

STAR WARS

TALES OF THE JEDI



I-IV: SALVAGE

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ELEVEN FAMILIES.
TWELVE GENERATIONS.
ONE EVIL.

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THREE HUNDRED YEARS AGO A SMALL GROUP OF INTREPID EXPLORERS SURVEYED THE NARTHIS SECTOR AND SOON IT BECAME ANOTHER PART OF THE GALACTIC REPUBLIC. THE DESCENDANTS OF MOST OF THESE EXPLORERS STILL RESIDE IN THE SECTOR, WHERE THEY HAVE BECOME BOTH FAMOUS AND WEALTHY. BUT DID THE ORIGINAL EXPLORERS DIVULGE EVERYTHING THEY DISCOVERED, OR HAVE THEIR FAMILIES BEEN HIDING SOME DARK SECRET EVER SINCE? NOW A JEDI KNIGHT HAS VANISHED WITHOUT TRACE AND THE INVESTIGATION WILL BRING ANOTHER FAMILY TO THE SECTOR. FROM NOW ON NOTHING WILL BE THE SAME...

SALVAGE

THE DISCOVERY OF A WRECKED STARFIGHTER OFFERS A CLUE TO THE DISAPPEARANCE OF KYLE JENNER. BUT CAL AND LARA FIND MORE THAN JUST A WRECKED SHIP WAITING FOR THEM...

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1 .

The crew of the trawler worked rapidly. The only way to make a decent living was for them to remove the fish from the line as it was reeled in and then be ready to bait the hooks freshly when it was unreeled once more. Like most vessels of its type, the trawler mounted a massive reel on each side of its hull, giving it two lines for its crew to work. At any time one would be in the water while the other was being worked, either baited or reeled in.

The trawler lurched suddenly and the crew cried out in alarm as it listed in the water and began to veer to one side.

"We're caught!" the pilot yelled from the bridge and he cut the power to the engines immediately. Another crewman stopped the winch that was letting out the line that was being baited before giving a shout.

"Quick!" he bellowed, "If that line breaks it'll cost a fortune to replace" and the entire crew on deck rushed towards the deployed line.

"I don't see anything." The first of the crew to make it to the far side said, staring over the side into the ocean below.

"What's happening?" the captain asked as he made it onto the deck.

"We're caught on something." He was told, "But the water's too deep to see what."

"Then we'll have to reel it in won't we?" the captain said.

"But what if the line breaks?" one of the crew asked.

"It's doing no good if we have to drop it. Is it?" the captain replied and he pushed past his crew to the winch control, "Now get ready lads," he said, "no point wasting whatever fish we've got."

The captain activated the winch and almost immediately the trawler began to shift in the water as whatever the line was hooked on refused to give way. Slowly he dialled up the power to the winch and the trawler shuddered again as the mystery object was dragged free. The crew stood along the side of the trawler and as hooks appeared with fish dangling from them they reached out and pulled them free before throwing into the storage tank behind them.

"I see something!" one of them suddenly called out and he pointed into the water. The captain stopped the winch and all of the crew looked over the side of the trawler.

"I don't believe it!" one of them called out, "What's that going to be worth?"

Cal Udra, the jedi knight assigned to the Narthis Sector banged on the bathroom door.

"Lara!" he shouted, "Get a move on."

The door slid open and Lara Udra, Cal's younger sister and padawan learner stepped through, rubbing her hair with a towel.

"What's the hurry?" she asked, "I thought we were supposed to be patient. Besides, you've already been in this morning."

"I don't need the bathroom, I need my apprentice."

"Why? What's happening?"

"We've just had a message from Delvad. Someone's just found Kyle Jenner's starfighter."

"Luke, may I ask what is happening in my own home?" Erill Crassis asked.

Luke Crassis looked up from the display he was studying and saw his father entering the room. The old man was as always accompanied by a protocol droid that pulled the oxygen cylinder that he depended on.

"Father, I'm sorry." Luke said, "I didn't want to disturb your rest."

"Rest, rest. It seems all I do nowadays is rest." Erill replied as he slowly made his way towards the nearest chair, his droid staying close enough to support him if needed. As soon as he reached the chair he sat down heavily and held out his hand. The droid extended its own arm and passed Erill the mask that was connected to the oxygen tank. Erill took it and placed it over his face before taking several deep breaths.

"Father, you should not be up." Luke said, "It is not good-"

"I will decide what is to be done in my house boy." Erill interrupted and he handed the mask back to his droid, "Thank you Victor." He said.

"You are welcome Master Erill." The droid replied.

"Now Luke," Erill went on, "tell me what you are doing with the resources of our family. The family I am still in charge of."

Luke handed a datapad to his father.

"We received this just over an hour ago from our people on Delvad." He explained as Erill looked at the image of a starfighter strapped to the deck of a fishing trawler.

"I have seen many like this in my time." Erill said, "Though not in such poor condition. Did it belong to who I think it did?"

"Kyle Jenner?" Luke said, "We think so. The markings certainly match his."

"And who else knows of this?"

"The Runns of course."

"They could hardly not, Delvad is their home."

"Indeed father. The Druds as well, Jaynie Drud was seen at the harbour when the trawler docked. There's no way that she hasn't informed her family."

"You spoke with the Runns about the Jedi did you not?" Erill said.

"Yes and they denied having anything to do with his death."

"Yet here we are, looking at an image of his starfighter having been pulled from the oceans of their homeworld."

"That's why I'm going there again." Luke said, "I'll see if they have anything else to say about this now."

"What of your wife?"

"Salla's out running." Luke said, "I'll ask if she wants to go with me when she gets back, but I'm quite prepared to go alone if you'd rather she stay here with you."

"Nonsense boy." Erill replied, gasping more now and Victor handed him his mask again. Erill took several more deep breaths, "You know I relish the time I get to spend with my grandchildren. But you have told me what you know of the Families' knowledge. Now what about the Jedi themselves?"

Luke paused and bowed his head for a moment.

"They know." He said, "They left Aurek Station twenty minutes ago and jumped towards Delvad."

"So where exactly are we supposed to land?" Lara asked when she got her first look at the world of Delvad through the viewport of the *Bright Hope*, the vessel assigned to the two Jedi.

The world appeared as a pale blue sphere, covered by wide and shallow seas. Here and there, a few scattered clusters of islands were just about visible.

"There are a few landmasses." Cal replied, "There's a pretty decent starport on one of them. Ah, here's the beacon now."

There was little air traffic in the region immediately surrounding Delvad's starport and the *Bright Hope* was immediately cleared to land. As the ship came in closer the two Jedi saw that the starport not only occupied the whole of the island on which it was constructed but also featured landing strips and piers that stretched out into the ocean on artificial platforms. Additionally, not far from the coastline were several structures floating above the waves on replusorlift fields.

"Those look fancy." Lara said, staring at the platforms as her brother brought the *Bright Hope* into land. Cal ignored her and instead concentrated on shutting down the ship's systems.

"Come on sis." Cal said, getting out of his seat, "Look smart. We want to make a good impression for our hosts."

Walking down the access ramp side-by-side Cal and Lara found a member of the near human wroonian species waiting for them. The blue skinned humanoid wore a gaudy uniform.

"Jedi Udra." The man announced in a friendly but still professional manner, "I'm glad you could make it here at such short notice. I am Chief Marshal Elken Daal and I am in charge of the planetary investigation division."

