

STAR WARS

TALES OF THE JEDI



II-XII: RENEGADE

BY STEPHEN J DUTTON



ELEVEN FAMILIES.
TWELVE GENERATIONS.
ONE EVIL.

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

RENEGADE

WHEN THE JEDI ORDER BECOMES SUSPICIOUS THAT THE SALVAGE OPERATION IN THE PHILLOS SYSTEM IS HIDING SOMETHING THE UDRAS ARE AMONGST THE GROUP SENT TO INVESTIGATE. BUT WITH CAL'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GAYAL KARN EXPOSED THE FOUNDING FAMILIES START TO MOVE AGAINST THEM...

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1 .

Jedi Knight Seth Ashran lived to fly. Whenever he encountered a new type of starship his first instinct was to attempt to get into the cockpit, no matter what purpose the vessel was designed for or how old it was. In fact he relished the opportunity to try out older craft that were no longer commonly encountered in the starlanes.

“Seth!”

Seth looked around when he heard the woman’s voice calling to him from across the courtyard.

“Karrie.” He replied, smiling as his fellow Jedi dashed up to him, “So how can I help you today?”

“My hyperdrive motivator’s given out again. Could you take a look at it for me?”

“I’d love to.” Seth told her, “But I’ve just received the latest updates from the Narthis Sector.”

“The salvage reports you mean?”

“Exactly. The only other ships within a hundred parsecs as old as that old starbreaker you’re flying. You really should trade it in. I recommend a-“

“A fighter?” Karrie interrupted, knowing what he was about to say.

“Well it would be faster and more reliable.”

“And armed.” Karrie pointed out, “Seth, you know I rely on not presenting a threat to anyone.”

“Oh yes? And what’s that then?” Seth asked, indicating the lightsaber that hung from Karrie’s belt.

“A symbol of our office.” She said, “Now what’s so important about those reports from the Narthis Sector that means I need to trust a bunch of service droids to repair my ship?”

“Let’s just say that something doesn’t add up.” Seth replied, “Now I’ll take a look at your ship as soon as I can, but I really need to check this data out.”

“Fine.” Karrie said, “But I’ve got your word, you’ll see to my ship as soon as you’re finished with your other antiques?”

“I promise.” Seth said.

The report Seth had received listed every ship salvaged from the Phillos system in the last month. According to the numbers another six Republic cruisers had been broken down and anything not regarded as usable taken to be scrapped. In addition three smaller ships had been judged to be worth renovating and passing into commercial service.

“More Republic ships.” Seth muttered and he looked at the list he had been keeping of the other ships recovered. All of them were Republic vessels he noticed, which meant that the fleet that had engaged the sith in the Phillos system a thousand years ago had been quite large, at least sixty cruisers and battleships plus support craft. But so far not a single sith ship had been recovered.

They were in the system of course, Seth had seen them himself when he had been there and it was quite possible that the company contracted to conduct the salvage operation, Farris Industries had yet to move onto them. But the number of Republic ships involved in the ancient battle suggested that the sith fleet should have been several hundred vessels at least given that they were able to wipe out the Republic forces entirely. So there were two possible explanations, firstly Farris Industries could have been deliberately avoiding the sith vessels until now or alternatively only a handful had been there to start with. It would be easy to check on this of course, all that Seth needed to do was head for the system himself and see how many sith vessels he could find at Phillos. But if he could not find enough to account for the destruction of so many Republic ships then he would need to figure out where the others went.

Seth sighed. Karrie’s hyperdrive motivator was just going to have to wait.

“I suppose you’re wondering why I’ve called you all here.” Han Shill, CEO of Shill Security announced. All around him were very important people, representatives of all of the Founding Families plus two others who were also descendants of the explorers that had originally charted the Narthis Sector for the Republic.

Normally in such meetings most or all of the participants would be present only in a virtual form, but on this occasion Han had insisted that each family send someone in person so that communications could not be intercepted. This had presented problems of course and not just because two of the families loathed one another and even without the supernatural abilities of a Jedi he could sense that Lorna Fayal was fighting back the urge to attack either Josh or Heddren Drud. For their part, Josh, Heddren and Heddren’s wife Millel were doing their best to ignore Lorna. The nautolan Ruun Family never left the ocean world of Delvad for any reason and Erill Crassis, head of the Crassis family was far too ill to travel from Crassis Major to the

Ruun's undersea estate. Therefore Luke and Salla, the old man's son and daughter represented the Crassis family in law.

"Oh get on with it Han." Trent Narthis snapped.

"Yes," his wife Calleen added, "do spare us the pointless dramatics."

"Some of us are expected back in the Core." Hugo Callan then said. He was one of those not technically part of the Founding Families, his ancestor having returned to the Core Worlds to found a shipping company. Hugo's presence here, along with that of Keleen Delvad who also normally resided on the Republic's capital world of Coruscant was a fortunate coincidence, they had happened to be in the sector when Han had called the meeting and so he had included them also.

"Very well." Han responded, "I've heard from Corlay."

Several of those present reacted visibly when Han mentioned the name of his younger sister. The woman was a part of the freedom warriors, the non-Force sensitive troops that supported the Jedi Order and she used her position to keep Han informed of the order's activities. If she was contacting Han now then it meant that the Jedi were up to something.

"What do the Jedi know?" Luke Crassis asked.

"Your guess is as good as mine." Han replied.

"Is that it?" Del Karn exclaimed, "Do you know how much it's costing us to be here? Or the risk of us all being together?"

"Now dear I'm sure the Ruun's estate is secure." His wife Faye said, patting his arm and she glanced at Ket and Fial Ruun, smiling at them.

"Indeed." Ket said, "No one knows we are all here and even if they did, they could not reach us."

"Actually as far as we can tell it's because of you Del." Han said.

"Impossible." Del snapped, taken aback by the accusation.

"What have your daughters done now Del?" Lorna said, shifting her glare from the Druds to him and Faye, "Hijacked Aurek Station perhaps?"

Del and Faye just glared back at her.

"What have you heard?" Corva Torin asked Han.

"One of the Jedi has been getting reports on the ships from the Phillos system." Han replied and all eyes turned towards the Karns. Though Del had used the company that still bore his bachelor name Farris to undertake the operation it would not take much to connect it to him.

"I knew this would happen!" Lorna snapped, "You undercut me with the Republic by cutting corners. Now the Jedi know we're after those Sith ships."

"Oh don't be so stupid Lorna." Del replied angrily, "The salvage teams have been told to stay well away from the Sith ships in case they're booby trapped and that's what they'll tell the Jedi if they're questioned."

"What about the people you're using to recover the Sith ships?" Josh Drud asked.

"We aren't recovering them." Del replied, "At least not yet. I want the Republic to forget about them. In the meantime we've been sending small teams aboard to check them out, looking for anything we can salvage without raising any suspicions."

"Well it looks like you've failed." Heddren Drud said, "Why else would the Jedi be on their way?"

"Actually it's just one Jedi for now." Han responded, "A knight by the name of Seth Ashran."

"That still brings us to a total of four in the sector." Milled Drud pointed out.

"Five if you count Kyle Jenner." Deesa Torin added, reminding the other woman of the renegade Jedi knight now known to be at large, "He's opposed us in the past."

"But he isn't associated with the order any more." Trent said, "He's just one man, no threat to us."

"No, but the others are." Keleen said.

"That's why I've brought you all here." Han said, "We need to decide if we're going to take direct action against the Jedi before they can uncover what we're doing here."

"Please tell me you're not actually taking that thing into the shower with you now." Jedi Knight Cal Udra said to his younger sister and padawan learner Lara when she emerged from the bathroom with a towel wrapped around her. Slung over one shoulder was a pulse wave rifle fitted with an underslung grenade launcher that they had taken from a group of Mandalorian mercenaries.

"Not actually into the shower, no." Lara replied, "But I want to try firing it so bad Cal. I know, let's take the Bright Hope off to some asteroids where I can practice with it."

"No." Cal said, "Look Lara even adding those grenades we got on Tepillos to the ones Han gave us, we've only got a limited number. Remember Master Karas doesn't know we've got it and if he found out he'd go berserk. I lied to his face after all."

"Han said he'd give us as many as we wanted." Lara said, "And who cares about Master Karas? He's parsecs away. It's not like he's going to send someone to check on us is it?"

Before Cal could reply the front door communicator chimed and Cal went to see who it was.

"Its Seth!" he hissed at Lara, "Seth Ashran is standing outside the door."

"Oh kriff!" Lara exclaimed, "Master Karas must have sent him to check on us."

"Well don't just stand there." Cal said, "Go put that thing away. And put some clothes on." And he waved towards Lara's bedroom where she normally kept the weapon. As soon as Lara vanished into her room and shut the door behind her Cal opened the front door and smiled, "Seth." He said, "This is a surprise. Come on in."

