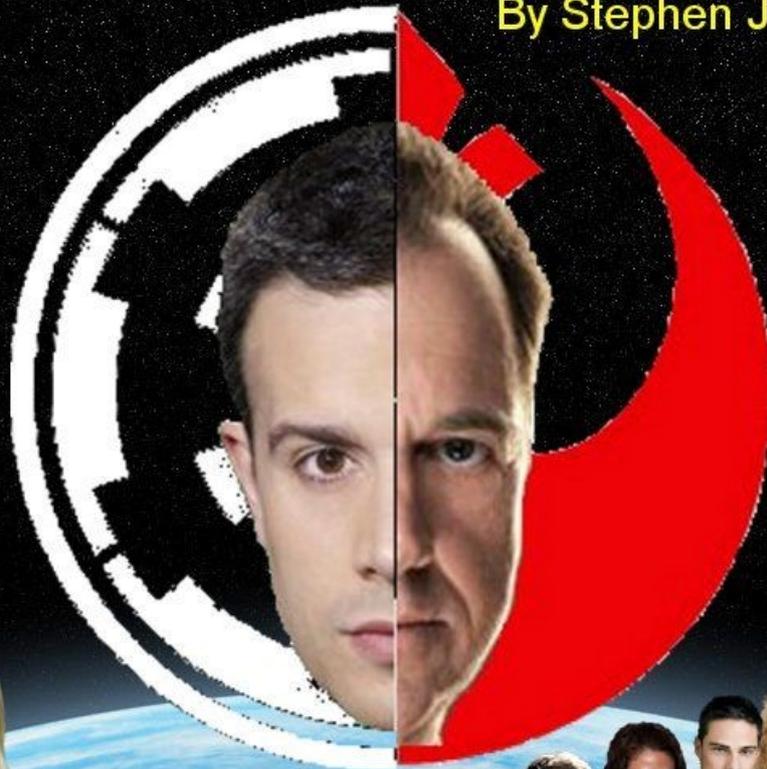


# STAR WARS

9-02: Heritage

By Stephen J Dutton



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Civil war turns father against son

IT IS A TIME OF CRISIS. REBEL FORCES FIGHTING  
AGAINST THE EVIL GALACTIC EMPIRE ARE OUTNUMBERED  
AND OUTGUNNED BY THEIR FOES. THEY MUST INSTEAD RELY ON GUERILLA  
WARFARE AND HIT AND FADE STRIKES BY SMALL GROUPS AGAINST STRONGER  
FORCES.

ONE SUCH GROUP IS LEAD BY THE EXILED NOBLEMAN VORN LARCUS III WHO, WITH  
THE HELP OF THE SMUGGLER MAGE GRAYLE, CAPTAIN OF THE FREIGHTER THE  
*SILVER HAWK* TAKE THE FIGHT TO THE EMPIRE.

FACING THEM ARE A MULTITUDE OF ENEMIES, BOTH SEEN AND UNSEEN AS THE  
EMPIRE PLOTS TO BRING DOWN THE REBEL ALLIANCE AND FOREVER EXTINGUISH  
HOPE AND FREEDOM IN THE GALAXY...

## HERITAGE

WITH THE TALISMAN STOLEN BY CHARITY NOW IN THEIR POSSESSION THE  
FOUNDING FAMILIES MAKE PLANS TO ESCAPE. HOWEVER, WHEN VORN LARCUS  
RISKS REACHING OUT TO HIS SON GARM FACES A RACE AGAINST TIME TO STOP  
THEM...

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

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# 1.

When Vay Udra awoke she immediately realised that she was alone in the bed.

"Garm?" she called out as she made use of the Force to pull a robe towards her.

"Here." Garm Larcus replied as he appeared in the doorway leading to the bathroom. Despite the early hour he was already dressed in his ISB uniform and Vay frowned.

"Where are you going? Our shifts don't start for hours." she said.

"I know. I got a call." Garm said.

"Then why didn't you wake me?" Vay asked as she dashed to the closet to collect her own uniform.

"The call didn't come from the office Vay. It came from my father." Garm said and Vay came to a sudden halt and stared at Garm. Garm's father, Vorn Larcus III, had been a member of the Estranian Parliament for many years until he began to speak out against the Empire. This led to his expulsion from Parliament and he famously defected to the rebel alliance just before he could be arrested. This had driven a wedge between father and son, with Garm remaining an agent in the Imperial Security Bureau. Vay knew that Garm's own faith in the Empire had been shaken more recently but he continued to serve what he saw as the legitimate government of the galaxy.

"Garm is he surrendering to you?" Vay said but Garm shook his head.

"No." he replied, "Nothing so simple."

"Then what's wrong?"

"There's been a break in at a facility where seized property is stored. It's nothing special and not much has been taken, but what was taken is important to my family." Garm told her, "A pendant. My father told me that it was brought to the sector by an ancestor of mine called Charity Crassis."

*Uh-oh. This means trouble Vay.*

Vay was startled at the sudden interruption by the spirit of one of her own ancestors, Lara Udra, who had been a Jedi around four thousand years earlier.

"Why is that important?" Vay asked.

*Because Charity Crassis was part of a family of insane power hungry freaks who thought they could control Sith sorcery. She said she was going to go under the name Larcus but I didn't realise that Garm was a direct descendant of hers.*

"Charity took the pendant from a storehouse of Sith knowledge. She never knew what it did but she knew that one day someone could come after it. Now after four thousand years it looks like someone has. I don't know about you but if some group of Sith worshippers stays interested in something for that long then I think it must be important." Garm said and Vay looked into his eyes.

"What else did he say Garm? What else did your father tell you?" she said.

"Charity left instructions on what to do if someone did come after the pendant." Garm replied.

"Which were?"

"She said not to trust local law enforcement because the people who want the pendant infiltrate such organisations. She said to go to the Jedi Order instead." Garm answered and Vay frowned.

"The Jedi Order fell." she said.

"Yes. But Charity said to seek out very specific Jedi. She said to find the Jedi called 'Udra'."

*Oh great. Four thousand years later and I'm still having to clean up her family's mess.*

Vay opened the closet and took out her uniform and a bodyglove.

"Give me five minutes to get dressed." she said.

When Garm and Vay arrived at the capital building there was no unusual level of activity and Garm strode up to the first ISB agent he saw.

"What's going on?" he said, "A storage facility has just been broken into and from the looks of things around here you'd think that every traitor and rebel in the galaxy is taking a vacation."

"I'm sorry sir." the agent replied, "The incident has been categorised by the sector rangers as a low priority case."

"Low priority?" Vay exclaimed.

"Yes, I've seen the reports." Garm agreed, "Blasters being fired in the streets. Explosions and destruction of Imperial property. Not to mention that we must now consider the ramifications of Mandalorian mercenaries at large right here on Estran. Is Director Helios in yet?" then he checked the time from the readout on the wall, "Of course he won't be." he added before he turned to look around the office where several agents were on duty, "Can I have your attention please." he called out and all of the agents turned to look at him, "I hope you've all heard about the break in at the storehouse yesterday. If you have not read up on it because I'm upgrading it to a priority incident. I want updates from all local agencies and travel restrictions put in place

across the planet. I want to know that whoever thinks it's okay to stage open warfare on the streets can't just hop on a transport and leave. Now if anyone wants me I'll be in my office."

Leaving behind, a scene of much more frantic activity than when they arrived, Garm and Vay headed for Garm's office. As the second in command of the ISB in the sector this was not only spacious but also equipped to be able to connect to any other ISB or local law enforcement office in the sector immediately. As soon as he sat down Garm set to work collecting together all of the reports from law enforcement as well as the fire department units that had turned out to deal with the consequences of the attack on the storage facility while Vay sat back and watched.

"So did your father give us any hints about who we should be looking for?" Vay asked.

"No, only that they were part of a group of families that must have been trying to collect anything to do with the Sith for at least four thousand years." Garm replied. Then he looked up from his computer, "I don't suppose you can explain why some distant ancestor of mine knew that you'd be here to help with this do you?" he asked and Vay smiled.

*Tell him Vay. This investigation is important. If the Founding Families have survived this long then they need to be stopped. The galaxy is not prepared to combat the sort of chaos they could unleash.*

"They're called the Founding Families." Vay said and Garm nodded.

"I know. That was in the message Charity left. How do you know about them?" he said.

"Because it was a distant ancestor of mine that stopped them." Vay told him, "Two in fact. Cal and Lara Udra were Jedi deployed to the Narthis Sector four thousand years ago."

