

# STAR WARS

## TALES OF THE JEDI



### II-V: LABYRINTH

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ELEVEN FAMILIES.  
TWELVE GENERATIONS.  
ONE EVIL.

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

**LABYRINTH**

WHEN A NEW SET OF RUINS IS UNCOVERED ON ATCH THE JEDI ORDER DESPACHES THE UDRAS WITH JEDI SCHOLAR KRAUS TREVAN TO INVESTIGATE THEM. BUT THERE ARE OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES AS WELL...

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<http://thehazugfiles.uk/Index.htm>

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# 1 .

"Doctor Larnson! Come quickly!"

Dayle Larnson emerged from the simple tent that was his home on the world of Atch. For some time now he had been the leader of the scientific expedition researching the ruins on this world beyond the borders of the Republic. To look at him Doctor Larnson did not look like a typical xenoarchaeologist, being almost two metres tall and heavily muscled.

"What is it?" he called out to the grad student now rushing towards him, waving frantically.

"Doctor Larnson we've just got the latest radar pictures from the droids. They're amazing!"

In recent months the expedition had unexpectedly received a massive increase in funding by its sponsors and this had been used to obtain several airborne droids equipped with ground penetrating radar.

Dayle ran after the grad student to another tent filled with the equipment that was in constant contact with the droids.

"Show me." He said to the operator.

"Here, we've got three droids moving along the coast to the north."

"Past that big arten settlement?" Dayle asked. The arten were the local indigenous species, amphibious and tribal they had at one point in their past been subjugated by a more advanced alien species. After the departure of this species they had fallen back to a Stone Age level of technology and largely abandoned the imported alien culture, however a small number still clung to these practices and were feared by the other natives. So far the research expedition had come into contact with this group once and thanks to the intervention of the Jedi Order they had scared them off.

"That's right, where the beaches give way to cliffs. We always knew that there were several cave systems around there that led inland, but the radar image suggests they're much, much more than we thought." The operator answered Dayle and he called up an image recorded by one of the droids. The image clearly showed the cliff face dotted with black areas where the cave openings were located. The image shifted as it showed how the caves made their way through the rock and as they went deeper their outlines became squared off.

"That looks artificial." Dayle said before the image sudden flickered, "What happened?" he asked.

"I don't know." The operator replied, "The cliffs must have something in them that's reflecting the radar."

"That's not important right now." Dayle said, "What is important is that we've just found the largest example of an alien structure on the planet so far. Tell everyone to pack, we're going to go and take a look at it for ourselves."

In an office on Coruscant, capital of the Republic Keleen Delvad smiled as she saw the droid telemetry. Reaching out she activated the communicator on her desk.

"Book me on a ship to the Narthis Sector," she said, "and make it a fast one. I need to get there as quickly as I can."

"Lando, go stand down there." The only female amongst the group of researchers said, handing him a datapad, "Let us know if any of the carvings match what's shown on this."

"Sure thing Charleen." He replied, taking the datapad in one hand and a flashlight in the other before walking off down the passageway.

The remaining researchers stayed where they were, a place where four passages met one another and the builders of this place had expanded the junction to form a small circular chamber that was lined with images carved into the stone walls.

Using a floodlight for illumination the researchers studied every carving carefully, checking them against the database they had been building since their arrival on Atch and also recording them for study back at their camp.

"What's taking Lando so long?" one of them said, peering down the passageway after Lando.

"I don't know Len." Charleen said, standing beside him and looking into the darkness of the passage herself, "Hey Lando!" she called out, "What's so difficult?" and she waited for a reply.

When no reply was forthcoming she turned around and walked over to where a folding table had been erected, picking up another of the team's flashlights, "Come on," she said, "let's go find out what he's up to now."

The pair walked down the passageway, the flashlight projecting a beam in front of them. They halted suddenly when the beam illuminated Lando's flashlight lying broken on the floor, his datapad lying not far away.

"What the kriff?" Len exclaimed as he knelt down and picked up the flashlight and saw the dark red liquid on it's grip, "Charleen this is blood."

"Lando!" Charleen yelled, "Lando where the kriff are you?"

"I've got a really bad feeling about this." Len said, "I think we should be getting out of here."

"Me too." Charleen agreed and they both began to retreat back towards the circular chamber they had come from. But as they made their way back along the passageway a low growl caught their attention and they both turned around, Charleen shining the flashlight beam straight ahead.

In the circular chamber the rest of the team just heard a pair of screams.

Cal Udra, the jedi knight assigned to the Narthis Sector sat on his couch with his younger sister and padawan learner Lara. They had spent the day practicing the basic physical exercise that all jedi were expected to master and were now relaxing by watching holodramas after their evening meal when their communicator sounded, indicating a message in text format had arrived.

"Oh who's calling us now?" Lara asked.

"One easy way to find out." Cal replied and with a wave of his hand he caused the screen they were watching to split in two, with one half being taken up by the jedi's message system, "Looks like its from Dayle Larnson." He added.

"What the science guy on Atch?" Lara asked, "What does he want now?"

Cal opened the message and both jedi read it, letting the significance sink in.

"Stang Cal." Lara exclaimed when she saw that several of the research team had vanished.

"I know." Cal said back to her as he got his feet, "We need to get out there as soon as we can."

"You think it's the Blood Tribe?" Lara asked. The Blood Tribe were the arten who had tried to keep the ways taught to them by their alien occupiers alive. During their last visit to Atch Lara had discovered information that indicated that these aliens had been the Sith. This information had been kept secret; the Jedi Order preferred not to make such things public so as to avoid members of the public interfering with dangerous artefacts they did not understand.

"We can't ignore the possibility." Cal said and then he paused, "And I think we need to ask for help."

"Help? Cal you can't seriously be thinking of-"

Cal held up a hand.

"Look Lara we don't know just how much Sith lore the Blood Tribe have access to. If they are responsible for the disappearances of those researchers then it means they've suddenly gotten a lot braver and that means trouble. We need to let Master Karas know what's happening and send for back up. We'll head straight for Atch as soon as we can and meet whoever he sends there. Now go get your things together while I contact Master Karas."

Lara then turned towards her room, but after taking only a few steps Cal called out after her.

"Oh and Lara?" he said, waiting for her to turn back towards him, "Leave the grenade launcher here okay?" he added and Lara's face fell.

"You wished to see me master?"

Jedi Master Ben Karas opened his eyes and got to his feet when his meditation was interrupted. The newly arrived jedi was older than he was, but Kraus Trevan had never been elevated to the rank of master. Instead he focused much of his time on the collection of knowledge for its own sake and was known for his ability to use this knowledge to plan for almost any eventuality.

"Yes Kraus. The situation in the Narthis Sector may be developing even faster than I believed possible."

"The Udras master? What have they done?"

Ever since Cal and Lara had been deployed to the Narthis Sector Master Karas had been troubled by premonitions that they would ultimately serve the Sith, so the news that they were heading to a world where the Sith had once held sway was something he could not overlook.

"Nothing yet." He said to Kraus, "But they are heading for Atch once more. Some of the research team have disappeared and they suspect the influence of the Sith worshippers amongst the natives. I want you to take a team and join them."

"A team?"

"Yes. I want you to act as leader; you're the most qualified jedi I have for such an assignment. Take Jedi Khal and his padawan for protection. If this is indeed the time that the Udras fall you will need them."

"Of course master." Kraus said without emotion, but Master Karas sensed his concern at having to regard fellow jedi as a threat, "Will there be anything else?"

"You will take Jedi Tyran as well." Master Karas went on, "She is an expert negotiator. Perhaps she can find a way to deal with the arden without the need for combat. Perhaps that will keep the Udras further from the influence of the Dark Side."

