

STAR WARS

TALES OF THE JEDI



I-X: ECHO

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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...

ECHO

THE INSURGENTS ON TEPILLOS ARE STRETCHING THE REPUBLIC'S RESOURCES WITH THEIR RELENTLESS ATTACKS. CAL AND LARA UDRA ATTEMPT TO CUT OFF THE SUPPLY OF ARMS TO THE INSURGENTS AND IN DOING SO COME ACROSS ANOTHER ONE OF THE NARTHIS SECTOR'S MANY SECRETS...

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1 .

The first bomb would later be judged to have gone off prematurely. It exploded in a trash can located in front of a government building, but at a time when there were no people in the streets to be injured. The next five went off simultaneously, also located near government buildings but outside the areas covered by security checks. Then as sirens sounded and citizens did their best to get away from the city centre another eighteen devices detonated at transport hubs causing limited structural damage but massive casualties thanks to the random pieces of metal packed into the devices as shrapnel.

That was when the Republic forces made their presence felt.

Colonel Airon Jeck had put his troops on standby as soon as the first bomb went off, so they were in a higher state of readiness than the insurgents had anticipated. Few of the planned insurgent snipers were in position as platoons of soldiers began to channel movement along controlled routes, keeping the primary streets clear for emergency aid vehicles. Nevertheless, these few carried out their role as it had been intended, firing on the Republic troops in the hope that they would respond by returning fire on the general population.

The attempt failed and there was no massacre of civilians by the military, Colonel Jeck's men were far too well trained for that. But it did prompt the Colonel to reinforce his forces in the city, drawing more men away from the Green Zone.

That was when the insurgents' main force made their presence felt.

Vehicles packed with explosives were crashed into the perimeter fences before hoards of armed insurgents rushed to get through the breaches before the Republic's troops could react. But it was to Colonel Jeck's credit that he had anticipated further attacks elsewhere, so had retained an air mobile reserve at the Green Zone's starport. Using their heavily armed transports for support, the troops of this reserve soon drove back the assault and in less than two hours the Green Zone was again secure and by nightfall the city was nominally under government control once again.

Senior Agent Jule Raser, head of the sector rangers in the Narthis Sector welcomed Jedi Knight Cal Udra and his younger sister and padawan Lara into her office.

"I hope this isn't inconvenient." She said.

"We were about to find out who stole the statue from the ancient temple on Partharan." Lara said.

Jule looked puzzled.

"Partharan?" she said, "I've not heard of that planet. I thought you were only responsible for the Narthis Sector."

"It doesn't exist." Cal said, "She was watching a holodrama. So no, this isn't inconvenient."

"Like you don't care who reprogrammed Shaylen's droid to tell her that Vorsas is really her cousin so she can't marry him." Lara replied.

Ignoring this, Jule returned to her desk and picked up the package that lay there. It was a bulky energy rifle, wrapped in clear plastic and labelled with an evidence tag.

"There's been a serious incident on Tepillos." She said, "A series of explosions and attacks on Colonel Jeck's men, culminating in an all out assault on the Green Zone."

"Is the colonel alright?" Cal asked as he took the weapon and looked at it. Then he frowned, "Is this what I think it is?" he asked.

"A wave rifle." Jule said, "One of about thirty seized from the insurgents."

"A wave rifle?" Lara repeated, "But those things are illegal just about everywhere."

"Unfortunately the insurgents on Tepillos aren't too worried about breaking the law." Jule pointed out.

"Weren't those gun runners you dealt with trying to move a bunch of these to Tepillos?" Cal said to his sister.

"Yeah." She replied, "But I only got hold of the magnetron controllers. Perhaps the insurgent got replacements."

"That's what I want your help with." Jule said.

"You want us to find out where the insurgents are getting their weapons from?" Cal asked, handing the weapon back to Jule.

"I do." She said, "All my people are busy at the moment and I hate to pull anyone off a case part way through."

"Does this mean we're going back to Tepillos?" Lara asked.

"You should be used to the place by now." Cal replied.

When the delaya-class transport the *Bright Hope* landed on Tepillos Colonel Arion Jeck was there to greet the Jedi.

"Sorry there's no honour guard this time." He said.

"That's quite alright." Cal replied, "I take it you're still operating in a state of heightened alert?" and Cal indicated the armoured vest that the colonel wore.

"We are." Colonel Jeck replied as they began to walk towards the nearest building, "But I've had to cut down on patrols to be able to boost the manpower on the Green Zone's perimeter."

"So while you're stuck tight in here the insurgents have free reign outside?" Lara said.

"Exactly. I've put in a request for more men and some battle droids, but even if the matter is expedited by the Republic's Ministry of Defence it'll still be at least a fortnight before I get reinforcements."

"Agent Raser told us you wanted someone to cut off the supply of arms." Cal said.

"You saw the wave rifle?" Colonel Jeck asked in reply.

"Yeah." Lara answered, "I thought I'd stopped them from getting here."

"Only some it would seem. Though I'm sure things would have been much worse if you hadn't done as much as you did."

"See," Lara said, prodding her brother with her elbow, "I helped." And she smiled.

Colonel Jeck paused to open the door they had now reached before leading the Jedi inside.

"This is what we seized after the attack." He said, turning on the lights.

The structure was a simple storehouse that normally stood empty. Today however row upon row of captured armaments and other paramilitary equipment was laid out on the floor. Every single item individually wrapped and labelled to indicate where it had been discovered.

"Some of its ours I'm afraid to say." Colonel Jeck said, "Stolen from our troops or even our own armoury in one or two cases."

"Do you have much of a problem with corruption?" Cal asked as he walked along a row of energy weapons, relieved that none of them bore Republic markings.

"Not much." Colonel Jeck replied, "Most of the stores that go missing are from the mess. Troopers taking a few extra candy bars when no-ones looking. We haven't actually lost any weapons from storage since I've been in command."

"You seized a lot." Lara said, "This must have hurt the insurgents at least."

"Some of them, yes." Colonel Jeck said, "But not all of the groups would have been involved in the attack on us. Since it ended the planet level of violence has actually gone up. Some of the groups that weren't involved are moving against those that were, striking while their rivals are weak."

"Terrorists killing other terrorists." Cal said, "Part of me says let them get on with it."

"Me too." Lara agreed.

"There's something more." Colonel Jeck said and his hand reached for a large pocket in his combat fatigues, "Something I've kept out of the reports so far."

"What is it?" Cal asked.

"The insurgents used this to cut through our perimeter fence in one section." The colonel said.

Lara was closer to the colonel, so it was to her that he handed the object he took from his pocket.

Surprise.

Fear.

The reaction came from Lara.

"Lara let me see." Cal said as he hurried towards his sister. As he got closer Lara turned around and held out what she held. Then, with a 'snap-hiss' she ignited the lightsaber and its emerald green blade extended out in front of her.

"Stang." Cal exclaimed as Lara waved the weapon between them.

"Cal this is real." She said. There were companies that manufactured copies of the symbolic Jedi weapon, but none of them stood up to close examination by a Jedi.

"Could we be dealing with a Sith?" Colonel Jeck asked.

"Not a genuine one." Cal said, "The blade is the wrong colour. But I suppose we could be dealing with one of the Jedi who fell during the war. Lara give that here."

Lara shut off the lightsaber and handed it to Cal who began to study it closely. Twisting one end, he opened up the casing.