"I thought all records of the Jedi Order were destroyed or sealed." Garm said, "Were you given access to them during your training or something?"

Tell him the truth Vay. It's time he knew.

"No." Vay replied and she held up her datapad. The device was an ancient model that could not compete with modern designs for speed and capability but Vay was never far from it, "The Jedi we hunted down two years ago had this. He gave it to me right before he died and told me it would tell me everything about who I am."

"And who was he?" Garm said.

"Kieran Udra. He was my father." Vay replied and Garm frowned.

"Your father? But the Jedi didn't have children. Not for the last thousand years anyway." he said.

"It happened more than you'd think." Vay said, "And more than the Jedi Order would admit to as well."

"But you killed him Vay."

"No. He killed himself. He asked me to run away with him but I wouldn't leave you. So to avoid me being forced to hunt him down he activated my lightsaber himself and killed himself before I could do anything to stop him. Since then I've trying to learn as much as I can about my heritage. Plus I've had help."

"There's another Jedi in the sector?"

"No, but death isn't necessarily as final for a Force user as it is for others. With enough effort and power it's possible for them to come back. In spirit at least. Lara Udra's been talking to me ever since we spent the night locked in your old office downstairs." Vay said and Garm winced for a moment as he remembered the uncomfortable night he and Vay spent tied to a chair together.

"So can you tell me what this pendant does?" he said.

"No, I've no idea."

"And what about this Lara? Surely she must know. Can't she see everything from within the Force?" Garm said.

"I don't think it works that way." Vay said.

*No it doesn't. My focus is on you.*

"She agrees with me." Vay said in response to Lara's words.

"Well it would be nice to know if we're looking for someone in possession of a weapon." Garm said before his intercom activated, "Larcus." he said.

"Garm may I see you and Vay in my office?" a man's voice asked and both Garm and Vay instantly recognised it as being Moff Gregor Horatian and they looked at one another.

"Of course sir. We'll be there as soon as we can." Garm replied.

The two agents were shown straight into the sector moff's office when they were shown straight in and they found the moff sitting behind his desk.

"What are you playing at?" he asked as soon as he saw them entering his office.

"I take it you are referring to the investigation of the break in at the storage facility?" Garm asked.

"Of course I am. You've got the entire planet on alert over a burglary." the moff said, "Do you really think that is justified?"

"Moff Horatian, I believe that my father was involved in the fighting outside the facility. I think he was there to try and access the facility himself to recover property that was seized from him that was also of interest to a party who was willing to hire mandalorian mercenaries to get hold of it." Garm replied.

"But what could possibly be so important Garm?" Moff Horatian asked.

"Vorn Larcus maintained extensive records on political allies and rivals while he was in Parliament." Vay said before Garm could think of something to say that would not alert the moff to the true nature of what had been taken, "It's possible that some of these records could have been inside the storage facility."  
Moff Horatian looked at Garm.

"What sort of information are we talking about?" he asked.

"Anything my father thought he could use." Garm said, going along with Vay's lie, "Business dealings, personal liaisons. Even medical data when he could get hold of it. Most of it was related to fellow members of Estran's Parliament but there were also records held on Imperial staff."

"The rebellion could potentially use it to blackmail our people." Vay said.

"Or build up profiles of behaviour that could make staging attacks easier." Garm added, "With our current security situation attacks on local government could be used to force us to keep vital resources here on Estran rather than sending it where it is needed elsewhere in the sector."

Moff Horatian considered this for a moment and then leant forwards.

"Garm, did your father collect information on me as well?" he asked.

"I don't know." Garm answered, "But given your position-"

"Find what was taken." Moff Horatian interrupted, "Requisition whatever you need. Now go."

## 2.

The body of the small electronics store's owner had been bundled beneath the counter where it was out of sight through the front windows. Mott and the second mandalorian had killed the man when he was about to close up for the night and had been using the store as somewhere to hide since then while the military and police presence on the streets grew. The nature of the store meant that its communication system was highly capable and when it became apparent that they would not be able to leave the next morning Mott used it to establish a holographic link to the other leaders of the Founding Families and it soon appeared as if the five of them were in the room at the back of the store with Mott.

"Do you have it?" Asha Fayl asked and she smiled when Mott held up the pendant.

"The captain came through for us just like he said." Mott replied, "We gave him his money and parted ways."

"Then why haven't you returned?" Harlen Drud asked with a stern expression.

"There has been an added complication." Mott replied, "In addition to the security at the storage facility we were attacked by what I believe to be a group of rebels led by Vorn Larcus himself."

"We already know that he didn't know the nature of the pendant." Den Shill said.

"Or its exact location." Den's twin brother Karlo added.

"Nevertheless, they were there. Eight rebels disguised as Imperial personnel. They were well armed and trained and only I and one of my men escaped. Our transport was also destroyed. Now we are hiding out in an electronics store while the streets are being searched."

"This could explain the travel advisory we received." Verren Karn said, "Our departure from Estran has been delayed while additional security checks are being put in place."

"I have a bad feeling about this." Mott said, "I have spent almost two decades studying the Empire's response to terrorism and this goes beyond their typical reaction to a relatively minor act."

"A speeder shot down is minor?" Harlen asked.

"In terms of rebel activity, yes." Mott answered, "I would expect a heightened police presence and perhaps teams of sector rangers but what I'm seeing is more akin to martial law. There are stormtroopers patrolling the streets in squads."

"Could the Empire suspect the nature of the pendant?" Asha said, her hologram looking at the others.

"Unlikely." Karlo replied.

"It would have been sat in one of the Emperor's personal storehouses with all of his other treasures if they did." Den added.

"Could this be a reaction to the presence of Vorn Larcus?" Harlen suggested.

"It is a possibility," Mott replied, "But it does not change the fact that for now we must wait here."

"Very well Mister Mott." Asha said, "But I want you to check in regularly. We will do our best to find out how long this state of affairs is likely to last."

Garm crouched down as he inspected the discarded armour that had been simply left by the side of the road.

"I don't know," he said, "It looks genuine to me. But I'm no expert in mandalorian armour and weaponry."

*If it is the Founding Families then it will be mandalorian armour. They used mandalorian troops four thousand years ago and their leader was never caught.*

Vay looked around. There were numerous other Imperial agents present from both the Imperial Security Bureau and the sector rangers as well as a squad of stormtroopers keeping back crowds of onlookers curious to see why their street had suddenly become the focus of so much attention from the authorities. Fortunately they were all occupied with dealing with the crowds, either questioning them about what they saw or keeping them away from the evidence that had been left behind so Vay felt comfortable speaking openly to Garm.

"Lara says that the Founding Families used mandalorian troops," she said, "Also not all of them were accounted for."

"So we're dealing with a mandalorian clan that specialises in stealing Sith artefacts." Garm said as he got to his feet, "Just what I need to know." then he looked towards the crowds and saw a sector ranger standing in front of a group of locals wave to him, "Looks like we're wanted." he said and he and Vay calmly walked over to the sector ranger.

"Assistant Director Larcus," the sector ranger said and he pointed to a grey haired man in the crowd, "this man says that he witnessed the mandalorians landing."

"Really?" Garm replied and he looked at the man, "So what did you see?"

"Those two mandos came down out of the sky," the man said, pointing upwards, "and they had one of your lot with them. At first I thought maybe they'd kidnapped him but then one of the mandos gave him what looked like a massive load of cash and he ran off while they dumped their armour and most of their weapons

and then ran off in the other direction.”

“Which direction?” Garm asked and the man pointed, “Thank you.” Garm said to the man and then he took out his comlink, “This is Assistant Director Larcus to control, I need a check running on any accesses of the seized property database relating to items taken from Vorn Larcus the third. I need to know who's been looking at those records.”

“Yes sir. We'll get right on it.” a voice responded.

“You think they had inside help?” Vay asked and Garm nodded.

“It makes sense. The reports indicate that very little inside the facility was disturbed so whoever broke in must have known which areas to search. That requires a degree of inside knowledge.”

“So what do we do while we wait for the information?” Vay said and Garm looked in the direction identified as the one the mandalorians had departed in.

“Care to take a walk?” he asked her.

“Lead the way.” she replied.

“Captain Tennell is not answering.” Verren said as he sat down at the table with the other heads of the Founding Families.

“Perhaps he has already left.” Karlo suggested.

“As an Imperial officer he could get off planet more easily than us.” Den agreed, nodding.

“He could have been arrested.” Harlen pointed out.

