

STAR WARS

TALES OF THE JEDI



IV-XI: HIDEOUT

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...

HIDEOUT

KYLE JENNER HAS EVADED ALL ATTEMPTS AT PURSUIT FOR TWO YEARS. NOW THOUGH IT SEEMS THAT THE JEDI ORDER HAS HIM CORNERED AND THE UDRAS ATTEMPT TO FINALLY CAPTURE HIM. BUT ARE THEY REALLY STRONG ENOUGH TO TAKE ON SOMEONE AS POWERFUL AS HE IS...?

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

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1 .

For most of the three hundred years since the Narthis Sector had been settled by the Republic the survey ship *Shining Glory* had formed the centrepiece of the museum exhibit about the original survey mission. For most of this time the ship and exhibit had attracted no more attention than any other exhibit but all that had changed just a few weeks earlier.

The former jedi knight Kyle Jenner had broken into the exhibit and removed computer drives from the *Shining Glory*. More significantly during the burglary he had killed museum security guards and police officers that had attempted to stop him, not realising who he was until it was too late. Even when his identity had been realised and a large force of well-armed police officers had been deployed Kyle was still able to force his way out of the building and escaped. Since then the Founding Exhibit as it was known had been closed off to the public while the police had carried out their investigation. But now that they had concluded that Kyle had acted alone they had determined that it was a matter best left to the Jedi Order and it was for that reason that the three jedi currently assigned to the sector now stood in the otherwise empty museum exhibit looking at the ship. Of these three, two were similar in age. Cal Udra was the jedi knight officially assigned to the sector and beside him stood his younger sister and padawan learner Lara. Finally came the third of the jedi, a man significantly older than the Udras who wore a stern expression. This was Tarris Blake, a member of the secretive jedi shadows who dedicated themselves entirely to hunting down artefacts and acolytes of the Dark Side of the Force.

"So do we know what he wanted?" Lara asked and Cal looked at the datapad that the police had given to him.

"This says computer drives." Cal replied, "Both the flight deck and the main computer core were tampered with."

"There is more at issue than what was taken." Tarris said without looking at Cal or Lara, "We already know that Kyle Jenner is seeking to destroy the Founding Families."

"Not such a bad thing if you ask me." Lara muttered and Tarris whirled around and glared at her.

"Maybe not padawan." He told her, "But are you willing to chance Kyle Jenner obtaining whatever it is that they are seeking?"

"Err, no." Lara replied and Tarris turned back towards the *Shining Glory*.

"We know that Kyle Jenner was here." He said, "That is what we should be interested in. The police have examined the ship for evidence using their methods and now we need to do the same. Like all Force sensitive individuals Kyle Jenner creates a disturbance in the Force wherever he goes and I want you to hunt for traces of such a disturbance."

"Us?" Lara asked, "What about you?"

"The security footage confirms that Kyle spent time outside the ship before the museum closed. I wish to confirm that nothing else was tampered with." Tarris replied.

"Come on then." Cal said to Lara, "Let's get on with this."

"We should bring Ghost with us." Lara said as she and Cal walked up the *Shining Glory's* access ramp, "He'd sniff out anywhere Kyle went."

"After three week? I doubt it." Cal replied and at the top of the ramp he stopped, breathed deeply as he cleared his mind and then let the Force flow through him. Beside him Lara sighed as she looked around the compartment they were in and then did the same.

Though it had been some time since Kyle had been inside the ship there was still a detectable trace of his presence in the Force, a faint echo that told the jedi whereabouts in the ship he had been.

Go up.

Cal frowned as he felt the Force direct him.

"Up." He said out loud.

"Huh?" Lara responded.

"I just get the feeling that we should head upwards." Cal told her.

"Well given that we're on the lowest level we can't exactly go anywhere else now can we?" Lara said. Then she added, "So do you have anywhere specific in mind big brother?"

"Well according to the police report Kyle entered the ship through a hatch on the upper hull." Cal replied, "So I figure we may as well start there."

Cal and Lara stood in the doorway of the airlock where Kyle Jenner had broken into the *Shining Glory* by apparently using his lightsaber to remove the lock on the outer hatch itself.

"There's not really anything here is there?" Lara said.

"No, but we now that Kyle was." Cal said and he crouched down to examine the floor.

"Oh this is pointless." Lara said suddenly, "I tell you what, the hull is even further up than this. How about I take a look up there?" and she stepped into the room.

"Lara wait no." Cal exclaimed and he reached out to grab her before she reached the ladder that led up to the hatch. Then he frowned, "Did you hear that?" he asked.

"Hear what?" Lara asked in reply.

"When you stepped through the door I thought I heard something. A soft rattling sound."

"Probably a stone or something." Lara said, "I must have kicked it." And Cal grinned, "What's wrong?" Lara asked.

"I seriously doubt that after three hundred years there'd still be a loose stone rattling about in here." He said, "This thing would have been cleaned from top to bottom when it was first handed over to the museum."

"So Kyle must have trampled it in." Lara said and she looked up at the hatch, "It probably got dislodged from his boot when he jumped down here."

"We need to find it." Cal said and both he and Lara got down on their knees and began to search for the stone.

Lara found it by a bulkhead on the other side of the room and she picked it up between her thumb and forefinger.

"Doesn't look like much does it?" she said as she stared at the pea-sized object.

"Maybe not." Cal replied, "But if that came from Kyle's boot then it could give us a clue as to where else he's been. Now come on, I'll bet Jule knows someone that can check that thing out for us."

Agent Jule Raser was the most senior member of the sector rangers in the Narthis Sector and she and the Udras had assisted each other on numerous occasions. She was based on Aurek Station, the primary hyperspace navigation beacon in the sector that also happened to be where the Jedi had chosen to establish their base of operations.

"I ran this by the survey guys." Jule said when Cal and Lara went to see her for the results. The tiny stone was now contained in a sealed plastic bag and clearly labelled with the time, date and location of where it had been found.

"And did you find anything interesting?" Cal asked, "Or rather did they?"

"A return address would be nice." Lara added with a smile.

"Well as it happened this is an incredibly dull piece of rock." Jule replied and Lara's face fell, "Common to planets all across the sector." Jule added.

"Ah well, bad luck baby sister." Cal said, "I suppose we better go tell Tarris that our hunch was a bust. At least we're no worse off than when we started." And Lara frowned.

"Stop calling me a baby Cal." She said.

"But then the geologists passed it on to some biology experts." Jule added with a smile and both Jedi stared at her across her desk.

"I'm sorry but did you just say biologists?" Cal asked, "You know it's a rock right?"

"Yes indeed and it's almost impossible to pinpoint the planet of origin of a piece of rock like that. But when the analysis reveals the presence of bacterial organisms in it, then you need to go and ask a biologist instead."

"Bacteria." Lara repeated, "That little piece of stone had got bacteria on it?"

"In it." Jule corrected her, "And the biologists are certain that they've been there for some time. Several hundred generations at least."

"And which planet are these bacteria native to?" Cal asked.

"Ah, now that's the thing." Jule replied, "This precise strain isn't known to our people. But the genetic information that makes it up has been seen on a small number of worlds."

"All in this sector right?" Lara said expectantly.

"Well kind of. But not on any Republic controlled world." Jule told her.

"So where are they from then?" Cal asked.

"Somewhere in the Levik Cluster." Jule replied.

"You have got to be kidding me." Lara said, "The Levik Cluster? Are there even any maps of that place?"