"Kathracite." He said.

"What?" Colonel Jeck asked.

"There are several different types of Adegan crystal that we use to make our lightsabers." Cal explained, "Kathracite is one of them."

"The worst one." Lara said, "Even my relacite blade's better than that."

"So what does that mean?" the colonel asked.

"It means that this weapon likely belonged to a padawan." Cal said.

"Lom Des." Lara said.

A sullustan, Lom Des had been the padawan learner to Jedi Knight Kyle Jenner whose disappearance had triggered the deployment of the Udras to the Narthis Sector. Lom Des' body had been found at their residence in the city.

"His weapon was never recovered." Cal said, "We just assumed that it was taken by the assassin droid that killed him."

"Maybe it was." Lara said, "Proof of the kill."

Cal thought for a moment.

"Its possible I suppose." He said, "We know that Kyle Jenner chased the droid off planet, but we don't know how much time elapsed between Lom's death and Kyle discovering the droid. Now we know that an off world mercenary team was involved in Kyle's death, but maybe they had more than just a passing interest in Tepillos."

"We have had some mercenary teams turn up here." Colonel Jeck told the jedi.

"And mercenaries must have sources for weapons." Lara pointed.

"I'm guessing these mercenaries don't land here." Cal said, "So where do they land?"

2.

Cal handed over two hundred credits in docking fees.

"Will my ship be safe here?" he asked the port official. The starport was about as far away from the Republic's Green Zone as it was possible to get on Tepillos, on the outskirts of a city situated in the middle of a desert region. Sand blown in from the wilderness around the city was everywhere.

"As safe as any of the others." He replied gruffly.

Cal handed over another hundred credits. This time in cash rather than from an electronic credit stick. The official grinned, revealing large gaps in his crooked teeth.

"I'll make sure she's looked after real nice." He said.

"Thank you." Cal said and as he shook the official's hand he discretely pressed another twenty credits into it. "Now where would a man with his own ship that is looking for employment go to relax?" he asked and the official smiled again.

"The Crying Nerf." He said.

"Leave them." The doorman of the Crying Nerf said when he saw the blasters that both Cal and Lara had strapped to their legs. Operating undercover, the jedi had deemed it prudent to leave their lightsabers on the *Bright Hope* and instead bring the more conventional pulse-wave blasters that they had been issued to supplement them. The physical size of both the doorman and the plasma carbine he cradled gave the impression that there would be no exceptions to the cantina's prohibition on carrying weapons inside. As the doorman held out a metal box Cal and Lara both dropped their blasters into it. Then the doorman locked the box and handed the key to Cal.

"You can have them back when you leave." The doorman said, then he sat down and looked out into the street.

"Stay close." Cal whispered as he and Lara walked into the cantina.

Surprisingly the interior of the business was brightly lit, instead of the dingy room lined with shadowy alcoves that Cal and Lara had expected. Outside of the Green Zone, this was the first place they had visited on Tepillos that seemed to have proper lighting.

"I guess no-one's worried about being seen here." Lara said quietly.

"Of course not." Cal replied, "I bet everyone here's a crook."

"So where do you want to start?" Lara asked, looking around the room.

"I think the bar itself." Cal replied, "What are you having?"

"Think I'll stick with beer."

"Me too." Cal said and he took out a small bag of coins.

The two jedi calmly walked towards the bar, avoiding making eye contact with any of the other patrons.

"What can I get you?" the twi'lek barman asked, his lekku head tails slipping from his shoulder.

"Two beers please." Cal replied and he placed a coin on the counter.

The barman took the coin and exchanged it for two glasses of golden liquid.

"Could you tell me if anyone here's looking for transport?" Cal asked.

"Transport? To where?" the barman asked in return.

"Anywhere." Lara answered, "We have our own ship."

"Its fast." Cal added.

The barman smiled.

"Well you could do worse than try those beings over there." He said, pointing to a table where a group of beings from several species was playing cards.

"Thanks." Cal said, then he looked at Lara, "Come on, let's go make some new friends."

"Ooh, I do like meeting people." Lara said.

As Cal and Lara approached the table a green skinned rodian threw down his cards.

"This just got too expensive for me." He said in the rodian language and he got up. As he walked away from the table he walked past Cal and Lara, "Take my advice." He said to them, "Stay away from this bunch of cheats."

"Poor loser." One of the group still at the table said in a deep rumbling voice. The owner was a massive female herglic who occupied three seats on the couch set against the wall, "If one of you wants to join us you're more than welcome."

"Actually," Cal said, "I don't mind if I do. The name's Cal, Cal Disrel."

"Can I join in too?" Lara asked, "You've got an extra seat."

"She's just gone to use the refresher." Another of the group at table said, "She'll be right back." And he began to deal out the cards.

"So who is your companion?" the herglic asked, looking Lara up and down.

"This is Lara." Cal replied, "She's my, err--"

"I'm his girlfriend." Lara interrupted, placing a hand on her brother's shoulder, "Though I sometimes wonder why. He doesn't like to admit it."

"Well grab a seat." the dealer said to her, "Just because you're not in the game doesn't mean you can't stay. I've never turned down a bit more female company."

"She's mine." Cal said.

At that moment the final participant in the game returned to the table.

"Well hello there Cal." She said and Cal picked up on pheromones in the air.

"Kassa." Cal replied, frowning.

Kassa was a member of the near-human zeltron species, red skinned humanoids who were able to manipulate other humanoids by releasing pheromones. She was an information broker, who bought and sold details of events throughout the sector and beyond. Cal and Lara had encountered her before. This of course meant that she could give them both away, but Cal doubted that the beings around the table were aware of what she really did either. If she exposed him then he could do the same to her.

"So you know Cal and his girlfriend then?" the herglic asked Kassa.

"His girlfriend?" Kassa replied.

"Yes, she's his girlfriend." The herglic said, "But apparently he has trouble admitting it."

"Isn't that always the case with men?" Kassa said, then she looked back at Cal and with a large smile on her face she said, "Come on Cal, show Lara how much you care. Give her a kiss. A big one."

"What?" Cal and Lara said simultaneously.

"Don't be shy." The herglic said, "Show your young lady how much she mean to you."

"Right. Well of course." Cal said and he and Lara looked at one another nervously.

"We're all waiting." The dealer said.

"And we're not going any further until you've kissed her." Another gambler added.

Slowly, Cal and Lara moved closer together.

"Get on with it!" the herglic snapped and she grabbed both the jedi and pressed their faces together.

Wide-eyed, the two siblings remained in their position as the others watched.

"That's no good." Kassa said her smile still on her face, "Come on Cal put some effort into it. A lady likes some effort."

"That's better." The herglic said as Cal and Lara embraced.

"Now cut it out or get a room." The dealer said, "We're ready to play."

Cal and Lara gasped as they separated.

"Oh look," Cal said after draining his beer, "My glass is empty. Barkeep! One of your strongest please!"

"Make that two!" Lara called out as she too gulped down the remains of her beer.

As fresh drinks were brought to the table the card game began. All the while Cal and Lara kept an eye on Kassa. Initially Cal just listened to what the others had to say as they played. He did not want to arouse suspicion by raising the subject of smuggling. He did however; let slip that he had a ship capable of interstellar travel.

