

From: JackeeC <74363.2566@CompuServe.COM>
Newsgroups: alt.tv.x-files.creative
Subject: NEW: XJEDI VOL THREE!! 13/24
Date: 23 Jan 1996 03:50:59 GMT

XJEDI 13 (vol. 3)

DISCLAIMER: It's somewhere in this rather long note, I'm afraid.

Okay, for everyone of you who has stuck it out for this long...my deepest sympathy...er...thanks. Sure, I'm on the edge of my sanity by now...it's been a long strange journey and this trip is only half over. Some of you may have noticed that there is a title for each volume...

Vol. one was: "Leave taking" (you can surely guess why)
Vol. two was: "Breaking the way" (think about it)
Vol. three: I'm calling: "Going home" (semi-obvious?)
Vol. four: will be "The Gift" (you'll see)

These vols. are rated PG, btw as are the first two, for anyone who cares.

In the epilogue there will be more info as well as the order listing.
Once again, the characters of Mulder, Scully, Skinner, CM (the General), and Mr. X (the passenger) all belong to CC and 1013/FOX. Luke and Leia, Han, Chewie the droids, the entire Galaxy in fact belongs to George Lucas and/or LucasArts
The Cestallians are mine but, they *are* leasing space in the Lucas Galaxy
so... No copyright infringement is intended, no profit is gained, this was all for fun. So, relax. Enjoy.

Additional Note: Those lovely little translators that you all now know Mulder, Scully, Rae and the children wear on their lapels, are always tracking. It's a small thing, but I didn't want to write it every time. Except where necessary, of course.

AND a word of gratitude to CallieSky for aiding and abetting and all around urging me onward. Thanks a plenty! :)

GOING HOME

by Jackee C.

Ben finally reached the point of origin of the signal. He had to admit surprise at the location. The Imperial Palace was an excellent place for

he needed to do. His father had taught him secrets about the palace...secrets
that allowed one to enter undetected. He smiled and began his descent
along
the secret co-ordinates of Coruscant's electronic blind spot. This was
almost
going to be too easy.

* * * * *

Leia Organa Solo sat bolt upright in bed. She'd gone home to sleep only after she had been convinced that Han was going to be fine. The doctors had promised that he'd be back on his feet in no time. In fact, by the time she had left he was already complaining about having to stay the night in the infirmary.

But now, she looked around the room nervously. Something had awakened her. In the next instant she felt Luke's presence in the force. He was speaking to her, mind to mind. <Contact the guards in the security bay,> she heard. <There is an intruder in the palace.>

Leia pushed back the covers and activated the hidden security panel beneath the surface of the night stand. She threw the switch that would open the communications feed to the chief guard on duty.

"Security bay, please respond..."

* * * * *

Benjamin Adams slipped into the rear of the Imperial Palace via a hidden entry panel. The General had implanted this information on his consciousness earlier. Ben now knew every secret entrance his father had known.

The tunnel was dark and musty from obvious years of disuse. But glow rods still functioned along some of the walls nearer in to the central part of the palace. Ben crept stealthily along the meter wide corridors toward the uppermost landing bay. It was easy for Ben to understand the logic behind placing the Hinderer in that bay, it was simply the most easily secured landing bay in the palace. According to his father, it was where the Emperor's personal craft had been kept.

The tunnel Ben was in ended suddenly. 'What?' he thought confused. There was not supposed to be a dead end here. This stretch of tunnel should have lead to the more elite living quarters. Perhaps the rebel scum that had taken the palace had found this particular section

closed it off. That was the most reasonable explanation.

Ben banged his fist on the side of the wall in frustration as he back-tracked to find another route.

* * * * *

Fox Mulder found himself in a dimly lit corridor, chasing the fleeting form of Luke Skywalker. Tubes hung high on the walls gave off faint blue light that reflected off his face as he ran. Always having had long legs, Mulder was used to slowing down for people. But, though he was a head taller than Luke, he was having considerable difficulty keeping up. He could hear himself loudly in the confines of the small space. Luke though, barely made any sound at all as he slid quickly and gracefully through the corridor.

The corridor made a sharp 90-degree angle and Mulder lost sight of Luke altogether. Pushing harder, he picked up his pace. Mulder rounded the corner only to be greeted by another empty corridor. An eerie hum rose in the distance. Mulder pushed ahead. The sight that greeted him around the next corner stopped him dead in his tracks.

The cylindrical object Luke had pulled from his belt was still in his hand, but a glowing blade now extended from one end of it. Luke quickly cut an arc in the wall of the corridor from as high as he could reach to the floor. He then cut another and a connector between the two. Mulder realized that he was cutting a doorway out of the wall.

Luke made a movement with his hand and the blade closed down, disappearing back into its cylindrical container. With a side kick, he knocked the cut piece of the wall out into the brightly lit room beyond.

Mulder stood frozen in his tracks. When Luke stepped through the new 'door', he followed. The room on the other side of the 'door' wasn't one that Mulder had been in before. It was a large room with bits of strange equipment stacked neatly. There was a shelf in one corner containing metal globes. Mulder was vaguely reminded of a gym.

"My exercise room," Luke said answering Mulder's unspoken question. Mulder raised his brows at Luke's back. That wasn't the first time he'd done that. 'And they call *me* spooky,' Mulder thought.

Luke ran to a storage locker and pulled out a blaster and handed it to Mulder. It wasn't quite F.B.I. issue, but the principle was the same; just point and shoot. Mulder nodded and they were up and running again.

* * * *

Dana Scully woke suddenly. She listened to the silence of the dark, still room. Something propelled her out of the bed and into the common area. The lights were still on and Mulder's door was open and his room was empty.

Scully stood before the door leading into the outer corridors of the guest wing, debating whether she should be worried. Mulder was a big boy and he often wandered off. But, something had woken her. She looked down at the long gown she wore. It brushed against her bare feet. She went back to her room and pulled on the knee boots. The gown was made of a heavy material and had long flowing sleeves. Dana felt that she could get away with it in the corridors. They didn't seem to believe in robes on this planet.

Dana decided to go down to the medical bay and see how Han was. If she ran into Mulder along the way, then all the better. The door slid open as she stepped toward it. In the hallway a noise to her right caught her attention. She took an uncertain step in the direction of the sound, the medical bay was the opposite direction. Scully made up her mind, since trouble had a way of finding Mulder, she'd feel better if she checked it out.

* * * *

Ben was thoroughly frustrated. Someone had systematically been cutting off the entry panels from the tunnel passage. The tunnel he'd entered originally had been dusty and heavily populated by cobwebs. The tunnels he now followed were clear of cobwebs and the glow rods were new. There was no access to the upper landing bay by means of the tunnels. He'd have to find another way.

Ben was glad he'd brought the lightsaber along. He unclipped it from his utility belt and cut a hole in the wall. According to his calculations, this wall should be near the lift in the guest wing. Ben figured that if he acted as if he belonged, there would be no problem.

compartment in his boot and moved his blaster to the holster beneath his jacket. After straightening his clothing, Ben stepped through the hole and turned to inspect the damage. There was no way to conceal that. Ben felt it more prudent to evacuate the scene.

Ben hurried around the corner in the direction of the upper level bay. Since it was the middle of the night Capital City time, he didn't expect to meet anyone on this level. That was why it was a complete shock when he all but ran into Dana Scully dressed in her night gown. The shock was mutual. Ben recovered first.

"What are you doing here, Dana? I thought I was supposed to pick you up at your place," Ben asked, sounding as if genuinely curious.

At first, Dana just gaped at the man. Then she blinked a slow blink of disbelief, taking in the outfit he wore. She saw the bulk in the side of one boot and wondered if he had a holster under that jacket. Dana opened her mouth as if to speak, then pointed vaguely back down the hall, taking a jerky step backwards.

"Excuse me," she said and turned to go back to her room--for her gun. She wished she had been paranoid enough to bring it. The folds of her gown would have easily hidden it. Unfortunately though, she didn't get very far.

Ben grabbed her around the waist, pulling her back. "Not so fast, little one," he said softly. "We've got work to do."

Dana kicked back hard with the heel of one boot. When she felt Ben's grip loosen in surprise, she elbowed him in the belly. Ben stumbled back away from her as his breath went out in a whoosh. Dana spun to deliver another elbow blow to whatever part of his anatomy was closest. Before she was halfway through the spin though, Ben, in anger, delivered a force-blow that knocked her across the corridor into a very solid wall.

* * * *

Mulder followed Luke as they ran through the brightly lit corridors of the palace. Luke stopped running as the entrance to the security post came

chief guard acknowledged Luke with a smart salute and gave Mulder a nod. He didn't seem at all surprised that Luke's saber was drawn, if not ignited, or that Mulder was carrying a blaster.

"Evening, sir," the guard said. "There's been no activity all evening. Madame Organa Solo informed us to go to level red a few minutes ago."

Luke nodded and peered into the bay at the ship that sat across the room, behind a force field. He knew it was a matter of time before the intruder showed up here. Why else would this Jedi be inside the palace?

Something tickled in the back of Luke's mind. In an effort to find the source, he turned to the two guards and then to Mulder. The Agent stood against the wall, his expression still, as if he were thinking about something. Luke realized that this man was using the force and didn't even realize it. He was broadcasting all over the place.

Luke could feel his sudden tension and it had nothing to do with their recent mad dash through secret passageways. Dana was in trouble. "This way," Luke said. They both felt it when Ben used the force on her.

* * * * *

Ben heard running footsteps approaching his position. He had wanted to take the girl with him; the General would have loved that. But, he didn't have time for that now. He needed to get on with his mission. The lift was his best option. While they were busy with her, he'd get on with his other plans.

* * * * *

Mulder saw a crumpled form lying on the floor in the distance, knowing instinctively who it was. He also knew there was a cross corridor up ahead separating him from Scully. He skidded to a stop on one side of the corridor, just as the soft hiss of the lift's doors being opened sounded. Mulder threw himself out into the corridor, blaster ready to get off a shot at whoever might or might not be standing there.

Ben stood in the lift with his blaster trained on the cross corridor.

mind vaguely registered a shadow crossing over his head. His momentary hesitation should have cost him his life. But, from nowhere, Luke was there in front of him, weapon up and ready. Ben's blaster bolts deflected harmlessly off the blade of Luke's lightsaber before the lift's doors closed.

Mulder's head jerked momentarily in Luke's direction as he tried to come to terms with what his eyes were telling him. Aside from the fact that Luke had been behind him before, how had Luke done what he'd done with that sword of his? Mulder pushed the questions aside for now, Scully needed him.

"Dana....," he called her name, gently cradling her face in his hands. Automatically he went through the emergency medical assessment that had been ingrained in him at the academy and because he'd watched Dana do it so often. To his relief, she was still breathing, if shallowly. And her color was pale and her skin clammy.

Luke looked at them and back to the lift. The intruder would have to take a longer route to the security deck if he took that lift. Helping Dana was important and it should only take a minute. He slipped his lightsaber back to his utility belt and stepped over.

Luke touched Mulder's shoulder. "Let me help her," he said softly. Mulder's eyes met his. Luke could feel the misery emanating from the man. Mulder sighed deeply and moved away to allow Luke access to his partner.

Luke placed his hands on Dana's face and closed his eyes, reaching into the force. He focused on the damage and healed it. She would be fine. "She's sleeping now," he told Mulder. "Get her back to bed. I've got to stop this guy."

"His name is Benjamin Adams." Mulder said, lifting Scully into his arms. "He was supposed to be her *date* last night." Mulder's bitterness was not lost on Luke.

Luke blinked in amazement at what Mulder had just revealed. There was a lot more here than met the eye. Drawing his lightsaber once again, he ran off down the hall.

From: JackeeC <74363.2566@CompuServe.COM>
Newsgroups: alt.tv.x-files.creative
Subject: NEW: XJEDI VOL THREE 14/24
Date: 23 Jan 1996 03:52:07 GMT

XJEDI 14 (VOL.1)

DISCLAIMER: Still in force from part thirteen.

Ben emerged from the lift on the operations level. The guest wing's lift wasn't programmed to stop there, but the General had provided him with override codes for all of the lifts. Ben used the force to project an image that the rest of the technicians would see as a trusted work mate.

Once in the Ops control center, it was a small thing for him to deactivate all functional force fields in the upper landing bay. That done, he simply walked out the access door to the upper landing bay's catwalk.

The catwalk extended between sub-bays A through E. Ben could see a Corellian freighter docked in sub-bay B along with a sleek luxury craft. The Hinderer sat beyond the freighter in bay C. It was necessary for Ben to descend to floor level to accomplish his mission. He covered the distance to sub-bay A with no trouble.

Ben checked out the bay floor beneath him for guards. Sensing none, he threw himself into the air, somersaulted and landed noiselessly on the landing bay floor. When his feet touched the ground, he ran for the Hinderer's airlock. He knew his time was growing shorter; the Jedi Skywalker could be here any minute now. Ben didn't need to take care of him; his grandfather would be more than happy to take care of that particular piece of rebel scum...later.

The Hinderer's airlock opened immediately to Ben's command input. The interior of the ship was dim, but the air smelled 'clean', as recycled air went. That meant life support was functioning normally. Ben quickly made his way toward the command center. He was happy to find the plasteel barrier still in place. Ben pushed at the intersection of rock and plasteel that formed a dimple, causing a control panel to appear. Quickly, he punched in the entry code.

Life pods sat against the wall of the control room. Ben reached into a pocket and retrieved a small pouch. He then dumped the contents onto a table near the pods. Several crudely made bracelets clattered to the surface of the table.

The stones strung along the pieces of string were not ordinary stone. They were carefully selected from an artifact, at a secret site on Earth. These rocks were the precise geological opposites of that of the Gates. It would cancel out the effects of the particles that were fused into the genetic structure of One's people. Ben didn't have all of the information, but he did know they had been banned from the galaxy for some crime or another before the days of the Empire. The infusion of the particles had made it impossible for One and his people to function consciously in this galaxy.

The General had carefully hidden the secret of the rocks for a very long time. Ben wasn't about to share the secret with the little creatures in the pods, either. But, he did need their help right now. And there was no other way they could function consciously outside of the Infinity. Their knowledge would do them no good, anyway. There was no room in Ben's plan for them to live long enough to share the information with the rest of their kind.

Ben began the stasis recovery process. The indicator flashed green; all was well. He placed a bracelet on the arm of each Jedi. The process would take several minutes, after which, they'd have several more minutes of disorientation. Several crucial minutes. Ben thought it best to activate the Karamac cruiser's automatic homing circuits and send it to the Milky Way auxillary base. That way he wouldn't have to risk another trip through the palace and back to his ship.

