

# STAR WARS

## TALES OF THE JEDI



### IV-I: REDEMPTION

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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...

**REDEMPTION**

THE UNEXPECTED RETURN OF GAYAL KARN PROVIDES CAL AND LARA UDRA WITH THE WITNESS THEY NEED TO CLEAR LARA OF MURDER. BUT GAYAL'S MARRIAGE TO ERILL GRASSIS HAS NOT GONE DOWN WELL WITH THE OTHER FOUNDING FAMILIES AND THEY ENLIST HELP IN TRYING TO DETERMINE WHY THE GRASSIS FAMILY IS SO INTERESTED IN HER...

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

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# 1 .

The speeder ride from the Crassis estate back to the one owned by the Karn family had been tense, with no words exchanged at all during the mercifully short journey. Sial and her sister Keera followed their parents out of the vehicle and only then did Sial speak up.

"Mom, what is all this with Gayal? How can she be married to that old man?" she asked.

"Not now." Faye Crassis responded as she and her husband Del looked back down the driveway to where several other luxury vehicles were following their own.

"But wasn't she supposed to be on Alderaan?" Keera then asked.

"Your mother said not now." Del said sternly, "Now get inside the house. There are things we need to discuss."

"Like what?" Sial asked and Del beckoned to one of the suited security staff that had appeared at the front door when they arrived.

"Just get these two out of the way." He said softly, "We're about to meet with the heads of the other families and we can't be disturbed. Take them to a club or something if you have to."

Sial and Keera looked at one another. Though Sial was not far from turning twenty-one, neither of them were old enough to legally enter any licensed drinking establishment on the world of Crassis Major yet and their history of doing just that had often earned them their parents' anger. Now though it seemed that they were positively encouraging such behaviour.

"Can we take the speeder?" Keera asked.

"Yes, yes, just go." Faye replied and the two young women got back inside the back of the vehicle while the guard joined the driver in the front. As the speeder then drove off, circling around to pass by the other vehicles approaching Del and Faye waited for their guests to reach the house.

The first vehicle to reach them held Trent and Calleen Narthis, descendants of Jayk Narthis, the captain of the survey ship and the man after whom the Narthis Sector was named. The Karns were also descended from one of the survey team who had originally charted the sector three centuries earlier and since then these descendants had become publicly known as the Founding Families and enjoyed a high public profile. Like the Karns, they both wore stern expressions on their faces.

"Please see our guests to the main office." Del told another member of the household staff who had appeared at the front door to greet her employers upon their return, "And let the kitchen know we'll be needing refreshment for about a dozen." The woman nodded and led the two guests inside.

The next vehicle to arrive also held two occupants, but unlike Trent and Calleen these two were not related. Nissel Fayl emerged first, a young woman barely into her twenties who had suddenly found herself the head of her household when her mother had supposedly suffered a mental breakdown and been hospitalised. The man accompanying her was Han Shill, the head of Shill Security, the private military company that had handled all of the security needs of the Founding Families for the last two decades. Though not one of the Founding Families, the Shill Family remained at the centre of most of their planning as a matter of necessity. "We're meeting in the main office." Faye said to Han and he nodded.

"I know the way." He replied and he placed a hand on Nissel's shoulder to guide her inside.

The third and final speeder held the most people, six all together. Like the occupants of the previous speeders they were all human, though their skin was of a much darker colour. General Josh Drud was the first to get out of the vehicle, dressed in a formal version of his Planetary Defence Force uniform and he held the door for his sister in law Millel and brother Heddren to follow him. On the other side of the vehicle Josh and Heddren's younger sister Kayza emerged first followed by Heddren and Millel's two adult children, their son Hiran and daughter Jaynie, both of whom were a similar age to Sial.

"Come with us." Del said, "Everything should be ready." And together the members of the Drud and Karn families made their way to where the others were already waiting.

Del picked up a datapad as he sat down and tapped at the screen, accessing the advanced communication system that the house was equipped with. This aligned the subspace communication antenna and four more figures promptly appeared in the room in holographic form. Two of these were human, Corva Torin and his wife Deesa who spent their time travelling the sector aboard their luxury starship. On the other hand, the final two were members of the aquatic nautolan species. Ket Runn and his wife Fial resided permanently on the ocean world of Delvad and were rarely even seen away from their own estate on the seabed. For them to travel to another world was utterly unheard of.

"Well, now that we're all here I suppose we can begin." Del said as he sat down.

"How about we start with what the hell is your daughter doing with Erill Crassis in the first place?" Trent snapped, "Let alone married to him."

"And how come the Crassis family has suddenly ejected Shill Security and replaced them with mandalorians?" the image of Fial Runn added.

Faye looked at Heddren Drud.

"I thought you said that Gayal wasn't going to be causing any problems." She said, scowling at him. Then she turned to Han, "And you. Didn't your sister say that she wasn't going to be hanging around with that jedi any more?"

"And she still won't." Han replied, "I doubt that Erill will be wanting to share his young wife with anyone."

"I don't understand what's going on." Nissel said, "Can someone explain it to me please?" and Del sighed.

"Our daughter Gayal was involved with Cal Udra." He said.

"The jedi knight?" Nissel responded.

"Know any other Cal Udras?" Jaynie Drud commented, drawing brief glares from around the room.

"Exactly." Del said, "So Han and Heddren came up with a little scheme to get her out of the way and hopefully deal with the jedi as well. Gayal was supposed to be committed to an asylum while Cal's sister was to be blamed for killing another. Unfortunately Cal went on the run with Lara and now somehow the Crassis family has been able to figure out where Gayal was sent."

"An asylum?" Nissel asked, "Like mom?"

"The same one." Heddren said, "Why?"

"Erill Crassis came to see me and was asking about mom." She said, "He wanted to know if I'd been to visit her and I told him about how Mister Drud had taken care of everything."

"That would right before he came to see us." Kayza said.

"He spoke with grandpa." Hiran added.

"About the Fayl's apparently." Kayza said and Millel held her head in her hands.

"Oh dad, what have you done?" she said.

"Erill must have figured everything out from there." Han said, "And hired those damned mandalorians to make sure that I didn't find out what they were up to. But I still don't get why he did it? What's he gained?"

"Nothing." Corva Torin said, "Gayal Karn just isn't that important."

"Erill obviously thinks that she is." Josh said.

"I'm more worried about the attention she could attract from the authorities." Han said, "Remember that she was with Lara Udra at the time she was supposed to have murdered that old jedi. She can clear her and I doubt that either the Jedi Order or the Sector Rangers will want to waste any time in speaking with her."

"If Gayal was committed then how can she get married?" Nissel asked, "Surely she wouldn't be considered competent."

"A false name was used." Heddren told her, "There are no records of her having been at the hospital. All that is known is what was claimed publicly about her going away to school."

"Can you get the marriage overturned?" Del asked, looking straight at Heddren, "I'll be damned if I let Erill Crassis take my daughter without a fight."

"Not without more information." He answered, "We need to get someone inside the Crassis estate to tell us what they are up to."

"And how do we do that?" Deesa Torin asked, "Now that they've got rid of Han's people there's only the Crassis family themselves and those mandalorian killers."

"Yes but there is still someone who can get inside the house." Heddren said, "Someone who was not there today." Then he looked the holograms of the Runns, "You'll need to buy a gift." He said.

