

STAR WARS

TALES OF THE JEDI



III-III: ACQUISITION

BY STEPHEN J DUTTON



ELEVEN FAMILIES.
TWELVE GENERATIONS.
ONE EVIL.

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

ACQUISITION

LOOKING TO PURCHASE SUPPLIES GAL AND LARA UDRA TRAVEL TO ONE OF THE WANDERING TRADE FLEETS IN THE BRENA STAR SYSTEM. BUT WHEN A VERY SPECIAL ITEM IS OFFERED TO THEM, THEY BECOME CAUGHT UP IN A RACE TO OBTAIN IT...

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

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1 .

Cal Udra had laid out all of the equipment he considered surplus to requirement on the hangar deck of Dorn Station and was cataloguing it carefully.

"We'd make more if you include everything." His younger sister and padawan learner Lara said as she looked over his shoulder.

"The brenary will sell anything to anyone." Cal replied without looking up, "If we supply them with the blasters and slug throwers that we took from those smugglers then we may as well just hand them over to criminals ourselves."

"Technically we are criminals Cal." Lara commented. Thanks to Lara having been framed for murder and Cal breaking her out of lawful custody the pair were now wanted fugitives in the Republic, forced to hide out aboard a remote abandoned space station.

"But I thought we had plenty of cash anyway." Lara said.

"Oh we've still got several thousand from our budget that I cashed in as well as the cash the smugglers had on them when we killed them. Plus of course there's the three hundred and two credits you earned as a stripper."

Lara scowled and punched Cal's arm.

"I didn't take my clothes off Cal." She said and Cal smiled.

"Sure. Whatever you say my young apprentice." He said, "Now back to the issue at hand. We do indeed have a considerable cash reserve for now, but I'd rather be getting rid of this stuff before we get desperate and have to accept whatever we're offered."

"What? For some old clothes and cheap jewellery, a few PTP links and some flasks of what may be drink or may be paint remover? Is that even worth the fuel we'll burn to get to Brena?"

"We're not just selling, we're buying as well."

"Buying what?" Lara asked.

"Whatever looks like it could be useful." Cal replied.

"Okay, so what about him?" Lara said and she looked around at the dog sat calmly on the deck chewing at a length of hose it had been given as a toy.

Cal smiled.

"We'll take Ghost with us." He said, "I'd rather not leave him here with Tyshon for a week." Tyshon was an ancient jedi knight who had made Dorn Station his home for the past two hundred years. A member of a mysterious diminutive green skinned species, Ghost the dog was larger than he was, "Besides," Cal went on, "I can't leave without my first officer."

Lara frowned and folded her arms.

"What's that supposed to mean?" she asked.

"It means that the chain of command around here runs me and Tyshon at the top, Ghost and then you young padawan. Tyshon and I are full jedi knights and Ghost is a fully qualified dog. You're just an apprentice."

"So I'm outranked by a dog? Ha ha, very funny."

"Let's put it to the test shall we?" Cal said and he bent down and took the length of hose from Ghost's mouth. The dog reacted by looking up at him expectantly, "Fetch!" Cal yelled as he hurled the hose across the hangar and Ghost set off after it.

"Oh and what's that supposed to prove big brother?"

Cal just smiled as Ghost returned and dropped the hose at Cal's feet.

"Well he fetched it while you just stood there. One nil to the dog I think." Cal said and Lara's frown deepened, "Oh just get this stuff packed." He added.

It was more than four hundred years since the homeworld of the brenary had been rendered uninhabitable. At that time although the species had yet to discover the secrets of hyperspace travel they still had a significant sublight ship building capacity and had constructed hundreds of vessels capable of carrying survivors. When the Republic had first arrived in the Brena system they had found the brenary still travelling about in fleets of such vessels gathering whatever resources they needed from the remaining planets and moons within reach or by trading with one another. The brenary had eagerly traded for hyperdrive-capable vessels and now small fleets travelled the entire sector conducting trade with anyone willing to pay. However, these fleets paled in size compared to the ones that remained in the Brena system itself where over two hundred ships of up to a thousand metres in length could be found in each fleet. Brena's remote

location limited its viability as a true commercial hub, but for those with a need to keep the goods they bought and sold unnoticed by the Republic it was the perfect place to visit.

The *Bright Hope*, the vessel originally provided to the Udras by the Jedi Order dropped out of hyperspace unchallenged, the brenary lacked the capability to secure their system and relied on their usefulness to everyone as a deterrent to attack.

"Okay big brother," Lara said as she studied the sensor scans, "where to now?"

"That one." Cal said suddenly and he pointed to one of the clusters of dots on the sensor display that represented one of the brenary fleets.

"Why that one? There are others closer and several bigger." Lara said.

Cal paused and thought.

"I'm not sure." He said, "For some reason I just get the feeling that that is the place we should go."

"A feeling? That's it? Are you telling me it's the will of the Force that we go there?"

"I hope not." Cal said, "Because the Force hasn't taken us anywhere nice recently." And then he set a course to rendezvous with the brenary fleet.

Cal docked the *Bright Hope* with one of the larger brenary vessels and as soon as he and Lara stepped off the vessel they found themselves being accosted by merchants either waving trinkets in their faces or attempting to lure them to their places of business. Most of these were brenary, a humanoid species slightly below the average height for a human and possessing numerous tiny hornlike growths that sprouted all over their bodies. Where a human would typically have hair on their head the brenary instead had a denser cluster of these horns.

"So what's the plan?" Lara said as she waved away another trader who was holding out crudely cast machine parts that looked likely to fail as soon as they were activated.

"For now we just take a look around." Cal replied, "We need to know what's on offer and who may be willing to buy what we've got to offer. We'll leave *Ghost* with the ship and meet back here in an hour okay?"

"Got it. Can I have money? You know, just in case I see something we have buy right away before someone else gets it first."

Cal sighed.

"I knew you'd say that." He said and he handed her small pouch of coins, "We can spare this I think. Now don't spend it all at once."

Lara smiled as she took the pouch and then without saying anything further she turned and walked away.

Cal sighed again and before he headed off in the opposite direction he looked at a brenary.

"Do I look like a member of a species that needs one of those?" he asked.

Cal had spotted several places that either offered items that Cal though could be useful or would be willing to purchase the things that the Jedi had available for trade. With plenty of time left before he had to return to the *Bright Hope* to meet up with his sister Cal considered heading into a nearby cantina.

"I wouldn't if I were you." A familiar voice said from behind him and Cal turned to see a red skinned zeltron female standing there smiling at him, "Their stuff's watered down so much you could keep a pet fish in it. Have you ever had a pet fish Jedi Udra?"

"Kassa." Cal said without enthusiasm. The female zeltron was an information broker, trading rumours and data throughout the sector, "What are you doing here?"

Kassa smiled.

"Well given the number of beings who pass through here buying and selling it's a good place to watch out for familiar faces and see what they're up to. Now you never answered my question."

"What question?"

"Did you ever have a pet fish?"

"No. Though I do have a dog now. Plus Lara. The dog is better behaved and smarter I think. So I take it that my presence here will not be remaining a secret for long then." Cal said.