“Regardless, we cannot use him to find out why our actions are being treated so seriously.” Asha said, “We must look elsewhere.”

“Perhaps Mister Balve has more customers with money problems from among the Imperial military.” Harlen said.

“I don't doubt it.” Asha replied, “However, I do not think that involving that loathsome individual in our affairs any further is a wise move.”

“Then what do you suggest Asha? Pick a name at random out of the comm directory?” Verren commented.

“If you remember we did compile a list of beings on Estran who might be in a position to help us.” Harlen responded and he held out a datapad on which was shown a list of names, “Perhaps one of these.”

“Someone in law enforcement rather than the military.” Den said.

“A sector ranger perhaps?” his brother added.

“Just what I was thinking.” Den replied.

“We did find one who appears open to financial rewards in exchange for information of an operational nature.” Karlo said.

“Does anyone else have any suggestions?” Asha asked, looking around her and when there were no replies she added, “Okay, what about objections.” but again nothing was said and Asha looked at the Shill brothers, “Go.” she told them, “Make contact with her and find out what is happening.”

“How much should we offer her?” Den asked.

“I'm sure we could get results fifty thousand or less.” Karlo replied.

“Take a hundred.” Harlen said, “Offer fifty but don't haggle unless she wants more than a hundred.”

It did not take long to walk far enough from the spot where the mandalorians had landed and abandoned their equipment to reach a street that appeared normal, with stores open for business and shoppers walking around. Of course there was also an entire squad of stormtroopers marching towards the ISB agents but few of the beings in the street were paying them any attention other than to move out of their path.

“Without their armour I don't fancy our chances of being able to pick those mandos out of this crowd.” Garm commented as he and Vay walked down the street, looking for any signs of suspicious activity.

“They have several hours head start on us.” Vay replied, “They would have been gone from here a long time ago.”

“Perhaps. But they would need to get off the streets to avoid the emergency services that responded.” Garm said as they walked along the street.

“I'd say that they could have had a vehicle waiting, but then they wouldn't need to abandon their armour.” Vay said in agreement.

“We should still check with the local police regarding any vehicles reported stolen.” Garm said.

*Vay you have more senses.*

Vay frowned for a moment before she opened her mind to the Force and gasped, reaching out and grabbing hold of Garm's arm to steady herself.

“Vay what's wrong?” Garm asked.

“The Force.” she told him, “There's something nearby that is causing a major disturbance.”

“The pendant?” Garm suggested.

“It would be a big coincidence if it isn't.” Vay said.

“Is something wrong here?” the leader of the nearby stormtrooper patrol asked as the armoured soldiers

approached the two ISB agents when they saw Vay stumble.

"I'm fine." Vay replied.

"Sergeant how long have you been in this area?" Garm said.

"My squad has been patrolling this block and two others for the last hour and a half sir." the stormtrooper told him.

"Have you logged any suspicious activity during that time?"

"No sir. Everything is according to expectations." the stormtrooper said.

"Vay can you tell where the pendant is?" Garm said as Vay began to straighten up and regain her composure.

"Close." she said, "I think it's just across the street."

Garm turned around, doing his best to avoid looking like he was focusing on any specific location and he suddenly noticed that on a street filled with various types of stores that were open for business and well lit, there was one store that remained closed.

"The electronics store." Garm said quietly and Vay looked around, mimicking Garm's casual glance rather than focusing on the darkened electronics store.

"I see it." she said, "I think so."

"Do you want us to investigate?" the stormtrooper squad leader asked.

Garm was about to agree when all of a sudden an alternative course of action occurred to him.

"Vay can you track the pendant?" he said.

"I think so. Providing I can stay close enough to it." she answered.

"Good. My guess is that the two mandalorians are inside that store with the pendant." Garm said.

"Then why not attack? We can easily overwhelm them." Vay pointed out, glancing at the stormtroopers standing with them. Then she smiled, "Unless you're after more than just the mandalorians."

"Exactly." Garm replied, "The mandalorians won't have planned any of this. I want the beings giving them orders." then he looked at the leader of the squad of stormtroopers, "Agent Udra and I are returning to headquarters." he said, "I want you to continue patrolling your assigned area as normal. I want you to note the condition of that electronics store but take no action against it or anyone you see around it."

"Yes sir." the stormtrooper sergeant replied and then Garm pulled Vay back the way they had come.

"We're leaving?" Vay said, "Shouldn't I stay here to monitor the pendant?"

"Those mandos aren't going anywhere right now." Garm replied, "Not while the streets are filled with troops. I want to see about slicing into that store's communications first. Maybe we can get some more information from it."

"Activity." the other mandalorian said to Mott as he observed the squad of stormtroopers speaking with Garm and Vay across the street. And Mott moved to stand beside him. Both mandalorians remained well back from the windows, using the darkness of the store to conceal their presence. This would not necessarily protect them from the MAFTAS system fitted to the stormtroopers' helmets though and when it looked as if one of them was turning towards the store both mandalorians ducked out of sight.

"We've seen stormtroopers before. They're running a circuit." Mott replied, "But the ISB is new

"We'll adjust the angle of the security cameras." Mott said, looking up at one of the security cameras the store owner had fitted in the belief that they would protect him and his property from criminals. Now ironically it would be his killers that would put them to use to protect themselves. Then Mott noticed something familiar about one of the ISB agents and he quickly leapt to his feet so that he could reach up to the nearest security camera and point it across the street towards the Imperial agents, "Come on." he told the other mandalorian as he ducked back down again and, staying low to avoid being seen by the stormtroopers the pair hurried into the back room where the security monitor station was located. Mott promptly activated the monitor and used the control panel to focus in on Garm and Vay, paying particular attention to Garm, "Stang." he hissed, "We need to get this to the others."

### 3.

With Den and Karlo Shill gone, there were only three of the heads of the Founding Families present when Mott contacted them.

"Mister Mott," Asha said, "you have news?"

"Oh I've got news alright. Take a look at this footage I'm forwarding to you." Mott said and then beside the three dimensional image of the mandalorian a flat copy of the security footage appeared, floating in mid air and when the gathered heads of the Founding Families saw the face of the individual in it they exchanged nervous glances.

"Is that-" Harlen began.

"It's Garm Larcus." Mott said, "I recognise him from our initial intelligence search. Now I don't know about you but I think that him leading this investigation is just a bit too coincidental."

"Den and Karlo have gone to follow up on another potential source." Verren said, "Perhaps they can find out what's going on."

"Mister Mott, is your position secure?" Asha asked.

"For the time being I think so. I doubt that the ISB would hold a tactical briefing right across the street if they knew exactly where we were, but I don't like the way that we've got them so close to us. Obviously they knew which way we came." Mott replied, "Moving now would risk exposing ourselves so we'll hold position for the time being and keep an eye on what's going on outside." and then the hologram faded.

"Well this complicates things." Harlen commented.

A checkpoint had been set up at the monorail station where a team of sector rangers were checking the identities of everyone passing through. Ordinarily after the sector rangers would have been stood down from the case after it had been judged to be rebel activity but on this occasion they were acting in a supporting role while the ISB led the investigation. This had led to a degree of frustration among many of the sector rangers as they were relegated to a role they considered far beneath their ability. However, their orders had been relayed straight from the office of Moff Horatian himself and so they carried out their duty.

"There she is." Den said when he saw a female sector ranger walking away from the monorail station towards a nearby food stall.

"Right where she's supposed to be." Karlo added, "Perhaps we should go over and introduce ourselves."

"Lead the way brother." Den said and the two men walked towards the woman.

"Excuse us, Agent Remm." Karlo called out towards the sector ranger and she looked towards them. When she did not recognise either man her hand moved towards the blaster holstered on her hip but she did not draw the weapon yet.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"Friends of your brother." Den said.

"Not the brother your employers know about Tanya. The other one from your father's first marriage." Karlo added and the woman's jaw dropped.

"If you're here to threaten me-" she began and the two brothers smiled.

"Oh nothing so serious." Den said.

"In fact we're here to help you." Karlo added, "Perhaps we should discuss this somewhere a little quieter." and he pointed towards one of the nearby monorail supports that held the magnetic rail high above ground level and offered some concealment from observation.

"Okay, but I'm warning you, I'm armed." Tanya said and Den smiled.

"That much is obvious." he said, not bothering to mention the armed mandalorians that were waiting nearby should he or his brother need them.

"Okay so now what?" Tanya asked as soon they were out of sight of the monorail station.

"We understand that your brother's, err shall we say personal habits have caused him some medical problems." Karlo said.

