

STAR WARS

TALES OF THE JEDI



IV-V: SCANDAL

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...

SCANDAL

WITH CORVA TORIN AND HIS WIFE APPARENTLY DEAD AFTER AN AMBUSH BY INSURGENTS ON TEPILLOS, JEDI CAL AND LARA UDRA SEARCH FOR THE GUILTY PARTIES. BUT AS VORN TORIN'S SCHEME UNRAVELS HE IS NOT THE ONLY ONE CAUGHT UP IN THE FALLOUT...

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

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1.

The Republic army gunship touched down on the landing pad and Colonel Arion Jeck jumped down to the ground.

"Tell me what we've got lieutenant." He said to the junior officer who came running up to him.

"Its an Empress Teta-class space yacht sir." The lieutenant replied.

"A luxury yacht? Here on Tepillos?" Colonel Jeck said, "So any idea about what happened?"

"Not yet sir. There was a fire aboard of course, that's what led us here. It looks like the ship's been entirely gutted."

"What about the crew?"

"We've found bodies sir. They were scattered around the interior of the ship. But there's something else as well sir."

"Go on lieutenant." Colonel Jeck said and the lieutenant held out a small bag containing a tiny metal cylinder that had been blackened by fire, "Is that what I think it is lieutenant?" the colonel asked as he took the bag and inspected the contents through the plastic.

"A bullet casing? Yes sir. We found a handful of them in the hold."

"So this suggests that the crew didn't discover a fire and landed while they tried to fight it then." Colonel Jeck said. Then he turned his attention to the starship. Empress Teta-class space yachts were top of the range luxury vessels and although such vessels would sometimes visit the war torn world of Tepillos they landed in the Green Zone, the fortified area controlled by the colonel's troops and not out here in the areas where the numerous armed gangs vied for control. Gangs who on this occasion seemed to have slaughtered the occupants of this vessel.

"Sir!" a voice called out and both the colonel and the lieutenant looked to see a soldier in white armour running towards them.

"What is it trooper?" Colonel Jeck asked.

"Sir we've just found this." The armoured soldier replied and he handed the colonel a wallet, "Look inside sir." He added and the colonel opened up the wallet and began to sift through its contents. He halted when he found an identity card and looked at the lieutenant.

"Corva Torin." He said, "Of the Torin family."

Three hundred years earlier a single exploration vessel had surveyed the Narthis Sector and since then the descendants of the crew, collectively known as the Founding Families had become incredibly rich and famous. The Torin family was one such family and Corva had been its head. Significantly Corva Torin was known for spending almost all of his time travelling around the sector aboard his space yacht, an Empress Teta-class ship. Now it appeared that he had been murdered here on Tepillos.

"I've got a very bad feeling about this." Colonel Jeck said.

"Cal! Cal wake up!"

Cal Udra, the jedi knight assigned to the Narthis Sector opened his eyes to see his younger sister and padawan learner Lara looking down at him.

"Lara? What time is it?" he asked.

"Three in the morning." She replied.

"Three in the morning?" Cal repeated and he pulled the covers over his head.

"Cal come on, you need to see this." Lara said and she pulled the covers from his bed.

"Okay fine, I'm coming." Cal said, yawning and rubbing his eyes as he stood up and followed his sister from his room into a room almost devoid of furniture. His eyes widened briefly as he stood on a rubber dog toy that produced a sudden squeak and in response the dog curled up in a basket nearby opened its eyes and looked towards him, "Go back to sleep Ghost." Cal said, "I may let you bite Lara later on though." Then he focused on his sister, "So what's so important that you're getting me up in the middle of the night? In fact why are you up in the middle of the night?"

"I'm just getting back." She replied.

"Back? Oh yes, the date. How did it go?"

"Guy was a jerk. So I used the Force to make him look away while I left and went to see a movie instead."

Lara replied as she headed for a computer terminal on a table at the side of the room.

"And you woke me up to tell me about you misusing your powers?"

"No. To show you this." Lara said and she turned the computer display around so that Cal could see what was on it. Lara had accessed an online news feed and called up a breaking story, "This was all over the public monitors." She said as Cal read the headline.

CORVA TORIN DEAD: BELIEVED MURDERED.

"So is that important enough to justify waking you?" Lara said.

"Oh, I've got a bad feeling about this." Cal responded.

"So are we going to investigate?" Lara asked. Since their arrival in the Narthis Sector the Udras had come to believe that ever since it was first settled the Founding Families had been searching for the key to a storehouse of ancient sith knowledge and that they were willing to go to extreme measures to reach this goal. Unfortunately the only member of the Founding Families to have spoken to them openly about this, apparently hoping to recruit them to help her family had been ruled to be insane and for the time being at least both Cal and Lara were supposed to be staying away from them.

"Master Karas would not be happy." Cal reminded her.

"Oh he's never happy. You know he doesn't like either of us Cal."

Cal looked around.

"Where's Tarris?" he asked.

"Probably in his room." Lara replied, "Why?"

"Because although we may need to wait for law enforcement to ask for our help, he doesn't." Cal said.

Tarris Blake was a jedi shadow, a member of a specialist division of the Jedi Order that was dedicated purely to hunting down the followers of the Dark Side of the Force. He had originally been sent to the Narthis Sector to hunt down Cal and Lara when the Founding Families had framed Lara for the murder of another jedi and now he had remained to further investigate the influence of the Dark Side he sensed there. Unlike Cal and Lara he was effectively a free agent, the Jedi Shadows hunted down the followers of the Dark Side wherever they found them and did not wait for permission to start investigations.

"Well?" Lara asked as Tarris looked at the news report.

"How did you come across this?" Tarris asked in reply.

"Oh I was on my way back from a date and-"

"A date?" Tarris interrupted.

"Yes a date. You know when-" Lara began and then she halted as she remembered Tarris' fanaticism regarding the Jedi Code and its teachings on commitment and dependency in relationships, "Well maybe you don't." she muttered.

"What matters is that the head of one of the Founding Families is dead." Cal said, "We have to find out why."

"Hmmm." Tarris said, rubbing his chin, "There is little information about the cause of Corva Torin's death Jedi Udra. Certainly nothing to justify my interfering with what is still being investigated by Republic law enforcement."

Lara sighed.

"Therefore I shall require you to go to Tepillos and make an initial assessment." Tarris went on and Cal and Lara looked at one another and smiled, "Determine if the Dark Side was involved in any way and report back to me. Then I will decide whether or not to get involved." Then he stared at the two younger jedi and waited, "Well?" he said, "What are you waiting for? Tardiness is not becoming of jedi."

"Wait here." Senator Airia Torin told her guards as she got out of her speeder.

"But madam senator," one replied, "Mister Shill has instructed us-"

"I don't care what Han's told you." Airia interrupted, "I want to speak with my cousin privately. So wait here."

And then, accompanied by her personal droid Genie she approached the front door of Vorn Torin's residence on the sector's capital world of Crassis Major and pressed the intercom, "Vorn it's me." She said, "We need to talk."

Moments later the door opened to reveal Vorn, the younger brother of Corva Torin and he waved Airia inside.

"Airia, do come in." he said, "Can I get you a drink?"

"No." Airia replied sternly and as soon as the front door was closed she slapped him across the face.

"Ow! What was that for?" he exclaimed as he raised his hand to his face.

