

# STAR WARS

## TALES OF THE JEDI



### I-XII: AMBUSH

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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...

**AMBUSH**

THE HUNT IS ON FOR THE SUPPOSED KILLER OF JEDI KNIGHT KYLE JENNER AND HIS PADAWAN LOM DES, THE MYSTERIOUS MAN WHO DESTROYED THE UNDERGROUND STRUCTURE ON TEPILLOS. COULD THE ANSWER POSSIBLY LIE IN A COLLECTION OF ARTEFACTS STOLEN FROM A PRIVATE COLLECTOR...?

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## 1.

“Redecorating?”

Cal Udra looked around at the woman who had just been admitted to his apartment by his younger sister and padawan learner with whom he shared the residence, Lara. Standing just inside the doorway was Agent Jule Raser, the most senior member of the Republic’s interstellar law enforcement body the sector rangers.

“It could do with it.” Lara commented, “Caf?”

“Thanks.” Jule replied, “A strong one.”

“Did you get the information I asked for?” Cal asked as he stepped back from the wall that he was busy fixing assorted notes and images to.

“What I could.” Jule replied, handing Cal a mem-stik, “What are you doing anyway?”

“Trying to figure out who killed Kyle and Lom.” Lara called out from the kitchen.

Kyle Jenner had been the jedi knight assigned to the Narthis Sector immediately before Cal and Lom Des his sullustan padawan. It was the sudden unexplained disappearance of the pair that had prompted the Jedi Order to deploy Cal and Lara to discover their fate.

“We found a Sith temple on Tepillos beneath Kyle and Lom’s home.” Cal said as he plugged the mem-stik into the desktop computer in the corner of the room, “Oh come on you nerf herder! Work!” he yelled at the machine and he struck the side of it. The screen flickered into life and a status bar appeared to show the progress of copying the contents of the mem-stik.

“And we were attacked by someone who knew how to use a lightsaber.” Lara added as she emerged from the kitchen and handed Jule her drink.

“So they were killed by a Sith?” Jule said, “But what about the droid?”

“We think the droid gave the Sith access to the residence.” Cal said, “Either through the main gate or the passageway that led to the temple.”

“So how does all of this relate to biographies of politicians from Tepillos who have been dead for years?” Jule asked.

“The house Kyle lived in was once owned by a minister in the government of Tepillos.” Lara said, “A man in power at about the time the government started to fall apart.”

“I still don’t see the link.” Jule said.

“The link is the temple.” Cal explained, “When we got there it had already been looted of artefacts, but just maybe that didn’t happen all that long ago.”

“You’re thinking that Kyle and Lom’s killer wanted the temple artefacts?” Jule said.

“We do,” Cal said as both he and Lara nodded, “and the people most likely to have known of the temple’s existence are those close to the former owner of the property. It’s not the minister we’re interested in speaking to, it’s his family.”

As nautolans Ket Runn and his wife Fial were perfectly at home in the water, so it was only natural for them to make their home on the water world of Delvad. It helped to be fabulously wealthy of course. Most of Delvad was dedicated to the sector’s super rich who dwelt on artificial islands kept floating above the waves by massive gravity-defying repulsorlift units, while the more lowly workers made their homes on the handful of true landmasses on the planet. The Runns on the other hand tended to remain beneath the waves. Since the time when their ancestor Yann Runn had been part of the survey team that had charted the sector the Runns had maintained a home on the seabed, a home that few beings beyond the descendants of the other survey team members, known locally as the Founding Families, ever got to see. Right now Ket and Fial had made one of their infrequent trips to the surface. In particular to the repulsor island owned by Trent Narthis, another member of the Founding Families from whom the sector took its name.

“So it is true.” Ket said furrowing his brow and causing his head tentacles to quiver, “The jedi are back.” And he handed the magnifiers back to Trent Narthis.

“They’ve started poking about in the history of Tepillos,” Trent said, “and that’s led them here.”

“How?” Fial Runn demanded, “We’re parsecs away, the far side of the sector.”

“Because that island over there,” Trent said, pointing to the nearby repulsor island where the starship operated by Cal and Lara Udra was just touching down onto a landing pad, “is owned by Tepillos’ former Minister of Justice, Varis Kall’s family. They left Tepillos when the government he was a key part of collapsed.”

"And who can blame them?" Calleen Narthis, Trent's wife said from the couch positioned at the far side of the observation deck said, "Such a grotty little planet. I wouldn't give fifty million credits for the entire thing. Luke and Salla Crassis almost died there you know."

"Thankfully the Jedi saved them." Trent added.

"The Jedi?" Ket said, "Then they can't know. If they did they would have—"

"Luke and Salla weren't the only ones the Jedi rescued." Trent said, "They were being held hostage with two other Jedi also."

"More Jedi?" Fial exclaimed, "How many are there here now?"

"Just the two again." Trent reassured her, "The others seem to have left as quickly as they came."

"But that doesn't explain why these two Jedi are here right now." Ket said, "What interests them here so much?"

Trent held out a datapad to the Nautolan and Ket looked at the display.

"This isn't possible." He said.

"Our agents with the Jedi and Republic military confirmed it." Trent said, "There was a Sith temple on Tepillos."

"Was?" Fial said.

"Somebody saw fit to blow it up." Calleen said as she poured herself a glass of wine, "And not the Jedi either."

"Then who?" Ket asked.

"Someone who was able to take on Jedi and live." Trent answered.

"Ah." Ket said, "So Kyle Jenner's murderer has finally surfaced. We need to know more."

"That's exactly why I invited you both up here." Trent said to the Runns, "I happen to know the Kall family well enough to have a standing invitation to visit them. I thought right now would be a good opportunity to introduce you to them."

"I do hope there's room for one more." A voice called out and the four beings on the observation deck looked around to see a young dark-skinned human making her way towards them from the main structure of the residence.

"Jaynie." Calleen said, "What a pleasure—"

"Yeah right." Jaynie interrupted.

"Be careful of your manners youngling." Fial said.

"Actually that's why I'm here." Jaynie replied, "My dad asked me to come along and let you know that he expects this sort of secrecy from the Fayl and Crassis families, but that you'd be sensible enough to keep him up to speed." Then she looked at Ket, "Especially considering what you've been entrusted with."

Ket clenched his fists.

"That's quite alright Jaynie." Trent said, sensing that Ket was about to lose his temper with the young woman, "I would of course have kept the Drud family up to date with events here, but I thought it wise to make sure of a few things first."

"Well I'm happy to save you some time." Jaynie said, "Now I can tell my dad what's going on for you."

As Cal and Lara disembarked from their ship a protocol droid met them on the landing pad.

"Good day gentlebeings." The droid said in a voice clearly intended to replicate a human female voice pattern, "How may I assist you?"

"Cal and Lara Udra." Cal announced, "We should be expected."

"Affirmative. Your visit is listed in my database. Do please follow me. Master Kall is waiting in his study."

The droid led Cal and Lara through room after room that were filled with expensive looking furniture and works of art.

"Now we know where all the decent stuff on Tepillos went." Lara whispered to her brother, "Some greedy sleemo brought it all here."

"Now, now." Cal said, "I'm sure that everything here is legally owned."

The droid walked through a doorway ahead of the Jedi and halted.

"Jedi Knight Cal Udra sir," It announced, "and Padawan Learner Lara Udra accompanying him."

