

# STAR WARS

## TALES OF THE JEDI



III-VII: ALLIES

BY STEPHEN J DUTTON



ELEVEN FAMILIES.  
TWELVE GENERATIONS.  
ONE EVIL.

**ELEVEN FAMILIES.  
TWELVE GENERATIONS.  
ONE EVIL.**

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...

**ALLIES**

HOPING TO UPGRADE THEIR STARSHIP CAL AND LARA VISIT THE WAR TORN WORLD OF TEPILLOS. ONCE THERE THEY ARE APPROACHED BY A CRIMINAL SYNDICATE THAT WANTS TO MAKE USE OF THEIR POWERS...

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

Star Wars is the intellectual property of Lucasfilm Ltd. This story is unofficial and Lucasfilm has not approved any of it.

# 1 .

The ancestors of both Keleen Delvad and Hugo Callan had been part of the original team of explorers that had surveyed the Narthis Sector. But unlike those who had remained in the Narthis Sector itself where they had become known as the Founding Families Hugo and Keleen's ancestors had instead returned to the core worlds to enjoy the wealth their discoveries had brought them.

Or so the story went.

From an observation point that overlooked a zero gravity loading area in space around Corellia Keleen watched as numerous large containers were being moved into the hold of a bulbous freighter when she heard a voice from behind her.

"I wish I could be going with you." Hugo said to her, "I'd like to get a good look at it."

"Oh don't worry Hugo." Keleen replied, "This is just one shipment. We'll be making several more yet. All from different worlds of course, we wouldn't ant anyone figuring out what we're planning to build."

"What we are building. Or rather what you are building." Hugo said, "It was your work that uncovered the technical readouts we needed."

"And your shipping company that's moving all of the components into place." Keleen responded, "And the survey data and funding from the others that's letting us actually build them and assemble them where it can do the most good."

"You mean cause the most damage?" Hugo asked and Keleen smiled.

"Yes." She said, "Fear can be a powerful motivator Hugo. Fear of this weapon."

The immense size of Dorn Station meant that if she wished Lara would be able to spend hours jogging around it without travelling along any single corridor more than once. She considered that far more than was necessary to maintain her physical fitness however and so settled for a much short route that covered only the sections of the station that the three beings, four if the dog currently bounding along beside Lara was included called home. Entering one of the station's many hangar bays she saw the two delaya-class courier vessels that she and her older brother Cal had at their disposal. One of them, the *Bright Hope* was the vessel assigned to them by the Jedi Order before Lara had found herself framed for murder and they had been forced to flee here, an ancient space station of alien construction that few in the Republic knew about and even fewer visited. The second almost identical ship had been used by outlaws who Cal and Lara had brought to justice. Their ship had simply been left here after that and since no one from the Republic had bothered to come and claim it Cal and Lara now made use of it themselves when they wanted to avoid their own vessel being identified.

Beside Lara the dog barked and suddenly ran towards the *Bright Hope*, his tail wagging as Cal appeared from where he had been standing out of sight beneath the ship.

"Good boy Ghost." Cal said, bending down to grab hold of the dog as it reached him. Then looking up at Lara he added, "See, he knows who his master is."

Lara said nothing in reply to this, instead looking along the length of the *Bright Hope* and taking a canteen of water from her belt.

"So what are you doing in here Cal?" she asked as she sipped at the water.

"After our run in with those mercenaries on Ralta I was investigating the possibility of installing an anti-personnel weapon in the lower hull."

"Interesting idea. A point defence gun would have kept them away from the access ramp while you started up the ship. We only just made it away in time." Lara replied as she too approached the vessel, "What sort of weapon?"

"Well I don't want to be worried about re-supplying it with ammunition so I'm thinking of an energy weapon of some sort." Cal told her.

"Like a light pulse wave cannon?" Lara asked, "Some of those are designed for vehicle mounting out of the box."

"I thought that at first as well. "Cal said, "But then I started adding up the likely cost. We can't acquire one openly so we'd have to go through the black market and I can see something like that easily costing us ten to fifteen thousand credits."

"That's a lot." Lara said, "Even with the twenty we got from Lorna we'd be sacrificing a large portion of what we've got."

"Exactly." Cal replied, "But then I remembered those thugs who came aboard. Now we've got all their weapons in storage and they had a few pulse wave rifles. Factoring in the other one with the grenade

launcher we took from those mandalorians and we only really need to keep one of the others to have one each. That leaves the rest for us to install on the ship. I was just trying to figure out the best way.”

“And what would that be?” Lara asked.

“Getting a professional to do it.” Cal said, sighing, “We’d need a recess constructing to house the weapon when not deployed, plus some mechanism to lower it into a firing position. Then we’d need to adapt the weapon itself to run off a continuous power feed from the ship’s power plant rather than replaceable cells.”

“What about targeting?” Lara asked and Cal nodded slowly.

“We’d need a data feed running to the cockpit and either a dedicated targeting and firing system installing or the existing fire control system modifying. And I don’t like the idea of making any alterations to the *Bright Hope’s* existing system.” He explained.

“But taken together that is beyond us.” Lara said. Then after a moment’s pause she added, “What about Tyshon?”

Tyshon was the final inhabitant of Dorn Station. He had arrived there two hundred years earlier and remained behind when the Republic abandoned it shortly thereafter.

“Tyshon’s just a jedi knight like me.” Cal answered, “More experienced maybe, but he’s never said anything to me about being a starship engineer.

“Well its not like we can just fly back to Aurek Station and hire someone to do the job for us.” Lara said, “So I suppose that means we just have to keep going as we are.”

“Not necessarily.” Cal replied, “I think I know how we can get the job done.”

“How?” Lara enquired.”

“Tepillos.” Cal replied.

“Tepillos? Cal you’re kidding me.” Lara said, “That place is a war zone Cal. You know that.”

“Precisely why we should be able to find someone there who will carry out the work we need doing. Or at least know someone who does.” Cal pointed out to Lara, “So what do you say?”

Lara frowned.

“We better take the grenade launcher.” She said, “And don’t forget its my turn to use it.”

Uggaro the Hutt scooped another large handful of food from the bowl and stuffed it into his mouth. As he greedily continued to eat he looked out of the window of his throne room at the ocean that his palace floated above. Most of the planet Delvad was covered by water, with only a handful of landmasses where the planet’s limited industry was located. Above and indeed beneath the water as well though were the luxury residences of many of the sector’s wealthy and powerful. All of the Founding Families had properties here and one of them even made their permanent home on the seabed. Of course Uggaro the Hutt would never receive an invitation to any of these estates, at least not a public one anyway. There were few individuals that actually sought out the company of crime lords.

A high-pitched squeal attracted his attention and Uggaro turned his massive head to see one of his servants being dragged into his throne room by a pair of his guards.

“What is the meaning of this?” he yelled, angry at having his meal interrupted and the translator droid stood beside him repeated his words in basic adding ‘The mighty Uggaro states-’

“My lord Uggaro.” One of the guards said, kneeling before his employer, “We found this girl trying to leave. She had these in her bag.” And he tipped up a shoulder bag that as well as a water flask and several ration bars was filled with jewellery, coins and a pair of small gold statues.

“What?” Uggaro bellowed, casting aside his bowl and ignoring the food that spilled out onto the floor, “Bring me my Saren. She will help me determine how this wretch is to be punished.”

Another of his servants that had been waiting patiently for orders nodded and dashed from the room before the droid had even finished the translation, “Who are you anyway wretch?” Uggaro said and he snarled while the droid translated the question.

The young woman being held on her knees by the guards remained silent, just glaring at Uggaro.

“Can anyone tell who she is?” Uggaro then asked.

“Calleri my lord.” One of the guards restraining her said, “One of those you rescued from Tepillos.”

Immediately Uggaro knew what Calleri’s story would be. The civil war on Tepillos would have removed all hope of a normal life on her home planet and so when offered the chance to live and work on Delvad, playground of the rich and powerful she would have jumped at the opportunity, possibly even paying whatever she could to buy her passage her. But when she arrived she would have instead found herself in servitude for life to the great Uggaro the Hutt.