"Medical problems he is demanding that you contribute towards the cost of." Den added.

"Are you offering to help with these costs?" Tanya asked.

"To the tune of fifty thousand credits." Den answered.

"In cash." Karlo said.

"That's only half what my nerf herder half brother is demanding to keep his mouth shut." Tanya said and Den and Karlo looked at one another.

"We may be able to stretch to another fifty." Den said.

"But we would expect you to be completely open with us about our requirements." Karlo said.

"What do you want?" Tanya said and the two brothers smiled at her.

"Oh nothing much in the larger scheme of things." Karlo said.

"We just need to know why a minor skirmish and break in is being considered worth so much attention." Den added.

Tanya frowned.

"What's the catch?" she asked.

"No catch. We're just interested parties who have concerns over the level of military presence on the streets of Estran City." Den said.

"Especially considering the current state of affairs in the galaxy." Karlo added, "Some people are saying that the alliance could invade any day now."

"They aren't telling us anything about the war." Tanya answered, "We don't even know exactly what was taken from the warehouse. We're just on the lookout for anyone with mandalorian clan markings."

"Mandalorians you say." Den commented.

"Yes, two of them abandoned their equipment near the scene of the crime." Tanya told him.,

"So is there a reason why Agent Garm Larcus is running this investigation?" Karlo asked.

"I've no idea who's running it. Honest." Tanya replied.

"Can you find out?" Den asked and Tanya considered this for a moment.

"Perhaps." she said.

"Do so." Den said and from under his coat he took a large envelope, "This is fifty thousand credits." he said, "You get the rest when we get our information."

As soon as Garm and Vay returned to the capital building they made their way to what had become the incident control room and were greeted by a tactical planning droid.

"Agent Larcus sir." the machine said calmly.

"Has there been a result from the communication tap already?" Vay asked.

"Correct Agent Udra." the droid answered, "In fact the system was active at the moment we sliced into it. A holographic transmission was being sent."

"Where to?" Garm asked.

"The exact location is unknown. The signal was routed via an orbital relay to a portable unit." the droid explained.

"They've got a ship in orbit." Vay said and Garm nodded in agreement.

"Do we have both halves of the transmission?" he said.

"Yes sir." the droid responded, "Would you like to see them?"

"Yes. I want to see who we're looking for." Garm said and the droid activated the incident room's own holographic projector. This created two distinct images, one of which showed three well dressed humans sat in what looked to be luxurious surroundings while the other showed two men with obvious identical mandalorian clan tattoos on their necks in far more austere surroundings.

"Pause." Garm said as soon as the recording began to play, "So that's who we're dealing with." he commented, "I want copies of these distributed to all agencies. Wait no, limit it to ISB and stormtrooper units only."

"Are you certain sir?" the droid asked.

"Yes, are you sure?" Vay added.

"Remember what we were told about them being able to infiltrate law enforcement?" Garm replied, "I don't want them to know that we know what they look like."

"They know what you look like. Look." Vay said and she pointed to the hologram showing the two mandalorians. The point in the conversation where the hologram had been paused clearly showed the image of Garm that Mott had recorded using the store's security camera.

"I've got a very bad feeling about this Vay." Garm said, "If these people are specifically targeting my family then they may know what I look like."

"Do you think that they'd move against you directly?" Vay asked.

"It's not me I'm worried about. It's Cayla." Garm replied. When he was at work his young daughter stayed with his late wife's parents while she was not in school and Garm knew that neither of them were capable of protecting themselves against mandalorian mercenaries, "I think it's time we brought in some heavy support." and he reached out for an intercom panel, "This is Assistant Director Larcus. I want Major Kramm in the incident room as soon as possible."

Dayle Kramm commanded a company of COMPForce assault troopers, soldiers directly under the control of the Committee for the Preservation of the New Order and although many in the military considered them nothing more than well armed thugs there was no denying the effectiveness of some of their units and Major Kramm's company was one such elite unit. Dressed in his white energy reflective body armour when he arrived, Major Kramm was accompanied by his second in command Captain Kyle Layne. Garm and Vay had worked with the two officers on numerous occasions and although they were far from being friends Garm knew that he could count on the men to do what he needed them to.

"You asked to see us?" Major Kramm asked.

"Yes major." Garm replied, "I take it that your company is on alert for rapid deployment?"

"That's right." the major said.

"Do you have orders for us?" Captain Layne added.

"Yes I do." Garm said, "I need a squad of your men for a close protection detail. Have half retain their armour and the other half adopt plain clothes."

"The subject?" Major Kramm asked.

"My daughter. I suspect that the people we're investigating may target my family." Garm said and the major nodded.

"What about the rest of us?" Captain Layne added.

"I need a platoon to stage an assault on a commercial building." Garm told them.

"I thought we were supposed to be following the mandalorians, not arresting or killing them." Vay said.

"We will be." Garm reassured her, "That's why I want to use COMPFforce troops. We all know that the quality of units can vary widely. Major Kramm's company is one of the best but we can count on them to hold back and make it look convincing. Once we've been led to their destination the rest of the company can be brought in to finish the job properly."

Vay smiled.

"So we let them slip through the perimeter and they lead us to their friends, right?" she said.

"Exactly." Garm replied, "We know they have a ship in orbit somewhere so they must have a way of reaching it."

"A shuttle?" Captain Layne suggested.

"Most likely, yes. The vehicle that was shot down near the storage facility was a speeder that lacked orbital capability. They must have another way of getting into space." Garm said.

"Great. So when do we leave?" Major Kramm asked and Garm and Vay looked at one another.

"Nightfall?" she said and Garm nodded.

"We can scale back the patrols then without it looking suspicious." he said, "But I want that protection detail deploying right away."

"I'll see to it." Captain Layne said.

"And I'll explain our job to the rest of the company." Major Kramm added.

"Assistant director, there has also been a development in determining how the suspects were able to gain access to the specific location in the storage facility they wanted to." the droid added.

"How?" Garm said.

"An army captain named Tennell. He has not been seen since before the break in and both a speeder and a weapon registered to him were discovered in the street outside it."

"Do you want him picked up?" Major Kramm asked but Garm shook his head.

"Not yet, no. But we'll monitor any use of his login details just in case our targets are trying to slice into our operation." he said, "Captain Tennell can wait until we've dealt with the mandalorians and their employers."

"Do you have the money?" Tanya asked when she met with Den and Karlo again, this time in a parking lot across the road from her sector ranger office.

"Do you have our information?" Karlo asked in reply and Tanya took out a datapad that she activated.

"We logged the incident as minor. There was minimal property damage even with the crashed speeder and no bystanders were killed. Whatever it was that was taken from inside the storage facility must have been specifically targeted because the perpetrators went right for it and then left, leaving numerous valuable items behind in a storage unit they'd unlocked." she explained.

"It wasn't until about seven hundred hours this morning that the ISB suddenly declared it a priority case and stepped in. The call came from the assistant director's office. Rumour has it that whatever was taken was politically sensitive, possibly some sort of data storage device, which is why the Empire stepped in to take direct control. We all know that the assistant director of the ISB is Vorn Larcus' son so the best guess is that he can identify what was taken. Others are also saying that he met with the moff at about the same time he declared the case a high priority. This could mean that he is being held responsible for recovering what is on the device before it falls into the wrong hands. He's probably on thin enough ice already. It's widely known that he's sleeping with the woman who used to be the moff's mistress. Vay Udra."

Den and Karlo looked at one another when they heard this name. They had already heard that Garm Larcus was in a relationship with someone called Udra but until now they had no idea who she really was.

"What can you tell us about this woman?" Karlo asked.

"What does she do?" Den added.

"She's hung around the moff for a while." Tanya replied, "Officially she was an intern or something but it was pretty common knowledge that the moff was having an affair with her. Some people said they saw her working with Garm Larcus at the ISB and others said she worked with that creepy guy who was with Imperial Intelligence until he tried to stage a coup. Whatever she used to do she's working full time with the ISB now

and she pretty much lives with Assistant Director Larcus. Now that's all I know. Where's my money?"

"Right here." Den said and he took an envelope from under his jacket that he handed to her.

"It was a pleasure doing business with you Agent Remm." Karlo added and leaving Tanya counting her money the two brothers turned around and started to walk away.

"An intern that works closely with both the ISB and Imperial Intelligence?" Den commented.

"And let's not forget that she had a cover that placed her in intimate contact with the moff at any time." Karlo added, "Perfect cover for one of the Emperor's personal army of Dark Side initiates."