"Thanks." Seth said as he stepped into the apartment. Then when Lara reappeared, now wearing a robe and he noticed her wet hair he added, "I'm not disturbing you am I?"

"Of course not." Cal said, "Now come and tell us what brings you all the way out here from Moldas."

"Can I get you a drink?" Lara asked as they all made their way to the lounge.

"Is that beer I see up there?" Seth asked, pointing to a case on top of a storage unit set into the wall of the kitchen area. Cal and Lara glanced at one another, knowing full well that the case in fact contained the grenades supplied to them by Han Shill, the case serving to disguise what he had delivered.

"Err, there are cold ones in the fridge." Cal said.

"Even better." Seth said, "I'll have a cold one."

"Me too." Cal added, "I think I need something strong."

Returning from the kitchen with three bottles of beer Lara handed one to both Cal and Seth before sitting down beside her brother.

"So what does Master Karas want of us this time?" Cal asked.

"Actually this is my operation." Seth replied before he took a sip of beer and pulled a face, "You call this strong?" he asked, "Dac uses stronger to clean his pans." Then he took another sip before continuing, "I've been keeping up with reports from the Phillos system, the types and numbers of ships being recovered and they don't make sense."

"How so?" Cal asked.

"So far not a single sith ship has been recovered. Now that could be entirely innocent, but by my reckoning there should have been hundreds of them in the system to have been able to overwhelm the Republic battle group accounted for."

"I only remember a few." Lara commented, "Plus that personnel carrier we saw in the Kinnis system."

"Exactly." Seth said, pointing at her, "But I'm talking about proper warships, not transports. So that means that the rest of the sith force must have escaped. But I don't think they went far, I think that they were the ships used to establish the short lived sith empire in this sector. I want to find them."

Cal and Lara glanced at one another.

"That sounds like a tall order." Cal said, "In three hundred years no ones seen a single one of them. Unless you count the Kinnin."

"They haven't been looking." Seth replied, "Now you know the odds of just stumbling across even a fleet of ships in space unless you're actively looking for them. There's quite literally a lot of space to get lost in."

"So how would you look for them?" Lara asked, "You don't think the crews are still alive do you?"

"No." Seth said, "Even if they were, members of the sith species aren't that easy to track. The Dark Side's too strong around them. But I think that there may be a way of figuring out where the ships went to after the battle."

"Well Kinnis for starters." Cal said, "But I don't see the Kinnin letting us poke our noses around their system for what may be left there."

"I think that the battle at Kinnis happened quite some time after the one at Phillos." Seth explained, "A force as large as the one we're talking about would have rolled over the Kinnin like they weren't even there, whereas the evidence suggests they fought off the sith invasion."

"Then how do you intend to find out where they went?" Lara asked.

"My guess is that when the Republic battle group arrived in the sector it will have launched scout ships to plot courses ahead of the main group and the data returned by them will have outlined the disposition of the sith forces. I'm hoping that the sith had already begun to deploy around the sector and that some of that deployment was caught by the scouts."

"It still doesn't explain how you're going to find this data." Cal said, "Those ships were lost a thousand years ago."

"Yes, but where they went will have been logged by the flagship." Seth said, "Now I'm hoping that the computer core of the flagship or another vessel provided with the scouts' flight records will have survived intact enough for us to pull the data. Then we can go find those ships."

Before either Cal or Lara could reply to this the apartment door's communicator chimed again.

"Expecting someone?" Seth asked.

"No." Cal replied and Lara got up to investigate.

"Cal, I think it's for you." She said, frowning when she saw who was standing outside and as she walked back towards the lounge she waved her hand at the door mechanism and opened it, "Come on in Gayal." She added.

Gayal Karn was the eldest child of Del and Faye and was widely known for her questionable behaviour. Many times she had been arrested only for her parents to use their great wealth and influence to ensure that charges were dropped. Cal had determined that her behaviour was at least in part due to her being Force sensitive and the negative emotions to which she had been exposed to growing up. More recently the two had become closer and begun a relationship that for now at least remained a secret from her parents.

"Gayal." Cal said, standing up and smiling, "Come and sit down."

"Yes." Seth added, "Have a beer. It tastes like piss but at least its cold."

"Thanks." Gayal said, sitting down next to Cal, "I think."

"So are you going to introduce me?" Seth said.

"Of course." Cal responded, "Seth Ashran, this is Gayal Karn."

"Of the Founding Karns?" Seth asked.

"The very same." Gayal replied as they both reached out and shook hands.

"So what brings you here this time Gayal?" Lara asked, "And where are those other two delinquents you call sisters?"

"Oh Keera and Sial are still at home on Crassis Major." Gayal replied, "But I thought I'd come and spend a few days with my man here." And she rubbed Cal's arm.

"Oh that's a pity, because actually we were just about to leave." Lara said with the hint of a smile.

"Really? Where?" Gayal asked.

"The Phillos system." Lara told her.

"Phillos?" Gayal repeated, "Is this about those derelict starships?"

The three jedi all glanced at one another. The existence and location of the wrecked ships was supposed to be classified to keep unlicensed salvagers from plundering the wrecks. Outside of the Republic hierarchy, only a handful of companies approached to bid for the recovery contract were supposed to know.

"What makes you say that young lady?" Seth asked.

"Oh I've just heard my parents talking about it, that's all." Gayal said, "They were quite impressed that my father's company got the contract. Though they also said it was costing them more than twenty million credits, so I don't see why they're happy about it."

"Hang on," Seth said, "the updates I get are from Farris Industries. What does the Karn family have to do with that?"

"Because my father was originally called Del Farris." Gayal explained, "He took my mother's name when they married, but he never renamed the company or integrated with any of the others my mother owns."

"So do you know much about the company then?" Cal asked with a grin.

"Oh yes. My father made me spend a month following him around there once. Well it was supposed to be a month. He gave up on the idea after a week. But I still know the basics of how it operates."

"Well that is good news." Cal said, his smile widening, "You can come with us in an advisory role. Come help me pack." And before Seth could object the pair dashed into Cal's room.

Seth looked at Lara.

"Am I the only one with a bad feeling about this?" he asked.

"No." Lara replied, "You most definitely are not."

2.

"Where is she?" Del Karn demanded from behind the desk in his study.

"Who?" his middle daughter Sial replied while the youngest, Keera simply gazed at him.

"You know who." Faye said, "Your sister Gayal."

"How should we know?" Keera asked.

"Because you're covering for her. Both of you." Del said.

"Are not." Sial muttered.

"What was that young lady?" Faye asked.

"I said we're not covering for her." Sial said more clearly.

"Then you'll have an explanation for this won't you?" Del said and he spun his computer display around so that his daughters could see the image on it. There, caught clearly by a surveillance camera was Gayal getting out of a speeder with Sial in the driver's seat.

"You had us followed?" Sial snapped.

"We didn't need to." Del answered, "That camera's mounted outside the starport you took her to. Now we know that your credit stick was used to buy her a ticket to Aurek Station, but she hasn't checked in at our apartment there. So where did she go after that?"

"I don't know." Sial said.

"Neither of us does." Keera added.

"Don't you realise how much danger she could be in?" Faye said, "Without a security detail or her tracking devices-"

"Huh." Keera interrupted, folding her arms, "Like anyone's going to threaten her with a jedi around." And Sial visibly winced.

"A jedi?" Del repeated, "Is this part of that ridiculous feud with that padawan? I told you to stop that." Then something occurred to him, "Its not is it? You'd all have gone if it was. Now tell me why she's gone to see the jedi while you two still have credit accounts to use."

For several long, drawn out moments Keera and Sial remained silent, glancing at one another nervously.

"Fine." Faye said, "You can both consider yourselves cut off until-"

"She's dating Cal." Keera blurted out and as Del and Faye now looked at one another in surprise she added, "She's been seeing him for months. That's how come she hasn't been arrested in ages. He and his goody two shoes sister won't let her misbehave."

"I can't figure out what either of them see in each other." Sial said, "It's not like they have anything in-"

"Get out." Del said sternly, glaring at his daughters and then when they remained still out of shock he leapt to his feet, slammed his hands down on his desk and bellowed at them, "I said get out!"

Terrified, Keera and Sial fled from the room.

Faye walked over to the door and closed it behind her daughters as Del sat back down.

"A jedi." He said, "This couldn't get any worse."

"I know dear." Faye replied, returning to stand beside him.

"We've no idea what she's already told him." Del went on, "We don't even know how much she knows."

"She can't have told him that much." Faye reassured her husband, "Otherwise we'd have the entire order beating our door down. Now we've obviously found in time to prevent any serious damage. What we need to do now is make sure that she's never in the position to tell Cal anything at all."

"But how?" Del asked, "You know what she's like."

