

STAR WARS

TALES OF THE JEDI



IV-IX: CAMPAIGN

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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...

CAMPAIGN

WITH THE ELECTION FOR SENATOR LOOMING ALL THE CANDIDATES ARE DOING THEIR BEST TO WIN OVER THE PUBLIC. BUT NOT ALL ARE WILLING TO TRUST IN THE DECISION OF THE ELECTORATE...

Original characters created and story written by Stephen J. Dutton.
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1 .

Trent Narthis waved as he emerged from the university building, his wife Calleen walking beside him. The crowd was made up mainly of reporters, although there were also numerous members of the general public and a mix of police and private security had to hold them back.

"Trent do you have any comment about the incident at the Founding Exhibit?" one reporter called out.

"Just keep smiling and keep moving." The woman immediately behind Trent whispered. This was Kayza Drud, his campaign manager. Both Trent and Kayza were members of the Founding Families, the descendants of the crew of the exploration ship that had originally charted the Narthis Sector. Trent was personally descended from Jayk Narthis, the ship's captain.

Trent smiled again and waved at the crowd once more.

"You're barely ahead of Hyronymous Kast, are you worried about your chances?" another reporter shouted. "Answer that one." Kayza whispered.

"Not at all." Trent responded, "I welcome the challenge and I'm looking forwards to the debate."

"Don't embellish. Keep it short." Kayza whispered and Trent just smiled and nodded again.

"Trent, none of the Crassis family has appeared with you in the last two weeks. Have you lost their endorsement?"

Kayza stepped forwards, positioning herself between Trent and the crowd.

"Just go." She told him before the crowd could notice the look on his face and Trent and Calleen hurried towards the waiting shuttle.

As soon as the ramp closed behind them Trent glared at Kayza.

"Well?" he said sternly.

"Well what?" Kayza asked in reply.

"You know what Kayza." Calleen said, "Will any of Erill's family be joining us any time soon? Or have your family screwed things up so badly that they'll be popping up next to Hyronymous in his next broadcast?"

"Ah." Kayza said.

"Are they even taking your calls right now?" Trent asked and Kayza hesitated, "I knew it." Trent added, "Your great idea was to show that all of the Founding Families were right behind me and now one of them won't even speak to you."

"Plus we've got to hope that your niece's recent actions don't come to light." Calleen added, "I mean what was she thinking? Stabbing her grandfather to death. Do you really think that Hyronymous would let a little thing like a murder go if he found out that there wasn't really a speeder accident?"

"Don't worry about Hyronymous." Kayza said, "I've spoken with Han and he assures me that he won't be a problem for you much longer."

Two advisors sat in the back of the speeder with Hyronymous Kast as they waited in traffic.

"Of all the days I pick to use a surface vehicle, it has to be when I'm due to give a speech." He said, staring out of the window.

"It make you look more like one of the people than if you fly everywhere." The male advisor replied.

"And what does turning up late for my own event make me look like Kiani?" Hyronymous asked and when his advisors just glanced at one another he added, "Just give me the numbers."

"You were behind Trent Narthis by two points." Kiani told him.

"That's within sampling error." The man added, "You're basically neck and neck."

"I ought to be ahead." Hyronymous said. Then he paused and added, "What about the others?" and Kiani looked at her datapad.

"Gogor Tok, the Tepillos nationalist still hasn't made any speeches away from Tepillos." She said, "Plus he's refused to attend the debates unless they're held on Tepillos."

"That'll never happen." The male advisor said, "The Republic could never guarantee security."

"I should debate him there on my own then." Hyronymous said and his advisors stared at him, "It'll make me look more outreaching." He explained, "Tepillos may be dangerous, but it's got a significant population. We'll take our own security. Now keep going."

"Leia Kerr has dropped out." Kiani said, "She said it was for personal reasons, but it's obvious she ran out of money."

"Leyon, get her to endorse me. I don't care what it costs." Hyronymous told his male advisor.

"She did call you a thief and inherently corrupt two days ago." Leyon reminded his employer.

"Then it will make her look much better won't it?" Hyronymous replied, "It takes a big person to admit they made a mistake and again it'll make me look like I can reach out to my opponents."

"That just leaves Mason Grisk the collectivist and Jaysica Priest the non-interventionist." Kiani said, "They're both still in but neither of them is making any progress."

"Ignore Priest." Hyronymous said, "Her platform of denying support to primitive worlds is easy to take apart. I'll point out how many lives were saved in the last decade by scouts and free traders selling advanced technologies to such worlds and ask why she would rather those beings were dead. Oh, I'll need to know how many lives were saved. Make sure it's big, in the tens of billions at least. I don't care how you need to count them."

"Got it, fiddle the figures." Leyon said and Hyronymous smiled.

"Just like my tax accountants." He commented. "Now what about Grisk? Do you think he can be bought?"

"Of course he can." Kiani replied, "Especially when we can point out how you made your money yourself whereas Trent Narthis is part of a privileged hereditary elite. We'll make sure he still expresses a dislike of you, but say that you're the only candidate who can effectively challenge the Founding Families' representative."

"So vote for me or it's your fault Trent becomes senator? I like that." Hyronymous said, grinning, "I think we ought to-" but then the sound of an explosion cut him off.

"What the kriff?" Leyon exclaimed and he activated the speeder's intercom, "Driver, what was that?"

"I don't know sir." The driver's voice replied, "But I saw a flash and there's smoke coming from up ahead. I think that it's at the park."

"You mean the park we're heading for?" Kiani asked.

"Say it like it is." Hyronymous said with a scowl, "The park where I'd be right now if we hadn't got caught in traffic."

"Jedi Udra!" a woman's voice shouted along the corridor of the space station and Cal Udra, the Jedi knight assigned to the Narthis Sector turned. He recognised the voice as belonging to Agent Jule Raser, the most senior member of the sector rangers in the sector.

"Ah Jule." He said, smiling, "How are you today?"

"Fine. Not disturbing you I hope." she replied and she looked down at the dog that Cal had on a leash.

"No, I was just taking Ghost for a walk." He told her.

"Well I need to ask your help." Jule said, "Have you been following the election?"

"In passing." Cal lied. In fact he had been keeping a very close eye on the campaign. Particularly the actions of Trent Narthis. Since coming to the Narthis Sector Cal and his apprentice, who also happened to be his younger sister Lara had uncovered information about a plot orchestrated by the Founding Families since the time of the original survey mission to exploit artefacts and knowledge left behind by the Sith a thousand years ago when they had controlled this region of space.

"So have you heard that Hyronymous Kast was almost killed this morning?" Jule asked and Cal's jaw dropped. This was something new.

"You're kidding." He said.

"No. There was an explosion where he was supposed to be giving a speech. Rather conveniently he was stuck in traffic at the time so he wasn't hurt. But more than a dozen others were."

"A bomb?" Cal asked, but Jule shook her head.

"A generator overload. It was located right underneath the stage where Hyronymous would have been. The local police are looking into it, but because of the implications if it turns out to be an attempt to assassinate a candidate for the Galactic Senate it falls under Republic jurisdiction."

"And you want me and Lara to help with the investigation?" Cal asked.

"Exactly. Jedi can act as investigators and bodyguards. Plus your very appearance will demonstrate how seriously we're taking this."