"Of course master." Kraus said and he turned to leave. When the door closed behind him Master Karas sat back down and tried to get back to his meditation. But a faint blue glow disturbed him.

"Hello again my master." Master Karas said to the apparition.

"Ben I wish you would heed my warnings. The council does not share your vision of the Udras and even you have failed to determine how they will fall."

"It does not matter master. The jedi I have assigned to this mission are capable of handling them should they fall."

"Indeed they are Ben. But remember what I have told you before, it could be your actions that will push them to the Dark Side."

When Cal landed the *Bright Hope* on Atch Dayle was waiting for the jedi beside his all terrain vehicle.

"Cal, Lara." He called out to them as they descended the ship's access ramp, "Its good to see you again." And he held out his hand.

"It is." Cal replied as he took Dayle's hand, "I only wish it could be under better circumstances."

"Have there been any more disappearances?" Lara asked.

"No, not since the group three days ago. But I've held my people back from going into the caves since then. I even posted armed watches at the entrances, but if there is something down there that's dangerous it doesn't seem interested in coming out here. At least not through any way in we've found yet."

"So there could be more to these caves then?" Cal said.

"Oh there definitely is." Dayle told him, "They extend for thousands of metres behind the cliff face and are thousands across. We were just starting to map them when all this happened."

"What about the Blood Tribe?" Lara asked, "Have you seen any signs of them?"

Dayle shook his head.

"If they're about then they're keeping a low profile for now and they've not been making any attempts to dissuade the other natives from working with us." He said, "Now come on, I'll show you what we've got."

He drove the two jedi to the campsite that had been erected on top of the cliffs. The tents were all set back from the edge but a simple wire fence had been set up just in case anyone became lost during the night and got too close. Beyond this several brightly coloured flags marked out the safe trail down to the cave entrances.

"This way." Dayle said as he disembarked from the ATV and he led Cal and Lara into one of the larger tents. Inside the research team had set up their computer equipment and also spread out more old fashioned hardcopy maps to show their discoveries, "This is where they vanished." He said, placing a finger on one of the maps laid out.

"Looks pretty close to the entrance." Lara commented.

"It's further than it looks." Dayle replied, "Those passages are definitely artificial in origin and from what we can tell they're part of some vast underground maze. That particular junction is actually set closer to the cliff edge than some of the natural sections you have to pass through to reach it. The passages seem to double back, confused the hell out of us the first week."

"So you've been here a while then?" Cal asked.

"Oh yes, almost three weeks now. But as you can see we've barely been able to scratch the surface so to say. Sensors are useless, there's something in the rock that keeps bouncing signals about. So no communications either. We were going to start setting up some hard lines to selected points, but that's on hold until we find out what's happening."

"Do you have a copy of this I can take?" Cal asked, indicating the map.

"Yes of course, everything is backed up digitally."

"Well in that case," Cal said as he turned to his sister, "would you care to join me for a walk in the caves Lara?" and she smiled at him.



## 2.

They walked down the trail towards the cave opening that offered the easiest way to reach where the junction where the researchers had vanished. As they approached the cave they noticed a figure sat outside, his back resting up against the rock face behind him and a pulse wave rifle leant beside him. As soon as he saw the Jedi approach the man got his feet, though he left the rifle where it was.

"Ah you're here at last." He said to them with a smile, "Does this mean I won't have to spend another shift sat here?"

Cal smiled.

"Hopefully not." He replied, knowing that it was unlikely that he and Lara would solve the mystery before their reinforcements arrived from the Jedi enclave on Moldas.

"But if you do," Lara added, "you may want to reconsider where you sit." And she pointed to the man's trousers that were now stained from the moss covering the rock he had been sat on until then.

"Oh stang." He said as he tried to wipe some of the green away.

Lara glanced down at the rock where the guard had been sat and a puzzled look appeared on her face when she saw a gap in the moss covering.

"What's wrong?" Cal asked, sensing her confusion.

"Cal look at this." She said as she walked over to the rock and she pulled her knife from her belt and began to scrape away more of the moss, "There." And she stood back and pointed. There, sticking out of the rock but bent flat against it so the guard had not been aware of it when he sat down was a corroded metal bar.

"That looks like the sort of reinforcing bar added to duracrete buildings." Cal said as he looked closer.

"And that doesn't look like the rest of the rock around here." Lara said as she looked from where the guard had sat to the cliff face and back again.

Cal reached out and pulled a clump of moss away.

"Give me a hand." He said and Lara clapped.

Cal scowled at her and then she began to help him uncover whatever it was that was hidden under the moss covering. Slowly something more than the simple irregular shape of a rock began to appear.

"Well that's interesting isn't it?" Cal said as he wiped his hands against each other.

"I'd say so." Lara replied and then she looked around at the researcher who had stood back and watched as the Udras cleared the object of moss, "Did you know you were sitting on a foot?" she asked him.

The man just looked back open mouthed at the carved foot.

"Well if the proportions are the same as human," Cal said as he made some quick calculations in his head, "then I'd say the statue this came from was about seven or eight metres tall." And both he and Lara looked upwards where they saw that about eight metres above them the rock of the cliff stuck out slightly, as if it had once been carved back to provide shelter for something.

"I wonder where the rest of it is?" Lara asked, "Or if there are any more?"

Cal looked over the side of the trail to where the ocean waves lapped against the base of the cliffs.

"Well I'm guessing that anything else there was fell down there and has probably been eroded away to nothing by now." He said. Then he turned to the researcher, "Go tell Doctor Larson about this." He said, "We're going inside."

In a cantina on Crassis Major, the capital world of the Narthis Sector and red skinned zeltron downed another drink. The near human species was impervious to the effects of intoxicants such as alcohol and so she had no need to fear getting drunk. But what did scare her was the figure that approached the bar and sat down beside her.

"Well?" Kyle Jenner, former Jedi knight and now fugitive asked, "What do you have for me Kassa?"

"A ship just came through Aurek Station." Kassa replied, "One that belongs to your former associates."

"Is it on its way here?" Kyle asked, his mind already planning the best way for him to leave the planet if a team of Jedi had been sent to apprehend him.

"Yes." Kassa replied, "But from what I hear it won't be stopping, Crassis is just a waypoint. The ship's cleared all the way to Atch."

"Atch? What do they want there?"

Kassa shrugged.

"My source couldn't tell me." She said, "But I do know that those two goody-two-shoes who replaced you are already there. I also heard a rumour that Keleen Delvad's heading here from Coruscant aboard a fast ship. Not one of her normal leisurely visits to spend time with the Founding Families."

Kyle grinned.

"Someone's found something." He said, "Something that links Atch to the Sith and now my enemies are gathering."

"So what do you intend to do about it?" Kassa asked.

"Whatever it is they want on Atch will be mine." He told her and he placed several coins of precious metal on the bar before leaving.

The natural shape of the cave abruptly gave way to the regular shaped walls of the ancient underground labyrinth.

"Nervous?" Cal asked as he shone his pocket torch down the passageway.

"No, why should I be?" Lara replied, "I mean its not like this is a centuries old structure that was probably built to honour a species of psychotic warlords is it? Beings that I might add were well known for their habit of filling their temples with booby traps to kill anyone stupid enough to go poking around inside them."

"Good. So we're both agreed there's nothing to be afraid of." Cal said and he took a deliberate step into the passageway, "There." He said, "No pits opening up in the floor, no spears or darts coming out of the walls to impale me or blades to chop off my head and no massive boulders rolling down the corridor to crush me.

Now let's go. Ladies first?"