"Ah yes, Jedi Udra, do come in and take a seat." The man sat at the desk in the middle of the room said, standing up as the two Jedi entered the room, "Allow me to introduce myself. I am Etrius Kall."

Etrius was well into middle age, his dark hair just starting to go grey and he smiled as the Jedi approached him.

*Fear.*

*Anger.*

"Is everything alright Mister Kall?" Cal asked, "You seem disturbed by our presence."

"Nonsense." Etrius replied as he sat down once more.

*Deceit.*

"We only want to ask you a few questions." Lara said, "We're not here to accuse you of anything."

*Anger.*

"Accuse me?" Etrius said loudly, "Of course not. I have complied with the wishes of your order to the letter and exactly what do I have to show for it? Perhaps you can explain to me what has happened to my property."

Cal and Lara looked at one another.

"I'm sorry," Cal said, "I don't understand."

"Sorry? Sorry hardly makes up for what I have lost."

"Mister Kall," Lara said, trying her best to sound conciliatory, "I'm afraid that we don't have any information about anything taken from you by the Jedi Order."

Etrius tapped his fingers on a keypad set into his desk and a hologram suddenly appeared above it.

"There you are." He said, "Deny that."

The hologram was a court document ordering that Etrius Kall surrender a list of items to the Jedi Order. Small flashing icons indicating that each of them had been handed over to a Jedi representative as required.

"This is the first time I've heard of this." Cal said as he looked at the list. A reference number and a brief physical description referred to each item, "What are these items Mister Kall?"

"Antiques. Valuable antiques that belonged to my father. He brought them here to Delvad at great personal risk when we were driven from our homeworld half a century ago."

"The Jedi Order isn't in the habit of seizing private property." Lara said and she looked at Cal, "Are they?"

"Of course not." Cal replied, "Who exactly presented you with this document Mister Kall?"

"A Jedi of course. Wandered in as if he owned the place and simply took everything on that list. Had his droid carry them out."

"Droid?" Cal asked, "When exactly did this happen?"

"The date is on the document young man." Etrius answered, "About three months ago."

"Why would Kyle want these things Cal?" Lara asked, "And why didn't we know about this. If he went through the courts-"

"Are you saying the Jedi Order does not have my property? Etrius interrupted.

"Not that we know of." Cal said.

"And no-one even told us about the court order." Lara added, "We're new."

"Mister Kall, I'm sorry about the confusion," Cal said, "but did Jedi Jenner say anything about why he wanted your property?"

Etrius frowned.

"Who is Jedi Jenner?" he asked.

"The man you gave these items to." Lara said, "Human, tall."

Etrius shook his head.

"I never met this man." He said, "The being who took my property was a Sullustan. His said his name was Lom Des and all his documents were quite in order."

Cal and Lara looked at one another.

"This complicates matters." Cal said.

"Do you have any pictures of the items taken?" Lara asked Etrius.

"Of course, for insurance purposes." Etrius answered and he tapped at the keypad again, replacing the document with a set of images of assorted carved objects.

"Could you zoom in on that one please." Cal asked, pointing to what looked like a short jewelled sceptre.

Etrius nodded and expanded the image to fill the entire display area.

"Cal," Lara said slowly as she stared at the image, "is it me or does that look a lot like-"

"A lightsaber." Cal interrupted, "A Sith lightsaber."

Just then Etrius' protocol droid returned to the room.

"Master Kall sir," it said, "you have further guests. Mister and Missus Narthis are approaching in a speeder, it seems they also have a Mister and Missus Runn and a Miss Drud with them."

"Ah, let them dock and show them straight in." Etrius said, "And bring drinks for us all." Then he looked at Cal and Lara, "Will this take us much longer?" he said, and "As you see I have other guests."

"We'd like copies of the images you've just shown us." Lara said.

"And the court order." Cal added, "Along with any details you have of your old home on Tepillos."

"Tepillos? What for? My family hasn't lived there for decades."



"I know." Cal said, "We're looking into events surrounding a more recent owner and would like to check up on a few things missing from his records."

"Very well then." Etrius said and he began to transfer the data to a mem-stik.

As he was part way through finding and copying the relevant files the door to the study slid open once more and the droid entered.

"Trent and Calleen Narthis, Ket and Fial Runn and Jaynie Drud to see you master." It said, "Refreshments will be with you shortly, the kitchen is just preparing them."

From behind the droid three humans and a pair of nautolans entered the room.

"Well hello again." Jaynie Drud said with a smile when she saw Cal and Lara sat by Etrius' desk. Cal and Lara both smiled politely.

"Trent, Calleen." Etrius said, standing up and walking over to greet his guests, "So good to see you once more." And he shook Trent Narthis by the hand.

"I'm sorry." Trent said, looking in the direction of the two jedi, "I didn't know you had company."

"What? Oh them. They were just here to ask for some information. They'll be gone soon. I hope."

"Information about this perhaps?" Ket Runn said, staring at the display that still showed the Sith lightsaber in close up.

"You recognise it?" Cal asked.

Ket looked at Cal, staring into his eyes but did not speak. Cal felt a cold shiver run down his spine.

"Etrius," Trent said, "I hope you don't mind me bringing company, but I thought you'd like to meet Ket and Fial Runn."

"Of the famous Runn family." Etrius said with a smile, "Of course. To think I live less than a hundred kilometres from your estate, yet we've never met before."

"My husband and I are private people Mister Kall." Fial said.

"And that only makes meeting you a greater pleasure." Etrius said.

Just then there was a roaring sound and an open topped speeder appeared in the window of the study, a single hooded occupant at the controls. As the beings gathered in the study all looked towards the speeder its driver lifted a short, bulky weapon and aimed it towards them.

"Down!" Cal bellowed while he and Lara both leapt to their feet and activated their lightsabers.

The first blast from the figure outside shattered the toughened plexiglass windows, and scattered droplets of super heated glass around the room.

"Plasma gun!" Lara shouted just before the gunman fired again.

Cal and Lara separated, letting the energy bolt pass between them. Unlike the stabilised energy bolts of the newer blast weapons this older model plasma carbine fired uncontained packets of high-energy matter. Though devastating at short range, it quickly lost effectiveness at greater distances. Even so, it would be lethal to anyone in the study who was unlucky enough to be hit.

Lara extended her lightsaber out beside her as she began to feel the heat of the blast moving past her. Her weapon met with the plasma bolt neatly and the field holding the blade together dispersed the plasma bolt, stopping it dead in its tracks and preventing anyone from being hurt.

The next blast was not aimed towards anyone in the room, instead blasting the side from Etrius' desk.

There was a flash as the holographic display vanished and the desk caught fire.

Cal and Lara both backed away from the burning desk as an alarm sounded and the room's automatic fire fighting system triggered, spraying a targeted jet of carbon dioxide towards the flames from a nozzle in the ceiling.

"Get back!" Cal warned the others and the size of the cloud of potentially suffocating gas grew and just then there was another blast from the plasma carbine. The expanding ball of energy passed through the cloud, dissipating more rapidly than normal amongst the dense mass of cooled vapour. But when it emerged from the far side it still possessed significant energy within it and Etrius Kall was thrown to the floor as it struck him in the chest.

The gunman shifted his aim, directing his weapon towards the five members of the Founding Families cowering in the corner and he fired. The blast looked on target to land amongst the group until Cal swung his lightsaber and dispersed it in midair. Then, before he could fire again the gunman looked around as if distracted by something. The speeders engines suddenly changed pitch and it's driver dropped his weapon into the passenger seat beside him and zoomed off. Over the sound of the fire alarm another siren became audible and a second speeder appeared by the shattered window.

