift islands that belonged to each of the Founding Families. Only the Runn family lacked such a residence, the aquatic nautolans instead maintained an estate located on the seabed that they were seldom seen away from and when Kyle turned the *Destiny's Shadow's* sensors towards the area occupied by this estate he noticed something distinctly unusual.

As a private estate the ocean above was a restricted area that the mobile repulsorlift islands of other planetary residents were not supposed to enter. But the sensor sweep confirmed that there were in fact several of them clustered above the Runns' estate. Furthermore, Kyle's scans indicated that all of these belonged to the other Founding Families. Only the Torin family, that had effectively ceased to exist with the death or incarceration of all its senior members and the Crassis family residences were not present.

Kyle ran the scan again to double check the readings. To avoid his spying being detected he was using only his ship's passive sensors that were not as precise as the active ones. But the results this time were the same as the first and Kyle found himself wondering why this would have happened. If the Founding Families had arranged some sort of meeting then it would have been far quicker and more efficient to travel by speeder or even submersible rather than going to the trouble of relocating the islands. Then there was the issue of the Crassis family residence, scanning again Kyle found this more than a thousand kilometres away with no sign that it was travelling to meet up with the others. Whatever was going on at the Runn estate, the Crassis family did not appear to have been invited and Kyle decided that he needed more information.

Turning to the communication system he broadcast a simple locating signal via the subspace antenna and was unsurprised when it located the ship belonging to the individual he wanted to speak with in the nearby Tepillos system.

"Kassa I require your assistance." He transmitted, making use of a function that converted his speech into text data that guaranteed that even if a third party was able to intercept and decrypt the message his image and voice could not be identified from it.

The reply came several seconds later as a red-skinned zeltron woman appeared on the communication screen. Unlike Kyle, Kassa had no fear of being identified.

"Well, well, if it isn't my favourite customer." She said, "So what do you need this time?"

"I need to know what the current state of relations between the Founding Families is." Kyle replied and as Kassa read the message that reached her she smiled.

"Ah, now that's an interesting subject right now." She said, "It seems that they're a bit annoyed with one another at the moment. You heard about the wedding right?"

"The one between Gayal Karn and Erill Crassis? Yes of course. When a man in his seventies marries a young woman in her twenties it tends to attract attention. It was a sign that the Crassis and Karn families were trying to form a closer relationship." Kyle said and Kassa snorted when she read this.

"Well for such close allies they really seem to hate one another right now." She told Kyle, "Rumour has it that since the wedding was announced the Crassis family has effectively cut itself off from the others. There was some communication at first but more recently even that seems to have ended. It may have something to do with a Shill Security assault force launching an all out attack on some new property that old Erill bought on Lovas. Even the Jedi got involved in that."

"The Jedi? Are they moving against the Founding Families?"

"I don't think so. If they were then I think that there'd be more of them in the sector than the three there are right now." Kassa said, "But the rumour since the attack is that the place on Lovas is where Gayal Karn's living right now and that she's being protected by mandalorians. In fact it seems that the Crassis family has handed over all its security to them. Shill Security's been kicked out. I guess your ex-girlfriend wouldn't have liked that. If she was still alive of course."

Kyle snarled at the mention of Belle Shill, the woman he had been romantically involved with while he was still a part of the Jedi Order.

"So the Founding Families are going to war then?" he said.

"Maybe, maybe not. Trent Narthis is running for senator after all. I doubt that a shooting war would do anything for his campaign. But I wouldn't want to stand between any of them, just in case. Oh and there's one more thing."

"What?" Kyle asked.

"How much do you know about Charity Crassis?" Kassa asked back and Kyle frowned.

"Just that she's the daughter of Erill Crassis. The younger of his two children. I've only met her once or twice. She never really seemed interested in anything going on around her."

"Well it's not surprising you didn't meet her much because she's stayed away from the rest of her family most of the time in recent years. I think she didn't set foot in their mansion on Crassis Major for about two or three years. That lasted right up until Erill married Gayal and all of a sudden she reappeared. Apparently she doesn't approve of her new step mother and she tried to put an end to the marriage."

"And this is relevant to me how?" Kyle interrupted.

"I'm getting to it." Kassa replied, "Charity didn't hang around for long. She left Crassis Major in something of a hurry right about the time that Shill Security launched its attack. Want to bet on who tipped off Han Shill about where Gayal was? I'd say that young lady had some importance to the Founding Families."