"Kriff off. You're supposed to be in charge, you can go first."

"If that's what you want little sister." Cal said, "After all, this way I won't be the one at the back who gets ambushed so the one in front doesn't notice they're under attack."

"How about we go in side by side?" Lara asked.

"Do you want to hold hands?"

"God no."

With their torches and a datapad to show the way, the Udras proceeded carefully into the labyrinth. Somewhere in here they knew were the missing researchers, plus possibly whatever had killed them. The most obvious feature of the walls were the carvings, both images of arten at war or in prayer and hieroglyphs that were clearly of Sith origin. Had Dayle's research team been better informed then they would have likely not have gone any deeper when they saw these, but the Jedi Order had spent more than a thousand years suppressing knowledge of the Sith to dissuade those who try and emulate them. The disappearance of the researchers was a tragic consequence of this policy.

They reached the chamber where the missing researchers had set up their equipment and found themselves in a scene of chaos. The floodlights, power packs and worktables lay broken and scattered on the ground. However, the more worrying aspect was the dried blood that coated parts of the walls.

"Too much to be an accident." Cal said.

"Some of its green too." Lara said, "I'm guessing that this belonged to the duros in the group."

"Unless it came from someone else, someone not in the group." Cal pointed out. Then he spotted that the dirt floor on one of the passages leading deeper into the complex was disturbed, "I think someone went this way." He said and he tucked the datapad into a pocket before drawing his lightsaber. Without activating the weapon he began to creep down the passageway, shining his torch on the ground to illuminate the tracks. Lara copied him, drawing her lightsaber but leaving it inactive.

Cal stopped when he reached another junction where the beam of his torch revealed a larger but broken one that had been trodden into the dirt floor. He returned his lightsaber to his belt and crouched down to examine the broken torch, but as he was gently wiping dirt away from it he felt a shiver run down his spine.

"Did you just feel that?" Lara asked, turning around and shining her torch down both the passages leading from the junction.

"Yes I did." Cal said as he got back to his feet and drew his lightsaber again, "Cold. Dark."

"Evil." Lara added, "Cal, I've got a bad feeling about this.

"Me too." Cal replied and there was a 'snap-hiss' as he activated his lightsaber, putting his torch away now that the blade of the weapon provided a flickering blue light. Lara copied her brother again and the two jedi stood back to back, each watching down one of the passages for the source of the disturbance.

In the flickering light cast by the two lightsabers the shadows were not fixed. But Cal was still able to pick out something moving towards him.

"Over here." He said and Lara spun around, standing beside him with her lightsaber held up in front of her. Slowly, out of the darkness a scaled quadruped about a metre in height emerged, followed by another identical creature.

Lara blinked, her connection with the Force suddenly wavering.

"Cal, what's happening?" she asked.

"Trouble." Cal said and then the two reptiles each let out a hiss and broke into a run.

Suddenly finding herself cut off from the Force, Lara panicked and screamed. She kept her lightsaber held in front of her, but found that without the Force to guide her movements she not decide what to do. Cal meanwhile could still feel the Force, though even he found it to be clouded by something and his movements felt slow and clumsy to him. He stepped forwards and moved towards the side of the passageway, letting the first of the creatures pass him by. Just as the creature moved past him Cal swung his lightsaber in an upward arc and sliced the creature into two parts, both of which tumbled onward and into Lara, knocking her from her feet.

The second creature swerved away from Cal, leaping up and pushing off the opposite wall of the passageway. Lara screamed again as she saw it coming, its mouth open wide to reveal rows of sharp looking fangs. Shutting off her lightsaber, Lara rolled aside just in time to avoid the creature and as it landed and continued to run down the passage until it was able to stop and turn around she felt Cal's hand reaching down to help her back to her feet.

"Get behind me." He said and Lara just nodded nervously.

"Cal, it's coming back." Lara said as she saw the growling creature slowly walking back towards them.

"I see it." Cal said as he prepared to meet the creature's next charge.

"Well aren't you going to do something?"

"Like what? I suppose I could offer it you and run away while it eats you. Problem is you're too skinny; it'd be done too quick and then what would I do? Even if I did escape mom and dad would be furious. I'd be grounded for a week at least."

"Longer." Lara replied, "I'm their favourite."

The creature let out another sudden hiss and lunged towards the jedi, its jaws open wide once more.

"Dive!" Cal shouted and Lara jumped out of the creature's path, rolling across the ground. Cal on the other hand brought his lightsaber up in front of him horizontally, aligning the blade with the creature's mouth.

Holding it steady, Cal shut his eyes and waited for the sudden tug as the path of the creature's leap took it straight into the blade, slicing it open lengthways. Cal then copied Lara, diving to one side before the lifeless corpse could slam into him. For safety he shut off his lightsaber as he dived and the passageway was suddenly plunged into darkness.

Lara felt the return of the Force hit her like an ocean wave the moment the second creature died and she held up her lightsaber and activated it, illuminated the passageway once more.

"Cal what the hell were those things?" she asked, getting back to her feet.

"Some product of Sith alchemy would be my guess." Cal said.

"I couldn't feel the Force." Lara said as she looked down at the mangled corpse of the second creature."

"Yeah, it was harder for me to connect with it too." Cal replied, "My guess would be that these things were bred for killing jedi. Cut us off from the Force and we're much easier to deal with."

"So do you think these things killed Dayle's people?"

"Probably. Or something like them."

"You think there could be more of these down here?"

"Oh I don't doubt it. The Sith have been gone for a thousand years so these things must have been breeding down here all this time. Now let's get out of here before any more show up, we're going to need help dealing with them."

"So after all that it's just some local predator?" Dayle asked and Cal and Lara looked at one another.

"Well not quite." Cal said hesitantly, "Those creatures were likely the result of Sith practices."

"Sith? But the Sith never reached here, the war never got anywhere near the Narthis Sector and no-one else has reported anything to do with the Sith in all the years the Republic has been here."

"They were here a thousand years ago." Cal said, "The Sith were the aliens who enslaved the arten."

Dayle stared at Cal and Lara.

"How long have you known?" he asked.

"We found out the first time we came here." Lara answered.

*Anger.*

"My people are dead!" Dayle yelled, "And now you're telling me you knew that we were in danger? Who the hell do you think you are?"

"We had no way of knowing that the Sith had left anything dangerous behind." Cal said, "And it's the policy of the Jedi Order to restrict access to that sort of information."

The answer did nothing whatsoever to calm Dayle's anger. But before he could speak again there was the sound of a powerful repulsorlift engine from overhead and all three looked up to see an antiquated starship fly over the camp towards where the *Bright Hope* was landed. Through the Force both Cal and Lara sensed that the ship held several Force-sensitive individuals.



“Hopefully these are our reinforcements.” Cal said, “Maybe they can help straighten things out.”  
“Oh I doubt that very much.” Dayle said, glaring at Cal.

### 3.

The first of the four figures to disembark the newly arrived starship was known not only to Cal and Lara but also to Dayle, Kraus Trevan had accompanied the Udras on their last visit to this world. The next two were known only to Cal and Lara, these being the shistavanen battle master Vrish Khal and his young padawan Pedrus Ketam. The fourth and final figure was a stranger to them all however. Cal remembered seeing her briefly when he visited Moldas, but they had never been introduced. She was a somewhat short woman, barely more than one and a half metres in height but she exuded confidence and it was she that was the first to approach Dayle and the Udras.

"Karrie Tyran." She said, smiling as she introduced herself to the xenoarchaeologist. The big man took the hand she offered, but his expression demonstrated that he was not pleased to see more jedi.

"So did you know as well?" he asked her sternly and Karrie glanced towards Cal and Lara.