Ben input the commands into the remote controller on his wrist. The readout indicated that the Karamac was responding and would be ready to make the hyperspace jump just after Hinderer.

* * * *

Leia Organa Solo hurried out of her quarters. It wouldn't do to show up in the security bay in her night gown and bare feet, so she'd slipped into a white ship suit she'd pilfered from Luke at some point in the past. As it was,

She drew in her breath sharply when she came face to face with CEstallia.
Leia had to bite back the undiplomatic words that bubbled forth in her mind.
When CEstallia's expression registered shock, Leia remembered that her race was telepathic.

"Stay out of my head!" Leia exclaimed. Most civilized telepaths would not snoop on the thoughts of others. In her estimation, this only added to her distrust of the woman.

CEstallia drew herself up. "I wasn't trying to get in your head as you put it," she said. "You felt those words so strongly, that you may as well have screamed them at me. You *did* direct them to me."

Leia sighed, remembering that she had indeed directed the words to CEstallia in her mind. But, they hadn't been meant for her to hear. She apologized. "Look, CEstallia, I'm very sorry. I didn't mean for you to hear the words. It's just that I'm feeling very stressed at the moment."

"Yes," CEstallia nodded comfortingly. "I feel the tension in the air. I came to ask if I could help. I thought I felt an...out of place presence nearby."

"Help...?" Leia asked, confused.

CEstallia pulled back the shawl to reveal her lightsaber. It was different from Luke and Leia's, which were purely utilitarian. Its handle was inlaid with precious stones, set in an odd geometric design. It was beautiful.

"You're a Jedi?" Leia whispered in astonishment.

"So they tell me," CEstallia nodded with a grin.

Leia smiled back at her. Luke trusted this woman and there *was* an intruder in the palace. They could use an extra set of force sensitive eyes in the search. Leia was about to thank her and accept her offer, when CEstallia's expression changed to one of surprise and then horror.

"What's wrong?" Leia asked, a feeling of fear wormed its way into her chest.

CEstallia refocused on Leia, she'd come to a decision. "I'm really sorry to have to do this to you, my dear. You'll just have to forgive me later." With that, CEstallia waved an open hand before Leia's eyes and then closed

Leia looked at her in confused expectancy for a few moments before she wilted to the floor in a dead faint.

CEstallia's attention was diverted elsewhere before Leia had even hit the floor. After quickly searching the area with the force, CEStallia closed her eyes and clapped her hands sharply together. The soft tingle began in her hands and worked its way through her body. When she opened her eyes again, she was onboard the Hinderer.

* * * *

Luke Skywalker approached the upper level bay, where the Hinderer was currently docked, into a run. The security team was still in place. "Stay here!" Luke yelled as he passed them.

"Yes sir!" the chief guard answered, not unaccustomed to strange behavior. The rest simply flattened themselves against the side of the guard station, out of Luke's path.

The Hinderer sat in the middle of the bay. Luke crossed the distance in the blink of an eye. His memory delivered up the code Artoo had given them earlier. The doors slid open obediently as he punched the last key. Luke slipped quietly into the ship's dim confines and immediately felt a slight rumbling; the engines were being initialized. That bit of information did not surprise him as he could feel the presence of someone on the ship--someone who wasn't sleeping. Wait...was that two...no six people?

Luke broke into a run.

* * * *

When CEStallia teleported onto the Hinderer, she was happy to find Ben's back to her as he worked at one of the control panels.

She only had a few moments before he'd feel her presence. She was determined to make the best of it. The figure in the nearest life pod was beginning to stir. CEStallia thrust a hand out, drawing the bracelet from the creature's wrist with the force. She grasped it in her hand just as she was found out.

Ben blinked in amazement at the gray-haired, gray-eyed woman standing before him. Where had she come from? He pulled his blaster to him from the side table with the force. He was firing it at her almost before she got her lightsaber up to block.

nice prize. In about a minute he'd have backup from the Jedi now stirring in their pods. They wouldn't be at full alertness of course, but

combined they would be more than a match for this little lady. He was confident he could keep her busy until then. And of course, there was also the fact that the ships co-ordinates were already set. As soon as those engines were on-line, she would be along for the ride.

CEstallia's eyes darted to the pods. Her worst fears were confirmed and then some. These little creatures were of the exiles she and Yoda had confined to the Infinity so many years ago. And they wore the Stones. How had they found them? They did not exist yet.

Ben shot another wave of blaster fire in her direction. CEstallia easily caught and deflected it. Surely, he knew she could block his blaster fire from here to eternity and those Jedi would not be ready to function for another minute or two. What he didn't know was that the little creatures in the pods would recognize her...and panic. But CEstallia had to do something first. She had to reverse the process on the pod containing the Jedi who no longer wore the bracelet. It would mean a horrible death for the little creature if she didn't.

* * * * *

Luke heard the sound of blaster fire coming from the direction of the plasteel barrier. The barrier was now half open. He could see CEstallia standing a few feet from the door with a lightsaber up and blocking blaster bolts. He flattened himself against the outside wall and tried to think of what to do. An idea came to him.

The portion of the room that Luke could see contained various control panels and pieces of equipment all bolted to the plasteel floor. Luke needed a distraction; perhaps something he could throw. A hard edge of the rock walls jabbed at his back. His eyes brightened with inspiration before he turned to take a closer look at the rock walls.

In one swift, easy motion, he drew back his lightsaber and cut a large chunk of the rock away.

A loud screech of mortal pain rang through the air. The rock Luke had severed glowed red-hot. It hung in the air glowing in time to the screams of agony that seemed to come from everywhere at once. The sound grew in intensity, blocking even thought. Luke covered his ears with his hands, his idea forgotten.

CEstallia cast around the control room frantically trying to figure out what had happened. Ben looked around, just as confused as she. He didn't know what was going on. CEstallia, however, knew that the little Jedi in the pod was dying. What she wasn't sure of was why. The process in the pod was not complete; she was sure of it. Then, she saw Luke in the corridor along with the broken chunk of rock that was now vibrating. She gasped.

seemed to assault him mentally and physically. His heart pounded and contracted at the sounds. Suddenly, something hit him from the side, propelling him down the corridor. Luke wasn't conscious to find out his destination.

* * * * *

Ben saw the woman dash out of the door of the control room. He struggled to hit the button that would slam the plasteel barrier shut, but he couldn't find the strength. The horrible sounds were robbing him of his power. The last thing he remembered before the darkness was a green three-fingered hand pushing the button he couldn't.

* * * * *

Fox Mulder stood watching his partner sleeping. She looked so peaceful, at ease. Her red hair stood out against the paleness of the sheets. His eyes drifted to the door. Now that he was sure Scully would be okay, he wanted to be out there, helping get the guy who had done this to her.

He knew that she had looked forward to her date with that man. Her job with the x-files allowed her little time to meet eligible men who weren't suspects. And now, Mulder felt sure, because she was his partner 'they' were now interfering in her personal life. He had to find out who had sent Benjamin Adams to Dana.

Mulder picked up Luke's blaster and left the room. His eidetic memory guided him back to the Security bay.

"Sir, you can't go in there," the guard told Mulder as he moved to pass. His body blocked Mulder's entry.

"But Luke's in there," Mulder said. He didn't know how he knew. He just did. Mulder stared back at the guard. He was prepared to face him down; pull his blaster if need be. The man that had hurt his partner was here, too.

"I'm sorry, sir. You don't have authorization." The chief guard was firm. He'd already sized this skinny man up. He figured he could take him easily without hurting him if he had to.

The situation resolved itself, however, when the airlock opened to release a loud screaming. Two figures launched from the Hinderer at speed, landing in a heap on the floor. The airlock slid closed, again blocking the sound.

Mulder pushed past the guard and dashed into the bay. Not that Mulder hadn't been as stunned as the guard, but he'd half decided to dash past the guard in the first place.

The guard was right behind him, calling for medical assistance.

Mulder ran toward Luke, who was nearer the doorway, but CEstallia had reached a hand toward him. So he changed course and went to her side.

care of it...until I ask,> a soft voice whispered directly into his mind.

proper Mulder nodded at the woman, allowing her to place the bracelet in his hand. He looked down at the coarse stones strung along a string.

Suddenly, the Hinderer came to life. Her repulser lifts kicked in, pushing the ship gracefully into the air. Alarm klaxons went off all over the bay.

Mulder saw that the guards had removed Luke from the bay floor and were carrying him out of the area. He turned to do the same with CEstallia. Only, she wasn't there. The spot that she'd occupied was empty. All he had was a bracelet of stone.

end part fourteen.

From: JackeeC <74363.2566@CompuServe.COM>
Newsgroups: alt.tv.x-files.creative
Subject: NEW: XJEDI VOL THREE 15/24
Date: 23 Jan 1996 03:54:03 GMT

XJEDI part 15 (VOL. 3)

Disclaimer: Still in force... May the disclaimer be ~~with~~ you...always.

<MW> Earth, North Carolina

Mandy's shift was ending, and she wanted to check on Big Foot before she left. She didn't know as yet how she would save him, but she would think of something. Jacket and badge in hand, she made the trip to the insanity ward. On a hunch, she glanced into John Doe 1's room. It was empty, the bed was made up as if no one had ever been there. Vanished, like so many others.

She could not let that happen to Big Foot. She had to get him out of here...if he wasn't already gone.

Mandy ran, in a brief moment of panic, the distance to Big Foot's room.
He was still there, gazing at the observation window before which she stood.
He seemed to look directly at her. There was intelligence in his eyes.
Mandy glanced sideways down the hall, suddenly mindful of the guard at the end

the hall. She couldn't just break the window; it was Plexiglas anyway. The locks on the doors were completely computerized. The only way in or out was with a computerized security key card. The doctors who administered

the meds had them and always came in twos, in case the patient needed subbing. The guards could also enter, but only under extreme circumstances.

Mandy's badge would only open the outer door to this corridor so that she could deliver food.

Mandy wished she could talk to Big Foot. Maybe she could convince him to play sick or something, like they did on television. But, as things stood, she would be lucky if she could convince him to blink.

* * * * *

"I don't think we're going to find anything here." Mr. X. said staring over the sooty ruins of Acme Industrials.

"I think you're right," Skinner said, cutting the power to his flashlight. Whatever someone had wanted to destroy in this fire was indeed destroyed. Skinner and his passenger had been combing the ruins for more than two hours and had found nothing.

"Well, do you have any more bright ideas?" the bearded man asked, glaring in Skinner's direction. His once immaculate attire was now sooty.

"Yeah, one." Skinner said, as he turned toward the car, happy he'd worn sweats. It was a small victory. But, he took what he could get.

* * * * *

Charlotte-Douglas International Airport

Walter Skinner pulled the green rental car into short term parking. If Rae had followed his directions this shouldn't be too much trouble. He withdrew a number from memory: CYA-1497. It was Rae's license plate number on a green Dodge Shadow.

He decided to began on the top level. His sister had always liked to park on the top level. Who knew, maybe it was a female thing. It wasn't. He'd done the circuit twice. Skinner directed the car to the third level of the four level parking deck.

The third floor appeared to be the charm. The green Shadow sat near the end of the row, at a distance from the elevators. Skinner pulled the rental car into the, now empty, space beside the Shadow.

Skinner's passenger had said nothing during the drive to the airport. He had simply glared out of the windshield. But now, he looked on with interest. Skinner reached into his sweatshirt pocket and pulled out a handy tool. Statistics said that the Dodge Shadow was the easiest car on the market to break in to. Skinner, just hoped no one saw. This *was* deviant behavior and could land him in jail. He didn't think he could count on his passenger to even stick around in that event, much less back his story of lost keys up.

"Do you mind playing look out?" Skinner asked his passenger. The bearded man got out of the car wordlessly and stood looking around the deserted deck as his companion broke into the Dodge.

After Skinner had gotten the door open. He briefly considered letting the man search his daughter's car. But, he couldn't bring himself to trust him that far. The interior light came on, exposing the cars shadowy interior. Skinner looked in the glove compartment and ashtray. Nothing unusual there. He ran a hand beneath both seats to see if he could find anything that might give a hint to where Rae and his agents had gone. His hand came across something under the passenger seat, two cylindrical objects. He pulled them out. One was chapstick, the other was...strange. It was a metallic cylinder, that looked vaguely familiar. He held it up and asked his companion if he knew what it was.

The bearded man seemed to pause for a brief instant in time before he answered. "No, no idea," he said and went back to his scanning of the garage. Skinner dropped the object in his sweat suit pocket. He was missing something here... He found nothing else of interest in the car. Since Rae's car was still here at the airport, the three of them must have taken a rental. The question was: Which company and in whose name had they rented? He turned to his bearded friend. It was time for him to be more useful.

<GFFA> Coruscant, Imperial Palace.

Leia Organa Solo woke to find herself lying on the floor outside her rooms. She sat up, expecting to feel woozy or at least have a headache. Instead she felt as if she'd just had a good night's sleep.

She pushed herself to her feet and tried to figure out how she'd ended up on the floor. The last thing she remembered was CEstallia's hand doing something in front of her face. Leia's features tightened, she knew there was something about that woman that she didn't trust. But, there was no time to ponder it now. She had to get to the security bay.

Halfway there, alarm siren's began to go off. Leia broke into a full run. The sight that greeted her both stunned and terrified her. The Hinderer was lifting into the night sky; headed for deep space by the looks of it. And the chief of security was fast approaching the guard station with a black-clad figure tossed over his shoulder. A figure Leia recognized as Luke. His lightsaber was on the floor of the bay, deactivated. As she rushed toward her brother, she saw Mulder pick the saber up while running from the chaotic bay, which now had security troops scrambling about, shouting orders.

A small squad of fighters and a troop carrier were being scrambled to pursue the retreating ship. Trouble was, the Hinderer, once in space, would become invisible to electronic scanning. And, visual tracking was iffy at best, even without the extensive collection of space junk that still plagued Coruscant's upper atmosphere.

The chief guard set Luke down with his back against the guard station desk. Luke's head slumped as another of the guard supported his back, allowing him to be eased flat onto the floor. Someone had called for a medic.

Leia knelt next to her brother. She took one of his hands in hers and brushed her sense against his. She got no response; almost as if his mind had simply shut down. Her worry deepened.

"What happened?" she asked looking up at the chief guard. Mulder knelt at Luke's other side.

The guard shook his head, "I don't know. A few minutes ago,

came running by. He ordered us to stay here and we did. Then after a bit, he showed up," the guard pointed at Mulder, "and then the airlock on that ship opened up and out came Skywalker. I think he must have been out before he hit the floor."

Mulder looked sharply in the chief guard's direction. The guard glanced back at him curiously. Leia caught the exchange.

