

STAR WARS

TALES OF THE JEDI



V-I: INAUGURATION

BY STEPHEN J DUTTON



ELEVEN FAMILIES.
TWELVE GENERATIONS.
ONE EVIL.

**ELEVEN FAMILIES.
TWELVE GENERATIONS.
ONE EVIL.**

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...

INAUGURATION

THE INAUGURATION CEREMONY OF NEWLY ELECTED SENATOR TRENT NARTHIS IS EXPECTED TO BRING THE FORMER JEDI KNIGHT KYLE JENNER OUT INTO THE OPEN. IN TURN THIS BRINGS JEDI MASTER BEN KARAS TO THE SECTOR WITH A PLAN TO APPREHEND HIM...

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

Star Wars is the intellectual property of Lucasfilm Ltd. This story is unofficial and Lucasfilm has not approved any of it.

1 .

Keana Vreyes, padawan learner to Jedi Master Ben Karas paused in the doorway of the darkened room and stared at the figure sat in the circle of candles with his back to her.

"Hello Keana." he said without turning around, "I take it that you are here to say goodbye."

"Yes Hargood, I am. Master Karas has rejected my idea." Keana replied.

"Of course he did." Hargood said, "Master Karas cannot see what he is taking you into. His rigid faith blinds him to what needs to be done."

"But if he'd just agree to take you with us then I'm certain that we'd be successful." Keana said.

"Maybe so." Hargood said, "But there is still a chance that you will prevail."

"And if we don't?" Keana asked and Hargood finally opened his eyes and got to his feet, turning to face the young padawan and staring directly into her eyes.

"In that case I will still be here." he replied, indicating the walls of the room they were in, "I am a prisoner here after all."

For three centuries, ever since the first survey ship from the Republic had charted the Narthis Sector, the descendants of the crew of that ship had scoured the sector in search of the knowledge they believed would hand them wealth beyond even the vast sums of credits they had amassed from the mundane discoveries. Known as the Founding Families, for much of this time they had ignored the lure of obvious political power and concentrated on maintaining the shadowy network that allowed them to investigate any rumours of unusual happenings or objects that may offer them the key to what they sought. However, when one of their number had decided that running for office would offer an route to success that did not rely on her becoming the head of her family, a position guaranteed to someone else, the Families had discovered the benefits of the sector's representative in the Republic Senate being one of their own. But Airia Torin had unknowingly become involved in a plot to murder the head of her family and when it was exposed her fall from grace was guaranteed and all of a sudden a new senator was needed.

A small army of labour droids now worked to assemble the stage where Trent Narthis, direct descendent of Jayk Narthis the captain of the original survey ship would be sworn in as senator following his victory in the recent election. His ancestry had featured prominently in his campaign and had been a useful counter to accusations that as a trillionaire he could not understand the concerns of the majority of the population. Trent had responded by claiming that his family history in the sector meant that he had a vested interest in seeing it prosper as a whole rather than just benefiting a small number at the top.

It had also helped that the election had been rigged.

By manipulating the ballots on Tepillos, one of the two most heavily populated in the sector, associates of Trent had given him the victory that ought to have gone to his rival the industrialist Hyronymous Kast. To throw off suspicion about the result the plan had even relied on the attempt to rig the vote being discovered. However, the initially rigged ballot had been for a third candidate and only when the authorities uncovered this and attempted to recover the genuine ballots they were in fact recovering more forgeries that had been mocked up in Trent's name and at the close of the vote he was declared the winner.

Trent watched the droids at work from the window of a hotel room overlooking the park outside the Crassis Major parliament building where the ceremony was due to take place.

"Haven't they finished yet?" Trent's wife Calleen asked.

"The ceremony isn't until tomorrow." Trent replied.

"Then they ought to be done by now then." Calleen said, "I hope that we won't need to put up with this when we're on Coruscant."

Trent smiled. One perk of the position of senator was the use of a luxurious grace and favour apartment in an exclusive area of the Republic's capital world, a far cry from even Crassis Major that was the most advanced world in the Narthis Sector. Trent's wife had always appreciated the luxuries that his wealth could buy and the opportunities she saw in being the wife of a Republic senator had been a major factor in her supporting him in running for office.

Then came a knock at the door and it slid open to reveal a tall smartly dressed man who carried a weapon holstered under his shoulder.

"Ah Han, come in." Trent said.

Though not a member of any of the Founding Families Han Shill was the CEO of Shill Security, the private military company that provided protection and covert military support to them. His influence with the Families had suffered of late when his mother had arrived in the sector to take over the Shill family operations. It had been his mother Natalay who had masterminded the scheme to rig the election and carried out primarily with the help of Han's supposedly deceased twin sister Belle. However, Han still retained public control while Natalay and Belle remained out of view to the galaxy at large. Since the inauguration was a very public event

Han was taking charge of the Families' security needs.

"There's someone here to see you." Han announced.

"And it took you to tell us?" Calleen asked, "You don't strike me as the doorman type Han."

"It's the jedi." Han replied, "I thought I'd come to you directly to find out what you want to do."

Calleen and Trent exchanged nervous glances. Cal Udra was the jedi knight assigned to the Narthis Sector, while his younger sister Lara was his padawan learner and the pair had made some headway in uncovering the activities of the Founding Families.

"I've got a bad feeling about this Trent." Calleen said.

"Cal and Lara are here?" Trent asked Han, "What do they want?"

"Actually there are four of them." Han said, "Cal and Lara are here, but they aren't in charge."

"Then who-" Calleen began before Han interrupted her.

"It's Master Karas." he said, "He's here with his padawan as well. He didn't say why he was here."

As the most senior jedi in the region of space that included the Narthis sector, it took a matter of great importance to bring Master Karas to the sector.

"Did Corlay warn you that he was coming?" Trent asked in reference to Han's younger sister who was a member of the Freedom Warriors, the non-Force sensitive troops who fought for the Jedi Order.

"Send them in Han." Trent said.

"Are you insane? Letting the jedi in here-" Calleen said before she was interrupted again, this time by her husband.

"They don't know anything." Trent said, "If they did it would be just Cal and Lara with the Sector Rangers here to arrest us. So I'm curious to find out what is important enough for a jedi master to travel all the way here from Moldas."

Han nodded and left the room, reappearing shortly after with the four jedi. Master Karas and Cal stood side by side while Lara and Keana stood behind their respective masters.

"Master Karas." Trent said, "What brings you all the way from Moldas?"

"You do Mister Narthis." Master Karas replied.

"That's senator." Calleen said with a smile.

"Not until he's sworn in it isn't." Lara commented and she smirked at Calleen, whose face fell.

"I see." Trent said, "And how may I help you?"

"Believe it or not we're here to help you." Cal told him.