Two ships dropped out of hyperspace in rapid succession close to Aurek Station, the massive space station that functioned both as a navigational beacon guiding ships through hyperspace in this region and also as the Republic's centre of operations in the Narthis Sector.

The first of these was the *Star of Light*, a starstorm-class courier piloted by the jedi shadow Tarris Blake.

Tarris had been sent to the Narthis Sector to hunt down the jedi knight Cal Udra and his younger sister and padawan learner Lara after Lara was accused of killing another jedi and Cal had helped her to escape justice before both fled into the wilderness beyond Republic-controlled space. However, when he had finally caught up with the fugitives he had come to believe that Lara was innocent of the murder and had decided upon a course of action almost unheard of amongst shadows like him.

"Aurek Station this is *Star of Light*," he signalled to the space station as he flew towards it, "I request permission for two vessels to dock, my own and the *Bright Hope*."

There was a pause before the flight controllers aboard Aurek Station responded to this, just as Tarris had expected there to be. The delaya-class *Bright Hope* was widely known to be the ship assigned to Cal and Lara Udra by the Jedi Order and right now the powerful ship was directly behind him.  
“Err, clearance granted *Star of Light*. Bays eighteen and nineteen are standing by.”

“Quickly!” Master Sergeant Wedge Keltan yelled at his men as they hurried to put on their armoured space suits. The marines had been alerted to the approach of the renegade jedi and although they were apparently in the custody of Tarris Blake, Aurek Station’s bothan administrator Ishtel Varr’kay was taking no chances and had ordered a squad of troops to be deployed to the docking bay.

“Sergeant,” a woman’s voice called out and Wedge looked around to see a woman wearing the uniform of a sector ranger standing in the doorway, “I take it you’ve heard then?” she asked.

“Just got the call Agent Raser.” Wedge replied, “And you?”

“I’ve three of my men heading to the docking bay already.” She said, nodding, “I thought I’d come and see how you were doing.”

“Concerned about taking on jedi huh?” Wedge asked as he finished putting on his armour and picked up his helmet and blast rifle.

“It could be a trap. Two renegade jedi, two ships. How is the flight controller to know that is was that other jedi that asked for permission to dock?” Jule asked in response.

“Well there’s only way to find out.” Wedge said and he pointed to the doorway with his helmet, “After you Agent Raser.”

“Gee thanks.” She replied, “Is that your plan for trouble? Hide behind me?”

“If it works.” Wedge said and then accompanied by Wedge’s squad they made their way to Aurek Station’s main hangar bay.

## 2.

The *Star of Light* was the first of the two Jedi craft to enter the bay, flying over the waiting marine squad and sector rangers. This was followed moments later by the much larger *Bright Hope* and as both ships deployed their landing gear and settled down onto the deck the Republic troops took up positions to cover their access ramps.

Tarris Blake was the first to emerge from the ships, the stern faced man striding down the access ramp of the *Star of Light* and walking up to Jule.

"Agent Raser, what brings you and these men here?" he asked, looking around at Wedge's squad of marines and the other sector rangers.

However, before Jule could reply Cal and Lara came walking down the ramp of the *Bright Hope* with a dog following just behind them on the end of a leash held by a massive labour droid.

"Stand to!" Wedge yelled and the marines dropped to their knees and aimed their weapons at the two Jedi.

Jule went for the blaster holstered at her hip, but as the weapon cleared the holster Tarris gave out a shout. "No!" he yelled, reaching out with his hand and through the Force to pluck the weapon from her grasp, "Have your people stand down Agent Raser." He said, "Jedi Cal Udra and Padawan Lara Udra are in my custody."

"They're armed." Wedge noted as he saw the lightsabers that both Cal and Lara still carried.

"Not to mention that they turned up piloting a heavily armed starship." Jule added.

"Perhaps so. But they are in my custody nevertheless." Tarris said.

"Oh we'll be good." Cal said as he and Lara stood at the base of the ramp, neither making any move that could prompt the gathered marines or sector rangers to attack.

"We promise." Lara added.

"What's going on here?" Jule said, staring at Tarris, "If you want me to back down then you're going to have to explain yourself. Those two are listed as fugitives from justice."

"Neither of them is a fugitive Agent Raser." Tarris said, "As I already told you they are in my custody."

"Agent Raser!" a voice called out, "Why are these two not in custody?" and Jule looked around to see a short statured figure with furred skin approaching across the hangar bay.

*Anger.*

The bothan's feelings were easy for all three Jedi to pick up on, but they just waited calmly as he hurried towards Jule.

"Ah, administrator." She said, "I wasn't expecting you here."

"I wanted to see the fugitives taken into custody for myself. Yet here they are standing right in front of your men and a squad of marines and still free. Why?" Administrator Varr'kay demanded.

"As I was just explaining administrator, the Udras are in my custody. Now order your troops to stand down." Tarris told him.

"This is outrageous! I demand that those two are disarmed and secured." The bothan replied.

"They will remain with me administrator." Tarris told him, "And they will be treated as I see fit."

"But."

"But nothing administrator." Tarris interrupted as Varr'kay tried to protest, "The Jedi Order established jurisdiction over the killing of Jedi Knight Kraus Trevan and the incident which saw Padawan Udra freed, the Republic has no claim on them. I am the representative of the Jedi Order here, so I will decide what is to be done about them. Now have your men stand down and stand aside. I need to procure lodgings suitable for us. Alternatively we can all just stand here doing nothing. But I warn you administrator, my patience is great but is not without its limits."

"Is that supposed to be a threat?" Varr'kay asked.

"Its just good advice." Cal responded.

"Stand down." Jule said and after a moment's pause the other sector rangers lowered their weapons. Then Jule extended her hand towards Tarris, "I'd like my sidearm back if you don't mind." She added and the Jedi handed her weapon back to her.

"And your marines administrator?" Tarris asked, glaring at Varr'kay.

"Stand down sergeant." The bothan said before he stared Tarris in the face, "But I warn you, I will take this up with the Jedi Order. This is my space station."

"Funny." Lara said, "I thought it belonged to the Republic."

"Jedi Udra! Padawan Udra!" Tarris then snapped, "Follow me."

"Of course Jedi Blake." Cal replied and then he and Lara followed Tarris as he walked towards the exit from the hangar with their droid following along silently with the dog, leaving the Republic personnel behind them. "So what do you suppose is going on?" Wedge asked Jule as she watched the Jedi leave and before she could reply Administrator Varr'kay also hurried away. "I don't know." She said, "But I've got a very bad feeling about it."

There were few landmasses on the world of Delvad, the few that existed being used for the limited industry and services that were required to support the needs of its inhabitants. Most of these inhabitants were some of the richest beings in the sector and they inhabited large artificial islands that made use of powerful repulsorlift engines to float above the waves and could be relocated depending upon the whims of their owners. Out of the Founding Families only the Runns who made their home on the seabed of Delvad did not own such a property. But today Ket and Fial made one of their rare trips away from their underwater estate to visit the floating residence of the Crassis family.

The Crassis residence had been lowered to just above the water level when the Runns' speeder approached and when Charity Crassis heard the sound of its approach while she swam in the ocean she climbed out of the water and put on a robe over her swimming costume before heading inside where she was met by a pair of mandalorian warriors.

"There is a vehicle approaching and requesting permission to dock." One of them told her, "Shall we let it continue or shoot it down?" and Charity sighed.