"Pleased to meet you." Cal replied, "Allow me to introduce my padawan learner, Lara."

"A pleasure." Chief Daal said and he bowed his head slightly in Lara's direction.

"Can we see the ship?" Cal asked.

"Of course. Do follow me." Chief Daal said and he began to walk towards a speeder parked nearby. As the Jedi got into the vehicle after Chief Daal, the marshal noticed them looking at its engines, "Modified for use over water." He said, "Essential in any vehicle used on this world." And he waved his hand towards the sea visible on the horizon all around before starting the engine.

"Aren't you worried about the tide coming in?" Lara asked.

"Not at all young lady," the marshal answered, "Delvad has no moons you see, so there aren't any tides here. Just an endless clam ocean. Aside from the odd storm of course, but they aren't much trouble."

"Providing you have a mobile island." Cal commented and he looked towards the cluster of floating platforms.

"Ah yes." Chief Daal said, "Many of the sector's rich and famous beings have private repulsor island on Delvad. Their mobility makes privacy easy to maintain. They stay out to see for the most part, but every so often they move closer to an island - especially this one because of the starport."

"Including the Founding Families?" Lara asked.

"Indeed. Most of them have such an island of their own. Only the Ruuns go without. Ironic really since they actually live here permanently. But they have an alternative means of maintaining their privacy."

"Really?" Cal asked, "What?"

"They're nautolans. They made their home on the seabed. We see even less of them than the others. Here we are anyway, the fighter's in this building."

The building was a hangar that looked no different to any of the other structures lined up either side of it, apart from the large identifying number painted on the wall. There was no guard, but the doors were all sealed and as Chief Dall got out of the speeder and walked up to the nearest entry point he removed the identity card from his chest. He passed this across a scanner mounted beside the door and there was a beeping sound as it unlocked. Once inside he reached for a switch beside the door and the interior of the hangar was lit up. There in the centre of the hangar was the wreckage of a starsaber-class fighter. Its canopy was missing and its hull was discoloured by the plant growth from the time it had spent on the seabed.

"Looks like one of ours." Lara said.

"Yes it does." Cal said as he walked closer, "But looks can be deceiving." When he reached the fighter he circled it, looking for any clues regarding how it had come to be on this world without its pilot. He heard footsteps behind him and knew that it was Lara approaching him, her presence in the force standing out like a spotlight in darkness. Continuing his inspection, Cal pulled himself up to the cockpit and peered inside, "The chair's still here." He said.

"But no canopy." Lara said, "If Kyle, sorry Jedi Jenner triggered the ejection system then why did only the canopy charges blow?"

"I don't think they did." Cal replied, "Look, this one's still intact. Something else caused the canopy to be separated from the ship."

"Like what?"

"That I don't know." Cal replied, "But you were right."

"Right? Of course I was. Right about what?"

"This is Kyle's fighter. Or at least the serial number on the tail matches his." And Cal pointed to the fighter's somewhat deformed V-shaped tail. Just visible beneath the weed still caught there was a registration number.

"So how did the ship get here?" Lara asked, "I thought it was destroyed by that assassin droid we took out in the Tepillos system."

"Obviously not." Cal replied, "Or we wouldn't be crawling all over it now." Then he jumped back down to the floor of the hangar, "Go back to the ship." He said to Lara, "This needs reporting. We'll need an expert to go over this ship properly."

"Won't there be engineers here who can do that?" Lara suggested.

Cal glanced towards the door, where Chief Dall still stood watching them both.

"I want to make sure that whatever is found is kept within the order." He said softly, "The chief seems on the level, but we've had instances before with people knowing our business ahead of schedule."

"But that means contacting the enclave on Moldas." Lara complained.

"So what?"

"So Master Karas is in charge there," Lara said, "and I don't think he likes me."

"I don't like you either." Cal said, "Now get to it."

2.

"I'm not disturbing you am I?" Lara asked. The room was dark apart from the glowing blue image of Jedi Master Ben Karas as projected by the holographic communications system.

"Yes." He replied curtly, "It is the middle of the night here. But that doesn't mean you don't have to call me 'master'."

"I could call back if you'd rather." Lara said, then she suddenly remembered to add, "Master."

"No. I am awake now. What do you want?"

"We think we've found Kyle Jenner's starfighter."

Even though it was not possible to pick up on Master Karas' emotions across the great distance between them, Lara still saw the reaction of surprise on his face that he rapidly suppressed.

"Where?"

"Delvad master. Its an ocean world where-"

"Yes young one, I know what Delvad is. Now get to the point. What do you want?"

"My brother wants a specialist to take a look at the ship master."

"Your teacher. What about the local authorities?"

"Cal would rather keep this amongst us." Lara replied, forgetting to call him 'master' again.

"Very well." Master Karas replied and his image faded as he shut off the transmission at his end.

Lara reached to her belt and produced a compact point to point communicator.

"Cal." She said, holding the device near her mouth.

"Go ahead." Cal's voice replied, "Is Master Karas sending help?"

"I think so. But he wasn't very nice about it."

"Never mind that, get back here now."

In the communications suit at Jedi enclave on the world of Moldas, parsecs beyond the Narthis Sector Jedi Master Ben Karas lowered his head.

"I do not want them here." He said.

"The dream?" a voice replied and a glowing figure materialised beside him. This was not a hologram, though it had no more substance to it than one.

"The Udra family will serve the Sith." Master Karas said, nodding as he repeated the warning that had come to him so many times since the Udras had been deployed from Coruscant.

"What does the council have to say about this?" the glowing figure asked.

"They do not share my vision."

"Then what will you do?"

Master Karas looked around at the figure.

"Tell me what to do. What did you do when you fought the Sith my old teacher?"

"I died."

"Back so soon Luke?" Ket Ruun said as Luke Crassis stepped from the submersible, followed by his wife, "It seems like only last month you were last here."

"It was." Salla replied as they walked away from the docking port, "If I'd known we'd be back so soon I'd have suggested we stay on our island instead."

"And deny me your company here as my guests?" Ket said, leading them into a lounge, "Ah well, I don't have much room at the moment."

As soon as Luke and Salla entered the room they saw that they were not the only humans present. A young dark skinned woman sat beside Fial, Ket's wife whilst a man with similar pale skin and dark hair as Luke sat in the far corner.

"Here alone Trent?" Luke said to the man in the corner, "How much of your money will your wife have spent by the time you get back?"

The man cracked a brief smile and sipped at a drink.

"Here on your father's behalf again boy?" he said, "Or have you finally finished off the old man and taken over?"

"If you must argue," Ket interrupted, "do it in someone else's home." And he sat down on the same sofa as his wife and the young woman.

"I didn't realise there would be so many of us here." Salla said as she looked around at the representatives of the Founding Families in the room.

"I was already here anyway." The young woman said, "My father didn't see the point in sending anyone else."

"Hopefully we won't need your family's legal talents anyway Jaynie." Trent added.

"What about you Trent?" Luke asked, "What is the Narthis family interested in?"

"The same as you." Trent replied, "To find out what happened to the jedi. If it wasn't any of us that killed him, then who did? And why?"

"The jedi have many enemies," Fial said, "and anyone who could threaten them could threaten us."

"Yes we know that." Salla said.

"The others know it as well." Trent said.

"The others?" Luke asked, "You've heard from them?"

"I spoke with Faye Karn before I left Crassis Major and she asked me to let her know what happens here." Trent answered.