"Citizens do not panic!" an amplified voice called out from the police vehicle.

Cal rushed to the window and waved.

"We're jedi!" he yelled, "We've got it here. Get after him!"

The driver of the police speeder just nodded and the vehicle accelerated away in pursuit of the mystery gunman.

"Etrius." Trent said as he crawled to the man's side.

Lara rushed to join him and crouched down beside the man.

"I'm sorry." She said to Trent, "he's dead."

## 2.

"A what?" Jule Raser asked, her image on the display of the communications screen showing a puzzled expression.

"A court order demanding that Etrius Kall hand over a list of artefacts that may have come from the Sith temple beneath his old family home on Tepillos." Cal said.

Jule shook her head.

"No." she said, "I've never heard anything about such a court order."

"What if Kyle didn't apply for it on Aurek Station?" Lara asked, "He spent most of his time on Tepillos after all."

"That may be." Jule said, "But for a court order issued anywhere but Delvad to have legal effect there it would have to be registered with the Republic authorities. That means the sector rangers would have a record of it. We'd be the ones who had to enforce it if the receiving party refused to follow it."

"Thanks anyway." Cal said, "Let us know if anything turns up won't you?"

"Sure." Jule said, "Its not like I need to spend time with my family or anything." And the channel went dead.

"The document Etrius showed us was definitely issued by the Republic." Cal said to Lara, "I just wish that his computer hadn't been trashed by the plasma attack. Let's just hope the investigators can recover something."

"What if Lom Des got the court order?" Lara suggested, "He was the one Kyle sent for the stuff anyway."

"No court's going to give a padawan an order like that." Cal replied, shaking his head, "Besides, it would still be on file."

"Well then," Lara said, "you know what that leaves don't you?"

"Yes." Cal replied, "The court order was fake."

"But faked by who? Kyle or Lom?"

"Lom?" Cal said, frowning, "Why would he—"

"What if he found the temple Cal? The tunnel we found that led to it was hidden in one of the rooms used for training so Lom would have spent a lot of time there. Maybe he found the temple and saw a way to speed up his training."

"You're saying Lom Des fell to the dark side?"

"Its stupid I know." Lara said, looking away.

"Actually it might not be." Cal replied, "Look, we've been assuming that Kyle and Lom were killed by the same person right?"

"Right. First we thought the droid, now there's this mystery hooded man."

"Well what if they weren't both killed by him? What if Kyle found out Lom had fallen?"

"Lom was killed by a lightsaber." Lara said, her eyes widening as she realised what Cal was suggesting, "Kyle killed him. And the assassin droid fled before it could be destroyed too."

Cal nodded.

"So who's this hooded man that killed Kyle?" Lara asked.

"My guess is that Lom didn't just find a temple. I think he found a new master too and I think this new master either killed Kyle himself in revenge or had those mercenaries do it for him."

"I don't like this." Ket Runn announced to the room, "We should return to our home."

"I wouldn't recommend that." Heddren Drud told him. Jaynie's father had arrived not long after the attack on Etrius Kall's home and had immediately intimidated the local law enforcement officers into letting the members of the Founding Families leave the scene with threats of legal action.

"You wouldn't recommend it?" Fial repeated, "Why not exactly?"

"Because as your lawyer I have to advise you that you are all witnesses to a crime and the police are likely to want to question you at some point. The jedi too in all likelihood. Now do you want them calling on you at home?"

"No." Ket said, "That must never be allowed to happen."

"You are of course welcome to remain here as our guests." Trent said, "Aren't they darling?"

"Of course." Calleen said, "Our home is yours."

"What if that guy comes back?" Jaynie asked.

"Han's on his way now." Heddren replied, "He's bringing extra men to secure this place and the Runn's as well. In less than a day we'll have an entire company of troops and air cover to protect us. In the mean time I've news about the investigation itself."



"I was sort of hoping not to see either of you two again this soon." The blue skinned wroonian said to Cal and Lara as they returned to the wrecked study. Etrius's body had been removed but the damage inflicted by the plasma carbine would take a great deal of effort to cover up when the marshals were finished, "The bodies tend to pile up."

"Sorry Chief Daal." Cal said, "Perhaps next time we can arrange for the murders to happen outside of your jurisdiction."

"That would be nice." The head of Delvad's Planetary Investigation Division said, "But at least this time the mess following you around is not my problem. Agent Raser will be here shortly to take over."

"The sector rangers are taking over?" Lara said.

"The victim of this crime was the son of a former government minister from a world currently suffering from a period of civil unrest." Chief Daal explained, "There is the potential for it to be an act of political terrorism. And I'm glad to say that that makes it a matter for the Republic authorities." And he smiled, "I'll still be around to liase of course, but my actual work here is pretty much done."

"So what can you tell us?" Cal asked.

"I can tell you that the gunman can pilot a speeder better than my own people." Chief Daal said, "He outran them easily."

"What about satellite tracking?" Lara asked.

"We tracked it just fine. Right up until he stopped the speeder and shut off its engines."

"He ditched into the ocean?" Cal said and Chief Daal nodded.

"We were going to try and send someone down for it." He said, "But then we got the call that Agent Raser was on the way so I figured I'd let her pay for it out of her budget instead, so I just put a guard on the spot it went down."

"Your dedication is outstanding." Cal said.

"What about the computer?" Lara asked.

"Fried." Chief Daal said, "A plasma weapon will do that."

"Any chance it was networked?" Cal asked, "We could do with some of the files he was accessing."

"Thankfully the terminal was isolated." Chief Daal said, "If it hadn't been then there's a chance that the plasma blast could have set up a surge that would have blown out everything connected to it. Then the residence's repulsorlifts would have given out and the whole place would have dropped like a stone into the sea."

"So what do you want to try now then big brother?" Lara asked Cal.

"Well we're looking for information on the artefacts Etrius' family brought her from Tepillos right?" he said.

"Right. But the stuff is missing and the records are fried."

"Here yes. But remember what Etrius told us about why he had the images to begin with?"

Lara smiled.

"They were for his insurance company." She said.

"Exactly. Which means that the insurance company will have copies."

"So we-" Lara began.

"No, not we." Cal interrupted, "You need to go and get copies of the images. Plus any information the insurers have about the items. They'll have done at least a brief study to assess their value."

"So what will you be doing while I'm actually working?"

"Hobnobbing with the Founding Families." Cal said, "The gunman only left when the cops turned up, not when Etrius was down."

"Yeah, I saw him take that extra pot shot. That you deflected nicely by the way."

"Thanks. But yes, the gunman seemed to want them out of the way. Which makes me think that they may know something about him."

"Think I prefer the idea of spending time with insurance agents." Lara said.

"Me too. But with great rank comes great responsibility."

### 3.

#### *Fear.*

Two scared looking guards in the uniforms of Shill Security aimed their weapons towards the landing pad as Cal stepped from his borrowed speeder.

"Halt!" one of them called out, his carbine quivering slightly.

Cal halted, unnerved somewhat by the sight of the two men aiming guns at him.

"My name is Jedi Udra," he said, "I'm here to—"

"Lower your weapons men." A familiar voice called out from behind the guards and Cal looked towards the source of it to see a tall shaven headed man walking towards him confidently.

"Well, well, Heddren Drud." Cal said.

"Jedi Udra." Heddren replied, "Is your sister not with you?"