"You didn't see anything else?" Leia asked, addressing the guard. The guard shook his head. Leia sensed no deception from him. He'd been with the palace guard a very long time and she trusted him, but Mulder obviously had something on his mind.

Leia didn't get the chance to ask what it was, however, because at that point the medics arrived, hover bed in tow. She gently released her brother's hand and moved away, so that the medics could lower the hover bed beside him.

When she stood, Mulder handed Luke's lightsaber over to her. She clipped it to her waist, along side her blaster. Mulder then looked at the blaster he still held and handed that over, too. It was Luke's, anyway. Leia clipped that one to her waist also. Mulder wished he'd worn his own shoulder holster over his clothing. It seemed that no one was bothering to carry concealed.

"Keep your post," Leia told the guard, kindly. He gave her a small smile and a brief salute before returning to his post. Leia glanced briefly at Mulder before she started up the corridor. Mulder fell into step beside her.

"What was that all about?" Leia asked as they walked, a few yards behind the medteam with the hover bed.

"Madame Organa Solo," he started as he'd heard others call her.

"Leia," she corrected him.

"Leia," he began again, "Cestallia was with Luke when he came out of that ship. I don't understand why the guard didn't see her."

Leia came to a full stop in the hallway and turned toward Mulder. "She was on the ship?" she asked in disbelief.

"Yes," Mulder nodded emphatically. "She went down, just like Luke."

Mulder held onto the knowledge about the bracelet, though. He wasn't sure why but he just felt an urge to keep quiet about it.

"Come with me," Leia said as she hurried, not after the hover bed that had turned a corner up ahead, but toward guest quarters. She came to a stop outside CEstallia's rooms. Leia rang the door chime. No one answered.

Knowing that diplomacy would not allow her to invade CEstallia's personal space, Leia turned to Mulder, "You said she went down?"

"Yeah, I know this sounds crazy, but, she was on the floor right in front of me one minute and the next she was gone. She looked right at me."

"Not so strange as you might think," Leia murmured, running a hand over her forehead, thinking. If CEstallia had been conscious enough to get herself out of the bay, then she probably wasn't hurt. She was, after all, a Jedi. Besides, someday the CEstallians might want to join the New Republic. In which case, insulting one of their representatives by barging into her quarters unannounced might not be such a good idea. So she'd announce herself. Leia reached out with the force, feeling for the woman's mind. It wore the stillness of a deep sleep, not unlike Luke's complete inactivity. She wouldn't be able to get much out of the woman in that state.

"Let's just go see Luke," she sighed. She'd deal with CEstallia later.

* * * * *

The chief guard's smile had faded away to grim determination as soon as Leia had turned away. Someone had stolen into the security bay, while he'd been guarding it. No one unauthorized had passed his station. That someone must have gotten in some other way. And he meant to find out how.

"I need the security monitor video files for every possible access way to this bay for the last 2 hours. And I want it like yesterday," the chief guard said gruffly to his younger companion.

The younger guard saluted smartly and went to attend to the task.

CEstallia

Arric sat silently in his sleeping chambers, gazing at the stars that penetrated the atmospheric haze in the upper atmosphere. He was remembering his life; the highs and lows. Most of all, the high point of being Chief Intermediary to CEstallia, the Matriarch.

The moons glimmered in the distance as they followed their course across the night sky. It was a full crossing, this night; all three moons were full. A full crossing occurred every 35 days, ten times a year. This would be Arric's last full crossing.

CEstallia had already chosen her successor and tonight, her successor had chosen her own Intermediary. No Intermediary ever lived on for long after his Matriarch died. Arric had had a full and rich life to contemplate as he awaited the Time. A Matriarch knew the time of her own death, if not the circumstances; an Intermediary simply waited for it.

Arric knew that he was truly no longer Intermediary. He also knew that CEstallia would never return home, to CEstallia. That, in itself, was a great sacrifice. But, until the crossing passed with the rising of the suns, he would remain at his post.

Arric got up from his lounger and stepped out onto his balcony. The night air was cool and ruffled his robes.

All of Central City was sleeping. There was no artificial light to be seen, only the reflection of the moons on the pools of water beneath the falls.

Arric allowed his thoughts to wander to the children. Tomorrow would be a big day for them. They had been allowed one day to become used to their surroundings before the difficult task of removing the cylinders began. He wondered too, if Luke Skywalker knew what great honor he held to travel with the Matriarch on her last journey, that duty generally fell to the Intermediary. But Arric was not bitter. CEstallia had her reasons; good ones he was sure. Skywalker would become her temporary Intermediary; he would witness her passing in Arric's place.

Arric's eyes drifted to the Big Fall Landing Port, where Luke Skywalker

last
touched foot on CEstallia. A strange sight greeted him. A ship hovered
near
the top of the big fall; a ship that was barely visible. Arric gathered
his
staff and headed for the door. A feeling of dread settled in the pit of
his
stomach

* * * *

The bedroom was dim. The young woman sat up slowly in bed. Someone had called her. She turned her head slowly toward the window. Night light cast shadows over the furnishings. In the back of her mind she knew where she was and why she was here. She also knew who was calling her--had called her before.

She got up from the bed as she was told. Moving silently through the room, she gathered her clothing and quickly dressed. When she reached the central room, the children were already there.

"Come along, children," she said as she reached a hand out to them. They all drew near to her. The huddled group looked up to the ceiling as if listening. Then, they all walked out onto the balcony.

The outer door to the childrens' chamber slid open. Arric rushed into the room, his staff raised. He saw the group on the balcony bathed in brilliant light. The young woman turned her head in his direction. A slight smile spread across her lips that made no effort to touch her eyes, and then she turned back toward the light.

Arric ran out to get the children back. He wondered at how this ship had penetrated the barrier? Nothing foreign could penetrate CEstallia's planetary barrier undetected. A brief thought shot through his mind: Could this ship be of CEstallia, truly CEstallian? Not possible. His mind rejected that thought.

When Arric reached the edge of the light, a force more brilliant than the light hit his mind. A painful wave of emotions and images flooded his mental perception, blanking his mind, his thoughts. Arric was thrown clear as though by a physical blow.

He woke later, screaming.

<MW> Charlotte, North Carolina

Saturday.

Asst. Director Walter Skinner sat behind the wheel of his rental car. His passenger stood outside, leaning against the passenger door of the car, making a phone call. Skinner watched the horizon. Though it was still dark, he could tell that the sun would be rising soon. And his agents were still missing. This assignment should have been easy. But, with agent Mulder involved was anything ever easy?

Skinner turned the key to turn on the radio. Listening to the low murmur of his passenger's conversation wasn't getting him anywhere.

"...our top story this morning. The missing and feared abducted Mr. Mike Ashton was found late last night wandering near an industrial park. Mr. Ashton was disoriented and has at this time no memory of what happened to him over the past 48 hours. Ms. Theraesa Manning is still at large and wanted for questioning..."

Skinner started the car.

end part fifteen.

=====

From: JackeeC <74363.2566@CompuServe.COM>
Newsgroups: alt.tv.x-files.creative
Subject: NEW: XJEDI VOL THREE 16/24
Date: 23 Jan 1996 03:58:01 GMT

XJEDI 16 (VOL. 3)

Disclaimer: Still in force. The disclaimer is out there.

Coruscant

The Sun was rising over Capitol City when the chief guard finished his security investigation. He'd downloaded it all to a data crystal. Now, he sat across from the Director of the Guard, who was staring intently at the information the man had gathered.

When the holo-imager faded and the scene on the chip played itself out, the Director sat back in his chair.

"You've done very well," the Director said. "Intelligence was working from the viewpoint that some sort of slave system had been activated, especially in light of the fact that another ship departed into hyperspace right after it. We still don't know why we didn't pick it up before that time."

"Could it have had stealth circuits, sir?" the guard asked.

"It's strange, but Intelligence doesn't believe so. The vector the ship followed indicates that it was on the surface of Coruscant, right here in Capitol City."

A chime rang at the Director's door. He'd put in a call to the Internal Security Council as soon as his guard had told him what he'd found. He pressed the button on his desk to tell his assistant to allow the Security representative entry.

He hid his shock very well when Mon Mothma, herself, stepped through the doorway.

* * * * *

For Han Solo the first order of business after leaving the infirmary was to get the Falcon prepped to go after Chewie. This business about not being able to *find* a planet made no sense to him. He'd sent the co-ordinates in his message to Leia. He couldn't imagine what more they needed, he'd practically drawn them a map.

When Han reached the bay, there was a balding orange-haired man standing beneath his ship. He was fiddling with the Falcon's landing pods.

Han strode over to the man and tapped him on a thin shoulder. "Uh,

some
help?"

The man turned distractedly toward Han.

Han noticed that the man was younger than he had at first thought.

"Oh, you must be Han Solo," the man said. "I'm Gien Becter, I'm one of the scientists assigned to examining the data from your ship," he said, distractedly before turning his attention back toward the Falcon's landing pods.

Han now found himself glaring at the man's back. "Well, stay out of my way," he said to the back of Becter's head, "I've got work to do."

With that he stalked up the entry ramp and into the ship.

Becter barely noticed Han's words, so engrossed was he in what he'd found in the grooves within the landing pods. He placed another sample into the portable analyzer to be sure of his findings. It was true. He let out an uncontrollable whoop of glee.

A second later, Han rushed down the ramp to see what had happened to the odd little man under his ship. "What the--" he said upon reaching the bottom of the ramp. The man was hugging himself.

When Becter saw Han, he immediately trotted over to him, waving his portable analyzer in the air. The frazzled orange hair that curled around the back of his head along with pale skin, gave him the look of a somewhat colorless clown.

Han took in the man's shaking hands and glassy eyes and wondered what sort of interesting drug he might have gotten into in the past few minutes.

"Solo! Solo!" he exclaimed. "You've got to look at this," he said, holding the instrument before Han.

Han looked dubiously at the man and then down at the instrument's readout display. It looked like a bunch of gibberish as best as he could make out. "What? Is it broken?" Han asked, confused.

"No, no, no," Becter said, "*look*", unable to contain a goofy grin.

Han looked back at the readout display reluctantly. It didn't make any more sense than it had the first time around. He looked back into Becter's expectant face. Sarcasm mode on.

"Now it makes *so* much more sense. Do you mind translating into plain Basic? I don't have time to play guess the symbol."

Becter frowned, miffed at Han's attitude. He depressed a button and an indicator began to step through a testing mode. Then, a little chamber snapped open. Barely discernible granules of a black substance sat within the chamber.

"I found residue on your landing pods," Becter began, "that would have come from your most recent planetside landing, which had to have been the planet Earth, since your maintenance record shows that the pods were cleaned prior to your departure. I've found some...irregularities that are at odds with a few accepted galactic rules of physics."

"What!?" Han asked, growing even more irritated. Was there a conspiracy keeping him from trying to get Chewie back? First Luke and his 'conference' with some woman from some planet...CEstoria or wherever, and then the scientists suddenly forgetting how to follow simple co-ordinates and now some idiot telling him that he was 'at odds' with accepted galactic rules of physics. They would probably want to impound his ship, the way things were going.

"I don't have *time* for this," he muttered, shaking his head as he headed back toward the Falcon's ramp. When he'd left everything was nice and normal, as far as it went. No one was having trouble following simple co-ordinates or ranting about galactic rules being broken. Han decided that the goal of the moment was to get back to Earth to rescue Chewie. The galaxy would do just fine without his help.

"Wait, Mr. Solo, hear me out," Becter said. His voice was steadier and carried a seriousness and professional demeanor that gave Han pause. He turned and waited for the man to say something that might convince him that what he had found should matter one bit in the scheme of things.

Becter took a few steps closer before he began to speak. "Until this moment intergalactic travel was thought to be impractical because of the great distances involved, that and superstition. From the rim, it would take 41 light years just to reach the nearest galaxy. But, what I found on

ship begs to differ. You see, every particle in this galaxy has a certain signature, a galactic...tone, if you will. Every single particle has it. And this tone cannot be changed. It's been tried. The residue we found on your ship has a different signature--much different. There is absolutely NO WAY," Becter pointed to the analyzer's collection tray, "this dirt is of our galaxy."

Han stood and looked at the man, measuring what he'd said.
"Have you told anyone else about this?" he asked.

Becter's expression changed to one of uncertainty. "Well...no. I'm a Jr. on the team and this was just a hunch. We don't normally run the galactic tone scan because it didn't seem reasonable since you were only gone for a day. What actually led me to do the test was the trace molecular distortion on the hull. It hasn't affected the integrity, but it was a bit strange.

Besides, the team's results have already been transmitted to Madame Organa Solo."

"And they are..." Han prompted. There was always the hope that they'd make more sense than what this young man had come up with.

Becter shrugged, "Faulty nav system. Temporary localized spacial disturbances. Operator error--"

"Okay, I get the picture," Han said, sighing. The exit ramp of the Falcon began to rise as he activated a remote lock down switch. Turning to Becter with a grimace of half resignation and half curiosity, Han said, Not that I believe any of what you just said but if there's one thing I learned from Luke Skywalker it's that he can sometimes make sense of the most ridiculous things. Come on, I think he and Leia should hear this."

* * * * *

Leia turned cool eyes on CEstallia. She was giving the woman a private audience only because Luke had requested it. Leia would have preferred bringing her before the Council.

That morning when Luke had awakened in the infirmary, he hadn't had any answers for Leia on what had happened to him. He'd assured her that he felt fine and requested a private audience for CEstallia.

Now it was Leia's turn, she had a few questions of her own before
she
listened to what CEstallia had to say.

"How are you feeling this morning?" Leia asked. "Fox Mulder tells
me
that you had some difficulty last night after you left me."

CEstallia returned Leia's look with a smile. "You and I," she said,
"we
should be allies. We have a common foe."

Leia carefully concealed the fact that she was pondering over
CEstallia's
statement by taking a sip of her morning beverage. She decided not to
become
side tracked by the obvious question just now.

"What happened to Luke last night?" Leia asked point blank. "And
how did
you get on that ship? And what did you do to me?"

Luke looked up in surprise. He hadn't known that something had
happened
to his sister. He turned a curious eye on CEstallia. Leia's question was
now
his.

CEstallia sat back in her seat, watching the both of them. "The
dark
Jedi were waking and I had to prevent that."

Leia's eyes widened slightly. In her worry over Han and Luke and
Chewie and the loss of the Hinderer, she'd actually forgotten that the
Jedi were there. "And did you prevent it?" she asked, carefully
concealing
her thoughts.

"No," CEstallia replied, eyes down cast. "I didn't."

Luke knew that. He'd felt them waking as he'd entered the ship.
Their
very presences stained the force near them. Leia should have been able
to feel
them, too, not as strongly as he, but still...unless...? <What
happened?>
he asked his sister, silently.