"And Corva and Deesa Torin's ship will be here in two days." Ket added.

"What about the Fayl's?" Salla asked.

Trent snorted.

"It would seem that Lorna is somewhat distracted at the moment. I doubt we'll be hearing from them." He said.

"So what do we know?" Luke asked, "I take it the jedi are here?"

"They arrived shortly before you," Ket answered, "and they were taken directly to the hangar."

"Has the ship been examined?" Luke asked.

Trent shook his head.

"Not yet." He said, "But when it is we've already made arrangements to learn everything the jedi do. Maybe even a little bit more." And then he smiled.

Approaching the hangar on foot, Lara found both her brother and Chief Daal waiting for her outside.

"Come on!" Cal called out when he saw her walking towards them, "Hurry up."

"Where are we going?" Lara asked.

"To the docks." Cal replied, "I want to speak to the men who found the ship."

"Actually," Chief Daal said, "I doubt they'll be at the docks."

"Then where can we find them?" Cal asked.

"We're talking about hard working men who just been told they'll be getting a salvage payment of thirty thousand credits. They'll be celebrating in the nearest cantina."

Getting into the landspeeder, Chief Daal drove the two jedi towards the coast and past the row of vessels docked.

"That's the ship that brought in your fighter." He commented as a trawler came into view. Both Cal and Lara turned their heads to look at the vessel. It was non-descript, almost decrepit and had obviously seen better days. Just as Chief Daal had suggested, there were no signs of life aboard the vessel.

Further on, Chief Daal steered the speeder away from the dock and in the gap between two warehouses a cantina came into view. Above the entrance was a faded sign that read 'The Bottom Feeder.'

"Don't think much to the name." Lara commented.

"This is where the fishermen tend to hang out." Chief Daal explained as he brought the speeder to halt outside. There were no other vehicles parked outside the building, suggesting that the patrons tended to walk to get here.

"So our guys will be inside yes?" Cal asked as he got out of the speeder and looked the building up and down.

"Like I said, this where the fishermen hang out." Chief Daal repeated and he headed inside with the jedi behind him. Once inside he took a look around and spotted a group of men sat around a table that was crowded with empty glasses, "That's them." He said, pointing.

"Then we'll handle this." Cal said and he nodded at Lara.

Leaving Chief Daal at the door, the jedi picked their way through the room towards the celebrating fishermen.

"Good afternoon." Cal said when they reached the table, "May we join you?"

"She can." One of the fishermen replied, staring at Lara, "You're not my type."

"I don't think I am either." Lara said, "I don't smell of fish."

The fishermen looked at one another.

"Now that wasn't very nice." One of them said, "Why should we let either of you stay?"

Cal brushed his cloak aside to reveal his lightsaber.

"Because your salvage payment depends on my say so." He said sternly, "Of course, I could just recommend we sign the fighter over to you instead and you can try and find a buyer for what's left of it while paying its hangar fees as well."

The fishermen went quiet suddenly.

"Take a seat." One of them said. Cal looked at the man and from his age guessed that he was the captain.

"Thank you." Cal said and pulled an empty chair from a nearby table and sat down. Lara then copied him, positioning her chair further away from the fishermen than Cal did.

"So what do you want to know?" the captain asked and he gulped his drink.

"Tell me about the fighter," Cal said, "and where you found it too."

"It was our first time in the area this year." The captain answered as he put his drink down again, "We change locations depending on the season you see, lets the fish stocks recover."

Cal nodding, understanding what the captain was saying, though taking little interest in this part of the tale.

"Well our lines got snared on something," the captain went on, "so we stopped the boat and hauled in the line as carefully as we could."

"Careful's the right word," another fisherman commented, "those lines cost thousands to replace when they break. We were lucky that ship of yours didn't wind up costing us money." And the other fishermen nodded in agreement.

"Well as soon as we saw what it was we hauled it aboard and came straight back here." The captain said, getting back to his explanation.

"So the fighter in the hangar is exactly as you found it?" Lara asked.

"It is my girl." The captain replied, "Or at least it was when the marshals sealed it in there. Anything missing then wasn't on it when we pulled it from the water."

"So there was no canopy?" Cal asked.

"No. We spotted that too. We just figured that the pilot bailed out before his ship went in the water. That's what we told the other woman and that's what we're telling you."

"Other woman?" Cal said, picking up on that.

"Yeah." The captain replied, "The one that paid for our drinks today." And he pointed at the empty glasses, "You didn't think we could afford all these before you paid us did you?"

"She was a zeltron." One of the others said, "Real pretty too. Though not as pretty as your lady friend here." And he grinned at Lara.

"There she is right now." Another fisherman said and he pointed across the room to where a near-human zeltron woman was stood next to Chief Daal, her red skin contrasting the blue of the wroonian's.

"Thank you gentlemen." Cal said and he and Lara got to their feet.

"Hey! What about our money?" the captain asked.

"Your claim is being processed." Cal replied before he began to make his way towards the door. But by the time that he and Cal reached Chief Daal the zeltron woman was gone.

"Who was she?" Cal demanded, pointing through the doorway the woman had just left through.

"No-one." Chief Daal replied, "She just wanted directions, that's all."

Deceit.

Cal scowled, knowing that the man was lying to him. He looked towards Lara and saw that she had sensed it too.

"I'm going after her." Cal snapped.

"What about me?" Lara asked.

"Go find us a boat." Cal replied, "We need to check out where the fighter was found for ourselves."

3.

The shuttle that landed on the pad was greeted by a pair of armed men wearing breath masks that covered their entire faces and the uniform of Shill Security.

"That's close enough." One of them said to the zeltron woman who stepped.

"This isn't very friendly." She said to the men, "Why invite me to a repulsor island if I'm not going to be made welcome?"

"Mister Narthis is a careful man." One of the guards said, "None of us want you using your pheromones when you shouldn't now do we?"

"Spoilsports." The woman replied, "So where is your boss anyway?"

"This way." the guard replied, pointing towards a door.

"Ah Miss Kassa, do come in." Trent Narthis said when the zeltron woman appeared in the doorway of his study.

"No mask?" she asked as she entered.

"The life support system is doping the air with a chemical counter agent to zeltron pheromones." Trent replied, "Please do sit down and tell me what you have learnt. Would you like a drink?" and he indicated a bottle on his desk.

"I never say no." Kassa said and as she sat down she picked the bottle up. But rather than pour some of the contents into one of the glasses arranged beside it she just raised the bottle to her lips and took a drink,

"Nice." She said, "Expensive?"

"Very. Now what do you know?"

"I know the jedi have identified the fighter as Kyle Jenner's."

"We had already determined that ourselves. Young Jaynie Drud was fortunate enough to get us images that let us pick out the registration number."

"Well the jedi sent a message back to their base on Moldas and they're sending someone to examine the ship more closely."

"Oh this is just great." Trent said, raising a hand to his forehead, "Now instead of two jedi poking their noses into our business her, we could have three of them instead. Four if the new arrival brings a padawan as well."

"That's all I know." Kassa said, "The marshal didn't know anything about who was being sent."

"That's alright." Trent replied, "You may go now."

Kassa smiled and set the bottle back on the table.

"You may as well take that with you." Trent said, "The guards will make sure you get back to your ship."

Still smiling, Kassa picked up the bottle again and left the room. As soon as the door dropped shut behind her, Trent activated the communicator on his desk.