"What the kriff did you do Vorn?" Airia snapped.

"I don't know what you're talking about." Vorn said.

"Oh don't lie to me cousin. Just a few days ago you came to me asking for the access codes to the Tepillos defence network and now the head of our family, your older brother is dead! Killed on Tepillos. And don't bother with that poodoo you span me about some artefact that needed smuggling past the Republic." Vorn smiled.

"You caught me." He said and he walked away from Airia, heading for a nearby couch where he sat down, "Now are you sure you don't want a drink?"

"Just tell me what you've got me involved in Vorn." Airia replied.

"I wanted Corva out of the way and now he is. Now I'm in charge."

"Corva has children Vorn. The rules of succession are clear, they inherit—"

"They get his money cousin dear and I've got plenty of that myself. But my nephew doesn't get the power until he's sixteen and that's still four years away. Until then I am the head of the Torin family and you'd be wise to remember it. I won't be being used as anyone's errand boy any longer."

"That's what all this is about?" Airia exclaimed, "Poor little Vorn got tired of being bossed around by his older brother so he kills him and his wife?"

"Kind of, yes." Vorn said,

"But you know how I got those codes. I went to Colonel Jeck and he's not likely to forget that. You've led the Republic straight to my front door!"

"Oh don't be so pessimistic." Vorn said, "The colonel has no reason to believe that the defence net was tampered with. The investigation will conclude that Corva used a false transponder to land on Tepillos outside the Green Zone where he was tragically ambushed and murdered by one of the assorted insurgent groups infesting that world."

"One in your employ not doubt." Airia commented.

"Yes, keeping in touch with Jondo and letting him use my name for his fund raising finally paid off." Vorn said, "I had hoped that it would look like an accident, but it seems that the gang I bought off wasn't as thorough with their clean up as I'd hoped they would be."

"And you really think that the other families will stand for this?" Airia asked.

"Of course they will. Because they're going to think the same as everyone else, how my poor brother got in over his head and paid the ultimate price."

"And if I tell them otherwise?"

"Then I tell them how you and he were colluding to keep information away from them. That's even true, from a certain point of view."

"From a certain point of view?"

"Yes. I told you that Corva was planning to increase our family's power by smuggling a sith artefact off Tepillos without informing the other families and you were only too keen to help." Vorn explained, "Now how about you go back home and do what I'm doing."

"And what is that exactly?" Airia asked.

"Waiting for the media to turn up to record my grief at the loss I've just suffered of course."

2.

"Are they all in there?" Han Shill asked his assistant as he stood outside the door to his office in the headquarters of Shill Security.

"Not quite sir." The woman replied, "There's no one from the Torins. But the others have sent representatives. Oh and Mister Callan is present as well."

"Hugo? I thought he was in the core worlds." Han replied.

"Apparently not sir." His assistant said and then Han took a deep breath.

"Well here goes." He said and he opened the door to his office.

Stepping into the room he was greeted by nine glowing figures, holographic representations of senior members of most of the Founding Families plus one other individual and Han looked around at each figure in turn.

From the Crassis family was Luke Crassis, the son of the family's elderly head Erill. Next there were two darker skinned humans from the Drud family and once again neither was the true head of the family. Heddren Drud did however have effective control of the family while his older brother Josh was occupied in his role as the head of Crassis Major's defence forces. Today his younger sister Kayza accompanied him as well, perhaps sensing the need for a public relations specialist.

Nissel Fayl on the other hand despite being much younger than any of the others present had been the head of her family ever since her mother had been removed from the position. Next to her were Del and Faye Karn. Faye was the head of the Karn family, her husband having taken her name upon their marriage. Looking as if they were standing just beside the Karns came the final two heads of the Founding Families present, Trent Narthis was descended from the survey mission's captain who would never let anyone forget it and Ket Runn. The Runns were the only non-human family and were never seen away from the ocean world of Delvad in person.

The final hologram was of Hugo Callan. The Callan family was also descended from one of the survey mission's crew members, but unlike most of the others his ancestor had returned to the core following the mission and set up a shipping company that meant Hugo frequently travelled between the Narthis Sector and the core worlds.

"So what happened Han?" Luke Crassis asked before Han could speak.

"A good question." Ket Runn said, "Though it disturbs me that two of our families have not seen fit to have their leaders here with us and that the Torins are not present at all."

"You want to disturb the Torins now?" Faye Karn commented.

"Our brother's duties make his presence impossible." Kayza Drud added without waiting to see if Ket would reply to Faye.

"And what of your father Luke?" Trent Narthis asked, the hologram of him looking at that of Luke Crassis.

"My father is tired. He did not sleep well." Luke replied, "I'm sure you understand."

"Of course." Trent replied, "I doubt any man would sleep well with a wife almost fifty years his junior." And then the hologram glanced towards the Karns who both refused to make eye contact. Meanwhile several of the others present smiled slightly, knowing how the fact that the Karns' daughter Gayal had married Erill Crassis as a ploy to keep the Force sensitive woman under the control of the Crassis family.

"If we could stick to the matter at hand?" Heddren Drud said. As the one who had colluded with the Karns to have their daughter committed to an asylum he had no more desire to discuss how she had ended up with Erill than they did, "How did Corva die?"

"I've not been able to get hold of the report yet." Han replied, "All I know so far is that he went to Tepillos for some unknown reason and that his ship was attacked on the ground."

"But that's nothing more than has been in the news already." Nissel said.

"Indeed it is." Del said, "What about your men Han? Didn't Corva have a team aboard his ship?"

"Of course he did." Han replied, "In fact shortly before he travelled to Tepillos he had me assign more men to his security detail."

"So he was expecting trouble then." Luke said.

"Or it could just have been because he was planning on setting down outside the Green Zone." Faye added.

"In which case we need to be asking why he thought that was such a good idea." Hugo said, his image flickering slightly due to the distance over which it was being transmitted.

"Then we need to ask the Torins." Luke said.

"Are you perhaps volunteering?" Faye asked.

"No I'm not." Luke replied and then his hologram looked directly at Han, "He should go."

"Me?" Han responded.

"Yes." Luke said, "Your men were supposed to keep Corva alive so perhaps you should go and find out why they failed." Then he smiled, "Unless you're concerned that seeing you would remind them that there are alternatives to Shill Security for protection?"

Han frowned at the reminder of how the Crassis family had successfully replaced Shill Security with a force of mandalorian mercenaries as another part of their scheme to acquire Gayal Karn for themselves.

"No, I'll go." Han said.

"What about Tepillos?" Nissel asked, "Shouldn't someone go and find out what's going on there before the Republic can?"

"That's going to take someone highly skilled." Trent commented.

"Oh don't worry about that." Han said, "I have just the person in mind. She's been keeping a low profile for a few weeks now, but I'm sure she's ready to get back into action."

The red skinned zeltron woman paused when she entered the cantina and looked for the man she was here to meet. This was made more difficult by the fact that most of the beings did not want to be recognised made this more difficult but Kassa knew the man she had come to see very well, the pair of them had enjoyed a profitable business relationship for a few years now and she was keen to keep it going.

She found the man she was looking for sat at the far end of the room, alone at a table under an archway. He was hooded so Kassa could not see his face, but she knew by the fact that everyone in this crowded room seemed to be keeping their distance from him. She made her way across the cantina, ignoring offers of drinks or companionship from several males of various species even though she was not producing any of the pheromones her species was capable of to influence others.