Leia allowed him to see what she remembered. Since mental
communication
was so much faster than verbal all this happened in the space of a
second.

"What did you do to Leia?" he asked CEstallia. He had never seen
that
move that she'd done with her hand. And he didn't particularly care for
the
fact that she'd done it to his sister.

Luke sensed a slight defensiveness.

"I appreciate your concern for my well being," Leia said, diplomatically.
"But there's still the question of why. And what you felt it necessary to protect me from. Not to mention how you got on the ship and what happened to you and Luke."

"We don't have time for this," CEstallia said to Luke with a pleading tone. Turning to Leia, she added, "Every minute we waste is more to their advantage. There are things you need to know, Madame, and you need to know them *now*."

Leia glanced at Luke, gauging his reaction. He raised a brow at her. The decision was hers, but, what harm would it do to hear the woman out? Leia was concerned about CEstallia's warnings, but she couldn't give up on finding out what had happened so easily.

"If I hear you out, will you answer my questions?" Leia asked, enjoying the upper hand.

"One condition," CEstallia said.

Leia hesitated before answering, "What is it?"

CEstallia wore a ghost of smile. "There is a cylinder, you found it in the palace. When this mission is over, I want it. No questions."

Leia paused completely. What was so important about that cylinder? She thought back, it had made Luke's mind strange. Whatever happened on that ship had made his mind strange, as well, in a different way perhaps, but she felt sure that they were related. Her decision was which was more important, knowing what had happened to Luke or holding on to that cylinder in hope of gaining some deeper knowledge.

"Why don't we let you know?" Luke answered after a few silent seconds. His knowledge of the cylinders was admittedly slim, but this was probably the only one on the planet. And he meant to keep it, for now.

Leia let it rest. "All right, then," she said. "What is it that I need to know?"

CEstallia began her story.

* * * *

Dana Scully eyed herself in the full length mirror that, she discovered, appeared on the wall next to the closet when she pressed the knob. The house keeper droid had been in minutes before and braided her hair in a wreath around her head. She hadn't been able to style it like she would have at home, but the braids were nice. The outfit she wore, on the other hand would not have been her choice, but it was better than the previous nights. She wore tights again, but this time with a tunic that reached to mid-thigh. The black knee boots rounded out the outfit.

"The fashion police would have a field day in this place," she said to her reflection, wishing for her overcoat to cover the whole thing up. But, she'd left it on the ship.

Giving up on any hope of improving, she walked out of her room into the main room of the suite. Mulder was already there, dozing on the sofa. Rae stepped out of her room, which was across from Scully's.

"Nice outfit," Rae said, looking down at her own green tunic and tights outfit.

Scully looked over Rae's outfit. "At least they're different colors," she said. "We could have been twins."

"Good point," Rae said, stepping more fully into the room. She caught sight of Mulder asleep on the sofa and shook her head. "Does he have something against beds?" she asked. "It's not like there's a television or anything."

Scully thought of all of Mulder's paranoia's with a wry smile. "Probably."

"Do you know what the real bummer in this is?" Rae asked, continuing.

"No, what?" Scully asked.

"No toons," Rae lamented, "no X-men, no Animaniacs, no Pinky and the Brain--"

"No Power Rangers?" Scully put in.

worse
than death..."

"Oh, you mean the Power Rangers movie?" Mulder asked, now pulling himself into a sitting position.

Pee laughed. "What are we going to do tomorrow, Brain," she said, out of the blue.

"Same thing we always do, Pinky...Try to take over the world!"
Mulder said, adding a deep seriousness to his voice, before falling back on the sofa laughing.

Scully rolled her eyes and left them to their reminiscing to see if she could remember how to operate the kitchen.

* * * * *

Leia had listened to CEstallia's fascinating story about the children and the Gates. She was as amazed...and as confused as Luke had been. There were a lot of things that she didn't understand, but CEstallia kept saying that it was ancient knowledge that must stay that way.

"So do you think someone is building up an army of Jedi children?"
Leia asked.

"That was the old motive," CEstallia said, "but now, I cannot be sure."

Leia nodded. She was just opening her mouth for the next question when the door chime rang. The droids had been sent down to Luke's chambers because CEstallia would not talk with them around. Leia had to reassure her several times that her personal quarters were swept electronically quite often for eavesdropping devices. But, since there was no one else to get the door that she'd sealed, she got up to do it. "Excuse me," she said.

"Leia and Luke, good," Mon Mothma was saying when she walked into the living room, a tall rather long headed man followed. She came to an abrupt halt when she saw CEstallia.

"Oh, good morning," she said politely.

Leia introduced them.

Mon Mothma turned to Leia, "There is information on the incident that took place early this morning..." She allowed her words to trail off, so that Leia could understand that this was an internal matter -- not for the ears of visiting off-worlders.

Luke was the one who spoke up in defense. "Mon Mothma, if you'll pardon me, Cestallian people are aware of ships much like the Hinderer. They used to build them, many years ago. If anything the technology was stolen from them. I think she should be allowed to listen in to whatever we've come up with."

"Very well," Mon Mothma said. She trusted Luke almost as much as Leia. If he'd wanted a government post he might easily have gotten one. His judgment was good and he was sincere.

"Director Mricos informed Security of this data crystal." Mon Mothma said, holding the device up for all to see. "I believe it speaks for itself." She placed the crystal into the holo-imager in the center of the table that sat before the sofa. An image faded into view of a man walking through the Operations room. The fact that he stood out and was so obviously armed did not matter to the operators. No one seemed to find him out of the ordinary, a few even smiled at him. He worked at a panel for a few moments and then continued out of Ops. onto the security bay catwalk.

"This is the intruder from the guest wing," Luke spoke up. "He has the power of the force, but I didn't sense that he was dark."

Mon Mothma frowned at Luke's words. She'd seen the report of the incident in the guest wing. But, she hadn't known that the man had used the force. The Earth man, Mulder, had reported that the man was also from Earth. She hoped that Earth was not going to be a problem. A delegation might be in order, when they found it, of course.

The imager went on to show the hole in the wall near the lift that led to the inner passageways. A readout indicated that most likely the instrument used to cut into the wall had been a laser of some kind, because of the singed edges. There was also a record of the computer glitch, that operations actually caught later, that allowed the guest lift to stop on the Ops level.

"This glitch," Mricos spoke for the first time, since his morning

believe that someone used an override code to stop that lift."

Luke thought again of how bad an idea he thought it was to locate New Republic headquarters here.

The crystal continued on, playing the footage of a much smaller ship, just before it jumped into hyperspace, presumably behind the now, electronically and otherwise invisible Hinderer.

This new ship was a dark triangular design and unfamiliar to all persons present.

The holo-image faded away as the crystal reached the end of its run. Just at that moment, the doors of the suite swished open to admit Han Solo followed by a orange-haired New Republic scientist.

Silence fell in the room as all eyes fell on the pair.

"All right," Han said, pushing Becter forward. "Tell 'em what you told me."

Becter cleared his throat, suddenly nervous in front of an audience. Especially one containing the Minister of State "Earth is in another galaxy," he said simply.

"What?!" said Luke, Leia, Mon Mothma, Director Mricos and CEstallia.

"My sentiments exactly," murmured Han. Then he pointed at Becter, "He says he found *dirt* that doesn't belong to this galaxy on the Falcon's landing pods."

All heads had turned to Han when he began speaking. Now they all turned back to Becter.

"Dirt?" said Luke and Leia. Mon Mothma simply took it all in, hoping that someone was going to explain this soon. Mricos' thin brows rose several inches. And CEstallia thought busily to herself. Something did not quite fit here.

Han stood back and grinned. This wasn't even making a flicker of sense to Luke, either. "I'd be more than happy to bring you some more *dirt* from Earth, when I go get Chewie. Then you can test all you want."

"Actually, there is one test we can do for clarification. It'll let us

"How's that?" Luke asked.

"The Earth people, we need to examine them."

* * * *

Scully was busy pondering over the completely unfamiliar menu of the kitchen droid and trying to explain to it what toast and coffee was when the door chimed. More than ready for a break, she went to see who'd arrived.

The door slid open to reveal Han Solo followed by the frazzle-haired scientist, as well as Mon Mothma and Leia, Luke and CEstallia and Director Mricos. They all strode single file into the suite. Scully didn't catch what Han had said when they'd first entered the room, but she did notice the tension in the room.

"Good morning?" she said, stepping to one side of Mulder and Rae.

"Pardon me," Mon Mothma said, stepping forward. "My name is Mon Mothma. And I'd, first of all, like to welcome you to Coruscant."

"Thank you," Mulder, Scully and Rae all responded politely.

"The gentleman near the door," Mon Mothma continued, "is Director Mricos of the New Republic Guard. This man," she gestured toward Becter now by her side, "is Gien Becter. He is one of the scientists involved in finding out just where Earth is. Everyone else, I believe you already know. Mr. Becter has a request to make of you, but before you make your decision, please hear his reasons." Mon Mothma stepped to the side allowing Becter to begin.

"Yes, first of all, are you all aware of the particles that make up all things?" He waited while the translators tracked his words.

"Yes," Mulder, Scully and Rae nodded.

"Good," Becter continued. "Well, each particle has a certain signature. This signature is usually in the form of a subatomicly emanating quantum resonance frequency."

The translator was having a difficult time with Becter's last sentence. An unusually long string of words were emitted to represent 'subatomicly

Han waited in growing irritation for the translator to finish its phrase.
At Mulder, Scully and Rae's looks of growing confusion, he knew his suspicions were confirmed. They didn't have a clue as to what Becter was talking about...and possibly neither did the translator.

"We don't have time for this," Han interjected over the translator continuing attempt at deciphering Becter's sentence. "What he's trying to say is this: He thinks the Earth is in another galaxy. And he wants to check you out to see if he's right."

The translator had no problem with Han's choice of words. But his listeners did. "Come again?" Scully asked dazedly. Wasn't it really bad enough to be on another planet? Mulder stood with a blank expression for a half a second before a grin began to spread across his face. Rae simply sat down.

Han's head was beginning to ache. "The scientist found some dirt on the Falcon, and it ain't from around here. He wants to check you out to see if you're from the same place the dirt is from."

"What kind of test is it?" Scully asked.

"It'll only take a few minutes," Becter answered. "All I need is a piece of hair or some sort of cellular tissue."

"All right," Scully said, looking around the room, "I do it."

* * * * *

Everyone sat on the semi-circular sofa in the common room of the suite Scully, Mulder and Rae shared. Mricos had left to attend to the duties of the day, since his services were no longer required. He left the data crystal with Mon Mothma.

"There's something I don't understand," Han said while they waited for the analyzer to complete its analysis. Living, or once living in the case of Scully's tissue sample, took a bit longer than simple inorganics, such as ordinary dirt, to process. "What was wrong with the co-ordinates I gave you? I used them myself and they worked just fine."

"We tried that," Becter said. "A scout from a station not too far distant from your co-ordinates was dispatched. They found nothing except empty space. There is simply nothing there."

"What about Artoo? His sensors must have picked up something."

"The information contained in his logs are inconclusive, just like the Falcon's logs. According to his and the Falcon's records, when you reached that point there was an electronic glitch and the next coherent record is of your ship 1000 kilometers out from a planet, co-ordinates unknown. The fact that the Artoo unit's glitch and the Falcon's glitch both occurred simultaneously indicates that there must have been some outside phenomena."

"Outside phenomena...yeah," Han said thoughtfully. "There was this...big...bright...vortex," Han finished, struggling for words to describe what he'd seen. "It only lasted for, maybe a second."

Becter's instrument beeped. He busied himself with the readout, continuing to speak. "I've concluded that it may have been a strange naturally occurring magnetic phenomena that conditions happened to be right for. A very rare phenomena, I might add. Your description seems to affirm that hypothesis."

"So how do you explain the trip back?" Han asked, not yet done with his questions.

Becter shrugged, "The phenomena was still active on some level. Perhaps, since the Falcon had passed through it once before, it made a return trip."

"I don't buy that," Han said.

Becter continued to examine his results. The raised brows clearly said that it didn't matter what Han bought. A wry smile of half triumph was spread across his face when he held the results up. "Positive match."

"So we *are* in another galaxy?" Mulder inquired.

"Yes," Becter nodded.

Mulder glanced quickly in Scully's direction before he asked his next question. "And you think this phenomena or whatever got us here isn't going to happen again?"

"I'm afraid not," Becter said, packing the analyzer away in one of

many pockets within his lab coat.

"I disagree," Mulder stunned everyone by saying. From Han it was expected. But, no one, not even Scully, was prepared for Mulder to speak up with a logical reason for his conclusion.

"I think the phenomena will occur again. And I think it will soon. Remember, we are not the only one's here from Earth." Mulder thought it best not to bring up Scully's attack before the group, he knew how she hated being portrayed as a victim.

Luke nodded glancing at CEstallia, she was being very quiet. "I think we should replay the security recording for them." He said to Mon Mothma.

The holo-imager came to life, showing Benjamin Adams walking calmly through the Ops center and out onto the bay catwalk. The imager then went on to show some of the damage he was suspected to have done.

Scully wrapped her arms around herself as she recognized the man. It chilled her that she'd actually been attracted to him. And the dream she'd had last night...along with Mulder's words that they weren't the only one's there from Earth gave her an eerie feeling. Something held her back from asking Mulder how he knew Ben was there.

"I have a question," Mulder spoke up. "This man isn't dressed like anyone else in the room," he began, gesturing toward the holo-image. "Why doesn't someone ask him what he's doing there? He's obviously a stranger."

Luke answered that question, "It seems that he was using a Jedi mind trick. He gave off the illusion of being a trusted workmate and so no one questioned his presence."

Dana Scully's expression changed subtly as she looked intently at Mulder waiting for him to ask the obvious question. But he didn't. He simply nodded his head as if adding it to a list of acceptable possibilities.

Dana, however had to ask that one, "Excuse me, Jedi *mind* trick? I'm afraid I'm not familiar with that particular type of criminal behavior."

Leia spoke up from her end of the sofa, carefully hiding a smile. "The Jedi are able to exercise extraordinary powers through the force. And not all Jedi are criminals. Luke is a Jedi Knight."

Scully's eyes went unbidden to Luke. He certainly had an aura about him.

But, she wasn't ready to chalk it up to some extraordinary ability to see some 'force'. "And this is normal on this planet?" she asked.

"The force is everywhere," Luke said, "in everything, in every part of the universe. Where there is life, there is the force."

"Oh," Scully said, closing her mouth. She didn't want to offend them by saying what was on her mind. She simply raised a brow and sat back in her seat. Mulder *would* be right at home here.