"Oh I doubt the people I do business will care about you Jedi Udra." Kassa replied, "Now how about I show you a place that serves decent drink? You can explain what's made you risk being seen in public to come here. Brena may not be in the Republic but I doubt I'll be the only one to recognise you. Others may be interested in the reward that's out for you and your sister."

"No thank you. I need to be getting back to my ship, I've got business that needs conducting before I can take time off." Cal replied and he walked away.

Kassa stood and watched him leave, still smiling. As Cal vanished into the crowd a tall cloaked figure approached and stood beside her.

"Why is he here?" the figure asked.

"He didn't say." Kassa replied, "And you're not paying me enough to press the issue."

"Then its possible that he doesn't know about it." The fallen jedi Kyle Jenner said as he lowered his hood. Then, looking down at Kassa he added, "Keep looking. Its here somewhere and I want it."

Clutching the bag containing her recent purchase to her chest Lara continued to look over the various stalls. The section of the ship that she was currently wandering through seemed to specialise in trinkets and oddities, with little or no practical value. However, the appearance of many of these items was of interest to Lara and her focus on them drew the attraction of some of the traders.

"Those fake!" one called out as Lara studied the engraving on what a stallholder had labelled as genuine Alderaanean jewellery, "Come to my stall, I have the real thing."

The owner of the stall Lara was at launched into a sudden verbal assault on the issuer of this accusation in the brenary language.

"Its alright I was just looking anyway." Lara said, backing away as it looked as if the pair of rival merchants were about to come to blows. Seeing this the pair then began to argue over who had scared her away.

"Jedi lady." A voice hissed from the shadows and Lara spun around to face its source, "Jedi lady." The voice repeated and a hunched female brenary stepped into view.

"Why are you calling me that?" Lara asked, aware that she had to keep a low profile.

"Your weapon. I see your weapon." The brenary replied and she pointed to where Lara's lightsaber was sticking out from beneath her robes.

"Oh stang." She muttered, adjusting the robes to cover it again.

"A rare find. Rare and expensive." The brenary continued, "You trade?"

"No." Lara replied, "Look I need to be getting back to my ship. I'm expected."

"I sell you more for your collection." The brenary said, grabbing hold of Lara's arm and as Lara looked back at her the brenary reached under her own cloak and produced a crystalline pyramid that fit perfectly in the palm of her hand and Lara gasped, "Yes." The brenary said, "A genuine holocron. Rarer even than your weapon. Now you trade? Negotiate?"

"I- I-" Lara stammered. She had seen many holocrons during her time at the Jedi Temple and one thing that she knew was that although they could come in various shapes and sizes the jedi did not make them in this particular shape.

But the Sith did.

Added to its shape the holocron possessed a coldness to it that Lara could sense through the Force. The Dark Side seemed concentrated around this thing.

"Ah. You like." The brenary said, smiling.

"Yes I do." Lara said, regaining her senses, "But I can't part with my lightsaber."

"A shame." The brenary said, and she began to slip the holocron back beneath her cloak.

"Wait!" Lara exclaimed, holding out a hand, "I can pay, I'm sure."

"You have money?"

Lara thought for a moment, the holocron would undoubtedly be very expensive and even if she had not already spent some of what Cal had given her she would not have had enough to pay for it.

"I don't have it with me right now." She said and the brenary frowned at her, "But I can get it. Just wait here and I'll be back with someone who can offer you a good price for that."

"Go." The brenary said, "I wait here for you. One hour."

"Oh thank you." Lara said before rushing off, unaware that she was being watched by another figure.

2.

Belle Shill waited as Lara departed, keeping a careful eye on the jedi. The presence of the Udras here in the Brena system was unexpected and could lead to complications. The last thing she needed was a confrontation. However, Lara had done her the favour of drawing out the individual with the holocron for sale, rumours of which had reached important people back on the Narthis Sector's capital world. Those people had sent Belle to retrieve it by any means necessary. With her hand on the silenced slug thrower in her pocket, Belle waited until Lara was completely out of sight and then turned back to the brenary woman with the holocron. Cautiously she approached the woman, assessing escape routes and noting the positions of the two nearby security officers.

"Excuse me." Belle said to the brenary woman, "But I think you have something I want."

"No. Nothing for you." She replied and she turned away.

"I think you do." Belle insisted, "I saw it. The glass pyramid. I am authorised to pay any price."

"Ah." The brenary said, "Expensive. But you are not the only one who is interested. Another buyer is already lined up."

"I will beat their bid." Belle said, "Name your price."

The brenary woman just grinned.

"Come back in an hour. I will hear what each of you has to offer."

Had Belle been in a more civilised system then she could simply have called in reinforcements from one of Shill Security's many rapid response teams and not only acquired the holocron, but also eliminated Cal and Lara Udra. But out here help was several days away at best and she did not want the fugitive jedi pair knowing she was here. Particularly since it was her that committed the murder that Lara had been blamed for and she did not know how much the Udras knew about this.

Then a thought suddenly struck her. Perhaps the Udras were here for her. That possibility, no matter how unlikely meant that she needed to complete her business and leave as quickly as possible.

"I'm afraid an hour is no good to me." Belle said to the brenary, "You need to come with me now."

It was then that another visitor to the ship bumped into Belle and for a brief moment the hand that gripped her pistol slid far enough from her pocket that the weapon was exposed and the brenary woman saw it. Her reaction to this was immediate and dramatic. She pulled back from Belle and began screaming something in her own language. The brenary language had always escaped Belle's comprehension but she could tell that this was not good. Sure enough the nearby security officers began to make their way closer with their hands on their weapons.

"Boring conversation anyway." She said to herself and she drew her pistol and shot the closest officer in the head.

Though the weapon was fitted with a silencer to muffle the sound of its use the fact that she had just fired it in plain sight of everyone around her triggered panic as everyone tried to get away. The second security officer thus found his line of fire to Belle blocked by the moving crowd so instead he began to yell for people to get out of his way and began forcing his way closer to Belle. As the officer emerged from the crowd he found himself with arm's reach of Belle and he reached out to take hold of her.

"Drop the weapon!" he bellowed, "You are under ar-" but he was cut off suddenly as Belle twisted in his grip, pulled him closer and pressed her pistol up under his armoured vest, pulling the trigger twice and his body jerked. Letting go of the corpse Belle turned again, hunting for the woman with the holocron, but much to her annoyance she had made use of the panic and escaping crowd to vanish from sight.

"Kriff!" Belle yelled and then she spotted one of the local stallholders cowering nearby, "Get up!" she yelled as she dragged stallholder out into the open, "Now tell me what you know about the woman I was speaking to."

"Cal! Cal are you here?" Lara shouted as she burst through the hatch of the Bright Hope.

"In here." Cal called back from his cabin.

Lara set down her bag on a nearby ledge and rushed to Cal's room where she found him sat on the floor with Ghost.

"Cal you need to come quick. I've found something amazing." She exclaimed and Cal sighed.