"Get me Shill Security." He said, "Tell Han Shill I need him to get in touch with our contact on Moldas."

Deceit.

Fear.

Greed.

Guilt.

Lara could sense that there was something more to the locals' refusal to accept her offer to charter a boat. Any boat in fact. Though the docks were filled with craft varying from ocean skimming versions of speeder bikes up to multi-million credit luxury yachts, not one of the businesses advertising their vessels for hire was willing to deal with the young jedi. The more reputable businesses all either quoted prices well beyond her budget or gave very polite refusals that were total fabrications. On the other hand some of the less reputable appearing places either ignored her or made alternative suggestions about what she could do for the owners in exchange for a boat.

"Having trouble?" a voice said from nearby as a door was slammed shut behind Lara.

Looking around she saw a dark skinned woman of similar age to herself leaning against the safety rail along the dockside.

"Would you believe I can't find a boat?" Lara said.

"Where did you leave it?" the woman asked and Lara frowned, "Sorry. The name's Jaynie, Jaynie Drud."

And she stepped away from the rail and held out her hand in greeting.

"Drud? As in—"

"The Drud family, yes."

"But you seem nice." Lara said as the pair shook hands, then her eyes widened as she realised what she had just said.

"That's alright." Jaynie replied, "My family are lawyers. Even my brother."

"Yeah I met him. He spent most of the time wondering what I look like naked."

"So you need a boat?"

"You know where I can hire one?"

"I'm a Drud remember. We're rich. We don't hire boats, we buy them and throw them away when they get dirty."

Lara just stared at her.

"You can borrow mine." Jaynie said, "Come on I'll show you where it is."

Cal watched the shuttle as it came in to land. He had missed Kassa by only moments when she took off and had considered taking the *Bright Hope* after her. But when he saw the shuttle head straight for one of the nearby repulsor islands and land there, he decided that it would be better simply to wait and see where she went next. He barely had time to walk to a vantage point that gave him a view of the repulsor island when he saw the shuttle take off again and head back towards him. He considered approaching her as soon as she disembarked from her ship, but at the last minute he decided to watch and see where she went next. Unsurprisingly for a zeltron, she headed directly for the nearest cantina. Cal took a quick look around just in case he too was being watched before following her inside.

"How about you let me buy this one? And one for me as well." he asked, leaning on the bar beside Kassa.

"Why thank you Jedi Udra." Kassa replied.

"You have me at a disadvantage." Cal said, "I don't know your name."

"Kassa."

"Brief trip was it Kassa?"

"Don't know what you're talking about."

"I followed you from the other cantina to your ship and I watched you fly to one of the repulsor islands anchored off shore. You weren't there very long at all. What happened?"

"They were out of beer." Kassa answered sarcastically.

"So how about you tell me why you're asking questions about my investigation?"

"Maybe I'm investigating your friend's death for myself."

"Did you know Kyle Jenner?"

"Of course."

"How?"

Kassa turned towards Cal and looked him in the eyes.

"You don't know anything about me do you Jedi Udra?"

"Enlighten me."

"That's what I do Jedi Udra, I enlighten those who want it."

"So you're an information broker."

"I believe that's the technical term yes. Oh look, my glass is empty."

"Too many will make you sick."

"Not me, I'm zeltron. We've got an extra liver. Means I can keep going all night if I need to. Can you keep going all night Jedi Udra?"

"You wouldn't be interested in Kyle Jenner's death if someone wasn't willing to pay." Cal replied, "So who's paying for that information?"

"I don't discuss my clients. Now how about you tell me what you know?"

Cal picked up the drink that had been placed in front of him and took a sip.

"I may not have a second liver," he said, "but I can use the force to keep my wits about me when I'm exposed to chemical intoxicants. It doesn't matter if it's the beer in this glass or those pheromones you're putting out right now to try and confuse me."

Kassa's face fell. Before either of them could say anything more they were interrupted by Cal's PTP link.

"Go ahead." He said with the device next to his mouth.

"Cal it's me." Lara said, "I've found us a boat. Its at pier seven."

"Thanks Lara, I'll be right there." Cal told her and he shut off the link before looking back at Kassa, "Nice to meet you." He said.

"Likewise."

Deceit.

Cal stared at the boat in disbelief.

"Isn't this great? Lara called out when she appeared on deck wearing a wetsuit, "It's got everything we need."

"Including the money to pay for it? How much is this costing us?"

"Nothing." Lara replied, "The owner's letting us use it for free."

"For free? Who's the owner?"

"That would be me." Jaynie Drud said, appearing behind Lara.

"Cal, meet Jaynie Drud." Lara said.

"Drud? Oh great." Cal responded.

"If you don't want my boat-" Jaynie began.

"No we want it." Lara interrupted and then she stared at Cal, "Cal, tell her we want it."

"Okay, yes. Miss Drud, we very much appreciate your putting this vessel at our disposal." Cal said as he boarded the boat, "Now if you wouldn't mind disembarking we'll be have it back to you as soon as possible."

"Oh no." Jaynie said, "I'm letting you use my boat, but I'm not letting you just take it. I'll be coming with you."

Cal glared at Lara.

"No one else would talk to me." She said.

Though he was loathe to say so out loud, Cal had to admit that Jaynie Drud's vessel was very well equipped for what they wanted to do. It carried a wide range of underwater sensors as well as diving equipment for several people all of which appeared to be of the highest quality. Like his younger sister, Cal was able to find a wetsuit in his size and changed into it.

"Very nice." Jaynie said when he joined her and Lara on the bridge.

"I just don't know where to keep my lightsaber." He replied.

"Well you can't use it underwater anyway." Lara said, then she pointed at one of the instrument panels,

"Look, this is where the fighter was pulled from the water."

Cal looked for himself. The display was a surface radar and at the spot where the radar showed a stationary object.

"The marshals marked the spot with a buoy." Jaynie said, "Your sister told me you've got permission to approach though. You do, don't you?"

"We do." Cal reassured her, "Don't worry, you won't lose you licence."

"Good, because if I did my family would sue you. Now go get ready, we'll be at the spot in about five minutes."

4.

When Jaynie came out on deck the two jedi had already lined up enough diving equipment for them all. They had selected masks that would cover their entire faces and included built in communicators to allow them to keep in contact. Various air supplies were available and Cal selected a set of complicated looking rebreather packs.

"How long will these give us?" Cal asked when he saw Jaynie.

"Well sonar says we're in thirty metres of water so they should last us well over an hour. We'll be deep enough to have to watch out for nitrogen narcosis, but not deep enough for oxygen toxicity. Any questions?"

"I have no idea what you just said." Lara replied, "I prefer to swim on the surface."

"I'm sure you'll do just fine." Cal said and he tossed her a facemask.

Jaynie double-checked the equipment as the jedi put it on, making sure that it was all fitted properly. Then as they waited sat on the side of the boat she put on the remaining set in much less time it had taken them.

"Can everyone hear me?" she asked, testing the communications link.

"Loud and clear." Cal replied.

"Fine here." Lara added.

"Good," Jaynie said, "then let's get our feet wet." And she lent backwards until she fell into the water.

Lara looked at Cal nervously as he also lent backwards until he fell.

"Hurry up." She heard Cal signal from beneath the ocean's surface and then she too let herself fall into the water.

Cal was waiting for his sister just beneath the surface, while deeper down Jaynie was heading even deeper. There was a sudden flash as she turned on her torch before the water became too dark.