“Kriff you!” Calleri suddenly yelled.

“Having trouble oh great one?” a woman’s voice called out from the throne room’s massive doorway and Uggaro looked up to see another human female entering in the company of the servant sent to fetch her.

“Ah Saren.” Uggaro said, “Perhaps you can help me deal with this little thief. She’s one of those we rescued from the war on Tepillos and in return she’s tried to steal from us and run away.”

“Give us the room.” Saren said sternly, looking around at the various servants and guards and they began to file out, dragging Calleri with them. As soon as the last one left Saren used her datapad to seal the room, both the doors and all of the windows, “Are you really so useless?” she said to Uggaro the moment that she knew that there was no possibility that they were being observed.

“But Saren I-“ Uggaro began.

“Oh shut up!” Saren interrupted, “Look, I’m trying to run a sector wide organisation here and all I ask of you is to sit there on your great fat backside and pretend to be an evil mastermind. Okay? Right now I’m trying to figure out how we’re going to find out what it is that the Founding Families are importing and how we can profit from it and I don’t give a stang about some urchin we picked up out of the gutter in a warzone or a small bag of trinkets so I’ll leave it up to you how to deal with her. Think up something creative and make it sound like its tailored to what she did. Got it?”

Uggaro nodded.

“Yes I think so.”

Saren frowned.

“Don’t think. You’re not very good at it.” She said and then she unsealed the room, “Now’s your moment.”

She muttered as the blast door slid open and the guards dragged Calleri back to face judgement.

“The great Uggaro has reached a decision you ungrateful little vacc head.” Saren said to the young woman,

“Now sit and listen while you hear how he deals with your sort.”

Behind Saren just Uggaro laughed.

“Bring me a maintenance droid.” He said as Saren strode past Calleri and out of the room, “And have it bring some metal sheets, bars and chains.” Then he laughed again.

## 2.

Tepillos had been beset by civil war for many years and while the conflict had died down since the deployment of a contingent of Republic troops to act as peacekeepers there were still numerous armed insurgent groups active that made the security situation there a nightmare. On this occasion from the point of view of Cal and Lara this was a beneficial situation and they were able to land the *Bright Hope* far from the Republic controlled secure Green Zone without being challenged by any air defences or traffic controllers. On the other hand the supposed starport was nothing but a large area of flat ground covered over with ferrocrete and as they exited the ship they saw a group of armed beings heading towards them. "Uh oh. I've got a bad feeling about this Cal." Lara said as she saw them approach and her hand slid towards the blaster she wore openly on her hip.

"Don't worry." Cal said softly, "I think this is the official welcoming committee. But perhaps we shouldn't let them get too good a look at us." And then both he and Lara lifted up the hoods of their cloaks enough to hide their features before Cal looked at the newcomers and called out to them, "Good morning."

"Afternoon." The leader of the mob replied, "Its afternoon local time."

"Sorry, we've only just landed." Cal said.

"That's why we're here." The leader said, "For your fee."

"Fee?" Lara asked, "What for?"

"Firstly this is our land, so its twenty credits per day to just to land here. Plus there's the security charge. We make sure no one tries to break in to your ship for another thirty per day."

"Fifty credits per day?" Lara exclaimed, "The Green Zone starport charges less than that."

"Well why don't you try landing there instead?" the mob leader asked with a grin, "Is it perhaps because you don't ant the government taking a look at your identity or inside your hold?"

"Here." Cal replied as he handed over fifty credits to the man.

"Do we need to pay a security charge?" Lara asked Cal, "Han Shill only got the hatch open because his men were professionals with the proper kit."

"You can get into any ship if you use enough force." The leader of the mob said, snatching the money from Cal's hand.

"Does that sort of thing happen often here?" Lara then asked him.

"To those who don't pay? Yes." The mob leader replied, indicating that it may well be he and his men that would break into vessels who's owners did not pay up and now that he had his money for the day he turned around and strode away with his men right behind him.

"We could always have left *Ghost* in the ship." Lara commented.

"Somehow I doubt that would be enough to deter them ." Cal replied, "Now come on. I think that we should get and get ourselves a drink."

"Do you think the locals will let a dog in their cantinas?" Lara asked as they began to walk away from the *Bright Hope*.

"To be honest I think we should worry more about whether *Ghost* will be willing to go inside the local cantinas." Cal replied.

As it happened the closest cantina was mainly an open-air affair. The bar and kitchen were in a small hut that looked like it had been brought along on the back of a vehicle and simply deposited in place while a crude canopy had been erected in front of it and seating laid out beneath this.

"You wouldn't happen to know of anyone who can carry out modifications to a starship would you?" Cal asked the individual in the hut who served them their food.

"Who me?" the server replied, "No. But a fair few of the pilots land here. You could try asking them. Just don't go hogging my tables or annoying my customers okay?"

Cal glanced around at the mainly empty tables.

"Sure." He replied, "We'll make sure you don't lose any business over us."

The two jedi selected a table that gave them a good view of the nearby landing field and waited. The problem was that two strangers who kept their faces hidden did not inspire anyone to answer questions.

"This isn't working Cal." Lara said after some time had passed and she found herself looking at the bottom of an empty glass.

"I'm starting to think that myself." Cal replied, "In fact I'd say that-" then he stopped and stared across the street towards the entrance to the landing field.

"What's wrong?" Lara asked.

Beneath his hood Cal smiled.

"Nothing." He told her, "In fact I'd say that a solution has just presented itself."

"Where?" Lara asked, looking over her shoulder at the landing field for herself.

"He's just walking off in that direction." Cal said and he pointed to a figure heading away from them.

"Is it someone we know?"

"Oh yes. It's Ren Distler." Cal answered. Ren Distler was a smuggler. The Udras had encountered him on several occasions and knew that rather than the run of the mill excise evasion or contraband smuggling that most in his line of work undertook Ren often moved items for the Founding Families and this connection had helped keep him out of prison so far, "Come on Ghost," Cal said as he got to his feet and took hold of the dog's leash, "its time to introduce you to a friend." Then he looked at Lara, "You can come too." He added.

The Jedi followed Ren from a distance, not wanting to risk calling any attention to themselves and he led them to another cantina where he disappeared inside.

"Think we can take Ghost in there?" Lara asked.

"If Ren's gone in there I doubt they're too picky." Cal answered, "Come on, let's go find out."

There was a bulky bouncer on the door of the cantina with a vicious looking blade that Cal could not decide if it should be called a knife or a sword hanging at his side. This individual looked both Cal and Lara up and down as they approached but did not say a word as they walked into the building.

Inside the two Jedi lowered their hoods and looked around, searching for Ren.

"Bar." Lara commented as she spotted the barman handing Ren a drink and she and Cal walked up behind him.

"Hello Ren. Fancy meeting you here." Cal said when he turned around and he jumped.

"Ah. Cal. Lara." Ren said, then he grinned, "I see your hair's back to normal." And both Jedi frowned briefly as they remembered Lara accidentally turning their hair bright colours when she attempted to disguise their appearance.

"Yes. That didn't last long fortunately." Cal said, "Green hair was something of an inconvenience. It didn't help with blending in."

"But the pink sort of suited you." Ren then said, looking at Lara, "So what do you want this time? That last favour I did you cost me a good contact."

"Favour?" Lara exclaimed, "You charged us five thousand credits."

"So that's worth getting a man killed is it then?" Ren replied in mock outrage.

"That wasn't what I meant." Lara said.

"Ren we need someone to modify our ship." Cal said suddenly, "Not a big job but we want it doing properly."

"What makes you think I'd know anyone like that?" Ren asked.

"Because sooner or later you must need to get rid of any tell tail markings left by weapons fire from disgruntled customers or customs agents and you can't exactly get that sort of damage fixed openly without people asking questions."