"Lara I'm sure that whatever it is looks really good to you, but we can't go wasting our limited money on-"

"Cal it's a Sith holocron." Lara interrupted and Cal's jaw dropped.

"You're joking." He said.

"No. I saw it myself." Lara replied and she held out her hands to form a triangle, "This shape and about this big. Made of crystal. It's a holocron Cal. I know it."

Cal began to get to his feet.

"Tell me more." He said.

"Well the woman saw my lightsaber and wanted to swap for it. But I thought that—"

"Good move." Cal interrupted, "Your lightsaber can be traced back to you."

"Yeah, I know that. And since I didn't have enough cash to buy the thing from her I thought I'd come back here and get you. She said she'd wait an hour."

"Good call." Cal said, "Now let's go."

The Jedi made their way as quickly as they could through the corridors of the Brenary ship.

"So do you think we'll have enough money to buy the holocron from her?" Lara asked as they went.

"Unlikely." Cal replied, "But I'm sure we can work something out."

"Like what?"

"If necessary we can perhaps make another lightsaber and trade that. But that'll take quite some time and effort."

"What if she won't wait?"

"What do the Brenary need above all else?"

"I don't know. A good bath? I don't know if you've noticed but this place stinks."

"They need ships." Cal said, "And we're in a position to offer a state of the art delaya-class courier."

Lara frowned.

"Cal we can't just get rid of the *Bright Hope*."

"I know that. It's just as traceable as our lightsabers are. But we do have another ship waiting at Dorn Station."

"The one we took from the smugglers?"

"Exactly. Of course we'll still need a week to get it here. But I'm certain she'd wait for it. Uh oh."

"What's wrong?" Lara asked as Cal came to a halt and grabbed hold of her arm.

"Look for yourself." Cal replied and he pointed to the passageway ahead and as Lara looked she saw the way blocked security guards, "Isn't that where you said the woman was waiting for us?"

"Yes it was." Lara answered, "Cal I've got a bad feeling about this."

"Me too." Cal added and then he noticed another face in the crowd, a bright red one. Kassa. She looked back towards Cal and as soon as she realised that he had seen her she slipped away into the crowd, "In fact I've got a very bad feeling about all this."

"Well?" Kyle asked as Kassa returned to him in the private booth of the cantina.

"I think the Jedi know about the holocron." She told him and Kyle snarled.

"Security are crawling all over it as well. It looks like a human woman tried to steal the holocron."

"Lara Udra?" Kyle asked.

"No. But she was similar in appearance, similar height, long blonde hair and pale flesh."

"Belle Shill. The Founding Families attack dog has been let off her leash." Kyle sneered, "My enemies are moving rapidly."

"Yeah well she failed. All she managed to do was kill a pair of guards and a stallholder."

"Do the Udras have the artefact?"

"No. They turned up later." Kassa answered.

"Very well." Kyle said and he slid a bag across the table between them. Smiling, Kassa took the bag and open it, pouring the precious stones it held into her palm, "You may leave." Kyle went on, "I will contact you when I need your services again."

"What's happening?" Cal asked one of the security officers.

"There's been a shooting." The officer replied, "Please move along."

"I would love to officer, but you see my associate and I had business with an individual in this sector and we're rather concerned that she may have been hurt."

"Official statements will be released later. For now just—"

"We're cleared to know." Cal interrupted, waving his hand subtly and focusing his mind on that of the guard, you can tell us what happened."

"A human female assaulted a trader. When she resisted the human drew a slug thrower and shot two security guards. She then proceeded to beat a second trader and then shot him as well."

"And the original trader?" Cal asked.

"Vanished. After the two guards were shot."

"Tell us about the human woman." Lara added, attempting to manipulate the guard's mind in the same way Cal had done, but he just stared back at her silently.

"Yes, what did she look like?" Cal asked, pushing at the guard's mind again.

"According to descriptions given by witnesses, a bit like your friend here." He said, "Light skin and hair and a similar height. If they hadn't described her as older and her clothing as different I'd be arresting you both right now."

"Thank you officer you've been most helpful." Cal replied, "We'll be on our way."

"Yes, be on your way. Official statements will be released later." The guard then said as Cal released his grip on the man's mind.

Cal and Lara walked away calmly before Cal stopped and looked directly at his sister.

"So did that description sound familiar to you?" he asked her.

"What? A blonde killer?" Lara asked in return, "I'm guessing you mean Belle."

Cal nodded.

"Belle Shill. Shill Security's black ops specialist and she just so happens to have a run in with someone in possession of a holocron. Combined with Kassa this place is getting pretty crowded with people we know."

"Yeah, so much for us keeping a low profile." Lara commented.

"At least it sounds like she doesn't have it yet." Cal said, "Maybe we can beat her to it still."

"Let's just hope no one else comes looking for it." Lara added.

"Someone like me perhaps?"

Cal and Lara whirled around as soon as they heard the sound of Kyle Jenner's voice and both drew their lightsabers, ready for a fight.

"I wouldn't recommend activating those." Kyle said as he stood in front of them, his arms by his side and his hands empty, "It won't take time for the brenary to figure out who any of us are and they'll contact the Republic. I don't think any of us want that now do they?"

"What are you doing here Kyle?" Cal hissed.

"Oh come now Jedi Udra – Ha, you're hardly a jedi any more are you? You're in the same position as me."

"I didn't kill a padawan. My own padawan." Cal replied.

"No but she killed Jedi Trevan. Or so I heard." Kyle replied, looking at Lara, "Now as for your question I'm here for the same reason you to are. I'm after the holocron; the Founding Families must not be allowed to get hold of it. Now if we work together we can-"

"We didn't come here for the holocron." Lara said, "We just-" but then Cal interrupted her in turn.

"Why would we work with you?" he asked, looking at Kyle.

"Because now you must surely see the truth of what I have warned you about. The Founding Families are corrupt and evil. If they are not stopped they will cause the deaths of millions."

"Oh and I suppose we're supposed to believe that you're acting out of the goodness of your heart." Cal replied.

"I could have killed you before now Jedi Udra." Kyle said and then he looked at Lara, "Both of you. Join me and we can bring peace to this sector."

"I think we'll pass." Lara said.

"Exactly." Cal added, "No if you don't mind Kyle this conversation is over and neither of us will be turning our backs on you for the foreseeable future."

"As you wish." Kyle said with a smile and then he turned and left, the crowd parting naturally to allow him through.

"Okay so first Belle and now him?" Lara said as she and Cal put their lightsabers away, "Excuse me for saying this but I'd like to get as far from here as possible. Back to Dorn Station ill do, but the core would be better."

"I know what you mean." Cal replied, "But for now we need to stay here. At least until we can find that holocron."

3.

Gaining access to the brenary vessel's supposedly restricted computer network proved to be simple. All Belle had to do was snap the neck of an unwary technician and take his toolkit. This included everything necessary to unlock the access ports scattered about the ship, including in some nicely secluded places such as the chamber where she was now located and also a datapad that was already configured to log onto the network as soon as it was connected. Of course should the body of the technician be discovered then the brenary would have no difficulty in locking her out so Belle had simply disposed of that out of the nearest airlock. Being on a space ship travelling through a system at tens of thousands of kilometres per hour made some things much easier.