"Her duties have called her elsewhere. Mine brought me here."

"As I expected they would." Heddren said, "My clients are of course prepared to respond to reasonable questioning.

"With you determining what's reasonable no doubt."

"I am their legal representative."

"Well how about you get out of my way so I can actually go and question them then?" Cal asked, "Not really earning your six thousand credits per hour just standing here are you?"

"Of course. This way please." And Heddren beckoned Cal forwards.

Cal was led into an empty room, furnished in the luxurious style that he had come to associate with the Founding Families.

"Please wait here." Heddren said and he left Cal alone.

While he waited Cal took the opportunity to study the décor. There were several images mounted on the walls that appeared to depict the original crew of the survey mission that had charted the Narthis Sector over three hundred years ago. But there was something not quite right about the image. Something he couldn't quite put his finger on. He realised what it was just as the door opened and Heddren entered with his clients.

"Ah Jedi Udra." Trent Narthis said, smiling, "Good to see you again. If for no other reason than your protection makes me feel a lot safer."

"Not putting much faith in your guards then?" Cal said as he shook Trent's hand.

"Ah." Trent said, "Well the people that Shill Security provide are amongst the best in their field, but I'd wager you're better than ten of them."

Cal smiled.

"Thanks for the vote of confidence." He said.

"If we may proceed?" Heddren said, "My clients' time is rather valuable?"

"Of course." Cal said and he watched as everyone else took a seat, noticing that the Runns had chosen to sit as far from where he stood as possible.

"Now then," Cal said, walking closer to the Runns, "I suppose you're all wondering why I've asked you here today."

"To question us about Etrius' murder I hope." Heddren said, "My clients aren't here to be harassed about other matters."

"Yes I know." Cal said, "I've just always wanted to say that."

"They aren't here to have their time wasted either." Heddren said.

"So how well did you all know the late Mister Kall?" Cal asked loudly.

"We didn't." Ket said, "You were there when Trent introduced us."

"Same here." Jaynie added and she glanced at her father.

"Well we knew him for years." Calleen said, "Him and his wife. I often went shopping with her on Crassis Major."

"My wife and I were regular guests with him." Trent said.

"Regular?" Cal said, "So did you ever see his collection of antiques from Tepillos? The stuff his father brought here with him."

"No." Trent said, "The family kept that part of their history to themselves. We knew they had some keepsakes of course. But they didn't show them off."

"Fine." Cal said, "Now what about Etrius himself? What can you tell me about him? Did he ever speak of people who wished him harm or that he'd fallen out with?"

"You." Calleen said as a puzzled look appeared on Cal's face, "Even though we never saw his family heirlooms we knew that the Jedi Order had taken them from him."

"I'd just like to point out," Heddren said, suddenly interrupting, "that your presence here Jedi Udra is for the purpose of statement taking in relation to the death of Etrius Kall only. You are not authorised to undertake any search or seizure."

"Of course not." Cal said, "Though I would also like to ask if any of you have anyone that wishes you harm." "Us?" Calleen said, looking shocked at the suggestion though through the force Cal sensed that she was not quite as surprised as she wanted to appear.

"We are held in high regard throughout the sector." Trent said, apparently genuine in his belief about this though Cal had encountered several beings that did not share this opinion since his arrival in the sector.

"Why would you want to know that Jedi Udra?" Heddren asked.

"Because the killer didn't leave after Etrius was dead." Cal said, "He hung around shooting at your clients until the police showed up. Despite the fact that there were two Jedi between him and them."

"There are rivalries with others." Trent said, "In business and such, but it's the same for most people isn't it? We just have richer rivals. All the Founding Families do."

"What about the mercenaries you use for security?" Cal asked and he immediately noticed all of the beings in the room with him become tenser, including Heddren, "Have you dismissed any lately?"

"No." Trent said, "We only use employees of Shill Security. Han Shill makes sure that all of his troops are professional."

"You all use Shill Security?" Cal said, "All of the Founding Families?"

"I think we're getting sidetracked here." Heddren said before anyone else could answer, "Jedi Udra if you are through asking about Etrius' murder then this session is over." And everyone just looked at Cal in silence.

"Of course." Cal said, "I think we've reached an end here." And the others began to get to their feet, "But may I ask a more personal question Mister Narthis?"

Trent looked at Heddren.

"It's just about this picture on the wall." Cal said, pointing to the image of the original survey team, "I was wondering about why there were so many people in it. There aren't that many Founding Families and I've only heard of two beings from the crew that chose to leave the sector."

"It's the entire crew." Trent said, relaxing, "My ancestor is Jayk Narthis, he's the one in the centre. Beside him are Bail and Leia Crassis, they were already married when that was taken. Of course there's also Bolatha Drud, Jo Karn, Corvis Fayl, Yann Runn and Geth Torin." As Trent reeled off each name he pointed to one of the figures in the picture.

"Even with two of them marrying and two leaving, that still leaves two too many." Cal said.

"The man at the far edge in combat gear is Rodge Kenner." Trent said, "He left the sector as well. He was just hired to provide security and didn't make as much as the others. I think he died quite young and never married."

"What about the twi'lek?" Cal said, "Aside from the Runn family I thought all of the Founding Families were human."

*Fear.*

No one answered for some time as Cal looked at each of the beings present in turn.

"That's Ban Hollinis, he died too." Trent said eventually, "During the survey."

"It was an accident." Heddren added quickly, "Now is that all Jedi Udra?"

"Yes thank you for your time." Cal said, "I'll show myself out. I know the way."

The others remained in the room after Cal left, not saying anything until they heard the sound of a speeder departing and through a window they saw Cal flying off into the distance.

"What if he starts asking about Ban again?" Jaynie said nervously.

"Then he will be wasting his time." Her father replied, "Ban is not an issue."

"Yes but we all know what happened to him don't we? Where he is right now." Jaynie said, "What if the Jedi find out?"

"Then we need to be sure that they don't." Ket said, "If necessary Cal will have to die just like his predecessor."

"That would draw suspicion." Heddren said, "Another Jedi fatality here is likely to bring the sector to the attention of the council. His father may not be a member of the council itself, but he is a Jedi Master."

"Would you rather he knew what happened to Ban?" Fial said, "Worse yet would you rather he find Ban?"

"Perhaps when Han arrives we should discuss this with him." Trent suggested, "Perhaps some of his people can take care of things. His twin sister maybe."

The delaya-class transport *Bright Hope* had been assigned to Cal and Lara by the Jedi Order. Fast and manoeuvrable, it was a joy to fly and Lara relished the opportunity to pilot it solo. Normally Cal would be with her and most times he insisted on doing the flying. Today however she had the chance to fly the way she wanted, banking and rolling to make the most of the ship's handling abilities. At least until she entered the controlled airspace of Crassis Major that was. The planetary traffic controller took a dim view of aerobatics in congested travel lanes. So from the moment she entered the atmosphere, Lara headed directly for the building where Etrius' insurers were located. Fortunately for her it was a large building that featured a landing pad on its roof. Though being designed with airspeeders in mind it was a tight squeeze for her to set the seventy-metre *Bright Hope* down on it and when she lowered the access ramp she found that she had to leap off the side half way down to avoid the eighty storey drop to the street below.

"Good morning Jedi Udra." A short middle aged woman said to Lara as she walked towards the door that gave access to the building.

"Morning?" Lara said, "Oh yeah, the time difference. Sorry I forget sometimes."