"Oh really?" Trent said, confused, "And why might I need the help of no less than four jedi?"

"Because there's a former jedi knight out there who wants you and every member of the so-called Founding Families dead by all accounts." Master Karas answered.

"You are of course referring to Kyle Jenner." Trent said, "Cal's predecessor."

Cal and Lara had originally been sent to the Narthis Sector to investigate the disappearance of Kyle Jenner and his padawan Lom Des. The sullustan Lom had been found dead and all evidence pointed to Kyle having killed him before fleeing. As well as apparently falling under the influence of the Dark Side of the Force, Kyle had gained considerable animosity towards the Founding Families and had even attempted to recruit the Udras to help him bring them all down.

"What makes you think he'll show up here?" Calleen asked.

"Because there will be representatives of all of the Founding Families here." Cal replied, "Even that kid who's inherited the Torin family fortune."

"Actually that's not quite correct Jedi Udra." Calleen said, "You ought to know that the Runn family never leaves Delvad and the Crassis family won't be attending either. Something to do with bad feelings regarding Erin Crassis and that beautiful young wife of his. Emphasis on the young. But I suppose you'd know all about that wouldn't you Cal?"

Anger.

There was brief tremor in the Force that all of the jedi picked up on and it was obviously coming from Cal.

The comments about the head of the Crassis family marrying a young woman were intended specifically to get under Cal's skin since the woman in question, a woman by the name of Gayal Karn, had been his girlfriend before mysteriously disappearing for six months and then reappearing as the elderly Erin's wife.

Erin had had nothing to do with her disappearance however, instead he had sent troops to rescue her from the asylum that her own family had placed her in when they had discovered her relationship with Cal. This event, combined with Erin's marrying Gayal had driven a wedge between the Crassis family and the other Founding Families. Especially when it became known that Gayal was Force sensitive and could be the key to what they had been trying to achieve for three hundred years.

"Nevertheless," Master Karas responded, "it is our opinion that Kyle Jenner-"

"Former Jedi Kyle Jenner." Han muttered but Master Karas ignored the barb and carried on.

"-will attempt to use the inauguration as an opportunity to strike at a large number of members of the Founding Families at once." he explained.

"We have security." Trent said, "The local police, the defence force and our own people from Shill Security

will be here in large numbers.”

“Do not be so proud of the army you may have amassed Mister Narthis.” Master Karas replied, “The ability to control a crowd of protesters is nothing compared to the power of the Force. For all his faults Kyle Jenner is strong with the Force and he will find a way past your guards.”

“And you think that with you standing beside me he'll just give up and go home?” Trent asked.

“Only if we're stupid enough to stand out in the open.” Cal said, “We're not here to deter Kyle, we're here to deal with him once and for all.”

A smile spread across Trent's face.

“Well then Jedi Udra, I welcome your presence here. A threat to public safety as great as a fallen jedi needs to be dealt with and if anyone can achieve this then I'm sure that the two jedi responsible for uncovering the plot to rig the election against me are them.”

Cal and Lara both scowled.

2.

"Well hello handsome." the red skinned zeltron woman said to the young Crassis Major Defence Force lieutenant, "My name's Kassa. Want to buy me a drink?"

Zeltrons were an empathic near human species capable of reading the emotions of others and Kassa had correctly determined that the young officer was feeling nervous and lonely here in the cantina close to the park where the swearing in ceremony was to take place. In order to make him more malleable to her will Kassa also took advantage of another ability her species possessed and released pheromones that would make him find her more attractive.

"Sure, what are you having?" the man replied as he began to come under the influence of Kassa's pheromones.

"A beer will do fine." Kassa replied and the officer waved the bar tender over and ordered her a drink. Kassa noticed that the bar tender undercharged him for the drink and she smiled with satisfaction. She had already paid off the bar staff to make sure that the officer would not run out of money while he was still buying drinks for her. Kassa wanted information and it would be easier to get it if she could keep the officer drinking long enough for him to become mildly intoxicated. Kassa herself would remain sober of course, another benefit to being zeltron was her ability to avoid becoming intoxicated thanks to her second liver.

"So tell me what brings a handsome young lieutenant like yourself to a place like this." Kassa said before she took a sip of her drink.

One of the meeting rooms in the parliament building had been turned into a command centre for the duration of the swearing in ceremony. Most of those working here were police officers, both uniformed patrol men and plain clothed investigators. Here and there were the military uniforms of members of the Crassis Major Defence Force, however, when the Jedi entered the room in the company of Han Shill it was none of these government agents that interested Cal, instead the individuals he picked out to keep an eye on were those wearing clothing that identified them as employees of Shill Security.

"The police already have the access routes plotted." Han explained, pointing to the large holographic display at the far end of the room, "This isn't their first swearing in ceremony after all. So they'll have men on them all, some in uniform and others mingling with the crowd. Then we'll have the military forming an honour guard in front of the stage itself, with more in transports overhead to enforce the no fly zone."

"So what's the point in having you here?" Lara asked.

"The police and military are here to deter and deal with anyone wishing the senator-" Han began.

"Senator-elect." Keana corrected him and she and Lara briefly smiled at one another.

Anger.

Obviously the comment had had the desired effect on Han, but Master Karas did not appear impressed at his padawan's provocation of the man.

"Anyone wishing the senator-elect any harm." Han continued, "And also maintain general good order if anything goes wrong. On the other hand my people will concentrate on protecting the senator-elect himself. They'll deal with anyone who gets past the perimeter and evacuate him if needed."

"And the others?" Master Karas asked.

"I'm sorry. The others?" Han asked in response.

"The other members of the Founding Families." Master Karas said, "Aren't you contracted to protect them all? All of those who will be attending at any rate, I am aware that your company's services are no longer required by the Crassis family. Since they will be in the crowd itself, what are your plans regarding them?"

"The security forces will allow them through the perimeter to where they can be evacuated as well." Han replied.

"And all those who cannot afford your protection will be left behind."

The voice came from the doorway and none of the Jedi needed to turn around to see who it was, they had already sensed his approach through the Force and his aura of certainty and self confidence told them exactly who he was. On the other hand it was only when Han turned towards the door that he saw who it was that had just called out to rebuke him.

Tarris Blake was a member of the Jedi Shadows, an elite and some would say fanatical group that dedicated their entire lives to hunting down the servants of the Dark Side. Originally he had come to the Narthis Sector to hunt Cal and Lara when it was believed that they may have fallen, but when he finally caught up with them and determined that they had not been corrupted he had remained to help them in their efforts to bring down the Founding Families. However, apprehending Kyle Jenner was also something he was keen to do and in hindsight the only thing that surprised Han about the shadow's sudden appearance was that it had taken so long.

"The police will move in to protect them." Han replied.