What Belle had hoped to find was a detailed report on her killing of the two guards and the stallholder who had been unable to answer her questions to her satisfaction. Ideally this would have included the identity of the brenary woman with the holocron and where she lived. However, the brenary attitude towards law enforcement and investigation left a lot to be desired. Aware that all an individual who had committed a crime had to do to escape was head for the nearest docking port and travel to any one of the hundreds of other ships in the system or even leave it altogether they placed little emphasis on investigation. Instead the ship's crew distributed lists of wanted individuals to the security guards and left it up to them to detain anyone who they happened to encounter that matched someone on the list. All Belle found was a basic description of herself with a note that an image would be generated and added later.

Giving up on the database Belle switched to the technical readouts and here she found far more information. A basic floor plan of the ship was widely available on the public access network, but this omitted many of the features that the brenary themselves would be well aware of, things such as maintenance hatches, air processing ducts and utility distribution networks. The woman with the holocron had been able to escape Belle far more quickly than if she had simply followed the crowd, which meant that she had to have used an alternative means of escape.

Such as a secondary passageway that had supposedly been sealed over many years before.

Cal and Lara returned to the *Bright Hope* to consider their next move.

"If we just had something that belonged to her then maybe we could use Ghost to sniff her out." Lara commented as she presented the dog with a bowl of food and then petted him as he ate

"You think that Dag trained him to be a sniffer dog?" Cal asked, referring to the dog's late owner and Lara shrugged.

"Maybe." She said, "He barked when those mercenaries surrounded the farmhouse."

"That's a bit different. A lot of dogs will do that; they're just protecting their territory. But maybe we don't need to track her precisely." Cal suggested.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this woman is likely in hiding right? Somewhere out of the way until Belle leaves and she can come out again. What we need to do is find somewhere on this ship that someone could go to hide."

"Huh." Lara snorted, "On a ship this size there could be hundreds of such places."

"Yes, but how many close to where you saw her? We need to get back to that market."

Lacking a true day/night cycle board the ship the various inhabitants all ran off their own schedules so in theory no time was busier than others. However, after Belle's killings the market where they had taken place had been temporarily sealed off by ship security and shoppers had been driven elsewhere. With no one to buy their goods the traders had therefore given up and closed their stalls until the crowds returned.

So it was that Belle found herself alone as she crept along the passageway between sealed stall fronts.

However, she was careful to keep the noise she made to a minimum. Many of the stallholders' made their business premises their homes as well and if any of them noticed her it would not take much for them to realise who she was in spite of her efforts to conceal her appearance beneath her cloak.

Making use of plans downloaded from the ship's own computer she soon located the place where a side passage had at one time branched off from the main passageway and sure enough the dirt covering the floor at the base of this supposedly sealed entrance had been scraped away as if someone had pulled the metal plate blocking the passageway out of position and slipped through. She felt around the edge of the metal plate and a smile spread across her face as she found a hidden latch. Pressing on this produced a soft 'click' and Belle pulled on the plate. It was not easy to move and the bottom of the plate dragged across

the deck below, just as Belle had expected but the plate moved enough to create a gap that she could get through.

"Returning to the scene of the crime Belle?"

Belle jumped at the sound of Kyle's voice and she realised that in focusing on the concealed entrance she had neglected to watch her back. Fortunately the former Jedi had chosen to announce his presence rather than simply strike her down and as she looked around she saw him aiming a bulky plasma weapon at her. "Well hey there Kyle." Belle said, her hands slipping beneath her cloak and to the pair of pistols she carried. For now however she left them where they were. Seeing if she could draw and fire them before Kyle could pull his trigger was not something she wanted to put to the test if there was an alternative, "Would you really shoot me after how close we used to be?"

"You think I don't know you were just using me to locate Sith artefacts?" Kyle replied.

"And you think I don't know what you were doing with the ones you got hold of? You know I tried seducing Cal Udra as well, but he was able to resist me." Belle asked in response and she took a step backwards.

"Cal Udra obviously has better standards than me then. Or maybe he's just not into women old enough to be his mother."

"You know I am not that old." Belle said, clearly hurt by the suggestion and she stepped back once more, putting her up against the bulkhead immediately beside the entrance to the passageway.

"One more step and it will be your last." Kyle warned her, "Now where is the holocron?"

"Oh lover. Do you think I'd still be aboard if I had it?"

"No. But you're not the type to go poking about old abandoned places if you don't think there's something worth having in them." Kyle said, before there was the sound of barking.

"Stay where you are! Both of you!" Cal yelled out from down the passageway and Kyle looked around to see Cal and Lara standing there with blasters in their hands and Cal holding a dog on a leash that was looking right at him and still barking.

Seeing her opportunity Belle rolled aside and into the abandoned side passage and once inside she slammed the entrance shut. There were no lights in the passageway and she found herself in total darkness. Fumbling through her belt pouches she took out a flashlight and made her way down the passageway as quickly as she could until she reached the first bend in it and she turned and crouched by the wall. Shutting off the flash light she drew both the slug throwing pistol and the compact pulse wave blaster and pointed them into the darkness in the direction of the entrance. If anyone tried to follow her through then she would be waiting for them.

Outside in the deserted marketplace Kyle stood and faced Cal and Lara, all three aiming their weapons at one another as Ghost continued to bark.

"Well, well Jedi Udra." Kyle called out as he trained his plasma carbine on Cal, "it seems that once again your life is in my hands."

"I could say the same about you." Cal replied as he continued to point his pulse wave blaster back at Kyle.

"But which of you do think would fire first?" Kyle asked.

"Even if you're the first to shoot Lara will still kill you." Cal pointed out.

"Oh really? More likely she would be so shocked about your death that she would be unable to react before I shot her as well." Kyle said. Then his expression suddenly changed to a smile, "But I didn't come here to kill either of you." He said, first lowering his weapon, then in a single rapid motion slinging it over his shoulder, "My offer still stands. Join me." He said, looking at Lara and he held out his hand, "I will complete your training and together we will defeat the Founding Families."

"I'll never join you." Lara replied.

"Then I suggest you both start running." Kyle told them.

"Is that a threat?" Lara asked.

"No. Just a suggestion. Listen."

The Udras listened, struggling to hear anything over the sound of Ghost's barking. But then they heard what Kyle was warning them about.

"Security's coming." Cal said as he heard the sound of heavy footfalls.

"Who called them?" Lara asked.

"I don't know, probably one of the traders I can sense hiding behind these locked up stalls.""

"So what do we do Cal?"

"Like Kyle said, we run." Cal said and he began to back away from Kyle before turning around and breaking into a run.

"Where are we going?" Lara yelled as she ran after her brother.

"Back to the ship." He yelled back, "We need to figure out where that passageway leads to."