"You have something for me Kassa?" the hooded man asked before she had even sat down. That was something that un-nerved Kassa, his ability to know she was there without having to see her but she knew that it was just a consequence of dealing with someone Force sensitive.

"Have you heard about Corva Torin?" she asked as she sat down.

"Of course. But in case you've forgotten I pay you to get me information and answers to questions, not to ask them of me."

"Well at first I figured you were responsible." Kassa said.

"No. Though I must admit his death suits my purposes just fine."

"Yeah I know, so I figured that you'd be interested to hear that there's an insurgent group suddenly wielding some nice new pulse wave weapons. I mean really new, not the usual battered second hand stuff that gets smuggled here." Kassa said and the hooded man leant forwards.

"The sort of weapons that would be carried by operatives of Shill Security?" he said and Kassa grinned.

"That's what I was thinking." Kassa said, "And I figured that you'd be interested in anyone who shares your distaste for the Founding Families."

"Tell me where I can find them." The man said, holding out several banknotes.

"Here's a map." Kassa replied as she held out a mem-stik in return and they both exchanged what they were holding.

"It has been a pleasure doing business with you again." The hooded man said as he got up.

"Oh and there's one more thing. A freebie." Kassa said and the man paused.

"Yes?" he asked.

"I've heard that the jedi are on their way here as well. Cal and Lara definitely, but I don't know about the other one, the – the – what do you call him?"

"A shadow."

"Yeah, the shadow. There's a chance he could be coming as well so you might want to watch your back Kyle."

3.

The *Bright Hope's* wings folded as the ship came into land and Colonel Jeck flinched as loose dirt from the landed pad was thrown into the air. He waited as the Jedi vessel's engines powered down and then walked towards the access ramp as it opened to meet Cal and Lara as they came down.

"It's good to see you again." The colonel said and then he looked down at Ghost, "And I see you've found a new friend."

"I had to." Cal replied, "Lara's not bad, but Ghost here does what he's told more often than she does." And Lara pulled a face at him.

Colonel Jeck smiled and pointed towards one of the nearby hangars.

"I've set up a incident room over there." He said, "It's big enough to hold the space yacht."

"You've had it moved here?" Lara asked.

"No." Colonel Jeck replied, "It's still under guard where the attack happened at present. We need to bring in a ship capable of lifting it without damaging it. But all the bodies are here as well as some of the other physical evidence we've found."

"Then perhaps that where we should start." Cal replied.

Colonel Jeck led the Jedi into the hangar, past a pair of guards who allowed them through without obstruction. Inside the spacious building most of the floor space had been cleared to allow room for Corva's space yacht while in another section rows of tables had been set up on which smaller pieces of evidence had been laid out.

"What's in there?" Lara asked, looking to the far end of the hangar where a compact prefabricated structure had been erected.

"That's the morgue." Colonel Jeck replied, "It's cooled to prevent decomposition. I've got a medic in there examining them right now. I'll take you in." then he paused and looked down at Ghost, "Though I think he'll have to wait out here."

Ghost remained with a guard outside the morgue as the Jedi followed the colonel inside and immediately they were aware of the difference in temperature. Inside, a single military officer was leant over a burned corpse conducting an examination. When she became aware of the newcomers she looked up, half her face hidden behind a mask.

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

"Doctor Kain this is Jedi Cal Udra and his padawan Lara Udra. They're here to assist in the investigation." The colonel replied.

"Can you tell us what you've found so far?" Cal asked as he looked at the body.

"Well surface appearances aside this man didn't burn to death. He was shot." Kain answered, "And not with the firearms we're used to seeing. This man was hit by a pulse wave blast at close range. Watch." And the doctor gently pressed down on the corpse's chest to demonstrate that it would give way, the internal structure having been massively disrupted by an energy blast.

"Some insurgent groups have access to that sort of weaponry though." Cal pointed out.

"Yes, but they tend to be the bigger and more vocal groups." Colonel Jeck replied, "The sort that would have been trumpeting this action to anyone who would listen and so far we've had no one take responsibility."

"So you suspect someone other than insurgents?" Lara asked.

"Oh I'm convinced that an insurgent group was involved, but I think they had help from off world." Colonel Jeck replied.

"Any ideas about who?" Cal asked, but the colonel shook his head.

"None whatsoever." He said.

"What about Corva and his wife? Deesa isn't it?" Lara asked.

"I've got them over here." Doctor Kain said and she walked across the morgue to where two other bodies were under sheets pulling each one back in turn to reveal what remained of their faces, "More pulse wave blasts." She said, "A single blast from point blank range to the head. They were powerful enough to smash their skulls and reduce most of their brains to a thick liquid that then drained out of the cracks."

"An execution." Cal said, "There's more to this than just some random ambush."

"My thoughts exactly Jedi Udra." Doctor Kain said.

"But how did the killers know where to find the Torins?" Lara said, "I doubt they published their schedule, especially not if they were landing outside the Green Zone."

"Outside information again I'd guess." Cal said, "For the timing at least. Then a portable sensor to track the ship as it entered the atmosphere to give them the location."

"There's more to it than that Jedi Udra." Colonel Jeck responded, "Corva Torin made use of a false transponder to enter the atmosphere then flew low enough to avoid being tracked as he made his final approach."

"Final's the right word." Lara commented and Cal glared at her briefly.

"Obviously he didn't manage to avoid being detected though," Cal said as he looked back at the colonel, "if you were able to pick up the false signal."

"Actually we didn't." Colonel Jeck said, "But we only picked up his ship briefly at the edge of our sensor range. Then it left again and we lost it. We've not been able to identify the signal from it when it actually came in to land."

"Colonel I'd like to take a look at your sensor recordings." Cal said, "I don't get why Corva would reveal his presence at all if he was planning to use a false transponder code. He could have made the switch while still in hyperspace. I think that Corva had an alternate way of getting past your sensors."

"Cal, you're not suggesting some sort of cloaking device are you?" Lara asked.

"No. Corva's ship was an Empress Teta-class and no ship that small has a cloaking device. Those things are big." Cal replied and to emphasise his point he held his arms out wide apart.

"And impractical." Colonel Jeck added, "Especially when a ship is entering an atmosphere. The heat trail gives them away every time."

"Okay, so not a cloaking device." Lara said, "So what then?"

"I don't know. That's why I want to see the sensor recordings." Cal replied.

Though the man had tried to hide it, Kyle Jenner had seen that he was concealing a pulse wave blaster under his jacket. Clearly the man had not expected a former Jedi knight to be watching him or he would have taken better care to keep his weapon hidden from view. Or better yet remained hidden in doors where he would not be seen at all. But now the man was to be Kyle's key to obtaining the precise location of the insurgent group that had dared to strike at the leadership of one of the Founding Families.

Keeping his face hidden under his hood Kyle watched as the man turned down a side street too narrow to take any vehicle bigger than a speeder bike and he headed for the side street himself. By the time that Kyle reached the end of the street the man had vanished, but Kyle heard the sound of a door slam and he smiled as he realised that he had found what he was looking for, the insurgents' hideout.

Calmly Kyle walked down the street until he came to the door he had heard close just a few seconds earlier and then knocked, banging his fist on the door three times. The door slid partially open and a woman peered through the gap at him.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

Anger.