"Yes Mister Shill, I'm sure they will." Tarris replied, "In the mean time we will deal with Kyle Jenner." Master Karas had not bothered to respond to the arrival of Tarris. Instead he had focused his attention on the display. This showed the proposed deployment of every police officer and soldier assigned to ceremonial duty. As well as the personnel that would be at the park itself there were reserves located at nearby strategic points along with paramedic units just in case, while just as Han had said there were aerial transports overhead carrying more troops.

"You have seen what is missing?" Master Karas said softly to Cal who was stood beside him.

"Shill Security." Cal replied, "Not one of their people appears on this display."

"Which means that neither we nor the police and defence forces know exactly how many of them are supposed to be there and where they are deployed." Master Karas added.

"Oh I don't know." Cal said, "Remember who's in charge of the Crassis Major Defence Force."

"You suspect General Drud of being complicit in concealing information from the police?" Master Karas asked.

"He's the head of the Drud family." Cal said, "Most of them are lawyers as well as being one of the Founding Families. So yes, I suspect him of being dishonest."

Tarris strode across the room, ignoring most of those present to stand alongside Cal and Master Karas.

"You have assessed the tactical situation?" he asked.

"The situation is incomplete." Master Karas replied.

"How so?" Tarris then asked.

"None of the Shill Security units are shown here." Cal told him, glancing around at Han who suddenly averted his gaze when the jedi made eye contact.

Tarris remained perfectly calm as he studied the display more closely.

"We shall position ourselves here." he said suddenly and he pointed to a spot just behind the stage and moved his hand across the display.

"Jedi Blake, you are not in command here." Master Karas pointed out.

"I have spent my adult life doing nothing but hunting the servants of the Dark Side." Tarris replied, "You may follow my lead or not, it does not concern me. But I will be here behind the stage."

"Why?" Cal asked, "Surely an attack would come from the front where there's a crowd to hide in and clear lines of fire."

"And no room to move or way of pursuing the target when his security evacuate him." Tarris said, "There may be an attack from the front, but it will be only a distraction. Should Trent Narthis be killed by it, it would only be a fluke."

"I'm sure that'll be a comfort to his widow. 'Oops, sorry Missus Narthis, your husband's dead but was a real fluke that he died.'" Lara commented and Master Karas briefly glared at her.

"So we just sit at the back and wait?" Cal asked.

"Not entirely Jedi Udra." Tarris answered, "Jenner will be expecting us so if we fail to react to an attack he will become suspicious. Only Master Karas and I will remain behind the stage while Narthis is removed by his security. You will lead the padawans to investigate the diversionary attack. In all likelihood it will lead you to an accomplice that may be used as a source of information."

Cal nodded.

"The plan is sound." Master Karas then said, "When Kyle launches his own attack the two of us should be more than strong enough to deal with him."

At that moment Lara felt a brief tremor in the Force from close by and glancing at Keana she was unsure as to whether she caught a hint of a frown on her face.

Leaving the young officer at the bar, Kassa headed for a more unsavoury part of the city. Here she could feel eyes watching her for more reasons that just because she was an attractive female. However, the confident way in which she moved was enough to deter most potential assailants.

Most, but not all.

Kassa became aware that she was being followed and she making a sudden change to her route identified the individual as a large and heavily tattooed zabrak, the ring of small horns around his head all ending in metal spikes that were presumably intended to intimidate victims beyond his normal appearance. Kassa picked up her pace somewhat, but not enough to make the zabrak realise that she had noticed him and continued on her way to her planned destination in an alleyway between a speeder repair workshop and a cantina that looked like it provided as much sustenance to the local vermin as to its customers.

The alleyway terminated in a chain link fence that left Kassa trapped as the zabrak followed her into it and grinned as he drew a serrated knife from his jacket.

"Okay lady just hand over-" the zabrak began before his neck suddenly snapped as a hooded figure appeared right behind him and wrapped one arms around it while the other grasped his skull and twisted it.

"You are getting careless." the hooded figure said, dragging the zabrak's body down the alleyway until he reached a large trash container that he lifted the corpse into.

"I like to think of it as making use of my resources Kyle." Kassa replied as Kyle Jenner then lowered his hood, "I knew you'd take him out for me. You have to keep me alive after all."

"Alternately I could just have waited for him to kill you and then taken the mem-stick that you have concealed in that hidden pocket." Kyle said, "Then I would have no need to pay you for it."

"You're a real bundle of laughs Kyle, has anyone ever told you that?" Kassa said, reaching into her jacket and producing a mem-stick, "Now about my money-"

"Take it." Kyle said, interrupting her and tossing a small bundle of banknotes to her. Kassa caught this in one hand and threw the mem-stick back to Kyle who promptly used the Force to pluck it from the air and plugged it into a datapad that he slid from under his cloak.

"That's got all the police and military deployments for the ceremony on it." Kassa said, "It was pretty easy to copy from the army guy's datapad. But there's nothing about Shill Security on it."

"Of course not." Kyle responded, studying the datapad, "The Founding Families want full deniability if their hired killers start shooting the wrong people. They'll claim it was some terrorist cell."

"But do you think that you can get through the regular forces without being spotted by the Families' own goons?" Kassa asked.

"I will not be challenging the police or defence force personnel. They are innocent in this." Kyle replied and Kassa frowned.

"But how-" she began before he interrupted her.

"I know exactly where Han Shill will have deployed his people." he said, "There are obvious locations that offer commanding views of the stage and surrounding area that ought to be occupied but are not. Han Shill's people will be there."

"You make it sound so easy." Kassa said, sliding her hands into her pockets.

"Wait." Kyle said as she began to walk back down the alleyway.

"What?" Kassa asked, turning back to face him.

"I require your services further." Kyle told her and she smiled.

"Ah, so saving my life wasn't such a bad idea after all." she replied.

3.

Han noticed the nervous looks on the faces of many of his employees when he returned to the headquarters of Shill Security and it did not take him long to realise that those looks only appeared when they noticed him. Though he could be a demanding employer at times, tolerating no foolishness or incompetence, he knew that he was at least respected by those who worked for him and for them to be behaving so oddly meant only thing.

"Hello mother." he said as he strode into his office, not bothering to check with any of the staff in the communication centre outside as he usually did, "Making yourself at home I see."

Natalay smiled as she looked up from behind Han's desk.

"I came to check up on your plans for the ceremony." she replied, "Now that Belle and I have made sure that Trent got elected it would be a terrible shame if he was to get himself killed before he could even set foot in the senate chamber. Don't you agree?"

"Of course." Han said as he sat down in another chair and Natalay leant forwards.

"So why are you wasting your time with any of this?" she asked, pointing to the computer display on Han's desk and the map it showed. Unlike the similar map in the parliament building this one also featured the exact positions of the Shill Security personnel to be deployed and the armoured evacuation transport to be held in reserve.