"Yes. Important enough to risk revealing themselves by starting a war over her." Kyle said, "I think that perhaps I ought to have a conversation with Charity Crassis myself. You say that she left Crassis Major, where did she go?"

"Delvad. She headed right back to that fancy floating island of theirs." Kassa replied and Kyle smiled.

"How fortunate." He said, "You may put this conversation on my account." And then he shut off the communication link.

The repulsorlift islands owned by the Founding Families were easily defended against attack. All included their own shield generators and weapon emplacements operated by the force of well-armed guards stationed aboard each one. Added to this their very nature made them difficult to approach unobserved. With no terrain to hide behind a would be intruder would be picked up by radar many kilometres away while sonar probes lowered into the water would detect a submersible vehicle. What was needed was a legitimate reason to approach the residence.

Kyle obtained this by heading to the first florists he found when he landed and picked out an expensive bunch of flowers.

"I need these flowers delivering to this address." He told the florist, "Today."

"Of course sir. We are happy to make express deliveries. But I will need your identity for our records."

"You don't need to see my identification." Kyle replied, using the Force to persuade the florist of this as he placed cash on the counter to pay for the flowers and delivery.

"Oh no sir, I won't need to see your identification." The florist said, oblivious to what was being done to her mind, "There. It's all done. Your flowers will be sent out immediately."

"Thank you." Kyle said with a smile, "I'm sure your service will make my friend as happy as I am."

"We aim to please sir." The florist replied, smiling back at Kyle.

The former Jedi then left the store and walked around to where several small repulsorvans were parked and waited. A short time later the door of the florist opened and one of the staff came out clutching the flowers that Kyle had purchased. Heading for one of the vans the florist placed this in the back and then pulled the door closed before heading for the driver's seat. However, with a wave of his hand Kyle stopped the door from closing properly and darted towards the vehicle while the florist was still preparing to drive off. He pulled the door open just wide enough to allow him to slip inside before he closed the door behind him. Then he felt the vehicle shift slightly as its engine started and it was driven away with him inside.

4.

From his hiding place in the back of the repulsorvan Kyle heard the florist's muffled voice as they announced themselves to the mandalorian that challenged the vehicle's approach. Kyle felt the vehicle slow slightly as the florist waited for clearance and then speed up again when it was given. It was then that Kyle headed back to the door and opened it from the inside, climbing out onto the side of the van before closing the door one last time to conceal his presence. Then he looked towards the floating island that the delivery vehicle was rapidly approaching.

Kyle's jump required careful timing. Too soon and he would plummet into the ocean below, whereas leaving it too late would risk his being seen by a vigilant guard. To assist him Kyle concentrated on what he needed to do and let the Force flow through him.

Then he jumped.

He flew through the air, the repulsorvan rapidly pulling ahead of him. As he continued to move through the air Kyle saw his altitude decreasing and he reached out. The loss of altitude was only to be expected and it fit with Kyle's plan. He did not intend to land on the upper surface of the island where he would be visible; instead he aimed for the underside. Spying a length of pipe protruding from beneath the structure Kyle pointed his extended arms towards it and focused on it. Had the pipe been a loose object then Kyle's use of his telekinetic abilities would have dragged it towards him, but given the overwhelming difference in mass between him and the entire artificial island it was Kyle that was pulled towards the pipe and he grabbed hold with both hands as soon as it was within reach and pulled himself up to sit on it.

The lower hull of the residence was easily within reach from where Kyle clung to the pipe and he drew his lightsaber then activated it and swung it upwards. With four quick slashes against the hull he cut a rough hole and the dislodged section of hull plummeted down into the ocean below. Sensing no one close by inside the island Kyle shut off his lightsaber again and then climbed up through the hole.

He emerged in a storeroom that looked to be part of the service and support section of the hovering island, it was clean and tidy but the decoration could not be described as luxurious in any sense of the word. Kyle doubted that any member of the Crassis family had ever even been down here, preferring to let servants or droids carry out any work that required being here.