Clearly the way in which Kyle had banged on the door had annoyed the woman, but to him that was irrelevant.

"I am here about the killing of Corva Torin." Kyle said sternly.

Fear.

The woman's face vanished from view and the door slid shut again. At that instant Kyle felt a tremor in the Force.

Danger.

Diving to one side he was just in time to avoid the sudden burst of gunfire from an automatic slug thrower as it tore through the door, the shooter apparently spraying bullets around in the hope that at least one would end up hitting Kyle. The gunfire halted as rapidly as it had begun, the weapon's magazine presumably having been emptied and from under his cloak Kyle slid his lightsaber and waited for the building's occupants to come out and check on the results of the shooting.

Sure enough there was a hiss as the bullet-ridden door slid open again, all the way this time and a green skinned rodian stepped out into the street clutching a short-barrelled submachine gun.

The 'snap-hiss' sound as Kyle ignited his lightsaber alerted the rodian to his presence and the alien turned just in time to see Kyle swinging his lightsaber in an upwards arc that sliced off not only the barrel of the submachine gun but also one of the rodian's hands. Screaming, the rodian dropped what remained of his weapon and grabbed at the cauterised stump of his arm, but before he could tighten his grip on his ruined limb Kyle brought his lightsaber back horizontally and sliced the rodian's head from his shoulders.

Even as the rodian's headless corpse was falling to the ground Kyle charged through the open doorway and the first person he saw was the man he had followed here with his pulse wave blaster now in his hand. Kyle reacted quickly, placing his lightsaber in the path of the spatial distortion to burst it before it struck him. Then he sensed the presence of another individual and he glanced sideways to see the woman who had first answered the door picking up a shotgun. In response to this new threat Kyle reached out towards her and

lightning shot from the tips of his fingers. The woman screamed in pain as the Force energy struck her and there was a loud 'boom!' as the shotgun discharged when her finger instinctively tightened on the trigger. Kyle then ceased this attack and lunged towards the man armed with the blaster, the blade of his lightsaber held straight out in front of him as he thrust it through the man's chest.

Kyle then shut off his lightsaber and turned to face the woman who now lay helpless on the floor as she gasped for breath and through the Force he reached out to pull the shotgun out of her reach.

"Now perhaps you'd like to take me to someone who can answer my questions." He said to the woman.

"Never." She gasped.

"Oh really?" Kyle replied with an evil grin, "Then perhaps I need to persuade you." And he reached out with his hand and through the Force and the woman began to feel her throat tightening.

"Okay." The woman croaked and Kyle released her, causing the woman to collapse as she sucked in air and rubbed her throat.

"Get up." Kyle ordered, "I do not have time to waste."

"Okay, okay. I'm getting up." The woman replied as she steadied herself against a wall to help her to her feet. Then she began to move towards a doorway and Kyle followed her, reaching out through the Force to watch for any signs of another ambush.

The woman led Kyle into a large room filled with tables that were covered with assorted contraband items. Clearly this particular insurgent group was in reality a criminal gang using the political instability of Tepillos as a cover for its actions and this room was at the heart of their operation. There were a large number of other beings in this room as well and Kyle noticed that many of them were armed with pulse wave weapons that looked new; just as his informant Kassa had informed him. When these people noticed the hooded figure entering the room a number of them reached for these weapons.

"Mister Strill," the woman called out towards the centre of the room and a man pushed his way towards the front of the group he was in, "there's someone here to see you."

"I take it that this has something to do with that commotion does it?" Strill asked.

"Y-Yes sir." The woman said and Strill stared at Kyle.

"I'm guessing that the rest of my men out there are dead." He said.

"They are." Kyle replied, "When someone raises a hand against me, I make a point of removing it."

"A sentiment worthy of respect." Strill said, "But if a man takes something from me, I like to take something from him and you have taken my men. Now why shouldn't I see how well you can face all of us at once?"

"Because I did not come here to fight you Mister Strill." Kyle replied, "I came to see if you are worthy of joining me."

"Joining you? Why?" Strill asked.

"Because you killed Corva Torin." Kyle answered.

Strill grinned.

"Well it wasn't exactly our idea." Strill replied, "We're being well paid for that job."

"Then perhaps I ought to discuss this with your employer. Any enemy of the Founding Families is of interest to me." Kyle said.

"I don't think so. I don't think you would see eye to eye with him." Strill said, "In fact I wouldn't be surprised if he gave us a bonus for giving him your head on a platter." And then he nodded to one of his men.

Kill.

That single thought was suddenly present in the minds of everyone around Kyle and he reached beneath his cloak with both hands. But his lightsaber was not the only weapon that he produced, in addition he drew a short but bulky carbine that had been slung under one arm and without even looking he pointed it towards the man now raising a pulse wave rifle towards him and fired. There was a flash and a flare of heat as the plasma carbine discharged and a blast of energy hurtled towards the man. The latest blaster weapons used a focused and stabilised plasma bolt to inflict damage, but this older weapon was far cruder. Instead it just fired an uncontained blast of super heated matter that could burn through almost anything. At longer ranges the damage was lessened due to the cooling of the blast, but at this range the effect of the carbine on the man was absolutely devastating and he screamed briefly before it struck him, the heat blistering his skin prior to impact. Then when the plasma bolt struck his chest it came apart and spread across him, consuming him in fire.

The effect of this was two-fold, as well as killing the man before he could fire on Kyle it also distracted everyone else in the room long enough for the former Jedi to roll under a nearby table and activate his lightsaber as he leapt back to his feet several metres from where he had been. He let go of his carbine and let it drop to his side as he sliced a nearby man in half with a double-handed stroke of his lightsaber.

Panic.

It had not occurred to any of Strill's men that they could be facing a Force user, let alone one with the experience Kyle Jenner had accumulated during his decades of service to the Jedi Order and now they did not know how to react. So instead each of them just drew a weapon and aimed at him.

Kyle timed his next roll perfectly, ducking out of sight just as the insurgents around him opened fire and the assorted energy blasts and bullets flew over his head. Since he was surrounded by the insurgents this meant that they were in effect firing on one another and several fell to the shots of their own side.

Fear.

"Kill him!" Strill yelled, "Kill him someone!" and he shoved a nearby man forwards so that he was positioned in between Kyle and Strill. Armed with a pulse wave blaster, the man fired at Kyle only to see his shot blocked by the blade of Kyle's lightsaber and before he could fire again Kyle raised his hand and sent a sudden wave of Force energy towards him, throwing him off his feet and hurling back into Strill.

Strill scrambled out from under the man's lifeless body and ran, heading towards a doorway while Kyle was kept busy slicing off the arms of two more of Strill's men who, lacking any other weaponry attempted to attack him with metal bars. Kyle saw this attempt at escape and extended his arm towards Strill, Force lightning leaping from his fingertips.

"I have you now." He said to himself, but although the attack struck Strill momentarily and he screamed with pain Kyle's aim was suddenly thrown off as the woman who had answered the door to him slammed into him, reaching for the carbine by his side.

"I think not." Kyle said as he threw her off and then he spun around to face her and thrust the blade of his lightsaber through her neck.

Ducking to avoid more gunfire Kyle looked around again, hunting for Strill. But the man was gone and Kyle headed for the door he had disappeared through, lashing out with his lightsaber and lightning at anyone foolish enough to get in his way.