"I don't know what you mean." Han said, "I've got to protect members of almost all of the Families and that takes a lot of effort. I'm not trusting it to anyone else."

Natalay sighed.

"Han, all you needed to do was provide a close protection squad for the Families. Everything else could have been handled by the police and defence force. Make it Josh Drud's problem instead. He knows what he's doing from what I can see."

"What about the threat from Kyle Jenner? I knew that the ceremony would be a target before the Jedi became involved."

"But you should have known that they would." Natalay said, "And if they didn't then you should have made sure that Trent requested Jedi protection. They're duty bound to agree. This is potentially a fight that we've no need to be involved in. We've nothing to gain, but we could lose a lot of good people and equipment if it goes wrong."

"Oh really? And what would have me be doing instead?" Han asked.

"Apologising." Natalay said and Han snorted.

"Apologise? To who?"

"Erin Crassis." Natalay replied and Han laughed, "I'm not joking." Natalay went on, frowning, "Han, we are faced with exactly the situation you were supposed to prevent, the Families are on the verge of going to war with one another over Gayal. Your shooting up the Crassis estate on Lovas was an idiotic move."

"I was just doing what Heddren Drud asked for mother." Han explained.

"And you should have been smart enough to tell him that it was a stupid plan. I'm just relieved that Erin Crassis was smart enough not to respond in kind. Can you imagine the fallout if he sent a brigade of Mandalorians to attack the Druds rather than just one to dump a few dozen severed heads on the Druds' driveway?"

"Mother I-" Han began before Natalay held up her hand for him to stop and continued to speak.

"Fortunately for you Erill was willing to see me this morning." she said.

"You went to see Erill Crassis?" Han asked.

"Oh yes, though those Mandalorians he's hired made sure I was searched. It seems that thanks to both yours and your sister Belle's mistakes they thought that I may be trying to get in to assassinate Erill. But once they were done with groping me I was actually able to get in to see the old man and apologise for your behaviour."

Han frowned.

"And now everything's forgiven is it?" he asked.

"Of course not."

"Didn't think so." Han muttered.

"But I have at least convinced him that the Crassis family needs to be at the swearing in."

"Erill Crassis is going to be at the ceremony?" Han said in astonishment.

"Of course he won't. He's far too ill. But he has ordered his son and daughter-in-law to attend. I've promised him that you'll make sure they're kept safe." Natalay replied.

"So there won't be a score of Mandalorians traipsing around and shooting anyone that looks at them the wrong way then?"

"No dear. Though you better hope that your men are up to their job now you've decided to take responsibility

for the safety of everyone there.”

“The police are still in overall command.” Han pointed out, “Technically it is a matter of civilian law enforcement.”

“So if it gets out of hand the press will be demanding to know why they relied on private mercenaries and the blame will be laid squarely at your door. Han, there is no winning here. Tell your men to make sure that the members of the Families get out of there safely, but don't let them do anything else. Leave crowd control to the cops and Kyle Jenner to the Jedi. Do you understand me?”

Han frowned.

“Yes mother.” he replied.

The five Jedi arrived at the site for the ceremony well before the area was opened up to the public.

“We should have brought Ghost with us.” Lara commented as she saw a team of police canine handlers moving to conduct a final sweep of the perimeter.

“Ghost is hardly a trained sniffer dog Lara.” Cal pointed out, “He'd probably catch the scent of something in the trees over there and you'd spend the rest of the day trying to get him to come back.”

“That sounds like an admission that he's my dog.” Lara said and then she looked at Keana, “Wouldn't you agree?”

“What? I don't understand.” Keana replied.

Cal sighed.

“Lara is under the misapprehension that Ghost is her dog when in fact he's clearly mine. It says so on his collar.” he told the other padawan.

“You made the collar Cal.” Lara reminded him.

“Dag gave him to me.” Cal said, “Remember? I told him I always wanted a dog, but all mom and dad gave me was you.”

“Will you two stop bickering?” Master Karas hissed, “We have a job to do here and I expect you to do it. Now Jedi Blake and I will take up our position behind the stage while you three walk the perimeter. A planning display is enough to begin with but it can't make up for an inspection of the real thing. I want a full report on the weak points in the security before the public are allowed in. Understood?”

“Yes master.” Keana replied while Cal and Lara just nodded.

“Good. Then go.” Master Karas ordered and he watched them spit up and leave.

4.

Kayza Drud, the younger sister of Josh and Heddren who between them led the Drud family, was a skilled public relations specialist. In the past few years she had skilfully advised members of the Founding Families on how to present themselves to the public in the best possible light and this had culminated most recently in helping Trent Narthis with his election campaign. In the end her efforts in the election had been largely wasted of course, Trent would have lost to Hyronymous Kast had it not been for Natalay's interference with the ballots on Tepillos but as far as the public were concerned she had masterminded the campaign for the winning candidate and new job offers were already coming in. Right now however she had to help organise one last public appearance for Trent.

"Hyronymous is going to be in the crowd." she told Trent, "So it may be worth making some mention of him in a positive light."

"Why not just ignore him?" Calleen asked as she checked herself in a mirror while her husband reviewed the speech that had been written for him once more, scanning through for the most likely place that his rival could be mentioned.

"It's not for him, its for everyone that voted for him." Kayza replied, "You want them to feel like they're still getting something out of Trent's victory. Otherwise they'll be looking for reasons to criticise him from the beginning and it'll hurt us come the next election."

"That's not for another six years yet though." Trent said, "What will one speech now matter then?"

"Because it'll be recorded and someone's bound to use it in their campaign then. Make it good and it'll be you, otherwise it'll be all your opponents." Kayza answered.

"So what about here?" Trent asked, pointing to the first section of his speech, about his feelings when he first heard the announcement that he had won the election.

"Too obvious." Kayza said, "Besides that section is just about you. You need to link Hyronymous to the success of the sector." then she took the datapad on which the speech was stored and scrolled through the pages until she found what she was looking for, "Here." she said, returning the datapad to Trent, "You're talking about improving business opportunities in the sector so say how you're certain that you'll be able to work with businessmen like him to make everyone better off."

"I'd sooner see him bankrupt." Calleen commented.

Just then there was a buzzing sound and Kayza took out her point-to-point communication link.

"Yes?" she said into it.

"Miss Drud," the voice of one of the people responsible for the general organisation of the swearing in ceremony said, "I just wanted to let you know that the first of the VIPs has arrived."

This was not unexpected. Though the ceremony was not due to start for almost two more hours yet the crowds would need to be in place before it began and the VIPs would be admitted even earlier so that they could take their places without needing to rub shoulders with the more mundane guests.

"Who is it?" Kayza asked.