"Excuse me." Kassa said at the end of a hand, "I just need to pay a visit again."

"Already?" the dealer said, "I thought you zeltrons could hold your liquor."

"We don't get drunk easily." Kassa replied, "We still need to pee. Especially when drinking whatever this place serves." And she got up and headed towards the refresher stations.

Deception.

The gamblers had bluffed repeatedly through the game, some better than others. But Kassa's statement was a blatant lie.

"You know what," Lara said as Kassa disappeared from view, "I could do with going myself." And she got up and followed Kassa.

Lara moved cautiously, using her abilities to blend in to the crowd as she neared the refresher station.

Inside only one of the stalls was occupied and Lara crept closer. She took a deep breath and then jumped into the air.

"Busy?" she said suddenly as she caught hold of the top of the refresher door and looked over the top at Kassa who at that moment was sliding cards up her sleeve.

"What the hell are you playing at?" Kassa demanded as she opened the door and stormed out of the stall.

"Well you know us girls." Lara replied, "We never go to the refresher alone." And she grabbed Kassa's arm, "Unless we're cheating at cards anyway."

"Going to tell your brother on me? Or is that your boyfriend? What is the jedi order's position on incest nowadays?"

"Actually I was thinking about telling the other gamblers." Lara said and she snatched the cards from Kassa's sleeve before turning back towards the door leading to the bar.

"Give those back!" Kassa yelled and she grabbed hold of Lara's hair and pulled on it.

The high-pitched scream from across the room made everyone look towards the door to the refresher stations. Just emerging were Kassa and Lara, both clutching clumps of each others hair in their grasps, while Lara also held several playing cards in her other hand that Kassa was desperately trying to snatch from her.

"Awesome." One of the gamblers said.

"No," Cal said, "not awesome at all." And he rushed towards the two fighting females as a pair of bouncers did the same.

"Lara stop!" Cal exclaimed as he wrapped his arms around his sister and tried to pull her away from Kassa.

"Cal let go of me!" Lara cried out in reply, "She's cheating!"

As Cal and the bouncers broke up the fight, the other gamblers crowded round to see what Lara was talking about. None made any attempt to conceal their reaction when they saw cards drop from Lara's hand and Kassa's sleeve.

"Get out of here!" the barman yelled at Kassa when he too saw the cards, "I run an honest house!"

"Okay fine." Kassa replied, "Let me just get my money."

"Don't push it." The herglic said, blocking Kassa's return to the table, "Just leave."

Scowling, Kassa stormed out of the cantina.

"You know," the herglic said to Cal, "you and your girlfriend did us a favour there and I'd like to repay it. How would you like a nice easy courier run? Just a few high value items that I need moving quickly and not through official channels."

Cal smiled.

"Tell me more." He said.

"Dorn Station?" Lara said when she and Cal returned to the *Bright Hope*, "Sounds like a nav beacon, but I thought there were only three in the sector."

"There are." Cal said and he began to enter the data given to him by the herglic into the *Bright Hope's* navigation system, "So I think we should ask a few questions before we jump to these co-ordinates only to find out that it's a trap."

Cal turned from the navigation system to the communications and set the system to connect to Aurek Station where the jedi were usually based. After a short delay Agent Raser's face appeared on the display.

"Jedi Udra." She said, "How are things going on Tepillos?"

"Not bad." Cal said, "In fact we may have a lead on the route being used by the gun runners. We've been asked to head out to Dorn Station."

"Dorn Station?" Jule repeated.

"That's right." Cal said.

"We didn't know there was a Dorn Station." Lara said, "Just Aurek, Besh and Cresh."

"There are." Jule said, "I've not heard anything about a fourth navigation beacon. I can run it by Captain De Kuun if you like."

"Please do." Cal said, "But hurry. If we don't leave soon then the smugglers may start to get suspicious of us."

"Cal promised them we'd be there in under ten hours." Lara said, "So from that data we've been given we'll have to leave in two or three."

"You've been given jump co-ordinates?" Jule asked.

"Yes we have." Cal replied, "I can forward them to you if that helps."

"Yes it will." Jule said, "I'll run them through Aurek Station's database and see what I come with in addition to speaking with the captain."

"Copying the data now." Cal told her.

Jule's image looked aside as the information reached her terminal and she ran it against the navigational database.

"There's a match." Jule said, "But it's incredibly old. Two hundred years or so."

"So there is a Dorn Station then?" Lara said.

"I don't know about that." Jule said, "But at one time or another the Republic charted a route to those coordinates and then abandoned them."

"Well then," Cal said, "it looks like we're about to find out why."

3.

The co-ordinates supplied by the herglic were in interstellar space, well away from the mass shadow of any stellar body. It was exactly the sort of place that a navigation beacon would be placed and when the *Bright Hope* dropped out of hyperspace the Udras found themselves staring at a massive space station.

"That thing is huge." Lara said, gazing out of the cockpit canopy.

"Sensors say about six thousand metres across." Cal said.

Dorn Station consisted of a large sphere that made up about half of the structure's total diameter, with a system of spines emerging from around what appeared to be its equator.

"It's got power as well." Cal said, "Thermal scans show a large heat source near the centre of the core section, "I don't see any lights or other signs of habitation though. I'll take us in closer."

"Do they look like docking ports to you?" Lara asked as the *Bright Hope* began to pass beneath the spines and she pointed upwards to towers descending from the spines toward them.

"They do." Cal said, "I'd say that this place was built to handle space traffic. A lot of space traffic."

"But who's? This thing doesn't look anything like anything I've seen built by the Republic."

"There aren't any Republic markings either." Cal commented.

At that moment the *Bright Hope's* communications system interrupted them.

"Is that you Cal?" an unidentified male voice said.

Cal and Lara looked at one another.

"I think you'd better answer him." Lara said before adding, "Whoever he is."

"This is Cal." Cal said, "Who are you?"

"You can call me Nordem. The fat lady told us to expect you. Now follow my signal, we've got the merchandise." The man then stopped speaking and the channel's audio signal was replaced by the regular bleeping of a homing signal.

Cal adjusted the ship's heading, taking it up through the spines and towers and towards the central sphere. As they cleared the equatorial network a flashing light could be seen coming from an opening on the surface of the sphere.

"A docking bay?" Lara said.

"Makes sense and there seems to be a shield over the opening too. I think we just found our gun runners."

The shield covering the docking bay shimmered as the *Bright Hope* passed through and Cal set it down on the deck. The bay itself looked to be as large as the primary hangar on a fleet carrier and had room for several ships the size of the *Bright Hope*. However, at this moment there was only a single other vessel present. It was another transport ship that looked to have seen better days.

"Dynamic-class." Cal said, "There could be quite a few beings on that. We best keep our blasters handy."

"What about our lightsabers?" Lara asked and Cal shook his head.

"We need to keep incognito until we know as much as possible about their operation." he said, "Plus any information we can glean about Kyle Jenner. We can't do that if they spot our lightsabers."

Lara nodded.

"I suppose so." She agreed.

There were enough of the hangar bay's lights still functional to provide a reasonable level of illumination, though it was clear that at one time there had been many more lights in operation. The bay was for the most however, tidy. There were only a handful of objects lying on the deck as if they had been abandoned, most of what was on the deck looked as though it had just been unloaded.