From a nearby rooftop Belle Shill, the twin sister of Han watched the insurgent hideout through a set of wide scan binocs. It had not taken her long to uncover rumours of an insurgent group that had suddenly been able to acquire a shipment of energy weapons like those issued to Corva Torin's security detail and only a short time longer to track them to this location.

All of a sudden Belle saw a section of wall that was covered in brightly painted graffiti revealed to in fact be a doorway that had been concealed by the paint as it burst open and Strill came rushing out.

"Where are you going in such a hurry?" she muttered as she watched him run down the street. Then her question was answered as Kyle Jenner burst out of the doorway after him, his lightsaber shining in his hand, "Well, well, Kyle Jenner." She added and she sighed, "Ah, the one that got away. Oh well, I know some people who will be interested in hearing about this." And she reached for a pocket communicator and activated it.

"Emergency operator. What service do you require?" an automated voice asked her.

"Police." Belle replied, "There's a gang of terrorists trying to kill a jedi."

4.

Lara yawned as she stroked Ghost.

"Are you paying attention?" Cal asked, glancing away from the display.

"Yes." Lara replied, "Lots of little dots with numbers beside them."

"Sorry, but this is all we have." Colonel Jeck said from behind the two Jedi, "The ship appeared for a few seconds and then it no longer appeared on our scopes."

"But there aren't any other ships suddenly coming in after it." Lara said, "So that means that Corva must have waited before making another approach with the false transponder."

"It's just a pity the Senate didn't decide to review my resources before now." Colonel Jeck said, "We desperately need a better sensor array."

"And better supplies." Lara added, wincing as she took a sip of the drink she had been given, "That's dreadful."

"Yes it is." Cal said, "But what's worse is that there's no explanation for why Corva's ship behaved the way it did. Look, one minute it's starting atmospheric entry and then—"

"What's wrong?" Lara asked when Cal suddenly stopped talking.

"Colonel, can we adjust the playback speed of this recording?" Cal asked.

"I think so." The colonel replied and he leaned over Cal and adjusted the controls to the display, "That should do it." He said, "What are you looking for anyway?"

"I want to see Corva's ship head back into space." Cal replied, watching the sensor return from the space yacht as it began to enter the atmosphere of Tepillos. Then it suddenly disappeared from the screen,

"There!" Cal snapped, "Did you see that?"

"See what?" Colonel Jeck asked, "The ship just pulled up and went out of sensor range."

"No, it didn't, Colonel." Lara said, "Watch closely." And she pointed to the screen as the recording was replayed once again, "Look, here it is coming down. Then gone."

"There isn't a signal as it supposedly returned to space." Cal said, "Colonel, someone just made it vanish from your sensors."

"But we've ruled out a cloaking device." Colonel Jeck said.

"Which only leaves tampering with your sensors to explain what we've just seen." Cal said, "Colonel, someone's figured out how to get round your entire planetary security system."

The colonel stared at the two Jedi open-mouthed as he tried to process the implications of this. But before he could respond his point-to-point communication link buzzed.

"Jeck." He said.

"Colonel, we've just got a report from local police. Someone's reported a terrorist attack in progress and they're saying that the target is a Jedi."

The colonel looked at Cal and Lara.

"There's just us here, Colonel." Lara told him, "Tarris stayed on Aurek Station."

"Kyle." Cal hissed, "Colonel, mobilise your men. As many as you can get."

Strill pushed people out of the way as he ran, hoping that by knocking them over they would slow down his pursuer. But Kyle simply leapt over or ran around them as he steadily gained ground on the fleeing gangster. Then Strill ducked down an alleyway and as Kyle came running in after him he found the man aiming a pulse wave blaster at his head.

Scowling, Kyle waved and through the Force he knocked the weapon from Strill's grasp.

"Now, Mister Strill, you will tell me just who you are working for." Kyle said, grabbing hold of Strill by his neck and lifting him off the ground.

"Never." Strill said as he struggled to claw Kyle's hand from him, "You'll have to kill me instead."

"Oh, I'm going to kill you anyway." Kyle replied, "It's just a matter of how I do it and how long it takes." Then he focused his mind on Strill's and through the Force he reached inside it, "Tell me." He said.

Strill convulsed as he tried to resist the overwhelming compulsion to tell Kyle everything. But he lacked the discipline to resist for long and all of a sudden he let out a yell.

"Torin!" he shouted.

"Yes, I know who you killed, Mister Strill. But who put you up to it?"

"Torin! Vorn Torin!"

Kyle let go of Strill and the man collapsed in a heap at his feet.

"You mean that I have wasted my time on a petty feud between my enemies?" he asked, "You have formed an alliance with Vorn Torin?"

"Oh an alliance was never part of our agreement. "Strill said, still gasping from breath after being almost choked to death, "Neither was being hunted by you."

"And how did Vorn arrange this?" Kyle asked.

"He got hold of the codes for the planet's defence system." Strill answered, "I don't know where from. Now I've answered your questions, I don't know anything else. How about you just let me go?"

Kyle sensed no deception from Strill, but he wasn't quite finished with the man just yet.

"But there's something you've forgotten Mister Strill." He said.

"What?"

"As I've already told you, I intended to kill you anyway."

Cal and Lara did not bother waiting for the gunships to touch down, instead jumping from the airborne craft as soon as they were low enough. Then as soon as they landed they ignited their lightsabers and rushed down the narrow street to where the insurgent gang had been based, pressing themselves up against the wall either side of the doorway.

"Sense anything?" Cal asked and Lara shook her head, "Me neither." Cal added, "But keep alert anyway. From the looks of that roodian at our feet I'd say that this was definitely Kyle Jenner's handiwork." And then he spun around and leapt through the open doorway.

Another body greeted him, this time that of the man who Kyle had followed here and Cal moved forwards cautiously, reaching out through the Force as he searched for any signs of survivors.

"Cal I've got a bad feeling about this place." Lara said as she followed him inside, "It feels – it feels cold."

"I know." Cal replied, "I feel it too. It's the Dark Side. Hopefully it's just an echo of what Kyle did."

"And if it's not?" Lara asked.

"Then there's something else in here that's linked with the Dark Side and we better find it quick before anyone else turns up looking for it." Cal answered. Then he looked towards the inner doorway, "This way."

He added and he headed towards it.

Making his way into the next room Cal halted and shut down his lightsaber.

"It's over." He said.

"What is?" Lara asked and when she saw the room for herself she just added, "Oh."

"Whatever happened here, we missed it." Cal said as he looked around at the multiple bodies and smashed furniture, the contraband that had been neatly stacked and organised now spread across the floor and mixed together, "I think that the colonel's men are going to have their work cut out for them sorting all of this out." He added.

"How many bodies do you think there are?" Lara said as she tried to count.

"I'm not sure. That's the problem with dismembering people with a lightsaber, taking a head count is much harder when you can't find the head." Cal responded and then he and Lara both turned around as they heard the sound of heavy footfalls.

"Commander what's the situation?" the lead Republic trooper asked, his voice distorted by his armour.

"Everyone's dead sergeant." Cal told him, "Have your men establish a perimeter and start questioning the locals. It's obvious that Kyle Jenner isn't here any more so I want to know where he went." Then he looked at Lara, "Come on, let's go and see if there's anything outside we can pick up on."