"He knows about the Sith." Cal said.

"You told him?" Kraus asked.

"We had to." Lara answered, "The maze complex is populated by some sort of Sith creatures."

"A pair attacked us." Cal added.

Kraus and Vrish looked at one another.

"I will need to see these." Kraus said.

"Well give us chance to get our blasters from the *Bright Hope* and we'll show you the bodies." Cal said.

"Why do you need blasters?" Pedrus asked nervously.

"Because if you let those things get too close they can block the Force." Lara said, "That's how come we figured out they were Sith creations."

"An assumption." Kraus said, "The ability to interfere with the Force is not unknown in nature. Though it is somewhat unusual."

"You know," Dayle said, "none of this changes how you lot let my people get killed just to keep your little secret."

"Perhaps we can discuss this elsewhere," Karrie said to him, "while we leave the matter of determining exactly what we are facing to my fellow jedi knights."

"Fine." Dayle said, "We can talk in the mess tent."

After retrieving their blasters from the *Bright Hope* Cal and Lara took the newly arrived jedi, aside from Karrie who remained to try and placate Dayle, into the underground passageways where they had encountered the Sith spawned creatures. Cal sensed a slight ripple in the Force from Kraus when he first laid eyes on the corpses, but the older jedi made no comment as he crouched down to study the nearest of them.

"What are they master?" Pedrus asked Vrish.

"I do not know my padawan." The canine alien responded, "I have not seen their like before."

"Be glad of it my friend." Kraus said, "Cal and Lara were correct in their assumption. These creatures are deadly servants of the Sith."

*Fear.*

Pedrus took a step backwards, instinctively.

"Control yourself." Vrish said sternly, easily detected his student's reaction.

"So you know what they are then?" Cal asked as he leant over Kraus.

"They are called Hssiss, they are relatively common amongst the Sith remnants the Jedi Order has encountered. They have also been known to be in the possession of other outlaw groups, though they are savage beasts it is possible to domesticate them."

"So are there likely to be any more of those things down here?" Lara asked.

"I am afraid so padawan Udra. These two could not possibly have lived for a thousand years. So unless someone brought them here within the last decade or so they must be part of a breeding colony, presumably left here to guard this place."

"What is this place exactly?" Pedrus asked, his hand resting on his lightsaber.

Kraus moved to the nearest wall, shining a torch over the carvings. Gently he moved his fingers over the hieroglyph, muttering as he used the Force to channel the thoughts of the long dead creators of these writings so he could understand their meaning.

"These carvings tell of the conquest of this world." He said, "They are almost identical to those found near to the campsite of the Blood Tribe."

"Almost?" Cal commented.

"These are far more complete." Kraus said, "This particular set is just one instance of a campaign to subjugate the native population. My guess would be that all of the achievements of the Sith lord who ruled this world are recorded on these walls."

"But recorded why?" Lara asked, "And why is this place guarded by those things?"

Kraus smiled.

"Young lady, ancient kings have always sought to protect and decorate their final resting places. Somewhere in this place is the body of a Sith lord."

"Is that the best you can do?" Dayle asked, "You're sorry my people are dead but the Jedi Order doesn't like to warn people about the danger they may face?"

"Doctor Larson, the Jedi Order takes the threat of the Sith seriously and the greatest threat is from individuals unconnected to them who may accidentally unleash their evil. The fewer beings have access to any knowledge of the Sith the less likely that is."

Dayle glared at Karrie and she could sense from his anger that he did not agree with what she had said. She decided that an alternative argument would be required.

"Supposing we had told you that the Sith were the ones who once enslaved this world? What would you have done differently? We still don't know for certain that the creatures in the tunnels are even related to the Sith. Rest assured doctor, we are here to help you. I promise."

Karrie sensed that Dayle's attitude had softened slightly, though he still harboured resentment towards the Jedi. But before either of them could say anything more the sound of repulsorlifts filled the air once more.

"Who's that?" Karrie said, looking upwards even though they were inside the mess tent.

Dayle smiled.

"Someone who really cares about this expedition." He said and walked out of the tent.

Karrie accompanied him back towards the increasingly crowded landing zone where a compact courier vessel was coming into land. Before the engines had even been shut down fully the hatchway opened and Keelen Delvad emerged. Though she tried to appear composed, Karrie could sense that the woman was tired, presumably from her journey.

"Doctor Larson." Keelen called out, "I came as soon as I heard. Has there been any word of your people?"

"It looks like they're dead." Dayle replied and he looked at Karrie, "I'm sure that Jedi Tyran can explain why that happened."

"Jedi Tyran? I thought that the Narthis Sector was the responsibility of Cal and Lara Udra."

"It is." Dayle said, "But apparently the Jedi Order has decided they needed help in covering up what's been happening here. There are more in the complex right now."

"Actually I think that this is them heading this way." Keelen said as she saw the other Jedi approaching in a group.

"Perhaps we should return to the mess tent." Karrie said, "We can discuss this further there."

"That's a good idea." Keelen said, "I could do with something to eat as well."

Dayle and Karrie both turned to leave. Keelen on the other hand stayed still, waiting while her pilot disembarked from the ship and walked up to her.

"Let Mister Crassis know I've arrived." She whispered to him, "And let him know this place is crawling with Jedi. I'll need a direct line to him."

From a hill overlooking the landing zone Kyle Jenner watched the Jedi, Dayle and Keelen as they headed back towards the campsite. He knew all of the Jedi by sight. Three of them, Karrie, Lara and Pedrus he knew presented no threat to him. Lara and Pedrus were far too inexperienced while Karrie was a peacemaker who lacked the temperament to be an effective warrior. On the other hand, the threat posed by Cal, Kraus and especially Vrish was far greater. If he was going to seize whatever had brought them all here then he knew that it would be advisable for him to avoid confronting them directly.

Kyle waited for them to disappear from sight before he got up and headed towards the cliffs, intending to get a head start on searching the underground complex.

"I believe that this place is the tomb of a Sith lord." Kraus said, "The creatures living in it were left here to protect the Sith lord and his treasures."

This caught Dayle's attention, though he said nothing.

"So how many of these things are we looking at?" Cal asked.

"Perhaps a dozen." Kraus replied, "Any more in a location with such limited food sources and they would start to turn on one another."

"A dozen?" Lara exclaimed, "Cal and I barely handled two of them!"

"Cal and who?" Cal commented, pointing out that it was he that had dispatched both of the hssiss they had encountered.

"Most will be in a central nesting area." Kraus explained, "Though smaller groups such as the pair already killed may leave this location to hunt."

"So where will this nest be?" Karrie asked.

"Planning on helping with the hunt?" Vrish asked, "Not like you Jedi Tyran."

"These creatures are the spawn of the Dark Side." She replied, "They cannot be reasoned with."

"They'll be nesting in the centre." Dayle suddenly said and everyone else looked towards him, "Well this is a tomb right?" he went on, "And these killer lizards were put here to guard the final resting place of a Sith warlord right? So it figures that whoever put them in the labyrinth would have placed them as near to the warlord's grave itself as they could."

"So all we need to do is find our way to the centre of an underground maze and defeat a horde of vicious predators that can block our connection to the force?" Lara said.

"Pretty much." Cal replied.

It was then that the meeting was interrupted by Keleen's pilot entering the tent.

"Excuse me Miss Delvad," he said, "but there's an urgent call for you."

Keleen nodded.

"I know what this is." She said, "I need to take it." And she got up and followed the pilot from the tent. She accompanied him back to the ship that had brought them here and made her way to a small circular chamber that lacked any sort of furnishings. Closing the door behind her Keleen stood in the centre of the room and waited for the mechanism built into it to activate.