"Ladies first." Cal said and he waited while Lara swam down after Jaynie.

When the seabed first came into view it was obvious that something large and heavy had been taken from it. A massive furrow was gouged from the seabed where the fighter had first ploughed into it and later when it had been ripped free by the fishing trawler.

"We should circle out from here." Cal said.

"Not too far." Jaynie added, "Stay close enough we can still see one another. Just in case."

"Okay, let's go." Cal said, but as soon as Jaynie had turned her back he grabbed hold of Lara's arm.

"What-" Lara began before Cal raised his index finger to his faceplate for her to be quiet.

"You okay?" Jaynie signalled.

"Oh, err, yeah I'm fine." Lara answered as she watched Cal writing something on the brightly coloured datapad he had brought with him.

Stay close to her, he wrote. Then he erased the message. Lara nodded and swam after Jaynie.

Cal swam in the opposite direction and it was not long before he noticed a straight edge that could not be natural among the clutter of the seabed. He headed lower, right down to the seabed and he brushed aside the sand covering what lay there. He smiled as he saw the canopy of the starsaber fighter appear from beneath the sand.

"I've got the canopy." He said and he reached to his belt where a set of cylinders was hooked on. He unhooked one and instead hooked it to the canopy. Then he took hold of his datapad again and swam a short distance away before activating the cylinder.

The cylinder burst open suddenly and a large balloon inflated from inside. The sudden introduction of the buoyant balloon lifted the canopy from the seabed and Cal watched as it floated up to the surface.

Lara meanwhile, was watching what Jaynie was doing. She knew Cal did not trust the young woman's motives for helping them but so far she did not seem to have done anything wrong. Then she noticed something glinting amongst the fungal weed growing between a cluster of rocks and she swam closer.

"Hey I think I've found something." She said as she got nearer.

Lara saw that the glinting was caused by the light of her torch beam reflecting off the face of a wrist chronometer that was set into a metal gauntlet of some sort. Lara stood on the seabed and reached down for the gauntlet with one of the floatation cylinders in her hand. She hooked the device around the wrist of the gauntlet and then used her datapad to trigger it. The balloon promptly inflated, but it did not lift the gauntlet from its location so Lara crouched down to free it. She pulled a length of weed away and the gauntlet began to float upwards. Then Lara screamed as the weeks old corpse was dragged up right in front of her.

With a kick of her legs, Lara began to swim upwards as rapidly as she could.

"No don't!" Jaynie yelled over the communications link and she reached out and grabbed hold of Lara's ankle.

"What's happening?" Cal demanded as he swam towards the pair. He could sense his sister's fear and was ready to protect her if she was under attack.

"Cal help me!" he heard over the link. But it was not Lara calling out it was Jaynie, "I can't hold her much longer, she can't just swim to the surface!" and Cal realised what was happening. Something had scared his sister enough to panic her into trying to reach the surface as quickly as she could and if she broke free of Jaynie's grasp there was nothing to stop her. The effect of such rapid decompression from this depth could be fatal. Cal had to do something.

"Lara stop." He said, trying to project calmness towards her through the force and as he swam to her he took hold of his sister and looked directly into her face, "Stop." He repeated, "Now what happened?"

"In the weed." Lara replied, gasping for breath and she pointed upwards. Both Cal and Jaynie looked up to where they saw the corpse still drifting towards the surface. "It was in there." Lara added and she pointed to where the body had emerged.

"Stay clam." Cal said as he let go Lara and she nodded as he swam towards the weed and swept his torch beam across it. Then he let go of the torch and let it dangle on the tether that held it to his belt. Then from another point on his belt Cal pulled a short chemical filled rod. He bent the rod until he heard a 'snap' and shook it to mix the chemicals it contained together. As he did this the rod produced a white light and Cal dropped it over the patch of weed. As it sank slowly towards the seabed Cal saw the other bodies hidden in the weed.

"You know," he said, "I doubt they were all inside the starsaber."

Cal was the first to break the surface. They had ascended slowly to make sure that their bodies adjusted to the change in pressure safely. All around him the ocean was littered with the balloons that he, Lara and Jaynie had attached to the bodies they had discovered in the seaweed near the crash site.

"Hey!" he suddenly heard Jaynie cry out and he turned his head towards her, "What the hell is she doing?"

Jaynie was pointing away from the boat that had brought them here and as Cal turned his head further he saw that there was an open topped speeder floating about a metre above the water, its engine idling. Leaning over the edge of the speeder, Cal could clearly see Kassa reaching down into the water and pulling out bodies. Already two of them were in the back of her vehicle and she was just cutting a third free of its attached balloon.

"Kassa!" Cal cried out, "Stop what you are doing!"

Kassa turned towards Cal and smiled. Then she dumped the third body in the back of the speeder and sat herself down in the driver's seat. She blew Cal a kiss and then drove her vehicle away, heading further out to sea.

"Damn it!" Cal snapped, knowing that they had no way to catch up with her.

Just then Lara broke the surface also.

"Hey Cal," she said, "why so mad?"

Cal stared at the four body bags lined up along the dock in the fading light as a group of marshals kept the local fishermen back so that the bags and their contents could be loaded into a coroner's transport.

"So where the hell did they come from?" Chief Daal asked, "That fighter was a single seat ship."

"I know." Cal replied, still smarting from having a further three bodies stolen by the zeltron information broker.

At that moment Lara wandered up to them.

"I spoke with the coroner." She said, "He estimates they've all been dead about a month or two. Though he says it'll be hard to be exact."

"Well that fits our time scale." Cal said.

"What time scale?" Chief Daal asked.

Cal looked at Lara.

"The disappearance of Kyle Jenner." she said.

"You think they had something to do with it?" Chief Daal asked.

"Too much of a coincidence for them not to." Cal replied and he turned back towards the marshal, "Now how about you explain how that information broker got out there without being intercepted? I thought the region was closed off."

"The system worked." Chief Daal replied, "But the marshals on duty for that sector were lured away by a false report. By the time they got back it was too late."

"What about her ship?" Lara asked.

"It left here just after you set out and kept her altitude too low for us to track properly amongst the surface clutter. I don't where she got the speeder, but it wasn't from around here."

"So she's gone." Cal said, "Along with my evidence." Then he looked at Lara, "Come on, let's go."

"Where?" she asked.

"I want to make sure our other evidence is still there."

Borrowing a speeder from Chief Daal, Cal drove back to the hangar where the wrecked fighter was stored.

"Cal, look!" Lara exclaimed as the building came into view.

Ahead of them Cal could see that the main hangar door was wide open, though from this angle it was impossible to see if the starsaber was still inside

"No!" Cal yelled and he accelerated towards the building.

He slammed on the brakes at the last moment and both he and Lara leapt from the vehicle, drew their lightsabers and ignited them.

"Someone's in there." Lara said as they dashed towards the door.

"I know." Cal replied, sensing the presence in the force himself. It was strong.

The two jedi ground to a halt when they reached the hangar door and saw inside for the first time. There in front of them was not one, but two starsaber fighters, the additional one in pristine condition.

"Well hello there." A man said as he walked out from behind the wrecked fighter. He wore a simple flight suit and from his belt hung a lightsaber, "The name's Seth Ashran. Master Karas sent me to help you. Now would you mind putting those away?"

In unison, Cal and Lara deactivated their lightsabers and returned them to their belts.