There were three beings unloading crates from the dynamic-class ship when Cal and Lara descended the *Bright Hope's* access ramp. One of them, a zabrak judging by the small horns that covered his otherwise bald head smiled and waved when he saw them. Subtly, Cal motioned with his hand behind his back and the *Bright Hope's* access ramp retracted up into the hull. If anything went wrong then the last thing he wanted was for these criminals to get hold of the ship.

"Call!" he called out, his voice revealing him to be Nordem, "Good to meet you at last. I see the fat lady was right, a delaya-class should be able to get down to Tepillos and back out again before the Republic can react."

"My ship's fast alright." Cal said, "She can beat yours any day of the week, in hyperspace or at sublight."

"You two got much experience running blockades?" Nordem asked.

"Some." Lara said.

"Enough." Cal added, "We've never been caught so far. But then again, our ship is difficult to catch. We can just turn around and come back later for another go if we have to."

"Not with this cargo you can't." Nordem replied, "Our customer needs a rapid delivery."

"So what's the cargo?" Lara asked.

"Weapons." Nordem said, "Firearms mainly, we've got a guy in the Levik cluster turning them out where the Republic can't find him. But there's some heavy stuff too."

"What good are firearms against the Republic's army?" Lara asked.

"They may be a thirty thousand years or so out of date," Nordem said, "but they'll still kill you and some of them will do it from further away than a blast rifle can manage. Anyway, right now our customer is desperate. He'll take whatever we can get him."

"Say we pull this off," Cal said, "will there be more?"

"Sure, I don't see why not. Our customer is always looking for more. We've got some modern stuff coming in next month. That should fetch us a good price. Three or four times what its worth on the legitimate market."

The Nordem turned around and called out to a figure just disembarking from the dynamic-class ship, "Hey Vell! Come meet the smugglers who are taking our shipment to Tepillos."

The figure that had looked human from the side turned towards Nordem and the Udras and as he did so he revealed a face that lacked eyes, instead having just sunken empty sockets. He was a miraluka.

After millennia living in an environment that lacked visible light, the miraluka had first lost the use of their eyes before losing the actual organs themselves. Now they 'saw' through the force and when they looked at a Jedi they knew what they were seeing immediately.

"Stang!" Cal exclaimed and he reached for his blaster.

"They're Jedi!" Vell bellowed and he too reached for a weapon.

Cal fired first, sending a spatial distortion directly at Vell and the miraluka fell backwards as it slammed into his chest and pulverised his ribs. Momentarily stunned by the sudden change of circumstances Nordem hesitated before diving aside and scrabbling away from the Jedi as the other gunrunners returned fire. Cal and Lara fell back towards the *Bright Hope*, laying down covering fire with their blasters as they went. So far both sides were doing the same thing, making use of suppressing fire while the combatants sought to take cover from one another. This left the Udras at a disadvantage, the only cover reasonably available to them came from the structure of the *Bright Hope* while their opponents had not only their vessel but also the crates they had already unloaded to hide behind.

"Nice going." Lara said, "It sure would be nice if we had our lightsabers right now, but I suppose that would give us away. Not like getting seen by a miraluka or anything."

"Okay I admit it." Cal replied, "Maybe my plan did have one slight flaw in it."

Having got themselves organised after the sudden shock of finding themselves involved in a battle, the gunrunners were beginning to spread out now as they attempted to surround the Jedi. As the Jedi were forced to spread their attention over a wider area Nordem ceased firing from behind the crate he was using as cover. Initially Cal and Lara both assumed that he was reloading his weapon, but then Cal spotted him prying open the crate and taking a long tubular weapon from it. Moments later he lifted the weapon to his shoulder and directed towards the Jedi.

"Grenade launcher!" Cal exclaimed as Nordem fired.

Cal extended a hand and reached out through the force, hoping to deflect the fist sized explosive projectile before it could reach them. But he was a fraction too slow and there was a blinding flash accompanied by an overpowering 'boom' as he steeled himself against the blast. Dazed, he fell backwards as Lara collapsed beside him. The projectile had been a non-lethal flash-bang and it was all Cal could do to resist it, but Lara had been overcome and blacked out. Over the ringing in his ears Cal heard the sound of pounding feet.

"Drop the weapon Jedi!" one of the gunrunners bellowed at him, standing over him and aiming a pulse wave rifle at his head.

The gunrunners dragged Cal and Lara to their feet, taking their blasters from them.

"What no lightsabers?" Nordem asked, "A pity. From what I hear they fetch a nice price with the Tepillos rebellion too."

"What do we do with boss?" one of the other gunrunners asked Nordem.

"Kill them." Another said.

"No." Nordem replied, "Our client may want to talk to them, not to mention the fat lady. For them to be here means we've got a leak. We'll stash them somewhere and use their ship to complete the run ourselves."

The stairwell had fewer functioning lights than the hangar bay, but still enough to provide a suitable level of light for humans to see by.

Under the watchful eyes of his comrades who kept their weapons trained on the Udras, Nordem knelt down and used two more sets of binders to bind the jedi's legs together. Then he retreated back up the stairs and along with the other men left the stairwell, slamming the hatchway shut behind them. A second 'clump' from beyond the door indicating that they had jammed it shut.

"So now what we supposed to do?" Lara asked, trying to turn her head far enough to be able to see Cal.

"Hang on, I'm thinking." Cal said as he cast his eyes around the stairwell.

"Thinking about what?" Lara asked, "We're standing half way down a set of stairs and we're tied up so we can't even get to the next step."

"There must be something we can use to get out of these binders." Cal said.

"Like what?" Lara said and she too began to look around.

"Careful." Cal said.

"Careful of what?"

"Careful you don't make us fall."

"Don't be ridiculous, I'm not going to make us-" Lara began before accidentally pushing against Cal and knocking him sideways.

The two jedi both cried out in alarm as they toppled over and rolled down the stairs. As they tumbled, out of control and unable to stop themselves falling they both let out cries of alarm and pain until they reached the base of the flight they had been left on. Lying on the deck plating where the stairs turned through one hundred and eighty degrees they both groaned.

"Are you okay?" Cal asked.

"Fine." Lara moaned in response, "What about you?"

"A few bruises I think. My ego for starters."

"A critical wound then."

"Oh very funny. Now do you think you can sit up?" Cal asked.

"Not with your weight holding me down."

"We'll go together. On three. One, two three!"

Simultaneously Cal and Lara lifted their bodies up off the deck, using one another for leverage until they were sat upright with their legs sticking out in front of them.

"There." Cal said, "That's much better."

"Oh yes." Lara replied, "We're still tied up but at least now we're tied up in a sitting position. Its paradise. We should try this more often."

"Don't tempt me!" Cal snapped.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means that keeping you tied up would make my life a damn site easier. I'm your master and you should remember that more often."

"Well you're a rubbish teacher!" Lara snapped back, "In fact so far I can't think of one thing you've taught me."

She's holding you back.

Cal was about to yell the insult at Lara when he realised that it was not coming from him, rather it was something else prompting him. He took a deep breath and let fore flow through him, calming him. But there was something more there too.

"Lara, there's something in here with us." He said.

He's jealous of what you may become.

"I feel it too." Lara replied.

"Something cold."

"Evil."

"Yes."

"Cal what if whatever it is finds us like this?" Lara asked, but Cal did not reply, "Cal?" she added after a pause.

"I'm fine, I was just thinking that's all."