"How ironic." Den said, "How the mighty and honourable Udra family has fallen. A slave to a monster and viewed by the population at large as a mere prostitute."

"But she could cause us problems." Karlo said and Den smiled.

"Not us brother. Mister Mott perhaps but I think that he and his men are more than capable of handling a single Dark Side adept whose support mechanism no longer exists."

## 4.

"This doesn't really give us any new information." Harlen said after listening to Den and Karlo giving their report, "At best it gives us only hints about why the Empire is taking this incident so seriously."

"I agree. Taken at face value it is nothing more than a coincidence but that could be to underestimate our enemy." Asha added.

"On the other hand to assign too much knowledge to Garm Larcus could make us over cautious." Verren pointed out.

"How would Garm know about the pendant's origins if his father didn't?" Den asked, "Perhaps Vorn really did create a datafile of information he could use to blackmail people."

"That in itself could have been useful to us." Karlo suggested.

"Well it's too late to go back now." Harlen said.

"Has anyone considered that maybe Garm Larcus isn't the loyal Imperial agent he presents himself as?"

Verren said suddenly, "What if father and son are as estranged as they appear to be publicly?"

"You're saying that Garm is a spy for the rebellion?" Asha said curiously and Verren nodded.

"That's exactly what I'm saying." he said.

"And perhaps this explains why this Vay Udra is so close to him." Den said.

"Perhaps the Udra family has not fallen so far after all." Karlo added, "She may have sought Garm out specifically to watch over him."

"This speculation gets us nowhere." Asha said, "For now all we can do is tighten our security here while we wait for Mister Mott to arrive with our pendant. Then we can make our escape."

The stormtroopers continued to patrol the street even as the crowds of customers were dispersing and the stores began to close. The electronics store where Mott and his subordinate waited looked no different to any of the other businesses now but the two mandalorians still used the security system to monitor happenings outside.

"They're pulling out." the other mandalorian said to Mott, "Look."

Mott came over to look at the security monitor when summoned and he saw that an armoured vehicle had arrived at the end of the street and the squad of stormtroopers that had been patrolling since that morning was now embarking.

"Okay this is our chance." Mott said, "We'll give them ten minutes to make sure that this is more than just a shift change then we'll head out for the tether."

"Yes sir." the other mandalorian replied.

The two warriors then sat and waited, the only source of light inside the store being the monitor they watched closely for any signs of activity outside. The ten minute window Mott had specified had almost elapsed when a camera mounted externally to the back of the store, intended to deter any from trying to break in from the rear activated automatically upon detecting movement.

"What's that?" Mott asked.

"An animal? I don't see anything on the monitor." the other mandalorian responded.

"Exactly. If an animal had triggered the camera then it would still be visible. That was triggered by something that knows about motion sensors." Mott said as he drew his blaster.

"Do you want me to go and check?" the other mandalorian asked but Mott shook his head.

"No. We need to stick together." he said before the security monitor suddenly shut off, "They cut the power!" Mott hissed, "They're coming in now."

Then there was the sound of breaking glass from the front of the store that was followed seconds later by a loud explosion from a concussion grenade. Protected by the wall between them and the grenade, Mott and the other mandalorian both prepared themselves for what they knew was coming next. Positioning themselves either side of the doorway that led into the store itself they waited until they heard the sound of armoured footfalls from the street in front of the store and then leant around the door frame and fired their blaster pistols repeatedly.

By adjusting their aim between shots the two mandalorians laid down enough fire that the COMPForce troopers in the street were forced to retreat before making it into the store.

"The back way." Mott said.

"But don't they have that covered?" the other mandalorian asked.

"Yes but we won't be going along the alleyway. There's a storm drain access right outside the door. We'll blast that and head down. These guys are sloppy enough that they triggered a security camera and left a gap between the grenade going off and trying to break in that they may have missed it. My guess is that they're COMPForce amateurs. Now go."

With Mott continuing to lay down covering fire through the front of the store the other mandalorian nodded and ran towards the back door. Without power the motor would not function but a single shot to the wall where the motor was contained left the unlocked door free to move and the mandalorian lifted it up by hand. Right away there was blaster fire from the alleyway that struck the door and wall around it but missed the mandalorian and he fired at the cover to the storm drain access point. "Hatch open!" he shouted and then as he fired through the opened doorway into the darkness Mott broke into a run, rushing straight out through the back door and then climbing down into the storm drain. The storm drain was designed to be able to move massive amounts of water away from the city before serious flooding could occur. There had been no heavy rains recently anywhere near the capital so the drain was almost totally dry and easy to navigate without the mandalorians needing to worry about getting wet. "This way." Mott said as the other mandalorian landed behind him and the pair hurried along the underground passageway, putting as much distance between themselves and the hatchway before the COMPForce troopers above them could toss in another grenade.

"They're moving." Vay said quietly while sat beside Garm in the chariot command speeder. This vehicle had been held back from the staged assault on the electronics store, along with most of the COMPForce company and Garm looked at the vehicle's driver who was the only other person in the vehicle with him and Vay and the only one of them who was not aware of the true nature of the object they were tracking. As far as the COMPForce driver was concerned the stolen item was emitting some sort of signal that could be tracked at short range using the command speeder's advanced sensor suite.

"Which direction?" Garm asked.

"South-west." Vay said and Garm activated the communication system that connected him to the armoured personnel carriers that were carrying the rest of Major Kramm's COMPForce company, "All units move out. Targets are moving bearing two-two-five degrees. Larcus out."

The armoured vehicles then began to move. The chariot was capable of operating at rooftop level and so the pilot was able to set a direct course while the heavier troop carriers were limited to operating just a few metres above ground. This was enough for them to effortlessly cross rough terrain but not enough for them to be able to move directly over the buildings in the area and so they had follow behind the speeder. Fortunately they were tracking targets moving at a walking pace only and so the troop convoy did not fall behind.

"Can you still sense it?" Garm asked.

*Reach out Vay. Look for the Dark Side. It may not be strong but it is there.*

Vay concentrated, opening her mind to the Force. Her training had focused on harnessing the Dark Side and using her hatred and anger as a source of strength. Several months earlier however, it had been pointed out to her that she had been losing this quality, although she was far from having the selfless attitude of a Jedi. She still retained the sensitivity to the Dark Side that had she had been indoctrinated with though and now this came in useful. She could pick out the anger and hatred coming from the COMPForce troopers, all of them eager to kill in the name of an Emperor that was already dead and an Empire that looked soon to join him. The mandalorians were harder to sense, however. From what little she knew of the Founding Families they were motivated by greed and that emotion, though certainly a path to the Dark Side, was not as easy to detect as those more directly linked to violence. The pendant on the other hand was far different. Created by a civilisation that saw the Dark Side as a means to many ends, the pendant produced a shadow in the Force that Vay could pick up on. This continued to move in a roughly constant direction as the mandalorians followed the path of the storm drain.

"Assistant director, we're coming up on the river." the driver reported after several minutes.

"Then they'll have to leave the drain." Garm said as he looked at the sensor displays laid out in front of him. None of these indicated the presence of any sort of vehicle or significant indications of life, meaning that the mandalorians would be continuing on foot with their prize, "Hold position here." he ordered and the driver brought the speeder to a halt, descending over the building they were currently positioned over so that it would not stand out against the sky. Meanwhile Garm activated the chariot's light amplifying visual sensors and watched for signs of movement on the ground.

This appeared less than a minute later as the two mandalorians climbed out of the storm drain where it flowed into the river. Watching from the chariot command speeder, Garm and Vay saw the two figures moving towards a nearby parking structure.

"This is Major Kramm." the major said over the communication net, "I'm watching your feed now. Do we move in?"

"Negative major. Hold position until we can be sure that the item they stole has been handed over." Garm replied as he watched the two mandalorians climb through a barrier into the structure, "Well," he then said to Vay, "back over to you." and she smiled as she let the Force flow through her again.

It was still early enough that the parking structure was in use and the two mandalorians waited in the

shadows until they heard someone approach. Looking out from their hiding place they saw a figure walking towards a row of parked speeders. This figure held up a key fob and there was a high pitched sound from a nearby speeder as its security system was deactivated by the fob.

"Now!" Mott hissed and the two mandalorians charged towards the vehicle owner. Not wanting to attract attention to themselves they did not use their blasters to shoot their victim from a distance, instead Mott leapt onto him and wrapped an arm around his neck before twisting it hard enough that it broke, "Open the trunk." he told the other mandalorian before stuffing the body into the trunk of the speeder. The two mandalorians then got into the vehicle and Mott calmly drove it out of the parking structure.