"Yes I know and I'm afraid this will require some considerable sacrifice from us." Faye said and then she reached out and activated the desk-mounted communicator, calling one of the stored numbers.

"Shill Security." A woman's voice answered, "How may help you?"

"This is Faye Karn. Put me through to Han Shill. Now."

Han Shill entered the private hangar and headed towards his twin sister Belle.

"Ready?" he asked her.

"Almost." Belle replied, climbing down from her Daavab-class starfighter.

"Good. Now I'm afraid there's been a slight change of plan."

"Han, you can't be serious. I've planned every detail."

"Well take a look at this and see if your plan still holds water." Han said and he took a datapad from his pocket and held it out to Belle. She took it and her jaw dropped as she looked at the display.

"Oh kriff." She said, lowering the datapad, "This is a disaster."

"Exactly." Han replied, "So it needs dealing with and you're the only one I trust to do it."
"Fine. Consider it handled, though I'll need a bigger ship. I hope you're charging enough for this."
"I am. Heddren is too. He'll meet you when you're done to finish things off; all the details are there. Now pick whatever ship you need and get going."

"The Phillos system isn't normally such a tourist attraction." The red skinned zeltron said as she handed over a datapad in exchange for the cash brought by her client.

"Then they've found something." Kyle Jenner replied as he looked at the datapad, "Though I don't see any mention here of what. I pay you a lot of money to keep me informed Kassa. I could have pulled this myself from beacon logs."

"But you don't have time to pull beacon logs do you?" Kassa said, "Anyway aren't you wondering about what's not in there?"

Kyle looked at the datapad again and then glared at the infomerchant.

"No riddles. I've paid you, so tell me."

"The Founding Families don't seem to be doing anything at all about this." Kassa said, "Four jedi heading for a meeting in a remote system, you'd think they'd send someone to take a look."

"The Phillos system is full of their people. You know as well as I do that Farris Industries is run by the Karns."

"Yes, but they're just workers. Not spies or warriors. They couldn't even stop that padawan you're sweet on from-"

Kyle suddenly reached out and grabbed hold of Kassa's hair and pulled her across the table.

"Do not mock me!" he hissed directly into her ear and then he let go, allowing her to slump back into her seat.

"Okay, I'm sorry." She gasped, "But my point remains. The Farris Industries people are no match for jedi. Not even the specialist crews they've got working some of those sith hulks they've been ignoring otherwise. By all rights they should have sent someone by now. Probably Del or Faye Karn themselves with a full detail from Shill Security. But there's been no activity at all."

"Did you consider the possibility that their spy in the Jedi Order has let them down on this occasion?" Kyle asked.

"Well if that's what's happened its not going to last long. Their people will report the jedi's arrival as soon as it happens."

"Then I must move quickly." Kyle said, "I need to get to the Phillos system ahead of them. I will discover what the jedi are hunting for and take it from them."

"There are four of them." Kassa reminded Kyle as she got to his feet.

"But not the right four to stop me." He replied.

The *Bright Hope* dropped out of hyperspace on the edge of the Phillos system. In the cockpit Lara was at the controls while Seth watched her.

"Good." he said, "You handled that exit nicely."

Lara smiled.

"Flying's easy." She replied, "Shooting and flying at the same time however, that's a different story."

"Well we ought to let your master know." Seth said, "He should be here."

"I wish people wouldn't call him that." Lara said.

"What? Your master?"

"Exactly. He's Cal. He's my brother. The guy who tied my pigtails to a lamp."

Seth grinned for a moment and then remembered he was a jedi.

"Well kids do stupid stuff." He said, "But right now-"

"It was last week." Lara interrupted and Seth smirked again.

"Never mind." He said, regaining his composure, "Right now we need to look for Jedi Trevan's ship."

"Kraus is meeting us?" Lara asked, "I thought this was your operation."

"Technically it is." Seth replied, "But I figured I may need help accessing a thousand year old computer system, so I sent a message to him on Atch and asked him to meet us here. If he left as soon as he got the message then he should already be here. I think its only fitting that we're all here to meet him."

Lara sighed.

"He's in his cabin. With her."

Seth smiled.

"Stay here. I'll go get him." he said and he exited the cockpit, leaving Lara in sole control of the ship. This did not bother Lara in the slightest; she had enough confidence in her ability to pilot the ship without help.

"This is Jedi Trevan. *Bright Hope* is that you?"

Lara was startled by the sudden signal, but she quickly recovered and activated the communications system.

"This is the *Bright Hope*." She replied, "It's Lara. Err, everyone's in the back at the moment. Can I help?"

"Hold your course and speed." Kraus told her, "I'm heading for you now. We should rendezvous in ten minutes."

Lara glanced at the sensor display and saw a contact heading directly for the *Bright Hope*. Its transponder identified it as a light transport ship.

"I see you on my scope Jedi Trevan." She said, "Confirm rendezvous in one zero minutes."

The two Jedi vessels met right on schedule and the occupants of the *Bright Hope* all gathered by the docking port as they waited for Kraus to come aboard. Kraus Trevan was significantly older than any of the Jedi aboard the *Bright Hope*. A believer in the saying 'knowledge is power' he was known in the order as a scholar and his views were often sought by Jedi in the planning stages of missions. Though he had never been elevated to the rank of master, his length of service meant that he would be the most senior Jedi of the group.

The airlock door hissed open to reveal Kraus standing just inside his own ship.

"Good day to you." He announced, "Won't you please come aboard and-" and he halted when he noticed Gayal standing behind Cal, "Who is this?" he asked.

"Oh, err. Gayal Karn." Cal replied, "She's a member of the Karn family and knows something of Farris Industries."

Kraus looked sternly at Gayal for a few moments, then relaxed slightly.

"As I was saying, do please come aboard. I have set up a briefing area in the lounge and I will take you through what I have already discovered." And then he stepped aside to allow the others to pass. As Seth walked by he held out a hand and placed it on his arm, "Might I just have a quick word with you?" he asked, "I would like to know what is happening on Moldas in my absence. The rest of you go ahead."

Kraus and Seth watched as the others headed towards the lounge and when they were out of earshot Kraus looked at Seth and in a low voice he spoke.

"So why did you bring me here really Jedi Ashran? I know you; you do not need me to access any part of a starship. Even if you found it difficult you would relish the challenge. So why bring me here?"

"Master Karas' warning." Seth replied just as quietly, "We're dealing with Sith ships here and Master-"

"Yes, I know. Master Karas remains convinced that the Udra family will fall to the Dark Side. I need someone to watch my back, but bringing more Jedi from Moldas would have been too obvious."

"Of course. Now what about that young woman?"

"Gayal? She's more than just an advisor. She's Cal's girlfriend."

"Ah, this complicates matters." Kraus said, "You know she's Force sensitive?"

Seth stared at Kraus in surprise.

"No I didn't." he said.

"She is. Not particularly strong, but I can sense it. But I'm guessing you sensed something about her too, it was obvious to me."

"Yes I did." Seth said, "I can sense the Dark Side all around her. She's not totally corrupted, but it's there nonetheless."

"We will have to watch her closely I think." Kraus said.

"Hey!" Gayal suddenly called out, "What are you two gossiping about? We're waiting for you both in here."

Briefly making eye contact once more, Kraus and Seth then headed into the lounge.

As Seth sat down on the same semi-circular couch as the others were sat on Kraus remained standing and activated a holographic projector, causing an image to appear in the centre of the couch. The image was a somewhat grainy depiction of a crashed starship, partially buried on the surface of some planetary body.

"This was a Republic fleet carrier." Kraus explained, "The recovery teams located it shortly after they established their main base of operations on the same moon that it crashed on during the battle against the Sith. So far only a preliminary survey has been carried out."

"So why haven't they salvaged it yet?" Lara asked, "I mean all that scrap and a potentially functioning computer sat right on their doorstep?"

"Too much work." Gayal responded and the others all looked in her direction, Cal smiling, "Their salvage droids are meant for operations in zero gee," she went on, "so cutting it up would require either the droids to be reconfigured for surface operations or someone would have to do it by hand."

"A lot of someones." Seth commented, "That ship looks pretty big."

"Over seven hundred metres." Kraus said.

"Exactly." Gayal said, "So with easier pickings still at hand in space why would they bother?"

"Well in this case their impatience has worked in our favour." Kraus said, returning to his briefing, "Because although the hull and engines appear hopelessly beyond repair, the computer core is relatively intact.

"Relatively?" Cal said, "Can you be a bit more specific than that?"

"Yes of course." Kraus replied, "Without power all of the volatile storage has been lost. In addition several of the drive mountings have been damaged, separating them forcibly from the transceiver lines to the primary processing core. This may have damaged some of their data ports. Normally replacements would be impossible to come by, but on this occasion we may just have an ample supply of spares."

"Where?" Lara asked, "I mean its thousand year old tech."