Luke didn't try to convince her further. She obviously didn't know of her partners potential powers, either. But, some on her world must have known of the force. How else would Benjamin Adams have learned to wield it so well?

The holo-image faded to a starfield as a small ship came into view. Mulder could not believe what he was seeing. "Is this one of yours?" he asked breathlessly, pointing to the ship that a moment later vanished into hyperspace, leaving only an empty starfield behind.

"No," Luke answered. "We've never seen anything like it. We think it was hiding on the planet some place until the Hinderer was stolen."

"Can you replay it?" Mulder asked.

"Sure," Luke said, resetting the crystal for enhanced replay.

"What is it, Mulder?" Scully asked her partner. He had that look he got when he was on to something big in a case.

"Scully, *that* ship," he punctuated the air with a finger, "is just like the ships they were flying around at Ellens."

"What?" Scully gasped, leaning in for a better look. "Mulder are you sure?"

"Yes, eidetic memory...remember?"

"But, Mulder, you don't remember anything. All we have are some blurry photographs," Scully argued.

"Scully, the likeness is unmistakable."

CEstallia looked distractedly away from the two arguing agents.

Solo," she began, "What exactly were those co-ordinates?"

Han shrugged. "It should be in the Falcon's computer or Artoo might know."

Leia spoke up, she remembered exactly. The force gave her an eidetic memory, as well. She rattled the co-ordinates off to CEstallia.

CEstallia gasped as the last piece of the puzzle fell into place for her. The two agents ended their debate and all eyes went to CEstallia. She focused shocked, pupil-less gray eyes on Luke. "Those are the co-ordinates for one of the Gates," she whispered. "That explains everything."

"Gates?" Han asked, "what Gates? And how does this explain everything?"

And come to think of it, what is everything?"

"Yes," said Mon Mothma, "I'd be interested in the answers to those questions, as well."

CEstallia kicked herself mentally for her slip. She schooled her features to remain placid against the weight of all the eyes in the room. Her senses fed her information regarding the emotional states of those around her in the half second it took her to formulate a reply.

"I'm very sorry, that is a matter of CEstallian internal security. I have already shared the information with one member of the New Republic as a sign of good faith. But, the information is far too dangerous to share with so many."

"But we already have the co-ordinates." Becter spoke up. "What is to stop any one of us from going out there and having a more in-depth look around than that scout ship could?" Already Becter was mentally running through the equipment he might need to run the necessary scans of the area.

CEstallia turned to Becter, infusing a small amount of suggestion into her words. "Because, Mr. Becter, current technology is not sufficient to the task."

"Not sufficient to the task..." Becter echoed, suddenly confused as to what he'd been about to say. He turned a distracted gaze off in the distance as he tried to recapture the thought. Then, shrugging he refocused on the conversation.

Scully watched Becter curiously. He seemed to have disconnected from the conversation. Turning back to the group, she noticed scowls on the faces

Han and Leia. She then turned to Mulder to see if he had noticed the exchange.

He had. His eyes met hers and he shook his head ever so slightly.

"Sufficient or not," Han muttered. "I plan to have the Falcon prepared and out of here in 30 minutes. If anybody is planning on joining me, you know where you've gotta be by then." The entire exercise with Becter hadn't told him anything. But, it had succeeded in delaying him. He was up and halfway to the door by the time Leia called out after him.

"Han!" she said, exasperated, excusing herself.

"Can you get us back to Earth?" Mulder asked CEstallia. He wondered if perhaps the Gate was a doorway.

"Yes, I might be able to," she said, softly.

Leia caught up to Han in the corridor. "Han, you can't go alone," she said, falling into step beside him. She had to almost run because his steps were so much longer than hers. "I want to find Chewie, too. But, we have to know where we're going. As much as I hate to admit it, we should probably bring CEstallia with us."

Han's jaw tightened further. "What's wrong around here?" he asked the air in general. Then he came to a stop and turned to his wife.

"Look, I was there, not...two days ago. The universe doesn't just up and rearrange itself, no matter what cockamamie story the CEstallians or the scientists or whoever come up with. It's there and so is Chewie." Han began walking again, "And I don't need someone's grandma to show me how to use a navicomputer."

"Han," Leia called, frustrated, again forced to run to keep up with him. She didn't like the delay any more than he did, but if there was only half truth to what CEstallia suspected, they'd need to be cautious.

"There's more than Chewie at stake here," she said, trying to make him see her point of view. "From the looks of things this needs to be a two-fold mission."

"What's the other mission?" Han asked. This was the first he'd heard of a possible other assignment. And what could some planet in another galaxy, that they'd only just found out about, have to do with any mission other than handing Chewie over?

reviewing all the places a snooping device might be concealed.

"All right," Han shrugged in feigned nonchalance. "I suppose I am somehow included in this party?"

"Wouldn't be a party without you," Leia smiled at him.

"Remember that," Han grinned back. Then, gestured toward the dock, "I'll get the old girl ready. You get the committee moving?"

Leia nodded and watched him go. That was where Luke found her a few seconds later.

"What is it, Luke?" she asked, knowing immediately that something was wrong.

"I just got a message from the CEstallian system. The children are gone.

Kidnapped, by a ship that sounds a lot like the Hinderer."

end part sixteen

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From: JackeeC <74363.2566@CompuServe.COM>
Newsgroups: alt.tv.x-files.creative
Subject: NEW: XJEDI VOL THREE 17/24
Date: 23 Jan 1996 03:59:26 GMT

XJEDI 17 volume 3

Disclaimer: Many of the characters, okay, the vast majority of the characters used herein are not mine. (well, there's a surprise, considering this IS fan fiction) You guys know the routine and I'm sure I'd like your disclaimer better than mine anyway as I am fresh out of really clever ways to put those oh so lovely words. So...<insert favorite disclaimer here> Now, we're all happy.

<MW> Earth, Pineville, North Carolina

Jenine Ashton puttered around her kitchen cleaning non-existent spots from various surfaces. Her daughter and her family had left hours before, leaving the kitchen spotless. But, Jenine couldn't sit still.

Her husband, Mike, had been missing for three days, three days of fear and uncertainty and need. In all of their twenty-seven years of

where her husband was. Their lives had been orderly, planned. But all that had changed.

Mike had been able to offer no explanation of his disappearance. His memories began when some young men found him wandering near Gastonia. Fortunately, they'd recognized him from a Crime Stoppers Bulletin as a missing person, instead of mistaking him for the drunken vagrant he'd resembled.

Jenine had received a call in the early hours of the morning requesting that she come to Carolinas Medical Center. There she'd found her frightened and disoriented husband. He now occupied himself in his garage office, effectively shutting her out.

Jenine's hands stilled over the coffee pot that she'd begun to relentlessly scrub as she stared out of the bay window. The leaves of the big oak were falling. The colors were brilliant this year and the weather had grown quite brisk over the past few days. Her life and her husband's had changed just as quickly. The world was a different place than the one she'd grown up in, than the one she'd known only three days ago. There was no more safety, no assurances.

A movement among the trees caught her eye, bringing her out of her musings. She frowned and leaned forward for a better view. A man sat on little bench she kept in the back yard. He was dressed in jeans and a trench coat. A mop of dark hair fell over the dark rimmed glasses he wore as he calmly smoked a cigarette.

Suddenly anger rushed up into her chest. What gave this man the right to invade her private property, her personal space? It was bad enough that the press was out front and that she'd had to take the phone off the hook. She would not have them invade her back yard.

Jenine walked determinedly toward the closet shelf, where she'd always kept her dad's old rifle. Stumping toward the back door, she peeked out to see if the man was still there. He was.

She undid the latches and poked the rifle out.

* * * * *

<GFFA>

The Hinderer flew through hyperspace toward its goal. Beneath the ships living outer hull, Jedi children sat in trance. They were aware of their training only while in this state--the leaders preferred it that way, less chance of an uprising.

Samantha sat cross-legged on the floor of her chamber. The very walls

music
played around her; its melodies echoing across her consciousness. Space
music,
the song of time and life itself played and wafted through the larger
consciousness of the living rock as it journeyed to meet its brethren.
The
tones became more insistent as they neared their destination. The songs
called to her, she could do no less than to obey. She remembered her
life
before, now. But it didn't matter, the music was everything. It told her
all
she needed to know.

Benjamin Adams opened his eyes and looked up into steady brown ones
in
a small elfin face. There were a few lines around the small mouth and
stiff
yellow hairs grew behind pointed ears. Ben pushed himself from the floor
in
shock, momentarily at a loss as to his surroundings.

The elfin man stood back and considered him. "Why are you here?"
the
voice creaked, louder than Ben had expected.

Ben stood panting against a control panel, memory returning. He
realized where he was and what he had to do. With a quick straitening
of his jacket, he pulled himself together and headed for an operations
panel. He ignored the elfin man's question. "What's your name?" he asked
instead.

"Sarn is my name," the little man said, turning his head to
track Ben's movements.

Ben punched in a few commands. No response. He wondered if
something had been damaged during the ship's original malfunction
that had allowed it to fall, temporarily anyway, into Rebel hands.

"What happened here? And where are the others?" Ben asked, moving
on to an alternate station.

"They are here," Sarn said.

Ben glanced up. He hadn't seen anyone when he'd first awakened.
Perhaps the little man was a bit senile. There was no one else there.
Ben went back to fussing with the uncooperative control panel. Wait...
Ben's eyes shot back up, they all stood in a loose semi-circle around
him.

He didn't want them to know that he was rattled, so he fixed an
unconcerned gaze on Sarn. "What's wrong with this panel?" he asked.

Sarn gazed back, "There is nothing wrong with the panel.
Perhaps it's your code."

Benjamin doubted that. The codes his father had given him worked
on everything the Emperor had touched. Save one. He allowed Sarn a bit

"What order would you like implemented?" Sarn asked.

"I would like to check our heading," Ben answered.

"Very well," Sarn replied, placing a three finger hand over the panel. Then in a blur of movement he input a manual command code. It happened so quickly and unexpectedly that Ben didn't catch it.

The panel monitor came to life, displaying the Hinderer's programmed coordinates and elapsed time to reach the destination.

"What--," Ben started before he took a closer look at the co-ordinates. "This isn't our course!" he exclaimed.

"Do you suggest that the computer is in error?" Sarn asked, calmly.

That was when Ben realized that the little man was watching him quite intently, as were the others.

Coruscant

"You can stow your things here," Leia directed the small group from Earth. She gestured to an overhead locker in the main bay of the Millennium Falcon. She ducked out of the way so Mulder could undo the overhead latch.

"We'll be leaving in 10 minutes," she informed them.

"Is there anything we can do to help?" Rae asked.

There was a bustle of activity all around them as the ship was loaded with Becter's excess measuring equipment. CEstallia, surprisingly, hadn't objected.

Operators directed floating platforms along at maximum speed. A team of medical specialists consulted and an investigating team, that Scully and Mulder immediately picked out as this galaxy's version of the F.B.I., consulted with Luke and CEstallia. They were bound for the CEstallian system to investigate the children's' apparent abduction.

"Everything is about done, amazingly," Leia said. "Just make yourselves at home." She turned and headed toward the front of the ship, where her husband was doing preflight checks.

Mulder grinned when he saw Artoo roll into the room alongside Threepio, just as Leia was departing. He'd developed a liking for the little droid, even though, most of the time, he didn't have a clue what the thing was saying. He couldn't read Basic any more than he could speak it. But, he had learned to decipher a few of Artoo's simplest comments. Such as his greeting, which he gave as soon as he entered the room.

the little droid. She was, after all, the one who'd been shocked by him.

"Hi there, little buddy, who's your friend?" Mulder asked Artoo, glancing at the golden droid curiously.

"I am See-Threepio," the golden droid replied primly, in English. "I am fluent in over six-million forms of communication. How may I be of service?"

"Do I get three wishes?" Mulder asked.

Threepio's backlit eyes appeared to blink and he tilted his golden head to one side. "Three wishes? I'm afraid I'm not familiar with that particular phrase. Please clarify."

Mulder chuckled, "Never mind. I'm Fox Mulder and this is Dana Scully and Rae Manning," Mulder gestured to each woman in turn, who nodded at the droid. "Looks like we're all along for the ride."

"I am pleased to meet all of you," Threepio responded. "I found it fascinating the way in which you happened to meet Master Solo. Do you mind if I retell it in future?"

All three of the humans, surprised by the question, glanced at each other. "No, not at all," Mulder answered.

"So, you keep history, then?" Scully asked.

Artoo made a warbled comment that didn't sound very complimentary. Scully glanced in his direction and then back to Threepio, who was by then looking offended. Or as offended as a metal faced droid could possibly look.

"Forgive my counterpart," Threepio said apologetically. "His manners programming is not as advanced as my own."

"As for my keeping history," Threepio continued. "I am not an archival droid. But, I do have limitless storage capability. I enjoy sharing the experiences of those around me. For example, would you like to hear the story of how Master Solo and Mistress Leia met? It is a very exciting tale..."

* * * * *

Luke and CEstallia occupied the cockpit of the Falcon along with Han and Leia. Luke had thought she'd want to ride with him in the V-Eiker, but, she'd insisted they all ride in the Falcon.

Following the Falcon were a large carrier, a Calamarian Cruiser with a full complement and Gien Becter in a small science vessel, which would fit into the carrier if need be.

While the larger ship's assignment centered on surveillance of the Earth and backup for the Falcon if it became necessary, Becter was along to study the effects of passing through Han's co-ordinates

Both ships were present at the request of Mon Mothma. Because, even though CEstallia had insisted that the equipment would not measure anything, she *had* said she knew of a way to reach Earth. That along with the fact that she'd been cagey on the particulars of just how they'd get there aside from using Han's co-ordinates, had given Mon Mothma cause to be extremely cautious. Mon Mothma also hadn't forgotten that the person who'd infiltrated the heart of the New Republic's Capital to steal the Hinderer was from Earth as well. So, in exchange for New Republic assistance, CEstallia had been forced to allow the other two ships along.

The three ships had now been in hyperspace for an hour. It was time for the first inter-ship communication.

When Han Solo entered the main cargo bay of the Falcon, Threepio was in the middle of one of his stories. "Put a plug in it, Goldenrod," he said. "Time for the first link."

Leia, Luke and CEstallia followed him into the bay. Han activated a switch on the rear control panel. "All right," he began. "Is everyone receiving?"

"Receiving Falcon," a voice from the Cruiser said.

"I'm here, as well," Bexter spoke up.

"Good." Han turned to Leia. This mission was her baby. He was here to get Chewie. The bits of information he'd gathered hadn't been much to go on. But the tenseness in his wife's shoulders told him that this wasn't going to be any ordinary mission. Then and the fact that a Calamarian Cruiser, armed to the teeth was overall to rescue a Wookiee.