Han Shill was CEO of Shill Security, the private military company that provided security for all but one of the Founding Families and was regarded as the premier PMC in the sector. Given his profession he made certain that his home was as secure as was possible and so he knew not only that someone was approaching the door to his apartment before they had chance to sound the bell but also who it was. He waited just inside the front door with his hand positioned over the control, peering through the spy hole. Then as soon as his visitor was right outside and reaching for the bell he opened the door.

"Han! Stop doing that!" Kayza snapped and she shoved him back.

"Ah, I love you too Kayza." He said as he waved her inside, "Though don't tell your brothers I said that."

"No, I doubt they'd appreciate it if they thought you were serious." Kayza replied as she walked into the apartment. Then she turned to look right at him, "So what went wrong?" she asked.

"I'm not sure." Han told her as he headed for the couch, "You have to remember that Shill Security can't be anywhere near this. Even if there's no conclusive proof we're still-"

"Yes, yes. You're connected to the Founding Families and with the election in three weeks it'll look like you're acting on behalf of Trent." Kayza said.

"Which of course I am." Han commented, "Even if we're using a proxy to do it."

"And who is this proxy?" Kayza asked as she sat down opposite Han.

"Ah, now do I ask you about PR?" he asked in return, "The identity of the individual who wants Kast dead as much as we do must remain a secret for now. But don't worry, they'll be exposed in time for the election don't you worry. Trent's an obvious suspect and we can't have his good name being dragged through the mud now can we?"

"Perhaps if Belle-" Kayza began, but Han interrupted her at the mention of his twin sister.

"As far as the galaxy is concerned Belle is dead." Han said, "I shot her myself and that is how she needs to stay for now. This is far too high profile to involve her. The risk of exposure is too big."

Just then the communication unit built into the wall interrupted them.

"Comms answer." Han called out and responding to his voice what looked like a large painting on the wall changed to an image of a young woman who was obviously wearing the uniform of a Republic Navy officer, "Erin." Han said, smiling at his younger sister, "To what do I owe this?"

"I'm guessing that she's there about the election?" the image of Erin Shill replied, looking at Kayza.

"Of course." Kayza said.

"Good." Erin said, "Because whatever you're up to you need to rethink it."

"What do you mean?" Han asked.

"I mean that if either of you is connected in any way to that explosion that almost conveniently removed Kast from the election then you better watch your back. The Jedi are on their way." Erin said.

"Stang." Han hissed, "This is just why I wanted to deal with him quickly. Having the Jedi investigate is one thing, but now that they're here to protect him things just became a lot more difficult. I'm telling you Kayza I've got a bad feeling about this." Then he looked at the image of his younger sister, "Thanks for letting us know." He said, "I don't suppose you can tell me when they'll get here can you?"

"They left about an hour ago." Erin said, "They could be on Crassis Major already."

2.

Unsurprisingly Hyronymous Kast had set up his campaign headquarters in the same building as his company offices and Cal and Lara Udra could not help but notice the large number of uniformed security guards positioned in public places.

"Reckon they always have this many guards about?" Lara whispered as they rode in a turbolift up to the floor when Hyronymous was running his campaign from with a guard standing right in front of them.

"Perhaps his employees work better at gunpoint." Cal whispered back as he looked at the sidearm carried by the guard.

The turbolift door opened and the guard stepped out ahead of the Udras into a wide hallway. All down one side of this were seats occupied by beings equipped with a variety of recording devices and like Cal and Lara they all wore identity tags that read 'VISITOR'. But unlike Cal and Lara they also each wore one that read 'PRESS'. One of the reporters looked up and as soon as she saw the two jedi exiting the turbolift she grabbed a recording rod and rushed towards them.

"Why are representatives of the Jedi Order here?" she called out, holding the recording rod out towards the Udras. This alerted the other reporters to their presence and as fast as they could they too readied their equipment.

"Is this confirmation that this morning's explosion was an attempted assassination?" one asked.

"Who do you think is trying to kill Hyronymous Kast?"

"Is the Jedi Order here to endorse Hyronymous Kast?"

"Absolutely not." Cal said in reply to this final question, "The Jedi Order does not get involved in political campaigns."

A door at the far end of the hallway opened up and Kiani appeared.

"Ah, Jedi Udra." She said, "Do come in."

"Will Mister Kast be making a statement soon?" one of the reporters who had thought being close to the door was an advantage until he found himself caught furthest away from the jedi.

"Yes soon." Kiani told him, "But right now he has business with the jedi." And she waved Cal and Lara through the doorway.

The room they entered had the look of a communications centre, with about a dozen individuals of various species operating communication terminals.

"Where's Hyron?" Lara asked.

"You should refer to Mister Kast as such." Kiani replied.

"Actually we've met him before and he said we should call him that." Lara told her.

Annoyance.

Kiani's reaction was brief, but both Cal and Lara noticed it and they glanced at one another and grinned as they realised that Hyronymous obviously did not allow her as close as she would like.

"We do need to speak with him." Cal said.

"He's this way." Kiani said and she led the two jedi past the communications terminals to a glass walled office in which Hyronymous sat holding a communications handset to his head.

"Yes of course councillor." He was saying as the jedi entered the room, "I'm giving top priority to reviewing your message and it will be given the importance it deserves." Then he saw Cal and Lara standing in the doorway, "I'm sorry I have to go. Two very important sponsors have just arrived." And he put down the handset, "Cal, Lara, its so good to see you again. Please sit down." He said, pointing to a couch set against the wall. Then he looked at Kiani, "Bring them something to drink won't you?"

"Of course Mister Kast." She replied before turning around and walking away.

"Hello Hyron." Cal said when Kiani was gone, "I'm sorry to have interrupted your call."

"My call?" Hyronymous responded, a confused expression on his face, "Oh right. The councillor. Quite frankly I've no idea what he wants. Kiani and Leyon didn't think his message was important enough to bother me with."

Now it was Lara who was confused.

"But you just said you were giving it top priority." She said.

"No, I said I was giving reviewing it top priority and I will be sure to ask what it was about. Then I'll decide how important I think it really is. Hopefully it'll be something I won't have to deal with before the election. The last thing I need now is for it to be some policy suggestion that will make him look good to his local constituents but make me look foolish to the rest of the sector."

"I'd have thought someone trying to blow you up would have been a bigger problem." Cal said.

"Oh that." Hyronymous said, "Cal, let me put it this way. I have you and your sister to protect me now and I've every confidence in your ability to keep me safe from whatever assassins Trent Narthis sends my way. On the other hand I doubt you'd be willing to visit every voter in the sector and use your abilities to convince them to vote for me would you?"

"No." Cal replied, "We've already had to point out to a reporter that we can't get involved in the election campaign itself." Then he added, "How do you know that it was Trent Narthis that tried to kill you?"

"Who else am I threatening?" Hyronymous asked, "Let's face it, there are only two swoops in this race and I'm the one that can put a stop to the Founding Families and their domination of this sector. Did you know that out of the thirty-seven senators to have represented the Narthis Sector, twenty-two have been members of one of the Founding Families? Typically cousins or younger siblings, but now they're trying to get one of their major players in the position. And it would be a Narthis as well. Don't you see that they see this entire sector as their personal fiefdom? All because their ancestors came blundering through here three hundred years ago."