The Levik Cluster was a dense formation of stars located at the edge of the Narthis Sector. The Republic frequently sent scouting missions into the area to try and build up reliable data about the star systems and

worlds within it but as well as explorers the cluster had attracted numerous groups of outlaws who were looking for somewhere safe to hide from the Republic.

"I don't have any maps." Jule said, "The Levik Cluster is beyond my jurisdiction. But the Republic base on Vayal has pretty up to date information from their survey flights."

"But you can tell us where these bacteria came from?" Lara asked.

"Yes, that's right here in the report." Jule answered, "There are apparently three planets in the Levik Cluster where such genetic patterns exist and on one of them it's only in fossils. The planet's a rock now, totally dead."

"So that narrows it down to two." Cal said with a smile, "Perfect."

"Why perfect?" Lara asked.

"Well we do have two ships at our disposal." Cal replied, "We can search one planet while Tarris takes the other."

Tarris studied the report in silence while Cal and Lara stood in front of him expectantly. As they waited a dog walked up to them clutching a rubber toy in its mouth and stood in front of them. When they both ignored the dog it dropped the toy between them and looked up.

"Not now Ghost." Lara whispered, but she reached out with a paw and prodded her, "Not now." She repeated and she grinned as Tarris looked up from the datapad. Then he waved one hand and the toy was suddenly flung across the room. Ghost barked and ran after it.

"Your plan is sound Jedi Udra." Tarris said, "And the suggestion of dividing the search between us is logical. I am confident that I can handle Kyle Jenner alone if I have to, while the pair of you should be able to protect yourselves long enough to summon me."

Lara looked at her brother.

"Notice how he doesn't expect us to be able to handle Kyle?" she said, just as Ghost returned and dropped the toy at her feet again.

"Then perhaps we should take Ghost with us to tip the balance in our favour." Cal replied.

Kyle Jenner sat cross-legged in the centre of a ring of candles in an otherwise empty room, meditating. On the floor in front of him there was a small triangular based pyramid and as he focused his mind on it a tiny glowing light appeared inside. But all of a sudden he felt a shift in the Force and his concentration was broken, causing the light to go out. But in his mind there was a single thought.

They are coming.

Kyle got to his feet and plucked the lightsaber from his belt before he strode out of the room, blowing out the candles with a wave of his hand. As he headed down the corridor outside the room he could hear a distant pounding sound and muffled cries for attention.

2.

The delaya-class *Bright Hope* dropped out of hyperspace and Cal began to scan the system.

"So this place is too dull to settle then?" Lara commented as the both looked out of the canopy.

"The survey report says 'Not economically viable.'" Cal replied, "Few minerals and no life forms of any interest."

"But far enough out of the way to be useful as a hideout for a renegade jedi." Lara added.

"Possibly." Cal said, "There's only a fifty-fifty chance that this is where Kyle came and if this is the place we're not sure why he came here. It could have been a flying visit. Straight in and straight out."

"Well that's the planet right there." Lara said, pointing to a tiny globe visible through the canopy, "What are we waiting for?"

"Well I thought it might just be a good idea to see if Kyle's ship is lurking around here anywhere." Cal replied.

"And is it?"

"It would appear not."

"So let's go Cal."

Cal sighed.

"So impatient." He muttered as he took hold of the control column in front of him and the *Bright Hope* accelerated.

Cal continued to monitor the ship's sensors, watching for any signs of activity either on the planet or in space.

"So where do we start anyway?" Lara asked.

"The Republic survey team left an outpost behind." Cal answered, "Partly because it wasn't worth the effort in packing it all up and partly—"

"As an emergency shelter." Lara interrupted, "Just in case anyone got stranded out here, they'd have somewhere to wait for a rescue team. I'm right aren't I big brother?"

"Exactly." Cal replied, "And what would you say was an essential feature about emergency shelters baby sister?" and Lara frowned briefly.

"Rations?" Lara asked, "Or air? No wait, the planet's got a type one atmosphere. So it's rations."

"No. Try again." Cal said.

"Okay, so not rations. What about medical supplies?"

"Wrong again."

"Okay I give up." Lara said, "Tell me what the most important thing about an emergency shelter is."

"A beacon that not only guides in a rescue team, but also leads anyone stuck here to safety." Cal said and he pointed to the sensor display.

"But I don't see a beacon." Lara said,

"Which means someone must have shut it down." Cal said and Lara smiled.

"Someone like Kyle Jenner." She said.

"Maybe. Or maybe some other outlaws that didn't want visitors to their new hideout. But either way that's where I want to begin."

"Okay, then let's go." Lara said, pointing through the canopy again.

"That's precisely what I'm doing." Cal replied.

"Oh yeah." Lara said and then all of a sudden she turned and punched him in the arm.

"Hey! What was that for?" he exclaimed.

"You called me a baby. Stop doing that." Lara replied and she folded her arms.

Cal continued piloting the *Bright Hope* towards the nameless planet ahead of them while Lara switched her attention between the sensor display and the data available on the outpost left behind by the survey team. The ship began to shake as it entered the atmosphere and outside a red glow of superheated air rushing past the hull obscured everything else.

"Hey brother, you're flying the wrong way." Lara said when she noticed the difference between the *Bright Hope's* heading and the location of the outpost according to the survey data.

"No I'm not." Cal replied.

"Yes you are. If you keep going this way we'll land about twenty kilometres east of it."

"Ten actually." Cal said.

"What? So you're doing this deliberately?" Lara asked.

"No." Cal said, "I think that it would be a better idea to fly this ship right up to the outpost and land it there so that Kyle Jenner knows that we've arrived and can ambush us. That's a much better idea than landing further away and then sneaking up to the outpost on foot."

"And if he senses us coming?"

"We're still less noticeable than the ship." Cal commented, "Trust me, this is the best way. Worst case scenario we have to walk to the outpost and back and Kyle's not there."

"I hope you're right." Lara said, "Because I've got a bad feeling about this."

Kyle had scanned the skies using a combination of his Force enhanced senses and a set of wide scan binocs that had been left behind by a previous occupant of the outpost. He heard what sounded like distant thunder, but from the visible atmospheric conditions Kyle knew that the sound was not caused by the weather. Turning in the direction the sound had come from he caught sight of a vapour trail in the sky that could only be caused by a starship having passed through a layer of cloud as it entered the atmosphere and sure enough, at the end of that trail he could just about make out the shape of a ship. It was too far away for him to be able to make out the class of ship, let alone identify a specific vessel but given the premonition from the Force he did not need to see it to know which ship it was. It was the *Bright Hope* bringing Cal and Lara Udra.

It was obvious that they were not going to land here at the outpost, but Kyle knew that this would be their final destination. Most likely they would land their own ship at a safe distance and they approach on foot to make themselves as undetectable as possible. However, Kyle had no intention of being caught he unawares. Instead he would take action to seize the initiative from the Udras and with this in mind he turned around and headed back inside the outpost, specifically heading for his own ship, the vaya-class *Destiny's Shadow*.

The wings of the *Bright Hope* folded to allow the ship to land and Cal and Lara remained in their seats while Cal shut down the ship's systems to conserve power.

"Okay let's get our gear." Cal said as he got up and left the cockpit, Lara following him. In the corridor outside they were met by Ghost, the dog wandering up to them with his tail wagging in anticipation of leaving the ship, "Not just yet Ghost, there's a good dog." Cal commented as he and Lara continued on to the storage room where most of their larger equipment was kept.

"So what weapons are we taking?" Lara asked.

"All of them." Cal replied, "Kyle's too dangerous for us to risk being caught with the wrong one." And then he picked up a pulse wave rifle that had a grenade launcher mounted beneath its barrel and passed it to Lara who frowned as she took it.