"Its not that. It's just that..." and Lara trailed off.

"What?"

"I want mom."

"Mom? What makes you say that?"

"Well it's just that she's always been there. Like that time when I was six and you made me watch that horror vid about the Sith."

Oh yes, I remember that." Cal said, "You had nightmares for a week."

"Yeah, well mom was there when I was scared and right now I'm scared. I'm twenty-one and I don't want to die. Not now and not like this."

"Then we're not going to." Cal exclaimed, "You're my baby sister and my padawan and I'm going to get you out of here safely."

"How?"

Cal looked around.

"I reckon the door we were brought through is wedged shut." He said, "Besides, I don't think we could get up the stairs that easily."

"Agreed."

"But what about the doors below us? If we can get to the next level down then maybe we can find something to get us out of these binders there."

"So how do we get down to the next level?" Lara asked, "We can't walk."

"No, but we can roll. That's how we got here."

"We fell."

"Rolling, falling. Same thing really. We just get ourselves to the edge of this landing and let ourselves roll down to the next floor. Unless you have a better idea."

"No. But I do have a bad feeling about this plan."

"There'll be plenty of time to discuss it when we're back on Aurek Station. Now slide back towards me."

Still stuck in a sitting position, Cal and Lara pushed themselves across the deck until they reached the top of the stairs leading downwards with Cal facing so that he was looking down them.

"Okay," he said, "I can see the hatchway below us and it's open. When I say go I want you to lean to your right and then roll over me. It's not far. Now go!"

Despite their fall being planned this time, it was not much less painful than their previous one and when the Udras reached the base of the flight of stairs they lay still and groaned once more.

"Wondering I am," a voice said from the hatchway, "why are you here?"

4.

There was a 'crack' and both Cal and Lara winced as they tried to look up at the source of the voice but just butted the backs of their heads together. On their subsequent attempt they moved slower and found themselves looking at a rather unimposing figure that stood with the aide of an equally short staff. Green skinned and with pointed ears that jutted out horizontally. The figure wore simple robes similar to those worn by Cal and Lara and to the two jedi it was clear that he too was force sensitive, in this otherwise sinister and foreboding place he radiated an aura of serenity and calmness.

"Help us." Lara said suddenly.

"Help? Help yes, but to do what?"

"Well getting us out of these binders would be a start." Cal said, "We're jedi and there's a bunch of gunrunners about to steal our ship and use it to smuggle weapons into a war zone."

"Hmmm." The being said, "Resourcefulness is the hallmark of a jedi. If so easily trapped you are then not so effective as jedi are you."

"In our own defence," Lara said, "they had stun grenades. Now I can sense the force in you, can you help us or not?"

"Help you I can." The figure replied, then he turned around and walked away, vanishing from sight.

"Hey come back!" Lara called out and a moment later the figure's face peered around the doorframe.

"Come, come. Follow." He said, beckoning them towards him. Then he vanished once more.

"You know what to do?" Cal said.

"Slide?" Lara replied.

"Slide." Cal repeated.

Though the mysterious figure could not walk very quickly he had no difficulty in keeping ahead of Cal and Lara as they struggled to drag themselves along the deck plate while still bound together back to back. He led them along several corridors that had little or no lighting until he disappeared into a chamber and the sound of objects being tossed about before an empty food can rolled through the hatchway.

As they dragged themselves into the room the figure had gone into ahead of them, Cal and Lara looked around. An assortment of containers was stacked round the room. One of these was lying on its side and the diminutive stranger was on his hands and knees protruding from the container while he threw random objects over his shoulder.

"Look at this place Cal." Lara said as she looked around.

"Yeah, it's worse than our apartment. Though not by much."

"Not here it is." The figure said, backing out of the container, "Somewhere else have I left it."

"Err Cal," Lara said, "is it just me or is he just stringing words together at random?"

"Elsewhere must I look. Remain here you should." And the figure climbed past Cal and Lara and walked out into the corridor.

"Hey where are you going?" Lara shouted after him, but he did not respond.

"Well at least this is better than the stairwell." Cal said.

"How?"

"Well, err. I'm not sure, but it is."

There was a rustling and something in the corner dropped to the floor.

"Was that a rat?" Lara exclaimed, "Cal, I think that was a rat. If that little guy doesn't get back here soon and untie us I'm only going to have nine toes, I know it."

"Look, just stay calm. I'm sure he'll be back soon."

"How long does it take a rat to eat a human toe?"

"Right now I'm hoping they prefer your tongue."

Just then the small figure reappeared.

"Found it I did." He said and he held up a short metal cylinder, "Many years since I have used this it is." And then with a 'snap-hiss' that was familiar to the two jedi he ignited the lightsaber, "Hold still you should." He said as he used the weapon to slice through the binders restraining the Udras.

"So you are a jedi." Cal said, rubbing his wrists as he got back to his feet.

"Yes, a jedi was I. But long ago."

"Well I'm Lara." Lara said.

"And my name's Cal, Cal Udra. I'm her master."

Lara frowned at this comment.

"So who are you?" she asked, "I mean we've never heard of any other jedi in the sector apart from the one immediately before us. The again we'd never heard of this place either."

"Not surprised am I." The figure said, looking around, "Long ago it was that I came here. Told no one I did and since then have I stayed. My name – Tyshon."

"How long have you been here Tyshon?" Cal asked.

"Almost two hundred years have I been here now." Tyshon said.

Cal and Lara paused as they took this in.

"I'd heard that your species lived a long time." Cal said, "But to spend two centuries alone here seems a bit extreme."

"Extreme? Yes. But also necessary it is. Something else my companion has been. Something unseen, something—"

"Evil?" Lara said, interrupting.

"Yes."

"So what prompted you to come here?" Cal asked, "It's not like this place is on any of the major routes. We didn't even know it existed until a few hours ago."

"A new beacon for the Republic was planned. New hyperspace routes would it open up. Found this place their scouts did, empty and abandoned a long time."

"So it's definitely not built by the Republic then?" Cal said.

"No, unknown its builders are. But gone a long time."

"So the Republic tried to bring the place back online then." Lara said, "But what stopped them?"

"Death." Tyshon said solemnly, "Accidents. Started small, then larger. Fighting between some of the engineers broke out it did. Attract my interest this did and to come here I decided. When leave did the Republic, stay did I. Stayed to find what else with me was here."

"We felt it too." Cal said, "In the stairwell."

"It was trying to turn us against one another." Lara added, "Is there a nexus of dark side energy here?"

"No. Not a nexus." Tyshon said, "Something else. Something intelligent. Something angry. Move about the station it does, not tied to one place."

"Definitely not a nexus then." Cal said.

"An idea your padawan has." Tyshon replied and he stared at Lara.

"Could it be related to the Sith?" Lara asked.

"Why say that you?" Tyshon asked in reply.

"We've found considerable evidence that the Sith came here." Cal explained, "There are ruins on Atch and the remains of a battle fleet that destroyed a Republic force in the Phillos system about a thousand years ago."

Tyshon closed his eyes and leant on his staff.

"Disturbing this is." He said, opening his eyes once more, "When destroyed the Sith Empire was, evidence that a Sith's soul could be transferred to their places of power the jedi found. But only by the most powerful lords could this be done. If such a lord here is, then not forever will he remain trapped. A very bad feeling about this do I have."