As the two Jedi emerged from the building they saw Colonel Jeck issuing orders to his men. Unlike the fully armoured troopers he commanded, the colonel had merely added a protective helmet and vest over his duty uniform so he remained recognisable.

"Colonel!" Cal called out, "It looks like we got here too late."

"Yes I was worried about that." The colonel replied, "The local police take too long to pass information to us. I've got my men spreading out to find witnesses."

"Yeah, we gave similar orders to the men you sent inside." Lara said, "But you'll have to keep the building locked down, it's piled high with pretty much everything there's a black market for."

"Do you think that's what Kyle Jenner came here for?" the colonel asked, "Black market goods?"

"It's possible." Cal answered, "But I think there's something more to it than that. Kyle left too quickly."

Avoiding the Republic soldiers was easy, Kyle simply willed them either to look away at a convenient moment or simply not notice as he walked right past them with his features hidden beneath his hood. Making his way back towards the hideout of the insurgent group he had just wiped out single handed he saw both Cal and Lara standing beside one of the landed gunships with Colonel Jeck as they in turn watched the

troopers removing bags filled with contraband goods from the hideout and loading them onto another of the gunships. Then after taking note of the positions of all of the nearby soldiers Kyle advanced directly towards the jedi.

Cal was the first to sense the disturbance in the Force as Kyle reached out towards him, but even as he and Lara both reached for their lightsabers they found the weapons being plucked from their belts from where they flew through the air to end up in Kyle's hands.

"It's Jenner!" Colonel Jeck yelled as he drew his blast pistol, "Open fire!"

Energy blasts flashed towards Kyle, but he reacted by igniting both the lightsabers he held and spinning them so rapidly even Cal and Lara had trouble keeping track of the blades. The shield this formed in front of him blocked and deflected every one of the blaster shots, sending them off in harmless directions.

"Cease fire!" Cal yelled, "Cease fire!"

"Cal what are you doing?" Lara exclaimed as the Republic troops ceased fire but kept their weapons trained on Kyle, "That's Kyle Jenner."

"Yes and he doesn't seem to have killed anyone." Cal replied, "Well, apart from all those insurgents."

"Very good Cal." Kyle called out as he shut off the lightsabers and began to walk slowly towards them, "Now maybe we can have a civilised conversation." Then he looked at Colonel Jeck, "Colonel it's good to see you again. It has been too long."

The colonel looked at Cal briefly then turned back to face Kyle.

"Kyle Jenner you are under arrest." He called out.

"Oh, now why would you do a thing like that colonel? I'm only here to help."

"Help how?" Lara asked.

"You want to know who killed Corva Torin and I'm here to tell you." Kyle said as he halted just in front of Cal, Lara and the colonel.

"So it was you." Lara said and Kyle sighed and shook his head.

"You should not be so impulsive young padawan." He said, "Though I celebrate the death of Corva Torin as much as I am sure you do deep down I regret that I was not the one to deliver the justice he deserved."

"Then who was?" Cal asked.

"Why his own brother of course. The man you want is Vorn Torin." Kyle replied.

"That's ridiculous." Lara said.

"No more ridiculous than a dying man marrying a young woman just to keep her away from her own family."

Kyle replied and Cal frowned.

Anger.

Lara glanced at her brother as she felt the sudden flash of emotion.

"Be careful Cal. Anger is a path to the Dark Side." Kyle said with a grin.

"Suppose we believe you." Colonel Jeck said, "What do you expect us to do with this information?"

"Why use it to bring another of the Founding Families to justice of course." Kyle replied.

"Yeah, well those of us who haven't fallen to the Dark Side need evidence before arresting people." Cal replied.

"Vorn Torin has an informant providing him with access codes for the Tepillos planetary defence system.

Find the leak and you'll have your evidence." Kyle said. Then he smiled again and added, "And now I really must be going." And he thrust his arms out in front of him.

The sudden blast of Force energy Kyle unleashed blew Cal, Lara and Colonel Jeck off their feet. Seeing this the Republic soldiers opened fire again, unconcerned about accidentally hitting the jedi or their commanding officer now that all three had been knocked over. But Kyle had been expecting this and the moment he released the telekinetic blast he dived into the nearby gunship. Hurling Cal and Lara's lightsabers out of the other side he waved a hand towards the hatch controls and promptly sealed the craft shut.

Outside Cal got up, pulling Lara to her feet as well.

"Come on, we've got to stop him!" he snapped and he began to run towards the gunship.

Through the cockpit canopy the two jedi saw Kyle climb into the vacant pilot's seat and take hold of the controls and there was the sound of replusorlifts as he started the engines.

As Colonel Jeck picked himself up some of his men were firing on the gunship with their blast rifles, the strikes producing scorch marks on its hull.

"Cease fire!" the colonel shouted, "That armour's too thick for blasters."

Cal spotted their lightsabers on the ground on the far side of the gunship and using the Force he called them both to him just as Kyle had done, only when he grabbed them out of the air he tossed one to Lara.

"Move!" he yelled over the noise of the engines, "He's about to-" but before he could finish his sentence the gunship lifted off the ground and swooped overhead.

Kyle made a single pass over the other landed gunships, firing at them to prevent them being used to pursue him. Then he increased the power to the engines and the gunship accelerated away.

"Colonel I think you had better signal for transport back to the Green Zone." Cal said as he turned back to face Colonel Jeck, "We need to find out who's passing information to Vorn Torin."

"You mean you actually believe him?" Lara asked.

"Why not?" Cal responded, "If we find evidence then we can follow it up. If not, then we know he was lying."

"But Cal, finding a way to fool the defence net is one thing. Actually finding someone to give him the codes and-"

Guilt.

Lara stopped talking and both she and Cal turned to look at Colonel Jeck again.

"Colonel what have you done?" Cal asked.

"I thought it was an order from the senate." He replied.

"Thought what was an order from the senate?" Lara asked.

"I was asked to provide deployment schedules for my troops and access codes to the defence system."

Colonel Jeck said, "But how was I to know that-"

"Colonel who did you give those codes to?" Cal interrupted.

"The senator." Colonel Jeck told him, "Senator Airia Torin."

"Oh kriff." Lara exclaimed, "Corva and Vorn's damned cousin."

"We need more." Cal said, "We can't just go knocking down a senator's door. For all we know the senate really did request that information and it's just a coincidence. She could have seen the request as an opportunity to deal with Corva or maybe she's got nothing to do with this."

"But how do we prove it one way or another?" Lara asked.

"Colonel how did the request arrive?" Cal asked the colonel.

"Via video link." He replied and Cal smiled.

"Then it should have been recorded yes?" he said.

"That's right. All high level communications are recorded." Colonel Jeck answered.

"Then I want to see that recording colonel." Cal said, "Right now it's our only lead."

5.

By the time a replacement gunship was able to get the Udras and Colonel Jeck back to the Republic's military headquarters in the Green Zone the recorded conversation between the colonel and Senator Torin had been retrieved from the communication archive and transferred to the computer terminal in the colonel's office.

"Colonel Jeck, the Defence Oversight Committee does not answer to you. On the other hand you can be summoned before the committee to answer before it. Which I guarantee will happen if you do not give me what I am asking for promptly. Now I find you lack of compliance disturbing colonel and I assure you that the committee is not as forgiving as I am. In other words, just do it-"

The colonel paused the playback at this point.