"You never give this to me without me reminding you it's my turn to use it." She said.

"Which technically it isn't." Cal said, "But I'd rather you had the launcher for this mission. I'll be taking this."

And then he picked up a long barrelled projectile rifle with a bulky optical scope mounted on top of it.

"The RAP rifle?" Lara commented, "How many rounds do we have for that?"

'RAP' stood for 'Rocket Assisted Projectile' and the weapon launched its ammunition like a conventional slug thrower before a tiny rocket motor ignited to maintain the projectile's velocity and heading. Though the weapons were too complex to be considered practical military weapons they did have certain useful features relating to how they operated, chiefly that a guidance system could be built into the rounds so that they would fly according to commands broadcast from the optical scope. This particular rifle had been taken from a would be assassin on the war torn world of Tepillos who had unsuccessfully attempted to use it against the Udras.

"Two full magazines of standard rounds, plus one of guided." Cal told Lara as he tucked the magazines of unguided ammunition into his belt and then loaded the one filled with guided ammunition into the weapon,

"If I can just shoot Kyle from six hundred metres away then I'll be a lot happier than if we have to take him on up close and personal. So far that hasn't gone too well for us." Then he set the RAP weapon down and picked up another pulse wave rifle, this one lacking a grenade launcher.

"Won't two rifles slow you down?" Lara asked as Cal loaded this second weapon as well.

"I won't be carrying it." He replied and then he looked towards the doorway and called out, "Shorty! We need you in here."

There was the sound of heavy footfalls and a massive LB-series labour droid appeared in the doorway, bending down slightly to reduce its two point three metre height enough for it to be able to fit through.

"Take this." Cal said, hooking the sling of the pulse wave rifle over one of the droid's arms before turning round to face the other way, "And we need you to carry that as well." He told Shorty, pointing to a case of

projectile grenades. Finally he turned to Lara again and added, "Now we just need to get our sidearms and we can be on our way."

Ghost was the first down the *Bright Hope's* access ramp as it opened; the dog darted down it and ran a short distance before turning and barking back at Cal and Lara as they too came down the ramp cradling their rifles. Finally Shorty followed them carrying the equipment that was considered too heavy for the Jedi. As Cal sealed the ramp behind them Lara looked around.

"Not a terribly inviting place is it?" she said as she took in the largely barren landscape, only a few clumps of dark green vegetation scattered amongst the grey rocks and dust that made up the rest of the terrain.

"Why else do you suppose the planet was never colonised?" Cal said as he finished securing the ship and joined her. Then he took out his datapad and looked at it briefly, "The outpost is over there." He said, pointing, "If we get going now we should make it in about three or four hours."

Lara sighed.

"We need to get a speeder." She said. Then she smiled and added, "But I'll drive it. You'll just lose it and we'll have to pay for it."

"Oh come on." Cal protested, "That was in our first week here. It was almost two years ago now."

"Maybe so big brother, but it still happened." Lara said as she began to walk in the direction of the outpost.

Inside the hangar where the ship was kept, the *Destiny's Shadow's* sensors could not be used to track the *Bright Hope* as it descended. Instead Kyle gave the Udras a few minutes during which time he expected them to land and disembark from their ship before he powered up his own ship and took off. However, rather than rapidly gain altitude Kyle just hovered his ship a few metres off the ground, scanning with his passive sensors just in case he had been mistaken about the Jedi's plans to approach on foot and they were instead flying towards him at low level. If that were the case then the *Destiny's Shadow's* sensors would likely detect not only the *Bright Hope*, but also any sensor sweeps that it was running. Detecting nothing Kyle began to move off, keeping his speed and altitude low for now. Rather than head directly in the direction he had seen the *Bright Hope* go he flew off at an angle to this with the intention of circling around to where he estimated that the Jedi would have landed. Only then would he gain altitude so that he could search for their ship.

3.

"The outpost should be on the other side of that hill." Cal said, pointing to a low rise up ahead. Then he waved Ghost towards him, "Here boy." He said, maintaining a low tone of voice this close to their target. The dog rushed over to him, wagging his tail as Cal hooked leash to his collar and then handed the other end to Shorty, "Shorty stay here with Ghost." Cal instructed the droid and it nodded its understanding, "Okay Lara, let's see what's over the other side of this hill." He added.

Keeping low, the two Jedi moved quietly towards the top of the hill before lying down just short of the crest and peering over. Both Cal and Lara made use of their weapons' optical sights as they surveyed the outpost, ready to take a shot if they saw an opportunity.

Below them lay the outpost, a large structure made of half a dozen prefabricated modules assembled in place in a semi-circle around a larger core module and all connected by short corridors.

"Looks like Phillos." Lara commented with a frown, remembering how on a trip to the Phillos system she had been framed for murder.

"Nowhere near as big though." Cal pointed out and he looked up from his sight and at the large outpost module in the centre of the structure, "I'd say that one looks like the hangar. If anyone's been here recently then there ought to be some evidence of them there."

"What if it's a trap?" Lara asked as she continued to look down her rifle sight, searching for anything that looked out of the ordinary. The problem with this was that she did not really know what was ordinary for this place. The structure was clearly old, older than her or Cal in fact, but it was still intact with no signs of having been patched or rebuilt anywhere. Even the communication antenna looked intact even though Lara knew that it was not transmitting the usual beacon, "Kyle could be waiting for us down there."

"I don't sense him." Cal replied.

"That's not exactly a guarantee though is it?" Lara pointed out.

"No, I know." Cal admitted, "But I don't sense any danger either."

"So what-" Lara began but before she could finish her sentence Cal suddenly leapt to his feet and charged over the top of the hill, "Oh I've got a really bad feeling about this." Lara then said as she got to her feet as well and ran after him, "Cal! Wait!" she called out but he kept on running, heading for the hangar.

Cal skidded to a halt beside the main door to the hangar where he propped his rifle up against the wall and drew the pulse wave blaster from its holster on his leg.

"Don't wait for the door to finish opening." He told Lara as he held his hand over the control panel, "The moment it starts opening go. I'll be right behind you."

"Behind me? Why do I have to go first?" Lara responded.

"Because you're smaller than I am." Cal pointed out, "You'll fit before me. Don't worry, I really will be right behind you. I promise."

"You better be. Or else I'm going to kick that fat ass of yours." Lara said and she crouched down in front of the door and then nodded, "Okay now." She said and Cal hit the control to open the door.

Immediately there was a rumbling sound as the door began to rise open and Lara rolled beneath it before she leapt back to her feet and looked around, her rifle raised and ready to fire. Behind her Cal slipped under the still rising door as well and lifted his blaster as he took in his surroundings.

Big enough to hold a ship about the size of the *Bright Hope*, the hangar was empty. Whatever vehicles and ships had been stored here over the years were gone now and the various tool cabinets positioned around the edges hung to reveal their empty interiors.

"Okay this room is clear." Cal said as he returned his blaster to his holster.

"So Kyle's not been here then?" Lara asked.

"All we know is that he's not here now." Cal said, "But I think that we ought to take a look around before we dismiss the idea that he was ever here."

It took Kyle some time to locate the *Bright Hope*. Cal and Lara had not tried to camouflage the ship, but they had landed it closer to the outpost than he had expected and he had initially searched in the wrong area.

Now however he had what he wanted – access to the Udras' ship.

He brought his own ship in low and hovered close to the *Bright Hope* while he ran an active scan. It no longer mattered whether his scan was detected since at this distance anyone inside the Jedi vessel would be aware of his presence already. But when his scans revealed no one to be aboard he set his own ship down next the Jedi's.