"Yeah. Who do you use?" Lara asked.

"There's a guy on Dust." Ren answered, "A vultar named Lordo Digg. He's a union foreman at the main starport. Slip him a few hundred credits and he'll get you into one of the maintenance sheds with a full crew. Tells the management that there's a safety issue or something and threatens a strike unless his men get time and a bonus to fix the problem. Unless you need some unusual parts ordering he can normally do it pretty cheap, Hyronimus picks up most of the bill. Not that he knows he's doing it though."

"Who?" Cal asked.

"Some industrialist. Outside of the Founding Families he's pretty much the richest guy in the sector." Ren said.

"I should have known that you wouldn't risk stealing from the Families." Lara commented, "What will you do when we've finished taking them down?"

"Oh I doubt that will ever happen little girl." Ren replied.

"Would you try and stop us?" Cal then asked and Ren smiled.

"Now that is an interesting question." He said.

"Digg." Lordo said simply as he answered the call. Activating the communications panel put a large spot of grease on the switch and he began to dab at it with a rag, trying to wipe off the grease without turning of the panel.

"Lordo, the hutt needs a ship and crew." Saren said, "Quick."

"There are plenty of ships and crews." Lordo replied, "What does the slug need from them?"

"The great Uggaro needs a ship that is fast and manoeuvrable. It must be armed as well, the target itself isn't armed but there may be an escort."

"Ah, an ambush. What's wrong with that aqualish I thought you were using?"

"Lacko's an idiot. We want someone that can identify what they're standing in front of before they blow it up."

"Okay, I'll keep my eye out." Lordo said.

"Good. Whoever you get they need to be on Delvad in four days." Saren said and she began to reach for the control to shut off the link. Then she paused and added, "Oh and Lordo."

"What?"

"Call our benevolent master a slug again and he'll see to it that you wind up without any legs either." And then the screen went blank.

"Mister Digg!" a voice suddenly called out from outside the small office and Lordo leant out of the door. On the walkway outside he found one of his technicians with the face mask needed to go outside on Dust lifted up to reveal his features.

"What is it?" Lordo asked.

"Two people to see you Mister Digg. They asked for you by name" The man answered, pointing over his shoulder with a thumb, "They say Ren Distler said you could help them." And Lordo smiled.

"Wait here." He said, "I'll go find out what they want and then I'll need to inspect the main air filter system. It may need overhauling again." And the technician smiled as well.

"Yes sir." He said as Lordo headed towards the two figures in long brown cloaks that hid their appearances.

"I'm Lordo Digg." Lordo said as he approached Cal and Lara, "How may I help you?"

"We hear that you carry out work on starships." Cal replied.

"Discretely." Lara added.

"Of course. Discretion is good for business." Lordo answered, "What sort of work are we talking about?"

"A security upgrade." Cal told him, "We want to upgrade our protection against break-ins."

"I see and how would you like this achieving?" Lordo asked.

"We have an active countermeasure in mind." Cal said, "We have the device, but it needs installing. Along with a control system operated from the cockpit."

"Of course, I think I understand fully." Lordo said, "What sort of vessel are we talking about?"

"A delaya-class courier." Lara replied and Lordo's eyes widened briefly.

*Greed.*

Cal sensed his reaction but could not understand it.

"You know," Lordo said, "if you are available then I have an associate on Delvad who would like to meet with you. He needs a fast ship and crew to help retrieve something."

"Retrieve what?" Lara asked.

"Like I said, discretion is good for business." Lordo replied, "If you're interested then I'll get your job done tonight and you can go visit my friend tomorrow and everyone's happy."



### 3.

Saren read the message from Lordo with interest. His reply had been far quicker than she had expected and her initial worry was that he had selected someone just to get her off his back. Of course if that were the case then the trouble it would cause for him would be far greater than that caused by his failing to find someone at all. However on the face of it things looked promising. Delaya-class couriers were some of the fastest ships around and boasted significant firepower. Of course there was no way of telling how good the crew would be, but Saren planned on sending a few thugs along for that ride anyway. If it came down to it they would take over the vessel and the current owners would find themselves floating home. Lordo had included information about the two individuals that were coming as well and Saren read through this. They had opted to try and hide their identities by wearing hooded cloaks, but the vultan had still been able to determine certain details about them. Firstly they were either human or of a near human species and their accents suggest a homeworld nearer to the core than any in the Narthis Sector. In addition it had been easy to spot that one was male and the other female. Finally Lordo had included a still image taken by a security camera. Though the hoods hid the faces of the wearers it did not do so fully from this angle and a portion of the face of each was just about visible. This was not enough for Saren to be able to identify either of them, but it would be enough to run through a facial recognition program and get a short list of suspects.

Assuming that the two hooded figures would have criminal records Saren chose to run the images through the sector's law enforcement databases and knowing how long this was likely to take she left the computer running as she went for something to eat.

When she came back some time later with a mug of caf in her hand she found that the computer had indeed found matches for both individuals. However, given that only a small part of an obscured face was visible the program had not been able to determine exactly who they were from this.

SUBJECT 01. HUMAN MALE: 546 POTENTIAL MATCHES.

SUBJECT 02. HUMAN FEMALE: 238 POTENTIAL MATCHES.

Saren sighed and then smiled, remembering what other information she also had about them and she instructed the computer to cross reference the two lists for people known to work as a pair and then also to narrow down the list to those known to possess a delaya-class vessel.

SUBJECT 01. HUMAN MALE: 1 MATCH.

SUBJECT 02. HUMAN FEMALE: 1 MATCH.

"That's better." Saren said to herself and she called up the data files on them. When the images of the pair appeared on screen Saren gasped and the mug dropped from her hand, "Oh kriff." She said to herself and she leapt up and ran as fast as she could to Uggaro's throne room, "I must speak with you in private my lord." She called out and when Uggaro nodded his agreement the attending guards and servants began to file out. Amongst the servants Saren noticed Calleri, the young woman pointed out to her as a thief and potential runaway and Saren was glad to see that Uggaro had dealt with her sternly. The serving girl now had rigid metal bars between her wrists and ankles keeping them a fixed distance apart. A chain joined the two bars together and also connected them to the cage that looked to have been built around her head that reminded Saren of some ancient Sith torture device. Part of the cage bent inwards to wedge Calleri's mouth open and as well as preventing her from speaking Saren noticed it would mean the only way of feeding her would be to tip liquid food straight down her throat and Saren grinned at the suffering inflicted on her.

"What is it Saren?" Uggaro asked as the blast door slammed shut.

"Lordo's sending a pair of people to us for the Founding Family job." She replied.

"Already? That was fast. But what do you need me to-"

"They're kriffing jedi." Saren interrupted.

"Jedi? But we can't have jedi coming here." Uggaro exclaimed.

"Don't panic." Saren replied, "It's that girl who killed another jedi knight and her brother that broke her out of prison. They're on the run from the Republic and the Jedi Order."

"But it seems a terrible risk to bring them here. What if it's all an act to expose us?" Uggaro asked.

"Oh don't be so stupid. The Republic can't even prove you exist, let alone me. We're not in any danger. But you will have to carry out the meeting yourself."

"But why? If there's no danger then-"

"There's no danger while they're talking to a hutt who has a mind they can't read. But if I get too close they may figure out that I'm in charge." Then Saren smiled, "Who knows, if we can make this a regular arrangement then two renegade jedi could come in useful."

Cal and Lara had been given nothing but a coded beacon to follow, so whoever it was that had a job needed doing as keen to remain anonymous.

"Remind me again why we're here." Lara said.

"Because someone is obviously planning to commit a serious crime." Cal replied.

"But why would we want to help them?"

"We wouldn't." Cal answered, "But I don't want to just let them carry it out either and by coming here maybe we can prevent it."

"The Runns have an estate here." Lara commented, "Do you think its them?"

"I doubt it. I think Shill Security takes care of all their black ops. Whoever this is I think they're just a regular criminal." Cal said and then he pointed through the canopy, "There. I can see an island."