"We still need more than that to go on." Cal said, "Now have you been getting any death threats?"

"Of course I have." Hyronymous answered, "I'm a hard working billionaire Cal. I'm used to getting death threats from those too lazy to go out and earn a living themselves who instead think that they're more deserving of my money than I am."

"But any specifically relating to your campaign?" Lara asked.

"You'd have to ask Leyon or Kiani about that. Ah, here's Kiani now with your drinks." Hyronymous said as Kiani returned bearing a tray with cups of caf on it. As she set it down on the desk and began handing the drinks out Hyronymous went on, "Kiani, Cal and Lara would like to know about the threats we've been getting."

"Oh they're all recorded and filed." She replied, "Plus we send a copy of each to the police for their input."

"We'll need to see them as well." Cal said before he was interrupted by the sound of his point-to-point communication link warning him of an incoming signal.

"Jedi Udra?" a man's voice asked.

"Yes." Cal answered.

"Jedi Udra, I'm Lieutenant Terr of the Crassis Major Anti-Terrorism Department. My men have just completed going over the scene of the explosion and we've found the cause."

"Already?" Lara commented as she overheard this.

"That was quick lieutenant." Cal said, "Is it alright to come and see you now?"

"Certainly. I was hoping you'd say that. I want to get the crime scene cleared before it gets dark."

"Then we'll see you soon. Udra out." Cal said and he shut off the PTP link, "Sorry to have to leave so soon." He told Hyronymous, "But we're needed in the park."

"Of course." Hyronymous replied.

"Until we get back it might be a good idea for you to remain here where you've your own security force to protect you." Lara suggested.

"I was planning on staying late anyway." Hyronymous said, "To practice for the upcoming debate."

The police had sealed the park where Hyronymous had been due to speak that morning. The stage on which he would have stood no longer existed, having been demolished in the explosion. When the Jedi arrived they found a large number of police officers still going over the area, recording the positions of significant pieces of debris.

"Jedi Udra, over here!" a voice called out and both Cal and Lara looked around to see a Twi'lek male in a jacket marked ATD.

"Lieutenant Terr?" Cal asked as they headed towards the man, "What do you have for us?"

"One of my men found this." Terr replied and from his jacket he produced a transparent evidence bag that he held out to Cal. Inside the bag was a small piece of metal rectangular in shape with a circular hole near one end. Badly charred, it was nevertheless intact.

"What's that?" Lara asked, peering at the bag as Cal held it up.

"I've no idea." Cal replied.

"Neither did I." Terr commented, "But one of my agents knows about generators and she says that this little gizmo is a flow valve plate. It slides back and forth to regulate fuel flow into the fusion chamber."

"So I'm guessing you think that this caused the explosion?" Cal said, looking directly at Terr.

"I know so." Terr replied.

"How?" Lara asked.

"Because that'll cause any generator you put it in to explode." Terr said, "Look closely and you'll see that the hole to allow the gas through isn't a perfect circle. It's been extended at one side."

“So it allows more fuel in than is wanted.” Cal said and Terr nodded.

“Even if you try to close it completely the hole is big enough to allow gas through. An overload would be inevitable. All someone had to do was plug in the fuel supply and get clear.”

“How long would an overload take?” Lara asked.

“I’m told about thirty minutes. Give or take five. We’re not talking about a state of the art weapon here. Just someone with knowledge of fusion generators and a grudge against Kast. Individually those two lists would each have a lot of names on them and there’s got to be some overlap.”

“But in your opinion this isn’t the sort of thing a professional assassin would use?” Cal asked.

“No. Not precise enough. Kast survived purely because he got stuck in the rush hour traffic.” Terr said.

“So if he’d come by monorail he’d be dead.” Lara said.

“Assuming they were on time.” Terr replied, “Around here that’s pretty rare. Why else do you think so many people are willing to sit in traffic each morning?”

“Then perhaps Hyron should have a policy of making the monorails run on time.” Lara said.

“I think Trent Narthis is promising that.” Cal commented and then he sighed and handed the evidence bag and its contents back to Terr, “Thank you Agent Terr.” He said, “Though I’m afraid that really doesn’t give us much to go on. I was hoping that you’d have evidence of a professional assassination plot, but this looks like just some lone nut.”

3.

Han had been waiting in the disused building for over an hour before his contact arrived.

"What was the hold up?" he asked the figure that remained in the shadows.

"There was an unexpected visitor at the office." The figure replied. Then after a brief pause he added, "I thought you said that the generator would take care of him."

"It would have if you'd done what I told you." Han said, "I told you not to plug in the generator until Kast started his speech."

"I had to be elsewhere at the time. That's why I rigged it for about the time he was supposed to start his speech instead of near the end."

"Well let's see how you do with this." Han said and he dragged a bulky container from behind a supporting column and he opened it. Inside was a short but bulky weapon that had a thick power lead dangling from the handgrip at the rear. It was clearly designed for use in two hands and mounted on top of it was an optical sight that looked out of place on this weapon.

"A beam tube?" the mysterious figure asked.

"Yes, a beam tube." Han replied.

"Don't you have anything that didn't come as surplus from the army of Xim the Despot?"

"It's ideal for this job." Han explained as he lifted the weapon to his shoulder, "Over the range we're talking about the accuracy is perfect, its beam is immune to wind and gravity and while deadly it still lacks the more destructive properties of a modern blaster."

"So what I am to do with it?"

"Kill Hyronymous Kast of course. He'll probably be wearing an armoured vest now, but it'll be a covert type that won't stop an energy weapon. Even if it is about twenty thousand years out of date."

"Particularly if I blow his brains out with it."

"No." Han said sternly, "No headshots. Hit the chest, put the beam right through his heart. The optic should help with that. Unlike the weapon it's state of the art, though not restricted to the military."

"Why not a headshot? If the scope's that good then-"

"Because after you've killed Kast I want you to shoot Trent Narthis." Han interrupted.

"Hey, I thought you only wanted Kast out of the way."

"I do. That's why you'll be shooting Narthis in the shoulder. It'll look like you tried to put a blast through his heart as well but missed. The beam from this will mess up his shoulder for a few weeks, but there shouldn't be any permanent damage. No wait; there better not be any permanent damage. Trust me, if there is then he won't be the only one crippled or dead. Understood?" Han said.

"Yeah, I get it. Now give me the gun so I can get out of here."

When Cal and Lara returned to Hyronymous' offices they found the reporters still waiting in the hallway between the turbolift and the campaign office itself. Once again they rushed to question the Jedi about the attempt on Hyronymous' life and their role in the election campaign. This time however, neither Cal nor Lara responded to any of the questions.

Entering the office the Jedi initially thought that Trent Narthis was there with Hyronymous Kast, the two men standing behind separate podiums set up on a small stage in front of a group of about a dozen people scattered nearby. However, as Cal and Lara got nearer they saw Trent appear to flicker and they realise that 'he' was in fact a life size holographic projection used to simulate the presence of Hyronymous' opponent while Hyronymous himself practiced.

"How's this?" he asked.

"No, you're not looking at the camera." Kiani told him, "Ignore the person that just asked you a question."