Exiting his ship Kyle walked around the *Bright Hope*, studying it closely. He did not even bother to try opening any of the hatches, guessing that they would all be sealed. In fact he did not plan to enter the ship at all. It was quite possible that Cal and Lara would have set up a system to warn them if anyone went aboard in their absence and Kyle wanted his presence on the planet concealed from them for as long as he could. That was also the reason why he had not simply fired on the *Bright Hope* from the air. Though it was an easy target the effect of its destruction would probably be noticeable even as far away as the outpost. What he needed to do was inflict enough damage to keep the ship on the ground without doing anything to alert the Udras to his activities.

The *Bright Hope's* landing gear and wings were obvious targets. The hydraulic lines that enabled these to be extended or retracted were exposed while the ship was on the ground and Kyle slashed at each of these with his lightsaber. This would not prevent the ship from taking off, but it would severely limit its speed and handling while in the atmosphere. To really disable the ship however, Kyle had to target its engines. The repulsorlift engines were the key. The hyperdrive was non-functional within the gravity well of a planet and the ion drives put out so much thrust that if they were fired while the *Bright Hope* was still on the ground they risked causing a back blast that would destroy the ship.

The repulsorlift units on the *Bright Hope* were located along the ventral surface of the hull to provide lift, on the wings for manoeuvring and at the rear for forward thrust. To be certain of immobilising the Kyle would have to disable all of these and once again he began to attack the ship with his lightsaber.

Cal and Lara summoned Shorty to join them in the hangar with Ghost and Cal swapped his RAP rifle for the pulse wave rifle the droid had carried for him and slung the new weapon over his own shoulder.

"Okay let's see what's been left behind." He said as he crouched down beside Ghost and he disconnected the leash, "Go on boy. See what you can find." He said and then he let go of the dog.

Ghost immediately began to search the hangar, sniffing the air and every available surface.

"That's your big plan?" Lara asked, "Let the dog do it?"

"Why else would I have brought him?" Cal said, "Look Lara, Kyle's been here. I can sense his presence but he's obviously not here now. If Ghost can pick up a scent then maybe we can find some clue that he's left here."

"Well it looks like he needs to get through that door." Lara said, pointing to where Ghost was pawing at a hatchway.

Cal went over to the hatch and opened it, watching as Ghost the darted through and ran down the corridor. "Come on then." Cal told Lara, "We better follow him before he eats whatever he finds." Then he looked at Shorty, "You too. Come on." And the droid nodded before following Cal.

Ghost led the jedi to a module that appeared to be designed for habitation and to a large room filled with tables and chairs laid out in a way that made it obvious that this had been a mess hall at some point. Ghost then ran into an adjoining room that was connected to the mess by a doorway and a large hole in the wall.

"Nice work Cal." Lara said, "You let Ghost go and he went straight to the kitchen. What was that you were saying about him eating what he finds?"

Cal sighed and went into the kitchen where he found Ghost licking a plate that he had been able to knock off a work surface and he frowned.

"Problem big brother?" Lara said as she entered the room behind Cal to she saw him trying to pull Ghost away from the plate.

"No I'm just fine." Cal replied and then Ghost sudden stopped licked the plate and lifted his head. Then he darted the door leading back into the mess hall where he began to bark.

"What's got into Ghost?" Lara said.

"Looks like a re-hydrated protein block." Cal replied, holding up the plate.

"No I meant-"

"Yes I know what you meant." Cal said as he stood up and approached Ghost, "Normally he only behaves this way when he's heard something."

"Kyle?" Lara commented.

"I don't think so. I didn't hear a ship." Cal replied and he placed a hand on Ghost's head, "Quiet boy." He said but the dog continued to bark, "Here. Now shush." Cal added, reaching into his robes and producing a pack of dog biscuits. Ghost immediately ceased barking as Cal held out a biscuit and then dropped it to the floor where Ghost scooped it up in his mouth and began to chew.

"So now we just need to-" Lara began.

"Quiet." Cal interrupted and he held out a dog biscuit towards Lara.

"Oh ha-ha." Lara said, "Very-" and then she was cut off as Cal pushed the biscuit into her mouth.

"I said be quiet. Just listen for a moment." Cal said as Lara removed the biscuit and placed it on the floor in front of Ghost, "There. Did you hear that?"

"Hear what?"

"There it was again. A tapping sound." Cal said.

"Like machinery?" Lara asked.

"No. Too irregular. I think it's someone banging against something." Cal replied and he unslung his rifle, "I think we should check this out."

Kyle flew the *Destiny's Shadow* back towards the outpost. But although he wanted to get there quickly he was also still keen to conceal his presence, so he set the ship down about five hundred metres from the outpost and out of sight of it behind the same hill that Cal and Lara had used to study the structure. Calmly he then shut down the systems of the *Destiny's Shadow* and disembarked from it, walking directly towards the outpost.

Lara followed Cal from the mess hall, both Jedi keeping their rifles raised and ready to fire. Cal focused on the distant sound and headed for it in as direct a path as possible. This took them deeper into the outpost module to a corridor lined with doors along each side and Cal froze.

"Do you sense that?" he asked.

Fear.

Despair.

Lara nodded.

"Cal, I've got a bad feeling about this." She said softly then from behind the Jedi ghost barked again and he rushed past them to one of the doors, pawing at it.

"He's got the scent of something hasn't he?" Lara said.

"I think so." Cal responded, then he patted his leg, "Ghost, here boy." He said, his voice still low. But then there was another banging that clearly came from behind the door and Ghost barked again.

"Please." A muffled voice said unexpectedly and Cal and Lara looked at one another. Then both of them rushed to the door and Cal hit the control to open it before he jumped back suddenly when the woman who had been sat just inside the room beyond the door fell into the corridor, "Please." She whispered as she lay on the floor of the corridor, "Food. Please."

"Lara quick, help me with her." Cal said and as Lara rushed forwards Cal crouched down and lifted the woman into a sitting position, pushing Ghost back as he tried to get closer to smell her.

"Here." Lara said as she pulled a ration bar from a belt pouch and held it out towards the woman who promptly snatched it from her, ripped open the packaging and began to eat it as fast as she could, "You're welcome." Lara muttered and Cal glared at her.

"Who are you?" he asked the woman and she swallowed a mouthful of the ration bar before she replied.

"Charity. Charity Crassis." She said and Cal and Lara's faces both fell.

"Oh hell no." Lara exclaimed.

Cal took a look inside the room Charity had been in and noticed the sparse nature of the furnishings, two plain chairs, a simple bed and a portable refresher unit. Then he noticed that the controls to the door on the inside of the room had been smashed, confirming his suspicion that the room was an improvised cell and that Charity had been held prisoner there rather than becoming trapped accidentally.

"Help me get her to her feet." Cal said to Lara, "We'll take her back to the mess hall."

"No!" Charity snapped suddenly, "We need to leave. We need to leave right now, before he comes back."

"He?" Cal commented, "You mean Kyle Jenner?"

"Yes. Yes, Kyle Jenner. He brought me here and left me in there without any food." Charity replied, "It was Kyle Jenner. The Jedi knight. We have to go or he'll kill us all."

"Kyle Jenner is no Jedi." Cal said, "Not any more."

"And he won't be killing us." Lara added, "We're Jedi and we can handle ourselves."

"No, you can't." Charity said, "Not against him. He's too powerful. He killed everyone else when he abducted me. Even the Mandalorian guards."

"Let's get her to the mess hall." Cal said again, "Then hopefully we can find out why he brought you here."

4.