"We have been expecting you." The woman announced as Lara stood in front of her, looking down at the considerably shorter woman, "My name is Katrine Haywall and I have been instructed to help you recover the data you require concerning one of the late Mister Kall's policies with us."

"So you've heard about his death?" Lara asked as she accompanied Katrine inside the building.

"Of course." Katrine replied, "As soon as his death was reported we froze all of his policies until the courts can confirm that we are able to make payments under them. Though I believe there may be a dispute about at least one policy."

"Really? What about?" Lara asked as Katrine led her to a turbolift.

"The one your are here to enquire about I believe." Katrine said, "His family wishes to report the missing artefacts as stolen, but they cannot provide any proof of this."

"What was the value of the items they are claiming for?" Lara asked.

"I'm not entirely sure." Katrine answered, "Claims aren't my department. But I believe that it is somewhere in the region of eighty million credits."

Lara gasped. Noticing the reaction, Katrine smiled.

"Policies of that value aren't that uncommon for our company." She said, "We provide cover for many wealthy individuals."

The turbolift door slid open and Katrine and Lara stepped out into a large room filled with desks separated by lightweight movable barriers that formed tiny cubicles. In each one an employee of the insurance company sat working at a computer.

"As you may be able to tell," Katrine said to Lara, "we're one of the largest insurance providers in the Narthis Sector."

"One of? So not the biggest then?"

"Ah, no. Karn Financial Services still handles more policies than we do." Katrine said and she halted by an empty cubicle, "Here," she said, "we've prepared a terminal for you. It has a limited access to Mister Kall's policy details only."

"That should do." Lara said as she sat in one of the two chairs in the cubicle. Katrine then sat in the other. Lara reached for the keyboard then stopped suddenly, "We need to swap places." She said to Katrine, "I just realised I don't know how to use your system."

Katrine and Lara swapped seats and it was then that Lara noticed the screensaver, a stylised combination of the aurebesh letters aurek, forn, leth and yev.

"Are you owned by the Fayl family?" Lara asked.

"Yes we are." Katrine said as she brought the terminal on line and the screensaver vanished, "Is that important?"

"No." Lara said, "Or at least I don't think so."

"So what do you want to see?" Katrine asked.

"I need the images of the items missing from Kall's home." Lara said and she held out a mem-stik, "I'd like them transferred to this please."

Katrine tapped at the keyboard and waited for the data to be displayed. A puzzled look appeared on her face and she tapped on the keyboard again.

"This can't be right." Katrine said.

"What's wrong?" Lara asked.

"There's no information here." Katrine answered, pointing to the display, "Its all been erased."

"Erased? By who?"

"I don't know." Katrine said, "This shouldn't have happened, those images were in a secured file." Tapping at the keyboard again, Katrine changed from looking at the data held on Etrius' policies to data about the actual files themselves, "This can't be." She said.

"What?" Lara asked.

"The files you're after, they were deleted less than ten minutes ago."

"Do you have backups?" Lara asked.

"Of course," Katrine replied, "on drives in the basement."

"Show me." Lara said, jumping up from her chair.

"Why? I can have the files put back on the main system from here."

"Because whoever deleted the originals is likely still in the building." Lara said, "And they'll probably be heading for those backups right now."

Cal recognised the insignia of the sector rangers on the vessel landed at Delvad's primary spaceport as he approached, but it was clear that the vessel was deserted so Cal headed on to the headquarters of the planetary investigation division where as expected he found Agent Jule Raser meeting with Chief Daal.

"Ah Cal," Jule said as he entered the office, "Chief Daal was just filling me in. On the investigation."

"I bet that didn't take long." Cal said, sitting down next to Jule.

"Did you get anything from the Founding Families?" Chief Daal asked.

"Only what I've come to expect from them." Cal replied, "Not much. Though whether they knew anything of use that they didn't tell me is another thing altogether. This time I think they actually had an incentive to talk to me."

"Well something's got them spooked." Chief Daal said, "We just got this through." And he handed a datapad to Jule.

"That's a lot of firepower." She said and she handed the datapad to Cal.

"And you're okay with this?" he said to Chief Daal, "Shill Security wants to deploy more than a hundred men."

Chief Daal shrugged.

"They'll be on private property." He said, "And everything Shill Security has is perfectly legal. To be honest I feel better knowing that there's all those troops here to deal with this mystery man if he makes another play for the Founding Families – means I don't have to tie up any of my men doing protection details."

Cal tossed the datapad onto Chief Daal's desk.

"I really wish I'd gone to Crassis Major instead of Lara." He said, "But since she's still a padawan I can't really give her the tougher assignments."

## 4.

Lara ran from the turbolift as soon as the door opened.

"Which door?" she yelled.

"Third on the left!" Katrine replied from the turbolift, "What about me?"

"You just go get security." Lara ordered.

Katrine just nodded and closed the turbolift door again. Meanwhile Lara pulled her lightsaber free from her belt and with a characteristic 'snap-hiss' ignited it. She slid to a halt by the door and paused. Lara knew that if she was right then beyond that door was one of the most powerful opponents she had ever faced and was doing so alone.

"I've suddenly got a bad feeling about this." She said to herself, and then slammed her hand down on the door control.

Inside the room was filled with row after row of computer storage drives. Cautiously Lara stepped inside and closed the door behind her. Remaining motionless, Lara waited by the door and listened. The only sound was the soft hum of her own lightsaber so instead she reached out through the force, searching for any sign of another person in the room. Once again there was nothing at first, but then there was a slight tremor and Lara smiled.

"I thought I'd already told you once." She called out as she advanced towards the source of the tremor, "I know that trick too." And she spun around to look between two rows of drives.

She found herself staring straight at a hooded figure.

"In the name of the Senate of the Galactic Republic—" she began, but the figure just reached out towards her and using the force he hurled Lara back into the wall behind her. As soon as she hit the wall, Lara released her grip on her lightsaber and it shut off as it dropped to the floor and rolled away.

"Look at me Lara." The figure said as it walked closer to Lara. Dazed she looked up, unable to make out any facial features, "You don't know what you are doing padawan." The figure said, "Your order is failing, infiltrated by its enemies. Join me and I will complete your training."

Out of the corner of her eye, Lara spotted her lightsaber and suddenly reached out towards it.

"I'll never join you!" she yelled and she called her lightsaber back to her grip.

At the same time the door she had entered through slid open and two armed men burst in.

"Freeze!" one of them yelled, aiming his gun at the figure.

The hooded man backed away as Lara got to her feet.

"They are your enemy." He said to her, "Strike them down and join me."

"Give it up." Lara said, the guards approaching her, "There's nowhere to go."

"Maybe. Maybe not. Your skills are not as great as you believe them to be padawan." And the figure standing before Lara faded to nothing.

Spinning around, Lara was just in time to see the hooded figure rush out from between the rows of drives nearest to the door and rush from the room, the door dropped shut behind him and there was a shower of sparks from the control panel.

"Stang!" Lara exclaimed as she tried to open the door only to find it jammed. She shut off her lightsaber and looked at the guards, "Well I suppose we should see if anything's damaged." She said.

"Cal, I'm sorry. I was too late." Lara said on her return to Delvad.

"Never mind that." He replied, "What about you? Are you okay?"

"I'm fine. I think we were right about Lom Des finding himself a new master, because our killer is looking for a new padawan. He tried to recruit me."

So he's desperate then." Cal said.

"Not funny. Cal, he knew my name."

This did not appear to bother Cal.