Meanwhile Kyle watched the Udras flee and then looked at the entrance to the abandoned passageway, now sealed once more that Belle had gone through. Ideally he would have simply blasted it open again with his carbine or cut it open with his lightsaber, but right now neither option seemed sensible with security set to arrive soon and so he instead opted to copy the Udras and he turned and headed off in the opposite direction.

From inside the passageway all Belle could hear was muffled shouts and the barking of Ghost. Then there was silence and she was left sitting alone and staring into darkness. After a short time of this she decided that no one was coming through the doorway after her and she returned her pulse wave blaster to its concealed holster and took out her flashlight once more. Turning the device on once more Belle took a proper look at her surroundings. At one time this place had been a simple corridor connecting the marketplace to some other part of the ship. At some point however someone had chosen to seal it off. Why this had been done was not obvious, perhaps wherever it had led had fallen out of use or maybe someone had simply decided to restrict access between the two points. What was obvious though was that sealing the passageway off had not prevented its use. There was litter along the passageway that was clearly new and in several places paint was daubed on the walls that was over the grime that covered them in general. Belle advanced cautiously. She had no idea who used this passageway apart from the brenary woman she was hunting and she decide that if she encountered anyone else she would just have to shoot first and ask questions later.

4.

Returning to the docking port where the *Bright Hope* was located Cal headed for a nearby public data terminal instead of going into the ship.

"What are you looking for?" Lara asked, "That hatch Belle went through didn't look like it was going to be on any map."

"Not obviously, no." Cal replied, "At least not on one available to us and its not like we can just walk up to the crew and ask for access to their restricted files."

"Yeah, who would have thought being wanted fugitives would be so inconvenient?" Lara commented.

"Here." Cal said and he pointed to the terminal display. He had called up a map showing the market area they had just fled from.

"See, no secret passage. Told you so." Lara said, "So what now? Do we go looking for paintings that have the eyes cut out of them so people can watch us from the other side of the wall?"

"No. Watch." Cal replied and he adjusted the scale of the map to show a much larger area. Located where the hidden entrance had been was a large blank area, "See?" Cal said, circling the empty space with his finger, "This entire section has been sealed off at some point. Now there could be other entrances here, here or here." And he pointed to each location in turn, "And those are just the obvious places. There could be at least half a dozen others that have been improvised."

"So we're supposed to just go hunting for one of these entrances then are we?"

"No. We find a nice secluded spot and make our own." Cal said.

"How?" Lara asked.

"The obvious way." Cal replied and he produced his lightsaber.

Belle heard sounds from ahead and at the same time she realised that there was another light source active besides her own flash light and she switched it off to avoid giving away her position. Continuing on her way she soon realised that the sounds were voices speaking in the brenary's own language and Belle smiled, guessing that her quarry was now close by and advancing even further she realised why this place had been hidden away from the public areas of the ship. It was a private market.

The private markets of the brenary fleets allowed the species to restrict certain trades to either just members of their own species or to those who's trustworthiness had been proven. Though the brenary were known for selling anything to anyone there were certain items that they could not sell openly, narcotics, weapons of mass destruction or obviously stolen goods that would risk provoking the Republic into cutting off their travel to other systems or even an all out declaration of war that the brenary could never win. The Founding Families and Shill Security had never been able to gain access to one of these markets given their prominent public profiles, but they had used intermediaries to procure items from them on many occasions.

Of course, whether they would react well to Belle's being here was doubtful.

Belle put her pistol away so as not to provoke the brenary, but kept her hand on the weapon just in case.

Additionally she pulled up her hood to conceal her features, with any luck the brenary down here would not even notice that she was amongst them.

The crowd of shoppers in the private market was unsurprisingly not as dense as in the public ones and Belle was able to use this to her advantage, avoiding all physical contact with the brenary that may risk exposing her. That was until one of them called out to her. Unable to tell what was being said Belle just continued on her way, making sure that her hands and face were out of sight. But that was not good enough and the brenary shouted at her again and when she did not reply for a second time he came storming up to her and grabbed hold of her arm. Elbowing the brenary in the stomach, Belle broke his grip and slipped free. But as she did so he was able to reach out and grab hold of her hood, pulling it down and exposing her all too human face.

"Oh kriff." Belle muttered as there were more shouts from the brenary that surrounded her and the grip on her pistol tightened, "Hey look, I just lost my way okay. I'll be-" but before she could get any further a large brenary with a muscular build stepped forwards and swung a club at her head. Belle dodged the blow with ease, but immediately after another brenary stepped forwards from behind her and wrapped his arms around her, pinning her own arms to her sides and then lifting her up off the floor. Belle slipped her gun from its holster and unable to put it in any direction other than straight down she pulled the trigger repeatedly. One of the bullets struck the brenary holding her in his foot and he screamed in pain, dropping Belle and falling backwards, "Stay back!" Belle shouted as she not only waved the slug thrower about but also

produced the pulse wave weapon as well. However as she straightened up there was the soft 'pop' of a low velocity projectile being fired and Belle shuddered as the electrically charged round shocked her into unconsciousness.

With Lara keeping watch Cal prised the deck plate up from the floor and peered into the hole opened up. Numerous pipes and bundles of cable ran beneath the deck here, but there was a gap that looked just large enough for the two Jedi to be able to squeeze through.

"Good job we left Ghost on the Bright Hope." Lara said, "We'd never get him down there."

"Just keep watch." Cal replied as he took out his lightsaber, "This could attract attention that we don't need." and there was a 'snap-hiss' as he activated it, the pale blue glow illuminating the corridor they were in.

Angling the weapon downwards Cal began to slice through the plating beneath the pipes and cables, the plating that made up the ceiling of the level below.

"Almost there." Cal said and he switched to a one-handed grip on his lightsaber, the other hand extended in the direction of the hole. Then, swiftly, he cut away the last piece of metal holding up the section he was cutting free. This began to fall, but using the Force Cal grabbed hold of it and pulled the loose sheet of metal back up through the hole.

"Nice work big brother." Lara commented as Cal shut off his lightsaber.

"Just like I said," Cal replied, "quick and quiet. Now get in the hole."

"Why me?" Lara asked, frowning.

"Why else? Ladies first." Cal replied with a grin.

Sitting at the edge of the hole Lara first let her leg hang through it and then pushed her self off the edge and dropped down to the lower level. The moment she landed Lara drew her lightsaber and rolled away from the hole, crouching up against the wall and looking around for any signs that her entrance had been noticed.

"Clear." She called out.

Cal jumped down into the hole he had cut, but his descent was brought to an abrupt halt as he became wedged and he let out a sudden grunt.

"What's the problem big brother?" Lara asked, smiling as she watched his legs kicking wildly as he attempted to dislodge himself, "Life on the run expanding your waistline perhaps?"

"Nothing I can't handle." Cal replied, "I just came through at a funny angle, that's all."

"Here let me help." Lara said and she got up and stood beneath him, putting her lightsaber away and taking hold of his legs.

"Lara I wouldn't do that if I were-" Cal began. But before he could finish Lara gave a strong pull on Cal's legs and he felt himself falling once more.

Lara cried out in alarm as Cal fell and landed on top of her.