"Let them dock." She replied, "It's the Runns. I'd recognise their speeder anywhere. Have them brought to the lounge. Oh and have the kitchen send up something." And she walked around the two soldiers and disappeared from view.

When the Runns were shown into the lounge they were accompanied by a pair of humans and from their appearance and demeanour Charity recognised them as the sort of people generally employed by Shill Security. These two individuals stopped at the door while the Runns sat down and Charity's mandalorian guards moved to stand behind her and eyed up the other bodyguards suspiciously, both pairs of guards looking as if they were waiting for an excuse to attack.

"Welcome." Charity said to the Runns, "Help yourself to refreshments. Now to what do I owe the pleasure?"

"Charity, we were hoping that you would be able to do us a favour." Fial replied.

"Yes, we were hoping you could pass on a gift to your family." Ket added.

"A gift?" Charity replied, frowning briefly.

"That's right." Fial said and she produced a small decorative box from inside her robes and placed it on the table between them. Then she opened it to reveal the brooch it contained.

"It's beautiful." Charity said.

"Part of our collection." Ket said, "I remember your father admiring it many years ago."

"And we thought that it would make a good gift to mark recent events." Fial added and Charity frowned again.

"What recent events?" she asked. Then she glanced around at the mandalorians standing behind her, "Wait, is this something to do with why all of the Shill Security people cleared out of here and these guys moved in instead?" she added.

"Possibly." Ket answered, "I believe that with the changes in his domestic situation your father decided that other changes were needed to smooth the transition."

"Smooth the transition? These guys don't strike me as smoothing anything." Charity said, looking at the armoured mandalorians and comparing them to the suited Shill Security guards, "Hang on, what's this about domestic changes. What's been happening?"

"Why your father's wedding of course." Ket replied, "What else?"

"Ket," Fial said, looking at her husband, "I think that Erill may not have told Charity the good news." Then she turned back towards Charity, "I'm so terribly sorry, we didn't mean to spoil his surprise. Perhaps we should be leaving."

"Perhaps." Charity told her, "I need to change."

"We'll show ourselves out." Ket said as the two nautolans got to their feet to leave.

Charity remained sat on the couch and when she heard the sound of the front door closing she looked at one of the mandalorians.

"Get me a ship." She said, "I need to go."

"Go where?" the mandalorian asked in response.

"Somewhere I thought I'd never go again." Charity said, "Home."

Jedi Master Ben Karas walked into the communications room of the Jedi enclave on Moldas to see the hologram of Administrator Varr'kay waiting for him. He had not spoken with the bothan in some time and the administrator had refused to tell any of the enclave staff exactly why he wanted to speak with their master, only that it was important and it was urgent.

"Ah, here he is now." A female Jedi who had been stood by the hologram said when she saw Master Karas and she backed away, "Ben I don't think he's in a good mood." She whispered as Master Karas took her place.

"Thanks Karrie, I'll deal with it." He replied and then he looked at the hologram, "How may I help you Administrator Varr'kay?" he asked.

"The Udras are here." The bothan replied.

"What?" Master Karas exclaimed, "You've caught them?"

"No. The just arrived here with that other Jedi you sent to catch them, Tarris Blake. I tried to have them secured but he wouldn't have it. He says they're in his custody, but they're clearly not. Both of them are still carrying their lightsabers around. Now what do you intend to do about it?"

Master Karas was shocked by this sudden revelation. The Jedi shadows operated outside the normal chain of command for the Jedi Order, an arrangement that allowed them to investigate any allegation of involvement with the Dark Side no matter where it led. Even to the Jedi Council itself if necessary.

"I'm sorry administrator, but Jedi Blake does not answer to me." He said.

"No, but those other two do. Or at least they're supposed to. So why don't you come and get them? I don't want them causing trouble on my station a moment longer than necessary. And let me tell you Master Karas, if you don't deal with them then I'll go over your head to the council if I have to." And then the hologram flickered and disappeared.

Master Karas turned around to the female Jedi and looked at her blankly.

"I told you he was in a bad mood." She said.

"Who have we got available?" Master Karas asked.

"Seth's not back from the Narthis Sector yet." Karrie replied, "But if we can get word to him then he could turn back and be there ahead of us."

"We'll need more than just one." Master Karas said, "Seth will need back up."

"What for? You're not suggesting that we challenge the authority of a Jedi shadow are you Ben?"

"Technically no. But I do want to remind him that we were handling the investigation before him. I want enough strength to convince him that the Udras aren't just going to slip away again."

"Then I suppose Hargood's out of the question?" Karrie asked.

"Of course he is." Master Karas replied, "He's strong but I daren't let him loose while Tarris is about. A shadow would never accept a fallen Jedi running around free."

"That's not what Varr'kay just said." Karrie pointed out, "He seemed to think that Cal and Lara were still free."

"Karrie, go and see who you can find." Master Karas said, "I'll be right here."

"Doing what?" Karrie asked him.

"Trying to get Jedi Blake to tell me what he's up to."



### 3.

"Ghost no! Get off the furniture." Lara called out as she pulled the dog from the couch. Then she looked around at the labour droid now stood motionless in the corner of the spacious room, "You should have stopped him Shorty." She said.

"I don't think that dog shooing was included in his programming." Cal said as he emerged from the kitchen and immediately Ghost rushed towards him and looked up at the plate of food he carried expectantly. "We're going to have to do something about it though Cal." Lara said, "I mean it was alright him sitting on the furniture on Dorn Station, but this is good quality stuff and your dog is getting hair all over it."

"Oh so you admit he's mine now do you?" Cal replied, dropping a small chunk of food to Ghost, "Anyway it doesn't matter. Tarris has rented this place and he's already said that all this will go. This room is going to be for exercise and training, while our own rooms will be reserved for private meditation. Ghost can sit pretty much anywhere."

"We still need to figure out where we're going to put a dog refresher unit." Lara said, "At least on Dorn Station we had those gardens, but I don't think that letting him go in any of Aurek Station's garden areas will go down too well." The she paused and smiled, "Perhaps we could rent our old place again and take him there to poop."

Cal glared at her.

"Lara that is stupid and unhygienic. Ghost might catch something." He said and then they were interrupted by a chiming sound, "Someone's calling." Cal said, "Go get-" but before he could finish his sentence Tarris appeared from his bedroom and without saying a word he walked over to a desk that had a computer terminal and communicator mounted on it.

"Jedi Blake." he said, activating the communicator as he sat down and on the display an image of Master Karas appeared just as Cal and Lara moved to stand behind Tarris.

"Ah, Jedi Blake," Master Karas said, "I've been trying to locate you."

"I have only just procured these lodgings." Tarris replied, "That is why there was no way to reach me earlier. Now how may I help you?"

"Its about them." Master Karas said, his image looking at both Cal and Lara in turn, "Administrator Varr'kay wants them removed from his station as soon as possible. I can have Jedi Ashran with you in two days and a larger party within a week to secure them for transport."

"There will be no need for that Master Karas." Tarris replied, "I have the Udras in my custody while I am continuing my investigation."

"Investigation? What investigation?"

"Why the investigation into the killing of Jedi Trevan of course." Tarris said.

"But Lara Udra killed-" Master Karas began.

"I have discovered evidence to the contrary," Tarris interrupted, "and I intend to follow it up before I condemn an innocent woman."

"What evidence?" Master Karas asked, now confused.

"A witness Master Karas. Gayal Karn has reappeared it seems."