"It's Luke and Salla Crassis." the organiser answered and Calleen and Trent both looked at Kayza in confusion.

"What the kriff are they doing here?" Trent asked.

"Hoping to sponge off your popularity probably." Calleen commented.

"No, they're here so we can present a united front." Kayza told them, "Natalay Shill told me she'd spoken with Erill Crassis and persuaded him to send a representative. The media are already getting suspicious about a schism within the Founding Families and the last thing we need is any of them investigating what it's all about. Don't worry, I've made arrangements for them to be seated somewhere that the media will think is a prime spot while still keeping them away from the rest of us. Though it may help if you acknowledge their presence in a polite way Trent."

"I'll see what I can do." Trent replied.

The luxury speeder was waved through the outer perimeter and guided to a parking area where Luke Crassis, son of Erin, and his wife Salla disembarked and were met by one of the event stewards.

"If you'd like to follow me, I'll escort you to your seats." he told the pair.

"Lead the way." Luke replied.

"Mister Crassis." a voice said from beside the speeder as Luke and Salla linked arms and when they both looked around they saw that the bodyguard who had rode in the vehicle with them had got out, "Are you sure you don't want me with you."

The man was dressed formally but his demeanour and facial features suggested that he was not used to wearing such clothing. His face bore the scars of years of combat that would under normal circumstances have been concealed beneath a traditional mandalorian helmet. But full battle armour had to be discarded for

an event such as this.

"No thank you." Luke replied, concerned at the repercussions of someone looking at the mandalorian the wrong way and him breaking their neck in public, "We'll be just fine." and then they departing following the steward.

There was an inner security perimeter that consisted of a three metre tall fence that gave of a distinctive hum of a deflector shield, indicating that attempting to climb over it would be a bad idea indeed. A checkpoint allowed passage through the fence and the steward led Luke and Salla directly to this where they were met by a group of uniformed police officers equipped with portable scanning devices.

"It's protocol I'm afraid." the steward announced as he was scanned by the police officers, "Even staff have to be checked every time we go in or out."

"That's quite alright." Luke replied as he then stepped forwards to be scanned, lifting his arms out wide.

"Well, well. They'll let anyone in to a swearing in nowadays won't they?" a familiar voice said and from behind a portable security control post Cal stepped into view, one hand resting on his lightsaber.

Luke smiled and when the police officers waved him forwards he stepped towards Cal.

"Jedi Udra." he said, "It's nice to know that we'll have your protection while we're here."

"But where is that charming sister of yours?" Salla added while she too was being scanned.

"About." Cal replied, "There are plenty of us here to make sure that none of you can get up to no good."

"What? Us?" Luke responded, "Why Jedi Udra, if I didn't know better I'd swear that you don't like us. And what with our family doing so much to help that young lady you're so fond of. By the way, Gayal's doing just fine."

Cal scowled briefly, knowing that Luke was deliberately trying to get under his skin.

"Well I must be going." Cal announced, "I've got more of the perimeter to inspect. Master Karas is concerned that certain people here today are so unpopular that someone may try and harm them. So as a jedi it's my job to stop that. No matter how much of a nerf herder they may be." and then without waiting for a reply he walked away.

"Luke. Look at his belt." Salla said as she watched Cal leave.

"What about it?" Luke asked, unable to see Cal's belt now that he had his back to them.

"Wait until he turns around." Salla replied, "It's on his left."

The pair then waited, watching Cal until he came to a halt near a cluster of trees close to the fence and began to inspect them, assessing the chance of someone using them as a way of getting inside the perimeter.

"Wait for it." Salla said softly and then as Cal decided to scale one of the trees, pulling himself up with his bare hands, his cloak fell back and revealed what was hung from his belt opposite the lightsaber he had been resting his hand on when he confronted Luke and Salla.

Another lightsaber.

Unlike the first, the one that members of the Founding Families had become used to seeing the jedi wielding whenever they had met him or in images taken of him that they studied, this weapon was not a polished silver colour with a black grip. Instead it had a much darker and more sinister appearance. Coloured entirely black the weapon featured short blades circling the emitter crystal and it looked nothing like anything that a jedi would manufacture.

Luke smiled.

"The lightsaber Charity saw." he said softly, "The Sith weapon."

"My thoughts exactly." Salla replied, "But why would he be carrying it around?"

"Isn't it obvious?" Luke asked in return, "It's important and he wants to know exactly where it is at all times. The only way he can be certain of that is if he's got it with him."

"If you're both ready I'll take you to your seats." the steward said suddenly and Luke looked back at him.

"Yes of course." he said, "I'm sorry but we both tend to get distracted whenever members of the Jedi Order are about."

"I know, that was the first time ever seen one myself. They are quite intimidating aren't they?" the steward replied before indicating the direction in which he wanted them to follow.

The area directly in front of the stage where Trent Narthis was to be sworn in contained rows of chairs and was separated from the open area where the members of the general public admitted would be expected to stand. Most of the chairs were of the common form used by humanoids, but amongst them there were also several that were obviously designed for other alien forms. Each seat had a small sheet of flimsiplast taped to the back on which the name of the being who would be seated there and the steward led Luke and Salla to the seats labelled with their names.

"The front row." Salla said as the steward walked away, "I'm surprised that Trent didn't have us placed under a tree used as a nest by birds with severe digestive disorders. What will the other Families think?"

"They may not even notice us here." Luke told her, "They'll be somewhere else."

"Somewhere else?" Salla asked, "So who are we sitting next to?"

"Well I'm not sure who you're next to, but I'm sat beside Hyronimous Kast." Luke told her, pulling the label off

the seat beside his and showing it to his wife.
"I've got a bad feeling about this." Salla replied as she sat down.

5.

While the younger jedi inspected the security perimeter around the park Tarris and Master Karas concerned themselves with the area behind the stage where they expected Kyle would launch his genuine attack from. At present there was an array of transport vehicles lined up in this area. Some of these were necessary to the ceremony itself, having been used to transport the stage, seating and sound equipment. But the majority were privately owned repulsortrucks that had brought a small army of news reporters from around the sector to witness the event and broadcast it to viewers unable to attend in person. But one particular area back stage had been kept clear of all obstacles. This was the location at which Trent Narthis would arrive by airspeeder, touching down already within the security perimeter and only a handful of metres from the stage where the ceremony would take place.

This plethora of transports made the area one that was littered with potential hiding places, even for someone without Kyle's jedi skills. Each vehicle would have been inspected upon its arrival by the police of course, but there was the possibility that Kyle could have used his Force powers to manipulate them into allowing him entry into the secure area and that he could have been just lying in wait for the past day and a half. Therefore Tarris and Master Karas carried out another sweep of the area themselves.