"As I'm sure everyone is aware, we reach our destination in approximately 10 hours. Until that time, I suggest everyone get some rest. Once there, we'll have some idea of what we're up against. We'll have our next communication in precisely 9 hours. Falcon out."

Han shut off the inter-ship link and turned to his wife. "So what's the plan?" he asked her.

Leia turned toward Mulder, Scully and Rae. "Is there anything you can tell us? Perhaps give us some idea of what may lie ahead? The Falcon's data suggests there was no resistance to its entry into the planet's atmosphere."

"There's usually an electronic surveillance net," Mulder said. "I suspect there was a window--"

Scully grabbed one of his arms to silence him. "Excuse me," she said. Then, turning to her partner, "Mulder, do you mind if I talk to you privately for a minute."

Leia nodded, understanding. She'd known it was a fine line she had been walking. She was asking questions that could possibly be viewed as a threat to their home world. "You can talk in here," she gestured through a doorway.

the closet from their initial visit to the Falcon. Had it only been 2 days ago?

Pushing those thoughts aside, she turned on her partner. "Mulder what do you think you're doing?" she questioned.

Mulder looked slightly baffled. "What do you mean? I'm trying to get you and Rae home and help Han get Chewie back."

"Mulder, don't you realize that you could be jeopardizing national security--hell, planetary security, by giving them any information concerning Earth's alert status. There's no way you can know whose hands any information you turn over will end up in," Scully answered, hands on hips.

"Do you think that if some hostile enemy intent on flying across the galaxy to attack Earth would just stay home because he doesn't know that we have a surveillance net? Earth in essence has zero resistance to invaders. The best we could do is see them coming," Mulder replied, staring down at his partner. He liked the braids. This would be his memory of her.

"Mulder, on principle alone, this is wrong."

Mulder sighed, "Scully, think about it. There had to be an open window for whoever flew in just before Han. And I suspect that the window just happened to still be open when Han flew in."

Scully frowned. "But, that would imply government co-operation with whoever took Benjamin Adams from Earth and possibly even with the theft of the ship and the kidnapping of the children." She began to realize where this was heading. "Mulder, surely you don't think..."

Mulder looked steadily back at her, finishing her statement, "That Sam may be here? Yes, I think I'm going to find her here in this galaxy. But, first I have to make sure you and Rae get home."

"But Mulder, you have no access in this galaxy. No home. What if you're wrong?" Scully argued, softly now.

As Mulder looked down at her, a calmness spread over him. He suddenly felt absolutely sure. "I know she's here, Scully. I can feel it."

Scully resignedly let her hands drop to her sides. This was an argument she couldn't win. If Mulder thought Samantha was here, there was no way she could get him to go home with her. But, as long as he was still a federal agent she couldn't let him violate his sworn oath.

"Mulder, you still can't tell them about Earth security," she said. "You made a sworn oath."

Mulder sighed, "Scully, this is one ship. The military actually has a chance of shooting us down. Now, I don't want that to happen." His eyes held hers for a moment. "Do you?"

Scully held his gaze for a few seconds and then looked away with a wry twist of her lips. "You're forgetting something, Mulder,"

them is armed to the teeth."

Mulder grinned slightly. But, it was not a grin of humor. "Yeah, well, call me paranoid, but, somehow I don't think either of the other ships are going to make it to Earth."

* * * * *

<MW> Eacch, Pineville, North Carolina

Walter Skinner felt like himself again. He'd purchased attire more suited for the Assistant Director of the F.B.I. Then he'd checked into a hotel and showered and changed.

He glanced at his watch before straightening his tie in the mirror. Eleven A.M. The press would probably be dying down about now, or at least going for lunch. He hadn't been able to get through to the Ashton's by phone, since their line was constantly busy. Which meant it was probably off the hook.

At least the hotel wasn't far from the Ashton home. He'd try Agents Scully and Mulder's cellular once more and then he'd gather his mysterious passenger and be on his way.

* * * * *

Jenine stepped out into the chill air of mid morning, keeping her eyes, and the gun, trained on the man on the bench. Her soft-soled shoes made little crunching sounds on the leaves but the man didn't seem to notice.

She paused. He seemed so far away. The cigarette hung suspended halfway to his lips. He seemed to come to himself as he brought the cigarette fully to his lips and drew on it. There was something vaguely familiar to his movements. She lowered the gun. "Geoff...?" she called softly. "Geoff Reenes, is that you?"

The man turned dark half-focused eyes on her. "Jenine," he said, as if suddenly remembering her name. "He's back, isn't he?"

Jenine nodded, letting the gun fall completely to her side. It didn't appear to matter to Geoff, he hadn't noticed it. On closer inspection, she saw that his hands were shaking.

She reached a hand toward him and touched an arm, "Why don't you come into the house with me. It's cold out here." She was beginning to worry. Geoff and Mike had worked together at Acme, but then Geoff had been transferred to another department. She had met both he and Judith at the company picnic years earlier, but they had never been close.

Geoff turned and continued to stare off into the distance as he had been when she'd come out. "No," he shook his head. "It's safer out here. No listening ears." He drew on the cigarette again.

"All right," Jenine said. "Would you like me to get Mike, he's in his office." She was beginning to feel uncomfortable. And Geoff

"No," Geoff said. "I've been waiting for you. I need to talk to someone and you're the only one who'll understand."

Jenine raised delicate eyebrows. "Understand what, Geoff?" she asked. "You know I don't know anything about you and Mike's work. He doesn't talk to me about it, you know."

"I quit Acme. A month ago. But, that wasn't good enough for them." Geoff's expression never changed. His voice remained toneless.

Jenine had no idea what Geoff was talking about. And she was getting chilly. "Geoff, just let me go back inside for a moment, I'll be right back."

Geoff's reaction was immediate and violent. "No!" he exclaimed vehemently, grabbing her arm. "Sit down and talk to me!"

Jenine's eyes widened in surprise. No one talked to her that way, ever. Her eyes began to tear up. But she sat on the matching stone chair that sat to one side of the bench. The rifle lay forgotten across her lap.

"Have you been watching the news lately, Jenine?" Geoff asked, again calmly smoking his, now, nearly gone cigarette.

Jenine shook her head uncertainly, "No. I never watch the news, it depresses me. Mike doesn't watch, either, he has his work, you know."

Geoff didn't seem to really hear her answer, he just continued on with his story as if her responses didn't matter anyway. "My Judy, they took her. She was gone for three days, just like your Mike. When she came back...she was different. They changed her. So, I decided to burn the place." Geoff actually grinned as he looked at the glowing tip of the cigarette. Then his mouth twisted disdainfully, "But, someone beat me to it."

Jenine sat stunned. She hadn't known about Judy. No one had told her. But then, no one would. She was too fragile, they would say. As she sat and looked at Geoffrey Reenes' private purgatory, she wondered if perhaps Geoff was the fragile one of the two.

Her heart went out to the man, she ached at the pain she knew he must have felt while his Judy was missing.

She remembered her own anger, vividly now. She'd wanted to strike out at someone. When Mike retreated to his work for solace, she'd felt the bitter ache of rejection. She wondered if Judy had done that, too. "Did she shut you out?" she asked.

Geoff blinked in surprise and looked at her. "Yes," he said. "How did--," Then he nodded, realization sinking in. "Of course," he said. "Of course."

In an unusually precise manner, Geoff stubbed out his cigarette against the stone bench. Normally, Jenine would have cringed at that, but today she didn't. She just waited.

"I can talk to you. I knew, you'd be a good choice. You'll understand the things that I have to tell someone. The things I saw at Acme."

Jenine nodded and listened. She didn't know what to expect. But for once, she wanted the straight, undiluted truth.

* * * *

Skinner pulled the car onto Pineville-Matthews Drive. The neighborhood was made up of large homes on equally large tracts of land. Each home was given a measure of privacy by the extensive wooded area that paralleled the street to the rear.

He found the Ashton home easily. One news vehicle was parked at the corner. No other vehicles were present. His passenger scanned the street just as he had, and apparently came to the same conclusion.

"I'll make sure this doesn't turn into a photo-op," the bearded man said, as he got out of the car and headed toward the van. Skinner almost smiled at the remark. He wasn't sure he wanted to know how that feat was going to be accomplished.

When the bearded man signaled him from the van, Skinner got out of the car and headed toward the front door. He was careful not to look in the direction of the van. When no one answered the door, he wandered around the side of the house. A five foot, white wooden fence separated the front and back yards.

Skinner peeped over the top of the fence, scanning the back yard. A movement among the trees caught his eye. A woman and a man sat on a bench. Skinner squinted, readjusting his glasses to be sure of what he was seeing. The woman had a rifle on her lap.

The adrenaline immediately kicked in as he pulled his gun surreptitiously from the waistband of his trousers. The fence barely creaked as he undid the latch and pushed it open. The woman seemed to be intent on what the man was saying.

Skinner flattened himself to the side of the house, slowly inching forward. The large backyard would not make it easy for him to get much closer as there was easily fifteen yards between him and his target.

He silently counted down to three.

* * * *

Mandy sat in front of her monitor staring at the email she was about to send. She was hoping that when the enormity of what she was contemplating hit home, she'd be either in jail or freaking cause she actually pulled it off. Without allowing herself any further thought she clicked on the 'send' button. The monitor flickered briefly before 'message sent' flashed across her screen.

work. But at least she'd have told someone her plan in case worse came to worse.

Her eyes went to the clock over her computer table. It was getting pretty close to lunch time at the clinic. For some odd reason, people tended to visit their not-quite-there relatives on weekends around lunch time, making these the busiest times of the week.

Mandy pushed that fact aside as a puzzle to ponder another day. Rescuing Big Foot was urgent. A feeling in Mandy's gut told her that if she didn't get Big Foot out now, she wouldn't have another chance. Quickly placing her uniform in a carry on, she set out for the clinic.

Alpha Point Station

One sat at the crude table in the building at the city's center. There was only one city in this ball they had been given to survive on, so there had been no point in naming it.

The table sat at the front of a very long room. Others gathered at the table with One. He raised his dark eyes to encompass the group that sat there.

"There is no turning back from the course we are now on," he began. "We must strike a deal with our new friends from the Earth galaxy. I've called to them. The evacuation will begin as soon as they arrive. Is this understood?"

Omak, one of the elder members, spoke up, "One, I have always trusted your insight, but you read too much into this situation with the Hinderer. We have all felt that she is on her way back to us, with the merchandise intact. There is no more danger. Our mission can continue as planned."

"Omak, you are short-sighted and over-anxious. I tell you there will be trouble. Trouble that our small army is not prepared for. The last time we struck too soon, I will not repeat that mistake."

One stared evenly at Omak as he spoke. Omak had challenged his leadership more and more frequently of late. It would soon be time to put a stop to it. One was true leader, hence his title.

"Domar," Omak said, deliberately using One's name rather than his title. "Our objective is to have what is ours. Going willingly into the galaxy of the others may lead to a trap, one we may not be able to escape so easily."

One did not flinch at Omak's deliberate slight. "Someday Omak, your arrogance will be your downfall," he said softly. "You must take care to be careful in future."

Omak bowed his head slightly in mocking tribute to the warning. A thin smile spread his mouth, but he said nothing. An outright

threat to One would not be prudent, especially now. But later...

"Who is with me?" One called out before the group.

The men looked among themselves considering this step. The plans they had so carefully laid were now on the line. The children were their key. Going with those 'others' from the Earth galaxy would mean new masters not just one as in the case of the son of Palpatine.

One calmly looked on. He knew they would side with him regardless of their personal feelings, they had no choice. His resolutions were always unanimous. Eventually.

<MW> Earth, Somewhere on the East Coast.

"Knock Knock...uh, you've got new mail," followed by the laughter of Beavis and Butthead erupted from the previously silent computer in the corner of a dim room.

A male figure crossed the room and sat before the monitor. He clicked on the 'new mail' icon. The screen blossomed to show the contents of the electronic message.

He quickly scanned the contents excitedly, then turned to his companions working in other parts of the dim room. "Hey, remember 'Spy chic without bounds','" he called, using her signature.

Frohike raised his head from a schematic that looked suspiciously like the blue prints for the pentagon. "Yeah," he said. "What's she up to these days? Any more HAIRY patients?"

"Same hairy patient. And you're just upset that she likes me better," Langly said.

"Why would I be upset? I have the woman of my dreams AND she has a license to kill," Frohike returned, going back to tracing lines on his blueprint.

Byers turned from his own monitor, "What did she say this time?" he asked. Something had gotten his buddy excited.

Langly grinned. "She says that today's the day she's gonna break Big Foot out of confinement. There's just a little something she wants me to do to help her plan along."

That got the complete attention of both men.

end part seventeen.

=====
=====
From: JmkeeC <74363.2566@CompuServe.COM>
Newsgroups: alt.tv.x-files.creative
Subject: RE: XJEDI VOL THREE 18/24
Date: 23 Jan 1996 04:01:04 GMT

Disclaimer: Still in force. Just pick one. Pick a disclaimer...any disclaimer...

Authors note: In case everyone is wondering how Skinner got his gun to Charlotte since he flew: He did it the same way Scully and Mulder do it.

It's classified and if I tell you.... That is to say, I have no idea. Good old F.B.I. magic. I mean, they stopped me cause of my buttons...

Now on with the story...

XJEDI part 18 volume 3

The Clinic

Mandy sat in the driver's seat of her father's custom Dodge van waiting for her turn at the entrance gate. The van was her father's favorite show piece, containing every conceivable and unnecessary convenience imaginable. Mandy hated the thing. But, the chances that Big Foot would fit into her Accord were slim to none.

The line edged forward. Mandy watched as a Ford Taurus ahead of her pulled up to the gate. And then it was her turn.

Don Goodman was at the gate today. Expecting that, Mandy gave him a brilliant smile. "Hi, Don," she said sweetly after she'd let the electric window down. "Busy day, I see."

"Yeah," Don grinned, setting his hat back on his graying head. "What you doing here so early, gal?" he asked, his native Carolinian accent coming out. His eyes wandered to the two cars behind the van, then dismissed them. They could wait.

"Oh, I just had to get something I left the other night, is all. Besides, I need to talk to Jimmy."

Don made an Ohh with his mouth and nodded his head. "He hasn't been bothering you has he?" he asked, cocking an eye as if the idea had suddenly occurred to him. Mandy knew different. Don didn't like Jimmy's 'type', as he called it.

Mandy shook her head, "No Don, nothing like that. I

"listen, I'll talk to you later, okay?"