"Gayal Crassis now." Lara commented and Cal glared at her.

"Padawan Udra has claimed that she was being held captive with Gayal Karn at the time of Jedi Trevan's killing and I intend to visit her to confirm the padawan's alibi. Only then will I render judgement as to whether the Udras are to be formally arrested and charged." Tarris explained.

"But Cal-" Master Karas began.

"Jedi Udra's actions, though on the face of them criminal, were motivated solely by a wish to correct your impatient rush to convict his sister. If she is cleared then as far as I am concerned so is he. Now is there anything else Master Karas? I must review my case notes before the trip to Crassis Major."

"No. No that's all." Master Karas replied.

"Good. Blake out." Tarris said and before the jedi master could say another word he shut off the communicator.

"Great, so when do we leave?" Cal asked, looking at Tarris.

"We do not." Tarris responded without bothering to look at him, "I will go to Crassis Major alone. You and your padawan will remain here until I return."

"But I know Gayal." Cal said, "She and I-"

"Yes Jedi Udra." Tarris interrupted, "I am well aware of the attachment you have to Gayal Karn and it is precisely because of that that I am forbidding you from accompanying me now. It may not be a crime, but

the Jedi Code is quite clear on the subject of emotional attachment. It is best avoided.”

”Without emotional attachment between jedi neither Lara nor I would even exist.” Cal replied, referring to the fact that the Udras’ parents were both jedi themselves.

”And without your attachment to this Karn woman your sister would not have needed to be separated from you while you attempted to apprehend Kyle Jenner.” Tarris pointed out, “Furthermore it was your emotional attachment to your padawan that caused you to act outside the law rather than acting rationally to clear her. Your emotions got you into this and now I will attempt to discover the truth without you.”

When Charity got out of the speeder in front of the Crassis mansion she paused to look up at the building she had grown up in. Then she heard two sudden bangs from somewhere on the other side of the building and she looked at the vehicle’s driver.

”Have my things taken inside.” She said, “I’m going around the back.” And she set off around the side of the mansion.

As she reached the rear of the building she saw a well-dressed man reloading a double barrelled projectile weapon while an automated target positioned on the lawn moved back and forth. Either side of the man stood a pair of mandalorians who wore their full armour including their helmets for protection from the noise produced by the weapon.

”Luke!” Charity called out as she walked towards him, but thanks to the ear defenders he wore the man did not hear her, “Luke!” she yelled again, waving at him and one of the mandalorians tapped Luke Crassis on his shoulder and pointed at her.

Luke frowned. Then he took off his ear defenders and handed both them and his weapon to one of the mandalorians.

”What the hell are you doing here Charity?” he asked.

”Am I not welcome here then?” she responded.”

”I thought it was you who decided that you didn’t want to come here again?” Luke said, “What’s it been now? Two years since you last showed your face here? A year since your last message? And you’re always conveniently away whenever any of us try and visit you on Delvad.”

Now standing right in front of her older brother. Charity produced the broach given to her by the Runns.

”Ket and Fial asked me to bring this to you.” She said, “They said it’s a present.”

Luke took the broach and handed it to a mandalorian.

”Check this.” He said, “Look for surveillance devices, explosives and toxins.”

”Yes sir.” The mandalorian replied before he carried the broach away.

”So that’s what we’ve come to now is it?” Charity asked, “Accusing the other Founding Families of trying to kill us or spy on us. Oh and what’s with these mandalorians?”

”It’s complicated.” Luke said, “Perhaps if you kept up with family business then you’d-“

”Oh are you going to go through all this again Luke?” Charity said, “Why do you think I left in the first place? It’s because of all this.”

”What? You mean work? What do you do with your days on Delvad exactly Charity?” Luke responded.

”Well I don’t let greedy gold diggers start stealing our father’s money.” She replied.

”Ah. Let me guess, the Runns told you.” Luke said.

”Yes. They told me alright. What the hell is going on Luke? How could father marry that stupid girl? How much money has he wasted showering her with gifts?”

”And there it is. Same old Charity. You’re not willing to work for any of your own, but you do seem rather attached to the family’s money.”

”And you’re not?” Charity replied.

”Mother left me fifty million credits when she died, same as you.” Luke said, “But I didn’t beg father for an allowance of twenty thousand a week as well.”

”You should. Get as much as you can before that Gayal Karn takes it all for herself. That’s what I’m going to do if I can’t put a stop to this ridiculous situation you’ve done nothing about.”

”Father knows what he’s doing.” Luke said.

”Oh what a pile of poodoo.” Charity, “If you believe that then maybe you’re starting to go senile like father must be.”

Angrily Luke lashed out; slapping Charity across the face hard enough for force her to recoil away from him. “Luke!” a voice yelled and both he and Charity looked around to see their father standing in a doorway to the mansion supported by a droid on one side and Luke’s wife Salla on the other, “Is that how you were raised Luke?” Erill asked as he slowly made his way outside. Then he looked at Charity, “Charity my dear it is so wonderful of you to pay us a visit. Do come inside, there is someone I want you to speak to.”

Wiping a tear from her eyes Charity approached her father and took Salla’s place to help him back inside.

"What's she doing back?" Salla asked when they had disappeared from view.

"Come to protect her inheritance." Luke replied, "She thinks that Gayal Karn married father for his money."

"Well it's a reasonable assumption for anyone who doesn't know what we do." Salla pointed out.

"Maybe. But she's going over the top. She already has enough money that she can continue to sit around and do nothing at all, but she can't stand the idea of someone else getting part of what she sees as her own. What's worse is that father lets her get away with it. He sees our mother in her and that makes him blind to her faults of which greed is only one."

"Yes I've noticed that." Salla said, "For someone called Charity she isn't exactly very charitable is she?" and Luke grinned.

"At least my parents didn't call her Chastity." He said.

Datapads and primitive hardcopy documents surrounded Gayal when she heard the sound of heavy breathing and she looked up to see her husband Erill being helped into the room by his personal droid Victor and daughter Charity.

"Charity?" Gayal said as Erill was helped to a nearby chair and sat down, "I wasn't expecting you."

"Oh you thought that you could help yourself to my family's money without me doing something about it did you? We may not have seen one another in three years but that doesn't mean I didn't keep hearing about your parents having to bribe officials to keep you out of prison. What happened? Did they finally cut you off so you came looking for someone else to take advantage of?"

"Charity that's quite enough." Erill said, "Now sit down next to me and let's hear what Gayal has found for us."

"Found? What do you mean found?" Charity asked as she sat down beside her father.

"Young Gayal has been looking through some of our notes to see how she can further our goals." Erill replied.

"You're kidding me right?" Charity responded, "Our family has been poking about under every rock in the sector for three hundred years and achieved what? Nothing. Now you expect her to suddenly get you inside that place?"

Erill smiled.

"Ah, but Gayal is such a very special young lady." He said, "You see whereas for three hundred years we have been limited to poking about under rocks as you say, she is actually able to put into practice the techniques our discoveries describe."

Charity stared at Gayal.

"You - you mean that she's-" and then she trailed off.

"Yes, young Gayal is Force-sensitive." Erill responded.

"Cal ran a blood test on me." Gayal added.

"Cal? You mean Cal Udra?" Charity asked.

"The very same." Erill answered, "He and Gayal were in a relationship for a short time. Before we married of course." And Charity scowled.