"What if we destroy the station?" Lara said, "Would that kill the Sith?"

"Depends." Tyshon replied, "If only a small part does the Sith possess then survive he will unless destroyed utterly it is."

"And a smaller fragment would be easier for someone to transport to an inhabited system." Cal said.

"Yes." Tyshon said, "Find where this Sith dwells I must, only then forever cast out can he be."

"What did you say?"

"I said you're in my way. Now get out of it before I get you out of it."

"Try it."

A weapon was drawn and there was a hum as it powered up. A sharp 'crack' indicated the discharge of a projectile weapon from elsewhere in the hangar and the round ricocheted off the deck beside the two arguing men.

"Knock it off the pair of you!" Nordem yelled, "I need you to get that ship open and running. Now get to it."

Eying one another up with suspicion, the two men returned to their work while Nordem watched them from near his own ship. He cast his eyes around the hangar and spotted another cluster of his men talking together as they continued to unload their cargo.

They're plotting against you. They're plotting to take your ship.

Nordem checked his weapon again.

"It's taking too long to get into that ship." A voice said from behind Nordem and the zabrak looked around to see one of his crew standing there.

"If you want things to move faster then try helping instead of just standing around complaining."

"I'm no good with locks."

"Then what good are you Kaylor?"

"I can get you the code."

"How?"

"You know how. The Jedi have that code and we want it. So let's just beat it out of them."

"Are you brain dead? How do you propose to torture a Jedi?"

"From what I've heard the Jedi for this sector are a brother and sister."

"So?"

"So how do you think big brother will react when I start carving bits off his sister. I'll start with one of her eyes. If he doesn't give me the code I'll make him eat it."

Nordem smiled.

"Take three others with you." He said, "I don't want the Jedi able to pull any mind tricks on you."

Kaylor whistled and waved for three of his comrades to follow him and the group walked across the hangar towards the stairwell.

"So what are we doing?" one of the three asked.

"Since we can't break into the Jedi ship, we're going to get them to tell us how to open her up." Kaylor replied.

The group reached the hatchway to the stairwell and Kaylor pulled the metal bar that had been wedged in the release wheel away.

"Get ready." He said, "They're bound, but they're still Jedi." And he opened the hatch, "Oh kriff!" he exclaimed, "They're loose!"

"So we're supposed to do this with just one lightsaber between us?" Lara asked.

"Knowledge our best weapon will be. Knowledge and the force."

"Well I'd rather have a lightsaber too." Lara replied.

Tyshon frowned.

"Can you suggest any way of preventing them from leaving?" Cal asked, "Can we seal the hangar somehow?"

"Risky." Tyshon said, "Sealing the hangar, risking it staying sealed we are."

"That makes things difficult." Cal said, "Unless we can force them to split up we can't just rush them all at once. Lara's right we need more weapons."

Tyshon shook his head slowly.

"Closed your mind is. Concentrate, past the darkness shrouding this place you must look."

Cal and Lara both paused to focus their minds. Whatever the presence aboard the station was, it cast a shadow throughout the force that made it difficult to sense anything else. But the minds of the gunrunners were just about detectable.

"They've split up." Lara said, smiling, "Some of them are heading this way."

Cal smiled too.

"I've got an idea." He said.

"Look, just because they weren't in the stairwell doesn't mean that they've broken out of the binders." Kaylor said, "They've probably just dragged themselves off somewhere close by."

"What if they've found something to get loose with?" one of the others asked.

"What are the odds of that?" another said.

"Pretty good actually." Kaylor said as he spotted Lara in the corridor ahead.

The four men raised their weapons, but before they could take aim properly Lara had vanished around a corner.

"Well what are you waiting for?" Kaylor yelled, "Get after her!"

The four men rushed around the same corner Lara had turned down just moments earlier and they spotted her peering around another corner several metres ahead of them. One of Kaylor's men took aim but at the same time as Lara ducked back Kaylor knocked the man's weapon aside.

"We want them alive." He said, "Both of them."

"So what do you suggest then?" the man snapped, "Ask them nicely?"

Kaylor held up his pistol. It was a bulky weapon, an obsolete plasma pistol with strong hitting power, but limited range and ammunition capacity. Grinning, he rotated a collar set around the barrel of the weapon to

disconnect the supply of gas to turned to plasma. Now when the trigger was pulled all that would be fired was a powerful and directional magnetic pulse.

"This thing has a stun setting." He said, "Now come on."

Rounding the next corner the group found not only Lara, but also Cal in the corridor, both of them standing by a closed hatchway at the far end.

"Okay you two," Kaylor said as he and his men advanced slowly, "just come quietly and you won't be harmed."

Deception.

Even with their ability to sense the force impaired by the mysterious entity aboard Dorn Station, Cal and Lara could see through the lie easily.

"Actually I don't think we'll bother." Cal replied.

"Well that's a pity." Kaylor said, "Because I'm not giving you a choice."

"Something about that do I have to say."

The four men whirled around as the voice came from behind them and saw Tyshon standing at the junction of the two corridors.

"What the kriff is this?" one of Kaylor's men exclaimed.

"Someone we don't need." Kaylor said, "Kill him." And the other three men all raised their guns.

Before any of them could fire, Tyshon let out a yell and leapt towards them. His lightsaber ignited with a 'snap-hiss' as he bounced off a bulkhead and a burst of gunfire passed harmlessly past his head.

Startled, one of Kaylor's men tried to hold his ground and track Tyshon with his rifle. But the diminutive jedi closed the gap between them faster than he could have expected and before he could get a good aim his head was cut from his shoulders by Tyshon's lightsaber.

"Another jedi!" one of the remaining men yelled rather belatedly just before Tyshon landed in front of him and leapt up again, slashing the man's chest with his lightsaber.

Kaylor brought his plasma pistol to bear, correctly predicting that Tyshon would aim for his one remaining companion next. But just as he was about to fire Kaylor felt an arm wrap around his neck and his gun arm was grabbed and pulled off target.

"Drop it!" Cal snapped.

Tyshon despatched the other man with a single blow from his lightsaber at the same time as Kaylor clawed at Cal's face with his free hand, then jabbed his elbow backwards into Cal's ribs. But as Cal relaxed his grip and staggered backwards, Lara stepped forwards and knocked the pistol from Kaylor's grip. It hit the deck at their feet and skidded towards Tyshon. Kaylor dove after his weapon, but as his hand wrapped around its grip, Tyshon's foot was placed on top of it. Kaylor had just enough time to look into Tyshon's face before the jedi brought his lightsaber down.

"Now only five of them there are." Tyshon said as he shut off his lightsaber.

"Better than that," Cal said, breathing heavily after being elbowed in the stomach, "we've got enough weapons for us all now." And he scooped up a discarded rifle.

5.

"Where the hell are they?" Nordem said as he looked down the deserted stairwell.

"The jedi must have gotten loose and Kaylor took his men after them." The man beside him said.

Nordem reached for his point-to-point communicator.

"Kaylor where are you?" he transmitted, but in response the channel was empty but for static.

"The structure could be blocking the signal." The other man suggested.

This man is against you. He wants you to go after Kaylor so he can take over. Kaylor is dead. If you follow then you will die also.

Nordem looked at the other man.

"Ferrim, Go and find Kaylor." He said, "Bring him back here."