"The other ships nerf herder." Seth said, "They're a thousand years old as well remember."

"No need to be nasty." Lara muttered, though a slight smile appeared on Gayal's face until she noticed Cal staring at her.

"So we're headed for this ship then?" Cal asked

"No." Kraus replied, "As soon as I discovered it I contacted the recovery team's base and requested that they extract the core and take it back to their base. We can examine it there without the need for environmental protection."

3.

The Farris Industries recovery team's base was made of prefabricated modules, stacked and interconnected to produce what was in effect a small colony on the frozen and airless moon. Until the arrival of the two Jedi craft everyone of the moon's temporary inhabitants was an employee of Farris Industries, either part of the recovery operation or hired to provide them with the services they needed during their off duty hours.

"Shouldn't someone be here to meet us?" Lara said as they stood in the terminal building that linked all of the hangars and docking ports together. All around them were beings of various species, some like them just arriving at the base while others awaited departing flights. All of them, including those in official looking uniforms ignored the Jedi party. They were not even approached by the security staff with queries about the nature of their visit.

"I fear this is the local commander's way of reminding us he does not want us here." Kraus replied. He seemed somewhat irritated when I instructed him to divert some of his men to recovering the computer core. It was only when I pointed to the clause in the recovery contract that gave agents of the Republic priority access to any material in the system that he agreed to my request."

"Then it's a good job Cal thought to invite me along isn't it?" Gayal commented and she strode up to the nearest data terminal and after removing her identity card from her pocket she inserted it into the machine. "Priority access granted." An electronic simulation of a woman's voice spoke, "How may I help you Gayal Karn?"

"Location of base commander and directions." Gayal said.

"Confirmed Gayal Karn. Commander Tayle located in command module, level four operations centre. Take west corridor and proceed through next three modules. Do you want the commander informed of your presence?"

Gayal looked around at the watching Jedi and Cal shook his head.

"Let's surprise him." he said.

"No." Gayal told the computer, "But clear me for passage through to the operations centre."

"Confirmed Gayal Karn. All hatchways configured to open at your command."

"And to think my father thought I didn't learn anything when I was with him at Farris Industries." Gayal said as she returned to the rest of the group.

"Nice work." Cal replied.

"Yeah," Lara added, "though I noticed how you made sure we need you along to open the doors."

As Gayal led the Jedi from the terminal a hooded figure entered through a docking port from a ship landed on a pad immediately outside the terminal structure. Unlike the Jedi this figure was approached by two guards.

"Identification." One of them said.

"You don't need to see my identification." Kyle Jenner replied, waving his hand in front of the guards while watching the Jedi leave.

The base operations centre resembled the bridge of a large starship, with sections allocated to monitoring environmental systems communications, and especially sensors. The sensor array installed on the base had to be able to identify and track tens of thousands of objects spread across the entire system, so no expense had been spared. The weight of data this provided of course meant that a large number of beings were required to check it all and so the number of comscan stations was larger than in most similar sized installations.

Again the command centre staff were of various species and all wore Farris Industries uniforms. This presented the Jedi with something of a challenge as they entered the command centre apparently unnoticed. Had this been a Republic base then the personnel would have worn uniforms that clearly identified their rank and position, but the Farris Industries uniforms were all identical and gave no hint as to which of the crewmen was Commander Tayle.

Anger.

The sudden flash of emotion made the four Jedi all look towards its source and they saw a cluster of men standing in a raised section of the command centre.

"What the hell are you doing here?" one of them called out, "I didn't give you permission to come here. Guards!"

"I gave them permission commander." Gayal replied loud enough for everyone in the command centre to hear her clearly, "I'm Gayal Karn. Didn't my mother tell you I'd be coming?"

All of the command centre staff froze, including the handful of guards who had been reacting to Commander Tayle's summons. With a wide grin on her face, Gayal strode towards Commander Tayle with the Jedi close behind her and she handed him her identity card.

"Now why didn't you meet us at the landing port commander?" Gayal demanded.

"Ah, well. I didn't-" the man spluttered, clearly taken by surprise.

"Gayal, the computer." Cal whispered to her.

"Oh yes." She responded, "Commander, where is the computer core you were instructed to recover? I assume you do have it don't you? It would be a shame if you'd failed to follow such an important order."

"Of course." Commander Tayle replied, having recovered his composure somewhat, "It was brought in about an hour ago. It's in recovery bay nine. It's where we've been keeping all the old computer junk. If you need spares they should be in there. Take whatever you want."

"Excellent." Kraus said, "Then I suggest we get out of the commander's way and head there immediately."

He then added, suggesting that he was doing the base commander a favour when in fact he was getting exactly what he wanted.

"We'll need someone to show us the way." Seth added.

"Well commander?" Gayal said, staring at the man.

Without replying to Gayal or the Jedi, Commander Tayle waved one of the guards over.

"Take them to bay nine. " he ordered, "Stay there with them."

The guard nodded. For a moment this confused Cal who had expected the man to salute, but then he remembered that these people were civilians who probably never saluted anyone.

"Follow me please." The guard then said to Gayal and he began to walk towards one of the command centre's exits.

"Well let's do as the man says." Seth said and he led the group as they followed the guard.

Leading the group from the command centre and to a nearby structure that held the workshop containing the salvaged computer core the guard did not speak until they reached their destinations.

"This is it." He announced.

"It's a heap of junk." Lara exclaimed as she stared at the individual storage drives and mounting racks laid out in the middle of the spacious room.

"Did you expect it factory fresh?" Cal asked, "It's a thousand years old."

"No," Lara replied, "But I thought that at least they would have kept it in one piece instead of taking the whole thing apart."

"They'd never have got it here like that." Seth told her, "This stuff must weight at least three tonnes together."

"I take it that it's all here?" Kraus said, looking at the guard.

"As far as I know sir." He replied.

Kraus rubbed his hands together.

"Then I suggest we start by sorting out the drives that are still fully intact." He said and he walked up to the nearest pile of computer parts.

Gayal just stood and watched as the four Jedi began to search through the salvaged computer for storage drives and examined each one in turn for damage, paying particular attention to the interface connections. Reaching into her pocket she took out a small flask and lifted it to her lips.

"Hey I'm dry!" she called out as she found the flask empty and she looked towards the guard who had remained by the door, "Where can a girl get a drink around here?" she asked.

"There's a cantina four decks up." The guard replied, "The Growling Bantha."

"Thanks." Gayal said and she turned back towards the Jedi, "Hey as much as I enjoy watching people sort through junk I'm off for a drink. Anyone coming?"

"Lara go with her." Cal said.

"Huh?" Lara replied, surprised at Cal both for suggesting she leave while there was still work to be done and that he would send her with Gayal when he knew that there was still lingering animosity between the pair.

"He is correct padawan." Kraus added, sensing her confusion, "We may have need of Miss Karn's undoubted influence again. So we should ensure that we are able to contact her when we do."

"Just remember you're working." Seth added without looking away from the drive he was inspecting, "So watch what you drink."

Dressed in a Farris Industries uniform Belle moved unnoticed through the base. She had been provided with a coded identity card that would give her access to any section of the facility but leave no trace of her passing; even her ship would be deleted from the records as soon as it departed. Loitering near to the recovery bay she saw Gayal and Lara leave. Though her primary mission here required her to gain access to the recovery bay in use by the Jedi, Belle was not the sort of person to simply rush headlong into any situation if it could be avoided and so she decided to instead follow the two young women to see where they went. After all, she had more than one mission to carry out and for that she needed to know where the entire party was.

She was not at all surprised when the pair made their way directly to a cantina several decks above the recovery bay in the same module. Gayal was well known for her antics and the fact that Lara had accompanied her suggested that Cal wanted her kept out of trouble but out of the way of the Jedi's work. Belle waited outside the cantina for a few moments, not wanting to risk running into her quarry if they should happen to leave straight away and then headed inside herself. She saw Gayal and Lara at the bar and she moved around them, taking care not to attract attention from anyone until she reached a spot from where she could observe them discretely.

Gayal purchased and downed two drinks in rapid succession, while Lara bought only one and was making it last. This told Belle that they intended to be here for some time and a plan began to form in her head.

Approaching the far end of the bar Belle waved over the barman she had seen serving Gayal and Lara, a man about ten years her junior.

"What are those two drinking?" she asked, pointing to Gayal and Lara.

"The brunette's on her third Jovan blaster," he replied, "and the blonde's making that kwanga juice last."

"I'll have one of each myself." Belle said, "Plus a light beer."

"Of course." The barman said and he quickly brought her the beverages.

"Thanks." Belle said as she lifted the beer and took a sip.

Even before the barman had turned away she was already reaching into her pocket and subtly removing a pair of plastic tubes containing a dull grey powder. She put the beer down and checked to make sure she was not being observed. Certain that she was safe she broke open the tubes and tipped the contents into the other two drinks before draining the rest of the beer and calling the barman back over.