"Just what is the idea of that anyway?" she asked, "It's the most stupid thing I've ever heard of."

"What you said earlier about Gayal being cut off and needing someone else to look after her was partially correct. Her family did indeed cast her out for being in a relationship with the young jedi and had her imprisoned, but when I found out what he knew about her I saw to her release."

"He sent the mandalorians to rescue me." Gayal added.

"So that's why they've replaced Shill Security." Charity said.

"Indeed." Erill replied.

"But won't Han Shill be angry about that?" Charity asked, "I thought you always said that the Shills were intended to make sure all the Families played things straight with one another."

"That no longer applies I'm afraid." Erill said, "The reason I married Gayal was to prevent the Karns from trying to snatch her back and the others are none too pleased about it."

"I'll bet. Han Shill will-" Charity began.

"Han Shill will shortly have other things to worry about." Erill interrupted, "You see when Gayal was abducted it was by Belle Shill and just for good measure she also killed a jedi knight and framed Cal's sister Lara for it, but now that Gayal is back her testimony can clear Lara. Naturally this means giving the authorities just enough information to point the finger at the Shills."

"This is insane!" Charity snapped as she got back to her feet, "Father you have to stop this now. Tell the Karns they can have her back and have her blame the jedi. The others will ruin us if you don't."

"No, they will not." Erill told her, "Now if you wish to stay here then I must insist that you abide by my decisions. Gayal stays with us."

"Fine have it your way." Charity said, "But don't count on my help for any of this." And she turned and stormed out of the room.

"I never have." Erill called out after her.

#### 4.

Rather than land at a commercial starport and then proceed to the Crassis estate by speeder, Tarris piloted the *Star of Light* directly towards the private landing pad in the grounds of the mansion. However, as was often the case with Jedi shadows who relied on fear and surprise he neglected to call ahead to warn the Crassis family that he was coming and so the sudden appearance of a starship hovering above the estate before setting down on the landing pad brought well armed and armoured Mandalorians rushing from the smaller structure built close to the mansion that housed them.

From inside the *Star of Light* Jule looked out through the cockpit canopy as the armoured figures formed a perimeter around the ship while Tarris shut down its engines.

"I don't think they're pleased to see us." She said, "Perhaps you should have called ahead."

"It would not have brought us here any faster." Tarris replied, "Besides Agent Raser, I would have thought that you would appreciate arriving without giving them the opportunity to remove Gayal Karn from the premises."

"How can you be certain that they haven't already done that?" Jule asked and Tarris stared out of the cockpit viewport towards the mansion itself.

"Because I can sense her." He answered.

Tarris strode down the *Star of Light's* access ramp ahead of Jule to find that one of the Mandalorians had chosen not to wear his helmet and was instead standing within the ring formed by the others and holding it as he waited close to the bottom of the ramp.

"I am Kaylor Mott." He announced, "I am the head of security for the Crassis family and you will explain your uninvited presence here."

"I thought that the Crassis family used Shill Security for its security needs." Jule replied and Kaylor smiled.

"They decided that their security needed improving." Kaylor replied, "Now who are you and what do you want?"

"My name is Jedi Tarris Blake and this is Agent Jule Raser of the sector rangers." Tarris answered. That they were a Jedi and a sector ranger was obvious from the clothing they wore, but now Kaylor had names to go with that.

"And why are you here?" he said, "If you have a warrant to search these premises then I suggest you present it to me now."

"We have no warrant." Tarris replied, "We are not here to conduct a search."

"Then why are you here?" Kaylor asked.

"We need to speak with Gayal Karn." Jule said.

"There is no one of that name here." Kaylor replied. Then before either Jule or Tarris could respond he added, "However, there is a Gayal Crassis present."

"That is her." Tarris said.

"Then come with me." Kaylor told them, "You are expected."

From a window on the upper floor of the mansion Luke and Salla looked out at the landing pad.

"Well they're here." Luke said, "Just as father said would happen."

"Maybe, but that's not Cal Udra." Salla pointed out.

"No it's not. Which is probably for the best. My father's last encounter with Cal didn't go so well." Luke said,

"But I just hope he knows what he's doing. A Jedi shadow is far more dangerous."

Surrounded by a squad of four other Mandalorians, Jule and Tarris were led into the mansion by Kaylor. As they walked Jule studied the armoured warriors. She knew that they were known not only for their effectiveness in combat but also for their frequent conflicts with the Jedi Order and she wondered how they and Tarris were feeling about being so close to one another, however none of them gave any indication of this before they were led into a lounge where Erill and Gayal waited for them.

To Jule it appeared odd to see Gayal, woman in her early twenties sitting hand in hand with Erill Crassis, a man into his seventies and reliant on the cylinder of oxygen that stood next to the couch. Previous instances where she had encountered such situations had rapidly seen the woman becoming a grieving if very wealthy widow under investigation for her husband's sudden demise.

"Do please sit down." Erill said, indicating another couch facing the one he and Gayal sat on.

"Isn't Cal here?" Gayal asked.

"No." Tarris replied simply, "I have ordered Cal Udra to remain on Aurek Station until this situation is resolved to my satisfaction. Now you will tell us what happened in the Phillos system."

*Fear.*

Tarris felt the brief burst of emotion from Gayal when he mentioned the place where Kraus Trevan had been murdered and the last place she had been seen for six months until her sudden reappearance right here.

"Go on my dear." Erill said, "Tell them what they need to know."

Tarris glanced at Erill. He could sense traces of the Dark Side in the man, but nothing specific and certainly not enough to justify taking any direct action against the elderly man.

"Lara and I were drugged." Gayal said, knowing that she had to keep the information she actually gave completely honest. There was too much chance that Tarris would sense any attempt at dishonesty, "I think someone put something in our drinks. Anyway, when we came to we were bound, gagged and blindfolded."

"But you're certain that Lara was still with you?" Jule asked.

"Yes, she was there. We were right next to one another. I felt the skin of her arm, I'm certain that someone stole her clothes while they left us there. Then later on she came back and drugged me again. That's the last thing I remember."

"You said 'she'." Jule commented, "Gayal, do you know who did that to you?" and Gayal glanced at Erill who nodded back at her.

"Yes." She said, "It was Belle Shill. She kept me captive until Erill sent Kaylor Mott and his men to rescue me."

"Belle Shill." Jule repeated and she looked at Tarris.

"That is fully consistent with the other evidence." He said, "Testimony from the Udras and the timing of her presence at Phillos to destroy the security recordings before I could recover them."

"Then our next task is to track down Belle Shill." Jule said.

Luke and Salla descended the staircase as Jule and Tarris were escorted back to the Star of Light by a unit of mandalorians. This time Kaylor did not go with them however. Instead he stood at the bottom of the staircase with Erill and Gayal.

"So how did it go father?" Luke asked.

"Very well my son." Erill replied and he looked at Gayal and smiled, "Gayal played her part perfectly."

"I did it for Cal." She said.

"No matter." Salla said, "So long as they believed you then they shouldn't be causing us any trouble."

"I'm sure everything that she said was true." Luke said and then he grinned, "From a certain point of view."

"Now we just need to ensure that Gayal remains safe and undisturbed." Erill said.

"What do you mean?" Gayal asked.

"Well unfortunately the other Families are all aware that you are here with us and I suspect that the sudden reappearance of Charity was no coincidence. I think that they may try and use her to get to you my dear." Erill explained.