Clutching his inactive lightsaber in his hand Kyle exited the room, picked a direction at random and set off in search of a way up to where he might be able to find Charity. Along the way he reached out through the Force in search of any disturbances that suggested the presence of a living being. Kyle had no idea how many servants or mandalorian guards may be present and he wanted to keep his presence here a secret as long as he could. This meant that when he did come across another living being he had two choices, either find a way to get around them unseen or kill them before they could raise the alarm. His preference was for the first option, killing them meant that he was not leaving himself surrounded and meant that there were fewer to be dealt with should anything go wrong and he be detected. Of course each body needed disposing of but the island provided a great many places to conceal a corpse, including if needed just tossing it over the side into the ocean. However, killing everyone that he encountered was not getting Kyle any closer to discovering where Charity Crassis could be found, for that he would need to question one of the island's other residents.

He found a suitable candidate sat in a room surrounded by computers. From here all of the island's systems could be controlled and a single mandalorian had been assigned to keep watch over them. He was sat with his back to the open doorway as Kyle approached, but glancing up he noticed Kyle's reflection in one of the monitors and he spun around, reaching for the rifle leant against his console.

There was a 'snap-hiss' as Kyle ignited his lightsaber at the same time as the mandalorian got to his feet and took aim. But before the mercenary could fire Kyle lashed out with his lightsaber and with a single stroke he severed both the mandalorian's arms. Shocked at the sudden loss of his limbs the mandalorian staggered back and then dropped to his knees.

"I have a few questions for you." Kyle said as he reached down and removed the mandalorian's helmet so that he could look directly into his eyes.

"I'll tell you nothing." The mandalorian hissed, "I'm not afraid of you jedi." And Kyle smiled.

"Oh you'll tell me everything." He said, "Because I'm not a jedi and that means that you should be afraid of me. You should be very afraid of me." And he pushed that thought as deeply into the man's mind as he could.

It turned out that Charity Crassis was not on the island when Kyle had arrived. She had instead been making use of the ocean surrounding it as an opportunity to do diving. In order to allow her to easily get in and out of the water a platform had been lowered beneath the island, with a staircase connecting it to the structure of the island hovering overhead. Of course this meant that she was totally unaware that Kyle was making his way through the rooms and corridors of the island and killing everyone there while she swam and she noticed nothing odd until upon checking the state of her air supply she decided that it was time to get out of the water.

Typically there would be one of the household staff on hand to assist her in removing her air tank before giving her a robe and offer her refreshment following her swim, but on this occasion she found no one waiting for her at all. Instead her robe was draped over a chair where she had left it before starting her swim and the table was empty of food or drink.

"Well this isn't very good." She said to herself as she put on her robe and then she activated the intercom set into the table, "Hello kitchen, is my food on the way?" and then she waited for a reply, a puzzled frown appearing on her face when none came, "Security I can't raise the kitchen." She then said into the intercom but once again there was no reply. Suspecting that the intercom was faulty she then proceeded up the stairs.

Upon reaching the main structure of the island, it did not take long for Charity to notice the absence of any signs of life.

"Hello?" she called out, wandering from room to room, "Where is everyone?"

Her first thoughts were of when Shill Security had been ordered to remove all its personnel from Crassis family property. But on that occasion the domestic staff had remained and the mandalorians had arrived to take over from them while they were still packing. This time though, the island appeared to be deserted.

Then she walked into a hallway next to one of the exterior vehicle landing pads and saw a large bunch of flowers that she did not recognise in a vase in the middle of the room.

"Where did these come from?" she said to herself as she walked up to the flowers and looked for a card.

"They're from me." Kyle said from behind her, "Don't you like them?" and as Charity turned to face him, Kyle sent out a wave of telekinetic energy that hurled her across the room. Then he walked towards where she had landed and now lay gazing up at him.

Fear.

Charity's reaction to him made Kyle smile and he glanced down at the floor.

"Oh look," he said as the remains of the vase she had crashed through crunched under his feet, "You've ruined them."

"I-I know you." Charity stammered, "I've seen your face before. You-You're the jedi."

Kyle frowned and crouched down right in front of her.

"You know it can get so annoying being recognised everywhere you go." He said, "Don't you think?"

"Wh-what do you want?" Charity asked and Kyle smiled, "Why you of course. That's the only reason I haven't killed you like I have everyone else here."

Kaylor Mott walked into the command post, answering a summons from one of his fellow mandalorians.

"What is it?" he asked.

"The unit deployed to the Delvad residence has missed a check in." the other mandalorian told him.

"Have you requested an explanation?" Kaylor asked.

"Yes sir and we've got a positive connection but no one's answering."

"Then contact the local squadron and have them do a flyby." Kaylor ordered, "I'll go and inform Mister Crassis that we may have a problem."