"That's rather rude isn't it?" Lara asked as she and Cal approached the stage.

"Yes, but that's not how it will look when broadcast." Kiani replied, looking round at the Jedi, "To the viewers it will look as if he's addressing them personally. In the end there are only a relative handful of voters in the audience asking questions, not enough to matter if they feel badly treated."

"Ah manipulating minds." Cal said and looking at his sister he added, "I can't help but feel that our way is more honest."

"Though no where near as well paying." Lara responded.

"There is that." Cal said.

"Cal, Lara." Hyronymous said, stepping down from the stage and heading for them, "So have you found out what happened?"

"The police have proven that the generator exploded due to sabotage of the fuel regulation system." Cal replied, "Though not the identity of the individual responsible."

"They're looking into that now." Lara added.

"So Trent has sent someone to have me killed." Hyronymous said, scowling, "I knew it."

"Actually it doesn't look like it was a professional job." Lara said, "Too random."

"Then who's responsible?" Hyronymous asked.

"Like I said, the police are looking into that." Cal said, "But it looks like a disturbed individual with an axe to grind."

"Then I'm sure that with you two around I'm in no danger at all." Hyronymous said loudly and he returned to the stage, "So we may as well continue." And he nodded at one of the people stood around it.

"Yes about that." Cal said, "If we're to provide a proper level of security coverage then we'll have to stick close to you at all times."

"How close do you mean exactly?" Hyronymous asked.

"He means we hope you've got guest rooms." Lara said, "Because you've got houseguests."

Kayza watched from a side door as a red haired woman spoke to the audience and smiled. Each being in the room had paid a tidy sum to come here tonight to hear not only this woman, but also Trent Narthis himself speak. The money was not needed for the campaign of course, but events such as this had the effect of making the guests feel as if they had an interest in it, possibly even influence.

"Kay Mazat?" Han Shill suddenly said from behind her and she jumped.

"Don't do that." Kayza said, slapping his arm.

"So you're going down the celebrity endorsement route?" Han asked and Kayza smiled.

"Our polling shows that Trent's considered out of touch with most of the electorate."

"Really? They can't relate to a trillionaire whose family gets invited to every Founding Day parade?"

"Oh shut up Han. Face it, when her fans watch this they'll see someone they admire telling them to vote for our man. It doesn't matter if what she says makes any sense, it just matters that she's said it." Kayza explained, "I'm just glad that Salla Crassis put us in touch with her before Erill's family pulled out of this."

"Ah yes, she's Salla's friend." Han said, "That's how I first met her you know? She and I almost."

"She turned you down flat Han." Kayza interrupted, grinning, "Salla told me all about it." Then she folded her arms and stared at Han, "So is it done?" she asked.

"Of course it is." Han told her, "I've handed over the weapon and told him how I want it used."

"And you're certain that Trent isn't going to be implicated?" Kayza asked him.

"Definitely not." Han said, "But it's going to need him to exercise some self control."

"Self control? Why?"

"Because he's going to be shot." Han said and Kayza's jaw dropped.

"You're going to shoot him?" she hissed.

"Not me. Someone else. But don't worry, he'll come off a lot better than Kast will. But that's not the real problem anyway." Han said.

"Oh, shooting someone isn't a problem? So what is a problem then Han?" Kayza asked.

"The jedi are sticking to Kast like glue it seems. They've decided to leave investigating the failed attempt with the generator to the local anti-terrorist forces while they act to prevent any more attempts on his life."

"Well that's just great isn't it? How the hell are you proposing to take them out?"

"I'm not. I'm going to get them to go away."

"Oh, you'll just ask them nicely will you?" Kayza said sarcastically.

"No. Though I think Gayal may be able to achieve that, I doubt it'd work for me. She may have married old Erill, but we all know that she's got Cal by the--"

"Yes we all know. But how are you going to get the jedi to simply pack up and leave?" Kayza interrupted and Han smiled.

"The police have decided that they're looking for a lone nut, so that's what I'm going to give them. Then they'll think that their work is done and away they'll go. Easy." He explained, but Kayza frowned.

"Yes easy. All you have to do is play the jedi for fools and then shoot the man we want to be senator." Kayza said and she shook her head slowly, "I've got a very bad feeling about this Han."

"Hey, it's me." Han replied, "Nothing you've just said is anything I haven't done before."

"Somehow I don't see Trent or Calleen seeing it that way when I tell them he has to be shot." Kayza replied, "I assume that you do expect me to tell them, right?"

"Well I'm not doing it." Han responded, "But then I'm not stupid." And then he swiftly kissed her on the cheek and walked away, leaving her standing watching him leave and frowning.

"I disagree." She muttered.

"Welcome to my humble home." Hyronymous said as he walked through the front door of his mansion, Cal and Lara following close behind.

"Humble?" Lara commented as she looked around, "I don't think the Jedi temple is this big."

"Hyron? You didn't say we'd be having guests." A woman's voice called out and Hyronymous smiled and held his arms outstretched to embrace her as she walked up to him.

"I'm sorry dear." He said, "But it was a last minute thing. This is Jedi Knight Cal Udra and his padawan learner Lara Udra." Then he looked at the two Jedi, "And this is my long suffering wife Tess."

"Jedi? Really?" Tess said.

"Pleased to meet you." Cal responded, "I'm sorry if we're inconveniencing you in any way."

"Oh not at all." Tess said, smiling, "But I wasn't aware that the Jedi Order billeted its agents in this way."

"We're here on official business Missus Kast." Lara said, "To protect your husband." And Tess' face fell.

"Protect? Hyron what does she mean?" she said, "We already have a pair of guards. Why do we need Jedi to protect us?"

"Oh nice work Lara." Cal said, frowning.

"It's nothing dear." Hyronymous told his wife, "There have been some threats made and Cal and Lara are here to make sure that we're all kept safe."

"And with that in mind I think that Lara and I ought to run a check on the building and its grounds." Cal said, "Just to evaluate potential security weaknesses."

"Yes of course." Hyronymous said.

Han was reluctant to go anywhere near Hyronymous' home, but given the nature of this task he considered the risk of being seen to be less than the risk of something going wrong if he sent one of his employees to carry it out. Especially since that would require letting them in on his plan and Han wanted that kept between as few people as possible.

"Okay so you know what you're doing?" he asked the scruffily dressed man sat beside him in the speeder.

"Sure." The man replied, "I go in there and scare the guy. I just need to wave the gun about and threaten him before I get out of there." then he snarled, "Trust me, this guy's got it coming."

"Then take this." Han said and he produced a small case that he opened to reveal an accelerator pistol. The weapon was designed to fire magnetically propelled projectiles and could not be linked to Shill Security in any way. This particular pistol had been captured from pirates and then never declared to the authorities, meaning that officially it did not exist, "And make sure that you fire it at least once. Otherwise he won't take you seriously."

"I can do that." The man said as he took the weapon from the case and inserted the magazine that was in there beside it.

"Good. Now get out." Han said and as soon as his passenger had got out of the speeder he drove away, resisting the temptation to accelerate as fast as he could and thus produce a significant amount of noise that could give him away.