"There they go." Vay said, "Just like I said." and Garm nodded.

"That speeder could be a problem for us." he said, "We can keep up with the thing easily but Major Kramm and his men can't in their troop carriers." then he looked at the command speeder's driver, "I'm locking our sensors onto that speeder's repulsorlift field profile." he said and looking at Vay again he added, "Follow it from a distance of between one and two hundred metres."

"That should be close enough." she said softly to indicate that she could sense the pendant through the Force from that distance and nodding.

Holding back from the speeder being driven away by the mandalorians, the chariot command vehicle followed at a discrete distance.

"We've got a tunnel coming up." the driver said, "Should I go under or over?"

"Over." Garm ordered, "And signal the troop carriers to hold back from entering it until the speeder has come out the other side."

"Yes sir." the driver responded and as Garm continued to monitor the speeder, the driver passed on his orders to the troop convoy behind them.

"There's a private starport about eight kilometres ahead." Garm said, "They could be heading there."

"I don't think so." Vay replied, "They've stopped."

"According to our sensors the speeder is still going." Garm said, looking at the sensor panel.

"Maybe, but the pendant isn't." Vay said softly.

Acting quickly, Garm reached for the controls for the chariot's optical sensors. Then as the landspeeder emerged from the tunnel he zoomed in on the vehicle. The speeder was enclosed but Garm was able to zoom in close enough that he could pick out the driver's arm through a window. However, shifting over to the other side of the speeder he realised that now there was only one person inside.

"Set us down." Garm ordered.

"But sir the-" the driver began.

"I said set us down!" Garm snapped and the drive brought the chariot command speeder to a halt.

Garm and Vay then got out of their seats and headed for the exit hatch.

"Sir what do you want me to do?" the driver asked as the hatch slid open.

"Continue following the speeder. My guess is that the driver will make sure you don't lose him while he leads you away. Agent Udra and I are going after the passenger. He has the stolen item." Garm told him.

"Yes sir." the driver replied and Garm and Vay both exited the command speeder, slamming the hatch shut behind them.

"Okay where to now?" Garm asked as the command speeder rose back into the air behind them.

"This way." Vay replied, pointing ahead of them.

The tunnel ran beneath a twelve lane highway and the chariot command speeder had set down in the dividing section between the lanes heading in different directions and Garm started to look for a gap in the traffic so that they could cross.

*Vay go. Now.*

On Lara's say so Vay on the other hand simply rushed out across the lanes.

"Now!" she yelled.

"Hey Vay wait!" Garm shouted as he ran after her. Seeing the two figures crossing the highway, the traffic slowed suddenly and there were loud blaring sounds from the vehicles as their drivers signalled their displeasure at having to brake.

"Having fun yet?" Vay asked when they both reached the other side and Garm scowled at her.

"We could have been killed." he said.

"No chance. Lara wouldn't do that to us. Or at least not to me. I'm not so sure about what she thinks of your family." Vay replied and Garm curled his lip.

"Down!" he hissed when he spotted Mott come running out of the tunnel below them, "Where the hell is he heading?" he added.

"That way I suppose." Vay said, "But there aren't any starports or airfields over there."

"No, but look at what there is." Garm said and he pointed towards the skyline where one particular structure dwarfed all of the others, a tether leading up to a high altitude skyhook. There were several of the structures high above Estran City and they were used to allow large spacecraft to deposit passengers and cargo

directly into the capital city without a massive area of valuable land being needed to be kept clear for them, "The Founding Families don't have a ship in orbit it's docked to one of the skyhooks." he added before taking out his comlink, "This is Assistant Director Larcus to control, I need a complete list of all vessels current berthed on any of the city's skyhooks transferring to my datapad."  
"Yes sir." the voice of another agent replied, "We'll get it to you in a few minutes."  
Without responding to this Garm put his comlink away just as Vay started to run after Mott and Garm groaned as he set off after her again.

## 5.

Mott checked behind him several times to see if he was being followed but there was never anyone in sight and so just before he reached the tether ground station he disposed of his blaster by tossing it into a nearby trash can. By the time it was discovered he hoped he would be far from Estran. Then he walked calmly into the ground station and through the concourse area where several stores and cantinas were still open to provide services to the other beings using the station.

Purchasing a boarding pass for one of the turbolifts that would take him up to the skyhook above the ground station he wasted no time in heading for it. Unlike the mundane turbolifts used inside modern buildings and starships the interior of this one was laid out more like a vehicle in its own right. The skyhook was more than a hundred kilometres above the city and travelling there aboard the turbolift would take almost half an hour so each passenger was provided with a seat and, for an extra fee, could access a data screen that provided both information and entertainment.

He sat down in his allotted seat with little time to spare before the turbolift set off and Mott was just fastening his safety belt as the doors slid shut. Glancing through the shrinking gap between the doors he suddenly spied two figures entering the ground station in ISB uniforms and he recognised them both as Garm and Vay from having seen them outside the electronics store earlier. However, before he could react to this the doors finished closing and the turbolift began to accelerate rapidly, leaving the ground station as well as Garm and Vay behind.

"He's gone." Vay said as she sensed the pendant rise up suddenly before it got too far away for her to sense through the Force.

"Maybe." Garm said, "But we know where it's going." and he took out his datapad. Just as he had requested a full list of all the vessels currently docked at any of the city's skyhooks had been transferred to the device and Garm quickly narrowed this down to just the almost two dozen ships docked at the skyhook above them. "What do we have?" Vay asked.

"We've got the *Ak-Dor* and *Estran Dreamer*, action-five transports. The *Galactic Prospector*, an AP-three hundred mining ship. The bulk transports *Telos*, *Jarrack's Dawn* and *Bothan Claw*. A luxury two-hundred class star yacht *Endeavour*. The *Lorna Fayl* a minstrel-class star yacht."

That one.

"Wait." Vay said, "Lara recognises that one."

"A minstrel-class ship wouldn't have been around four thousand years ago." Garm pointed out.

*Lorna Fayl was the head of the Fayl family who had a massive chip on her shoulder about the others not respecting her. She tried to bribe Cal and me into joining her right before she went nuts and vanished.*

"The ship is named after a member of the Founding Families from her time." Vay said, "It's that one. Trust me."

"We've got just under half an hour before that mandalorian gets there." Garm said, "We need to beat him there."

"A minstrel-class ship could have more than a hundred people on board." Vay pointed out, "We'll need backup." and Garm nodded as he took out his comlink.

"This is Assistant Director Larcus. Put me through to naval headquarters." he said into the device.

"Yes sir, connecting you now." an agent responded and moments later another voice spoke.

"Assistant director, how can the navy help you today?" Fleet Admiral Praus Vretan, the commander of the navy's sector group asked from his orbital headquarters.

"Admiral Vretan it's good to hear your voice." Garm said, "I need a ship docked at the sixth precinct skyhook interdicting."

Of course. Give its ID and I'll have a fighter patrol there in five minutes." the admiral replied.

"Excellent. It's the *Lorna Fayl*, a minstrel-class star yacht. Oh, I also need an emergency airlift up to the ship along with troop support. Marines or fleet troopers, it doesn't matter. But they need to be equipped for a boarding action."

"Understood. Your ride will meet you on the rooftop pad in ten to fifteen minutes." Admiral Vretan said and then Garm shut off his comlink and turned to Vay.

"Let's move. We've got a shuttle to catch." he said and she nodded.

Mott waited patiently as the turbolift rose through the clouds towards the skyhook. As its altitude increased it became easier to see some of the many starships in space around Estran through the viewports that made up most of three of the turbolift's four walls, especially when it came to the massive military vessels standing guard over the sector capital. But it was what was going on at a closer altitude that interested him more and

he watched carefully as a flight of TIE fighters appeared to loop around the skyhook the turbolift was heading for, exciting a small child who held a toy of such a craft in one hand and pointed the real life examples out to its mother with the other one. Mott knew that it was uncommon for standard fighter patrols to get so close to skyhooks just in case there was an accident with flight control so their presence in such close proximity meant that they had to be there for a specific purpose.

"I've got a bad feeling about this." he muttered to himself.

Garm and Vay waited on the roof of the ground station, the tether itself rising up out of the station not far away and every few minutes another large turbolift car either emerged from the ground station and headed up towards the skyhook or came back down and disappeared into it. A sudden roaring sound from overhead made the two ISB agents looked up into the sky and saw a shuttle descending above them.