Tracks in the dirt revealed that someone had come this way since Kyle had left the outpost. Crouching down he studied them, wanting to assess the strength of his opponents. It would do him no good to charge into the outpost to confront Cal and Lara if they also happened to be accompanied by a squad of Republic marines. A quick inspection confirmed that any fears about the Udras being supported by significant military forces were unfounded however, though the two young Jedi were clearly not alone. In addition to the boot prints of Cal and Lara, Kyle saw the tracks of some form of animal; most likely a canine of some type and also the heavy imprints left behind by a large droid. Kyle doubted that the Jedi would have brought a battle droid with them so from the depth of the tracks he guessed that the droid was a heavy labour model instead and as such did not represent a threat to him at all. The canine was another matter though. It was clearly of a fair size and although Kyle was confident he could fight it off should it attack him, he had to take into account that the animal would be attacking in support of Cal and Lara rather than alone and also that a dog's senses could surpass those of a human Jedi.

Kyle could just leave of course. With their ship disabled the Jedi would be powerless to follow him and he could even opt to destroy the outpost from the air. However, simply killing Cal and Lara was not what Kyle hoped to be able to do, though it remained an option if necessary. Kyle wanted one or both of them to join him.

Charity wasted no time in eating the food placed in front of her. The outpost's kitchen was still well stocked with various rations and Lara laid out several packets that were labelled as ready to eat. Beside her Ghost looked on, waiting for something to either be accidentally dropped or offered to him.

"Slow down." Lara said as Charity ripped open another packet, "You'll get indigestion." But Charity continued to eat.

"So why don't you tell us what Kyle Jenner wanted with you." Cal said.

"He just asked a bunch of questions about my family." Charity replied between mouthfuls, "And the others."

"Others?" Lara commented, "What others?"

"My guess would be the other Founding Families." Cal said and Charity nodded.

"He kept asking about their long term plans." She said, "I told him I didn't know."

"He'd be able to sense a lie you know." Lara pointed out.

"But I wasn't lying. I don't know anything about what the Families do. I don't care about any of that. So long as I've enough money I don't see the point in running the risk of hunting for things that have been lost for centuries. That's why I've done my best to keep away from them for the past couple of years." Charity said.

"So that's why we've never met you." Lara commented as Cal stared at Charity, trying to pick up on any hint of deception but finding nothing. Then he glanced at his sister and nodded.

"So what did Kyle do then?" Lara asked Charity.

"He left me in that room, that's what. Left me to starve." Charity said.

"Well don't worry about that." Cal said, "You're safe now."

"Oh no, not again." Lara said, placing her face in her palm.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Cal asked as both he and Charity looked at her.

"Oh come on Cal, we've been here before remember? The daughter of one of the Founding Families gets kidnapped, you swoop in and rescue them and then you both fall in love."

Charity coughed, spitting out the food she was chewing at that moment.

"What?" she exclaimed and Cal winced.

"I am not going to fall in love with her Lara." Cal said sternly, "Gayal was—"

"Gayal?" Charity snapped, "You mean Gayal Karn? That bone idle, money grabbing, immoral, scheming, rancor cow?"

"Oh, you've met her." Lara said and she grinned at Cal.

"She married my father!" Charity yelled, "She's younger than I am and he's in his seventies. She's just after his money. Her family cut her off and now she needs someone else to sponge off."

"I think we ought to leave." Cal said, getting up from his chair, "We can take Miss Crassis back to her family."

"Ah." Charity said.

"I've got a bad feeling about this Cal." Lara said.

"What's wrong?" Cal asked.

"Well it's just that I'm not supposed to go near them." Charity replied.

"Why not?" Cal responded, folding his arms.

"We had a bit of a disagreement." She answered, frowning, "That vacc head brother of mine came to my apartment and threatened me. He told me to stay on Delvad and then they did nothing while Kyle Jenner kidnapped me."

Cal sighed.

"Okay, since I'm guessing that you don't want to be left here we'll have to sort something else out for you." He said.

"Oh no!" Lara snapped, "She is not staying with us."

"I never said she was." Cal replied.

"Good, because she's not." Lara said, "I don't care if she is the only member of the Founding Families who's not one hundred percent evil."

"Are you two really jedi?" Charity asked.

"Yes we are." Lara replied, "Why? What else would we be?"

"Well you seem more like kowikian monkey-lizards. Drunken kowikian monkey-lizards wearing thick mittens, blindfolds and roller skates in fact." Charity said.

"Perhaps you'd prefer it back in your cell." Lara muttered and Cal glared at her.

"One of us should go for the ship." He said, "I don't think Charity's up to the walk just yet."

"You go." Lara said, "If I leave you here with her alone who knows what'll happen."

Cal handed his rifle to Lara.

"Take this. It'll just weigh me down." He told her before adding, "I'll be back as soon as I can and we'll get out of here."

Kyle watched from behind a moisture vaporator unit as Cal emerged from the outpost and began to walk away from it. He followed a different path to the one his tracks leading to the outpost showed he had taken on his arrival, preferring a route that was not as steep and Kyle grinned as he saw that Cal would not discover the *Destiny's Shadow* if he continued on his current path.

All of a sudden Cal stopped and looked around, Kyle's reaction to the course he was taking having triggered a slight tremor in the Force that Cal had detected. But Kyle's presence in the Force was not enough for Cal to detect him through it and he did not see the former jedi knight as he watched from his hiding place.

Convinced that the tremor had been nothing important Cal turned and continued on his way.

From the direction Cal was heading in Kyle could tell that he was returning to the *Bright Hope* and he considered how long it would take the jedi to discover the damage that Kyle had inflicted to the ship. Then there was the question of whether Cal would be able to alert his sister to Kyle's continued presence. It seemed likely that both jedi would be carrying point-to-point communication links and the typical twenty-five kilometre range of such devices placed the *Bright Hope* well within transmission range. This meant that a warning could be sent instantly without needing Cal to make it back to the outpost. But even without this return trip Kyle estimated that he still had three or four hours before Cal reached his ship, more than enough time for him to deal with Lara.

Charity and Lara sat in the mess hall without speaking. Shorty looked on, but the bulky droid was incapable of speech and Ghost just sat on the floor beside Lara while she stroked him.

"So how far away did you leave your ship?" Charity asked, getting impatient with waiting for Cal to return.

"It took us about three hours to get here." Lara replied without looking up from Ghost and Charity sighed.

"You ought to get a speeder then." Charity said.

"We don't need a speeder." Lara said, despite having made the same point as Charity earlier on, "Besides, Cal would just lose it."

"Well I think you should get one." Charity said.

"Are you offering to pay for it?" Lara replied, glaring at Charity.

Then, before Charity could reply Ghost got to his feet, stared at the doorway and barked.

"Perhaps your brother moves faster without you to slow him down." Charity commented.

"I doubt it." Lara replied, "Besides, I've not heard any engines. Have you?"

"No but-" Charity began before Ghost suddenly darted to the doorway and into the corridor outside.

"Ghost come back!" Lara yelled and she ran after him.

"Does this happen much?" Charity asked, looking up at Shorty. But the droid just aimed its eyepiece at her unable to reply.

Outside in the corridor Lara followed as Ghost ran down it and around a corner, passing through another doorway as he vanished from view.

"Ghost get back here." Lara called out as she rounded the corner and then ground to a halt when she saw Kyle Jenner crouched down and stoking the dog.

"Hello Lara." He said with a smile, "I think we need to talk."

It was only then that Lara realised she had left her rifle back in the mess hall. Though with Ghost in the line of fire she doubted that she would have attempted to shoot Kyle even if she had brought the weapon with her.