"We didn't now you were already here." Cal said as he shook hands with the newly arrived jedi knight.

"I got in about an hour ago." Seth replied, "Thought I'd make a start." And he looked back at the wrecked starsaber.

"So what can you tell us?" Cal asked.

"It's a write off." Seth said, "This ship will never fly again."

"We'd guessed that." Lara said, "Were you just sent here to state the obvious?"

"Ah, you must be the padawan with delusions of grandeur." Seth replied, "Master Karas doesn't like you."

"I know that too." Lara said.

"Can we stay on the subject at hand?" Cal asked, "Now how did the fighter end up at the bottom of the ocean?"

"Well I'm guessing someone dumped it there." Seth answered.

Cal looked at Lara.

"You're right." He said, "He is just telling us thing we already know."

Seth glared at them both.

"How about you two just keep in mind who's the most senior jedi here? He said sternly, "I've got almost ten years on you boy." He added looking at Cal. Then he turned back towards the wrecked fighter and waved at it.

"There's no battle damage," He said, "and very little structural damage of any kind. That ship didn't crash and it wasn't shot down. It was deliberately dumped into the ocean."

"Along with a bunch of dead bodies." Cal said.

"Bodies?" Seth repeated, looking back at Cal and Lara, "I thought the pilot was missing when the ship was recovered?"

"He was." Cal replied, "We just found them."

"I found them." Lara said, "Scattered nearby where the ship was. Scared the hell out of me."

"Think you've found a dumping ground?" Seth asked, "Local organised crime?"

"The coroner suggested that the fighter and the bodies all went in the water at about the same time." Cal said, "I think they're all connected."

"Well you need to let me get on here." Seth said, "Where's your ship?"

"Docking pad eighty-two." Cal replied.

"Fine, I'll come by when I've got news."

5.

"So who were they?" Fial asked.

"Was one of them Jenner?" Ket added.

"No." Jaynie replied, "I don't think so."

"You don't sound very sure about that." Salla said.

"Well you try identifying bodies that every ocean scavenger has taken a bite from." Jaynie replied angrily.

"Calm down young lady." Luke snapped, "Remember your place."

"Oh, my place?" Jaynie snapped back, "At least I'm not an errand boy for an invalid."

Luke and Salla looked ready to explode.

"The woman that took the bodies was a zeltron?" Trent asked calmly, trying to defuse the situation before it deteriorated further, "How many did she take?"

"Three. Why?"

"Because I believe that the woman in question is the information broker I have been dealing with here. We may be able to get hold of those bodies for ourselves. For the right price of course."

"You hired outside help?" Ket said. Trent found it difficult to read a nautolan's expression, but by the way Ket was looking at him he guessed that he was not happy, "Without consulting us?" Ket added.

"I did what I thought best. I don't need your permission." Trent said, "Just like I didn't ask you before I got in touch with our friend Han."

"Why?" Salla asked.

"Because the jedi have sent for reinforcements," Trent replied, "and I wanted to know what we could expect."

"Are they going to attack us? Do they know what's-" Jaynie began.

"Be silent!" Fial yelled, "That is not to be discussed. Even here." And for a brief moment everyone in the room glanced towards a large, blank section of the wall. Then Ket looked back at Jaynie.

"Unless you want to try your luck." He said softly and the others turned to look at her also.

"We all know what happened to the last one to try don't we?" Luke said as Jaynie looked around nervously.

"I'm sorry." She said.

"So what can we expect from the jedi?" Salla asked.

"They're just sending one of their number." Trent replied, "A knight called Seth Ashran. Apparently he's an expert pilot who knows everything there is to know about starships. He's technical support in this, nothing to worry about."

Cal and Lara had only just made it back to the *Bright Hope* when they were disturbed by the ship's communications system alerting them to an incoming message. They immediately made their way to the cockpit and sat down before Cal activated the receiver. Immediately that he did the face of a middle aged woman appeared on a screen, the collar of her sector ranger uniform could be made out at the bottom.

"Agent Raser." Cal said, "What can we do for you?"

"Actually I think it's what I can do for you." she replied. Jule Raser was the head of the rangers in the sector and was based on the same space station that Cal and Lara currently called home, "Did you just fish a bunch of bodies from the ocean?"

"You might say that." Lara said, "How did you know?"

"Delvad coroner's office took prints from the bodies and sent them to us for identification." Jule replied.

"And you got a result?" Cal asked.

Jule smiled.

"Indeed I did Jedi Udra. In fact I got results for all of the four bodies."

"So who are they?" Lara asked.

"Mercenaries." Jule told her, "Their outfit's been active in the sector for about six years now. They've come to our attention a few times but they've never stepped out of line enough for us to take action against them as a group. The prints are because at one time or another they've all been arrested here for minor violations."

"So what sorts of people hire these guys?" Cal asked.

"People that can't afford better. This unit is, or was, legit but it's by no means the best around."

"Like Shill Security?" Lara asked.

Jule smiled.

"You've run into them?"

"Once or twice." Cal replied, "They actually came in quite useful too."

"Yeah," Jule said, "well this unit was neither as expensive or picky as Han Shill is about clients. Most recently they've been operating on Tepillos. I'll send you a copy of everything we've got on them."

Cal and Lara glanced at one another.

"Where Kyle was based." Lara commented.

"Where he vanished from." Cal added then he looked back at the screen, "Look, Agent Raser can you keep this quiet?"

"I wasn't planning on holding a press conference."

"No, I mean could you not tell the coroner's office here? I want to keep this investigation to us."

"Sure. As far as I'm concerned I've delivered my report to the investigating agents. Anything else?"

"Yes." Cal said, "What do you know about an information broker named Kassa?"

Jule shook her head.

"Not much I'm afraid. I know of her, but she doesn't really like dealing with people like me. Or you."

"Thanks anyway." Cal said. The image of Jule then smiled and she broke off the transmission.

"Mercenaries from Tepillos?" Lara said.

"I'm guessing that we've just found out who sent the assassin droid that killed his padawan." Cal replied,

"Looks like it failed to kill him and led him to its masters. They ran here and he followed them. Probably into an ambush."

"But how did his fighter end up here?" Lara asked, "I mean if none of those bodies was Kyle-"

"We're missing three." Cal said, "One of them could be Kyle Jenner and the others the mercenaries he killed."

A second incoming transmission interrupted the Jedi. This one came in on Cal's PTP link.

"Cal Udra." Cal said as he answered the call.

"Jedi Udra, its Chief Daal."

"Go ahead." Cal said.

"I've just got a call from traffic control, we've picked up that zeltron's ship. It's heading out of the atmosphere."

"Gotcha." Lara said excitedly and she began to fasten her safety harness.

"Get them to hold her." Cal said as he too began to fasten his harness. Beside him Lara was already bringing the *Bright Hope's* flight systems online.

"Already done." Chief Daal said, "But she's not requested jump data, she may already know it."

"Then we need to be getting after her." Cal said, "Look, there's another Jedi examining Kyle Jenner's fighter, let him know what's happening. We may need his help."

"Will do." Chief Daal said and he broke the link.

As Cal put his PTP link away he looked at Lara who had already prepared the ship for take off.

"Get after her." He said and Lara smiled.

Kassa leant back in her seat and yawned. Her ship, the *Party Animal* was a conductor-class shuttle.

Though reliable and easy to operate it was not built for speed and she knew that she still had some time before she got far enough from Delvad to clear its gravity well and make the jump to hyperspace.