Her wrists bound in front of her, Charity was dragged away from the luxuriously decorated area of the artificial island that she spent her time in by Kyle, taking her to the more functional support sections and he took her to the control room where she gasped when she saw the body of the mandalorian whose arms Kyle had amputated tucked behind a console.

"Sit." Kyle ordered, shoving her into a chair and then securing her wrists to one of the arms to keep her there, "Now how about you tell me why you're here?" he asked, staring Charity in her eyes.

"I live here." She replied flippantly, despite the fear she still exuded through the Force.

"Very funny." Kyle said and then he kicked a nearby access panel, causing it to clatter to the floor as it was ripped out of position. Then he reached for the exposed bundles of wiring and ripped them free, "Now that wet suit of yours is probably a rather good insulator." He said as he sorted through the wires, hunting for a pair intended to carry power through the system, "But I notice that it doesn't cover everything." And then he jabbed the bare ends of the wires he still held against one of Charity's feet and she shrieked.

"No!" she screamed.

"Tell me why the Founding Families are all here on Delvad." Kyle said.

"It's nothing to do with me." Charity answered and then as Kyle extended the wires out again she flinched and tried to pull her feet under the chair where he would not reach them. However, all that Kyle did in response was to jab one of her hands with the wires instead and she screamed again.

"You know," Kyle said as he began to separate the two wires from one another, "I think that this would work so much better if I just connect one of these to you permanently." And then he forced the end of one wire down the back of her wetsuit before pressing the other against her neck. This time Charity did not cry out, instead she convulsed, her eyes widening before gasping as the wire was finally removed, "Yes that is better." Kyle said, "What do you think."

"Please I don't know anything." Charity pleaded, "I don't want anything to do with this grand plan everyone's so interested in."

"Ah so there is a scheme at work." Kyle said, "Why not tell me what it is?"

"I can't. They'll kill me." Charity said, "I was in enough trouble just for talking to the Druds."

"But the problem for you right now young lady is that if you don't tell me then I will kill you." Kyle explained, the tone of his voice almost friendly despite his words, "Now who do you think is more likely to carry out this threat?" he added.

However, before Charity could reply an alarm sounded from a nearby console and Kyle looked around to see the island's sensors reporting a small group of contacts approaching fast.

"Who are they?" he demanded, turning back towards Charity.

"I don't know." Charity replied as Kyle headed for the comscan station to investigate further.

5.

Five mandalorians, each one mounted on the back of a basilisk war droid flew towards the Crassis family island. Their powerful mounts could function equally as well on the ground, in the air or even in space and right now they were rushing headlong towards the artificial island ahead of them, looking for any signs of anything out of the ordinary.

As they approached the island there was no response from it at all. This in itself was suspicious.

"Range two thousand metres. No challenge so far." The lead mandalorian signalled, his message being relayed via their base to the main Crassis estate on Crassis Major.

"Any signs of activity?" Kaylor Mott's voice responded after a brief pause that was in part due to the conversation being relayed through various stages rather than being direct. But with the basilisk lacking subspace communications this was the only choice available to them.

"None so far sir. No external patrols and no one on any of the balconies."

"What about sensor scans?" Kaylor asked.

"Just basic sweeps. We're aren't being targeted and we've not been asked to identify ourselves."

The next pause was extended as Kaylor considered the best course of action.

"Try initiating communication yourselves." He said.

"Yes sir." The mandalorian squad leader replied before switching his communications to a short-range mode, "Island control this is basilisk squad leader, respond."

Kyle scowled. He had not expected there to have been more mandalorians on Delvad ready to respond when contact was lost with the island, instead he had been counting on having at least four hours before a ship could get here from the Crassis system. Now he would have to improvise and that was where things tended to go wrong.

Moving to another console, Kyle raised the island's shields.

The sensors built into the mandalorians' basilisks detected the sudden activation of the shield around the island and at the same time there was a brief glimmer as the energy field expanded into place.

"Break off!" the squad leader snapped, well aware of what a collision with the shield would mean and all five mandalorians steered their droids away from the island, each one heading in a direction chosen by himself.

One attempted to fly beneath the island, between it and the ocean surface. However as he flew underneath it the repulsorlift field generated by the island interacted with that being used to propel his basilisk and the droid lurched upwards suddenly. This movement was just enough to bring the droid and it's rider into contact with the bubble of energy surrounding the island and there was an explosion as the droid was destroyed, sending flaming wreckage as well as the corpse of its rider tumbling down into the water below.