A flickering light covered the walls briefly and instead of the tiny cylindrical room Keleen found herself in a virtual recreation of a luxuriously decorated room that appeared to be occupied by ten individuals. These were representatives of the Founding Families, whose ancestors had charted the Narthis Sector for the Republic. She had hoped to be able to talk with Erill Crassis, but instead of the elderly head of the Crassis family his adult son Luke and his wife Salla took his place. Next to them sat Josh and Heddren Drud.

Technically Josh was the head of his family, but as a general in the Crassis Major Defence Forces he left the running of the family to his lawyer younger brother. Next was Lorna Fayl, though Keleen guessed that if the Druds were present then Lorna was really elsewhere and she like Keleen was present in only holographic form in the room in the Crassis home. The same went for the only non-human amongst the group, the nautolan Ket Runn who rarely left his family's estate beneath the oceans of Delvad and also for Corva and Deesa Torin who spent their time travelling the sector aboard their luxury starship. Finally Faye Karn and Trent Narthis were there to represent their families.

"I was hoping to speak with your father." Keleen said to Luke.

"Well it's two in the morning here and my father is not well." Luke replied, "Now what's so damned important that you called us all here?"

"It had better be good." Lorna Fayl said, glancing at the Drud brothers and snarling.

"The Jedi are here." Keleen said, "A group of them arrived from Moldas to reinforce the Udras who from what I've gathered were summoned by Doctor Lamson."

"Why?" Ket Runn asked sharply.

"Because the Jedi know about the Sith presence on Atch I'm guessing." Trent Narthis commented and then looking towards Keleen he added, "Perhaps it is time we brought your little field trip."

"I'm not sure I understand." Keleen replied.

"What Trent is saying is that we have a team ready to go." Corva Torin told her, "A resourceful gentleman I have used before. His people can be there in a few hours and wipe out the researchers and the Jedi in one fell swoop."

"Risky." Heddren Drud said, "I wish you'd consulted with me before you brought outsiders into this."

"Trying to mitigate your exposure to treason Heddren?" Lorna asked, but both he and his older brother ignored the question.

"I would quite like to have been kept informed as well." Faye Karn said, "We've had some interesting artefacts from the dig on Atch. I would hate to lose the source."

"It's already lost." Salla Crassis said, "The Jedi will take every last artefact from the tomb and we'll be lucky if they even let the researchers keep images."

"We do have our source on Moldas." Josh Drud said.

"She's not in a position to be able to steal valuable Sith artefacts for us though." Luke said.

"Maybe not," Josh replied, "but together with our other people in the Republic hierarchy we could arrange to have them diverted." Then he looked at Corva Torin, "Your man perhaps?"

"Wipe them out." Ket said, "All of them."

"You seem very certain of yourself." A wheezing voice interrupted and all those involved in the meeting looked around as another figure entered the area covered by the holographic projection.

"Father, you shouldn't be up." Luke said as he and Salla both got to their feet to help Erill Crassis to a chair.

"Your bickering woke me." Erill said as he waved his son and daughter in law away and sat down by himself, "And Victor told me what you were all up to while I was asleep."

Victor was the name Erill used to refer to his personal droid and even as its name was mentioned the droid entered the room, bringing with it a portable oxygen cylinder that it set down next to Erill.

"So what are your feelings?" Keleen asked.

"Ket and my dear daughter in law are correct." Erill gasped, "We must go with Corva's plan if we are to salvage anything from this. If we wipe out everyone on Atch right now then we can loot this newly discovered tomb before the Republic can react and it will appear that raiders took the artefacts. Then we can sponsor a second expedition, but thanks to the loss of the first team we will be able to apply for permission to deploy a dedicated security force with it. I'm sure Han Shill will be happy to provide us with suitable personnel."

"What about me?" Keleen asked.

"What about you?" Erill replied, "If you leave now then by the time you get here all of this will be over and done with. It will be good to see you in person again Keleen, it has been too long since I last had the pleasure of your company."

## 4.

"What happened to all the jedi?" Keleen asked upon her return to the mess tent.

"Underground." Dayle replied, "They took some extra weapons and headed out not long after you left for your little chat."

"You don't sound too happy about it." Keleen said.

"Well its been made quite clear that I won't be getting hold of anything from in the tomb our expedition found. They quoted some arcane piece of legislation that restricts public access to anything to do with the Sith until its been cleared by the Jedi Order."

"They're shutting us down?"

Dayle shook his head.

"No, but I have to provide them with a full list of everything I find and they get to take what they want. I might get some of it back, but there's no guarantees."

"Well I'm afraid I have to be going as well." Keleen said, "Some of this project's other backers want an update in person."

"Do you want me to come too?"

"No. You stay here and try to keep things going. Don't worry doctor, I'm sure this will all be over soon."

"Amazing, truly amazing." Kraus said as he looked at the carvings on the wall beside him.

"You know," Lara said, "I get the feeling that this little hunting trip of ours would be over a lot quicker if we didn't keep stopping for you to look at the pictures someone scrawled on the walls a thousand years ago." Kraus looked around at her and frowned.

"Padawan Udra, perhaps you think that you can complete this hunting trip as you call it by blundering around down her until you happen to stumble upon the nest we seek, but I think that success will be obtained much quicker if we gather as much information about this place as we possibly can and that means studying the records left by its builders." And he waved a hand at the carvings.

*Embarrassment.*

Lara was clearly shaken by the rebuke and she averted her gaze from the older jedi knight. Kraus then turned to Cal who was smirking at his sister's distress.

"You should take your duty as her instructor more seriously." He added sternly, "Perhaps then she would learn to hold her tongue when called for."

"So what can you tell us?" Karrie asked, hoping to calm Kraus by distracting him and Kraus turned back to face the carvings before he responded.

"This is indeed the resting place of a powerful Sith." He said, "But he is not the only one buried here."

"More Sith?" Pedrus asked.

"In a sense yes." Kraus answered, "In that some of them were members of the Sith species, though not necessarily practitioners of Sith sorcery. They were the foot soldiers and priests of his empire. It seems that upon their deaths they were mummified and laid in state here so that they could serve their master for eternity."

"You said some of them." Vrish commented, "Who are the others?"

"Slaves. The ones who toiled to construct this tomb for their Sith masters. Their fate was not so pleasant as far as I can tell. The carvings suggest that they had their tongues cut from their heads and were mummified alive to prevent them from revealing the secrets of the tomb's construction. Other carvings," and at this point Kraus moved along the wall to indicate a different section, "suggest that those who violated the tomb were treated similarly if they were caught."

"Well at least we don't need to worry about that happening to us." Karrie said, "The Sith haven't been around here for centuries."

"Can you tell us where the nest is yet?" Cal asked.

"Not exactly no." Kraus replied, "But we are getting closer. The information in these carvings suggest we are close to the main tomb itself, the hssiss will not be far away."

"Open your minds to the Force." Vrish said, "If these creatures really do inhibit our abilities then doing so may just give us the warning we need."

With Kraus in the lead the jedi party then pressed on deeper into the tomb.

Keleen sat just behind the pilot in the cramped cockpit of the courier vessel as it climbed through the atmosphere towards open space.



"I've locked in the course for Cresh Beacon," the pilot said to her, "we should be far enough from the planet to jump in about six minutes and from then its about five days to reach – hang on."

"What is it?" Keleen asked.

"I've got another ship coming in, just entering the atmosphere now. Shall I try and contact them?"

"No. Keep going and stay out of their way."

"More signals, I think they're launching fighters. We need to warn the camp."