"*Party Animal* this is flight control." A voice suddenly sounded from her communications system, "Hold position, you are not cleared for departure."

Kassa suddenly sat up straight and checked her sensors. Sure enough, there was a contact moving up rapidly behind her.

"Oh no you don't." she said to herself and taking hold of the control column she accelerated, doing her best to coax every bit of speed from her ship as she could.

"She's running for it." Lara said as she saw the engines of Kassa's vessel flare brightly.

"You're doing fine." Cal replied, "She can't outrun us."

"Yeah, but what can we do to stop her? Are you willing to shoot her down?"

"No. But hopefully she won't realise that." Cal said and he activated the *Bright Hope's* transmitter, "*Party Animal* this is *Bright Hope*. You are under arrest. Halt your vessel and prepare to be boarded."

"Well hello there Cal." Kassa replied, "Sorry babe, but I gotta go." And then the channel went silent.

"So what now?" Lara asked.

"Now I bring the weapons on line." Cal said.

There was a flash and a stream of laser blasts pulsed across the sky outside the *Party Animal's* cockpit.

"Trying to scare me?" Kassa said out loud, "Sorry Cal, but you'll have to do better than that. I know when someone's aiming wide." And she banked towards the laser blasts.

The weapons fire from the Bright Hope ceased as soon as Kassa veered towards them and Kassa smiled as she realised that she had called the Jedi's bluff. A glance at her instruments told her that she was almost beyond the gravity well and would soon be able to escape into hyperspace.

That was when the proximity alarm sounded.

Kassa flinched as the starsaber fighter flew across her path, dangerously close to her ship.

"What the hell?" she exclaimed as she turned her head to try and follow the fighter. She watched as the starsaber spun through one hundred and eighty degrees, pointing back towards her. Then its engines flared and the ship accelerated back towards her, "Oh crap." She said as its pilot opened fire.

The quad lasers of the fighter ripped the tail from her vessel and immediately alarms began to sound throughout the cockpit. Everywhere that Kassa looked an instrument panel reported a systems failure and the fighter was getting closer.

"*Bright Hope* I surrender!" she signalled, "Cease your attack!"

With three Jedi to keep watch on her, Kassa was not restrained when they brought her aboard the Bright Hope. Instead they simply escorted her to the lounge area and sat her down.

"Kassa you are under arrest." Cal said.

"On what charge?" Kassa replied, folding her arms in front of her, "I've not done anything."

"Theft." Lara told her.

"Of what?"

"Three corpses." Lara said, "Oh and obstructing an investigation."

"Oh that." Kassa said.

"So where are they?" Cal asked.

"Who?" Kassa replied.

Fear.

All of the Jedi could sense that Kassa was worried about what was going to happen to her.

"Tell us where they are." Lara said, leaning close to Kassa. She focused her mind on the Zeltron's before saying, "You know you want to tell us."

Kassa let out a laugh.

"Trying your mind games on me?" she said, looking into Lara's eyes, "Go away little girl. You're out of your league."

"And you're out of luck." Cal said abruptly, "Never mind theft and obstruction I'm charging you as an accessory to murder."

Kassa's face fell.

"You can't do that." She said, "You can't prove anything."

"Kyle Jenner and his Padawan are dead and you're protecting their killers." Seth said, "Sounds simple to me."

"So where are the bodies you stole?" Cal asked.

"I had nothing to do with the killings." Kassa said, "If I tell you what I did with the bodies I want immunity."

Cal looked from Seth to Lara and back again. Seth nodded briefly.

"Go on." Cal said, "I'll overlook how you've been obstructing us if you put us back on track."

"Their friends wanted the bodies back." Kassa said, "They're a mercenary outfit and they don't like leaving their dead behind."

"Where are they?" Cal asked.

"An island near the equator. They've got a camp there. Check my ship's log, the location is there."

6.

"Should we really have let her go?" Lara said as the Jedi watched the *Party Animal* limping slowly back towards Delvad.

"She's a minor piece of this." Cal said, "I want the mercenaries that Kyle chased here."

"He didn't chase them anywhere." Seth said and the Udras both turned towards him, "I pulled his fighter's flight recorder. It clearly showed that the ship's hyperdrive had not been used on its last flight."

"Could he have landed here and taken off again?" Lara asked.

"No." Seth told her, "As far as the ship's navigation system was concerned it was still in the Tepillos system. Somebody transported it from there to here."

"The mercenaries." Cal said, "Let's go teach them not to cross the Jedi."

The two ships came in low over the water just as the sun was rising. In front was Seth Ashran's starsaber while the *Bright Hope* came in behind him. The mercenaries had selected a sheltered cove for their camp, which meant that the approaching Jedi would not get a clear look at it until the last minute. But there were lookout posts built in each direction to alert them to approaching attackers.

Seth fired as soon as his sensors locked onto the nearest outpost. The strike would undoubtedly alert the mercenaries but it would prevent them knowing exactly what they were facing. The missile streaked across the sky and blasted the outpost apart, a ball of flame rising into the air.

"You're clear." Seth said, "I'll cover you."

"Copy that." Cal replied, "Good hunting."

Cal brought the *Bright Hope* in to land near the burning lookout post and he and Lara disembarked before running in the direction of the primary mercenary camp. Ahead of them they could make out the sounds of weapons fire as the mercenaries fired on Seth, still unaware of the presence of Cal and Lara.

Cal's PTP link chimed.

"Go ahead." He said, plucking the device from his belt while continuing to run.

"Flyby complete." Seth's voice said, "I'd say there's less than a dozen of them down there. They've got a transport ship, but it's not powered up. You want me to take it out?"

"No." Cal replied, "We can't be sure Kyle's not being held inside it. Set down and join us."

"Copy Cal. Be with you soon."

As Cal and Lara neared the camp, they saw that it was in chaos. Seth's sudden attack run had targeted supply dumps and weapons emplacements as well as a cluster of repulsorlift vehicles parked by the edge of the shore. Now all were burning wrecks. The mercenaries themselves were focusing their attention in the opposite direction, where Seth's fighter had flown off. So as the other two Jedi ran onto the beach the mercenaries did not see them.

Two of the mercenaries were setting up a support weapon and when Cal spotted what they were doing he reached out through the force and collapsed the weapon before it was fully assembled. This caused the mercenaries to look around and see the oncoming Jedi.

"Behind us!" one of them yelled and he reached for a rifle.

"Scatter!" Cal snapped and he and Lara ran in different directions. Cal activated his lightsaber and hurled the weapon, its blade spinning around as it flew. The weapon sliced through one of the mercenaries who had been setting up the weapon and he fell to the ground with a smoking gash across his chest. The other one dived for cover as Cal called his weapon back to his grasp.

Meanwhile Lara used the cloud of smoke from a stack of burning crates to mask her advance. She activated her own lightsaber right as she leapt upwards through the cloud, holding it in front of her with both hands. She landed in front of a trio of startled mercenaries and sliced the barrel from the rifle of one as he tried to aim at her. Taking one hand off her lightsaber she reached out towards the mercenaries and channelled a blast of force energy towards them, knocking them all off their feet.

Cal saw a mercenary raise a weapon. It was a beam tube, an ancient energy weapon but no less deadly for it. Cal raised his lightsaber, placing its blade between himself and the mercenary so that when the man fired the energy beam struck it instead of Cal. Twisting his weapon slightly, Cal deflected the beam, sending it back towards the mercenary and before the man could take his finger from his trigger he was struck down by his own attack.