Left behind, the scruffy man headed directly for Hyronymous' home. A high wall surrounded the mansion and its grounds, but in places there were trees planted just outside this and the man intended to use one of these as a means of access to the estate. Climbing one of the trees the man crawled along a branch that reached out towards the wall and peered over it. On the other side he saw a large neatly kept lawn between the wall and the mansion itself and he considered how difficult it would be to get across that without triggering any of the motion sensors that were doubtless in place. However, the man was being well paid for this and he reckoned that he could cross the distance in a very short time if he hurried. Crawling as far along the branch as he could, the man jumped down to the wall itself and then pulled himself over before dropping down to the ground on the far side.

4.

Cal and Lara sat in the kitchen, eating.

"We should have brought Ghost with us." Lara commented, "He'd have loved running round that lawn."

"Problem is he'd have dug half of it up and then dragged it all over the furniture." Cal pointed out, "I doubt that the Kasts would have appreciated that."

"I suppose so." Lara replied, "Or worse still he could have jumped in that pool and shook himself off inside." One of the Kasts regular bodyguards then entered the room.

"We've got a perimeter alarm." He said, "Something big just came over the wall and triggered the impact sensors."

"Okay let's go." Cal said, before shoving one last mouthful of food into his mouth.

"Where's your partner?" Lara asked the guard.

"He was sleeping. I've woken him up and he'll be with us in a couple of minutes." The man answered.

"It'll all be over by then." Lara said as she opened the back door and looked out into the darkness. All of a sudden the grounds were lit up by spotlights mounted on the outside of the mansion.

"Okay we've got movement." The guard said and he looked at the datapad he held, "East side sensors. Same as the wall alert."

"Stay behind us." Cal told the man, swallowing what he was chewing before he drew his lightsaber from his belt and headed outside.

Cal, Lara and the guard stayed close to the mansion as they headed towards the source of the alarm, moving slowly and watching for any signs of life. The as suddenly as they had activated the floodlights turned off once more.

"Stay still." Cal said softly, "Let whoever's out there trigger them again." Then he looked at Lara, "Sense anything?" he asked.

Both Jedi concentrated, letting the Force flow through them and right away both of them picked up on the disturbance caused by a sentient being coming from the darkness.

"I think there's just one." Lara whispered and Cal nodded in agreement.

"And they seem pretty calm." He said, "No strong emotion of any kind."

"Isn't that odd for someone like we're looking for?" Lara asked.

"Not necessarily." Cal replied, "If they are emotionally disturbed we don't know how that would manifest."

Then there was the sound of footfalls as the intruder reached the path that ran around the mansion and began to walk along it, keeping beneath the field of view for the wall mounted motion sensors. This was followed by a 'snap-hiss' as Cal activated his lightsaber and the immediate area was lit up by the bluish light it cast.

"Stay where you are!" Cal yelled at the figure suddenly illuminated at the edge of the area lit up.

Panic.

The man turned away from the Udras and the guard and began to run back across the lawn. He had expected some security presence, but not a Jedi and now escape was foremost in his mind. Behind him the Udras and the guard ran after him, the guard taking out a point-to-point communicator to relay what was happening to his partner who had yet to arrive. Unable to retreat the way he had come because of the high perimeter wall the man ran towards the front of the house, hoping to escape via the main gates. But as he ran around the corner he found his escape already blocked.

"Get down!" the second guard yelled, aiming a shotgun towards the man. He had used the information from the guard accompanying Cal and Lara to position himself ahead of the man. However, rather than comply with the instruction the man reached into his coat and pulled out the accelerator pistol Han had given him. Seeing this the guard fired, raising the shotgun to fire a warning shot over the man's head and the booming sound produced by the weapon echoed off the wall.

"Stang!" Cal exclaimed as he came round the corner as well, "Watch where you're pointing that thing."

The intruder was now heading directly away from the house, triggering the security lights again and still holding his pistol but yet to fire it.

"He's heading for the wall." Lara called out as she headed after him, activating her own lightsaber, "Stop! Get down on the ground!" she shouted at him.

The man ignored her however, now intent on taking his chances in being able to get over the wall just up ahead of him and as he neared it he dropped his pistol and then leapt at the wall with his arms reaching up above his head. But even like this he still failed to be able to take hold of the top of the wall and he immediately drooped back to the ground.

Looking around he saw Lara closing on him rapidly with Cal and the two guard not far behind. Then he spotted where his pistol had fallen and he scooped it up and took aim at Lara.

"Stay back or I shoot!" he yelled.

Fear.

The man was clearly desperate and desperate people tended to do desperate things.

"Don't do it!" Cal shouted as Lara ground to a halt and raised her lightsaber to block the projectile she expected the man to fire at any moment, "Put the weapon down." But the man ignored Cal's instruction and pulled the trigger.

And was promptly engulfed in flames as the pistol exploded.

Pain.

Lara flinched at the overwhelming blast of emotion as Cal ran past her, dropping his lightsaber and tearing off his cloak so that he could hurl it over the burning man in an attempt to smother the flames. But even as he threw it over the screaming man, Cal felt his life slip away and there was silence.

"What the kriff happened?" Lara asked and Cal looked around.

With the security lights providing excellent illumination the debris from the destroyed accelerator pistol was easy to see scattered around the man's body. In addition to this there were lumps of flesh, some of which were easily identifiable as having come from the man's hand.

"Well I don't want to jump to any conclusions, but I'd say his pistol blew up and took his hand off." Cal said, "Perhaps Lieutenant Terr's people will be able to shed more light on it."

An orbiting satellite transmitted recorded footage of the chase and explosion to Han's office and he smiled as he saw the sudden heat flare from the explosion of the accelerator pistol. Now the Jedi had the body of a clearly disturbed individual that would close their investigation here on Crassis Major, leaving his agent clear to complete task of dealing with Hyronymous Kast.

"It was the battery." Terr said. The anti-terrorist unit had reached the Kast home about an hour after Cal called in the incident and they immediately set to work gathering up what was left of the intruder and the pistol.

"What happened exactly?" Cal asked.

"Well it looks like there was a faulty connection inside the weapon that caused a short across the acceleration coils. So when the trigger was pulled it shorted out the battery directly and since it was a low-grade phosphor-polymer one without any short circuit protection it tried to discharge itself all in at once. The excessive current flow triggered massive overheating and expansion of the battery that caused it to explode. I guess you know the rest."

"Yes, we got a good view." Lara said.

"Sounds like a black market weapon." Cal commented.

"So who was this guy?" Lara asked.

"We've not got an ID yet." Terr replied, "But we ran a field blood test and found traces of anti-psychotic medicines."

"So he's our lone nut then?" Cal asked.

"That's how it looks to me." Terr said, "Unless we can find any evidence pointing to someone else having been involved this case is closed."

"Well it looks like we can head back to Aurek Station then." Lara said.

Aboard their ship, the delaya-class *Bright Hope*, Cal and Lara waited for permission to launch and Lara noticed that Cal seemed preoccupied.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"I've got a bad feeling about this." Cal replied.

"Huh?" Lara responded.

"If that guy had a gun then why not shoot Hyronymous when he made his speech in the park in the morning?" Cal said.

"Too many witnesses?" Lara suggested.