"No we don't." Keleen said, "Look, just fly casual and act like you've not seen anything. I'm sure Mister Callan will reward you for your loyalty." And she looked out of the cockpit canopy towards the other ship and the smaller craft it was deploying, craft shaped like large mechanical beasts with armoured riders on their backs.

While the other jedi kept watch Kraus studied the latest set of carvings they had come across. Though the hieroglyphs were unintelligible to anyone but Kraus himself, the images that went along with them clearly showed technologically advanced armies battling one another.

"This is interesting." Kraus said, "These passages seem to describe a war between different Sith lords. It would appear that the Sith succumbed to their feudal ways after they arrived in this region of space."

"Interesting it maybe," Cal said, "but is there anything on that wall relevant to our task down here?"

Kraus frowned.

"It would seem impatience runs in your family Jedi Udra." He said and he side stepped further along the wall then suddenly froze.

"What's wrong?" Karrie asked.

"The Force." He said, "It is clouded."

"Then we're near the nest." Pedrus exclaimed.

"Indeed we are young one. I suggest we ready our weapons." Kraus said and he drew the blaster he had borrowed from the research team. Behind him the other jedi all readied similar weapons, having determined that the Udras' suggestion of using weapons capable of despatching the hssiss from a distance was the correct course of action. Cal and Vrish now moved to the fore of the group, blasters raised and torches aligned with them. They crept along the passageway and hunted for any signs of the creatures.

"I hear something." Cal said softly.

"I do as well," Vrish agreed, "and I do not believe that it is the noise that an animal would make."

"But what else is down here?" Lara asked from behind them.

"Everyone turn out your lights." Kraus said as he shut off his flashlight.

"But master-" Pedrus began, looking at Vrish.

"Just do it." The shistavanen jedi replied as he too turned out his light.

One by one each of the jedi shut off the flashlight they were carrying and as the last one was turned off the passageway was reduced to its ambient level of light, which this far underground should have been none at all. However, from some distance ahead a flickering orange light could be made out that gave all of the jedi just enough light to see by.

"It would seem we are not alone down here." Kraus said.

"But who else would be here?" Pedrus asked.

"Oh let me think," Lara replied, "who on this planet would possible want to live in an underground maze built by the Sith? Do the words 'Blood Tribe' mean anything to you?"

"Padawan Udra may not be being very polite about it," Vrish said, "but I suspect she is correct. We should be cautious, watch for an ambush."

The jedi advanced onwards, finding that the passageway grew brighter the further they went.

"Running water." Cal commented as he heard the sound of water from ahead.

"Arten." Lara said, "They're amphibious. It fits that they'd be near water."

"They likely use an underground river to get in and out without needing to go through the maze we have had to navigate." Kraus said.

The passageway ended suddenly at the top of a flight of stairs that lad down into a chamber large enough to hold the Bright Hope. Just as expected the chamber had water pouring through a hole in the ceiling that flowed out through another hole in the opposite wall. This river cut the chamber in two but was crossed by several stone bridges. In here about a dozen arten with their faces painted in the red of the Blood Tribe were walking about between cages that held hssiss.

More than a hundred of them.

"There are so many." Pedrus said, "How is that possible?"

"The creatures are kept caged and well fed." Kraus explained, "These are trained guardians, not merely wild beasts."

"Well we can't handle all of them." Cal commented, "As soon as those arten spot us they'll open all those cages and we'll be the ones being used to feed them."

"True." Vrish said, "We should leave and return when we are stronger. We will require assistance from Moldas; a force of Freedom Warriors can be here within a week. Until then we must concentrate on defending the research team."

"We need to keep an eye on these arten." Cal said, "If they do decide to launch an attack on the camp then the more warning we get the better."

"An excellent idea." Vrish replied, "I suggest you remain here with your padawan."

Cal nodded, but Lara's face fell. She watched as the other jedi withdrew back down the passageway and then turned and delivered a sudden punch to Cal's arm.

"Ouch! What was that for?"

"You had to open your mouth didn't you?" she said, "We could have been headed back to the camp for a meal, but no. My brother has to be the hero."

"And you're my loyal sidekick." He replied.

"Sidekick my—" Lara began, but she stopped when the arten below them suddenly became agitated. Another of the Blood tribe had just come rushing into the chamber, yelling at them and now the others were rushing from cage to cage and opening them up to release the hssiss held within.

"Oh stang." Cal said, "They must have figured out we're down here."

But then a distant sound echoed through the passageways. It was a series of muffled 'cracks' in rapid succession, followed by another after a short pause.

"Cal that sounds like gunfire." Lara said.

"It is." He replied, "Someone down here's firing off a machine gun. But the research team doesn't have anything like that in their armoury and we certainly didn't bring one with us. So unless the arten just advanced about three thousand years in technology overnight it means someone else is down here too."

"That's good news isn't it?" Lara asked, "I mean that means the arten might not know about us after all."

Just then a sound from behind them attract the attention of both Cal and Lara and they looked around to see a group of Blood Tribe warriors standing over them. Before they could react the closest warriors brought their clubs down upon the surprised jedi.

## 5.

Kaylor Mott's mandalorian force had been unable to locate a way into the tomb complex far enough from the research team's campsite to avoid being noticed so they had instead created their own by blasting a hole above one of the passages they were able to detect from the surface using the pulse wave cannons mounted on their basilisk war droids. However, their forced entry had attracted the attention of a number of natives who it appeared inhabited the subterranean complex and within moments his men were engaged in battle with them. Fortunately spear-wielding natives posed little threat to mandalorians and Kaylor had left only a token force to locate and secure whatever treasures the tomb held while he took the rest of his men to eliminate the researchers.

Equipped with repulsorlifts capable of carrying themselves and a rider to high altitudes, the basilisk war droids the mandalorians used as mounts were also equipped with legs to carry them over a wide range of surface terrain and to limit the warning that the researchers would have of their approach, Kaylor ordered his men to approach the camp on the ground. The droids were too bulky to be of use in the underground complex, so several rider less droids advanced alongside the ridden ones, being quite capable of autonomous action.

"Spread out." Kaylor signalled to his men, "We need to try and catch them all within the camp. If they flee we'll be stuck here ages trying to hunt them all down. Riders with me, autonomous units hold back until the shooting starts then engage repulsorlifts and form a line on the far side of the camp to block their escape." Then he urged his mount onwards and charged into the unsuspecting camp.

Dayle heard the pounding of heavy feet first, followed by a sudden scream. Immediately after that he heard the sound of heavy weapon discharges and more screams. Grabbing his blaster he rushed from his tent to witness the scene of chaos outside. Members of his team ran in all directions, some seeking cover while others tried to reach weapons. But most obvious of all were the armoured figures that sat atop armoured droids and fired indiscriminately into the camp. There was a roar from above him and Dayle looked up to see a smaller number of the bulky droids as they flew overhead. Instinctively he raised his blaster and fired a single shot at one of the droids. As luck would have it the spatial distortion created by his weapon struck the machine dead centre and it tumbled from the air, landing with a crash and rolling across the ground before coming to a halt and bursting into flames. Unfortunately his act of defiance brought him to the attention of the rampaging mandalorians and one of the ridden droids swung around to face him.

Kaylor sized up his opponent. The big man carried what looked like a standard pulse wave blaster, a powerful weapon but no match for the arsenal that the mandalorian leader had at his disposal. Grinning behind his armoured faceplate Kaylor charged, directing his mount's lasers towards Dayle.

"The cliffs! They're coming from the cliffs!"

The sudden call over the communications net distracted Kaylor just long enough for Dayle to be able to duck out of sight, using his tent for cover as he fled and before Kaylor could pursue him a second urgent signal was sent.