Many of their checks were mundane, most of the media operated vehicles functioned as communications relay units, transmitting what the reporters recorded directly back to their employers to be broadcast to their audience as it happened. This meant that many people were either inside or close by these vehicles, making them unlikely hiding places. Even if Kyle attempted to use the Force to help conceal himself he would give himself away to Force sensitive beings such as Tarris and Master Karas.

The vehicles used to bring the equipment needed for the ceremony itself were a different matter, however. If Kyle had infiltrated the perimeter at any point following the stage and seating being fully deployed then he could have used any of the now unmanned vehicles as a hiding place. Those used to transport the labour droids that had done the actual setting up were once again full, being the best place to store the droids until they were again needed to dismantle the stage and clear away all of the chairs. However, as a security precaution none of these vehicles were allowed to be left in a state where the police and military deployed for the ceremony would be unable to gain access to them at any time. This meant that those that had been locked had been so with specially approved locks for which the police had extra keys at their disposal. To Kyle this may have still not been a significant threat, his jedi senses would have alerted him to anyone attempting to open the vehicle before they had done so and then he could have used the Force to cloud their senses and prevent them from noticing him. To counter this the two jedi each enlisted the help of a police officer equipped with a key for the transports and split up to search them all. Though Kyle may have been able to distract a police officer, either of the experienced jedi would be able to see through such a trick instantly.

However, by the time that all of the vehicles had been opened and inspected the only thing that the jedi had discovered was that Kyle had not already hidden himself anywhere backstage.

"He cannot be anywhere else within the perimeter." Tarris said when the two jedi met up again.

"Agreed. There is nowhere for him to hide." Master Karas agreed.

"Then he is still somewhere outside." Tarris added.

"That helps us little." Master Karas said, "We need to know where."

The office building overlooked the Crassis Major Parliament and that had made it popular with businesses despite the high rents charged by the owners. Its proximity to the seat of government meant that it was a relatively easy matter to gain access to influential lawmakers and that was always good for business. But it was not the proximity of the parliament that brought its latest visitor to the office building. Instead Kyle Jenner was here because it overlooked the park where the swearing in ceremony would be taking place, giving it a valuable tactical location and he knew that Han Shill would have seen this as well and positioned at least one unit of his mercenaries here.

The glass doors to the building were sealed when Kyle walked up the steps from the pavement towards them but he saw that there was a pair of security guards sat behind the reception desk in the lobby, both of who just glared at him through the glass.

"Not today buddy." one called out, "Keep going."

"But you need to hear what I have to say." Kyle replied, waving his hand gently as he reached out through the Force and made contact with the guards' minds.

"We better hear what he has to say." one of the guards said to the other and both got up and approached the doors where Kyle waited patiently. With his lightsaber, pulse wave blaster and a plasma carbine concealed beneath his cloak the former jedi knight was confident that he could easily have simply destroyed the doors and killed both guards before either could raise the alarm. But a smashed door and a pair of smouldering

corpses on display to anyone who happened to walk past would attract the wrong sort of attention when Kyle was not yet ready for it.

"What do you want?" one of the guards asked when they reached the door and they and Kyle faced one another through the glass.

"You need to open the door for me." Kyle said, making use of the Force once more to place the suggestion in their minds and one of them placed an access card against the reader mounted beside the main door.

"I'll need to open the door for you." he said and there was a high pitched tone as the door lock released and it slid open to allow Kyle to enter.

Once again Kyle was aware of how the two guards were no match for him, even given the slug thrower pistols holstered at their waists. But killing them was not what Kyle was here to do and instead he smiled at them.

"I am with the men who arrived earlier." he said, "They should have told you to expect me."

"They told us to expect you sir."

"And they asked you to send me up to them." Kyle added with another subtle wave of his hand.

"They asked us to send you up to the sixth floor. Office number sixty-four."

"Thank you." Kyle said, "I'd better get going. I don't want to be late. But there is something else I need from you. Your surveillance system is faulty. It needs to be turned off."

"Thanks." a guard replied and as Kyle headed for the turbolifts the guards returned to their post and simply switched off the bank of security monitors located beneath it.

Kyle did not use the turbolift to take him straight up to the sixth floor. Instead he halted it at the fifth and drew his lightsaber. Then with a simple push through the Force he opened the emergency hatch on the roof of the turbolift car and leapt straight up through it to land on the roof. Reaching out through the Force once more he then restarted the turbolift's upward motion to the sixth floor while Kyle lowered the hatch back down, leaving just a tiny gap to peer through.

As soon as the turbolift came to a stop here the door slid open and Kyle sensed the presence of two lifeforms.

"It's empty." one said, his voice distorted and as the figure stepped into the turbolift car Kyle saw through the gap that he was wearing a breath mask. In addition to this the man wore an armoured vest and helmet and carried a short barrelled pulse wave weapon. Just as Kyle had expected the Shill Security team had positioned sentries by the turbolifts. But they were not prepared for what was about to happen.

Pulling the hatch fully open again Kyle leapt back into the turbolift, igniting his lightsaber as he dropped to the floor. There was a 'snap-hiss' as the blade extended and the smell of burning flesh as it sliced the Shill Security agent in half vertically. Before the second agent could choose whether to try fighting or warn his comrades elsewhere in the building first Kyle extended his free hand towards the man, pointing at his throat. Choking, the man dropped his own carbine and staggered backwards, clutching at his throat as he tried to breathe. In desperation he ripped the breath mask way from his face, but even this could not help as his throat was being crushed from the inside and as he backed into a nearby wall he slid down and landed in a heap on the floor. The agent was still alive when Kyle released on him but by then the damage was already done and there was nothing that could be done to allow him to survive. Kyle still took the precaution of reaching down and ripping the agent's PTP link away from him. Though he was unable to speak it was possible that he could use his last moments of consciousness to activate the device, thus alerting his comrades to a problem. Finally Kyle shut off his lightsaber and headed off, following the signs that pointed the way to office sixty-four.

As he neared the office Kyle slowed down as he felt the presence of someone else through the Force and sure enough the door to the office slid open and another Shill Security agent stepped out into the corridor, prompting Kyle to duck into an alcove and use the Force to conceal himself. The agent turned and looked about to close the office door behind him, but a slight wave of Kyle's hand implanted the suggestion that the door was already closed and the man continued to walk towards Kyle's hiding place. Oblivious to the former Jedi's presence the agent walked right past Kyle who promptly reached out and wrapped his arms around the man's neck. As Kyle pulled the agent back he twisted his head and there was an audible 'crack' as his neck broke. Leaving the dead agent on the floor of the corridor he then slipped through the open door.