"He would have to have gone to the park anyway to rig the generator." Cal pointed out, "On the other hand if he wasn't worried about the security of this place then why not come here before we arrived to reinforce security? No. I don't think that he acted alone at all. In fact I think that he's only a minor part of this. A decoy."

"But that means someone sent him here to get killed Cal." Lara said, "Why?"

"Because look where we are now, ready to leave and head back to Aurek Station and leaving whoever's really behind this free to finish off their plan."

“So what do we do then Cal?”

“We go.” Cal replied, “We give whoever is trying to manipulate us exactly what they want.”

“But shouldn’t we go back and protect Hyron?” Lara asked.

“Oh we will, just not straight away.” Cal told her, “Aurek Station is less than an hour’s flight away in the *Bright Hope* and we can get a commercial flight back here in about another two. That means about a three hour round trip. That still gives us time to get to Hyron before the assassin makes his next attempt.”

“Cal, how do you know that?”

“Easy. I took a look at his schedule of events so I could figure out where and when an assassin was likely to try and strike. Hyron’s next public appearance is tonight for the live debate.”

5.

Trent Narthis was the first of the candidates to arrive for the debate and he stood in the studio looking up at the stage.

"Only three?" he commented, glancing at Kayza.

"Yes, Gogor Tok's not coming of course and Mason Grisk dropped out of the race less than an hour ago. I spotted the stagehands removing his podium when we arrived. That means it's just you and Hyronymous Kast with Jaysica Priest."

Trent snorted.

"That Priest woman's no threat. It'll come down to me and Kast debating one another while she just hurls insults at us from the sidelines." He said.

"And you better remember not to respond in kind." Kayza reminded him, "Just grin and bear it."

"Yes I know. That way I'm the statesman and she's the freak." Trent said and then he smiled, "Talking of grinning and bearing it, here comes my real opposition." He added and Kayza looked around to see Hyronymous approaching with Leyon and Kiani behind him. Trent stepped around Kayza and held out his hand in greeting, "Hello there Hyron." He said and Hyronymous frowned briefly at the way Trent had abbreviated his name without asking. Nevertheless, aware that there were members of the media watching he accepted his opponent's hand and shook it.

"Hello Trent." He responded as both men squeezed one another's hands tightly.

"Can I just get an image?" a nearby journalist asked and with their hands still joined the two men looked at him and smiled while the picture was taken. Then the moment that the journalist was done they let go and looked at one another.

"I was so relieved to hear that the lunatic trying to kill you was stopped." Trent said.

"Oh really?" Hyronymous replied, "I'd have thought you'd have been more worried about how the attempt on my life has given me a five point lead in a day." And Trent's smile widened.

"Well we'll just have to see how well that holds up after the debate won't we?" he said.

"Priest's here." Leyon suddenly said and both candidates and their advisors looked towards the back of the studio where Jaysica Priest had just entered with a group of her supporters. Unlike Hyronymous and Trent who had feigned civility towards one another, she scowled as soon as she saw them and rather than heading for them she led her supporters around the side of the studio.

"Excuse me Miss Priest, but could I get an image of you with your two opponents?" the same journalist who had just photographed Hyronymous and Trent asked.

"Absolutely not." She replied abruptly, "I want nothing to do with them. They ravish worlds and ruin them to make themselves rich."

Hyronymous and Trent exchanged glances.

"Well that certainly makes you feel welcome doesn't it?" Trent said and both smiled the first genuine smiles since they had set eyes on each other in the studio.

Then one of the studio staff approached the group.

"Excuse me," she said, "we'll be admitting the audience soon. Could I ask you to head to make up?"

"Certainly." Hyronymous replied while Trent just nodded and the two groups made their way away from stage while the staff member headed for Jaysica's group.

"We'll be-" she began.

"Yes thank you, I heard." Jaysica replied, "I'll be on my way." And then she turned to one of her supporters, "Joffran would you handle things here while everyone else gets to their seats?"

"Of course I will." Joffran replied with a smile and he turned to leave the way the group had come into the studio while Jaysica's other supporters sought out the seats that had been assigned to them.

Outside the studio there was a crowd of people being guided in by staff. This crowd had been selected by the company that operated the studio and came from around the sector, each one being assigned a specific seat in the studio. Joffran noticed that some wore badges or ribbons to identify themselves with particular candidates but that studio staff asked them to remove these before taking their seats.

Joffran ignored all this, instead heading towards a cluster of people that were not part of the audience or studio staff. All of them wore identity badges that marked them out as members of Jaysica Priest's official team. Because of the limited number of seats assigned to each candidate's team they had been forced to wait outside the studio and they were apparently looking after the belongings of those who had been given a place.

They smiled as Joffran approached and stepped aside to allow him to collect the heavy case he had left with them. Then he headed back for the studio, not by the same door he had just used to leave it, but instead one of the side doors that led up to the overhead lighting rig and as soon as he was through the door he removed his identity tag and swapped it for a cleverly forged studio one.

"What are you doing up here?" a stern voice suddenly asked him and Joffran saw a security guard heading for him along one of the walkways that criss-crossed the studio.

"Checking electrical connections." He replied, holding out his forged identity tag.

"Well make sure you stay quiet." The guard said, "The debate starts in five minutes."

"Of course, I'll be careful." Joffran responded as the guard began to walk past him. But the moment he was behind the guard Joffran slipped a narrow dagger from his sleeve and stuck into the man's back, driving the point in just above the neckline of his armoured vest and aimed downwards to pierce the heart. He caught the guard as he fell and silently lowered him to the walkway. Then he took the guard's PTP communication link and sidearm, a compact semi automatic slug thrower pistol, before he began to look for a spot that gave a full view of the stage.

There were far too many people at the front door to the broadcast building for Cal and Lara to chance trying to sneak in that way. Even if they used their Force powers to distract some people there would be others that would notice them. They could of course have just walked up to the door and identified themselves as jedi to gain admittance, but they wanted their presence to remain a secret and if they announced themselves at the door it would have been broadcast around the entire building in minutes. Therefore they headed around the back of the building where they knew there would be other ways in.

Lara went first, taking advantage of her superior skill in using the Force to simply avoid people noticing her while Cal followed close behind and kept watch for any indication that they had been seen,

"Found one." Lara whispered, coming to a stop suddenly.

"How's it look?" Cal asked in reply.

"One guy standing outside a door he's wedged open for a smoke." Lara told him.

"That's perfect." Cal said, "Distract him."

"Got it." Lara said, creeping closer to the man stood smoking just outside the door.

Oblivious to Lara's approach the man continued to smoke, taking deep breaths before blowing jets of smoke into the air. As he did this Lara waved a hand, reaching out through the Force and planting the suggestion in his mind that he had just heard something in the other direction.

"Hey is someone back there?" he called out as he tried to see if anyone was hiding in that direction and then significantly he stepped away from the door, "You shouldn't be back here." He said while Cal and Lara rushed past behind him and through the open door. Outside the man convinced himself that he had heard nothing, shrugged and went back to smoking.

Meanwhile inside the building Cal and Lara looked around. The door had brought them into a storage room filled with audio, holographic and visual recording equipment.

"So what now big brother?" Lara asked.