The man nodded and headed down the stairs, watched from above by Nordem. When the man disappeared onto the deck below Nordem withdrew through the hatchway behind him and closed it. Then he replaced the metal rod and jammed it shut, trapping the other man behind it.

Very good. Let the jedi deal with him for you.

Smiling, Nordem returned to the hangar where his men were still trying to gain access to the *Bright Hope*.

"So what's up there?" Cal asked, pointing at the ceiling in the compartment that Tyshon had led them to.

This place was one of the areas that he had frequented over the last two hundred years and as such was littered with items that he had not bothered to clear away. With so much room available to him on Dorn Station, it seemed that tidiness was not a necessity to him.

"Corridors and rooms. Many of them there are above us."

"That's not exactly helpful." Lara commented.

"It's good enough." Cal replied, "Just so long as we know that we're not cutting into the hangar itself. It wouldn't be very helpful if they saw us cutting through." Then he looked down at Tyshon, "May I borrow your lightsaber?" he asked, holding out his hand.

Tyshon tossed Cal the lightsaber and the significantly taller jedi dragged a nearby chair into the centre of the compartment and stood on top of it. Then he held the lightsaber up above his head and activated the weapon. The energy blade sliced through the centuries old plating effortlessly, punching through to the deck above. Steadily Cal began to move the lightsaber around in a wide circle above him, continuing to cut through the plating.

"Err Cal." Lara said as the circle neared completion, "I don't think-"

"Not now." Cal replied, "I'm almost done."

"Okay big brother." Lara said and she folded her arms and stepped backwards.

It was when the final piece of plating was severed and the circle completed that Cal realised what his sister had been trying to warn him about.

"Stang!" he exclaimed as he toppled from the chair, interested only in avoiding the heavy disc of metal dropping towards him.

The disc stopped suddenly and floated in midair as Tyshon held out his hand towards it.

"Perhaps from the student can the master sometimes learn." He said as he gave the disc a shove through the force and pushed it away before letting it drop the rest of the way to the deck.

"I think he just said something nice about me." Lara said to Cal, "But I'm not quite sure. Can you understand what he's saying?" Then she cried out in pain as Tyshon swung his staff and bashed it against her shin.

"Perhaps too hasty was I." He said, "Nothing useful does this padawan know."

"Now that I understood." Cal said as he got back to his feet and tossed the lightsaber back to Tyshon. Then he stood beneath the hole once more and looked up through it, "Well we missed the hangar." He said and he reached out his hand and called the rifle he had left leaning against the wall to him. Finally he leapt straight up, passing effortlessly through the hole and landed on the deck plating beside it, "Clear." He called back down and first Lara and then Tyshon followed him up.

The 'clang' of metal on metal made Ferrim turn around rapidly. So far he had found no sign of either Kaylor or the jedi, though there were hints that someone was living down here. Ferrim advanced towards the source of the noise cautiously, keeping his carbine at his shoulder. He had no interest in taking the jedi back alive, he would shoot on sight.

You have been tricked. There is no way back.

Then sudden warning surprised him and he turned in a circle, looking for where it could have come from. Then he realised that there was no one there.
“Where are you?” he called out, “Come out where I can see you.”
There was a sinister cackling and the man spun around once more.
“I said come out where I can see you.”
From behind him there was a pale glow and the laughter became louder.
Only I can save you.

Even though Cal could not sense the presence of any of the remaining gunrunners in the immediate vicinity he headed towards the hangar bay as if one of them could be around the next corner. After all there was the outside chance that they had a droid with them that he had not seen yet and the last thing he needed was for the alarm to be raised ahead of time. Behind him Lara advanced just as cautiously while Tyshon calmly brought up the rear.

After a short while he realised that he recognised this particular corridor.

“They’ve sealed off the lower level again.” Cal said softly and he indicated the hatchway leading to the stairwell that had a metal bar jamming it shut.

“That means the hangar should be just up ahead.” Lara said.

“Then let’s get ready.” Cal replied.

When they reached the hatchway to the hangar the three jedi looked round to see where the gunrunners were located.

“I only count four.” Lara whispered.

“Same here.” Cal replied, “We killed one in the fight and four downstairs. That should leave another five from what we saw earlier, one’s missing.”

“Perhaps he’s in their ship.” Lara suggested.

“No more hidden can I sense.” Tyshon said, “If one more there is then not in the hangar he is.”

“They’ve not got into the Bright Hope yet.” Cal said as he looked at the pair of figures trying to force open the ship’s access ramp.

“We’ve still got plenty of time then.” Lara said.

“No need to rush there is. Careful we may be.”

“There’s another hatch on the roof of the ship.” Cal said, “If we could get to that then we could open up the ramp from the inside.”

“But I thought we didn’t want them getting inside the ship.” Lara said.

“An ambush you plan?”

“Yes.” Cal replied, “If we’re already inside the ship then we can surprise those two trying to open her up without leaving ourselves open to attack by the others. Plus I’d kind of prefer to have my lightsaber back than be using this thing.” And he held up the battered rifle.

“Great idea.” Lara said, “With just one point. How do we get to the top hatch?”

“Up there.” Cal told her and he pointed up to the hangar ceiling. Criss-crossing it was a metal framework that supported the lighting as well as mounting rails that looked as though at one time they had been used for a winching system to carry cargo across the bay.

“That’s a long way up.” Lara said, “About twenty metres I’d say.”

“Probably.” Cal replied, “But we should be able to find a way up there.”

As he spoke Tyshon looked up at the frameworks and leapt straight up, effortlessly grabbing hold of one of the beams and pulling himself onto it.

“Oh now that’s just showing off.” Lara said as Tyshon looked back down at her and Cal, “Do you think you could make that jump?”

“Down? Yes. Up? I doubt it.”

As the Udras watched from the deck Tyshon began to make his way along one of the beams. As he went he reached down and ripped loose one of the cables that weaved their way through the framework. For a brief instant he activated his lightsaber, keeping the weapon close to the beam he stood on so that its glow was not as noticeable from the deck below. Then he let the length of cable swing down.

“Our way up I believe.” Cal said, “Ladies first.”

“You’re only saying that because you want to test it with my weight first.” Lara said and Cal just grinned.

Ferrim found the hole exactly where the voice told him it would be and by piling up some of the discarded furniture that littered the compartment he was able to climb through it. Then he headed in the direction of the hangar, wary of running into the jedi. The last thing he wanted was to run into them before he reached his real target.

Rather than leave it hanging down for anyone to find, Cal pulled the cable up into the framework after he had scaled it and the trio made their way across the metal beams until they found themselves directly over the *Bright Hope*. Effortlessly and without a sound Tyshon jumped from his beam and dropped down onto the upper hull of the ship before creeping to the topside hatch and waiting.

"Looks easy enough." Cal said.

"Yeah right. It's not the drop, it's the sudden stop at the end."

Cal smiled and held out his hand.

"We'll go together little sister." He said.

Lara took his hand and smiled back before the pair of them stepped from the beam and dropped.

"Did you hear something?" one of the men attempting to break into the *Bright Hope* said as Cal and Lara landed.

"No, now shut up and keep working. Nordem wants this ship open." The other one replied.

Cal crouched down beside the *Bright Hope*'s top hatch and entered the code to release it. Then the three jedi either jumped or climbed down into the ship before the hatch was resealed again.