"Way to go Lara." Cal muttered as he and Lara untangled themselves from one another, "Now let's go find out what Belle's up to down here."

The passageway the Jedi had landed in was dimly lit and they had no need of additional illumination to find their way along it. From ahead they sensed the presence of other beings, some of who appeared agitated.

"Think Belle's been here before us?" Lara whispered.

"Could be." Cal replied just as quietly, "That lady does tend to leave an impression on the survivors. Now put your lightsaber away and follow me. I don't want to scare anyone off."

Cal advanced towards the nearby life forms, with Lara staying close on his tail and it was not long before they heard voices.

"That sounds like Brenary to me." Lara said softly and Cal nodded.

"They don't sound raised though." He replied, "I think that whatever this place is, this is it."

"Err Cal." Lara then said as she felt a tremor in the Force.

"Keep your voice down." He replied.

"But Cal I think-"

"Oh what is it?" Cal demanded, spinning around and he found himself staring at the group of armed Brenary standing further down the passageway, far enough from that their presence had not become obvious to Cal as he focused on the beings ahead of them.

"Run?" Lara asked.

"Run." Cal replied, nodding and they both turned back the way they had been heading and started to run.

From behind the Brenary called out after them in basic.

"Halt! Halt or we fire!"

Alerted to danger through the Force Cal spun on the spot, drawing and activating his lightsaber in one single motion and was just in time to use it to disrupt a spatial distortion projected by a pulse wave weapon

that had been about to strike him. Lara ground to a halt as well, drawing and igniting her own lightsaber as a second group of brenary appeared in the passageway ahead. Like the group behind them these were also armed, but in addition these also wore the uniforms of the ship's security officers.

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

"Really? You don't say." Lara replied.

"This area is forbidden to outsiders. Lay down your weapons and surrender." One of the guards called out.

"What do we do Cal?" Lara asked, holding her lightsaber up between her and the guards.

"Well they are on both sides of us." Cal noted, looked back and forth along the passageway, "If they shoot they risk hitting their own men."

"So being surrounded is a good thing?" Lara replied.

"Not really." Cal answered, "Just looking for a reason to be positive."

The brenary in each direction came to a halt, their weapons still trained on the jedi even if they were holding their fire for the time being and Cal let out a sigh.

"We give up." He said, shutting off his lightsaber and raising his hands.

"Cal are you kidding me?" Lara exclaimed as she frantically looked in both directions at the brenary now advancing towards them once more.

"Just do it Lara." Cal said, "there's too many to fight, but maybe we can still negotiate our way out of this."

Lara frowned and then shut off her own lightsaber. As soon as her weapon was inactive the brenary rushed forwards, surrounding them and confiscating their lightsabers. Seized roughly the jedi were pressed up against the wall and searched while plastic ties were wrapped around their wrists. The next thing either jedi saw was the blackness of the hoods then pulled over their heads.

5.

"Well, well, what do we have here then?" Belle asked as the hoods were pulled from Cal and Lara's heads and their wrists were untied before they were shoved into the cell.

The cell was one of many that lined both sides of the long narrow chamber the Jedi had been brought to after their capture. They were simple affairs, with walls made up of nothing but closely spaced metal bars running from the deck to the ceiling and fixed at both ends. Apart from the one opposite to the Udras that held Belle all of the others were empty.

"Belle." Cal said, snarling at her and she smiled at him.

"The high and mighty Cal Udra caught by the lowly Brenary." Belle replied as the Brenary guards left the room, leaving the three humans alone together.

"Oh and how did you get in here then Belle?" Lara asked and Belle scowled.

Before she could say anything however, the door to the room opened once more and two Brenary guards entered accompanied another Brenary in a different uniform.

"I am the captain of this ship." This other being announced, "It is my duty to ensure that it continues to run smoothly."

"Nobody disputes that captain." Cal said, "My sister and I were just—"

"Be silent!" the Brenary captain yelled, "I know who you are Cal Udra and I know her as well." And he looked at Belle, "I also know exactly why you are all here." And he looked back towards the door he had just entered through and beckoned two more guards into the room. One of these held three clear bags that held the items taken from the prisoners, while the second dragged in the Brenary woman who had offered Lara the holocron.

"Cal that's her!" Lara exclaimed suddenly as she recognised the woman.

"Indeed." The captain said and he looked directly at the woman. Holding out his hand the guard holding her passed the captain the holocron and he held it out, "This should never have been taken to the public market." He said to the woman, "You know that. Items such as this are not for outsiders who know nothing of our world's history."

"Forgive me!" the woman cried out, "I meant no harm. I need money to—" but before she could finish the captain drew his sidearm and fired a bolt of plasma into her chest, "And now," he said as he returned his weapon to its holster and looked back around at the shocked prisoners, "there is the issue of what to do with all of you." And he tossed the holocron back to the guard.

"I have powerful friends." Belle said, "Allow me to contact them and I'll see to it that you are well paid for your trouble." Then she looked at Cal and Lara, "Do with them as you wish." She added.

The captain walked up to the bars of Belle's cell and glared at her through them.

"More likely you will send more of your agents here to strip us of every piece of our history you can buy." He said, "No. Your fate will be the same as theirs." And he turned to face Cal and Lara, "You will be auctioned off to the highest bidder."

However, in facing the Udras in the cell opposite Belle's he had made the mistake of turning his back on her and before the captain knew what was happening Belle had reached through the bars, grabbed hold of the back of his collar and pulled him sharply against the metal. The Brenary guards reacted by reaching for their sidearms and the captain's hand also went to the holster at his waist. But Belle got there first.

Drawing the captain's plasma pistol she shot two of the guards before they could get their own weapons out of their holsters. The other two had chance to draw their blasters but with the captain being held between them and Belle they both hesitated fatally and two more shots from the plasma pistol despatched them as well. Belle's next shot was aimed at the locking mechanism on her cell door and it swung open as the energy bolt tore the lock apart. Belle released her grip on the still startled captain and leapt out of the open door, lashing out with her free hand and striking him in the throat hard enough to crush his windpipe. Then as the Brenary captain choked to death she stared at Cal and Lara.

"I could kill you both now." She said calmly, waving the plasma pistol at them, "But somehow the thought of the pair of you winding up as the door prize in some alien bar amuses me."

"What the hell is she talking about Cal?" Lara asked, looking at her brother.

"Haven't you figured out what this place is?" Belle replied, "Why the Brenary have holding cells located next to one of their secret contraband markets?"

"They're slave pens." Cal said.

"Exactly." Belle replied and she walked over to the bag that held her belongings and tore it open, removing the contents, "Who knows," she added as she then picked up the holocron dropped by another of the dead

guards, "I may just send someone to put in a bid on you. Think of the fun we could have." Then she blew them a kiss, pulled up the hood of her cloak leaving just a single length of blonde hair exposed and ran out of the room.

"Okay brother," Lara said, staring at Cal with her arms folded, "now what?"

"Simple." Cal replied, "We get out of this cell."