"Squad leader to control, the island's shields have been raised. One man down from collision." The leader then transmitted back to Crassis Major via the relay.

"Squad leader you are cleared to fire." Kaylor Mott responded as soon as he received the message, "Bring down that shield and get aboard the island. Reinforcements are on the way."

Kaylor went to see his employers as soon as he had given the order for more of his men to head for the island. He found them right where he expected they would be, in the office Erill Crassis spent much of his time in with his son Luke and his wife Salla sat close by as they monitored the communications between the mansion and the forces on Delvad.

"I take it you've heard?" Kaylor said.

"Of course we have." Erill replied as he took an oxygen mask away from his face and handed it to the droid beside him.

"But who is responsible for this?" Salla asked, looking at each of the others in the room in turn.

"My men haven't been able to identify the perpetrators." Kaylor told her.

"But we can all take a guess can't we?" Luke said, "They've not long since tried to take Gayal from us."

"No unusual activity has been reported from any of the other families since they relocated their islands to the Runn estate." Kaylor said.

"Indeed, this requires more investigation before we leap to any conclusions Luke." Erill said.

"Of course father." Luke replied.

"At the same time we must be ready for the possibility that the incident on Lovas was just the first in a series of attacks." Erill went on and he looked directly at Kaylor, "Do please prepare a suitable response Mister

Mott. If a few severed heads were insufficient to act as a deterrent then I think we need to make our point more strongly.”

Kaylor grinned.

“Of course Mister Crassis. I’ll get right on it.” And he turned to leave.

“One last thing Mister Mott.” Erill called out after him.

“Yes sir?”

“Charity.” Erill replied, “She may have misbehaved recently, but she is still my daughter and I’d liked her kept alive. Understood?”

“Of course Mister Crassis.” Kaylor repeated.

Four of the mandalorians were still circling the island, firing the weapons built into their basilisk war droids at the shield as they attempted to overpower it. But more worrying to Kyle as he continued to look at the sensor display was the larger group of sensor contacts now heading for the island. These had originated along the same heading as the mandalorian unit already attacking the island and it seemed clear that reinforcements had been despatched to help them.

“Not going so well?” Charity commented from the chair she was bound to and Kyle snarled, not bothering to turn around and look at her.

The island’s shields were proving sufficient to resist the firepower of the four basilisks currently attacking it and unless the approaching groups had any weapons significantly more powerful it would likely be some time before they were able to breach the shield themselves. But the problem was that while the shield was raised Kyle was trapped in here. Using the island’s defences to bring down the mandalorians seemed a sensible idea. If Kyle could just destroy the four already firing at the island then he drop the shield long enough to take a vehicle from the island’s hangar and escape before the larger force arrived. But the island’s weapons were not designed to be operated remotely from any single point. Instead each one required its own crew positioned with the weapon itself.

But there were other options and Kyle promptly lowered the shield.

There was another shimmer as the energy field around the island collapsed.

“Did we hit the generator?” one of the mandalorians broadcast.

“No.” Another responded, “It was shut down from the inside.”

“Cut the chatter.” The squad leader ordered, “And follow me in.”

The four mandalorians flew their basilisks towards the nearest landing pad and as soon as his touched down the squad leader opened fire with its laser cannons again, blasting the door that provided access to the inside of the island apart. Then there was a pounding sound as the four heavy basilisk war droids strode through the breach.

“Come with me.” Kyle said sternly and he activated his lightsaber to slice through the chair he had tied Charity to, allowing her to stand while still leaving her wrists bound. Then he pulled her towards the doorway.

“Where are you taking me?” she demanded.

“To meet with your mandalorian friends.” Kyle replied, “You’re going to get them to stand down long enough for me to kill them.”

Holding Charity by her hair Kyle pushed her along in front him, heading back towards the residential section of the island. The four mandalorians had stayed together as they began their search, so far keeping to the larger rooms and passageways that allowed them to remain on their basilisks. Clearly they valued the firepower these formidable machines offered in a situation where they did not know what they were up against, Kyle thought to himself, even though the noise they created just by walking made it very easy to determine where they were. Clamping a hand over Charity’s mouth to prevent her from warning the mandalorians he then made use of some of the smaller rooms to circle around behind them.