"I'm not surprised." He said.

"Why?"

"Because our identities aren't secret Lara. We're not superheroes trying to lead double lives. We're just jedi and we work openly."

"Wish I was a superhero." Lara said, "You could, be my sidekick. Nerf-boy."

"Who'd you be?" Cal asked, "The amazing stripper girl? Maybe not so amazing, you only got two one credit tips."

Lara punched his arm.

"I'm not a stripper Cal!" she snapped, "I didn't take my clothes off!"

"You kept the outfit though didn't you?" he replied.

On the other side of the room Chief Daal turned to look at Agent Raser.

"Are they always like this?" he asked.

"There is a pattern." She replied, "In the six years Kyle Jenner was around he never once got arrested.

These two have each been in my cells twice since they got here. Assault, burglary and public indecency." Chief Daal raised his eyebrows and looked back towards the Jedi.

"The upshot of all of this," Cal said, taking a seat once more, "is that we don't have any information regarding the items taken by Lom Des."

"We may not know what he took," Lara said, "but we know when he took it, the date was on the court order—"

"Fake court order." Jule pointed out.

"Okay, fake court order." Lara said, "In any case it was dated. Can't we run that through traffic control and find out where Lom went with the stuff?"

"It's a possibility I suppose." Cal replied and he looked at Agent Raser and Chief Daal, "Would that information still be on hand after three months?" he asked.

"If he used the central nav system then it should be." Jule answered, "But if he plotted the jump himself or already had it in his ship's computer then probably not."

"There's also the issue of what happens if Lom Des didn't take the items off world." Chief Daal said.

"The Fayls." Lara said suddenly.

"What about them?" Cal asked as everyone looked in Lara's direction.

"Well the insurance company is owned by the Fayl family right? Katrine told me."

"Who's Katrine?" Chief Daal asked.

"A woman at the insurance company." Lara said, "What if there was another backup? Off site?"

"Then I'm sure that the company would have told you." Chief Daal said.

"That's not what I mean." Lara replied, "I mean what if we were to make everyone else think that there was, when in fact there isn't?"

"A trap." Cal said, "You're talking about setting a trap."

Lara nodded.

"For the first time since we came here we know of something that could lure the killer out of hiding. So we let him think that what he wants is in a certain place and we make sure that we're there waiting for him."

Cal smiled.

Lorna Fayl was not happy at being disturbed at home so early in the morning.

"I'm sorry," Cal said to her as he and Lara were shown into the dining room by one of the household staff where Lorna and her daughter Nissel were eating breakfast, "but this is rather urgent."

"Urgent enough to barge in while we're eating?" Lorna replied, scowling at Cal and Lara.

"We believe that you may be able to help us catch a multiple murderer." Lara said and both Lorna and Nissel stopped eating and looked towards the two Jedi but otherwise did not react.

"Are you aware that one of your companies was attacked yesterday?" Cal enquired.

"Of course." Lorna said, "Apparently by the same man who murdered one of my company's customers and tried to kill several other beings. Including one of the Drud family – Not that I'll hold that against him."

"As my padawan says Miss Fayl," Cal said, "we believe that you can help us this man."

"And why should I?" Lorna asked.

"Mom, listen to them." Nissel said.

"Because if you don't I'm sure that Etrius Kall's next of kin will see it as evidence that you're trying to get out of paying up what you owe under their late relative's insurance policies. I believe that Heddren Drud of Drud Legal is still on Delvad. Perhaps he'll be willing to represent them."

*Anger.*

*Hatred.*

Lorna's opinion of the Drud family was clear, she had already alluded to her dislike of them and Cal was gambling that he could use that to his advantage.

*Guilt.*

Cal threw a quick glance at Nissel, then focused his attention back on Lorna before the woman noticed him looking towards her daughter. He remembered that Nissel did not share her mother's anger towards the Drud family and concealed the fact that she was friends with Heddren's son Hiran.

"Tell me what you want me to do." Lorna said, still scowling at Cal and Lara.

"Lara," Cal said, looking towards his sister, "it's your plan."



Lara grinned.

"We need you to accompany us back to the offices of your insurance company." Lara said, "We want the killer to believe that you're bringing replacement copies of the destroyed drives. We believe that the killer not only wants that information destroyed permanently, but also that he holds some sort of grudge against the Founding Families."

"So you're turning me into a target?" Lorna said, her expression still one of disdain.  
"If we're right then you already are." Cal told her, "Her too." And he looked at Nissel.

Katrine was under a great deal of pressure from her superiors to explain the events of the previous day and she had come in early especially to sort this out. As one of the few in the building and knowing that office hours did not begin for another half hour yet she was somewhat surprised when the communicator on her desk sounded.

"Katrine Haywall." She said.

"Good morning Miss Haywall," a woman's voice said, "I need you to meet me on the roof in thirty minutes. I'm on my way in with replacements for the drives damaged yesterday."

Katrine was confused.

"I'm sorry," she said, "I didn't realise there were any others. Whom am I speaking with?"

"Lorna Fayl." Lorna said, "Now meet me on the roof or have your desk cleared before I get there." And the channel went dead abruptly.

"That was a bit rude." Lara said as Lorna looked out of the window of the speeder.

"I don't care what you think." Lorna replied.

"Actually it was perfect." Cal said, "Now anyone listening in knows that Lorna is heading for the building and will think that she's in possession of data the killer wants destroyed."

"That's Miss Fayl to you." Lorna said.

"If that's how you want it." Cal said and he pulled a cap onto his head, completing his disguise as a member of Shill Security. Like the other Founding Families, the Fayls used Han Shill's company for their security needs exclusively. Sat beside Cal, Lara did the same.

"Now we just need to see who's waiting for us when we get there." Lara said.

## 5.

*...roof...*

*...thirty minutes...*

*...replacements for the drives...*

*...Lorna Fayl...*

The tap placed in the insurance company's communications had done its job perfectly. The existence of an off site back up had always been a possibility and precautions had been taken.

Using the force to call the plasma carbine he had used to kill Etrius Kall to his grasp, the man loaded a fresh power cell and gas reservoir into the weapon as he strode towards the airspeeder parked just outside his current dwelling. He leapt into the vehicle and started its repulsorlifts up as he stowed the carbine.

Then, with just slight pressure of his foot on the throttle pedal he took off and headed back to the building he had raided the day before.

Katrine shivered. At this time of year it was quite cool even at ground level, let alone almost two hundred metres above it on the roof of the building. Though cool, the morning was clear and she had to shield her eyes she looked up into the sky when she heard the sound of approaching repulsorlifts and she saw the silhouette of Lorna Fayl's luxury airspeeder as it descended from the authorised aerial travel lanes. The speeder set down on the rooftop pad and a door towards the rear opened up.

The first figure to emerge was a man in a security guard's uniform, followed soon after by a woman in a similar uniform. Katrine looked at the woman, thinking that she looked somewhat familiar. But the woman kept her head low and the peak of her cap obscured her facial features. After the two guards it was the turn of Lorna Fayl herself to exit the speeder.