"Be patient my baby sister." Cal replied, making Lara frown as he called her 'baby sister', "First of all we head out through that door over there and then we find a plan of this place. There must be one somewhere. Then once we've figured out where the debate is taking place we can figure out where the assassin is likely to be."

"So you think that they'll strike during the debate itself?" Lara asked.

"It's the best time." Cal answered, "The assassin will know exactly where Hyron is and that he won't be moving around."

The audience applauded as the debate's moderator walked out in front of them while studio staff escorted each of the three candidates present to their places, each of them appearing to ignore the other two for the time being.

"As the moderator of this debate I would just like to remind audience members that they are not here to take part in it themselves." He said, "Therefore while applause is allowed audience members should only speak when I call upon them to do so."

"Transmitting in thirty seconds." The producer then called out and the moderator took up his position as well. The audience were urged to applaud by studio staff as the transmission began and while this was going on below, above the audience's heads Joffran was finalising his position. The optical sight had its own power supply separate to that of the beam tube itself and Joffran used this to study the lines of fire available to him. He needed a location where he had a clear shot at both Hyronymous and Trent and that still allowed him

rapid access to one of the exits. The moment he fired studio security would be closing in on him so a quick escape was essential.

When he was satisfied he set the beam tube down and returned to the case to collect the heavy power pack. This weighed almost as much as the beam tube itself, which was why Joffran had not connected it as soon as he unpacked the weapon. Instead he carried it back to his chosen firing position where he set it down on the walkway and plugged it into the beam tube. Resting the beam tube on the walkway's safety rail he then took aim and waited for the right moment.

Reaching out through the Force Cal plucked a datapad from the belt of one of one of the broadcaster's employees, a man whose smart clothing suggested that he was at least mid level management.

"Okay let's see what's on this." He said as he and Lara ducked into an alcove with the stolen datapad.

"So long as there's more than just a diary." Lara commented.

"Well there's a diary on here as well." Cal replied, "But its all business stuff so I think what we need is going to be on here somewhere." And he sorted through the file organisation system, hunting for details of the building.

"Hurry up Cal." Lara said, "The debate will have started by now. Perhaps we should just ask someone. We can make them forget speaking to us."

"No." Cal said sternly, "That sort of manipulation is risky. It's a path to the Dark Side. Anyway, I think I've found what we're looking for. Yes, here we go. Studio six." And then he looked at a sign on the wall across the corridor. On this was a list of studios with arrows pointing towards each of them. Without a word Cal and Lara started to run towards studio six.

A sign outside the studio indicated that the debate was already in progress, just as Lara had indicated it would be and a single security guard stood outside the door to prevent unauthorised access. Cal raised his hand to distract the guard in the same way Lara had done to the man smoking outside, but he hesitated.

"What's wrong?" Lara asked.

"Where do you think the assassin would be?" he asked back.

"Inside of course." Lara answered, "So get rid of the guard. Or shall I do it?"

"Wait." Cal told her, taking out the datapad again and he searched for a floor plan.

"What are you looking for?" Lara asked.

"We saw the mock up of the debate stage in Hyron's office right?" Cal said and Lara nodded, "So that gives us an idea of what the layout of the studio will be." He explained, "And from that we ought to be able to figure out the best place for an assassin to strike from." Then as he found the floor plan of the studio he frowned.

"Not what you're looking for?" Lara asked.

"Yes and no." Cal replied, "Yes it is what I'm looking for, but no it doesn't give me much of an idea. From this I'd say that the assassin would be best off in the middle of the audience." And Lara frowned.

"Searching the audience is going to be a major pain." She said, "In fact I don't see how we can do it if we're trying not to be noticed."

"Don't worry, that's not where the assassin will be." Cal replied, "There's too much chance of something going wrong. Someone next to them could spot what they're up to in time to raise the alarm, they could disturb the attack or the audience could have a collective attack of bravery and tackle the assassin as they try to escape. We need to look somewhere else."

"Cal what's in there?" Lara said, pointing towards a smaller door set further along the wall from the main door into studio six and when Cal checked the datapad a smile spread across his face.

"Lara that's it." He said, "That door gives access to the lighting rig. The assassin could take a shot from up there and escape before anyone could get close."

"So let's go." Lara said, taking a step towards the door, but Cal reached out to hold her back.

"No." he told her.

"Why not?"

"Because I want you in the studio itself. Sneak in and stay out of the way. If I don't get to the assassin in time I want you to protect Hyron. Understood?"

"Understood." Lara replied and then she waved a hand towards the security guard on the studio door.

Han sat alone in his apartment watching the debate on a screen that filled most of the wall in front of him. Short of being there himself, this was as close as it was possible to get. Not that he wanted to be in the studio though. He did not want to be anywhere near Joffran when he struck, even the presence in the studio of the bodyguards Shill Security had provided to Trent was risky. Questions could be asked about what their involvement with the assassin was and also about how come he had been able to fire two shots at the stage

with a supposedly elite security team in the studio with him. This evening's events may be necessary in the longer term, but in the short term they could prove to be somewhat damaging to his business. A member of the studio audience had asked about the implications of exploration in the Levik Cluster and both Hyronymous and Trent had just indicated their support for the expansion of the sector's borders. On the other hand Jaysica Priest had now launched into a tirade against manned exploration and settlement, accusing scouts and prospectors of being no better than pirates plundering primitive worlds before calling for Hyronymous to prove her wrong by disbanding his company's exploration division.

"And what of the twenty thousand highly skilled people I employ for that?" he retorted, "Shall I make them all unemployed?"

"Of course not. You should keep them on in other roles." Jaysica replied, "The Republic needs to limit its impact on other cultures."

"If my ancestor Jayk Narthis had followed your policy then we wouldn't even be here." Trent pointed out, "How can you honestly represent this sector if you'd prefer that it didn't even exist?" and there was a spontaneous round of applause from the audience that prompted the broadcaster to display a shot panning around the studio to show the reaction. Han smiled at this; even he could tell that the applause meant that Trent had struck a chord with the audience and that both they and viewers of the broadcast would remember it. But as the image continued to sweep across the audience it caught an isle at one side of the studio in shot and for a brief moment Han noticed a figure standing right behind one of the camera droids. Reaching out to the arm of his chair Han accidentally knocked the remote for the screen to the floor and had to bend down to scoop it up. Then he paused the transmission and rewound it back to the audience reaction shot. He stepped through the footage frame by frame, watching for the isle and camera droid to come into shot and when it did he hit pause again before zooming in on the figure behind the droid. Slim, blonde and wearing plain robes there was only one person that it could be.

Lara Udra.

"Oh kriff." Han exclaimed and he ran for his communicator and activated it, punching in the details for Kayza Drud.

6.

Watching from backstage Kayza grinned as Jaysica tried to respond to Trent's attack, fumbling with how the Narthis Sector did not count and that he was twisting her words. Then she felt her PTP link vibrate and she pulled it from her pocket.

"What?" she hissed, "I'm really busy here with-"

"Shut up a moment and take a look around." Han interrupted.

"What are you talking about?" Kayza asked.

"Take a look at the camera droid closest to Priest." Han told her.

"Okay then. What am I looking for?" Kayza asked as she looked at the droid.

"Tell me what you see."

Kayza shrugged.

"Just a droid." She said.

"Really? No one else there?"

"No."