"Take these to those two ladies." She said, "Tell them they have a secret admirer and I'll make it worth your while." And she smiled.

"Of course miss." the barman replied, taking back the drinks and Belle watched as he carried the drinks to Gayal and Lara before returning. "So where can we go?" Belle asked and a puzzled look appeared on the barman's face, "What? Do I have to spell it out for you? You did something for me and now I'm going to do something for you. Or did you think I'd just give you a five credit tip?"

The barman smiled. Though older than him, Belle was an attractive woman and the offer of a no strings attached physical encounter appealed to him.

"This way." He said and he led Belle out of the cantina through a back door into a service corridor. Belle noticed a hatch in the wall nearby labelled 'WASTE DISPOSAL' and she smiled.

"So come here and get your reward." Belle said, undoing the top button of her tunic. As he came closer Belle wrapped her arms around his neck and leant in as if to kiss him. Then she suddenly leant back again and with a single motion of her arms she broke his neck. She took hold of the corpse, catching it before it could hit the deck and dragged it to the hatch and bundled it inside. She listened to the sound of the dead barman sliding into the darkness and sighed, "Well one thing's for sure," she said to herself, "in about ten minutes you're going to be a lot thinner." And then she headed back into the bar.

4.

Though Kyle was confident that he could beat any one of the four Jedi present in a one-on-one fight, he was less certain that he could take them all on at once, despite what he had told Kassa. So rather than simply bursting into the recovery bay he had tracked them to he instead looked for a less obvious means of entry. Fortunately for him the base's modular construction method included a network of utility shafts designed to allow construction engineers easy access to every section while they connecting different units together. The shaft that ran vertically beside the recovery bay included a small access panel that was just large enough for him to crawl through. Four bolts held the panel in place and Kyle knew that using his lightsaber was the only way he would be able to create an opening. He used just the tip of his weapon to burn through the panel, taking care not to let the blade pass too far through. If this happened then the light from the weapon would alert the Jedi below to his presence. Kyle ceased cutting when he had created almost a complete circle and the centre was held in place by just a narrow strip of metal. Deactivating and returning his lightsaber to his belt, he used the Force to send a blast of telekinetic energy at the loose flap that was stronger than anything he could deliver physically in the confines of the shaft. This pushed the flap outwards; leaving a hole that he could use to get into the recovery bay itself.

The opening was at just the right height for Kyle to emerge amongst the metal scaffolding near the recovery bays ceiling. This mounted not only the chamber's lights but also an assortment of lifting rigs. Below him Kyle could see both Cal and Seth searching through the salvaged computer equipment while by this time Kraus had moved on to attempting to recover any data that remained using a modern portable computer. "Still crunching numbers old friend?" Kyle muttered to himself as he watched the older Jedi at work and he smiled before he began to clamber through the scaffolding to reach a more advantageous position. With Kyle's attention split between where he was going and observing the Jedi below he was not watching the flap of metal he had created in order to gain access to the chamber. The act of cutting and deforming this had strained the narrow section of metal that held it in place and under its own weight the flap began to droop, straining its only support even further. All of a sudden this reached a critical point and the metal cracked, sending the loose section bouncing through the beams of the scaffolding and to the floor below. "Someone's up there!" Seth exclaimed as he looked upwards.

"It's Kyle!" Cal added and immediately he reached for his lightsaber.

Kyle had to think quickly. He faced three Jedi knights and an armed security guard, odds he considered to be highly unfavourable. He could of course try to retreat back into the service shaft, but he considered this an unwise option and this left only way for him go. Down. Drawing his own lightsaber Kyle jumped from the scaffolding, using the Force to guide his descent. His weapon was ignited before he even landed and so as Seth rushed to meet him he was able to parry the Jedi's first swing with ease.

"Hello Seth." He commented as the pair stood with their weapons locked together, "Still not much of a swordsman I see. Perhaps you should stick to flying." And then he delivered a blast of telekinetic energy that propelled Seth backwards through the air.

"Kyle Jenner you are under arrest!" Cal yelled as he advanced, gripping his lightsaber one-handed and keeping the other hand ready to channel the Force should Kyle attempt another telekinetic blow.

There was another 'snap-hiss' as Kraus finally activated his lightsaber and came at Kyle from the side. Seeing this Cal charged as well, timing his run to reach the renegade at the same time as Kraus.

But Kyle chose not to meet the simultaneous charges and he instead leapt upwards, spinning through the air before landing in front of the startled security guard who reached for his sidearm. Before the weapon could be drawn Kyle head butted the guard and he collapsed, his hands now clutching at his bleeding face. With a wave of his hand Kyle opened the nearby door and ran through it.

"After him!" Seth shouted as he picked himself up.

"Go ahead." Kraus responded, shutting off his lightsaber, "I should stay here and guard this equipment."

"Got it." Cal said as he headed towards the door himself, "But let Lara know, she needs to know what's happening." and then he and Seth were gone.

Kraus walked over to where the injured guard lay on the floor, still conscious but bleeding heavily from his nose. There was a first aid kit mounted on the wall beside the door and Kraus removed it.

"Perhaps you should seek proper medical attention." He suggested as he knelt down to help the guard.

"I think so too." The injured man replied, "I'll have command send you more guards though."

"Thank you." Kraus said, "Now go."

Kraus helped the guard to his feet and then closed the door behind the man. Then he took out his point-to-point communicator and activated it.

"Kyle's here?" Lara said with surprise when Kraus informed her of the presence of the renegade and that her brother and Seth were in pursuit.

"Indeed, though his reason for being here is unknown. It may simply be a reaction to our presence. Be watchful young one, if he is able to escape Jedi Ashran and your master he may seek you out instead. Do not attempt to challenge him, he is too strong for you alone."

"Understood. Lara out." Lara said before putting her PTP link away.

"Come on drink up." Gayal said to Lara, ignoring the conversation she had just overheard, "You've barely touched that."

"Well I've already had a full glass." Lara replied.

"Look, someone went to the trouble of giving us a free drink each, so it would be rude not to drink it. See, I'll down mine in one."

"You down all yours in one it seems." Lara said and she picked up the drink that had apparently been sent to her as a gift.

"So who do you think it is was that sent us these?" Gayal said, looking around the bar, "Who looks like they're eying us up?"

"Everyone." Lara replied, "All the men anyway. But it'll take more than a glass of kwanga juice to impress me." Then she noticed that the colour seemed to be draining from Gayal's face, "Are you alright? You don't look well."

"I don't feel it." Gayal replied, "I think this stuff is going to my head."

"You drink too much." Lara said.

"Maybe, but normally I can handle it."

"I think you need to lie down for a while." Lara said and she looked for the barman. The man who had served them was gone, but there was another member of the staff close by and Lara waved at her instead.

"How may I help you?" the woman asked.

"My friend's not feeling well. Is there somewhere we can get a room? One with a bathroom preferably."

"Sure. Just head straight down that corridor opposite the bar. There are short-term lodgings for rent there. You can't miss them."

"Thanks." Lara said and as the barmaid walked away she lifted her drink and gulped down what was left,

"Come on," she said to Gayal who was now looking even paler, "let's get you out of here." And from across the cantina Belle watched as Lara helped Gayal out.

Heading down the passageway indicated by the barmaid Lara soon encountered a glowing holographic sign that simply read 'ROOMS' that was located above an open doorway. Now half carrying Gayal, she headed through the doorway and found a large headed bith sat behind a desk.

"Hi, we need a room." She said to the bith.

"What's wrong with her?" the both replied, looking at Gayal.

"She can't handle her drink." Lara told him, "She really needs to lie down for a while."

The bith grunted.

"Fifteen credits per night, plus a fifty credit security deposit."

"Here." Gayal groaned and she handed the both a credit stick.

The bith took this, deducted the cost of a night's lodgings and returned it along with a key card.

"Room three. Right down there." He said.

With just a nod of acknowledgement Lara took both the key and the credit stick and then helped Gayal to the room. As soon as they were inside she dragged Gayal over to the bed and lay her down on it.

Immediately Gayal closed her eyes and fell asleep.

"I know how you feel." Lara said to herself, yawning as she went to close the door, "I feel rather sleepy myself." Then she felt as if her head was starting to spin and she staggered towards the bed. Half way there she suddenly dropped to her knees and then fell forwards onto the floor where she lay still.

Following Gayal and Lara, Belle simply walked straight past the bith on the hotel reception desk and he did not even look up, assuming that she was simply one of the guests heading for her room. She heard a sudden 'clump' from inside the room she had watched Gayal and Lara go into and she smiled. She knocked on the door and then darted further down the corridor, halted only when she passed around a corner while she waited to see if the door opened. When it did not she returned to the door and opened it with her identity card, knowing that there would be no record of the door opening.