"Fleet Admiral Vretan's not messing around." Garm commented when he recognised the type. Rather than an ordinary lambda-class or a troop carrying kappa-class shuttle the vessel touching down in front of Garm and Vay was a gamma-class assault shuttle. This class of ship was heavily armed and shielded but that was not where its true strength lay. For that it was necessary to look inside any of the forty hatches built into its upper hull, each of which allowed the rapid deployment of a single zero-g stormtrooper, each of whom carried enough firepower to make them equivalent to a squad of ordinary troops.

As soon as the assault shuttle's landing gear touched down another hatch on the side opened and a uniformed crewman waved Garm and Vay towards him. Then as they ran up to the hatch he helped each of them aboard before closing the hatch and showing them to the cockpit. In here the pilot and co-pilot were already strapped into their seats while the crewman who had helped Garm and Vay aboard sat down in one of the gunners' stations. This left the other two gunners' stations vacant and the two ISB agents sat down in them.

"You have your target?" Garm asked the pilot.

"Yes sir. We're not expecting much armed resistance before the troops get aboard so that's why we only brought one gunner and kept the other two seats free for you."

"Will you be able to hard dock?" Vay asked.

"We should be able." the pilot replied, "But the fleet admiral made sure that we brought along a couple of vacuum suits in your sizes just in case and we can deploy our platoon from a distance."

"Target sighted. Range twenty kilometres." the co-pilot said.

"I have you now." Garm muttered.

Mott pushed his way through lines of people aboard the skyhook to reach the *Lorna Fayl* where his associates waited eagerly for his arrival.

"I have it." he said as he stepped through the air lock and held up the pendant.

"And it looks like you led the Empire to us as well." Verren said sternly.

"I did everything I could to throw off pursuit. I don't know how they tracked us." Mott replied.

"That doesn't matter now." Asha said, "The flight crew are preparing for launch. We'll be away from here in minutes."

"You do realise that we'll be exposing ourselves when we leave don't you?" Harlen said.

"Does that matter now?" Den asked.

"The Empire already knows we have the pendant." Karlo added.

"It's not like we have a choice anyway." Asha said, "We either use the cloaking device or we get shot down before we get far enough from the planet to enter hyperspace."

"Picking up a power surge from the enemy vessel." the assault shuttle's co-pilot announced.

"They don't have clearance to launch." Garm said.

"Well it looks like they're going anyway." the shuttle's pilot responded, "Raising shields."

"They're pulling out of dock." the co-pilot added.

"This is flight leader to Assistant Director Larcus," the voice of one of the nearby TIE fighter pilot said over the shuttle's communication system, "enemy vessel is refusing to remain in dock. Do we have permission to engage?"

Garm glanced at Vay.

You can't let them get away with the pendant Vay. They obviously have some specific use for it.

Vay nodded.

"Flight leader," Garm responded, "you are free to engage."

"Understood." the flight leader responded and the four TIE/In starfighters all sped towards the corvette-sized space yacht. However, before any of them could open fire the yacht suddenly turned jet black and then faded from view before it became completely invisible.

"The ship no longer appears on any of our scopes." the gunner exclaimed.

"Impossible. No ship like that has a cloaking device." the pilot replied in surprise.

*The Founding Families have spend four thousand years gathering illegal artefacts. I'm not surprised that a cloaking device was among them.*

"Vay can you still track that ship?" Garm asked, hoping that her sensitivity to the Force would enable her to penetrate the cloaking device.

*Focus Vay. You know what's aboard that ship.*

"The pendant." Vay said to herself and then she looked at the pilot and added, "Continue on this heading. If they're cloaked they'll have to limit their power output and maybe we can still find them if we get close enough."

Garm smiled, knowing that this meant Vay thought detecting the ship through its cloaking device using the Force was possible.

The heads of the Founding Families watched as Asha placed the pendant into a device designed specifically to interface with its internal memory.

"How long do you think this will take?" Harlen asked.

"Does it matter?" Den replied.

"All that matters is that we have this and soon we'll have the locations of dozens, possibly even hundreds of hidden Sith fortresses." Karlo added.

"Miss Fayl." the voice of the yacht's captain announced over the intercom.

"Yes, what is it?" Asha said.

"The Imperial assault shuttle is continuing towards us."

"Directly?" Asha said, wondering momentarily whether or not the cloaking device she had spent a great deal of money on was less effective than had been promised. The unfortunate consequence of that would be that she would be unlikely to live long enough to be able to get a refund from the supplier.

"No ma'am. There is a slight variance in our headings. Theirs remains the same as when we cloaked."

"Then they are just hoping to stumble across us. Keep our speed low enough to ensure that the cloaking device keeps us hidden and take us away from the planet."

Vay sensed a tremor in the Force and gasped.

"There!" she exclaimed.

"Where?" the pilot asked, double checking his sensor readings, "I don't see anything."

"There is a short ranged tracking device of a classified nature aboard the target vessel." Garm told him.

"But how-" the pilot began.

"Never mind how." Vay said, "Steer starboard four degrees and pull our nose up seven."

"This is pointless." the co-pilot said, "Even if we can follow them, how are we supposed to get our troops aboard?"

"We'll need to disable the cloaking device." Garm said and Vay nodded, "Lieutenant, do you have vacc suits aboard in our sizes?" he asked the pilot.

"Yes sir. In the lockers just outside the cockpit."

"Then follow Agent Udra's flight instructions and remember that everything you see is classified." Garm said before he and Vay rushed out of the cockpit.

The pair hurriedly put on two of the vacuum suits they found in the lockers, along with a pair of rocket packs for propulsion.

"This side." Vay said, directing Garm towards one of the hatches at the side of the ship once the pair of them had finished putting on their suits and when they reached it Vay activated the controls to decompress this section of the ship, leaving only the cockpit and individual spacetrooper deployment silos with air. As the pressure dropped Garm connected their suits together using a short length of synthrope.

"I don't want us flying off in different directions." he told her and she smiled at him.

"Don't worry, I won't let you fall." she said.

The wall mounted pressure gauge suddenly reached zero and turned red, alerting Vay that she could now safely open the hatch without risking being blown into space. With one hand she opened the hatch while she held the other one out and took hold of Garm's hand.

"Now." she said and the two agents jumped out into space.

## 6.

"What the hell are they doing?" the yacht's captain said when he saw Garm and Vay leap out of the assault shuttle. The Imperial vessel had managed to remain close to the yacht and even adjusted its course to get closer but there was no evidence that they were able to see through the cloaking device. Two unarmoured figures jumping out of the vessel made no sense whatsoever.

"They're coming this way." one of the flight crew commented when Vay fired her rocket pack and the two figures in vacuum suits accelerated towards the yacht.

"I've got a very bad feeling about this." the captain said.

Though they were not moving very fast in relation to the yacht when they landed on its hull, the fact that it was invisible to the naked eye meant that neither Garm nor Vay was ready for the impact and both tumbled as they hit it before they were able to stand upright and clamp their magnetic boots to the ship.

"Ready?" Garm asked, drawing his blaster.

"Ready." Vay replied and she plucked her lightsaber from her belt and activated it silently in the vacuum of space. She then plunged the glowing red blade straight down into the yacht's hull and began to cut a hole in it. As soon as the blade penetrated the hull there was a rush of escaping air and Garm knew that any doubts about what they were doing that the ship's crew may have had would now have been dispersed.

"Make sure your armour is sealed." Mott told his men as they checked their armour and weapons. Then he looked at the other leaders of the Founding Families who were gathered close by, "You should all stay here." he told them, "That Jedi, or Sith apprentice or whatever she is, will be heading for the cloaking device. My men and I will deal with her. But just in case make sure that you keep that blast door sealed. I'll leave a couple of men outside just in case they come this way instead."

"She has a lightsaber." Verren said.

"And Mandalorians have been fighting beings armed with lightsabers for thousands of years." Mott reminded him.

Fighting against the rush of air coming out through the hole in the hull, Garm and Vay climbed down into the yacht's interior and clamped their feet to the floor.

"Lieutenant can you detect the ship yet?" Garm signalled.

"Partially sir." the assault shuttle's pilot responded, "The hull breach enables us to detect the ship when it's aligned towards us but its crew are doing their best to keep it facing away from us. I don't dare release my platoon yet."

"Keep after them." Garm ordered, "If you can get a lock with your tractor beam then use it. Hopefully the cloaking device will be down soon."