"Now that's really interesting." Han said, "Because I'm watching from home and not two minutes ago I saw someone standing right behind it."

"Han, as jokes go this isn't very funny." Kayza said as she looked at the droid again. But then she realised that she was not actually looking straight at the droid. Instead she was skipping past it without realising and she forced herself to stare directly at it, "Oh kriff." She said as all of a sudden Lara appeared beside the droid.

"That's just what I said." Han said.

"Han, I thought you said that the jedi were back on Aurek Station."

"Well they were. They must have come back and I'm willing to bet that if Lara's there then Cal can't be far way." Han replied.

"What about your assassin? Can you call him off?" Kayza asked as she hunted for Cal.

"No." Han answered, "He's not answering."

"Oh kriff." Kayza said.

On the walkway above the audience Cal found the body of the security guard and took out his own PTP link.

"Lara are you there?" he whispered into it.

"Right here." She replied.

"I think our assassin is close. I've just found a body of a security guard. Looks like someone stabbed him in the back. Stay alert." And then he shut off the link without waiting for a reply and looked around. With the studio below full of people it was impossible for Cal to simply look for the presence in the Force of the assassin so it was instead necessary for him to conduct a more mundane search of the walkway.

Joffran continued to watch from the walkway. His instructions from Jaysica were to wait until she had used a particular phrase in her answer before firing on Hyronymous when he next spoke. As far as she was concerned he would then leave the studio so that Trent would bear the blame for the attack, she had no idea that he had been further instructed to then fire on Trent Narthis and leave his original identity tag behind so that the blame would instead fall on her as the one who had brought him into the studio and had him try to assassinate her opponents. It had taken little convincing for Joffran to agree to this. He had found Jaysica annoying from the start and only agreed to work for her for the money and that was something that Han Shill had far more of to offer. Plus he had more belief that the Founding Families could get him off world before being arrested than in Jaysica being able to do the same.

"The worst thing about this is that people don't actually realise how much you exploit them." Joffran then heard Jaysica say. That was the phrase he was waiting for and he lined up the beam tube on the centre of Hyron's chest. From this range the archaic weapon would burn a hole right through him and roast his heart. Then he heard something else and he looked around.

"Lara. Sniper in the lights." Cal whispered into his PTP link, "Move!"

There were gasps from the audience as Lara suddenly appeared beside them, drawing her lightsaber as she rushed towards the stage.

“Down!” she yelled as she ignited the blade of her lightsaber and she leapt through the air to land right in front of Hyronymous’ podium.

With Cal closing in Joffran did not bother waiting for Hyronymous to speak again. Instead he looked back down the sight of his weapon and pulled the trigger right away. But Lara had moved too quickly for him and when the beam flashed between him and Hyronymous, Lara’s lightsaber blade was already in the way and it was deflected back up into the lighting rig above the stage.

“Security!” the moderator yelled as from the side of the stage the bodyguards that both Hyronymous and Trent had brought with them rushed out to protect their clients. Meanwhile the crowd went into a panic and people screamed as they tried to flee, pushing one another out of the way as they went.

Joffran then heard the sound of Cal’s lightsaber igniting and he swung the beam tube around, hoping for a shot at the approaching jedi. But the weight of the weapon was such that Cal saw what he was doing and like Lara he was able to block the attack with his lightsaber. Unlike his younger sister however, Cal was able to control the direction in which he deflected the beam with precision and he sent it straight back towards Joffran. The would be assassin screamed as the laser sliced through his shin, roasting flesh and snapping bone and he dropped the beam tube. The weapon tumbled over the side of the walkway and its weight dragged the power pack that had been beside Joffran over the edge after it. From below Cal heard the sound of it crashing to the floor.

“You’re under arrest!” he yelled at Joffran, pointing the blade of his lightsaber towards the man now cowering on the walkway in front of him. But rather than surrender Joffran reached into his jacket and he pulled out the pistol he had taken from the security guard and aimed it at Cal. He fired twice in rapid succession, but again Cal stopped the shots with his lightsaber. Given that the weapon fired solid projectiles, Cal was unable to deflect them as he did with the laser beam. Instead the plasma of his lightsaber blade vaporised the bullets leaving Cal unharmed. Then he lunged forwards before Joffran could fire a third time and swung his lightsaber. This produced another loud scream from Joffran as the blade sliced off his hand, pistol and they too fell from the walkway to the studio below.

“Are you really going to make me do that again?” Cal asked.

Then he heard footsteps echoing along the walkway and he spun around to see a group of studio security guards rushing towards him with weapons drawn.

“Cal Udra. Jedi knight.” Cal called out to identify himself and he shut down his lightsaber. Then he stepped aside and looked down at Joffran, “He’s all yours.”

“Lara, would you mind explaining what’s going on here?” Hyronymous asked, “I thought that the man trying to kill me was dead.”

“It seems that there was more than one person involved.” Lara replied, “I’m sure Cal will be able to explain better than I can.” And just then Cal walked through the door to the studio, followed by the security guards dragging Joffran along with them.

”Here’s the assassin.” He called out as he walked the length of the studio and halted only when he was right in front of the candidates and their advisors.

Anger.

Fear.

Cal smiled when he sensed the reaction and he looked right at Trent.

“Nothing to say?” he asked and Trent smiled.

“Thank you Jedi Udra.” He said, taking Cal’s hand and shaking it, “We could have all been killed if it was not for your actions.” Then he looked at Lara, “And yours of course. I shan’t forget this if I’m elected.”

“You mean you don’t know this man?” Cal asked him, confused.

“I’ve never seen him before in my life.” Trent replied.

“I have.” Kayza said and she looked at Jaysica, “He works for her.”

Panic.

Jaysica stepped back away from the jedi and then made a clumsy grab for the weapon belonging to one of Trent’s bodyguards. However, the large man reacted quickly and delivered a blow to her face that sent her tumbling backwards before bodyguards for both Hyronymous and Trent rushed to restrain her.

“Well?” Cal asked, staring Joffran in the face, “Who put you up to this?” and he reached out through the Force, trying to sense any signs of deception.

“She did.” He said, looking at Jaysica and Cal considered what he felt through the Force.

Nothing. As far as he could tell the man as telling the truth. Joffran smiled, knowing that he had indeed been truthful.

From a certain point of view.

"Good work Cal." Jule said as he and Lara disembarked from their transport back on Aurek Station.

"I was there as well you know." Lara pointed out.

"Of course, I'm sorry." Jule replied.

"Though I can't say I'm any happier about the outcome of it than he is." Lara added and she looked at Cal.

"Really? Why?" Jule asked.

"Because we couldn't pin it on Trent Narthis." Lara told her, "We thought we had them this time but it turned out that the Priest woman wanted her opponents out of the way instead."

"Well this might interest you both." Jule said and she handed Cal a datapad, "That's the latest news on the matter from Crassis Major."

"Cal what does it say?" Lara asked, looking over his shoulder at the datapad.

"It says that Joffran has secured legal counsel." Cal replied, "Millel Drud."

"Of Drud Legal?" Lara exclaimed.

"You know of another?" Cal asked, "That guy may be claiming not to have anything to do with the Founding Families, but they're sure as hell taking care of him. I've got a very bad feeling about this."