In front of her Belle saw Lara sprawled on the floor and Gayal on the bed, both unconscious as a result of the poison she had given them.

"You two should be careful what you drink." She said to herself as the door closed behind her. Then she knelt down beside Lara and began to strip her as she lay there helpless, leaving her in just her underwear. The problem that Belle faced was how to bind both Gayal and Lara in a manner that would be secure, safe and in the case of Lara leave no marks on her skin. But the biggest concern to her was how to keep them both quiet. Simply stuffing their mouths with cloth was too risky, the poison she had slipped into their drinks could quite easily cause either of them to be sick and such a gag would cause them to choke on their own vomit. Belle needed them out of the way, but she also needed them both alive. Had she known that she would be doing this she would have come prepared, with padded restraints and gags designed to hold their mouths open. But she had neither of these and so, much to her annoyance Belle was going to have to improvise.

The dispenser on Lara's belt provided more than enough synthrope to bind Gayal's hands and feet before tying her face down to the frame of the bed, but the thin polymer cord would leave clear indications of its use if she tried to bind Lara in the same way. Belle found the answer in the bathroom, taking a towel and tearing it into strips that she wrapped around the unconscious jedi's wrists and ankles prior to binding them together and then tying her to the bed beside Gayal as well as wrapping one last strip of cloth around her head to act as a blindfold. Returning to the bathroom Belle dismantled the shower curtain, taking from it two of the solid metal rings that held it up over its supporting rod. These she then pressed into the mouths of her captives, wedging the rings between their teeth.

Now all that remained was to disguise herself and Belle swiftly removed her uniform, exchanging it for the clothing she had removed from Lara. As a final touch Belle stood in front of the mirror and after raising the hood of her stolen robe she reached beneath it and pulled forwards some of her hair so that its blonde colour would be clearly visible to anyone she passed.

Belle then picked up her datapad and used it to access the base's security system and was somewhat startled to discover that the renegade former jedi knight Kyle Jenner was present and currently being pursued by both Cal and Seth. Pulling up the feed from the surveillance camera in the recovery bay she confirmed to herself that Kraus was alone and Belle smiled.

"Well thank you Mister Jenner." She muttered, "You've just made this a lot easier."

Then, taking one last look at her sleeping captives Belle left the room and headed back towards the recovery bay.

5.

Two guards stood outside the recovery bay door now, both armed with pulse wave rifles. Clearly the presence of Kyle Jenner had base security spooked. She walked up to the door, keeping her head low enough that the hood of her stolen robe concealed her face but not the hair she had carefully positioned to demonstrate that the hood concealed a blonde woman. She then opened the door and stepped inside, closing it immediately behind her.

In the centre of the recovery bay Kraus was working on interfacing a salvaged drive with his computer as Belle approached cautiously. He sensed her presence and glanced over his shoulder for a brief moment and Belle tensed as she waited to see if her disguise was working.

"Ah Lara." Kraus said as he turned back to his work, "I wasn't expecting you. Could you please hand me that probe over there?"

Belle continued to advance, passing by the probe without picking it up and her hand moved under her robe to the lightsaber on her belt.

Kraus suddenly stood up straight and spun around as he realised two things. Firstly it was not Lara under the robe, he could tell that whoever it was they were not a Jedi. Secondly the mysterious figure was now holding a lightsaber. Kraus went to draw his own lightsaber and there was a 'snap-hiss' as Belle activated the one she had stolen. Though she had no experience with this type of weapon and Kraus was an experienced Jedi, she still had the drop on him and while he was still lifting his own weapon up she struck. She swung the glowing blue blade horizontally and Kraus just gasped as it sliced through both his lightsaber and his hand, cutting both in half and sending the pieces clattering to the floor. Then she pointed the blade directly at Kraus and thrust it forwards through his chest. His eyes widened briefly as Belle withdrew the blade and shut off the weapon. Then he simply toppled forwards, knocking over a nearby stack of salvaged computer equipment.

Belle turned quickly to face the door and waited to see if the noise would bring the guards running in, but it seemed that it was going to take more than some dropped equipment to alert them. She hooked the lightsaber back on her belt and then just as calmly as when she had entered the room Belle left, once again making sure that the hood of her robe concealed her face and shut the door behind her.

Cal and Seth doggedly pursued Kyle through the corridors of the base. Aware of the identity of their quarry, the two Jedi could track him easily by searching the Force for the disturbance he caused even when out of sight.

"Jedi! Everyone get out of the way!" Seth yelled as the pursuit entered a public area filled with bystanders. The effect of this was immediate. At first the crowd stopped and looked towards the chase, then as they saw Kyle running through the crowd with the Jedi in pursuit those closest began to panic and scatter. A few stood their ground, confused as to how to react and those unfortunate enough to be directly in Kyle's path were forcibly pushed aside.

"He's heading for the terminal." Cal said as he realised where Kyle was going, "He must have a ship docked there."

"Call it in." Seth responded and Cal reached for his PTP link. Without breaking stride he activated the device.

"Control this is Jedi Udra, Jenner is headed for the terminal module. Seal it off now."

No reply came initially, but Cal kept hold of his PTP link as he continued to run through the gap in the crowd created by Kyle's passing.

"Confirmed Jedi Udra, section is being sealed. Reinforcements are en route, they'll be with you in five minutes."

"Did you catch that?" Cal said to Seth.

"Got it." Was all Seth said in response.

The passageway that led to the terminal module was crowded with bystanders and nowhere for them to run. To make matters worse the blast door at the far end was beginning to close, a warning klaxon sounding at the same time. Seeing this Kyle ground to a halt and focused his mind. He knew time was of the essence; Cal and Seth were getting closer with every moment. Through the Force he pushed against the segments of the blast door as they closed. Too thick to be ripped out of their mountings, Kyle instead concentrated on holding one of the segments in place. There was a groaning as the drive motor strained against the unexpected resistance, followed soon after by a brief flash of light. Letting go of the segment

Kyle ran headlong towards the partially closed blast door and dived through the gap left by the jammed segment.

In the terminal on the far side the guards were waiting, blaster drawn and aimed towards the entrance. Kyle was expecting this, having sensed the nervousness of the guards as he approached and even as he landed Kyle was activating his lightsaber.

"Open fire!" the lead guard yelled and a volley of shots erupted from their line.

The compact spatial distortions fired by the blasters streaked towards Kyle, but the renegade dived aside and held his lightsaber out in front of him to block the attacks. As each distortion hit the energy field surrounding the blade they burst harmlessly and Kyle kept moving. In moments he had reached the guards and there was a scream as he cut down their leader with a single stroke of his lightsaber. Shocked the remaining guards scattered, running for whatever cover they could find.

By the time Cal and Seth were able to get through the gap in the blast door Kyle was already through the hatch into his ship.

"Control can you keep that ship on the ground?" Cal asked using his PTP link as Seth attempted to open the hatchway. He could have simply opted to cut through it using his lightsaber, but he knew that if Kyle took off he could decompress not only the entire terminal, but also the passageway to the next module also owing to the jammed blast door.

"Negative Jedi Udra, vessel has already disconnected from our system."

"The *Bright Hope*." Cal said, "We can go after him."

"Forget it." Seth replied, stepping back from the hatch, "By the time we've got the ship ready for launch he'll already be in open space. Face it, he's escaped."

"Again." Cal added and then he yelled out loud, "Damn it!"

Seth pulled out his PTP link.

"Kraus its Seth." He said, "Kyle's gone." And then he paused as he waited for a response, "Kraus are you there?" he asked and when there was still no reply he looked at Cal, "Too engrossed in his work I bet." He said.

"Well we can tell him in person can't we?" Cal said and the Jedi smiled at one another.

They headed straight back to the recovery bay where they had left Kraus and encountered the two guards now stationed outside.

"Is he in there?" Seth asked.

"Just him." a guard replied, "The other one of you was here earlier, but only for a few minutes and then she left again." And then Seth opened the door.

"Oh kriff." Cal exclaimed when they saw Kraus' body lying on the floor and both he and Seth reacted by reaching for their lightsabers, searching the room for any signs of his killer, "Who could have done this?" he added.

"These wounds were caused by a lightsaber." Seth said.

"But Kyle couldn't have gotten back here in time to kill him." Cal replied.

Seth looked back at the guards.

"You say only one person entered the room while we were gone?" he asked.

"While we were here yes." One of them answered.

"And she's the only other person here with a lightsaber." Seth said, staring at Cal.

"No." Cal replied, "Lara couldn't have done this. She-" and then he stopped.

She will turn against you.

Cal had dismissed the warning as an attempt by the Dark Side to trick him into attacking his sister, but it suddenly returned to haunt him again.

"Problem?" Seth asked, "Something not quite right?"

"Everything's fine." Cal said, frowning, "If you think it was Lara that did this then give me proof."