Like the other office units in the building, office sixty-four was in fact a cluster of smaller offices and a shared reception and meeting area, intended for a small business to be able to operate out of fully. Reaching out through the Force, Kyle search for the other agents he knew had to be present and he found all three clustered together in a single room located at the edge of the building where they would be overlooking the park. Moving closer to the door leading to this room Kyle reached under his cloak and produced his plasma carbine. The short but bulky weapon was intended to be wielded in both hands, but Kyle was strong and practised enough to be able to balance it for short periods at least in just one. Holding it this way he reached for the control panel beside the door and opened it.

The instant the door opened Kyle was already searching for a target. The Force had given him approximate locations of the three agents, but only when he could see them could he be certain. There was a flash of light

and heat as he fired the powerful weapon and one of the agents was thrown forwards as the blast of super heated matter burned through the back of his armoured vest and boiled away most of the fluids in his chest, roasting what was left of his organs in the process.

The two surviving agents were both trained professionals but even they were startled by the suddenness of the attack and in the brief time before either came to their senses Kyle was able to acquire a second agent as a target and fire his plasma carbine again, this time striking his target in the neck. By now the final agent was reacting and while one hand reached for the pulse wave blaster at the agent's waist the other went for the PTP link clipped to his chest.

Kyle dropped his carbine and reached for his lightsaber. At the same time he extended his other hand towards the agent and left out a telekinetic blast that was aimed at the PTP link. Kyle considered this a greater threat than the pistol. All the agent had to do was activate the device and Kyle's presence would be exposed, even if he managed to kill the other man before he could speak. The wave of Force energy not only blasted the PTP link from its place on the agent's chest but also span the agent around and in the time it took the man to turn and face Kyle again he already had his lightsaber in his hand and was activating it.

The agent fired his weapon and Kyle moved his lightsaber blade in between them both, blocking the path of the shot and the compact spatial distortion that the agent hoped would shatter Kyle's bones and burst his organs instead exploded with a 'Pop!' as it struck the blade.

With a sweep of his arm Kyle sent all of the furniture between him and the agent smashing into a wall, leaving a clear path that he then used to charge at the other man who fired his weapon again to no more effect than the first time. Blocking each shot in turn as he ran, Kyle then swung his lightsaber in a sideways arc as soon as the agent came within reach of the blade. Not much more than the tip was able to intersect with the agent's torso but this was enough to carve open his chest and destroy his heart, killing him in an instant. Watching the body drop to the floor Kyle stood up straight, shut off his lightsaber and looked around the room.

The agents' equipment was now scattered around the floor following Kyle's recent telekinetic blast, but it was easy to see that they had been sent here with everything they needed to not only monitor events in and around the park but also intervene if necessary to protect their clients. A set of wide scan binocs was still set up on a stand near the glass wall that looked out over the park, while more sets lay where they had fallen on the floor. More significantly there were enough long range weapons for all six agents that Kyle had encountered leant up against one of the walls. Four of these were pulse wave rifles fitted with optical sights to improve their performance at greater distances. But there were also a pair of belt fed machine guns that Kyle guessed had been issued specifically to deal with him, the hail of projectiles that these weapons could produce would be extremely difficult for even a practised Force user such as himself to stop entirely. On the other hand these were exactly the sort of thing that Kyle himself needed to complete his plan and he smiled to himself.

Leaving the room Kyle headed back to the reception area and quickly located a communication terminal. Using a land line was far safer than relying on any form of wireless communication right now. Kyle had little doubt that there would be plenty of law enforcement and military personnel monitoring every conceivable broadcast frequency closely. Activating the terminal Kyle dialled a number he had committed to memory.

6.

Kassa waited beside the public comm booth for Kyle to call. Standing around on the street right now made her nervous. She felt like she had a large holographic sign floating in the air above her that read 'UP TO NO GOOD' and that at any moment a police patrol would arrive and demand to search her and the landspeeder she had parked only a few metres away. If that happened then she knew that there was no way she would be able to explain its contents away.

The communication terminal only had chance to sound once before Kassa answered it. There was a display screen for video calls but this remained blank, indicating that the caller did not want their image being sent along with the message.

"Growler's wookiee takeaway." she said, "Our menu is hair raising and that's a lot of hair."

"Enough jokes." Kyle said sternly, "I'm ready. The security system is disabled, can you handle the door?"

"A fire exit? Of course I can." Kassa replied, "Fire doors are designed to open easily, that's why they need monitoring."

"Good. I'm in office sixty-four. You need to-" Kyle began before Kassa cut him off.

"Hey, I know the drill. I'll just follow the bodies." she said and then she shut off the terminal and ran to her speeder.

Kassa drove carefully to the office building. There were video surveillance cameras monitoring traffic this close to the parliament building and she did not want to attract any undue attention at this late stage. Parking the speeder close to the fire exit at the rear of the building Kassa got out, this time carrying with her a bulky bag over her shoulder and straining under its weight. The fire exit consisted of a single large door that opened by sliding upwards. Designed as a multi purpose doorway, there was also a control panel set into the wall beside the door to allow it to be opened from the outside for use as an alternate loading door.

Approaching the door she took one last look around to ensure that she was not being watched and then drew her pulse wave blaster and shot the control panel beside the door to expose the circuitry behind. After that it was just a matter of shorting out the correct two wires and the fire exit slid open.

Heading inside Kassa closed the door again behind her and then crept forwards, looking for the turbolifts while at the same time trying to stay out of sight of any guards that were around. As it happened the only two security guards she saw were the two Kyle had manipulated into granting him access to the building and shutting down its security system. This pair was still sat at reception with their backs to Kassa and she watched them closely as she sneaked into a turbolift.

Selecting the sixth floor, Kassa waited while the turbolift rose and then gasped as soon as the door slid open. Though she had joked about following the bodies to reach Kyle she had not actually expected to find the scene that greeted her when the turbolift doors opened. The two halves of one body were wedging the door of another turbolift open while a second body lay slumped against a wall with scratch marks on his neck where he looked to have clawed at his own throat.

"Stang Kyle." Kassa muttered to herself as she picked her way over the bodies, "Can't you ever tidy up after yourself?"

Like Kyle she then followed the signs towards office sixty-four, finding another body along the way that she just walked straight past without bothering to inspect. The door to the office was still open when Kassa got there and she proceeded straight inside.

"Kyle?" she called out and he appeared from the room where he had killed the final three agents, "So where do you want this?" she then asked, tapping the bag over her shoulder.

"In here." he told her, "I've cleared a space for it."

Kassa carried the bag into the room and dropped it to the floor.

"Well, you've been busy." she commented as she looked at the three bodies now piled up in a corner.

"Never mind them." Kyle replied, "Give me a hand with this." and he crouched down to open up the bag.

"Well against Kyle Jenner I'd say that the security perimeter around this place is worthless." Cal said as he returned to back stage where the other jedi were all waiting, "He could leap over that fence any time he wanted to."