Cal piloted the *Bright Hope* towards the tiny spec of land where the beacon was located. The island was little more than a cluster of rocks stuck above the water, but there were several places that were flattened patches of shale instead and it was on one of these that Cal set down the ship. The beach was deserted but there were several places close by where someone could be hiding.

"Let's go get the rifles." Cal said as he powered down the *Bright Hope's* engines.

"Don't forget, it's my turn for the grenade launcher Cal." Lara replied.

"Yes I know. But no dancing around with it naked."

"Not likely."

"And no shooting it without my permission."

"Aw Cal."

"Its that or no launcher." Cal said sternly.

"Fine." Lara said, "I'll wait for you to say when I can shoot it. But I'm picking what grenades I take."

"Fair enough. Now lets go see whose criminal schemes we're going to be ruining."

With rifles ready Cal and Lara rushed down the *Bright Hope's* access ramp and onto the shale but as far as they could make out they were alone here. Behind them Ghost came running down the ramp as well and halted when he reached the bottom, clearly unsure about the shale underfoot. Slinging his rifle over his shoulder Cal crouched down and began stroking the dog.

"I guess we just wait." He said.

With Ghost sat between them Cal and Lara sat at the base of the *Bright Hope's* access ramp and waited for whoever it was they had been sent to meet to arrive. It was only when Ghost suddenly looked out to sea and began barking that they realised that someone was approaching. Both jedi leapt to their feet and lifted their rifles once more as they saw a repulsorlift vehicle come into view. The vehicle was a simple skiff, nothing more than a flat chassis with a repulsorlift engine attached at the rear and as it came closer Cal and Lara saw that it carried only a single occupant at the control column.

"I'm guessing that this is just our ride." Cal said as the skiff came closer.

"Makes sense." Lara replied, "If we weren't allowed a name then giving us an address would have been pretty stupid."

The skiff pivoted as it came to a halt above the shale and the pilot looked down at Cal and Lara.

"You here from the vultan?" he asked and Cal nodded, "Then get aboard. The boss is waiting and it's not wise to make him wait."

"Can we bring our dog?" Lara asked.

"Do I look like I care? If it makes a mess on the deck you can kick it into the sea. Now seal your ship and get aboard. I'm leaving in two minutes with or without you."

As the *Bright Hope's* access ramp hissed shut behind them Lara climbed up onto the hovering skiff and then turned around as Cal lifted Ghost up and handed him to his sister.

"Wishing we'd got one of those little breeds you can fit in a purse?" she asked as Cal then climbed up himself.

"No." he replied, "I wanted a dog, not a rat." And then he grabbed the skiff's safety rail as without warning the pilot accelerated away.

The guard captain stood in front of Saren and Uggaro. All around them were more guards, all heavily armed but unlike their human captain these were mainly drawn from the species to be found in and around hutt space. Although Cal and Lara were wanted fugitives Saren was taking no chances on their planning to stage an assault on her headquarters.

"You understand your orders?" she asked the captain.

"Yes ma'am." He responded, "I will meet the two visitors on the landing platform while a squad of my men remains out of sight but covers the area. I will then disarm them and escort them here to see the great Uggaro. You will be monitoring from a remote location just in case it's a trap set by them to snare us."

“Exactly.” Saren replied, “Now go to the landing platform captain, I believe our guests are approaching.” And the captain marched away. Saren then turned back towards Uggaro, “With your permission I will take my leave my lord.” She said to him in huttese.  
“What? Oh yes. Go.” Uggaro replied and as he watched her leave he reached out for another handful of food from the plate Calleri held close by.

## 4.

Standing on the deck of the skiff Cal and Lara saw the floating palace that was their destination come into view and grow larger as the vehicle neared it. They had seen several other such structures on their trip from the island, but each time the pilot of the skiff had altered course to avoid getting too close. At first the pilot kept the skiff close to the water and the palace loomed above it, giving Cal and Lara a good view of the multiple repulsorlift generators that kept it in the air. Then at the last moment the pilot pulled back on the control column and the skiff climbed sharply so that the palace was below it and on a ledge at the side of the palace Cal and Lara saw a landing platform on which a pair of armoured figures stood.

The skiff descended again and settled down on the platform.

"Time to get off." The pilot said and Cal and Lara jumped down, Ghost following them.

"You will give me your weapons." The guard captain announced as the skiff took off again behind the Jedi. Cal and Lara looked at one another and Cal nodded.

"We better do what he says." He said, "Give them our blasters." And he held out his rifle in one hand while he drew the sidearm from his leg and held that out in the other. The second guard stepped forward to collect the weapons, pausing longer in front of Lara as she removed the bandolier of grenades she also carried.

"Good. Now your lightsabers as well please." The guard captain said and Cal and Lara looked at one another again, "Really?" the captain said, "Did you honestly think we wouldn't find out who you are Cal and Lara Udra?"

Cal and Lara stared at one another.

"It's a long swim back to your ship." The guard captain said, "So you can either hand over the lightsabers or start swimming."

Cal reached under his cloak and took out his lightsaber, handing it over to the nearby guard.

"Cal-" Lara began.

"Just do it." Cal told her, keeping his voice low, "We're Jedi. We don't need weapons."

Lara sighed as she too took out her lightsaber and surrendered it.

"At least we'll have Ghost to protect us." She said, patting the dog.

"Thank you." The guard captain said, "Now if you'll follow me I'll take you see the great Uggaro the Hutt."

Cal and Lara glanced at one another again as the guards began to walk away from them. Several months earlier, before Lara was framed for murder they had uncovered evidence that one of the infamous Hutt crime lords was operating in the sector, but they had not guessed that they would find themselves face-to-face with him.

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

The two Jedi followed after the guards and as they stepped through the doorway of the palace another pair of armed beings stepped in behind them, boxing them in.

The interior of the palace looked to have been built with a hut in mind. Both passageways and doors were wide enough for several human sized beings to pass through side-by-side, easily enough for a Hutt either moving under its own power or mounted on a repulsor sled. Some might consider the décor to be extravagant but to Cal and Lara it instead appeared tacky, with numerous works of art lining every available wall. Finally after crossing the entire width of the palace they were led into the throne room of Uggaro the Hutt.

The bloated creature sat on an ornately carved platform. This lacked any form of ramp for him to slither up and down, suggesting that the entire thing could be raised or lowered as needed. Even for a Hutt there seemed to be a large number of guards present, with practically the entire length of the walls lined with armed and armoured troops drawn from the usual range of species found in the service of the Hutts. In addition to this there were servants clustered around the Hutt, most of whom were female members of species that humans generally found physically appealing and Cal noticed that one young human had been restrained in an unconventional manner that seemed to be designed as some sort of punishment. As he looked again at this individual he noticed that the metal restraints lacked any form of lock, having instead been welded in place and he wondered what she could have done to warrant this apparently permanent punishment. The other significant figure present stood on the platform with Uggaro. Rather than a living being this was a droid, present to translate the words of its master for those staff and guests that did not speak Huttese for themselves.

"Mighty Uggaro," the guard captain called out, "may I present former members of the Jedi Order Cal and Lara Udra. They came willingly and surrendered their weapons without argument." And at that point the guard carrying Cal and Lara's weapons stepped forwards and laid them out in front of him.

Uggaro pointed to Lara's lightsaber as it was set down and the translator droid picked the weapon up and handed it to him. Uggaro inspected the lightsaber before holding it out in front of him and activating it. "The weapon of a jedi." The droid said, translating as Uggaro spoke, "Rare and valuable." "So is our time. So how about you just tell us what you want?" Cal said sternly.

*Surprise.*

*Fear.*

Clearly those employed by Uggaro were not used to their master being spoken to like that and their reaction was easy to pick up on through the Force for both Cal and Lara. But Uggaro reacted with a deep booming laugh and he tossed the lightsaber back towards the other weapons.

"The mighty Uggaro has done you the honour of inviting you here to make you an offer that you cannot refuse." The droid translated as Uggaro spoke again.