"You should know by now that I mean you no harm." Kyle said, getting to his feet and extending his arms out in front of himself.

"Yeah right." Lara replied with a frown and she drew her lightsaber from her belt, igniting it with a 'snap-hiss'. "Is this really how you want to do this padawan?" Kyle asked, "I have twenty years more experience than you."

"That just makes you old." Lara replied as she edged forwards, holding her lightsaber out in front of her, "Ghost, come here boy." She called out and Ghost calmly walked back to Lara and waited, "Good boy. Now stay."

"Lara there is no need for this." Kyle said.

"Oh I think there is." She responded, "Now get down on your knees and put your hands behind your head. In the name of the Galactic Republic you are under arrest."

"Really?" Kyle asked as he knelt down, clasping his hands behind his head, "On what charge?"

"Oh how about murder, assault, theft and quite possibly treason?" Lara asked and then she took out her PTP link and moved it towards her mouth, intending to summon Cal back to help her secure Kyle.

All of a sudden Kyle thrust both hands forwards and unleashed two powerful telekinetic blasts. One of these was directed down the corridor at Ghost and the dog yelped as he was thrown back through a doorway. At the same time the other blast struck Lara and she was thrown off her feet, dropping both her PTP link and lightsaber. Fortunately the weapon deactivated as soon as her grip on it was released and it clattered harmlessly to the floor.

Kyle leapt to his feet and waved a hand towards the doorway he had pushed Ghost through and before the dog could rush back through it the door dropped shut, leaving Ghost unable to do anything other than bark in frustration from the other side.

With Kyle momentarily distracted Lara reached out through the Force and summoned her lightsaber back to her grasp, reactivating it as she got back to her feet.

"Leave my dog alone!" she yelled but Kyle just stared at her as he drew his own lightsaber and ignited it.

"Well?" he asked, "What are you waiting for?" and then Lara charged.

Almost without thinking Kyle positioned his lightsaber to block Lara's charge and she was forced to stop as the two blades met and locked together. With both hands she tried to push her blade closer but Kyle held it back singled handed.

"I am not your enemy!" he hissed, "If I had wanted to I could have killed you many times over since you came to this sector."

Lara pulled back and positioned her lightsaber for the attack she expected to come next, hoping that she would be quick enough to dodge or parry it. But the blow never came; instead Kyle shut down his lightsaber and also took a step backwards.

"See?" he said, "We can both be civilised."

"Yeah. Right." Lara replied as she continued to back away from Kyle, making her way to the door that had the muffled sound of barking coming from behind it, "Because kidnapping people and leaving them in small rooms to starve is really civilised."

"Ah. So you found Charity." Kyle said, "Am I to assume therefore that you let her out?"

"Of course we did. Did you really expect my brother would do anything else when confronted by a damsel in distress?" Lara said and Kyle frowned.

"Do you even know who she is?" he asked.

"Yeah, she's the daughter of Erill Crassis."

"She's one of the Founding Families. Surely by this time you of all people understand that they are evil."

"From my point of view you're evil as well." Lara responded.

"Then you are lost." Kyle said and he waved his hand at the door behind her, opening it so that Ghost could come rushing through. The dog charged forwards as far as Lara and then stood beside her barking and growling at Kyle, "Go." He said, "Return to your friend Charity. But I suggest you ask her how a Shill Security assault force was able to locate the Crassis family estate on Lovas recently. I believe that you were there weren't you? You and your brother. Where is he by the way? I'd like to give him my regards."

But rather than reply Lara turned and ran towards the door.

"Ghost, here boy." She called out and Ghost turned on the spot and followed her.

"Just ask her how they found the house." Kyle called out after her. Then he noticed Lara's PTP link lying discarded on the floor and he smiled. Then he walked over to it and brought his heel down on the device, stamping repeated until the case first cracked and the next blow crushed it under his foot.

Cal continued to run across the barren ground towards where he had left the Bright Hope when he suddenly felt a tremor in the Force and he ground to a halt.

Cal I need you.

"Lara." He said. The disturbance had the feel of an unconscious burst of emotion carried through the Force rather than a specific attempt to communicate with him, something Cal doubted Lara was capable of anyway. Concerned he reached to where he kept his PTP link and activated it, "Lara can you hear me?" he transmitted but in return all he got was silence, "Lara come in. It's Cal." He added, but again there was no reply. It was the silence that bothered Cal. Had there been something interfering with the signal then he would have expected it to manifest as random noise, but in the absence of this he could only assume that Lara was not able to reply for some other reason, "I've got a bad feeling about this." Cal said to himself as he put the PTP link away. Then he turned around and began to run back towards the outpost.

5.

"Oh there you are." Charity said as Lara came back into the mess hall with Ghost and she look up at Shorty, "Your droid isn't much for conversation you know." Then she noticed that Lara was glaring at her as she returned to the table, "What's wrong?" Charity asked.

"How did Shill Security find your father's mansion on Lovas?" Lara asked, "From what I hear the address wasn't exactly made public. Probably because the last thing your family wanted was for Han Shill to send some of his trained killers there to attack it."

"Ah." Charity said.

Fear.

"Worried about something?" Lara said, "Perhaps concerned that if Cal finds out that its your fault his precious Gayal could have been killed then he'll decide we should just leave you here to wait for the next passing ship to take you home."

"But I-" Charity began before Lara interrupted her.

"Oh wait you can't go home can you? You said it yourself, they kicked you out. It was because you turned on them wasn't it? Turned on them and told the other families where Gayal was being hidden." She said.

"I didn't know I swear!" Charity exclaimed, getting to her feet, "When Heddren Drud came to me about getting rid of Gayal I thought that he was just going to use some legal trick to get the marriage annulled. I didn't think that he'd have Han launch an all out attack. I promise you that's the truth."

"Sit down and shut up." Lara said sternly, pushing Charity back into her chair. Then she picked up both pulse wave rifles and headed for the doorway, "Shorty barricade those other doors." She ordered without looking directly at the droid, "Use tables, chairs, whatever you can find. I want to make sure that this is the only way in and out of here."

"Where are you going?" Charity asked.

"Nowhere." Lara replied as she set down one rifle against the door while keeping the one with the under slung grenade launcher in her hands and aiming it out into the corridor, "But Kyle Jenner's decided to make an appearance and I'd rather be ready for him if he decides to try and put you back in that cell. I'll let Cal decide what to do with you when he gets back with the *Bright Hope*."

Cal ran as fast as he could, drawing on the Force to bolster his endurance. This was not enough for him to make it back to the outpost before night fell, but he made it there without sensing any further troubling disturbances in the Force. Just as he was nearing the outpost he slid to a complete stop when he spotted the tail end of a starship sticking out from behind a hill ahead of him and all of a sudden he wished that he hadn't left his rifle, both rifles with Lara. Drawing his lightsaber instead Cal crept towards the ship, keeping his lightsaber inactive so that the light and sound given off by its blade would not give him away to anyone lying in wait for him on the other side of the hill.

As Cal rounded the hill he could see that the ship was a vaya-class scout. Less than half the size of a delaya-class ship like the *Bright Hope*, the vaya-class vessel was much slower in realspace and carried a much lighter armament. But it was ideal for a single being that wanted to move rapidly between star systems thanks to its state of the art hyperdrive, though again the *Bright Hope* was slightly faster. This particular ship appeared to be completely shut down but Cal still made his way closer in a cautious manner. As he reached the access ramp he found it in the raised position and sealed, preventing him from boarding the vessel without breaking in. This thought temped Cal, but when he looked at the ground beneath the ship he saw not only the indentation left when the access ramp had been lowered but also a single set of tracks leading away.