"Okay," Cal said, "Lara and I will go get our lightsabers and we'll all meet up by the access ramp in a couple of minutes. And remember everyone, stay away from viewports. The last thing we want right now is for one of those guys outside to realise we're in here."

6.

“Got it!”

Nordem looked towards the sound of the voice just as the *Bright Hope*'s ramp began to lower and he grinned.

“Get inside.” he called out in response, “I want that ship's flight systems brought online as soon as possible. We'll start loading the cargo.” And he turned back to the last of his men.

The pair standing at the base of the ramp began to walk up it.

“Dark in here.” One of them said.

“There must be a light switch somewhere.” The other replied, “See if you can find it.”

“Perhaps with that we can help.”

With three distinctive ‘snap-hisses’ the blades of three lightsabers lit up the interior of the *Bright Hope*.

“Jedi!” one of the men screamed, “There's three of-“ and then his body rolled back down the ramp.

Nordem drew his weapon and took cover behind the nearest crate, his companion following his example.

There was another scream from inside the *Bright Hope* and the second of his men rolled down the ramp.

The screams had focused Nordem's attention on the *Bright Hope* and Ferrim saw his chance. Keeping low he ran around behind Nordem and towards the ramp of the dynamic-class ship that had brought them to this haunted place. Whatever happened, Ferrim wanted to be sure that he would escape with his life.

“Cover me.” Nordem said when he grew tired of waiting for the Jedi to rush from their ship, “I'm going to head back to our ship and bring its guns on line.”

“What about the run?” the other man asked, “Don't we need that Jedi ship?”

“Kriif the run. If the client on Tepillos can't wait for these guns then we'll just find someone else that wants them.”

The man nodded and aimed his blast rifle over the crate. As soon as Nordem began to move he opened fire, sending shots blindly up the ramp and hoping to dissuade the Jedi from making an appearance.

His plan failed and the three Jedi came rushing down the ramp towards him, Cal and Lara using their lightsabers to block his shots while Tyshon merely leapt from side to side and made it impossible for the man to target him accurately.

There was a hissing sound and the man looked towards the dynamic-class ship only to see its access ramp lifting off the deck and retracting.

“No!” he yelled as he realised that Nordem's real plan was to cut his losses and run regardless of whether that meant leaving his crew behind or not. He leapt up and rushed for the ramp as it continued to close, still firing as he went. One of the energy bolts directed towards Cal instead struck his lightsaber blade and was turned back towards him. The man cried out in pain as the bolt hit his leg and brought him crashing to the deck. Unable to stand he reached for the pistol holstered under his shoulder, but just as he drew the weapon Tyshon leapt through the air towards and landed beside him. With a single swing of his lightsaber, Tyshon dispatched the man just as the dynamic-class ship's engines roared into life.

“It's Nordem!” Lara yelled over the sound of the engines, “He's getting away!”

“Quick! Into the *Bright Hope*!” Cal shouted back, “We've got to stop him.”

Nordem felt the ship shudder as he powered up its engines faster than the manual recommended. He knew that the Jedi vessel was much faster than his own and lacking a crew he had no way of holding them off with the ship's weapons. His only hope lay in getting out of Dorn Station's gravity well so he could make the jump to hyperspace. He did not care where he wound up, just so long as he escaped. An alarm from the flight console alerted him to the Jedi ship leaving Dorn Station behind him and he glanced down at the panels before of him. There he saw the sensor trace of the *Bright Hope* closing rapidly, but that was of secondary importance compared to the figure he saw reflected in the display screen itself.

He whirled around in his chair, reaching for his sidearm. At first he assumed that one of the Jedi had been able to get aboard with him, but as soon as he got a good look at the approaching figure he recognised Ferrim instead.

“You left me to die!” the man yelled and he dived at Nordem with a knife in his grasp.

In response Nordem drew his sidearm and pointed it at the man. But before he could fire the man was already bringing down his blade and Nordem was instead forced to reach out with his free hand and grab

hold of the arm in which the knife was held. At the same time Ferrim took hold of Nordem's gun arm and swung the pistol away from him.

The two men stared at one another, the rage on their faces obvious. Both of them was trying to do the same thing, get their weapon to where they could use it to kill the other man while not allowing him to do the same.

"Bringing a knife to a gunfight?" Nordem said, hoping to throw off his opponent's concentration, "I thought I taught you better than that."

Scowling, Ferrim pushed hard and banged Nordem's gun hand against the transparisteel of the canopy beside him. Nordem winced but kept hold of the gun. Again and again the other man banged Nordem's hand against the canopy but failed to force him to drop the weapon. But this could not go on forever and as Nordem's hand was once again thrust against the canopy his finger tightened on the weapon's trigger. There was a sharp 'crack' as the weapon discharged, sending a magnetically accelerated projectile into the canopy. Then there was another similar sound, only this time the cracking sound was more prolonged and both men stared in horror at the growing fracture on the canopy.

"Oh-" Nordem had time to say before the canopy exploded outwards.

From the cockpit of the *Bright Hope* Cal, Lara and Tyshon watched as the two figures were blown from the cockpit of the dynamic-class vessel. For a few brief moments they twitched before the immense coldness of space froze their unprotected bodies solid.

"Finished your task here is." Tyshon said, "Now take me back you must. On the station must I remain to locate our Sith."

"Why not come back with us?" Lara asked, "I'm sure Master Karas would be willing to send a replacement." Tyshon shook his head.

"For that to happen tell others you must. For now do not. Between us should this be kept. If the Sith is known of, more may come seeking its power."

"He's right." Cal said, "Lara you know how things are in the Narthis Sector. News travels fast. If we keep this to ourselves then maybe we can give Tyshon the time he needs to banish the Sith before he can cause any trouble."

"But what do we tell people about what happened here?" Lara asked, "Remember, Agent Raser knows we came here and Colonel Jeck probably does too by now."

"We tell them that we came here to meet the gunrunners. Then we say that they argued amongst themselves and killed one another. We can still give Agent Raser and the colonel the lead we have about the insurgents getting their arms from a group in the Levik Cluster."

"A reasonable explanation that is." Tyshon said, "Now to my home take me. Then to yours you should return."

"Lara! Dinner's here!" Cal called out as he carried the meal back to the lounge and set it down on the table. He took a pair of forks from the kitchen before returning to the lounge and sitting on the sofa. Then he picked up one of the containers, opened it and began to consume the contents.

"So what have I missed?" Lara asked as she joined Cal on the sofa and began to check the labels on the food containers.

"The doctor has altered the test results that prove Vorsas is Shalyen's cousin so they still don't know they're related because someone's blackmailing him with proof that he used the funds meant for the new hospital to bet on a pod race." Cal said.

"What about Marsie?"

"What? The least believable jedi in the galaxy? She's sensed that the statue Bronlin gave her is fake so she's taken a ship to investigate without realising that its hyperdrive has been sabotaged."

"Its just so true to life." Lara said, taking a mouthful of food. Then she swallowed it, "You know what the saddest thing about all this is?" she said looking at Cal.

"The script? The plot? The acting? The pressboard sets that wobble?"

"No. What happened with our disrupting the gunrunners."

"No, tell me."

"I'm now the hottest woman you've ever made out with."

Cal looked at his sister.

"Sadly that is true."

Then they both turned back to the holo player and took another mouthful of food.