"My men are quite capable of protecting all of you." Kaylor said.

"Yes I'm sure that you are Mister Mott." Erill said, "But I would rather that no one even made any attempt to take Gayal from us."

"What are you saying?" Gayal asked nervously.

"Oh don't worry." Luke told her, "Father's not suggesting locking you away anywhere, but for now its probably best if we find you somewhere less obvious to live."

"Precisely my son." Erill said.

"The estate on Delvad?" Salla suggested.

"Those repulsor driven islands are very defensible." Kaylor commented, "Particularly if we install shield generators and some concealed weapon emplacements."

"I was thinking of somewhere less accessible." Erill said, "Delvad is too close."

Salla smiled.

"Well that property developer did want to sell you some land on Lovas." She said.

"Lovas?" Gayal asked, "But that's right on the edge of the sector."

"My men could easily establish a fortified position there." Kaylor said, nodding, "It's a new colony so there's plenty of construction going on. Material should be easy enough to come by."

"And what we can't get hold of immediately can be taken there without attracting too much attention." Luke added.

"We'll have to make sure that anyone we bring in won't be a security risk." Salla said.

"My men can handle that easily." Kaylor said, "Colonial construction can be dangerous at the best of times."

Too many unknowns about new worlds.”

”What are you saying?” Gayal asked.

”Oh never you mind my dear.” Erill replied, ”All you need to know is that you will be well taken care of.”

”By shutting me away on some ball of mud at the edge of space?” Gayal snapped.

”In a luxury home with every convenience.” Salla said.

”And as the local colony expands you’ll be able to get out more.” Luke added, ”I’m sure that Mister Mott’s men won’t mind escorting you.”

”Then it’s settled.” Erill said, ”Salla my dear, would you mind contacting that real estate fellow to see what he has? Get details of everything and provide them to Gayal and Mister Mott. I want something that Mister Mott is happy can be properly protected and more importantly somewhere that my wife will be comfortable in her new home.”

Though Charity spent most of her time at the family estate on Delvad she also maintained an apartment on Crassis Major for when she needed to travel to the sector capital. No mandalorians guarded this apartment however; Charity had purchased it herself and never arranged for any security beyond that offered by the building’s management service. Therefore when Kayza Drud and her eldest brother Josh arrived it was Charity herself that answered the door to them, her face appearing on a monitor beside it when they rang the bell.

”Hi Charity.” Kayza said, ”We heard you were in town and thought we’d pay you a visit.”

”Come on up.” Charity replied and at the same time as the screen went blank the front door to the building opened.

The Druds entered the building and took the turbolift up to the floor where Charity’s apartment was located. Unusually for a member of the Founding Families, this was not the penthouse but was instead located roughly half way up the building’s height. When the turbolift door opened onto a hallway Josh and Kayza saw Charity standing in the doorway of her apartment.

”Taking a risk aren’t you?” Josh asked her.

”Oh don’t start with that.” Charity replied, ”Just come on in.”

”He can’t help it.” Kayza replied as she walked up to Charity and embraced her briefly, ”It’s the general in him. He sees security threats everywhere.”

”Yeah I get it.” Charity said as she closed the door, ”So to what do I owe this visit?”

”Curiosity.” Josh answered and Kayza smiled.

”We were surprised when we heard you were back on Crassis Major.” She said, ”So since we were heading out for a meal we thought we’d drop by and find out why.”

Charity frowned as she accompanied her guests to the living room and sat down.

”Haven’t you heard about my new stepmother?” she asked and Josh and Kayza exchanged glances, ”So you do know.” Charity added, ”My father says that she’s important to this grand scheme everyone’s involved with, but I’m certain that she’s more interested in our money. You know what she’s like.”

Again Josh and Kayza looked at one another, both thinking how out of Charity and Gayal it was Charity that seemed more interested in money. On the other hand Gayal had a reputation for her uncontrolled behaviour.

”So you don’t believe that they’re really in love then?” Kayza asked.

”Stang no.” Charity exclaimed, ”The word ‘love’ wasn’t mentioned once. Trust me. Father openly admitted that it’s all some scheme to keep the Karns from taking her back. Personally I think the Karns would be well advised to let her stay with my father.”

”But why would your family be so desperate to have her under their roof?” Kayza asked.

”Yes, what makes her so important?” Josh added.

”I don’t know the specifics.” Charity replied, ”I’m not interested in this grand quest you’re all obsessed with. But it’s something to do with her abilities.”

”Abilities?” Josh said, ”What abilities?”

”Oh didn’t you know? Gayal Karn is Force sensitive.” Charity said and in unison Josh and Kayza’s jaws dropped open.

## 5.

Once again the other Founding Families had gathered at the Karn estate to discuss what was to be done about events involving Gayal and the Crassis family. This time however, as well the holograms of Corva and Deesa the Torins were represented in person by Corva's younger brother Vorn and cousin Airia who also happened to be the sector's representative in the Galactic Senate. On the other hand both Hiran and Jaynie Drud were missing from this gathering. When Josh and Kayza arrived they were shown straight into the room where the rest had gathered.

"Erill's really done it now." Josh said before he even sat down, "It looks like he thinks he's got the key to getting into the library."

"How?" Airia asked and she scowled.

"Oh Charity was quite informative." Kayza replied, "She was only too happy to tell us how her new stepmother is Force sensitive." And then all eyes turned towards Del and Faye Karn who just looked back at them blankly.

"How is this possible?" Trent Narthis demanded, glaring at the Karns, "Gayal's twenty four years old and you never found out she was Force sensitive?"

"Well how were we supposed to know?" Faye snapped back.

"A midi-chlorian test perhaps?" Vorn Torin commented, staring at his drink rather than anyone else in particular.

"Have any of our families tested their children?" Nissal asked, looking around at those who actually had any.

"No." Heddren replied, "Running such tests as standard would risk bringing the attention of the Jedi Order."

"Well we've got their attention now haven't we?" Josh said, "Because it was Cal Udra that found out about Gayal's Force sensitivity. That's probably what brought them together in the first place. He was trying to recruit her to the Jedi Order."

"That would be a disaster." Calleen Narthis said.

"Obviously." Deesa Torin added, "So what are we going to do about it?"

"Erill Crassis may have a way into the library, but he does not have access to it." Ket Runn pointed out.

"With those mandalorians under their command the Crassis family could try and take it by force couldn't they?" Millel Drud responded.

"Would they really attack openly?" Deesa asked, "There's no way they could cover it up."

"Not necessarily." Josh replied, "They could use their estate on Delvad as a staging area and deploy forces via submarines. If they hit hard and fast enough they could take out the Runns' defences and communications before they could call for help."

"Not that we can afford to have the local police or military coming anywhere near our estate anyway." Fial added.

"Han, what can you do to prevent that?" Trent asked, turning to the only person not part of the Founding Families present.

"We can increase the number of guards protecting the Runns' home." He replied, "And we can do it without anyone noticing for the same reason those mandalorians Erill's hired could attack without being noticed by the Republic. But I'd rather act to prevent a strike."

"What do you recommend?" Corva asked.

"Show them we expect an attack and that we're ready to defend against it." Josh said.

"But how?" Calleen asked.

"Move all your properties on Delvad closer to the library." Han said, "Ideally position them in a tight cluster above the Runns' property. Is that acceptable to you?" he then added, turning to look at the holograms of the two nautolans.