"Jedi!"

Kaylor's client had been very specific about what was wanted from the mandalorians. Most importantly the artefacts in the tomb complex were to be secured and delivered and secondly all witnesses were to be eliminated. However, Kaylor had been made aware that a few survivors could be tolerated provided that they came from the research team only. All of the Jedi had to die. For a mandalorian this was not an issue and Kaylor steered his basilisk war droid towards the cliffs. Today he intended to claim a Jedi's scalp.

Pressing himself up against the passage wall Kyle Jenner simply willed the alien warriors who rushed by not to notice him. He had heard the shooting of course and he knew that it was not caused by the Jedi. Whoever these other mysterious intruders were time was most definitely of the essence if he was to reach the central tomb before them. Then he spotted a second group of alien at the far end of the passageway and he saw that they were carrying between them the unconscious forms of Cal and Lara.

Waiting for the warriors who had just past him to get far enough away that he could move without risking being seen Kyle followed this second group.

Battle Master Vrish Khal moved with all of the agility his species possessed, leaping and rolling from one opponent to another. Sometimes he delivered a blow from his lightsaber that was powerful enough to cleave an armoured mandalorian or war droid in two, while other attacks were more subtle and intended to sow

confusion as he kept injured opponents between him and others who would otherwise have a clear shot at him. Meanwhile the other three jedi, Vrish's padawan Pedrus included formed a single group. Of these the more elderly scholar Kraus was the most proficient in the use of his lightsaber and the other two concentrated on protecting him from being outflanked and surrounded as he too cut his way through the mandalorians.

The scene that Kaylor Mott arrived to discover was one of his own men in disarray, unable to mass enough strength to rush the cluster of jedi from one side without the shistavanen wolf man charging into their midst and cutting down even more of them. However, Kaylor was not alone and as he looked down from his airborne basilisk he quickly decided on a course of action. Aiming for the centre of the group of three jedi he began to descend and at the same time gave out a yell that his communicator carried to all of his men nearby.

"Charge!"

The droid landed with tremendous force, placing Kaylor in the midst of the jedi so that all of them faced away from him. Lashing out with one of its hind legs the war droid he rode delivered a powerful kick that sent Karrie flying away.

"Pedrus! Help her!" Kraus shouted as he spun around to face this new threat head on with a single stroke of his lightsaber he sliced the head from the war droid, forcing Kaylor to jump clear before the collapsing machine could trap him beneath its bulk.

The sudden blow came as a complete surprise to Dayle and as he fell he dropped his blaster. Looking up he saw the menacing form of a mandalorian warrior standing over him in his spiked armour. The warrior brought his rifle up to his shoulder and aimed it at Dayle, but before he could pull the trigger there was the sound of something flying through the air and a soft 'thunk' as an arrow embedded itself in the mandalorian's neck.

Dayle rolled aside as the mandalorian clutched at his throat and made a gurgling sound as he fell, landing right where Dayle had been a few moments earlier. Rather than look for his own lost weapon Dayle instead scooped up the mandalorian's more powerful weapon and then looked around for the source of the arrow. Standing about twenty metres away he saw the unmistakable form of an arten warrior holding a bow and already loading another arrow.

And he was not alone.

"Doctor Larnson!" a native in more ornate armour than the others called out as he came running up to Dayle, "Are you injured?"

"Elder Shem." Dayle exclaimed as he recognised the alien. Elder Shem was the chief of one of the local settlements that provided labour for the researchers as well as traded with them, swapping advanced trinkets such as flashlights and modern knives for fresh foodstuffs, "What are you doing here?"

"My hunters saw the flying machines." He said, "It is most unusual for so many to come and go in such a short space of time. We thought you were preparing to fight the Blood Tribe again, so I gathered as many of my people as I could and brought them here to fight along side you. We did not realise it was more outsiders."

"Well you're just in time." Dayle said, "Tell your warriors to avoid the droids the mandalorians are riding, they'll be too tough for your weapons. Concentrate on the riders, but watch for the armour, its tougher than anything you're used to dealing with."

"We already know this Doctor Larnson." Elder Shem replied, "Look." And the arten leader pointed to where a large group of arten warriors had surrounded a pair of mandalorians. The two mercenaries had cut down several of the natives using the weapons mounted on their basilisks, but now the arten had gotten close enough to drag them from their mounts and were aiming spears attacks for the gaps in their armour. The arten cheered as the mandalorians were killed and one of them raised aloft a rifle he had just taken from the body that he then turned against the armoured basilisk war droid.

## 6.

Lara's eyes flickered open and for a moment she wondered where she was. Her first reaction was to try and get up, but she rapidly found that she could not move her arms or legs. Lifting her head she saw that from the neck down her body had been tightly wrapped in bandages, her arms folded across her chest. Wriggling she tried to see if she could loosen the wrappings from around her but they held firm. Then she became aware of an odour and Lara guessed that the bandages had been treated with some sort of adhesive to hold them in place. Even if she could find a loose end to grab using the Force she would not be able to free herself. Looking around she spotted her brother lying on a plinth beside her, his body wrapped like hers in bandages but thus far he was still unconscious. Suddenly the words of Kraus Trevan as he described the fate of intruders to the tomb complex sprang to mind.

The sound of movement attracted Lara's attention and she strained to look around enough that she could look towards the source and there she saw an arden walking towards her. This one was clearly a member of the Blood Tribe, his face being painted with the typical red dye. Additionally this particular example wore an elaborate headdress that was decorated with tiny bones that suggested he was some sort of priest.

Lara took a deep breath and focused on the alien's mind as best she could.

"You want to release me." She said, but the arden just looked back at her and then set down a animal hide bag beside her, "I said you want to-" she began, but was suddenly cut short as the alien produced a set of tongues from the bag, dipped it into Lara's mouth and took hold of the end of her tongue. As the arden pulled his hand back, dragging out Lara's tongue he also took a serrated knife from his bag. Despite her tongue being held fast, Lara let out a scream as she realised what the alien planned to do.

*Fear.*

The noise and sudden burst of emotion was just enough to rouse Cal who turned his head to see the arden poised to cut out his sister's tongue.

"Let her go!" Cal yelled as he tried to get up, but the bandages bound him too tightly.

*Anger.*

"I said let her go!" Cal roared and using the Force he plucked the knife from the arden's grasp. The alien also let go of the tongues and Lara gasped as his grip on her was released. While she tried to wriggle away from the alien he just stared at the knife now floating in front of him. Cal was about to plunge the knife into the arden's chest when he realised that his actions were being motivated by the Dark Side. It took a great deal of effort on his part, but Cal was able to maintain his telekinetic grip on the weapon as he forced his body into a sitting position and swung his bandage wrapped legs around as he finally released the knife. Too late the arden realised that Cal was lashing out with his legs and before he could react Cal kicked his own legs out from under him. As the alien fell there was a 'crack' when it's head struck Cal's plinth and he was knocked out.

"Oh Cal." Lara exclaimed, "He was about to-"

"I know." Cal said as he tried flexing his arms under the bandages.

"But Cal, when you pulled the knife from his grip I felt it. I felt the dark side running through you."

Cal stopped his squirming.

"I know." he said, "But you're my baby sister. What did you expect? Now see if you can spot the end of these bandages." He then slid off the plinth and jumped up and down to turn his back on his sister, "Well? Can you see it?"

"They're glued Cal. I think the entire wrappings are coated in some sort of adhesive." Lara replied, "Can't you smell it?"

"Oh is that what it is?" Cal asked, "I just thought you'd let one rip."

Lara frowned and wriggled.

"First thing I'm doing when I get loose is punch you for that." She said.