"Kyle." He hissed, scowling and then his eyes widened, "Lara. Oh no." he said and he broke into another run, heading for the outpost as fast as he could.

Kyle had made sure that he knew the layout of every one of the outpost modules when he set up camp here. The danger of overlooking something that could bring others here had been too great to leave to chance. As it happened the only thing that would guide anyone here was the automated beacon that had been simple to shut down. But the exercise had also revealed everything about the outpost's systems to him, including how it was powered.

Fusion power was the de-facto standard for power generation across the galaxy, whether it was nuclear or hypermatter. But the outpost had been configured to exploit the nature of the nameless planet it had been

constructed on and while there were fusion generators for use in emergencies, the primary source of power was a geothermal system that offered unlimited amounts of energy without the need to refuel it. It was also much easier to sabotage without risking an explosion. Simply shutting down the generator meant that either of the Jedi would be able to restart it just as easily and Kyle did not want that happening. So he located the pipe through which water was pumped down into the ground and swung his lightsaber at it, the blade just about long enough to sever it. Immediately Kyle leapt back to avoid the water that came gushing out of the breach. Foul smelling and stagnant, the water was undoubtedly unsafe to drink. But all Kyle was interested in was that it would not be used to create the steam needed to drive the generator turbines. This still left the backup fusion generators though and although sabotaging them directly ran the risk of triggering an explosion, the control panel remained vulnerable. Kyle used his lightsaber to destroy these as well and waited as the sound of the geothermal generator began to falter as what steam pressure remained finally gave out and the outpost was plunged into darkness.

Charity let out a shriek as the lights went out and Lara jumped.

Fear.

"What's happened?" Charity exclaimed.

"Well at a guess I'd say that Kyle Jenner just cut the power." Lara replied.

"But why would he do that?" Charity asked.

"Perhaps because you're so afraid of the dark that he'll be able to track you from the other side of the planet." Lara said, "Now stay back there and stay quiet while I-" and then she stopped as she felt a presence in the Force close by, one so strong it could only come from someone Force-sensitive and she lined up her eye with the rifle's optical sight, making use of its low light capability.

Ahead of her she spotted a figure emerge from around a corner and she fired without thinking. The artificial spatial distortion sped down the corridor, but Lara's target dived out of the way and the blast impacted on the wall behind it and punched a fist-sized hole in it.

"Lara hold your fire! It's me!" Cal yelled.

"Call!" Lara called out, looking up from her weapon, "I didn't hear the *Bright Hope* arrive."

"That's because I didn't bring it." Cal replied as he ran to join her in the doorway of the mess hall, "I sensed that you may be in trouble so I just turned around and came back as quickly as I could."

"But I thought you were supposed to get the ship so that we could get out of here." Charity said, getting up and rushing towards the Jedi.

"I told you to stay back and keep quiet." Lara said.

Anger.

"Lara, what's wrong? What happened while I was gone?" Cal asked when he sensed his sister's anger.

"Kyle's turned up." She replied.

"Yes, I think I found his ship outside." Cal said.

"Well guess what he had to say Cal." Lara said and she looked at Charity before without waiting for her brother to reply she added, "Your new girlfriend here is the one that tipped off the Founding Families about where they could find your ex. She's the one that could have got us all killed."

"I told you it's not my fault." Charity protested.

"Your mouth is moving again." Lara said, scowling.

"Wait, back up a bit." Cal said, "Kyle Jenner was here and you spoke to him?"

"Well not here exactly. I think Ghost caught his scent and went after him. I went after Ghost and ran right into him in a corridor. That's when he told me about Charity being a scheming little laserbrain." Lara said.

Cal stared at her.

"What?" Lara asked.

"If you defeated Kyle Jenner in single combat then why did I discover you ready to shoot at anything that moved? Without bothering to properly identify your target I might add. Did your combat instructor teach you that in the Jedi Temple?" Cal replied.

"I didn't beat him of course. I know I'm no match for him on my own." Lara answered, "He let me go."

"He let you go." Cal repeated, "And why do you think he'd do that exactly?"

"Err." Lara said.

"He's trying to manipulate you Lara." Cal said sternly, "Pretty much every time we've met he's tried to convince us to join him and I'm willing to bet that he made you the same offer this time as well. Well? Did he or didn't he?"

"Kind of."

"Kind of. But you rejected him and then he told you about Charity selling out Gayal." Cal said.

"Hey, that's not fair. I didn't-" Charity protested before Cal held up his hand.

“Like my sister said, your mouth is moving again.” He said, interrupting her and Charity stopped talking. Then Cal turned back to Lara, “Now supposing you’d come rushing back here and started a fight with her because of your anger. What do you think the result of that would have been?” he asked her.

“I’d have killed her.” Lara replied.

“Exactly and then you could never go back to the Jedi Order. You’d have no choice but to join up with Kyle. That’s what he wanted Lara, for you to act on negative feelings and fall to the Dark Side.” Cal said. Then he smiled, “Fortunately for me though, my baby sister is smarter than that. Now pass me that other rifle down there. We’re going hunting.”

6.

With rifles in their hands the Jedi moved through the darkened corridors of the outpost while Charity, Ghost and Shorty followed behind them.

"Where are we going?" Charity asked, not having paid any attention while Cal and Lara had planned their strategy.

"To the power station." Cal told her, "Now keep quiet."

"The power station? But why?" Charity responded.

"Because that's where Kyle Jenner's trying to lead us." Lara said.

"Then why are we going there? Surely we should—" Charity began.

"Shorty shut her up." Cal said before she could finish and all of a sudden the loading droid reached down, grabbed hold of Charity with one hand and clamped the other over her mouth.

Cal and Lara looked at one another briefly and smiled.

"You know big brother, I think I preferred your other girlfriend." Lara said and Cal's smile turned to a frown, "Okay sorry, poor taste."

"Okay, the generator station should be just up ahead." Cal said and he darted forwards to a junction in the corridor and peered around it, "Yes this is it." He said softly, "Do you see the big doorway on the left?"

"Yeah I see it." Lara said as she joined her brother.

"Good. Then get ready to do your stuff." Cal said and he slung his pulse wave rifle back over his shoulder and then returned to where Shorty stood to unhook the RAP rifle instead. When he went back to the corner he knelt down beside Lara and they both took aim at the door to the power generation station.

"Ready?" Lara asked and Cal nodded, "Good." Lara said and her hand moved towards the trigger of her grenade launcher. There was a distinctive 'Pop!' as the weapon fired and the projectile shot through the open doorway.

Kyle had sensed the approach of the two Jedi. He could not tell exactly where they were located but knew they were close. He also knew that they would be unlikely to just give up and leave while they believed he was still close by, not that they could get very far without a functional starship. Cutting the power was a way for Kyle to draw Cal and Lara to the power generator station so he could confront them and he smiled as he prepared for them to come rushing through the door.

But what he actually got was the grenade from Lara's launcher.

Caught by surprise as the projectile bounced off a wall, Kyle was nevertheless able to dive out of the way before it detonated. He clamped his hands over his ears and opened his mouth in expectation of an explosion, but when the grenade went off there was a 'fizz' rather than a 'boom' and the room began to fill with thick, white smoke.

Kyle had not expected the Udras to make use of a grenade launcher. If he had then he would have picked somewhere else to confront them. But now he needed to get out of the room before it filled with smoke.