"Unsurprising." Master Karas responded, "The authorities on Crassis Major have no experience in dealing with someone strong in the Force."

"They should have requested our help in the first place master." Keana commented.

"And helping them secure the area would have scared off our target." Tarris pointed out.

"Are we really going to let Kyle attack this place and put the lives of all those people at risk?" Lara asked, looking to the area in front of the stage where more people were starting to arrive and representatives from almost all of the Founding Families were present, "Okay, so some of the crowd are from the Founding Families, but the majority don't deserve to get caught in the crossfire if anything goes wrong." then she

paused and frowned, "In fact why can't we just let Kyle kill Trent Narthis and as many of the Founding Families as he wants and then arrest him for it?"

Master Karas turned to Cal.

"Is this what you teach your padawan?" he asked.

"There is no time for this discussion." Tarris said, looking in the direction of the hotel where Trent Narthis was staying as an airspeeder took off from the roof and, flanked by a pair of military transports flew towards the park, "It seems that the senator-elect is about to arrive for his swearing in."

The airspeeder flew in a circle around the park and the crowd cheered, realising that it could only be Trent Narthis arriving for the ceremony. Then the speeder descended, vanishing from view to the crowd as it touched down in the restricted area behind the stage and the jedi moved in to meet it.

The airspeeder was a large type, with enough room for passengers to move around the compartment and a single hatch in one side opened to form a ramp that Trent and Calleen Narthis then descended, followed closely by Kayza Drud and Han Shill. Finally behind them came the four Narthis children, the youngest aged eight and the oldest still only fifteen.

"Stang, he actually brought his kids to this." Lara whispered to Cal, "How messed up is putting your own children in the line of fire?"

"You mean like our parents did when we started our training?" Cal replied, "Besides, he doesn't know that we're using him to lure Kyle out of hiding." and Lara nodded slowly in response.

"Mister Narthis." Master Karas said in greeting.

"Mister Karas." Calleen replied, purposely omitting to use his title.

"I take it that you are satisfied with the security arrangements." Trent added.

"We have inspected the perimeter fully." Master Karas replied, "We know the location of every police and military unit."

Trent smiled.

"That is reassuring to know master jedi." he said, "So where do you plan on being while I'm being sworn in as senator?"

"Jedi Blake, Jedi Udra and I will be here backstage." Master Karas replied, "While Padawans Udra and Vreyes will be positioned just in front of the stage."

"Really?" Trent said, "Because since my election was almost disrupted by vote rigging that was only exposed thanks to the actions of Cal and Lara I was going to thank them publicly as part of my acceptance speech and I'd like to invite Cal to be on stage when I do so. I think it's important for the people to see that the Jedi Order and the elected government of the Republic are united."

Cal glanced towards Kayza at this point, suspecting that Trent's words had in fact been dreamt up by her to put pressure on the jedi to give the appearance of endorsing Trent.

Master Karas and Tarris glanced at one another and Tarris nodded.

"That is acceptable." Master Karas said.

"Then it's settled." Kayza added with a smile, "I've had an extra chair positioned at the end of the stage. You'll be beside Trent's children."

Lara grinned and leant close to her brother.

"Ha ha. You're at the kiddies table." she said quietly and Cal frowned.

Kyle watched as Trent walked out onto the stage with his family. Most took places in the chairs lined up towards the rear of the stage while Trent himself made his way to the front. The datapad Kyle was using to watch this was displaying the feed from the targeting system of the remote mounting that he and Kassa had mounted one of the machine guns on. Two motors allowed this to move in both horizontal and vertical directions while a compact camera mounted to the muzzle of the weapon fed a view of what the weapon was pointed towards back to the remote control unit, the datapad in this case. Given that conventional iron sights were useless for this set up there was instead a combined laser rangefinder and targeting system installed and at the centre of the datapad display there was a small red dot. The link between mount and controller was wireless and thus vulnerable to being detected or jammed but this did not concern Kyle in the same way as making a voice transmission would since there was no way that the authorities could determine what the purpose of the signal was even if they were able to intercept it. In any case Kyle's plan relied on his being able to move from his current location and he wanted the option of keeping the machine gun firing when he did so. Therefore, a wireless command link was essential now that Kassa had departed.

He panned the camera across the stage, taking note of everyone present on the stage. Most of them were the people he had expected to be there; a judge to conduct the actual ceremony itself, Trent's wife and children, his campaign manager Kayza Drud and Han Shill to act as a final line of defence should anyone penetrate the multiple layers of security that Kyle did not see as an impediment to his plan. But there was another individual present that Kyle had not expected to see. Cal Udra sat at the very end of the stage and where Cal went Kyle knew that Lara would not be far behind. Redirecting the targeting camera away from the stage Kyle found her standing in front of it, between the crowd and the stage. But then another figure moved

into view and Kyle immediately recognised Keana.

“So, the padawan of Master Karas is here as well.” Kyle said, “But has the master accompanied the student?” Though still a padawan Keana was an advanced student and Kyle remembered that even before he had left the Jedi Order she had occasionally been sent on assignments without the presence of Master Karas. Cal's presence at the ceremony meant that there was a full Jedi knight present in any case so seeing Keana did not necessarily mean that Master Karas had to be there. But Kyle could not shake the feeling that the senior Jedi was lurking somewhere close by his apprentice. But Kyle could see no reason why Master Karas would bother with something as mundane as the swearing in of a senator, even one that the Jedi Order by now suspected of involvement with illegal research into Sith lore.

Then a sudden realisation struck Kyle. Master Karas was not here for Trent Narthis, he was here for him. The Jedi Order had correctly guessed that a gathering of so many members of the Founding Families would bring Kyle out of hiding to try and kill as many of them as he could and sent reinforcements to attempt to stop him. That meant he was facing four Jedi.

No, Kyle realised, he was facing five.

Tarris Blake, the fanatical hunter of all things related to the Dark Side would undoubtedly join in this effort to bring down Kyle. But as Kyle searched the area he saw no more sign of Tarris as he had Master Karas. All of a sudden the crowd that had been cheering and waving as Trent walked out onto the stage suddenly went quiet and all of them got to their feet, standing with a hand over their hearts as they prepared to sing the national anthem of the Republic. This was Kyle's best chance and he knew it. Even though he suspected that there were two more powerful Jedi concealed somewhere close to the stage he also knew that this was the one time that everyone both on the stage and in the crowd could be guaranteed to be stationary, allowing Kyle to line up his shot in the knowledge that no one would accidentally move into his line of fire.

The barrel of the machine gun lifted as Kyle aimed it back towards the stage. Then, when the red dot of the laser was pointed at the perfect spot Kyle smiled.

“I have you now.” he said and at the same time he pressed the part of the datapad display that was simply marked 'FIRE'.