Don grinned and nodded, waving her on.

Mandy waved and pulled the van into the lot proper. She heaved a sigh of relief. The easy part was over.

Pineville, North Carolina

"F.B.I. Drop your weapon!" Walter Skinner shouted, gun at the ready. His gaze didn't waver as the petite woman looked up in shock, allowing the weapon to slip to the ground. When she saw Skinner's gun her hands shot skyward.

Skinner's eyes flicked to the man who sat looking calmly in his direction. He quickly dismissed the woman as a threat, the man was the one to worry about.

Keeping his eyes on the man, Skinner directed the woman to slowly pick up the weapon.

She complied, bending over to carefully pick up the rifle. Skinner's eyes flickered to her to track her movements. In that moment while Jenine was looking down at the rifle, Geoff made his move. In a quick movement, he kicked the rifle away and grabbed Jenine roughly to him.

Skinner cursed himself for not seeing this coming. He reaimed the gun at the unsteady man, now, with hostage. He could see he had one arm around the woman's neck, but the other was behind the woman's back. He couldn't be sure what type of weapon he held there.

"I'm not afraid of you or your kind," the man whispered. "I've got nothing to lose."

Skinner looked at the man's eyes. He didn't seem exactly all there. "You don't have any reason to be afraid of me as long as you don't hurt anyone," Skinner said. "Why don't you let her go and then you and I can talk about it."

The man shook his head. "I trusted your kind once and look where it got me."

Skinner fought a grimace, aiming at careful neutrality. "Why don't you tell me about it?" he asked.

The man eyed Skinner a moment before speaking again. "Not until you tell *me* what *you're* doing here. If I like your answer, then maybe I'll answer your question."

"I wanted to have a word with Mr. Ashton or perhaps his wife," Skinner answered.

Geoff laughed at that. "And here I thought you wanted

a second chance."

Skinner sighed. What difference did it make? "I'm looking for some people. They've been missing for a couple of days, a man and two women."

Geoff's face clouded for a second. "Really?" he asked, loosening his hold on Jenine.

Skinner couldn't believe what he was hearing. "Yes, really," he replied, not one to give up on a good thing.

"Was the guy tall, dark hair and one of the women red-headed and the other one black with long hair?"

"Have you seen them?" Skinner asked.

The man looked down at the woman he had held. "I'm sorry I had to do that to you, Jenine," he said. "I didn't know what he was about." He released his grip, revealing no weapon in the now, obviously empty hand.

Jenine stepped cautiously away from him, but not sure whether she should go toward the man with the gun, either. She hovered somewhere in between looking warily one to the other.

"The rifle," Skinner gestured to the weapon.

"I--it's not loaded," Jenine assured him, nervously. "And it wouldn't shoot if it was." But she did go and pick the gun up and offer it to him.

Skinner took it just the same. He had enough problems.

"I'm Geoff Reenes," Geoff introduced himself to Skinner. "I used to work at Acme. I knew Rae, and I know she couldn't have done anything. I was frankly surprised when I saw her with those two."

"Do you have any idea where they are now?" Skinner asked.

"Man, that's a long story," Geoff said. "Can we go somewhere and talk? I could *really* go for a cappuccino."

The Clinic

Mandy had parked the van in the side lot reserved for the executive staff. Since they didn't work weekends, the spaces were now open to visitors.

She slipped in behind a family of four that she didn't remember ever seeing before. Hopefully, they wouldn't remember seeing her, either.

The family strolled ahead of her along the carpeted halls of the 'family wing', where the more stable clients

recognition of others.

Most of the patients were family of ambassadors and government officials wishing to bury knowledge of an 'unflattering' relation. Thus, most of them officially bore blazingly unrealistic names. There were an awful lot of Smiths.

Mandy used her computerized I.D./entry card to exit the wing into the 'employees only area'. In the medical wing, she spoke to the people she knew who worked days and in general acted as if nothing were up. While, in reality she was taking the lay of the land.

Her next objective was to find Jimmy, but not yet, she had some time to kill until lunch was over. Good thing she'd brought her laptop....

<GFFA> Deep space

The Falcon was quiet except for the humming and ticking of the ships automated systems, now that the humans were all in separate areas resting.

Fox Mulder was sacked out in the main cargo bay on a bunk near a corner of the room, and Rae was in the opposite corner, napping as well. Han and Leia had made themselves scarce in some other area of the ship and the droids were off recharging and otherwise doing droid things.

Dana Scully sat alone awake on her bunk. Her gaze wandered over her partner, who'd fallen asleep almost immediately, stretched out fifteen feet away. She was still furious with him for telling Earth's secrets, but she did understand his reasons. She'd forgive him tomorrow...maybe.

She felt remarkably well rested, not having slept as well as she had the night before in recent memory. Thus, now she couldn't fall asleep as everyone seemed to have done. Thoughts of sleep brought back to mind some of what had occurred the previous night.

She'd remembered seeing Benjamin Adams in the hallway, but the thought had been somewhat disconnected and she hadn't had time to contemplate it till now. A vivid memory of being tossed into a wall rushed into her mind. Dana shook her head to clear it. From where had that come? It wasn't so much that it had been buried, just that she hadn't thought about it.

The next thing she'd remembered was waking up in her bed, feeling good. Had she simply dreamed that Benjamin had attacked her? She knew he'd stolen the ship. Had she simply dreamed of him due to some strange anomaly before she gained that information?

Dana gradually became aware that someone other than her companions from Earth were in the room. She looked up and saw Luke standing in the doorway. She thought again of his charisma, but she couldn't believe it was due to some strange force.

Luke's face spread into a smile, as he caught her looking at him. "Hello," he whispered. "I didn't want to disturb you, since you seemed so deep in thought."

Dana returned his smile with one of her own. "You're not disturbing me," she said. "It was getting pretty quiet with everyone asleep, anyway. And for some reason, I don't feel the least bit sleepy."

A slight frown crossed Luke's face as he reached out and touched the right side of her head. "How's your head feeling?" he asked. His fingers sifted through her hair gently to the place where her head had hit the wall. Her hair flowed in a gentle wave from the braids that she'd taken out for lack of anything better to do.

Scully had been shocked when he'd put his fingers in her hair. If he had been anyone else, she might have caught him with a judo cut to the solar plexus. But, she restrained herself. She was curious about Luke. Curious as to what he would do. She completely missed his question.

"Excuse me?" she said, hiding her embarrassment.

Luke smiled slightly, "I said: How's your head feeling?"

"Oh," she grinned, "fine. How else should it feel?"

Luke let his hand drop almost reluctantly from the red waves. He had to maintain his focus here. "I thought your memory would be intact. Don't you remember what happened last night?" It was worrisome if she didn't, because his probe of her injuries might have caused some damage that he hadn't been aware of at the time.

Dana looked at him in dread. "Uh...I'm not sure," she said sheepishly, dropping her gaze. She wondered at what she could possibly have done with this man last night that would prompt him to ask how her head was feeling?

Luke sensed her embarrassment, but not the reason behind it. "Dana, it's really important to me." he said, catching her eyes. "Do you remember anything at all about what happened with Benjamin Adams?"

Dana closed her eyes and sighed as realization dawned. She didn't know whether to be relieved or disappointed. "I think I had a dream," she said.

"Tell me about it."

Dana's eyes went unfocused as she went back in her mind's eye to the night before. She began to speak softly, telling Luke what she remembered.

grinned wryly, "that Mulder was in trouble again. I went out into the corridor and that's when I ran into Benjamin Adams." A frown creased her brow. "We struggled and then I remember he got really angry..." her voice trailed off. "I thought it was just a dream."

"It wasn't a dream," Luke said, watching her intently. He noticed that she hadn't addressed the fact that Benjamin Adams had used the force on her, throwing her against that wall. She'd as good as said she didn't believe in it, but he needed to know if she remembered everything.

"Do you remember anything else?" he asked.

"Not much more, no," Dana replied, no longer meeting his gaze.

Luke decided to let her off the hook. "Well, I'm glad you're feeling better." He touched one of her hands as he prepared to leave.

"Wait," Dana said. "There is something I'm curious about."

"What's that?" Luke asked.

"How did I end up back in my room in bed?" That was as close as Dana would come to admitting anything out of the ordinary had happened.

Luke looked thoughtfully toward Mulder still form before answering.

"He carried you there," he said and then he was gone.

Dana Scully watched as he walked out the door. She twisted a lip as she pondered what Luke had said earlier. The force *was* an extreme possibility. But, was it possible for such a thing to exist--everywhere?

"He healed you, you know," Mulder said from his bunk, eyes closed.

"What?" Scully turned toward her partner, wide-eyed. She wondered how much of her conversation with Luke he'd heard.

"Luke healed you," Mulder repeated as he opened his eyes and rolled over to face her. "You had a concussion or worse from what Benjamin Adams did to you. But, Luke did something and then you were okay. Just sleeping.
I put you to bed while he went off to tangle with our friend Adams."

Dana felt herself blushing and fought it furiously. In the end she simply ducked her head down.

"Well, obviously he didn't catch him," she said.

"I think he likes you," Mulder surprised her by saying.

Her eyes rose to meet his. It was all there for him to see, no matter how she tried to hide it. He decided it was best not to add that he already knew how she felt. He wasn't sure her ego could take it just then.

"What's not to like?" Scully managed after a few seconds.

"What, indeed," Mulder chuckled. "Now let me get some sleep, woman."

KMW> Carolina Place Mall

Walter Skinner sat across the table from Geoff Reenes. The two of them had taken a taxi to a local mall and now sat in the Cupa Cabana, a gourmet coffee shop. The mall was decorated in an excessive amount of pale green and pink, which studies had suggested had a calming affect on humans. But this fact only seemed to add to Skinner's irritation.

"This is good stuff," Geoff said as he bit into another sticky bun.

"Yeah, good stuff," Skinner replied, heavy on the sarcasm. He leveled Geoff one of his patented I-can-freeze-you-with-my-eyes looks. But, Geoff was completely unaffected.

Skinner glanced at his watch, it was nearing two and he had yet to get anything useful out of this man.

"Mr. Reenes," Skinner began through clenched teeth. "My time might be better spent--"

Geoff raised a hand to halt his words. "No, no," he said, taking a final gulp from his mug of Double Cinnamon Caravan with X-tra sugar. "I'm ready to talk. I just couldn't do it on an empty stomach."

Skinner sighed heavily, pinched the bridge of nose. A remembered phrase from a commercial he'd once seen came to mind. 'I've got a headache *this* big and it's got Exedrin written all over it'. Except Skinner substituted a colorful metaphor or two and the name of Geoff Reenes. Who, for his part, sat back, made a few contented groans and began his story.

The Clinic

Mandy finally found Jimmy. If her calculations were correct all of the noonday meals should have been delivered and the dishes taken away.

So he should have been done with mealtime escort duty.

Jimmy was handling security near the records office. Even though no one worked there on weekends, there was always the press trying to get in and find out who was REALLY who around here.

Jimmy's entire face brightened when he saw her. "Mandy!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, Jimmy, hi," she said, feelings of guilt poked at her conscience over what she was about to do. Even though Jimmy would probably not get into trouble, he would be questioned. But, she hadn't been able to come up with anything else.

Jimmy took in Mandy's downcast expression, which hadn't been difficult for her to put on under the circumstances. "What's wrong?" he asked her.

Mandy glanced up at him sheepishly. "I guess I just need a hug," she said.

He drew her into his arms without hesitation. Mandy had always loved being in his arms.

It was hard to remember just why they'd broken up at times like these. She let him hold her for a few seconds before she began methodically running her hands up and down his back. Then she pulled away.

Jimmy's hands slid up to her shoulders and remained there.

"Thanks, Jimmy," she said gratefully as she lowered her hands to his waist. She continued to hold his gaze though, knowing that what would follow was inevitable. They had, to date, never been able to look into one another's eyes without this eventuality.

Jimmy bent his head and kissed her. She barely had time to remove his security badge before he crushed her body to his. She slid the badge up the sleeve of her sweater and then allowed herself to enjoy the kiss.

Carolina Place Mall

Walter Skinner strided dazedly from the mall the way he'd entered hours earlier with Geoff Reenes. He'd only stood at the corner for a few seconds when the green rental pulled up before him.

His bearded friend looked over at him from drivers seat. "I presume he was helpful?"

Skinner glared furiously at him. "Not very, but I want to check his story anyway before it gets too dark."

Mr. X raised an eyebrow slightly. "Where to?"

"Back to Acme."

The Clinic

Mandy managed to remove herself from Jimmy before things became more serious. He wouldn't need his badge until his shift ended at three. That was when hers was due to begin. She darted into the woman's locker room to change into her uniform. She hoped her email pal would do as he'd promised. If he did he was due in exactly fifteen minutes. By then she needed to have Big Foot out of the ward.

When she'd managed to pull into her uniform, she crammed her bag into her locker and headed out toward the ward.

A quick glance at her watch told her it was 2:35. Five minutes until the threat was due. When she passed the break room, Gennie Ann cornered her.

"I thought you and Jimmy broke up," she whispered, accusation heavy in her voice.

Mandy, desperate to be on her way, couldn't make any sense of what Gennie had said. "What are you talking about, Gee Ann?" she asked, with a distracted glance at her watch. 2:35

"I saw you and Jimmy in the hall," Gennie said, her voice rising.

Mandy's heart plummeted to the floor. She'd thought the hall had been deserted. She suddenly began to feel a little faint.

"Gee, what exactly is it to you?" Mandy asked breathing more heavily, hands shaking, now. She stuffed them into her pockets where her left one grabbed around Jimmy's stolen security badge.

Gennie's eyes narrowed before she sighed, releasing her anger. "I think we were about to start seeing each other, but I know he's still got a thing for you."

Mandy sighed in relief. "Oh Gee Ann," her voice wavered. "I'm so sorry, he's all yours." With that she hurried off down the hall, leaving a very confused Gennie Ann to walk back into the break room.

When she reached the corridor near the ward her watch read 2:39. The door guard was Derek Gregory. She smiled as she walked by.

Brunswick's office was around the corner from the ward for the criminally insane. On Saturday's he didn't usually even see the inside of his office, preferring to spend it in the family meeting area's to welcome the more affluent families.

Mandy's heart felt as if it would jump right out of her chest as she scanned Jimmy's card to open the door. A security override was a

the bomb threat, now, to worry about an override in Brunswick's office. In case they weren't she'd have to hurry. She left the door slightly ajar.

When she again approached the ward, Derek was gone, undoubtedly due to the bomb threat she was now sure of. The beating of her heart thundered ever louder in her ears as she slid Jimmy's card down the slot.

The door clicked open obediently.

She ran down the hall toward John Doe 2's room. This door also opened obediently.