"But how-" Lara began, but Cal simply extended his hand out through the bars and focused his mind on the plastic bags that now lay discarded beside one of the dead guards. The bag promptly flew through the air and into his grip. The bag held Lara's belongings and after pulling it through the bars he handed it to her.

"There you go my young apprentice." He said, "Now get us out of here."

Lara ripped open the bag and took out her lightsaber and she depressed the activation switch.

Nothing happened.

Cal frowned.

"You did remember to charge it before we left Dorn Station didn't you?" he asked.

"Of course I did. I hook it up to charge every night, you know that." Lara replied and she began to rummage through the bag, "My blaster's in here as well. But there's no power cells for it."

Cal reached through the bars again and summoned the second plastic bag to him. Tearing it open he began to search through its contents.

"Same here." He said, frowning, "Blaster but no power cells and let me see about this." And he took out his lightsaber and unscrewed the base, "Thought so, the power pack has been taken from my lightsaber as well. Looks like the brenary weren't stupid enough to keep our weapons loaded when they brought them into the same room as us."

"Maybe they were worried we could activate them using the Force." Lara commented.

"We can." Cal replied.

"Well that still doesn't get us out of here does it?" Lara said.

"No it doesn't." Cal said and he returned to stand by the bars, looking out at the bodies of the brenary scattered around, "No sign of a key on any of them." He added.

"What about their weapons?" Lara asked, but Cal shook his head.

"Slug throwers and accelerator pistols." He said, "So we'll not be blasting our way out of here any time soon and since the lock is magnetic we can't disrupt it telekinetically."

"So we are stuck in here then."

"Maybe not." Cal said and reaching between the bars again he used the Force to pluck one of the accelerator pistols from the guards' holsters.

"How is that supposed to help?" Lara asked.

"Just watch." Cal said, rummaging through his belongings again. This time he took out a compact multi-purpose tool and after ejecting the magazine from the pistol he proceeded to dismantle it.

"You not seriously going to try shorting out the lock are you?" Lara asked as Cal began uncoiling the wire used to create the magnetic field that propelled the rounds the pistol fired.

"No, that'd take far too long." Cal replied, cutting off two lengths of wire and baring the ends of each.

"Then what are you doing?"

"I'm going to use the battery pack in the accelerator pistol's magazine to power my lightsaber." Cal said and Lara frowned.

"But Cal, an accelerator pistol's no energy weapon. The battery isn't designed to deliver anywhere near that amount of power."

"I know. I'll only get a brief pulse." Cal said, "Now let me work."

Cal then bent one end of each wire into a hook shape and inserted them into his lightsaber so that they caught against the contacts intended for the weapon's usual power cell. Then he twisted the other ends around the contacts of the accelerator pistol's magazine and held up the hybrid weapon, the magazine dangling below the lightsaber's grip.

"There, that should do it." He said and held the lightsaber against the cell door so that its blade emitter was pressed against the lock itself.

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

"Hey, it's me." Cal replied and he activated his lightsaber.

Instead of the usual 'snap-hiss' and a metre long blade extending from the grip there was a brief flash of blue light, a simple loud 'Snap!' and a yell from Cal as his modification sent some of the charge into him.

However, although the lightsaber drained the accelerator pistol's power cell almost instantly it lasted just long enough to extend the blade through the lock and the cell door swung open.

"I told you it would work." Cal said looking at Lara and smiling as he shook his hand, still tingling from the electric shock.

"Yeah, and it looks like you burnt out your lightsaber." Lara pointed out.

"Yes it does rather." Cal said as he bent down to pick up the weapon and he peered inside, "Yes I think I see where I went wrong." He added.

"Where"? Lara asked.

"I should have used your lightsaber instead." Cal said and Lara frowned, "Come on. We need to get to Belle before she can get off the ship." Cal then said and picking up his belongings he dashed from the cell and bent down to pluck another accelerator pistol from a dead guard's holster.

6.

Having been hooded when the brenary took them to the slave pens Cal and Lara had not seen the route that took them there. This meant that they were compelled to move randomly around the passageways of the hidden section, keeping out of sight of the brenary until they found themselves somewhere they recognised and from there back to the hole that Cal had cut to get them in there.

"Okay so now what?" Lara asked as Cal helped her up to the deck above.

"Like I said, we need to catch up with Belle." Cal said, "We can't let her get away with that holocron."

"But how do we find her?"

"We don't find her at all." Cal said, "We go where we know she'll be headed towards and hope we get there before her."

"Which is where exactly?"

"To her ship of course." Cal told her and they both smiled.

"The fighter you think?" Lara said.

"Probably." Cal answered. The first time the Udras had encountered Belle Shill she had been piloting a mandalorian built daavab-class starfighter. While the ship allowed her to move about the sector rapidly and was available widely enough to avoid obviously tying the ship directly to Shill Security any type of starfighter would stand out amongst the vessels that normally visited the brenary trade fleets.

The brenary's public computer network did not provide lists of the ships docked with the vessel, but the fact that Cal and Lara were looking for a starfighter rather than a transport ship served to make their search easier.

"Okay," Cal said as he accessed the ship's deck plan on the first public terminal they reached, "She's in a fighter so an external docking port is no good for her. She'll have to use an internal docking bay and there can't be many of those even on a ship this size. Ah, here we go. There are four of them." And then Cal took out his datapad and plugged it into the terminal, copying the map and route data to it.

"So which one first?" Lara asked, peering over Cal's shoulder at the map on the screen in front of them.

"None of them look any more promising than the others so I think this one." Cal replied, pointing to the map.

"What about that one?" Lara asked, "It's closer."

"Yes but its on a different level. We're near the bottom of the ship and that's a dorsal bay."

"So?"

"So according to this map all of the turbolifts appear to be inactive. Its almost as if the brenary have shut them down while they search the ship for escaped prisoners or something. Besides, by going to this bay we go past the *Bright Hope*. We need to stop off for more power cells for our blasters and you can get one for your lightsaber. You did pack a spare didn't you?"

"Of course I did."

"Good, because I've also got an idea of how we can increase our odds of stopping her from getting away. Now let's move."

Each time Belle killed a brenary guard on the way back to her ship she paused to check the body for extra weapons and ammunition. Escaping from the slave pens had used up almost all of the limited shots of the plasma pistol and with her own weapons having none in them when she unpacked her own confiscated belongings she had been forced to switch to whatever she could pick up instead.

Arriving at the docking bay, Belle found it protected only by the single guard that was typically assigned to it and she smiled beneath her hood before she walked up to him as if nothing was wrong.

"Halt!" the guard called out, raising his carbine and he aimed it at Belle who halted as ordered.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"The ship's on alert. I need to see identification." The guard replied.

"You don't need to see my identification surely." Belle replied as she slowly took several more steps towards the hangar entrance, "I've been in and out of this hangar numerous times and I've never been asked for ID before."

"Like I said the ship is on alert. I've orders to check everyone trying to get past." The guard said.