The first thing Belle did when she returned to the hotel room was change back into the Farris Industries uniform and then she turned her attention to her two captives.

The poison she had given them had by this time worn off and both young women were struggling in vain to try and either get free or cry out for help. Belle climbed onto the bed in between them and both Gayal and Lara cried out again as best they could as they became aware of her presence. She took two more doses of the poison from her pocket and one after another, she held an open tube beneath one of their nostrils and clamped her hand over their wedged open mouths. When they were forced to inhale through their noses both young women also dragged the toxin up as well. Delivered this way, absorbed through the sensitive lining of their nostrils and deposited directly into their nervous system the effect was almost

immediate and Gayal and Lara were soon once again unconscious. Belle smiled and then set to work cutting them loose from the bed frame.

There was a woven rug on the floor of the room and Belle set Gayal down on this before rolling her up side it, securing it with more of the syntherope taken from Lara's belt mounted dispenser. Untying Lara and removing the plastic ring from her mouth Belle then proceeded to dress her in her own clothes again and gave her back her equipment belt, including her lightsaber. Belle was loath to return this, wanting desperately to take it as a trophy. But she knew that everything about Lara had to be set back the way it had been when the Jedi had first entered this room.

Leaving Lara unconscious on the bed Belle collected together all the pieces of syntherope and cloth used to bind her, picked up the rolled up rug that held Gayal and exited the room.

"Ah Lara. I wasn't expecting you. Could you please hand me that probe over there?"

Kraus stood up and turned as the hooded figure approached him. The figure's lightsaber came to life even as Kraus was reaching for his own weapon and after slicing through his hand the killer drove her lightsaber into his chest.

Seth paused the recording captured by the security camera that the base command centre had relayed to Kraus' computer.

"That proves nothing." Cal said, "You can't see her face."

"It's her lightsaber Cal, look at it and look at that too." And Seth pointed to the image where a length of long blonde hair could be seen hanging from beneath the figure's hood, "Plus we have Kraus' words themselves to identify her. Now if you're not going to help then just go back to Aurek Station. I'll contact Master Karas and get him to send someone to pick us up."

"No." Cal replied, "If you're taking her into custody I'm sure as hell going to be there to make sure you do it properly. I'm not having you claiming she resisted when you explain why you summarily executed her."

"Watch it." Seth replied, "She killed Kraus."

"Well that's still to be seen isn't it?"

Seth scowled at Cal briefly, then looked at the guards.

"Call this in." he said, "We need a location on Lara Udra immediately."

The bith heard the sound of heavy and fast moving footsteps in the passageway outside the hotel, but he assumed that it was nothing to with him. That was until Cal and Seth suddenly appeared on the other side of his desk with a squad of base security guards behind them, every one of which wore a heavy armoured vest and carried a rifle.

"I haven't done anything wrong!" he exclaimed, raising his hands.

Deception.

Clearly the bith has done something wrong, but it was obviously his lucky day because neither Cal nor Seth cared.

"We're looking for Lara Udra." Seth said sternly, "She was seen coming in here."

"Ah yes, of course." The bith replied and he tapped at his computer keyboard, "I have no one of that name here." He told them.

"Then we'll just have to check every room won't we?" Seth said.

"But my guests won't stand for that."

"Tough."

"Wait." Cal interrupted, placing a hand on Seth's shoulder and then he looked at the bith, "Try Gayal Karn."

"Of course. Yes we have a Gayal Karn, she and a second human paid for a room on her credit stick.

"Which one?" Cal asked.

"Three. Just down there."

"Thanks." Cal replied and he and Seth rushed down the passage indicated by the bith, the guards following behind.

The two Jedi pressed themselves up against the wall either side of the door to room three while the guards stood back and aimed their rifles at the door. Seth reached down and drew his lightsaber.

"There's no need for that." Cal said.

"Yes there bloody well is." Seth replied and he banged his fist on the door, "Padawan Udra! Open up!" and when there was no reply he banged on the door a second time.

Lara moaned as she awoke, confused as to how she had come to be here. Then she remembered coming here with Gayal and falling asleep. After that there was just a dream about being unable to move, see or speak.

Or was it a dream?

The banging at the door that had awoken her was suddenly repeated and Lara climbed off the bed to answer it. But even as her feet hit the floor the door suddenly slid open and Seth burst in with his lightsaber active.

"What's happening?" Lara asked as Cal and the guards followed Seth into the room. Apart from Cal every one of them was aiming a weapon at her.

"Padawan Udra you are under arrest for murder." Seth announced, "Now get down on your knees."

"Murder? Cal what's happening?"

"Look just do as he says Lara, this is serious."

"But—"

"I said get down!" Seth yelled, "And get your hands up where I can see them?"

Fear.

Cal and Seth both sensed Lara's fear, but to each of them it meant something different. To Cal she was afraid because she was being falsely accused of a crime, while to Seth she was afraid of the consequences now she had been caught.

Raising her hands over her head, Lara slowly knelt down in front of Seth.

"Binders." he said, holding out a hand to the nearest guard and the man reacted by passing him a set of binders from his belt, "Keep her covered." He said as he shut off his lightsaber and circled Lara, coming to a halt behind her. He grabbed her wrists and secured them behind her back before lifting her back to her feet, "Okay now let's get her out of here."

"Cal what's going on?" Lara asked, "I haven't done anything."

"Really?" Seth replied before Cal could, "Because we've seen a security recording of you murdering Jedi Trevan."

"Kraus is dead?" Lara exclaimed, "But Cal I've been here since Gayal and I left the bar. Someone took my clothes and tied me to the bed. Just ask Gayal." And then Lara realised that Gayal was gone, "Where is she?"

"Never mind that." Seth said, "Just move." And he shoved Lara towards the door.

"Cal help me! I haven't done anything."

"Are you coming?" Seth asked, looking at Cal who in turn looked into the face of his younger sister and saw the tears welling up in her eyes.

"No." Cal replied, "I need to get back to Aurek Station. You can call Master Karas for a pickup like you said."

"But Cal—" Lara began.

"It's alright Lara." He said before she could finish her sentence, "I'm going to sort this out. But I need to get a message to mom and dad first. Just do what they tell you and everything will be just fine."

The moment that Cal stepped off the *Bright Hope* back at Aurek Station he knew that every second counted. Seth would have contacted the Jedi enclave on Moldas as soon as he had secured Lara in the base's detention section and knowing Master Karas he would have sent a ship immediately. Cal needed to be able to get back to Phillos before that ship could arrive and take Lara away. Moving as quickly as he could he headed straight for his apartment and began to pack. He removed every last one of his and Lara's belongings from the apartment and stowed them aboard the *Bright Hope* and when this was complete he headed for the station's commerce levels. He proceeded directly to the nearest bank and handed over the credit stick that held the operating budget assigned to him by the Jedi Order for the next six months.

"I'd like to cash this in." he said, "All of it."

With the credit stick converted into hard currency Cal now had just one last task to carry out before he returned to Phillos. Heading back to his apartment he activated the communication terminal and began to write.

Mom and Dad,

Word may have already reached you that Lara is in serious trouble. I know she's done nothing wrong, but I'm worried that she won't get a fair hearing out here so I'm going to have to do something about it myself. Don't worry, I promise to look after my baby sister and hopefully we'll see you both sometime soon.

May the Force be with you.

Cal.

6.

The *Bright Hope* circled the base on Phillos as Cal studied the ships currently docked. It had been almost four days since he had left and that should not have been enough time for a ship to get here from Moldas. But as he circled the landing zone Cal saw the familiar logo of the freedom warriors, the non-Force sensitive troops who supported the jedi on one of the transports. Clearly Master Karas had diverted a passing ship to save time.

This was going to make things more difficult.

Cal emerged from the *Bright Hope* wearing his vacuum suit, minus its helmet and carrying a large holdall over one shoulder. As soon as he stepped through the terminal hatchway a pair of guards met him.

"Jedi knight." He announced and he held out his identification, "I'm here to help with the transfer."

One of the guards gave the card a cursory glance and then looked Cal in the face.

"You're just in time." He said, "They're moving her now."

"Which way?" Cal asked and the guard pointed.

"Two modules over." He said, "Forth level."

"Thanks." Cal replied and he headed off to meet his sister.

Cal stopped as soon as he reached the module that housed the detention section, in an empty corridor that had a turbolift cluster further along it. He set down the holdall and unzipped it. Inside was the helmet and a compact life support pack for his vacuum suit that he removed and hooked up to his suit. The bright pink suit and helmet Lara used and the pulse wave rifle with the underslung grenade launcher were also in the holdall, along with several grenades. He took one of these from the holdall and loaded it into the launcher mere seconds before the door to one of the turbolifts opened and a pair of freedom warriors stepped out, one of whom had what Cal recognised as Lara's equipment belt and lightsaber in one hand. Lara who had her wrists bound in front of her and Seth who was holding onto one of her arms then followed the freedom warriors out of the turbolift. Satisfied that this was the extent of the escort Cal lifted the rifle to his shoulder and fired the grenade launcher.