"Try me." Cal said, "I can refuse anything I don't like the sound of."

"Before the mighty Uggaro tells you what he requires of you he demands proof of your commitment." The droid said and at the same time Uggaro pointed towards the bound serving girl and waved her forwards.

Rather than wait for her to hobble forwards a pair of guards stepped out of line and dragged her between Uggaro and the jedi, shoving her as they let go her so that she fell to the floor, a distorted squeal all she could produce as she tried in vain to break her fall. As she lay on the floor trying desperately to get back to her feet Uggaro pointed at her again and spoke.

"Kill her." The droid translated, "Use your much vaunted jedi powers to end her life."

*Terror.*

Unable to speak Calleri's reaction was still all too clear to the two jedi.

"Cal." Lara whispered worriedly as he looked down at Calleri.

"I can do this." Cal replied softly and he reached out a hand towards Calleri and took a deep breath.

"But Cal-" Lara began.

"Hey, its me remember. I've got an idea." Cal interrupted, still keeping his voice low and then he clenched his fist and raised it upwards.

Calleri let out another distorted cry while there were gasps from around the room as she was lifted up off the floor and hovered in mid air, her legs kicking futilely as much as the bar binding her ankles would allow.

Lara's initial thought was that her brother was genuinely calling on the Dark Side just to keep their cover intact, but then she realised that there was no hint of darkness in what he was doing and she frowned as she tried to figure out what it was exactly that he was doing.

"Enough!" the droid said as Uggaro suddenly uttered something and Cal released his grip, letting Calleri fall back to the floor.

Then he looked at Uggaro.

"So how about you tell us why you need our help?" he asked.

The translator droid raised a datapad and used it to activate the throne room's holographic display system. Instantly a three-dimension image of a tall bald human appeared as if he were standing between Uggaro and Cal and Lara, facing the two jedi.

"You know this man?" the droid asked and Cal and Lara both frowned.

"Unfortunately yes we do." Cal replied, "He's Heddren Drud isn't he?"

"Correct." The droid said and then he continued to translate Uggaro's words, "This man acts as the head of his clan, though technically it is his brother that holds that position. We have observed recently that he has been making arrangements for a large transport vessel from the core worlds to dock and refuel at Aurek Station before heading on to its final destination."

"Which is where?" Lara asked.

"Our agents have not been able to determine that." The droid translated for Uggaro, "All we know is that the transport ship will bring a valuable cargo to the sector and then take it to a secret location."

"Let me guess the rest." Cal interrupted, "We're supposed to steal it right?" and Uggaro let out a booming laugh.

"Correct Mister Udra." The droid said when Uggaro finished laughing and answered the question, "Whatever is aboard that ship is being kept secret, therefore I want to know what it is. It is also valuable enough to be worth bring all the way here from the core, therefore I want it."

"May I have a moment to discuss this with my sister?" Cal asked and Uggaro simply nodded slowly.

"Thanks." Cal said and he pulled Lara back into the corridor outside the throne room.

"Cal what did you just do to that girl?" Lara whispered.

"I just lifted her up off the floor and tugged a bit on that slave collar around her neck that's all." He replied just as quietly, "She thought I was trying to kill her so her panic made it look like I was when really it would

have taken more than half an hour for her to suffer any harm and I bet on Uggaro getting bored long before then."

"One hell of a gamble that Cal." Lara muttered.

"I think we should agree to his deal." He said softly.

"Are you insane?" Lara exclaimed and Cal shushed her, "Are you insane?" she repeated at a lower volume.

"Look Lara this could be an opportunity to strike at the Founding Families." Cal replied.

"But he's a criminal." Lara hissed.

"Technically so are we." Cal pointed out and as Lara scowled at him he added, "And if what we believe about the Founding Families is even partly true then so are they and what they're doing is far worse than a bit of piracy."

Lara sighed.

"I've got a bad feeling about where this is headed Cal. What if he starts asking us to do more jobs for him? What if next time he asks you to kill someone he doesn't get bored before you finish? Or what if he decides we know too much about him?"

"I don't see that happening."

"Why not?"

"Because he won't be able to find us just like we won't be able to find him unless he wants us to. You know how difficult it is to find us and when we're gone from here he can just move this place somewhere else on the planet."

Lara sighed again.

"Fine." She said after a pause, "But I'm going to say I told you so sooner or later."

"Not if I'm right." Cal replied and then they both returned to the throne room, "Mighty Uggaro," he said clearly, "we are willing to consider your offer." And Uggaro laughed again.

"Excellent." The droid translated, "The mighty Uggaro offers you two percent of whatever you find."

"Twenty." Lara replied and Uggaro roared.

*Fear.*

Once again the reaction came from those around the hutt rather than the bloated alien himself.

"The mighty Uggaro wishes to know why he should pay you twenty percent." The droid said as its master responded.

"Because we're the ones with the ship you need." Cal said.

There was an awkward silence and Cal sized up the guards lining the walls just in case Uggaro gave the order for them to attack. Then the crime lord uttered a single word.

"The mighty Uggaro offers you ten percent." The droid told Cal and Lara.

"Deal." Cal said before Lara could attempt to demand more, "Just give us the route that the transport is taking and we'll arrange to intercept it when it comes out of hyperspace."

"Return to your vessel." The droid told the jedi, "A contingent of the mighty Uggaro's troops will join you there with the information you require."

"Troops?" Lara exclaimed, "Cal that was never part of our agreement."

"Perhaps you feel you are being unfairly treated?" the droid said.

"No." Cal replied, "Return our weapons and we'll wait for your men."

With a nod from Uggaro the guard captain picked up the jedi's weapons and passed them to a subordinate.

"Come with us." He said to Cal, "Your weapons will be returned when you have left the palace."

Cal nodded and he and Lara followed the two guards from the throne room and were led back to the same landing pad where they had arrived and they found the skiff waiting for them. The guard captain then returned their weapons just as he had promised and the two jedi boarded the skiff before it rose up from the pad and carried them back to the island where the *Bright Hope* waited.

"I told you so." Lara said as the skiff flew off into the distance and Cal noticed that its heading was different to the one that had brought them here, suggesting that Uggaro had indeed moved his palace to keep its location hidden from them.

"Nothing's gone wrong yet." Cal replied.

"That depends on your point of view Cal." Lara told him, "I mean letting that slug's thugs aboard the ship?"

"Don't worry." Cal said, "I'm sure they'll behave themselves."

The blast door slammed shut again leaving Saren and Uggaro alone in the throne room.

"You were listening?" Uggaro asked.

"I was." Saren replied, "Nice touch with asking for a demonstration that they weren't still part of the jedi order. But you should have waited until that girl was dead."

"But then I'd need an excuse to have another restrained like that. Haven't you noticed how afraid the others look when they see her? It's almost as entertaining as watching her hobble about."  
"I suppose so." Saren said, "But I'm still not convinced we can rely on these two. Once the transport and its cargo are secure I think we should have the men kill them and take their ship."

It was getting dark by the time the skiff returned carrying the guard captain and a group of his men.

"You have the navigation data?" Cal called out from the bottom of the access ramp as they walked up the beach.

"Right here." The captain answered and he held up a datapad, "The transport is on its way from the core. If we leave now we can intercept it in two days time at the beacon in the Peelam Sector."

"The Peelam Sector?" Cal repeated.

"The beacon there is fully automated." The captain replied, "There are no defences there for it to call upon for help."

"So we're supposed to share our ship with you and your men for four days?" Lara asked and she looked at Cal and mouthed, 'I told you so.'

"I'm sure you'll understand that we won't be giving you free reign of our ship." Cal said, "You can set up bunks in the hold, but that's it until we get to our destination. Any trouble and we'll just open the exterior door and you'll find yourselves floating home."

"Uggaro's orders were clear." The captain said sternly, "I am in command of-

"You command your men and nothing more on my ship." Cal interrupted.