"For three centuries the Runn family has acted as guardians of the library alone." Ket replied.

"For three centuries none of our families has acted in such a brazen manner." Trent pointed out.

"Oh I don't know." Vorn said, still looking into his drink. Then he looked up and turned his head towards Nissel, "What about her mother trying to bring the jedi under her influence?"

Just then there was a knock at one of the doors.

"Enter." Faye called out and one of her household staff walked into the room.

"I'm sorry to disturb you ma'am." He said, "But there is an urgent communication for you."

"Who is it?" Faye asked.

"It's Mister Luke Crassis ma'am."



"What the hell does he want?" Del exclaimed.

"He declined to say sir. Shall I ask him to call back another time?"

"No have him put through." Faye replied, "I want to hear what he has to say."

"Of course ma'am." The servant said and he bowed slightly before leaving the room.

Then there was a flickering in the middle of the room and a hologram of Luke Crassis appeared standing there and looked around.

"Ah, you're all here." He said with a smile, "This will save so much time."

"Damn you Luke! Just what is the old man playing at?" Trent snapped.

"Nothing that any of you wouldn't have done in his place." Luke responded.

"Where is your father?" Del asked.

"My father is not a well man." Luke replied, "He has retired for the night."

"If Gayal's with him I doubt he'll make it until morning." Vorn commented and Deesa scowled at him.

"Do you have to Vorn?" she said and he shrugged and poured himself another drink.

"What do you want Luke?" Heddren asked.

"The same as everyone here, wealth and power." Luke replied, "But more to the point I called to try and smooth things over."

"Then return Gayal to us." Faye told him.

"What? So you can stick her in another asylum? I don't think so. You see Faye your impulsive actions mean that she doesn't trust you any more. Right now she's on her way to a secure location where we can have her study sith texts without worrying about the jedi taking her from us. Now if we send her back to you how long do you think it will be before she tries to run away? Right into the arms of Cal Udra probably." Luke explained.

"Are you trying to say that all this is for the good of us all?" Ket asked.

"From a certain point of view yes." Luke said, "Now you all have a choice to make. Either accept what has happened and we can go back to working together to complete our plan, or try to take Gayal from us and we can go to war."

The assembled members of the Founding Families looked at one another nervously, none of them wanting to be the first to speak.

"Oh and one last thing before I leave you to make your decision." Luke added and his hologram looked towards Han, "I'm afraid that Tarris Blake and Jule Raser came to speak with Gayal earlier today and she was rather keen to help clear her former boyfriend and his sister of all involvement in the killing of Kraus Trevan. She told them that it was Belle that did it. So be careful Han, because I think that the jedi are going to paying you a visit very soon." And then the hologram flickered and vanished.

Cal and Lara were sat on a couch watching a video screen with Ghost at their feet when the door to the apartment opened to reveal both Tarris and Jule.

"So what happened?" Lara asked, getting to her feet as Tarris and Jule entered.

"And where's Gayal?" Cal added as he too stood up.

"Gayal Crassis is with her husband and family." Tarris replied.

"And now surrounded by mandalorians for security." Jule added.

"But you spoke with her?" Cal asked.

"Yes we did." Jule replied and she looked at Lara, "She confirmed everything you've said about being drugged and having your robes stolen."

"So I've been cleared?" Lara asked expectantly.

"Yes you have." Jule replied.

"There is more." Tarris added, "Gayal Crassis also named Belle Shill as her abductor. Therefore I shall be communicating with Master Karas on Moldas and recommending that he deploy a sufficient force to the Narthis Sector to allow us to raid Shill Security and uncover their full role in this."

"But what about Gayal?" Cal asked, "Why isn't she here with you?"

"She didn't ask to leave the Crassis home." Jule said.

"But they're holding her prisoner, they must be." Cal replied.

"It did not seem that way to me Jedi Udra." Tarris told him.

"Are you saying that she's happy with them?" Cal asked.

"No. I did not sense that." Tarris replied, "But neither did I sense that she was being held against her will."

"Then this should be easy then." Cal said and he walked towards the door, pushing between Jule and Tarris.

"Cal where are you going?" Lara called after him.

"To the *Bright Hope*." He replied, "Then to Crassis Major. I'm going to get Gayal back no matter what it

takes.”

”Oh I’ve got a very bad feeling about this.” Lara said.

When Cal reached the *Bright Hope* and began to bring its systems on line he found a message waiting in the ship’s communication system and his heart jumped when he saw that it was from Gayal. Immediately he opened it, expecting it to be a plea for help. But instead it was something quite different.

CAL I LOVE YOU BUT I HAVE TO STAY WITH ERILL CRASSIS AND HIS FAMILY. I AM BEING WELL TREATED AND PROTECTED. I LEAVE TOMORROW MORNING FOR LOVAS. HOPEFULLY BY NOW YOU AND LARA WILL HAVE BEEN CLEARED OF ANY WRONGDOING AND ARE FREE AGAIN. PLEASE DON’T TRY AND FOLLOW ME.

LOVE GAYAL.

”Lovas.” Cal said to himself, “Gayal, I’m coming for you.”

## 6.

It took just under seventeen hours for the *Bright Hope* to reach Lovas and Cal piloted the ship down to the only starport on the planet, a simple landing field that was barely worthy of being called a starport at all. Walking down the *Bright Hope's* access ramp Cal strode across the landing field towards the small structure on the outskirts where landings and departures would be recorded and as he entered the building the two staff on duty gasped at the sight of the Jedi knight standing in front of them and glaring at them.

"Err, how may I help you?" one of them said.

"I need to know about recent arrivals." Cal said, "How many have you had in the last twenty four hours from outside the system?"

"Just two. A medium transport and a scout ship."

Cal knew that neither of these would be the vessel used to bring Gayal to Lovas. The Crassis family invariably travelled in style and would have used a well armed yacht.

"What about landings elsewhere?" he asked.

"We had a sensor contact early this morning that came down to the north of the colony." The other man replied.

"Yeah, in the mountains where all those fancy houses are being put up." The first added and Cal instantly knew that this was what he was looking for.

"Tell me about them." He said, "These houses I mean."

"Well they're the usual sort of thing that gets put up on a new world. Rich people get to buy up unspoiled land and build their dream house before the planet gets too crowded for them."

"Show me on a map." Cal said and he and one of the men walked over to the large map on one of the walls.

"The ship came down somewhere around here." The man said and he ran his finger along a stretch the mountainside to the north of the new colony.

"Are there a lot of people there at the moment?" Cal asked.

"No. So far most of the development is in the early stages. Agents are just starting to go round the sector trying to sell them off."

"Good, that will make things a lot easier. But I need a way to get there that doesn't involve a seventy-metre starship. Does one of you have a speeder I can use?"

The speeder bike was battered and its engine in need of a tune up, but it took Cal where he needed to go. The mountains to the north of the colony on Lovas not the massive peaks that existed elsewhere on the planet, but they were high enough that homes built on them could be considered private. In the case of the one just recently purchased by the Crassis family, also easily defensible.

The main house was mounted on the side of a sheer drop overlooking the only approach road and when Cal stopped to survey the area he observed several locations where fortifications were being dug into the mountainside. Already he could see a missile battery pointed skywards and the beginnings of an energy weapon emplacement to cover the road. And in between these strong points he saw the unmistakable armoured forms of Mandalorian warriors.

"Looks like this is the place then." He said to himself.