When he found himself peering around a corner to the rear of the mandalorians and their droids Kyle activated his lightsaber and pushed Charity out ahead of him.

“Looking for me?” he called out towards the mandalorians and they pivoted around to look at him.

Danger.

Kyle sensed the attack before it happened and he dived out of the way, dragging Charity with him as he disappeared around another corner.

“Hold your fire you nerf herder!” the squad leader snapped as a volley from the laser cannons of one of his men tore through a wall, “He’s got the woman.” Then he pulled his rifle from where it was clamped to the

side of his basilisk and dismounted, "Follow." He commanded the droid and he advanced towards where he had seen Kyle vanish.

The remaining mandalorians copied their leader and they advanced with their weapons raised and their basilisks lumbering along behind them.

"Advancing on target." The squad leader said into his communicator, the signal now being first sent to his basilisk and then via the previous route to Crassis Major, "Subject is armed with a lightsaber and has a hostage."

On Crassis Major Luke and Salla looked at one another.

"A lightsaber?" Salla said, "The jedi?"

"I think not my dear." Erill responded, "I think that we are dealing with our old friend Kyle Jenner." Then he took a deep breath and added, "And he has my daughter."

6.

Kyle leapt out from behind the corner with one arm around Charity's neck and the other outstretched towards the mandalorians. All four of the armoured warriors took aim but none dared fire, knowing that the penalty for accidentally hitting Charity would be extreme.

"Let her-" the squad leader began, but as he spoke Kyle reached out through the Force and latched onto one of the basilisk war droid following the mandalorians and he pulled it towards him.

The machine flew forwards uncontrollably, crashing through the mandalorians themselves and crushing one beneath its bulk. Then it crashed into a nearby wall, the force of the impact punching through the panels that concealed the power line behind it and the droid was enveloped in arcing electricity until it burst into flames. "Get back!" the mandalorian leader yelled at his men as he picked himself up and he fired his rifle, aiming it close to but not directly at Charity and Kyle with the intention of just dissuading the former jedi from giving chase.

As it happened Kyle was not interested in pursuing the mandalorians in any case. Instead he dragged Charity back around the corner and along through the doorway just beyond it.

The mandalorians heard Charity's cries suddenly cease and they halted their retreat. If Charity had been killed already then there was nothing to stop them from firing on Kyle, but they did not want to suddenly get crushed by another of their own droids.

"Droids wait." the mandalorian leader said as he began to creep forwards again and his two surviving men followed him.

At the corner the mandalorians burst around it simultaneously and saw only an empty room, but they also saw the closed door that was the only way Kyle could have gone without being seen and the leader waved to one of his men. Nodding, the mandalorian advanced towards the door and reached out for the control to open it. However, on the far side of the door Kyle waited with his lightsaber pressed up against the control panel on his side and when he sensed the mandalorian reaching out to open the door he ignited the weapon.

The 'snap-hiss' was muffled, but the wall did nothing to impede the expansion of the blade of pure energy and it burst through the control panel just as the mandalorian reached for it, impaling him through his hand. The mandalorian screamed and withdrew his hand, but because he did not pull it back along the blade all he did was inflict further damage before he dropped his rifle and then staggered backwards, clutching at his ruined hand.

"Fire at the panel!" the mandalorian leader yelled to the only other remaining healthy mandalorian and both opened fire at where Kyle's lightsaber had emerged, hoping that one of their shots would pass through the hole and strike Kyle on the other. However, although their aim was good the spatial distortions fired by the mandalorians' pulse wave weapons burst when they came into contact with the containment field around the lightsaber blade and they burst without getting close to Kyle. The glowing blade vanished as Kyle shut off his weapon again and there was the sound of running as he withdrew from behind the door.

Rather than take the risk in pursuing Kyle right away, the mandalorian leader turned his attention to his injured man.

"Can you walk?" he asked and the injured warrior nodded, "Good." The leader added and he reached out to pluck the injured man's sidearm from its holster before holding out for him to take hold of, "Then take this and come with us while hunt down this jedi scum. We'll get you a new hand when this is all over."

The injured mandalorian nodded as he took the weapon and then they headed back the way they had come, searching for another way to reach Kyle.

"Where are we going now?" Charity asked as Kyle dragged her along by her hands.

"To the main reactor." Kyle replied.

"The main reactor? But Why?"

"Because I intend to overload it." Kyle said.