The two ISB agents then began to make their way towards the rear of the ship. They had no proof of where the ship's cloaking device would be found but without engines to power it the device would be useless. The yacht lacked the internal defences of a warship and when they came to a closed door they were able to open it with ease. This triggered another rush of air from the section on the other side but this ceased when Garm closed the door behind them.

"Stay behind me." Vay said, holding her lightsaber up in front of her.

"Okay, you block and I'll fire." Garm replied and he aimed his blaster over her shoulder.

As they continued towards the engineering section of the yacht a pair of Mandalorians came rushing through a doorway ahead of them and opened fire. Vay reacted to this immediately by placing the blade of her lightsaber in the path of each blaster bolt. Garm watched the way Vay's blade moved until he was able to predict where the blade was going to be just ahead of time and he fired his own blaster past Vay so that the shot also passed by the lightsaber blade and hit one of the Mandalorians square in the chest. The armoured warrior staggered but did not fall until Vay reflected the next shot from the second Mandalorian at him as well. This struck his armour in the same spot as Garm's shot and punched through the already weakened chest plate.

Vay then broke into a run towards the remaining Mandalorian, deflecting each shot from his rifle in turn before she got close enough to strike at him directly and she sliced off each of his arms in rapid succession before decapitating him. She then made her way to the doorway and peered through.

"It's clear." she said and Garm rushed up behind her, holstering his blaster pistol before picking up one of the Mandalorians' rifles. Then he smiled.

"I've got an idea." he said.

Though he had sent several pairs of warriors to search the ship for the two Imperial agents Mott had chosen to concentrate his men in engineering and the bridge, making sure that the key areas of the ship were best protected. Mott himself was in engineering, he considered this the most likely target of Garm and Vay because while it was possible to lock out and duplicate the yacht's flight controls using the droids aboard the ship, destroying its power core or distribution systems was guaranteed to prevent the ship from escaping. "She's coming!" a voice called out from the corridor outside engineering and there was blaster fire before a mandalorian backed into the compartment.

"Seal the door." Mott ordered and the newly arrived warrior did just that, closing the door to engineering and locking it from the inside, "Now everyone get ready. That girl will be able to cut through that door in under two minutes. Everyone needs to open fire on full auto as soon as she reveals herself."

The gathered mandalorians all took aim at the door, the new arrival backing away from slowly but keeping his rifle trained on it as it began to glow red in the centre.

"Here she comes." Mott called out and he watched the door intently as the tip of Vay's lightsaber appeared and then began to move, slowly cutting a hole in the door large enough for her to be able to pass through.

The section of the door that Vay cut loose dropped to the deck with a loud 'clang' and the mandalorians braced themselves for Vay to appear. However, before she made any attempt to enter the engineering compartment Mott felt the muzzle of a rifle press against the side of his neck.

"Tell your men to stand down." Vay said as she ripped off her stolen mandalorian helmet.

"Very good." Mott replied, "But not quite good enough." and he turned to knock Vay's rifle away from him before tripping her, "So you gave your boyfriend your lightsaber." he added as Vay rolled out of the way before he could bring his own rifle to bear on her.

"It kept your attention away from where it needed to be." Vay replied as she leapt back to her feet and the dived out of the way of a blaster shot from another mandalorian.

"No!" Mott yelled, "We can't risk any shooting in here. You cover the door. I'll deal with the girl." and he slung his rifle and drew his knife instead before advancing towards Vay.

Vay had been trained in various methods of unarmed combat and she dived at Mott. The veteran warrior stood his ground, making no effort to get out of Vay's way and instead he punched ahead of him, sending his fist right into Vay's path and knocking her back onto the floor again. As she tried to get up Mott swung his knife at her and Vay felt the tip of the blade slice into her arm.

"Garm!" she called out, "Now!"

The other mandalorians braced themselves for Garm to come charging into engineering but instead something metallic was hurled through the hole in the door and the mandalorians took cover, fearing an explosive device of some kind. However, Vay reached out towards the thrown object and used the Force to pull it towards her before it landed on the deck. Only as she plucked the lightsaber out of the air did Mott realise what it was and by then it was too late. There was a sudden 'snap-hiss' as Vay activated the weapon and then she thrust the blade under Mott's chest plate.

The knife slipped from Mott's hand and he placed his hand on Vay's shoulder, the face plate of his helmet almost touching her face as he stared at her.

"This isn't the end." he gasped.

"It is for you." Vay replied and she twisted the lightsaber inside him and Mott fell to the floor.

With their leader dead the other mandalorians turned towards Vay and aimed their weapons at her. For the time being though they held their fire, remembering Mott's warning about shooting in the engineering compartment and this hesitation gave Vay the chance to leap through the air towards the one piece of equipment in the room that she could not properly identify. Reasoning that this would be the yacht's cloaking device Vay plunged her lightsaber into it and there was a shower of sparks as the blade of energy sliced through the device's internal components, followed by a bright flash of light as it exploded and Vay was hurled backwards.

The flight crew of the assault shuttle suddenly saw a patch of blackness block out some of the stars ahead of them as the yacht's cloaking device failed and the vessel became visible again. In response to this the pilot slammed his hand down on the control panel in front of him.

"Deploy!" he snapped.

Outside the shuttle, forty hatches opened and from inside each of these a massive armoured figure emerged. Rockets built into the spacetroopers' armour then propelled them towards the yacht where they clamped onto the hull and activated the cutting torches that would allow them to gain entry to the vessel without using any of the airlocks.

"Was that firing?" Harlen said when he heard the sound of a blaster shot from the other side of the door.

"Don't panic. Mott's men can handle a couple of ISB agents." Den said.

"Even if one is a Force user." Karlo added.

"Look." Asha said as she watched the holographic display above the reading device in which the pendant

sat, "It's working."

Sure enough the random streams of numbers were now starting to form what looked like a star chart. At any moment the translation of the data stored within the pendant would be complete and the Founding Families would have a map that could lead them to thousands of Sith artefacts. However, before the process could be completed there was an explosion from the direction of the door and the startled heads of the Founding Families all turned to face it just in time to see a pair of zero-g assault stormtroopers step into their private meeting room. Both of the massive armoured figures raised their arms to point their built in weapons at them and then Garm and Vay stepped between them.

"Mister Mott." Asha said and Vay smiled.

"If you're talking about your pet mandalorian then I'm afraid he's had to tender his resignation. As have all of his men and the command crew of this fine vessel." she said.

"That looks like mine I believe." Garm said when he saw the pendant and he strode up to the device it had been connected to and ripped it free.

"No!" Asha cried out, "Don't you realise what you're giving up?"

"The Crassis family was one of us once." Karlo said.

"It could be again." Den added.

Garm ignored this pleading as he returned to stand next to Vay.

"Pretty isn't it?" he said, holding up the pendant in front of her.

*Pretty perhaps. But in the wrong hands it's dangerous.*

"Very." Vay said, smiling at Garm.

"We're done here." Garm said as he walked back out of the room Vay followed, pausing beside one of the spacetroopers and looking back over her shoulder at the heads of the Founding Families, none of whom looked like they knew what to do next.

"Kill them." she ordered and there were screams as the two spacetroopers opened fire.

"A pendant?" Director Helios, Garm's superior in the ISB said as Garm and Vay stood in Moff Horatian's office and showed the pendant to the moff, the ISB director and the sector head of COMPNOR, "You triggered a planetwide alert over a piece of jewellery?"

"I didn't actually know that this was what had been taken at the time." Garm replied.

"So why was that considered worth taking anyway?" Ridge Larrs, the sector's head of COMPNOR asked.

"This has been in my family for thousands of years." Garm replied, "Perhaps if I knew where it came from I could tell you, but my father is the only one who would know that. If even he does."

"Too bad those responsible for the theft did not survive." Moff Horatian said, looking at Vay but she remained silent.

"Shall I return this to the storage facility?" Garm asked.

"No." Moff Horatian replied, "I think we can allow you to keep it. It is a family heirloom after all."

"Just try and keep it safe." Director Helios added, "I'm not mobilising the entire ISB to recover it if it gets stolen again."

"Don't worry sir, I'll keep it safe," Garm replied.

"Good. Now you're both dismissed, go and write up your reports on all of this." Moff Horatian said and Garm and Vay both turned to leave.

"So what are you going to do with that now?" Vay asked as the doors to the moff's office closed behind them.

"I'm going to put it in the safest place I can think of." Garm replied and he came to a halt.

"Where?" Vay said.

"Right here." Garm told her as he fixed the pendant around her neck.