"Our ship." Lara corrected him.

"On our ship." Cal said, "If that's not good enough then you can go back and explain to him why the operation's failed. Perhaps he'll be in a forgiving mood."

The captain scowled and turned to his men.

"Get your stuff in the hold." He ordered them.

## 5.

In spite of the effort being expended by the Republic's military in particular to develop navigational computers with the processing power and memory to store the multitude of data required to plot a journey through hyperspace to any destination in the known galaxy still relied heavily on static jump beacons to provide the needed data. Some like Aurek Station in the Narthis Sector also became thriving trade hubs, colonies in their own right. On the other hand many remained like the one that was visible when the *Bright Hope* dropped out of hyperspace in the Peelam Sector, coreward of the Narthis Sector. This was little more than a computer left floating in interstellar space. Ships arriving here would transmit their required destination to the beacon and it would determine the next stage in their journey and provide the co-ordinates. Although it operated without a crew the beacon still maintained an atmosphere and regulated internal temperature that suited humans along with a store of survival rations. This was an emergency feature, should a ship be disabled out here then its crew could seek sanctuary aboard the beacon until a rescue vessel arrived.

"It's been a while." Cal said as he looked through the cockpit canopy at the beacon.

"You've been here before?" Lara asked.

"We both have." Cal replied, "This is the route back to Coruscant remember? We came past here when we travelled to the Narthis Sector."

Lara stared at the beacon.

"If we kept going we could see mom and dad." She said.

"Assuming we don't get shot down or arrested first. Coruscant is well defended and we are fugitives." Cal pointed out and Lara's face fell.

"Thanks for reminding me." She said. Then she added, "So what do we do now?"

"We wait for the target to arrive." Cal replied, "We have a transponder code to look out for and when we detect it we'll board the ship."

"That simple hey?"

"Only if everything goes according to plan." Cal replied.

"Oh I've got that bad feeling again." Lara said and Cal grinned.

"You and me both little sister." He said, "You and me both." Then he activated the intercom, "Okay captain," he announced to the troops still shut in the *Bright Hope's* cargo hold, "we're in position by the beacon. Get your men ready and we'll let you know as soon as the target vessel arrives."

"Copy that." The captain's voice responded, "We're suiting up now."

As he shut off the intercom Cal looked at Lara.

"You know getting into vacc suits sounds like a pretty good idea to me." He said, "If anything goes wrong we may have to do an EVA. I'll keep watch while you change and then we swap. Okay?"

"Okay Cal." Lara answered and she got up and left the cockpit.

A short time later both Cal and Lara sat in their seats wearing vacuum suits in place of their regular robes. Only the helmets had been left off, these sat on the empty chair behind them as they watched for the arrival of the transport.

Keleen Delvad walked through the cargo hold of the transport again, inspecting the straps that held the containers in place. The crew took this as an affront she knew, a suggestion that their handling of the ship was not up to scratch. But the truth was that any vessel entering or exiting hyperspace was subject to tremendous forces and even the best flown ship could not make the transition between universes without any turbulence at all. So given the nature of the cargo she considered the hurt feelings of the crew to be irrelevant.

"All hands stand by to drop to realspace." A voice announced over the intercom and Keleen turned around and dashed towards the bridge. She arrived there just in time to see the twisting lights of hyperspace give way to the blackness of realspace.

"Report status." The captain said.

"All systems registering functional. No damage." One of the flight crew replied.

"Excellent. Comscan contact beacon from jump co-ordinates to Narthis Sector." The captain added and then he noticed Keleen standing behind him and turned his seat around to face her, "Is your cargo safe Miss Delvad?" he asked.

"For the time being yes it is captain." She replied.



"Captain I can't contact the beacon." The comscan operator suddenly called out and the captain turned in his chair again.

"I thought all systems were functioning." He said, "What's wrong?"

"We're transmitting just fine captain. But we're not getting a reply to acknowledge our presence here. It's just static."

"Static?" Keleen said and she looked at the captain, "Captain get the ship out of here. It's a trap!"

"Don't be so—" the captain began, but the comscan operator interrupted him.

"Incoming vessel!" the man snapped, "Captain I think she's the source of the jamming."

"Show me." The captain ordered and the main bridge display screen shifted from the usual readouts to an image of the approaching craft.

"I know that ship." Keleen said as she looked at the picture of the *Bright Hope*, "Captain you have to get us out of here."

"We don't have the jump data." The captain told her, "We can't jump to hyperspace and this ship isn't going to outrun a delaya-class in realspace."

"Then issue whatever weapons you've got captain, because this ship is about to be boarded."

Cal and Lara unsealed the *Bright Hope's* hold as soon as the transport ship they were waiting for dropped out of hyperspace and now Uggaro's guard captain stood between them, leaning on their chairs.

"Looks like a herkalon-class ship." Cal said as he flew towards the target, "No sign of any escort."

"Of course not." The guard captain replied, "That would draw too much attention."

"You do realise that there could be more than four hundred people aboard that?" Lara said, "Can you fight your way through that many?"

The guard captain shook his head.

"They won't be carrying passengers." He said, "A few guards at most but no more than a dozen. You should be able to handle them."

"Us?" Lara exclaimed, "What's the point in you and your men if it's Cal and I doing all the work?"

"Calm down Lara." Cal said, "I'll go in with the captain and his men while you wait here and look after the ship."

"I'll leave one of mine behind as well just in case they try to sneak someone aboard." The guard captain added and Cal and Lara glanced at one another suspiciously.

The freighter began to turn and fired its main engines, obviously trying to put some distance between it and the *Bright Hope*. However, unless the crew were able to manually plot a jump into hyperspace then they were trapped here and their vessel could not possibly outrun the jedi's ship.

"There, that looks good." Cal said as the *Bright Hope* closed on the freighter and he pointed to a docking port, "Captain have your men form up in the main airlock. We'll make a hard seal so they won't need their helmets after all. I'll join you as soon as we have a hard seal and force entry to that ship."

"We have charges." He replied, "We can—"

"This will be more efficient." Cal replied and he took one hand off the control column and held up his lightsaber. The captain then just nodded and walked out of the cockpit. Cal then glanced at his sister, "Lara be careful." He said, "If whoever he leaves here with you gives you any trouble don't hesitate to deal with them and detach the ship from the freighter."

"But what about you?" Lara asked.

"I can take care of myself." Cal answered, "I'll get off the freighter and you can come pick me up."

"Enemy vessel is closing captain." The comscan operator announced, "Estimate one minute to contact."

"Where?" the captain asked.

"Looks like they're heading for the port side docking port." The comscan operator replied.

"Have your men establish a defensive line there." Keleen said, "Advise them to make use of fully automatic fire wherever they can."

"Full auto?" the captain exclaimed, "My men are cargo hands and technicians, not marines. I don't even have enough guns to go around."

"Then tell them to concentrate their fire on individual targets." Keleen told him.

"Full auto? Concentrating fire? Who do you think is aboard that ship?"

"Two fallen jedi captain. They're killers."

"Oh kriff." Was all the captain could manage in reply.

There was a loud 'Clang!' as the *Bright Hope* made contact with the freighter and the two docking ports locked together. In the freighter crewmen rushed to drag crates across the corridor to form a defensive

barrier they could hide behind. There were six of them in total and not one of them had ever been in battle before. Now if they were to believe their passenger they were about to face two of the most dangerous opponents imaginable.

After the sound of the two ships joining together there was silence and the crewmen decided to make do with what cover they already had and took up positions behind it. Then all of a sudden a spot in the corner of the door began to glow bright red before the pale blue blade of a lightsaber forced its way through and began to cut its way around the hatch.

"Remember our orders." The most senior crewman present called out to the others, "As soon as the jedi appear focus all fire on the closest one first. Don't stop shooting until they're dead or you run out of ammunition."

The hatch suddenly dropped out of its frame and the sound of it hitting the deck echoed down the corridor and the lightsaber blade vanished just before an armoured figure stepped through the hole it had created.