Under normal circumstances the outpost's ventilation system would have cleared it, but with the power out the system was not functioning and the smoke continued to fill the room. Kyle leapt to his feet and ran for the door, his lightsaber in his hand but inactive to avoid the blade giving him away in the darkness.

However, the optical sight on Cal's RAP rifle was adequate enough to allow him to spot Kyle as he emerged and he fired. There was a dull 'crack' as the projectile was fired, followed almost immediately after by the sound of its rocket motor igniting. At the same time the guidance system in the projectile activated, linking to the targeting system in the rifle's sight and as Cal swung the rifle around to follow the fast moving Kyle the projectile veered off to follow him.

At the last moment Kyle ignited his lightsaber and spun around on the spot to simply swat the projectile out of the air, a tiny explosion marking the moment that the energy blade ignited the explosive and fuel it contained. Cal fired again, twice in rapid succession but each time Kyle blocked the shots with his lightsaber before taking cover in another doorway.

"Is that how you want to do it Cal?" Kyle called out, "Is your skill with a lightsaber so poor that you dare not face me the Jedi way?"

"Why take the risk?" Cal responded as he stared down the sight of his rifle, waiting for Kyle to show himself. But in return there was only silence.

"Has he gone?" Lara whispered.

"I don't think so." Cal replied, "But he's spent so long here that it's become difficult to—"

Danger.

"Get back!" Cal snapped and he rolled away from the wall beside him and pulled Lara with him, just in time as Kyle's lightsaber blade was thrust through it from the other side.

As she landed beside her brother Lara fired a burst from her rifle at the hole Kyle had made, widening it and making two more close by. On the other hand Cal opted to discard his rifle and instead drew his lightsaber. "We'll take him together!" he exclaimed as he jumped up and charged towards the doorway that Kyle had vanished through. But as Cal neared it the former Jedi reappeared with his lightsaber in his hand to parry Cal's strike.

"I've tried to make this so easy for you." Kyle said to Cal, "You and your sister. The Founding Families are evil and if you want to stop them you must join me."

"No thanks." Cal replied as another of his blows was stopped, "I've already got a job." And Kyle snarled. "If you are not with me then you are against me." Kyle said and he suddenly unleashed a telekinetic blast of Force energy that hurled Cal across the corridor into the wall on the far side.

"Cal!" Lara yelled as she ran forwards and Kyle turned towards her. Then from the tips of the fingers on one hand he unleashed bolts of bright blue lightning that arced towards Lara. Immediately she ground to a halt and lifted her lightsaber to absorb the attack while at the same time Cal got back to his feet and struck again, swinging his lightsaber at Kyle in the hope he was too focused on Lara to react. However, once again Kyle parried with his own lightsaber and at the same time he ceased his attack on Lara and with his free hand he struck upwards to deliver a blow to Cal's arm that knocked his lightsaber from his grip. Cal jumped backwards, wincing in pain as his weapon dropped to the floor, shutting itself down as his grip on it was released and rolled away into the darkness.

"Now if you will not join me you will be destroyed." Kyle said and he lunged forwards. He expected Cal to either attempt to dive out of the way or remain in place as he looked for his lost lightsaber, so Kyle held his lightsaber horizontally so he could sweep it across to strike Cal no matter where he went. But rather than try and get his dropped lightsaber back Cal unexpectedly reached under his cloak and produced a second lightsaber, igniting it to reveal its bright red blade.

"Surprise." Cal said, grinning at Kyle as their weapons locked together.

"No." Kyle replied in amazement, "The weapon of a Sith. But how?"

"Just a little something the Artisan gave me." Cal said.

From the corner of his eye Kyle saw Lara approach and he whirled around, backing away from Cal to keep both Jedi in front of him. Without Kyle pinning him in place Cal reached out to where his own lightsaber had come to rest and now reached out through the Force to reclaim it, igniting it as soon as it was in his grip again.

Lara halted when she reached her brother and the two Jedi stood side by side facing Kyle, three lightsabers held out in front of them.

"So you'll be destroying us now will you?" Cal asked.

"Give up. You can't escape." Lara said, "We'll be right behind you every step of the way."

"I think not." Kyle replied, "The last time I saw your ship it wasn't in much condition to be going anywhere. Besides it would take you hours to reach it and by that time I'll be trillions of kilometres away in mine."

"You've got to reach it first." Cal said and Kyle smiled.

"I don't think that will be much of a problem." He said and he suddenly swung his lightsaber upwards to slice through the ceiling. This severed ceiling panels, support beams, utility ducts, wiring and the floor of the level above and destabilised the integrity of the ceiling enough that it collapsed.

"Cal look out!" Lara yelled as she tried to pull her brother back, but one of the falling panels came crashing down on top of Cal as the corridor was blocked, "Shorty! I need you here now!" Lara shouted, looking back towards the corner the droid was lurking behind and moments later it appeared, still holding onto Charity and with a hand clamped over her mouth to keep her quiet, "Help me with this." Lara said, pointing to the panel lying on top of Cal. Obediently the droid released its hold on Charity and walked over to the pile of debris. Then seemingly without any effort it reached down and lifted it up so that Lara could pull Cal out from beneath it.

"Cal are you okay?" she asked.

"Fine." He croaked in return, "Where's Kyle?"

"Err, either dead under all that or on the other side running away I think." Lara replied, looking at the debris blocking the corridor ahead of them and Cal sighed.

"Well we can check if his ship's still there on our way back to the *Bright Hope*." He said as he picked up both his lightsabers and returned them to his belt, keeping the Sith weapon out of Charity's sight.

"We're going to your ship?" Charity asked, "But I heard what Kyle said. He told you it couldn't fly."

"There's no telling whether or not that was true." Lara said.

"And even if it was we can wait there for Tarris to come pick us up." Cal added, "Either we send him a signal or he'll come looking for us when we don't check in."

"Oh great." Lara said, "Then we get to explain everything that happened here."

"What are you doing here Charity?" Salla Crassis asked as she walked across the hallway of the family mansion on Crassis Major.

"What?" Charity asked in reply, "No 'Charity it's so good to see that you're still alive'? Or maybe a 'We were so concerned about you when we heard about the estate on Delvad'? I have just spent a few weeks held captive in a tiny room by a madman and then two days on a broken down ship wondering if I'd ever be rescued."

"Just get to the point so I can have the guards throw you out." Salla said, "I believe Luke explained that you aren't welcome on Crassis Major any more."

"Ah yes, Luke. Where is my dear brother exactly? And my father? I'd rather be discussing this with a real Crassis." Charity said.

"Your father is unwell and my husband is taking care of family business in his absence." Salla said, "Now explain your presence."

"I'm moving back into my apartment here on Crassis major." Charity said, folding her arms, "With the estate on Delvad destroyed it's the only place I have left. Unless you'd rather I lived here maybe. Or perhaps on Lovas?"

Salla snarled.

"And why would you think that we would tolerate you returning to this planet?" she asked.

"Because my beloved sister in law I'm going to offer you something I know you want. A Sith artefact."

"A what?" Salla said, startled.

"You heard me." Charity said, "I know you're all desperate to get hold of anything to do with the Sith for your grand scheme and I can help you."

"Then hand it over." Salla said, "And I'll take your offer to Luke and your father."

"Ah, no I don't have it on me. But I know exactly where it is. Well sort of."

"What is it Charity?"

"It's a Sith lightsaber." Charity replied, "Cal Udra has it. He tried to hide it from me, but I heard Kyle Jenner identify it. Now is that worth something to you then?"

A smile spread across Salla's face and she embraced Charity.

"Why my dear sister in law," she said, "welcome home. We have been so concerned about you since we heard about the estate on Delvad."