Katrine had never met Lorna Fayl before, though she knew of the woman's reputation for being short tempered. The combination of dark hair and pale eyes gave her an almost hypnotic appearance. In her hand, Lorna held a metal case that Katrine assumed must contain the replacement drives. What she still did not understand was why Lorna Fayl felt them important enough to deliver them personally. Katrine guessed that someone was about to be fired and she wanted to make sure that it was not going to be her. "Miss Fayl." Katrine called out, approaching Lorna and extending her hand, "It is an honour to meet you." Before Lorna could respond there was the sound of another repulsorlift vehicle approaching. But unlike Lorna's luxury airspeeder this one was not slowing down. As Katrine turned towards it she saw a single figure whose appearance was concealed by a hooded cape perform a daredevil leap in mid flight and after somersaulting several times he landed on the rooftop pad beside the landed speeder and raised a short, bulky weapon that he aimed at Lorna. The speeder meanwhile carried on, arcing down gracefully until it ploughed into an adjacent building and exploded violently.

"Down!" the male guard yelled and he dived towards Lorna, knocking her off her feet while his female companion rushed towards the hooded figure. While all this happened Katrine just stood and watched, dumbfounded.

The hooded figure took aim at the female guard and fired. But he had calculated his point of aim based on her reaching for the blaster holstered at her hip. But instead she flicked her wrist and caused a lightsaber to slide out of her sleeve that promptly ignited with a 'snap-hiss'. As a result, the blast of high-energy plasma sailed past her harmlessly. As she raised her free hand and knocked the cap from her head, Katrine recognised Lara Udra.

Lara swung her lightsaber upwards, into the muzzle from her foe's weapon. There were sparks as the blade cut through the carbine and severed the magnetic coils it used to propel the plasma it created.

Getting to his feet, Cal removed his own cap, slid his own lightsaber from his sleeve and activated the weapon.

"Surrender!" he called out, "You're outnumbered and unarmed!"

Without saying a word the hooded figure brushed his cape aside to reveal a lightsaber on his belt. The weapon promptly leapt to his hand and its brilliant green blade extended.

"I have no quarrel with you Cal Udra." The figure called out, "Step aside and let me do what I must. You and your sister. We do not have to be enemies."

"I'll take that as a 'no'." Lara said and she struck again. But the hooded figure simply placed his own lightsaber blade in the path of hers and blocked the attack. As Lara continued to try and strike the figure Cal ran towards them, seeking to add his own lightsaber to the battle.

At the same time Lorna got to her feet also and dashed towards her speeder. Noticing this, the hooded figure reached out his free hand and sent a wave of force energy towards the vehicle. The blast wave struck the speeder and sent it flying off the rooftop pad. Loud crashes filled the air as it bounced down the side of the building.

"Get inside the building!" Cal yelled at Lorna as he joined Lara, "We'll take care of him!" and he aimed a blow from his lightsaber at the hooded figure's head. As with Lara's attempted strikes the attack was blocked by the mystery man's own lightsaber. It was obvious that the man had considerable skill wielding a lightsaber and also in bending the force to his will. A fact that was only reinforced when he leapt into the air and somersaulted over the heads of both Cal and Lara, landing close to Katrine and Lorna as they headed for the door from the roof.

Knowing that he could never reach the two women in time to save them, Cal instead drew his blaster and aimed at the hooded man's back. But the man picked up on his intention through the force and rolled sideways before Cal could fire. The delay provided by forcing the man to break off his attack was enough to let Katrine and Lorna reach the door and after rushing through they sealed it behind them. At the same time the sound of repulsorlifts filled the air as the sector ranger speeders that had been waiting for the man to reveal himself made their presence felt.

"Looks like they're gone." Cal said, "So given that there's no other way off the roof and we've got reinforcements coming you may want to rethink giving up."

"Unless you think you can cut through that door with us and the cops all around you." Lara added.

"You're really not very good at this are you?" the man said and he looked towards the closest of the sector ranger vehicles that was now hovering just above the roof, two uniformed sector rangers looked down at him from their vehicle.

"Get back!" Cal shouted as he detected the way in which the force was flowing into the man. But his warning came too late as the man leapt directly upwards and landed on the hovering airspeeder. Before the shocked sector rangers could react, the hooded man plunged his lightsaber through the transparisteel canopy and into the chest of the pilot. Then, with a single stroke of his weapon he decapitated the second sector ranger.

The speeder began to spin as the lifeless body of the pilot slumped forwards over the controls. But the hooded man simply reached in through the destroyed canopy and pulled the body out of the vehicle, letting it plummet to the ground hundreds of metres below. Jumping down into the vacant pilot's seat the hooded figure shut off his lightsaber and took hold of the controls. Then he stabilised the speeder and flew off.

"He's getting away!" Lara shouted as the speeder grew smaller.

Cal shut off his lightsaber and began to wave his arms at the other approaching sector ranger vehicles. One of which descended towards them.

"Shall we go after him?" the pilot asked, shouting over the noise of his vehicle's engine.

"No!" Cal shouted, "We will. Now get out."

The hooded man increased the altitude of his stolen speeder, taking it into the authorised travel lanes high above the level of the city's buildings.

"Oh this is ridiculous." Lara said as Cal piloted the airspeeder after the stolen one, "You drive like mom."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Cal asked.

"I mean it would be faster if I got out and pushed." Lara said.

"He's using the traffic for cover." Cal said, "If we go faster then we run the risk of injuring innocent people."

"Not if we get them out of the way first."

"Oh and how are we supposed to do that?"

"Like this." Lara said and she reached out to the control panel and activated the speeder's sirens, "It's a police speeder, remember?"

"I knew that." Cal muttered.

With the siren of the speeder now blaring and brightly coloured lights flashing most of the airborne traffic moved aside to let the Udras pass. This was a double-edged sword however, as they were also parting in front of the speeder the Jedi were chasing and allowing it to gain speed also.

"We should have brought the *Bright Hope*." Cal said, "She'd outrun this thing any day."

"We could just shoot him down as well." Lara added, pointing out the lack of weapons on the speeder. Cal smiled.

"Maybe we still can." He said.

"How? With hand blasters?"

"No, with the defence force. Use the comm. to get in touch with General Drud."

General Joshua Drud was the older brother of Heddren Drud and technically was the head of his family. However, when he had inherited the mantle of leadership he had chosen to remain as chief of Crassis Major's armed forces and instead leave the running of the family to his younger brother.

"It's still early." Lara said, "I hope he's available."

"I've got a feeling he will be." Cal replied.

Lara activated the speeder's built-in communicator and switched it to the channel used by the local military.

"This is Jedi Lara Udra calling for General Drud." She said, "I have an urgent request for assistance.

"Jedi Udra, this is General Drud." The reply came, "Go ahead."

"Told you." Cal muttered as the expression on Lara's face told him that she had not expected the general himself to reply immediately.

"We are heading north in pursuit of a stolen sector rangers vehicle." Lara said, "We need assistance with intercept."

"Confirmed Jedi Udra. Intercept ETA two minutes. Further support on way. Over."

Lara shut off the communicator and looked towards Cal.

"How did you know?" she asked, "Somehow I doubt he just sits around all the time waiting for calls like that."

"He's one of the Founding Families isn't he?" Cal said, "Ever since we came to the sector they've been doing their best to keep an eye on us. I figured someone from Shill Security would have passed word along about our operation as soon as we asked for some of their uniforms. I bet if we'd contacted them instead Han would just so happen to be in the office."

"Belle more likely." Lara said, "I think Han's still on Delvad babysitting the Narthis and Runn families."

"Fine, Belle then. But the point is I don't think we're ever very far from a response team working for the Founding Families."

Then a shadow passed over the speeder and Lara looked upwards to see a pair of fighters over taking them.

"Right on time." She said.

"Jedi Udra," a voice called out over the communicator, "this is Knight One. We have the target in sight.