"Open fire!" the senior crewman yelled and his men did as they were ordered. The armoured figure jerked as it was struck by an assortment of pulse wave blasts and projectiles and as he fell he was simply shoved aside by the next of Uggaro's guards to come through the hatch before he started shooting back.

Unlike the freighter crew Uggaro's men were combat veterans and well armed and half of the freighter's defenders reacted by ceasing fire and ducking down behind the crates they were using as cover. One that tried to keep firing was struck by a pulse wave blast and he fell dead, an event that caused the other two still shooting to duck for cover as well.

It was then that Cal burst into the corridor and charged towards the barrier with his lightsaber humming. He leapt up onto the barrier and stared down at the cowering crewmen. One raised a pistol but Cal lashed out with his foot and kicked the weapon from his grip.

*Fear.*

"Surrender!" he bellowed as he pointed his lightsaber down towards them, sensing their dread. The crewmen glance at one another before the most senior of them simply nodded and tossed his weapon to the floor. The others copied him and then they all got to their feet nervously and raised their hands above their heads.

"Get them up against the bulkhead." Uggaro's guard captain called out to his men and roughly they dragged the freighter crewmen to the side of the corridor and lined them up facing the wall.

"What are you playing at?" Cal asked him quietly, sensing that he was up to something.

"Uggaro never said anything about prisoners." He replied.

"Well Uggaro's not here and since we came on my ship-"

"But we're not on your ship any more." The captain interrupted and Cal scowled and raised his lightsaber, holding it close to the man's throat.

"Put them in an escape pod." He said, "When we leave we'll eject it and they can wait on the beacon to be picked up. And if any of them have any unfortunate accidents then I assure you that you'll have one as well. Do you understand me?"

Scowling back at Cal the guard captain nodded.

"Okay men, find an escape pod and lock them inside."

"Good." Cal said, "Now I suggest you send half your men to secure the engineering section while we take the rest to the bridge."

## 6.

On the bridge of the freighter Keleen and the flight crew waited nervously.

"Have you penetrated the jamming yet?" she asked, looking at the comscan operator but the man shook his head.

"It's too strong." He said, "If they weren't docked then maybe I could find a way to get through it but the antenna's been overloaded."

So all that's between us and them is that blast door then?" Keleen the asked the captain.

"I'm afraid so. The bridge is designed to act as a panic room so it's the most heavily armoured door on the ship but against a lightsaber even that will only slow them down, not stop them."

"Well hopefully it will slow them down long enough for another ship to turn up and notice something's wrong." Keleen said, knowing even as she said the words that they were a forlorn hope at best. A delaya-class courier like the *Bright Hope* was well armed and unless the vessel that happened to come along was a warship it was unlikely that it would risk coming to their aide.

"I want to speak to your captain." Cal's voice suddenly sounded from the intercom panel and the captain and Keleen looked at one another, "Come on captain, I know you're in there. At a time like this you wouldn't be anywhere else."

The captained sighed and went to the panel.

"This is the captain." He said, "And I'm informing you that you are guilty of piracy and-"

"Oh do shut up captain." Cal interrupted, "I'm standing outside your bridge with five heavily armed and rather impatient men. So how about you save us all a lot of trouble and open up?"

Had they been standing face to face Cal thought he would have been able to use the Force to trick the captain into doing as he was told, but with the blast door between them Cal could not focus on him properly and so had to resort to more primitive means of persuasion. Unfortunately the blast door was obvious a source of comfort to those on the bridge and it remained sealed shut.

"Very well, have it your way captain." Cal said and he plunged his lightsaber into the centre of the door where its various elements met.

On the other side of the door the Keleen and the flight crew watched as the blast door began to glow.

"They're breaking through!" the helmsman exclaimed.

"Don't be a fool." Keleen yelled back at him, "It'll take more than that to get through that door." The she looked at the captain, "Is there another way off the bridge?" she asked, "A service duct maybe? Anything." But the captain shook his head.

"They'll kill us!" the helmsman shouted, "If we don't do as they say they'll kill us all!" and before anyone could stop him he rushed to the blast door and slammed his hand down on the control beside it.

There was a sudden hiss and a rumbling as the door began to open and revealed Cal standing outside with his lightsaber in his hand.

"Don't do it!" he snapped as he saw the freighter captain reach for the pistol holstered at his hip and he leapt between the blast door sections as they were still sliding apart. Reaching out with his hand Cal used the Force to grab hold of the weapon before the captain could and it flew through the air towards him where he caught it in his free hand.

The helmsman was knocked to the deck by the first of Uggaro's guards to come through behind Cal and the man just cowered on his knees.

*Fear.*

It was all around Cal here, the flight crew understandably unsure of the fate that awaited them. Then as Cal looked at each member of the flight crew in turn he saw a familiar face and he smiled.

"Well, well, well. Keleen Delvad." He said as he strode towards her, "So tell me, what exactly are you doing on a freighter carrying a secret cargo?" but Keleen just glared at him. Cal grabbed hold of her by the arm and looked into her eyes, "I tell you what, why don't we go take a look at your cargo then." He said and then he activated the communications system in his vacuum suit, "Lara?" he transmitted.

"Go ahead." She replied, the signal distorted somewhat by the jamming that was able penetrate into the ship as well as flooding the space around it.

"The ship is secure. You can shut off the jamming." Cal told her.

"Copy that. Shutting off the jamming now." Lara said and Cal broke the link and looked around at Uggaro's guard captain

"Take the others to the escape pod. I'm going to find out what your boss has just stolen." He said and then he began to drag Keleen from the bridge.

"You'll never get away with this!" she yelled at him.

As soon as Cal was gone the guard captain looked at his men and addressed them.

"You heard him. Get these prisoners with the rest. I'm going to let the boss know we've secured the ship."

"So where are the two jedi now captain?" Saren asked the holographic image of the guard captain that stood before her and Uggaro in the throne room.

"Cal has taken one of the prisoners to the hold to inspect the cargo. He seemed to know her. The other is still on their ship."

"Are any of your men on the jedi's ship?" Saren then asked.

"Yes. I left a man there to keep an eye on things."

Saren smiled and stepped up onto the platform where Uggaro lay before whispering to him. Uggaro nodded and then spoke.

"The mighty Uggaro commends you on a job well done captain." The translator droid said, "Now complete your task by killing the prisoners and the jedi. Wipe them out."

"With pleasure my lord." The guard captain replied, snarling.

As the tiny hologram of the throne that was shown above the freighter's main communication console faded the guard captain was activating his own vacc suit's communicator.

"Braktu report." He ordered.

"Prisoners secure sir. We can launch the pod whenever you want."

"Change of plan. Kill them." The captain ordered

"But what about the jedi?" Braktu asked.

"He won't be around much longer." The captain said, "Just get on with it. Use a grenade if you have to." And then he switched channels, "Kaaldo come in. Where are you?"

"In the airlock of the jedi ship sir."

"And the female jedi?"

"Still in the cockpit."

"Good. Kill the little witch."

Lara sat in the pilot's seat, normally Cal's place in the cockpit and stared at the instrument panel. The only change to the readings since Cal had led Uggaro's men into the freighter was the transmission that had been sent after she had dropped the jamming and she guessed that it was the guard captain reporting in to the hutt crime lord.

"Oh get a move on Cal." She said to herself, "I'm bored."

Behind Lara Klaado crept closer to the door to the cockpit unnoticed by her and carefully he reached for the knife at his belt. He did his best to remain calm, reasoning that any sudden thought would give him away to Lara's jedi senses. He would rather have used a blaster to do the job but he was concerned that he may accidentally damage the controls of the Bright Hope if he fired into the cockpit so instead he planned on simply slitting Lara's throat.

Nearing the door to the cockpit he slipped the knife from its sheath and slowly raised it up in front of him, his view focused entirely on Lara as she sat with her back still to him. But before he could strike he felt something heavy and warm slam into him and he was thrown against the bulkhead beside him.