The communicator on Han Shill's desk activated.

"Mister Shill you should come quickly." A man said to him hurriedly.

"What is it?" Han asked.

"You asked to be informed if any of the tracking devices you had placed in those grenades were activated.

Well one of them just has been, in the Phillos system."

"I'm on my way." Han said and he leapt up from behind his desk and dashed from his office.

The grenade bounced off the inside of the turbolift and back into the corridor before it went off. There was no massive booming that echoed down the passageway however, Cal had been careful to select a non-explosive type. His intention was simply to free Lara and not harm anyone in the process if he could help it. Instead a thick cloud of white gas began to billow out of the grenade that rapidly expanded to fill the corridor.

Immediately the gas began to attack the eyes and throat of everyone caught within in and they began to cough. There was a 'snap-hiss' as Seth, realising that they were under attack briefly activated his lightsaber. But the gas was too strong even for him and he collapsed to the floor, coughing heavily.

"So what is it?" Han asked as he entered the communications monitoring room in his headquarters on Crassis Major.

"A single round sir." One of the staff responded, "Looks like a gas shell."

"What's the latest news from Phillos?" Han asked, "Do they still have Lara Udra in custody there?"

"Yes sir, though she's scheduled to be moved today."

"Then it looks like her big brother's rushing to the rescue. This isn't quite what we expected."

Slinging the rifle back over his shoulder Cal ran down the corridor. With his vacuum suit sealed the gas did not affect him at all and through the Force he could easily determine where in the thick cloud everyone was.

Fear.

Panic.

Surprise.

Cal first located the freedom warrior carrying Lara's belt and ripped it away from him. Then he looked around for Lara, finding her slumped nearby coughing as badly as the others.

"Get up!" he yelled

Disorientated by the gas and with her wrists still bound, Cal had to drag Lara back her feet and back down the passageway towards the holdall, pausing only to kick Seth's lightsaber as far as he could in the other direction when he spotted the weapon lying on the floor.

"Cal what are you doing? I can't see!" Lara protested as he pulled her along with him.

"It's called a rescue." Cal replied, "Or maybe you'd prefer it back in your cell?"

Cal reached down as they ran past the holdall and scooped it up and then he continued to drag Lara away. Meanwhile, though he was still suffering from the gas Seth was able to take out his PTP link and activated the device.

"Control," he gasped, "Padawan Udra has escaped. I think it was her brother. Lock down the facility and get the air down here cycled as quick as you can." Then he just dropped the PTP link and continued to cough.

Ahead of them Cal saw a blast door sliding shut to seal off the module, but this did not worry him at all. He planned to leave a different way. Halting beside a hatchway he knew to be an access point for one of the base's service shafts he let go of both the holdall and Lara he activated his lightsaber.

"Hold still." He said to his sister before slicing the binders from her wrists. Then he turned to the hatch and cut it open, "Inside." He added, pushing Lara into the shaft.

"Hey! I still can't see properly." She protested.

"Just climb." Cal replied, taking hold of one of her hand and placing it on a rung of the ladder running up the shaft.

"How far?"

"Just keep going. I'll be right behind you."

As Lara started to climb Cal retrieved the holdall and began to follow her, looking up to see how far up the shaft they were. Only when they reached the top did Cal tell Lara to stop.

"Okay this is it." He said and once more he cut open the shaft so that they could leave.

"Where are we?" Lara asked as Cal helped her from the shaft.

"The top of the module." Cal replied, "Now lets do something about your eyes."

He checked the pouches on Lara's belt for one of the emergency medical packs he knew she habitually carried and ripped it open. He quickly located a small bottle of eyewash that he tipped into both of Lara's eyes.

"How's that?" he asked.

"Better." Lara replied, blinking.

"Good." Cal said and he picked up the holdall and passed it to her, "Now change into this. Be quick about, they'll figure out where we are soon enough."

Seth stared up the shaft to where he could see light coming from the hole Cal had cut at the top.

"They've gone up." He said into his PTP link, "Top level I think. Seal it and get as many guards as you can up there to meet me. Remind them that both fugitives are armed and dangerous. Advise they shoot on sight."

"I can't believe you used this." Lara said, cradling the rifle and grenade launcher as Cal led the way through the top level of the module, "You knew I wanted to be the next one to have a go."

"Look at this way," Cal replied, "Master Karas is going to know we've got it now, so you may as well take some target practice when we're away." And Lara smiled.

"So where are we going?" Lara asked, "You still haven't explained how being stuck at the top of the module with guards and an angry jedi below us helps us escape."

"This'll do." Cal said as he opened a doorway and entered a small storeroom, "Shut the door and make sure your suit is sealed."

"But I don't have a life support pack."

"Two would have been too heavy to carry. Here, just plug into mine. We'll be sticking together anyway."

Then, as Lara closed the door and connected her suit to Cal's he activated his lightsaber and swung it above his head.

The energy blade easily cut through the ceiling and there was a sudden rush of air and an alarm as the room decompressed. Cal shut off his lightsaber and took hold of Lara's hand, "Now jump." he said and they both jumped through the wide hole, effortlessly landing on the roof of the module.

From here they could see out over most of the base, including as far as the terminal module and the starships docked around it.

"That's where we need to be." Cal said, "The *Bright Hope* is there."

"But we're up here and that's hundreds of metres away." Lara said, "We can't fly."

"In this gravity we can." Cal replied with grin, "Or as good as."

"Oh no." Lara said, "I've got a very bad feeling about this."

Holding hands once more Cal and Lara rushed towards the edge of the module and leapt in the direction of the *Bright Hope*, using the Force to give them a boost. Almost immediately they were free of the artificial gravity of the base and into the micro gravity of the moon itself. Slowly they began to arc back downwards, guided by Cal towards their waiting starship.

Anger.

Cal felt a quick flash of emotion and he risked a glance behind him. There he saw Seth glaring out of a viewport at them as guards rushed past behind him.

"Oh no!" Lara cried out as they came into land and Cal felt her grip tighten around his hand.

They landed upright exactly where Cal had wanted, on the upper hull of the *Bright Hope* close to the hatch.

"Now get in." he said as he unsealed the hatch, "We're leaving."

Once inside both Jedi rushed straight to the cockpit without even removing their helmets and sat down. Cal had left the flight systems of the ship switched on, but in a low power mode and isolated from the base's flight control system so all that was required to launch was to increase the power. Initially using repulsorlifts, Cal fired the ship's ion drives as soon as they were clear enough of the base that he would not risk damaging it and from there he let the ship fly a straight course away from the moon until they could enter hyperspace.

Gayal had no idea how long she had been unconscious for. The room she awoke in had a clinical appearance, all but one of its surfaces being white and the floor and three walls were also covered in a thick padded material. Her first instinct was to try and get up, but as she tried to move she found that her arms were restrained by a straight jacket and at the same time she felt the presence of something wedged into her mouth.

Turning her head, Gayal saw that the fourth wall of the room was transparent and that beyond it there were three figures, two of whom she recognised at once.

"It's very sad." Heddren Drud said, "Her family saw no other choice but to commit her."

"Indeed." Belle Shill added, "My diagnosis is that she's incurable. Now are your instructions clear doctor?"

"Of course." The third man said, "She will remain here with us. She is prone to outbreaks of extreme violence against herself and others so she is to be kept restrained at all times. Don't worry. Your clients may rest assured that she's not going anywhere and no-one will ever hear of her presence here."

Travelling by back routes as much as possible to avoid Republic patrols the *Bright Hope* spent four days in hyperspace until Cal called Lara back to the cockpit.

"We've arrived." He told her as the bright lights of hyperspace reverted back to the pinpricks of light from stars against blackness in real space.

"Yes but arrived where?"

"The only place that's safe for us now." Cal replied and he steered the *Bright Hope* towards the massive space station that floated ahead of them.

There was a second delatya-class ship in the hangar that Cal flew the *Bright Hope* into, but it was powered down and dark. This was a ship that Cal and Lara had seized from salvagers trying to steal from the wreckage of ships in the nearby Kinnis system. It had been left here simply because it was not considered worth the effort of recovering.

But Cal had not come here for the ship; he was more interested in the station itself. An ancient alien built space station, Dorn Station was rarely visited and then only by outlaw traffic, the occupants of which did not remain long or venture deep inside. It had only one permanent resident, known only to Cal and Lara themselves, who stood at the far side of the hangar as Cal and Lara disembarked from their ship.

"In need of my help you are." Tyshon said, "Help and shelter I sense. Welcome I say, your new home this is."