"Oh well, if you've been ordered to then I suppose I've no choice." Belle said as she stepped right up to the guard, "Here it is." She added and from beneath her cloak she pulled a narrow pointed knife and slashed the guard's throat. Then as the man collapsed, dropping his weapon and gurgling as he tried to stop the bleeding with his hands she drove the knife down into his eye, "Amateur." She muttered as she picked up

the carbine and checked it, "You wouldn't last a day in Shill Security." And then she proceeded into the hangar.

Her daavab fighter lay across the bay, in the same place its cockpit still sealed just as she had left it and she ran towards the compact vessel. She climbed the ladder that led up to the cockpit and was about to release its seals when something pulled her away and she squealed as she was hurled across the bay. There was a 'snap-hiss' and as Belle looked up from where she had landed she saw Kyle Jenner advancing towards her, lightsaber in hand.

"And now," he said sternly, "we will discuss the location of the holocron." And he extended his free hand towards Belle and using only the Force grabbed hold of her throat and lifted her into the air.

All of a sudden there was the roaring of repulsorlift engines as the *Bright Hope* came flying through the magnetic shield that held in the atmosphere and into the hangar bay.

"Give me your lightsaber." Cal said as he rushed to the ramp where Lara waited for him.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because Kyle Jenner's out there." Cal replied, "So you can give me your lightsaber and I'll take him on or you can keep it and take him on yourself."

"Take it." Lara replied, tossing him the lightsaber and drawing her blaster. Then as Cal caught the weapon she slammed her hand down on the ramp controls.

Kyle kept hold of Belle's throat as he turned to face the *Bright Hope* when its access ramp dropped and both Cal and Lara came rushing down to the deck.

"Let her go Kyle." Cal called out, holding his borrowed lightsaber up in front of him while Lara aimed her blaster at him.

Kyle frowned.

"That doesn't look like your usual lightsaber Jedi Udra." He said, "In fact it looks like your padawan's."

"He broke his." Lara said.

"I see." Kyle said, "Perhaps if you had possessed the same foresight as myself then you could have avoided losing your weapon." And then he looked up at Belle, "I correctly anticipated that out of the two of you and her it would be her that would recover the holocron and so located her vessel and simply waited for her to return."

"Oh? And how do you know we don't have it?" Lara asked and Kyle smiled, turning back towards the Udras.

"Because you're here to retrieve it from her, the same as I am." He said.

"Okay you've got us there." Cal said, "But you have to let her go."

"Why?"

Lara looked at Cal.

"Now?" she asked and he nodded.

"Now." He replied and simultaneously he ran towards Kyle while Lara opened fire with her blaster.

Under fire, Kyle released his grasp on Belle and she plummeted back to the deck where she landed in a heap and gasped for breath.

"See to her!" Cal yelled as he charged headlong at Kyle and swung Lara's lightsaber at him. With well over a decade more experience than Cal possessed the former Jedi knight simply dodged out of the way at the last moment and slashed at Cal with his own lightsaber. Suddenly finding himself on the defensive Cal leapt back and parried the strike with the weapon he held.

"Not bad Jedi Udra. I would have expected that to cut you in half."

"You'll find I'm full of surprises." Cal replied as he thrust the lightsaber at Kyle only for him to counter the attack by swinging his lightsaber upwards and deflecting the energy blade away from his chest, "So much for trying to recruit me and Lara huh?"

"You risk letting the holocron fall into the hands of the Founding Families. That I cannot allow. No matter what the cost."

As Cal and Kyle duelled Lara rushed towards Belle, keeping her blaster trained on the woman despite her still seeming helpless. From her experience Lara knew that helpless was not a state that could often be used to describe Belle.

"Where's the holocron?" she demanded.

Suddenly glaring at Lara, Belle scowled and lashed out with her foot. The unexpected attack caught Lara on the side of her knee and she let out a cry as she fell. Belle used the opportunity to strike again and she knocked Lara's blaster from her hand and sent it sliding across the deck. Belle scabbled back to her feet

and had just taken two steps towards her fighter when Lara reached out and grabbed hold of the bottom of her cloak, pulling her back to the floor.

As Belle fell the holocron came tumbling out of an inside pocket.

Lara let go of Belle's cloak and attempted to grab hold of the holocron instead but Belle dived at her before she could reach it, knocking her aside and positioning herself between Lara and the holocron.

Kyle saw the holocron as it bounced across the deck but he knew that he could do nothing to retrieve the ancient device while Cal was still trying unsuccessfully to kill him. Shutting off his lightsaber Kyle pivoted on the spot, the move catching Cal by surprise and the younger Jedi stumbled briefly. At that exact moment Kyle brought up his inactive lightsaber and drove the pommel into Cal's stomach, knocking the breath from him long enough for him to be able to kick Cal's legs out from under him. Then as Cal fell Kyle darted towards the holocron, extended his hand out in front of him.

"Cal! The holocron!" Lara yelled as she grappled with Belle, desperate to stop her getting to the holocron. Recovering his senses, but still breathing heavily Cal looked towards the device himself. Cal knew that he could summon the holocron to his grip with a thought but he also knew that any attempt to use the Force would be picked up on by Kyle and in a direct contest of Force manipulation was not a fight that Cal felt confident of winning. However, Cal still had another weapon at his disposal and he hand moved to the pulse wave blaster still holstered on his leg. Cal may not be able to seize the holocron himself, but he could still ensure that neither Belle nor Kyle got away with it either.

"No!" Belle screamed as she saw Cal draw and aim his blaster and upon hearing this cry Kyle looked around and also saw Cal preparing to fire.

"No!" he also yelled and he swung his lightsaber, attempting to place the blade in Cal's line of fire to the holocron knowing that it would disrupt the spatial distortions the pulse wave blaster fired.

Cal squeezed the trigger of his blaster, the weapon kicking in his grasp. The energy blast flew directly at the holocron, Kyle's lightsaber blade missing it by mere centimetres. Cal's aim was true and the distortion struck the holocron just as it came to a halt. The crystal structure of the ancient device was shattered by the distortion and the holocron exploded, sending fragments flying in all directions.

"You idiot! You kriffing idiot!" Belle screamed at him, kicking her way free of Lara's grip, "That was priceless!" Lara tried to grab hold of Belle once more, but the assassin rounded on her and delivered a blow strong enough to knock her backwards before rushing back to her fighter and scaling the ladder leading to the cockpit.

As Belle climbed into the cockpit and started up her fighter Cal and Kyle just stared at one another. Cal aiming his blaster at Kyle while Kyle brandished his lightsaber.

"Impressive move Jedi Udra." Kyle said calmly, "Perhaps there is hope for you yet." And then he shut off his lightsaber before turning and walking away.

"Halt or I'll fire!" Cal called out and Kyle stopped.

"You won't shoot me in the back Jedi Udra." Kyle said, glancing back over his shoulder, "Now I suggest that you copy Miss Shill, take your sister, get in your ship and leave. You are wanted fugitives on this vessel after all and I doubt it will take long for security to arrive." Then he continued to walk away.

Cal kept his blaster trained on Kyle, aiming between his shoulder blades.

"Damn you Kyle." He said suddenly and as quickly as he could he got back to his feet and rushed to Lara's side, "Come on," he told her, "we're leaving."