Unable to engage over a populated area."

Lara looked back at Cal.

"So what now?" she asked.

"We can still force him down." Cal replied.

"How?"

"Get them to repeat that message over the sector rangers channel. Our man knows he can't keep lose us over the city but if he strays beyond it he'll be shot down."

Lara smiled.

"He'll have to land and flee on foot." She said.

"Exactly."

Lara activated the communicator again.

"Incept flight leader, we did not read your last message. Please repeat on sector ranger channel."

There was a brief delay during which Lara switched the communicator back to its original channel.

"Jedi Udra, this is Knight One. We have the target in sight, but cannot engage over a populated area. Do you copy?"

"Copy that." Lara replied, "We hear you loud and clear." Then shut off the communicator and added, "And so did he I bet."

Sure enough the airspeeder piloted by the hooded man suddenly rolled sideways and began to head for the ground. Though the fighters operated by the Crassis Major Defence Forces were not the top of the range types that the Republic or Shill Security operated, they were more than capable of bringing down an unarmed airspeeder.

The hooded man continued his descent, keeping the speeder over areas where the fighters could not open fire at him for fear of harming people on the ground either from a stray shot or the falling wreckage of a destroyed speeder.

"Try and spot where he's heading." Cal said as he split his attention between flying the speeder and studying the ground below, "Look for somewhere he could hide."

Lara looked down. They had left the city centre with its towering skyscrapers behind now and were instead over the suburbs. Much further and the fighters would be able to open fire with impunity so their quarry would have to set down soon.

“There!” Lara exclaimed excitedly and she pointed towards wide surface road that ran through the area. Where its path crossed that of the narrower local roads they passed through tunnels beneath it. In particular Lara singled out a tunnel that had woodland less than ten metres from its entrance. Just as Lara predicted the stolen speeder promptly began to head for the tunnel.

“Knight One!” Lara said, switching the communicator back to the military channel, “Target heading for tunnel near woods. Cut him off! Respond on military channel only.”

“Acknowledged Jedi Udra.” Came the reply, “Heading in now.”

The two fighters roared ahead, but as they passed by the stolen speeder Cal and Lara watched as the hooded man held his arm out sideways.

## 6.

"No! Get clear!" Cal yelled, even though there was no way that the fighter pilot could hear him.

Cal and Lara felt the tremor in the force as the hooded man sent a wave of energy towards the fighter that threw it sideways where it collided with the second craft. Cal pulled back on the control column of their airspeeder as the pair of fighters exploded in an expanding ball of flame and debris. Evidentially the hooded man was not as concerned about the risk of harm to bystanders below as the fighter pilots had been.

"Stang!" Lara snapped as she tried to keep a watch on where the stolen speeder was while Cal did his best to avoid the cloud of wreckage in the air ahead of them.

As Cal rounded the cloud he and Lara both expected to see the stolen speeder accelerating off into the distance now that there was no way to bring it down. But instead the vehicle was still descending; smoke trailing from its engine where a part of one of the destroyed fighters had torn a hole. The speeder continued to lose altitude and the hooded man altered its heading to take it over the woodland near the tunnel mouth, now knowing that he would not be shot down the moment he crossed over the unpopulated area. Though he could not prevent the loss of altitude, the hooded man at least had some control over his vehicle's speed and so when it finally ploughed into the ground beside the woods it skidded across it instead of burying itself. The skid took the speeder into the tree line and as Cal brought the jedi's borrowed vehicle in lower he and Lara both heard an almighty 'crash' as it struck one of the trees.

Cal brought the speeder in to land just outside the woods, letting it settle gently on the ground before shutting off the engine and removing the security lock from the ignition.

"Come on!" he said as he climbed from the vehicle, "Let's get after him."

Lara needed no encouragement and was out of the speeder before Cal had even finished talking. Both jedi ignited their lightsabers and ran towards the woods, following the groove cut into the ground by the crashed airspeeder.

"Be careful." Cal whispered as they approached the wreck where it lay up against one of the larger trees.

"I don't sense anything." Lara replied, creeping forwards.

"Neither do I." Cal said, "But we don't know exactly how powerful this guy is. We'll have to take him together."

The jedi approached the speeder from both sides, prepared for the hooded man to exit from either door. But as they drew closer they saw that the entire forward section of the speeder had been crushed in its collision with the tree and that both doors had been thrown loose.

"Could he have survived that?" Lara asked, "I still don't sense anything."

"I don't either." Cal said and he bent down to look into the speeder, "Empty." He said as he stood back up. "Where did he go?"

"He must have jumped clear after he got under the cover of the trees." Cal said, "If he was smart then he jumped into one of the trees to avoid leaving any tracks."

"Then we've lost him." Lara said as both of them looked around, searching for any signs of the hooded man.

"Yes," Cal agreed, "we've lost him."

From a vantage point in a tree about a hundred metres distant the hooded man watched as the two jedi searched for him, knowing that they would not detect him this far away.

*We've lost him.*

The hooded man picked on the words as he used the force to enhance his senses and he smiled briefly before leaping to an adjacent tree and making good his escape.

Lorna Fayl sat down at her desk and activated her personal computer. When the machine was ready she activated its communication system and logged onto her company's secure data network. With a few more taps on the keyboard she selected the part of the network relevant to the insurance company's records. Then she began to type again.

*Access remote data store.*

*---Files classified. Enter password.---*

Lorna entered her password and smiled as she was given access to the off site backup that she had secretly maintained all these years. Now it was paying off. A few more commands entered and Lorna found herself looking at the images of the ancient Sith artefacts that Etrius Kall had insured with her company.

The artefacts themselves would have been better of course, but the images were of sufficient quality that all of the surface details could be made out in crystal clarity. Lorna imagined the faces of the heads of the other Founding Families when she presented these to them. Then another thought occurred to her. Maybe she would keep these for herself.

Having had so little sleep over the past couple of days, Cal and Lara were catching up when Jule arrived at their apartment.

"Sorry to disturb you." She said when Cal answered the door in his underwear and rubbing his bleary eyes.

"No problem." Cal replied, yawning, "Come on in."

"Thanks." Jule said, "I think Lara should hear what I've got to say too."

"Lara!" Cal yelled and Jule flinched.

"What? I'm asleep. Or at least I was."

"Jule's here. She's got news for us."

There was the sound of movement from Lara's room and she appeared wearing a robe from the Emperor chain of hotels.

"So what do you have for us?" Cal asked as he and Lara sat on the couch.

"Its about our mystery force user." Jule said.

"What about him?" Lara asked, "He's a jerk. That's all I need to know."

"It's about his ability to keep his face hidden." Jule said.

"Yeah," Cal said, "he's just using the force to cloud our senses."

"Well it looks like it doesn't work so well on electronic detection systems." Jule said and both Cal and Lara stared.

"You got him on camera?" Lara asked.

Jule nodded.

"He's done a pretty good job of keeping away from places with them, or at least not sticking his face in the cameras." Jule said, "But when you chased him across the city he wasn't watching out for traffic cameras as much as he should have been." She said, "I had the images enhanced and came up with this." And she handed a datapad to Cal. As he took the device Lara leant closer to him and looked at the display also.

"You're kidding me." Cal said, "I've hardly slept for two days and this is a joke."

"Somebody must have screwed up." Lara added.

"It's not a mistake and it's not a joke either. The man you're after is-" Jule said before Cal interrupted her.

"Kyle Jenner."