"Ghost!" Lara yelled as she turned to see the dog with his teeth gripping the prone Klaado's arm tightly as he tried to wrench it free, drawing blood. Then she noticed the knife in his hand and she reached for her lightsaber, "Drop it!" she yelled at Klaado.

Still trying to wrestle his arm free Klaado lashed out with a foot and kicked Lara's leg out from under her but she retained her grip on her lightsaber and as she fell she thrust it into his chest. Klaado's eyes widened briefly and then he let out a gasp before slumping against the bulkhead. As the knife fell from his lifeless hand Ghost then let go of his arm and approached Lara.

"Good dog." She said, shutting off her lightsaber and patting Ghost on the head.

Cal was still dragging Keleen along behind him when they reached the cargo hold and he halted as he saw the massive cargo containers it held. There were at least a dozen of them, but they did not come close to filling the entire hold. Significantly not one of them bore any manifest labelling.

"So what's so important you use a bulk freighter just for these?" he asked as he then dragged Keleen to the closest container.

"Nothing you could understand." She replied.

"Oh really? Then you won't mind me taking a look in this one will you?" Cal said and with a single swing of his lightsaber he sliced off the locks.

The door to the container swung open and Cal held up the lightsaber so that the light it cast illuminated the inside and a puzzled frown appeared on Cal's face.

"I told you you wouldn't understand." Keleen said.

"These are hyperdrive components." Cal said.

*Surprise.*

*Fear.*

Cal smiled.

"So it seems I know more than you think." He said, "But the question remains what are these for? I've never seen these components this large before. Even one of the navy's big command ships would have smaller parts. The ship these would power would have to be –" and then Cal suddenly stopped and his smile widened, "But they're not for a ship are they? I have seen components this big before after all. You're building a hyperspace cannon aren't you?"

In the days before spacecraft could be equipped with internal hyperdrives interstellar travel between the core worlds had been achieved using massive devices called hyperspace cannons. A ship would fly into one of these and be forcibly propelled into hyperspace until it reached its destination where the ship would introduce a drag element that would force its exit from hyperspace. Of course this had meant two way travel was only possible if the destination also possessed a hyperspace cannon to fire the ship back again and the concept had been abandoned thousands of years earlier. However, a renegade group had come across an alien built hyperspace cannon in the Narthis Sector and demonstrated its potential as a weapon capable of striking at targets over interstellar distances. Their shields may protect planets, but space stations and fleets at anchor would be horribly vulnerable to such a weapon and now it seemed that the Founding Families wanted one for themselves.

A dull 'Crump' distracted Cal and Keleen slipped free of his grip. Then as Cal turned to give chase his communicator sounded.

"Cal!" Lara's voice exclaimed, "Uggaro's guard turned on me. I killed him but I don't know where the others are."

"Stang." Cal muttered. Then he added, "Look Lara Keleen Delvad's aboard. I'm going to grab her and I'll be back as soon as I can. Don't let anyone on the ship okay?"

In the *Bright Hope's* airlock Lara balanced the rifle with the underslung grenade launcher on her hip as she loaded a grenade at the same time as she spoke with Cal.

"Oh I'm not letting anyone in here." She said.

Keleen ran for the nearest escape pod, hoping that she would be able to reach the beacon and from there call for help. But as she rounded a corner she found the captain of Uggaro's guards and three of his men blocking her path. Without warning they raised their weapons and opened fire. Keleen screamed as she dived out of the way and then began to run back down the corridor. However, this brought her crashing into Cal who grinned at her.

"Lesson one. When running away do just that. Don't run towards the person chasing you." He said to her.

"I was running from them." She replied and she pointed at the guards now running around the corner.

"Oh I've got a bad feeling about this." Cal said just before the guards opened fire.

Pulling Keleen into a nearby compartment Cal took the pulse wave rifle from his back.

"How about you give me that blaster?" Keleen said, indicating the pistol Cal also carried.

"Do I look stupid?" he asked, "You'd just use it against me." And then he briefly leant out of the door and fired a burst of spatial distortions down the corridor that sent one of Uggaro's men flying backwards, "Okay lady here's how this works." He then said to Keleen, "You're coming with me. If you try and escape I'll shoot you, if I miss those guys outside will shoot you and if you make it back to the *Bright Hope* without me then Lara will shoot you. I'm your only hope of getting out of here alive. Understood?" and Keleen nodded, "Okay, when I say we just go. The ship is on the port side."

"I know." Keleen replied.

"Okay now!" Cal yelled and as he leapt through the doorway he fired his rifle again, not aiming at anyone in particular but instead using it to keep Uggaro's men pinned down as he backed away from them. Then when he reached a junction he dived down the corridor to his side and both he and Keleen broke into a run. Along the way they passed by the escape pod that had been used to hold the freighter's crew and inside they saw only body parts.

"What happened?" Keleen exclaimed.

"Looks like someone used a grenade." Cal replied, realising what the sound he had heard in the cargo hold had been, "Now come on, the ship's not far." And he pulled Keleen along with him.

From ahead there was the sudden sound of barking.

"What the hell is that?" Keleen asked.

"Oh didn't I mention it? I've got a dog." Cal replied and then they rounded the corner leading to the *Bright Hope* and saw Lara standing in the air lock in her bright pink vacuum suit with Ghost beside her. Lara was pointing the grenade launcher directly at them.

"Cal get down!" she yelled.

"I'm with him!" Keleen exclaimed, lifting her hands above her head as she ducked.

Cal however looked around to see the guards sent to secure the engineering section now rushing towards them and he dived on top of Keleen.

"Lara do it!" he yelled and there was a brief 'pop' as Lara fired the grenade launcher. The round flew above Cal and Keleen before bursting open amongst Uggaro's men. However, there was no explosion. Lara had selected a grenade filled with white phosphorous and without the helmets of their vacuum suits on to protect them the guards screamed as the burning chemical enveloped them.

"Move!" Cal snapped, pulling Keleen to her feet and dragging her towards the airlock.

As soon as they were inside Lara shut the *Bright Hope's* hatch behind them.

"Here." Cal said, shoving Keleen at Lara, "Find somewhere to stash her for the trip home and then meet me in the cockpit. We're leaving."

Cal then raced to the cockpit and sat in the pilot's seat. The first thing he did was reactivate the *Bright Hope's* jamming system to prevent Uggaro's men from signalling their boss. Then he deactivated the seals holding the ship against the freighter and fired the thrusters to separate them. With the freighter's airlock destroyed Cal knew that this would depressurise at least part of the vessel, but he doubted that everyone aboard would be killed so after accelerating a relatively short distance away from the freighter Cal turned the *Bright Hope* around.

"Cal what are you doing?" Lara asked as she rushed into the cockpit and sat down beside her brother.

"Setting up an attack run." He told her, "Arm torpedoes and lock them on the freighter."

"Torpedoes? But what about the crew? Plus we can't exactly replace-"

"The crew are dead. Uggaro's men murdered them all." Cal interrupted, "And I want to make certain that there's nothing left of that ship or it's cargo."

The guard captain and four of his surviving men strode back onto the bridge of the freighter. Immediately one of them ran to the communications panel.

"They're jamming us sir." He said.

"Then we'll have to wait for them to leave." The captain responded.

"Actually sir I think they're moving into attack position." The guard said.

"Attack position? But-" and then the guard captain's face fell as he saw the proton torpedo erupt from one of the *Bright Hope's* launchers, "Oh kriff." He said a moment before it struck the freighter.

Cal steered the *Bright Hope* around the expanding ball of debris that was all that remained of the freighter and the hyperspace cannon components.

"So where's Keleen then Lara?" he asked.

"Oh I locked her in a closet with a flash light, a bottle of water and a couple of ration bars. Oh and a bucket."

Lara replied, "What do you plan on doing with her?"

Cal shrugged.

"I hadn't thought about it." He said.

"Well I suppose there are plenty of closets on Dorn Station." Lara said.