"Overload it? But that'll destroy the entire island." Charity exclaimed, "We'll be killed."

"I have other plans regarding that." Kyle said and then he pushed Charity into a turbolift.

The turbolift descended to the lowest level of the floating island and as soon as the door slid open Kyle felt the heat of the nearby fusion reactor.

"No! You can't." Charity shouted as Kyle pulled her from the turbolift.

"Watch me." Kyle replied, dragging her to the reactor control station and to Charity's horror he activated his lightsaber as he walked right up to the cooling system and then swung the blade through it.

There was a shower of sparks from the severed control and power lines, accompanied by a jet of vaporised coolant that made Charity flinch and the air was suddenly filled with a loud wailing sound.

"Warning! Reactor coolant malfunction." An automated voice called out, "Overload estimated in nine minutes."

The warning was broadcast throughout the island and the trio of mandalorians halted and looked at one another when they heard it.

"The reactor room." The leader said, "We can shut off the fuel input to stop it. Quickly."

The mandalorians and their basilisk war droids headed for a large cargo turbolift to take them down to the lowest level of the island and before the door slid open they had already raised their weapons just in case Kyle was waiting to ambush them.

There was no sign of Kyle as the mandalorians exited the turbolift however and they headed for the reactor control room as quickly as they could, but what they found there was not encouraging.

"So how do we fix this?" one of them said as they looked at the consoles, every last one of which had been destroyed by having a lightsaber swung across them several times. Looking at the manual emergency valves on the far wall the squad leader saw that these had been welded in place, presumably also using Kyle's lightsaber.

"I've got a very bad feeling about this." The leader said just before a pulse wave blast struck the already injured mandalorian in his back and he fell dead.

"Behind us!" the other mandalorian yelled as the two surviving warriors and the three basilisks turned around. Again their line of fire was obstructed by Kyle holding Charity in front of him as a shield, but this time as he backed away he dragged her through a door that he did not close behind him.

The two mandalorians headed after him, the basilisks following behind them in turn and when they reached the door they came to a halt.

"What's in there?" the junior warrior asked his superior.

"Storage." The leader replied, "From what I know it's a dead end."

"Warning! Overload in three minutes." The automated voice then called out, "All personnel should evacuate immediately."

"If we leave he'll escape." The mandalorian leader said, "On the other hand if we stay we'll die with him." then he looked at the basilisks and pointed to the one that had belonged to the mandalorian Kyle had just shot, "Remain here." He instructed it, "If the Jedi attempts to escape then kill him."

"What about the woman?" the other mandalorian asked, "Mott will kill us if—"

"We can't help her." The leader interrupted, "If the droid kills the Jedi then it can try and get her out of here. But we need to go now."

Climbing back onto their basilisks the two remaining mandalorians headed back to the turbolift as fast as they could and headed back up to one of the residential levels. The droids bounded out of the turbolift and ran headlong towards the nearest viewport larger than they were and crashed through it. As they fell towards the water the droids activated their repulsorlift engines and accelerated away from the stricken island.

Even without looking back, the mandalorians saw the flash of the island's reactor overloading reflected in the surface of the ocean and then they found themselves being buffeted by the shockwave that followed. Turning his head the mandalorian squad leader saw the ocean now strewn with burning debris as what remained of the Crassis family residence on Delvad sinking beneath the waves.

"Squad leader report." A voice ordered over the mandalorians' communication net and the squad leader recognised the voice of his immediate superior.

"There was a Jedi sir." He replied, "He had the woman as hostage and rigged the reactor to blow."

"What about the woman and the Jedi?" his superior asked and the squad leader hesitated, "Well? What happened to them?"

"We had the Jedi cornered but there wasn't time to deal with him." the squad leader replied eventually, "They must have both still been inside when it blew."

Then there was silence on the communication channel.

"Return to base squad leader. You'll have to explain this to Mister Mott yourselves."

By the time the mandalorians had reached the door to the storeroom Kyle had already expanded the hole he had used to gain access to the island and used it to make good his escape. Being right at the edge of the island, he had been able to get far enough away before it came crashing down to avoid either being crushed or sucked down beneath the ocean by the vortex created by the sinking island. Now he swam

towards the shore, kicking his legs while he held onto the sealed storage container that he had pushed through the hole ahead of him that now served as a flotation aid. And from within the container came muffled cries and a hammering sound as Charity banged on the inside, pleading with Kyle to release her.