There was a soft groan from near Cal's feet and he looked down to see the Blood Tribe priest starting to stir. The alien's eyes suddenly snapped open and it reached out and grabbed hold of Cal. Unable to move away Cal cried out as he was dragged off his feet. He landed heavily next to the alien and his vision blurred as his head hit the stone floor. Before he could attempt to roll further away the Blood Tribe priest took hold of Cal's hair and slammed his head against the side of the plinth Lara was lay on. There was a 'crack' and Cal lay still.

Gasping, the Blood Tribe priest got to his feet and looked down at Lara as she wriggled desperately trying to break free. Picking up his tools the priest once again took hold of her tongue by its tip and held out the knife.

Lara screamed, but before the priest could act there was a brilliant flash of light accompanied by the unmistakable sound of an energy weapon discharge and his upper body was consumed in flames. As the remains of the priest fell to the floor Lara tried her best to look around to see who had just saved her from having her tongue cut out for a second time. A disturbance in the Force told her that it was someone proficient in the Jedi arts, but it was only when a tall figure stood over her that Lara saw her saviour was the renegade Kyle Jenner and she screamed again.

*Fear.*

"Cal wake up!" she cried out as Kyle placed his bulky plasma carbine back into the oversized holster he wore on his back.

"Be quite Lara." Kyle said, "You'll just attract more attention if you keep making so much noise."

Lara looked Kyle in the face.

"What are you going to do to us?" she asked.

"Why nothing." He replied, "I need your help."

"We'll never help you."

"Oh but you will. It is only a matter of time before you and your brother come to see the truth in what I have told you. The Founding Families are evil, right now their servants are trying to wipe out the research team and your Jedi friends."

"So why not just tell Captain De Kuun and Master Karas?" Lara asked.

"Because the Founding Families have infiltrated both the Republic military and the Jedi Order." Kyle told her, "But you and Cal are not yet under their influence. Join me and we can end the Founding Families' ways. Believe me Lara when I tell you that I will do whatever it takes to stop them. If you are not with me then you are against me."

A pair of armoured figures burst into the chamber and Kyle whirled around, drawing his plasma carbine once more and before either of the Mandalorians could take aim he had already unleashed a blast that burned through the protective chest plate of one while spraying tiny droplets of super heated matter over the other. The second Mandalorian screamed in pain and began to withdraw, but Kyle let off another blast that cut him down as well.

"As you can see," He said to Lara as he turned around, "I am not the only one here for the knowledge this tomb contains. Now I'm afraid I can't have you kicking and screaming all the time while I work." And he clamped a hand down over Lara's nose and mouth and held it there tightly as she struggled, unable to breathe. When she went limp he released his grasp and checked briefly to make sure that she was still breathing on her own. His aim was to incapacitate, not kill her.

"We're under fire! Someone with a plasma weapon. I've got four men down at least."

The signal from within the tomb was barely audible, only the fact that the Mandalorians had blown a massive hole in the roof to gain access was allowing the signal to escape. This was not the news that Kaylor wanted to hear either, according to reports from the campsite the researchers had unexpectedly been joined by a sizeable native force that was threatening to overrun his men entirely, while here he was still facing the same Jedi foe and the battle was not going well. Though Kraus was clearly much older than Kaylor, the scholar had thoroughly researched Mandalorian fighting methods and he quite easily able to thwart all of Kaylor's attacks. On the other hand Kaylor was being driven back step-by-step towards the cliff edge.

He was not the only one of his men struggling either. Vrish Khal was more than a match for even several Mandalorians working together while Karrie and Pedrus only had to fend off attacks directed at them long enough for the battle master to intervene.

A deflected blaster bolt knocked a Mandalorian from his basilisk war droid and Kaylor saw his opportunity. "To me!" he commanded, using the droid control frequency to bring the machine towards him.

The basilisk leapt into the air, engaging its repulsorlifts and flew towards Kaylor. Kraus jumped backwards as the machine came back down to the ground, ploughing up dirt as it went. In this brief moment of respite Kaylor pulled himself up into the droid's saddle and took off into the air.

"Fall back!" he ordered, "All units fall back."

As the Jedi rushed into the camp they were met by Dayle and a group of alien warriors that included Elder Shem. They noticed that several of the aliens were now armed with modern weapons taken from fallen Mandalorians.

"Doctor Larson." Kraus said, "There are hundreds of Hssiss in the tomb, the Blood Tribe have gathered them together. Cal and Lara—"

"Elder Shem has already told me about the Blood Tribe." Dayle interrupted.



"When we approached we saw some of them fighting the other outsiders near a large hole in the ground." Elder Shem said, "We made our way around without them seeing us."

"But what about the Udras?" Karrie asked, "They're still down there."

Dayle looked around at the heavily armed arten warriors.

"I think we can handle that." He said and Elder Shem nodded slowly, "We'll conduct a search. You can all head back to Moldas."

"No." Kraus replied and everyone looked at him, "Master Karas gave me specific instructions. There is too much evidence of past Sith activity here for this world to be left unguarded. I will remain here. I can help Doctor Larnson with his research and ensure that anything that present a danger is contained."

Dayle stared at Kraus and though his expression gave nothing away the jedi sensed that the man was not happy about having Kraus looking over his shoulder from now on.

When Karrie, Vrish and Pedrus arrived back at Moldas Master Karas was waiting for them.

"I'll take care of this." Karrie said to the other two jedi and she walked towards their superior, "Hello Ben."

She said with a smile as they embraced briefly.

"I'm sorry about sending you into that." He replied.

"These things happen Ben." She said, "But are you sure about leaving Kraus there?"

"We need to keep up to date with what is happening there." Master Karas explained, "Jedi Trevan can assist the research team with their task while simultaneously securing any artefacts that may be considered dangerous."

"You've another motive Ben." Karrie said, "I can sense it."

"Yes I have. With Kraus in the Narthis Sector he is well placed to keep watch on the Udras."

Karrie paused.

"We still don't know what's happened to them." She said.

"Oh they'll turn up. I have no doubt about it."

The room that Cal woke up in was only dimly lit. He could still feel the arten bandages wrapped around him tightly but this time he seemed to be lay on something soft instead of the stone plinth he had woken up on the last time. He wriggled and felt something lay next to him.

"Cal?" Lara's voice called out.

"I'm here." Cal replied.

"I'm still tied up." Lara said, "I can't move."

"Me too." Cal said.

"Where do you think we are?"

"I don't know." Cal replied, but he lifted his head to try and get a look around wherever it was that Kyle Jenner had abandoned them. The only light appeared to be what was coming in through an open doorway and Cal suddenly realised where they were, "We're home." He said, "We're in my room."

"Kyle left us tied up in your room?" Lara exclaimed as she squirmed, "But why?"

"How should I know? He obviously doesn't want us dead; he's had chances to kill us before and not taken them. He seems to have taken good care of us too."

"But he's left us wrapped in these bandages." Lara pointed out.

"I know." Cal replied, "But think, it's a two day trip here from Atch even using the fastest starships. Do you feel like you've been wrapped up for two days?"

"No."

"So while we were on his ship he made sure we were kept fed and cleaned."

"So how are you going to get us free?" Lara asked, "Kyle's not here to take care of us now."

"Me? Why me?"

"Well it's your room. You must have something sharp lying around."

"Afraid not." Cal replied, "So unless we want to just lie here and wait for someone to happen to come by and find us like this, which could be some time, then I see only one choice left to us."

"Oh no." Lara said.

"Oh yes. I'll count to three and we'll do it together okay?"

"Okay."

"Right then, here goes. One. Two. Three."

"Help!"