"That's about when she hung up on me." He said.

"There's nothing to suggest that she passed the data on to Vorn though." Lara said.

"Not explicitly no." Cal replied, "But we can double check with the senate Defence Oversight Committee about the reasons for her request."

"It's a start I suppose." Colonel Jeck said, folding his arms, "But how long do you think that a response will take?"

"Too long." Cal said, "Show me the recording again." And Colonel hit the replay button.

"Of course colonel, I'll make this quick. I need a copy of your deployment schedule for the next two weeks and the access codes for the Tepillos defence net."

Cal watched the reply closely. But this time, rather than listening to the words that he had already heard Cal inspected the image, concentrating on the background behind Airia.

"Pause it right there!" he snapped and the image froze, "Good. Now zoom into that part of the image right there." He added, pointing to a sculpture positioned towards the edge of the image. Colonel Jeck isolated the area and zoomed in. The sculpture was made of polished silver metal and it reflected its surroundings like a mirror. Cal smiled, "Does that look like a person to you?" he asked as he looked at a particular part of the sculpture and Lara leaned in for a closer look.

"Sort of." She said, "Distorted by the shape of the sculpture, but it does look like there's someone there."

"I'll zoom in closer." Colonel Jeck said and he magnified the reflection that had caught the attention of the jedi.

"That's definitely a person." Lara said and the colonel frowned at the thought of having been deceived.

"Colonel, may I have just use your computer for a moment?" Cal asked, getting up from his own seat and approaching the colonel's.

"Yes, of course." Colonel Jeck replied, getting up to make way for the jedi.

Cal sat down and opened up a graphic's processing program.

"Is this the best you've got?" he asked and Colonel Jeck nodded.

"I don't get much call for drawing pictures." He replied.

"Well it'll do, I think." Cal said, copying the image from the video replay and loading it into the graphics program. He crudely highlighted the section containing the reflected image and deleted the rest, leaving him with just the reflection. Next he instructed the program to flatten out the reflection, producing something more like what would be seen in a conventional mirror.

"It's not very clear is it?" Lara commented.

"There's an enhancement function I think." Colonel Jeck said to Cal.

"Yes, I've found it." Cal replied and the three of them watched as the program began to study the relationship between individual pixels to create a higher resolution image. The program scanned the image multiple times, each time making it slightly more detailed until Cal was satisfied and told it to stop.

"Well look at that." Lara said as she stared at the clearly identifiable face of Vorn Torin, "A pity he didn't smile for the camera."

"It'll take more than just this to convict him." Colonel Jeck said.

"I know." Cal replied, "But it's enough to justify paying him a visit." And then he looked at Lara, "Okay Lara, we're heading for Crassis Major. I want to see how Vorn Torin explains himself."

"I can't send any men with you to Crassis." Colonel Jeck said.

"Don't worry." Cal replied, "I just need you to call Agent Raser on Aurek Station and let her know what we've found. If our visit to Vorn pans out then we'll need her help to deal with Airia. We'll also need you to check something else for us. I get the feeling that something else will have been removed from the defence system recordings so you'll have to ask for it elsewhere."

The region of Crassis Major where Vorn Torin lived was about as far different from the urban areas of Tepillos as it was possible to get. On Tepillos there was little luxury, that planet's wealthier inhabitants having left as soon as they could when the civil war began. On the other hand luxury was everywhere that Cal and Lara looked as they approached Vorn's home, a mansion in one of the most expensive areas of the capital. "So how do we handle this?" Lara asked as they walked towards the front gate, "The guards I mean?" "We'll just tell them we're here on official business and ask them to stand aside." Cal replied. "And if they don't?" Lara asked and Cal tapped his lightsaber. "At worst we'll have to fight our way in, but I'm hoping I'll be able to persuade them to see sense." He replied. There were two men in the uniform of Shill Security stood by the main gate, both armed with sidearms and batons. Both Cal and Lara kept an eye out for any more guards close by though, expecting more heavily armed troops to be available if needed. "What is your business here?" one of the guards asked as the Jedi walked up to him. "Our business is with Mister Torin." Cal said, "Let us pass." "Mister Torin isn't seeing anyone at present." The guard replied, "He is in mourning." Lara's hand moved to her lightsaber but Cal took another step. "Mister Torin needs to see us." He said, lifting his hand and waving it slowly in front of the guard. "Mister Torin needs to see you." The guard replied. "We really ought to hurry inside." Cal said. "Hurry up." The guard said, "Go on inside." And he stepped back. Then as Cal and Lara headed up the driveway he looked to his comrade, "Some people just need things spelling out simply don't they?"

"Mister Torin there are two people approaching the house." A servant said to Vorn as he sat on the couch with a drink in one hand and the controls to the entertainment system in the other. "What?" he responded, "But I gave instructions that I wasn't to be disturbed. Who are they?" "I'm not sure sir. But from the looks of them I'd say that they were Jedi." "Jedi? Stang." Vorn exclaimed, "Wait, no, they're probably just here to offer condolences about my poor late brother. Show them in." "Of course sir." The servant replied and then he bowed slightly before leaving the room. Shortly after the man reappeared with Cal and Lara behind him. "Jedi Cal Udra and padawan Lara Udra to see you sir." The servant announced. "Ah, Jedi Udra it's so good of you to call in person to-" Vorn began. "Vorn Torin." Cal interrupted in a stern tone of voice, "We are here as part of our investigation into the death of your brother Corva Torin, sister-in-law Deesa Torin as well as several other beings in their employ." "Well I'll do anything I can to help of course." Vorn replied, "But you could have-" "How much do you know about the planetary defence system for Tepillos?" Lara asked.

Fear.

Vorn's reaction was only brief, but it was enough for both Jedi to notice. "Nothing. Why would I?" he said.

Deception.

For a court this was not enough, Jedi could testify to what they sensed of course but any reasonable defence lawyer would remind the jury that even the Jedi Order regards such things as unreliable. However, right here and right now it was enough to convince Cal and Lara that they were on the right track.

"Shortly before your brother's death you left Crassis Major in your personal starfighter did you not?" Cal asked.

"Yes, but-" Vorn began.

"Where did you go Mister Torin?" Lara interrupted.

"What is all this about?" Vorn demanded, feigning anger with his voice but the ruse did not work on the Jedi, "If you're here to accuse me of anything then just do it."

"Vorn Torin, traffic control confirms that you requested navigation data for a jump to the Tepillos system." Cal said, "But there is no record of you having arrived there."

"What we do have however, is evidence that you received the access codes to the defence system from your cousin Senator Airia Torin." Lara added.

Panic.

My computer.

Vorn suddenly hurled a nearby table lamp at the Jedi as he leapt to his feet and ran for the door. Cal casually swatted the lamp away as he and Lara both drew their lightsabers.

"Stay where you-" Cal began as Vorn came closer but rather than slow down Vorn kept on moving and pushed the somewhat startled servant towards the two jedi to clear a path for his escape. Unable to simply push the servant aside as Cal had done with the lamp the jedi instead caught hold of the man to prevent him from being injured while Vorn fled the room.

"Guards!" Vorn yelled as he ran into the hallway outside and almost immediately a pair of Shill Security agents appeared ahead of him, "Kill them!" he added, pointing back to where Cal and Lara had appeared in the doorway and as the guards drew their weapons Vorn continued to run through the house.