Looking around Cal saw his sister battling the three mercenaries. Their rifles destroyed or lost when they fell, they had instead draw knives and were attempting to trick Lara into focusing too hard on one of them while the other two could take advantage of her distraction. Lara span, sweeping her lightsaber in a wide

arc that forced all three mercenaries to move back from her. Then she stepped forwards and plunged the energy blade into the chest of the mercenary nearest to it.

"Lara! Watch out to your left!" Cal yelled as one of the other two mercenaries lunged towards her with his knife extended in front of him.

Lara dived to one side and as the mercenary passed by her she cut across his waist with her lightsaber and sliced him in two. The last of the three mercenaries dropped his knife and dragged himself across the sand towards his dropped rifle, trying to put some distance between himself and Lara. But as he reached out for the weapon Cal, using the force to call the weapon to him instead, pulled it from his grasp. Lara swung her lightsaber back and forth, slicing across the mercenary twice and he toppled backwards before landing in a heap at her feet.

Through the force, Cal sensed an imminent attack and looking around he saw another mercenary aiming a weapon at him. Immediately Cal recognised it as a wave rifle, a weapon that emitted continuous streams of energy. What made it more dangerous was that it could be set to spread its deadly energy over a wide area instead of focusing it like other energy weapons. Knowing that he would not be able to block such an attack with his lightsaber, Cal dived for cover.

He felt the heat of the energy blast as it past over his head and a tent behind him burst into flames as it was swamped by the energy. Looking towards the pirate, Cal felt for the man's mind in the force and planted the idea of movement along the shoreline. The mercenary ceased fire and turned towards the water before firing again. There was a 'whoosh' as the massive energy discharge boiled the seawater and turned it into a cloud of steam.

With his opponent distracted, Cal charged at him and before the man could bring his weapon to bear on the Jedi again he cut him down with a single slice of his lightsaber.

There was the rattle of a projectile weapon set to fire fully automatic and plumes of sand as the bullets tore up the beach at Cal's feet. Before the firer could adjust his aim Cal threw himself behind a stack of boxes that Seth's attack run had missed. The firing intensified as more of the surviving mercenaries joined in. There was movement from beside Cal and Lara landed beside him.

"Now what?" she said.

"I counted four left." Cal said, "What about you?"

"I agree, four left. It would be easy if we could get out from behind here without getting shot."

Cal pulled out his PTP link.

"Seth are you there?" he said, taking care not to raise his voice too much in case the mercenaries heard him.

"I've got the camp in sight. But I don't see you." Seth replied.

"You see the boxes that's getting shot to pieces?" Cal asked.

"Yeah, I see it."

"We're behind that."

"Well just keep your heads down. I'll be there in a minute."

"I don't think we've got that long." Lara said as a chunk of a wooden crate splintered near to her head, making her flinch, "Cal we need a way out."

"Agreed." Cal said, "We can't afford to wait for Seth." And he looked around. Then he smiled, "Get ready to move." He said and he reached out his hand in front of him.

Just as he had used it to call the rifle towards him earlier, Cal once again channelled the force for telekinesis. But this time instead of moving a large object he wanted to move much smaller ones. Lots of them. A plume of sand rose upwards as Cal pulled on it with his mind and sent it straight up. Then he let go and allowed the sand to fall over a wide area. As the cloud of tiny grains of sand fell to the ground the mercenaries cried out in alarm and ceased fire as they shielded their faces.

"Now!" Cal yelled and both he and Lara jumped out from behind their hiding place and rushed at the mercenaries.

Seeing the Jedi approach the mercenaries turned to run, but they found their way blocked by the sudden appearance of Seth who cut down the man closest to him. Cal and Lara charged into the remaining mercenaries, lightsabers at the ready and as they attempted to bring their weapons to bear on the Jedi Cal and Lara each cut one down.

With no opponents remaining the three Jedi shut off their lightsabers and looked around.

"Hang on." Cal said, "Where's the other one?"

As if to answer his question there was the sound of an engine powering up and the Jedi all looked around to see the last of the mercenaries sat in the cockpit of one of their ships. Deliberately avoided by Seth, the Jedi had inadvertently left the man with a method of escape.

"Run!" Cal yelled and they all ran towards the ship as fast as they could.

Frantically the mercenary tried to ready his ship for launch and it rose off the ground just as the Jedi approached. Cal ground to a halt and pulled a cylinder from his belt that had a length of synthrope attached to it. Aiming the cylinder at the mercenary vessel he activated it. The cylinder flew from his grasp, trailing the synthrope behind it. The front of the cylinder unfolded to form a grappling hook and as it flew just under the mercenary ship it caught on its landing gear.

Keeping a firm hold of the other end of the synthrope, Cal was lifted off the ground as the ship got higher. Returning his lightsaber to his belt, Cal then began to pull himself along the line towards the ship while Lara and Seth watched from the beach below. The landing gear was retracted, trapping the synthrope line against the hull just as Cal neared the top. He let go with one hand and reached for his lightsaber again. Activating the weapon, he sliced across the hull to cut a hole large enough to let him climb inside. Once there he began to make his way to the cockpit, alert just in case there had been anyone else aboard to begin with. But the only presence he felt aside from his own was that of the pilot. Silently he crept towards the cockpit access and stood in the doorway, staring at the pilot.

"Take the ship back down." He said and the mercenary turned around, startled to discover he was not alone.

On the seat beside the mercenary was a weapon that he had discarded when he began preparing the ship for takeoff. The man reached for the weapon and his hand was on it before Cal could pull it away with the force. Instead, as the man aimed his blaster at him Cal struck. The blade of his lightsaber severed the man's arm and then sliced through his head, causing him to slump over the controls.

Cal shut off his lightsaber and grabbed hold of the empty seat as the ship itched forwards and began to dive towards the ocean below. Pulling himself forwards, Cal dragged the dead man from the control panel and took hold of the controls for himself, levelling out just as the ship was about to plunge into the water. Then he pulled the dead mercenary from his seat all together and sat in his place instead before steering a course that would take him back to the camp.

The bar was gloomy and the patrons all did their best to avoid eye contact with one another. Few of them wanted to be recognised. Kassa sat at a table located in a corner far from the bar itself and tilted the glass containing her ninth drink of the evening to drain every last drop from it.

"You have something for me?" a hooded figure asked.

"A cloak and hood?" Kassa said, "Could you be any more melodramatic?"

"I did not come here for fashion advice." The figure replied as he took a seat opposite Kassa.

"You were right." Kassa told him, "The rest of those mercenaries were hiding on Delvad after all."

"Then I shall go there and deal with them."

"No need. The Jedi have finished off your dirty work for you."

"The Jedi?"

"Oh yes. They figured out that the mercenaries were involved in your little scheme and took their revenge."

"The Jedi do not seek vengeance." The figure said solemnly.

"Well they sure made a mess whatever their motives." Kassa replied, "They killed all of the mercenaries you missed rather efficiently."

"There were no survivors?"

"No, not a single one. So no one has any reason to suspect you even exist."

"Except you."

"Yeah, well there's not much you can do about that is there? Kill me and some rather disturbing evidence may well end up in the possession of your rivals."

"They do not concern me."

"Well they should. After all they've been doing this for three hundred years, ever since their ancestors surveyed the sector."