Then he looked at the main house again and focused his mind on it, reaching out through the Force. Inside he felt the presence of numerous lifeforms, but only one of them really mattered to him. One the uppermost floor of the house he sensed a presence that stood out like a beacon shining in the night and Cal knew that there was only one person who would create such a presence in the Force to him.

Gayal.

The problem facing Cal however, was how to reach her. Even without the weapon emplacements being fully operational yet, the Mandalorians still had complete control over the approach to the house and even if Cal made it to the front door he would still have to fight his way up to the top and then back out again with Gayal. But then he looked up at the rock face above the house. So far the work on fortifying the house had not extended to this area, though Cal guessed that there would still be patrols up there. But patrols of Mandalorians could be sensed and avoided and then all he had to do was scale down the rock face and into the house right where Gayal was located.

Smiling to himself, Cal returned to the speeder bike and started it up again. He rode through the mountains, making use of its repulsorlift engine to carry him over the rough terrain until he had circled around behind the house and further up the mountain. Leaving the bike concealed by a cluster of bushes Cal drew his lightsaber and headed for the sheer drop that he needed to climb down.

Cal moved cautiously, using the force to watch for the approach of any of the mandalorians but he reached the edge of the drop without sensing anything and he peered over it.

"Why does it never look as far down from below?" he muttered to himself just before he became aware of something coming towards him.

This was not a presence he felt through the Force; in fact he sensed absolutely nothing through it. Instead it was a repeated sound, that of metal hitting stone and there was only one thing that Cal could think of that would explain that. Droids.

Whirling around Cal activated his lightsaber and there was a 'snap-hiss' as the bright blue blade extended. He found himself confronted by a pair of skeletal humanoid machines, each one with weapons built into their forearms.

"Halt!" they called out in unison and they both raised their right arms, "This area is-" but before the machine could complete it's warning Cal leapt into action. He rushed forwards with his lightsaber held out in front of him and he plunged it through the chest casing of one of the droids before spinning around to face the second.

This droid did not attempt any further warnings; instead it opened fire with the weapon built into its raised arm. This was a pulse wave blaster and Cal swung his lightsaber to block the spatial distortions projected by the deadly energy weapon, causing each one to burst as they struck his blade. Then just as the droid paused to reassess its strategy Cal struck again, bring his lightsaber up in an arc that took off the droid's raised arm. The severed limb dropped to the ground and bounced towards the edge of the drop. Stepping back from the droid, Cal reached out with one hand towards the arm and grabbed hold of it through the Force to prevent it from falling over the edge. If that happened then there was the risk that its sudden landing below could alert someone to his presence here. Of course that assumed that the droids had not already transmitted a warning.

The droid raised its other arm and Cal rolled as there was a screeching sound as a jet of flame erupted from the weapon, barely missing the jedi. Cal rolled again as the droid halted the jet of fire, this time heading towards the machine and he lashed out with a foot and kicked one of the droid's legs out from under it. The machine promptly toppled over and as it began to point its flamethrower-equipped arm towards Cal again he used his lightsaber to remove it. However, the blade of plasma also sliced through the fuel line to the weapon and as soon as the flammable fluid began to leak out it ignited.

"Oh kriff!" Cal exclaimed, diving away as the droid was consumed in flames. He jumped back to his feet and stood with his lightsaber raised, gripping it both hands as he looked at the droid. However the flames had done just what Cal needed them to do and the machine was now just a burning wreck. Shutting down his lightsaber, Cal then turned his attention back to the drop he had to descend.

Cal unravelled a length of syntherope from the dispenser on his belt and secured it around a large rock near the edge before throwing the other end over it. Then he grasped the line in both hands and used it to steady himself as he began to descend.

The roof of the house that protruded from the rock face sloped gently and as Cal reached it he maintained his grip with one hand on the syntherope line just in case he slipped. In the other hand he took hold of his lightsaber again and reactivated it, using it to cut a hole in the roof large enough for him to drop through. He found himself in an empty room, totally devoid of furniture or decoration and demonstrating how rapidly the Crassis family had seen fit to send Gayal here. They had not bothered to finish the property first. Cal closed his eyes and took a deep breath as he reached out through the Force, hunting for the distinctive presence of Gayal. Locating this nearby he set off in that direction.

Cal crept through the house, seeing more signs that it had been inhabited before it was fully ready. Numerous tools and building materials were scattered about, while protective sheets covered what little furniture he saw. His path took him towards the side of the house that overlooked the main approach and as he approached a doorway that led into a lounge right at the very front of it he saw a familiar figure silhouetted in front of the massive windows.

"Gayal." He called out as he stepped through the doorway and she turned around to look back at him, smiling.

Then her face fell and her eyes widened.

"No!" she yelled and Cal turned just in time to see the rifle butt that slammed into his face. A second blow was struck from behind him to his knees and he dropped to all fours, letting go of his lightsaber before it too hit the floor and rolled across, "Don't hurt him!" Gayal called out as the two mandalorian warriors whose presence Cal had missed thanks to his being too focused on Gayal grabbed him by the arms and lifted him back to his feet.

"Who are you?" one of the mandalorians demanded, "What are you doing here?"

"I just dropped in to deliver a box of candy." Cal replied, "And a calling card. What can I say? The lady loves it."

"Candy huh? Then where is it?" the mandalorian asked.

"I think I dropped it on the climb down." Cal answered.

"Let him go." Gayal ordered and the two mandalorians released their grip on Cal, causing him to drop to all fours again and he spat out a mouthful of blood onto the floor.

"Oh Cal what are you doing here?" Gayal asked as she picked up Cal's lightsaber and then crouched down in front of him.

"I'm here to rescue you." He said as he took back his lightsaber and then accepted Gayal's help to stand up again.

"I asked you not to come." She said.

"But why?" Cal asked.

"Because in exchange for releasing me and allowing me to clear you and Lara, I promised Erill that I'd help him."

"Releasing you?" Cal asked and he looked at the mandalorians, "You don't look very free to me."

"They're here to protect me." Gayal replied, "Do you know where I've been? Where Belle Shill and Heddren Drud sent me?"

"No but-" Cal began.

"They stuck me in an asylum Cal! I spent months all alone in that cell and I'm not having my parents send me back there." Gayal told him.

"I'll protect you." Cal said.

"Like you did on Phillos? Cal your sister was right there with me and Belle still got to us both. No, these soldiers are my best chance to stay free."

"And marrying Erill Crassis?" Cal asked.

"Part of the plan." Gayal replied, "If I'm his wife then I'm part of the Crassis family instead and my parents can't claim to be my next of kin to have me committed again." Then she smiled and kissed him, "But you could stay for a while if you want. Until tomorrow maybe. They won't mind." And she looked at one of the mandalorians.

"I can't." Cal replied, "Sham marriage or not, you're still married and I don't think that the Jedi Order would look too kindly on my having an affair with a married woman. It's bad enough I came rushing all the way out here without permission."

"Then the guards will show you out." Gayal said and she nodded to a mandalorian.

"This way sir." The masked soldier said and he pointed towards the doorway Cal had entered through.

"Thanks." Cal said as he limped towards the doorway, "My speeder bike is further up the mountain. Oh and you should send a maintenance guy up there as well. I saw a couple of broken droids while I was up there." Then just as he reached the door he paused and looked back towards Gayal, "I love you Gayal." He said.

"I know." She replied and then she turned away from him to look out of the window.