"Oh stang." Cal muttered as he raised and ignited his lightsaber, just in time to block a shot from a compact pulse wave blaster.

The guards fired again as Cal and Lara charged, but the jedi either dodged or blocked all of their shots. Even worse for the guards was that their weapons achieved their compact size in part at the expense of ammunition capacity and their weapons were soon empty. The guards ejected the spent power cells and reached for replacements, but at that moment both Cal and Lara struck and both guards were cut down.

"Come on" Cal snapped, "After him."

"Yeah, I get it." Lara commented as she followed him.

Despite being out of sight of the jedi, Vorn was fairly easy to track. He radiated fear and panic through the Force that allowed the Udras to tell exactly what direction he was in. The only impediment to their pursuit was the layout of the mansion, though the jedi could sense Vorn's location they could not simply walk through the walls to get to him. Simply using lightsabers to cut holes would not allow them to move fast enough, so each time they entered a new room it was necessary to search for a suitable exit.

But on the whole the jedi were moving faster than Vorn and they caught up with him just as he was heading through a doorway that had another pair of guards outside. These two were more heavily armed than the first pair and Cal and Lara ducked out of sight just as they fired bursts of pulse wave fire from their rifles.

"Gee, wouldn't it be nice if we had a grenade launcher?" Lara commented, frowning.

"Okay, I admit it." Cal replied, "You were right. But I would like to remind you that this would have been my turn to use it anyway."

"Good." Lara said, "That means you lose your go."

"How does it mean that?" Cal asked.

"Easy. This was your go, but you didn't bring it with you. That means that the next time is my go." Lara replied.

"Oh whatever." Cal said and he peered briefly around the corner then pulled his head back as another volley of pulse wave fire was sent towards him, "Okay I think I've got this." He said, "But I'll need cover okay?"

"Okay."

"Now!" Cal snapped and both jedi leapt out into the open again, using their lightsabers to block the shots from the two guards. Cal held his lightsaber one handed to do this while he reached out with his other hand towards a table positioned up against a wall near the two guards and concentrated on it.

The table was suddenly dragged across the room and the startled guards leapt out of the way before it could smash into them. But as soon as they took their attention away from Cal and Lara the jedi struck, cutting both down before heading for the door Vorn had vanished through.

"It's locked." Lara said as she tried the door.

"Then stand back." Cal said and he took a deep breath and raised his hand.

Vorn knew that he needed to remove all traces of the Tepillos defence system access codes from his portable computer before the jedi got their hands on it. On his way here he had considered physically destroying the computer, but without his blaster all he could try to do was smash the machine and that would not guarantee the destruction of all the data. Therefore his only option was to wipe the drive electronically. Hurriedly he activated the computer and waited as it powered up. Then he accessed the file storage system and was just calling up the copy of the message given to him by Airia when the door to his office exploded inwards.

"Knock knock!" Cal said as he strode into the room, his lightsaber held up in front of him. Behind him came Lara, also holding up her lightsaber, "Step away from the computer Vorn." Cal warned.

"Too late jedi." Vorn replied and he reached out to delete the incriminating data. But just as his finger neared the keyboard the computer suddenly flew through the air. Shutting off her lightsaber Lara reached out and grabbed the machine and smiled.

"Oh look Cal." She said, "A message file originating from Colonel Jeck on Tepillos to Senator Airia Torin and guess what?"

"It wouldn't happen to include the access codes for the Tepillos planetary defence system would it?" Cal asked.

"You peeked." Lara replied and both Jedi stared at Vorn and grinned.
"Vorn Torin." Cal said calmly, "You are under arrest."

6.

"What is it Genie?" Airia asked her droid.

"I'm sorry to bother you mistress but there are people here to see you." The droid replied and Airia frowned.

"But I don't have any appointments." She said.

"Oh we don't need an appointment." Agent Jule Raser of the sector rangers said as she marched into the office with a pair of her men behind her.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" Airia demanded.

"Oh it's quite simple senator," Jule said, standing in front of the senator's desk while her men walked around behind it, "you're under arrest."

"What?" Airia exclaimed. Then as the two sector rangers lifted her to her feet she angrily snapped, "Get your hands off me!" but the sector rangers ignored her, instead producing a pair of binders that they used to restrain her.

"Senator Airia Torin you are under arrest for being an accessory to murder, for espionage and, oh yes, my favourite – treason against the Galactic Republic. Now would you like me to read you your rights?"

Once again the representatives of the Founding Families met in holographic form. This time though there was another hologram being projected in the meeting, a news report showing Airia Torin being removed from her home by sector rangers.

"So that idiot Vorn has brought down his entire family it seems." Faye Karn said, "Han, couldn't you have done something about this before it got this far?"

"Belle tried to get the jedi to focus on Kyle Jenner instead." Han replied, "Unfortunately they didn't take the bait."

"So now we've lost Airia." Heddren Drud commented, "She's called my office demanding I do something to get her set free."

"And can you?" Luke Crassis asked.

"Of course not." Heddren replied, "There's not a single judge corrupt enough for me to be able to bribe them to overlook evidence of treason. She'll be executed along side her cousin."

"And we lose the advantage of having a senator among us." Trent Narthis said.

"Maybe not." Kayza Drud replied, "There'll be an election and I don't see why another of us can't run."

"But who?" Del Karn asked.

"It has to be someone who still seems respectable." Nissel Fayl said, glancing briefly at the Karns as she remembered how their daughters had spoiled the hopes of a distant relation of Faye's who had tried running against Airia when she was elected.

"I know that." Kayza said, "And I've the perfect candidate in mind." And she looked at Trent Narthis, "This is the Narthis Sector after all." She added.

The reporters gathered in the grounds of the Narthis mansion all knew what was going to be said here today, but they had come anyway to make sure that their news organisations would be able accurately report the precise details. They chatted amongst themselves until a large glass door was opened and Trent Narthis emerged hand in hand with his wife Calleen. Behind them several members of the other Founding Families followed as well in a show of unity for the cameras. Trent approached a podium that had been set up while Calleen stayed back. Pausing for a few moments while Kayza whispered some last minute instructions and reminders of which reporters he should agree to take questions from into his ear, Trent then faced the reporters.

"Three hundred years ago my ancestor Jayk Narthis led the mission that turned a desolate region of space into a thriving sector of the Republic. Now today, I would like to try and recapture some of that pioneer spirit as after discussing this with my friends and of course securing the permission of my wife, I announce my candidacy for the office of Senator of the Galactic Republic."

Sat in his office with several of his subordinates, Hyronymous Kast scowled as he watched the news broadcast from the Narthis mansion.

"What, so that's it then is it?" he exclaimed, turning off the hologram and turning to stare at the others,

"We've just rid ourselves of one member of the Founding Families and now they're all getting together to foist another of their number on us? Just who do they think they are? They don't own this sector." Then he

turned to his protocol droid, "Doc, organise a press conference. Tell them I have an important announcement to make about the future of this sector."

"You're not seriously considering running for senate yourself are you?" one of Hyronymous' subordinates asked.

"Let me tell you something," Hyronymous snapped back, "I built this business myself. I didn't need to rely on the achievements of someone who's been dead for more than two hundred years to make me a success. So when I see some pompous nerf herder acting like he's already been elected I can't think of anyone better to put him in his place. Can you?"