Big Foot looked up at her with glazed brown eyes. Her heart melted, they must really have sedated him this time. Which on consideration might work in her favor, since this might make it easier to lead him out.

Before she could change her mind, she grabbed a hairy forearm and pulled. He didn't budge.

"Come on, you big Oaf!" she yelled, adrenaline making her dizzy. The brown eyes stared back at her. Somewhat what she was trying to do must have seeped in because he slowly stood.

"Thank you..." Mandy's voice faded as he looked up at him. He was TALL! Her head was in the vicinity of his belly button, if he had one, that was. She pushed that thought aside and pulled him out of the room. He hit his head on the way out, not reacting fast enough to duck.

Mandy forced herself to patiently help him duck before dragging him down the hall. It was only a matter of time before an alarm would go off.

They'd entered Brunswick's office when she heard the intercom.
"This
is Dr. Brunswick speaking, who's in my office?"

Mandy froze.

"Stay where you are," the voice commanded. "Security is on the way."

Brunswick's office had an exit door which only opened from the inside.

Mandy used it. She didn't have time to see if anyone was coming before she dragged her new 'friend' to the van.

He growled weakly when she pushed him in, but he went. She locked the door and slid it shut.

Quickly, she pulled a sweater on over her uniform and a hat over her head. Then she pulled the van from the lot and onto the street.

It was 2:47.

Charlotte North Carolina

Walter Skinner looked into the woods that meandered along the backside of Acme's property. As best he could tell, there was a three foot drop to the forest floor and he'd just purchased this overcoat and shirt. Reenes had better have told the truth.

He looked over his shoulder at the bearded man. "Now or never," he said and jumped over the side. He had only gone several yards when something white to the right caught his eye. He fought through some broken branches to retrieve it. It was a small folded piece of paper.

He blinked in amazement when he recognized it. A phone number was hastily scrawled across the slip along with an eloquently stated description of Agent Scully's eyes.

"What is it?" the bearded man asked as he approached.

"Just some trash," Skinner said as he slid the slip of paper into his pants' pocket. He mused over what had just occurred. If Reenes had told the truth about his agents' and Ms. Manning having been here could he also have told the truth about the spaceship and the Sasquatch? Skinner wondered.

end part eighteen.

From: JackeeC <74363.2566@CompuServe.COM>
Newsgroups: alt.tv.x-files.creative
Subject: NEW: XJEDI VOL FOUR!!!! 19/24
Date: 23 Jan 1996 04:02:31 GMT

Disclaimer: Umm....these folks belong to CC, LucasArts...ah...10/13 and Fox or a curious mixture thereof. There, consider yourself disclaimed.

XJEDI part 19 Volume 4 (sorry, I know I promised 2, and then 3, well....I got a little carried away.)

Alpha Point Base

The large round disk of the Ka'dim ship settled into atmosphere at Alpha Point Station, gleaming white lights flashed in all directions. Aside from the ship's lights, the rest of Alpha Point was shrouded in deep shadow, Dark, like its inhabitants.

One stood within the central light, beneath the bottom center of the ship, and communed with the ship's Supreme

The Ka'dim had visited Earth many times and were familiar with the Son of Palpatine. They too had once made a deal with him. Now, the ship's Supreme Commander felt it necessary to make a deal with the ones they referred to as 'Exiles'. The Son of Palpatine had made one too many enemies of late.

When One signaled that the loading should begin, the ship glided silently away from One toward a large group of humans who gazed with unnatural calm at the vessel.

Suddenly a deep vibration rumbled through the surface of Alpha point and a soft whine began. The brilliant lights beneath the vessel began to widen as the rumble grew ever deeper. Then, it was gone. And so were the majority of the humans. The Ka'dim had chosen. Several thin-limbed Ka'dim stood alongside the remaining humans.

One nodded his head in agreement. The Ka'dim had chosen the stronger of the Jedi trainees as the first to leave this station. In exchange, a few of the Ka'dim would remain and One and a few other 'Exiles' would leave on the first run. They had wanted *her*, the young woman that gathered the children. But, she was not here and neither were the children. Another would have to be chosen for future gatherings. One's hand-picked group gathered around him, in expectation of the journey.

One reached out through the force and communed again with the Supreme Commander to inform them that he and his group were ready. But, to his surprise, the Ka'dim Commander did not comply with his wishes. Instead the lights chose several other 'Exiles', Omak among them.

One looked in stunned surprise toward Omak, the baleful grin stirred great anger within him. Anger that he could not afford to release at this time. Politely, he bowed his head in acquiescence. There would be time later, he would make sure of it. One plotted his revenge even as the Ka'dim vessel made its way back toward the channel that lead to the Earth galaxy.

East Coast, United States

"Yes?" a man's voice spoke softly into the telephone. A still smoking cigarette was held lightly between the fingers of one hand.

"Are you certain?" the voice requested, suddenly 100 degrees chillier. "Began the retrieval process, I have something of my own to check into."

The man returned the phone to its cradle and looked at the gray haired man seated across the desk from him. "I'd like to finish this conversation later, if I may. I have something I need to attend to."

The gray haired man nodded and left the room without a word.

Charlotte, North Carolina

While Walter Skinner stood in the woods pondering, the skies had darkened, night was falling. He looked up and gazed through the trees before turning to his companion, "There isn't much more we can do out here in the dark. Let's go get some sleep."

The bearded man nodded in agreement. "You're probably right," he said.

A soft chirp made itself heard as they turned to leave. They both moved to check their cell phones before they found that it was Skinner's.

<GFFA> Millennium Falcon

Han Solo stood against the entry door of his and Leia's private quarters and watched his wife braid her hair. He liked to watch the way her fingers deftly intertwined the rich brown strands. This was far more interesting than watching the droids do it.

"Sometimes I wonder if I shouldn't get it cut," Leia said as she paused to rest her arms. *She* much preferred having the droids do it.

"I thought long hair was traditional for Alderaanians?" Han replied noncommittally. He liked her hair the way it was. But if she wanted to get it cut, it was her decision. But, he didn't have to like it.

"What do you think if I got it cut to about here?" She indicated a point just below her shoulder.

Han shrugged and suddenly became very busy with the rooms temperature controls.

Leia gave him a sly look from the corner of her eye as she finished the last of the braid and tucked it under. "You know," she said, "I think I'll get it cut like Luke's. I mean we *are* twins, after all."

Han spun to face her. "Over my d--" His words were cut off when he saw that she was laughing at him. His scowl turned to a grin as he pulled her into his arms.

* * * *

Luke sat in the cockpit of the Millennium Falcon gazing into

co-ordinates, but a growing sense of uneasiness was beginning to creep over him. He hadn't pin-pointed the reason, but he knew he wanted to talk to CEstallia. There were some things he needed to clear up before he felt ready to possibly go into battle with her.

As if he'd issued a summons, he heard her footsteps as she stepped onto the cockpit behind him. She sat wordlessly in the rear auxiliary seat, to the left and slightly behind Luke.

<You want to talk to me?> she thought.

<Yes,> Luke nodded. <There are some things I don't understand. Like, what did you do to Leia?>

CEstallia sighed heavily, <Luke, there are so many things about the force that you have yet to learn. Some of these things would be dangerous for you to know, now. I have knowledge that belonged to the most ancient Jedi. It was not passed on in open training because of the potential for misuse. What I did to Leia you will someday learn, but how I got on the ship...it is difficult to see, you may learn and you may not.>

Luke was becoming amazed at CEstallia's ability to say so much, yet so little. With Yoda, it had been quite the opposite. <Do you know what happened on the ship, then?> Luke asked. He remembered that terrible screeching and then something knocking into him and then nothing, absolutely nothing at all.

CEstallia nodded this time. <Yes, this I can tell you, but it would take too long to explain. You will understand that when you reach the Gate.>

Okay, that was almost an answer. <Speaking of the Gate, exactly how is it that I'm to destroy them? Or is it just going to be the one? And why me? I'm sure there are others who know more about the situation.>

CEstallia smiled, amused. <That's a fair question, but once again, this is something you will know when the time arrives. As for the Gates, there will just be the one. But you, Luke, this is your destiny. Time itself has spoken. A Skywalker will destroy the Gate.>

Where had he heard that before? <*Time* itself?> Luke was incredulous. <But how can that be?>

CEstallia met his slightly disbelieving eyes with a steady gaze. <Whether you believe matters not. It simply will be so.>

Luke gave CEstallia a wry smile. "Is there anything else I should know?" he asked, aloud. Not that he had any better idea of what to expect than he had before. But there was a quietness, a tenseness, to her that hadn't been there when they'd left the CEstallian system.

A frown crossed CEstallia's face. <Luke there is going to come a time, very soon, when you are going to have to trust me.

someone else has entered your heart. So, I'm going to have to ask you to trust me.>

It was Luke's turn to frown. He had no idea what she was talking about. <An intermediary's bond...? And who's entered my heart?>

CEstallia gave him a soft smile, one of the half mysterious smiles that had made him loose his train of thought before. It didn't work this time. <You see,> she said, <it doesn't work anymore. Our bond is no longer secure. It is because you have formed an attraction with another since we've arrived here. So, we will have to continue on without the bond. But, you are still my Intermediary, you must fulfill that duty to me.>

Luke looked thoughtfully at the woman who sat before him. She was right, he did see her differently. She looked like someone's favorite grandmother. And when he thought of someone whom he might have formed a bond with, only one person came to mind...

<What is the duty that I must fulfill?> he asked as he refocused his attention. Then, before CEStallia could respond he spoke up, aloud. "Wait, let me guess. I'll know when the time comes, right?"

"You're a fast learner, young Skywalker," CEStallia said, grinning.

Charlotte North Carolina

Walter Skinner retrieved his cell phone from his pocket and clicked it on. "Yes," he spoke tersely into the receiver.

His stance immediately stiffened as he recognized the voice at the other end of the connection.

SPLIT TO HALF SCREEN OF SMOKEY OFFICE AND HALF SKINNER

"Good evening, Assistant Director," The General said as he lit another cigarette.

"Sir," Skinner acknowledged. He didn't look at the bearded man but turned and walked off a few paces. Scattered fallen leaves crunched beneath his feet.

"I trust our mutual acquaintance is staying out of trouble?" the man asked. He drew deeply on his cigarette as he awaited a response.

"I don't know who you mean, sir," Skinner responded. He hated with a passion being treated like a spy for this man. But, then on the other hand, when this man came snooping around, Skinner knew something big was going on.

Then more sedately, "I have an assignment that falls in their area of expertise. You'll find all you need to know in the usual location."

Skinner heard the soft click of the disconnect before he could reply.

CUT BACK TO ONLY SKINNER'S LOCATION

Skinner shut down the phone and placed it back into his pocket more calmly than he felt. Without a glance at his bearded companion, he headed toward the car. He got in on the driver's side and waited. He didn't have the key.

* * * *

Mandy glanced back at her passenger. He was out, sleeping the slumber of the drugged. She was sure no normal creature would be able to sleep in such an uncomfortably cramped position without the assistance of something artificial.

Mandy was glad that he was sleeping, because, now, she wasn't quite sure how she'd handle him. She couldn't just keep him forever like some pet. And she couldn't just dump him in the woods. Although, she figured that there was where he'd be the most comfortable. For now she'd decided to just take him to her father's beach house. It should be pretty deserted this time of the year.

The sign along the side of the highway said 104 Interchange ahead. It wouldn't be long, now.

<GFFA>

The hyperspace clocked ticked away the minutes until the Falcon was due to come out of hyperspace. Han had repaired the Falcon's automatic circuits and calibrated the ship's clock to that of the other two ships to insure that all three would drop into normal space simultaneously. There were 30 minutes and 17 seconds left in hyperspace.

"I expect everyone has made final preparations," Leia was speaking as she prepared to close the inter-ship link. "Groups A and B will regroup behind the moon after their missions are complete. Are there any more questions?"

When there were no more questions forthcoming, Leia signed off, "Okay then, you have your assignments. Take care, and may the force be with you." She nodded to Han, who terminated the link. All that was left now was to wait.

Luke wanted to meditate a little more before this all began. So, he headed toward one of the spare sleeping quarters

comfortable about this mission, but there was still anxiety. He needed to exorcise those feelings so that he could function efficiently as a Jedi.

Threepio was standing in a corner of the room, silent for a change. When he saw Luke leaving the main cargo bay, he followed. "Master Luke," he called after the Jedi Knight. "Might I have a word with you?"

Luke turned and waited for the golden droid to catch up to him. "Sure Threepio, what is it?" he asked. Their voices faded as the door slid shut behind them.

Han and Leia were left to look a little curiously after Threepio. He had been uncharacteristically silent since he'd came out of the auto optimization mode.

"What's gotten into him?" Han asked Artoo, who replied with a unique droid sound that no one could mistake for anything but 'Beats me'.

Han shrugged it off and headed out the doorway. "Well, I'm gonna go triple-check some systems make sure this old girl isn't planning any surprises for us."

Leia and Artoo followed him, leaving CEstallia, Mulder, Scully and Rae to stare at one another. The sound of Becter's equipment seemed louder than usual in the ensuing silence.

CEstallia moved to stand near one of the larger of Becter's monitoring stations. "I'll bet you are all anxious to get home," she said.

"I know I am," Rae answered first. "Although I'm not sure why, since I'm a wanted woman, now," she added, forlorn. "You guys, what am I going to do? I don't want to go to jail."

Scully walked over to Rae and put a hand on her arm. "There has to be some one who can provide you with an alibi," she said. "Did you talk to anyone on the phone? or see anyone at the corner that you knew? Even something small might be helpful."

Rae gave her a small smile of thanks for trying to reassure her. "I want to thank both of you for helping me, but I'm just afraid I'll get the two of you into trouble if you're found with me."

"Are you kidding? Trouble is his middle name," Scully gestured at Mulder. She was rewarded with a small smile from Rae, while Mulder cleared his throat loudly.

"Try to think back," Mulder said. "What was the first thing you did when you got home?"

Rae closed her eyes and thought about it. It seemed like such a long time ago. "Yes," she said after a few seconds, "I remember. I was in a really bad mood, so I got on-line. Surfing the net calms my nerves."

"Okay, that's good," Mulder said, throwing Scully an amused glance. "I don't know if anyone's ever used the fact that they were on-line as an alibi, but it could be helpful. Did you keep a chat log or send any mail?"

"Actually, I did," Rae said, brightening. "And there's something else," she said. "I have an even better alibi than I thought. I got a traffic ticket that night!" she announced happily.

"A reason to live," Mulder said dryly. "I hope it wasn't for reckless driving."

"Actually it was because my lights weren't on. And then once he did that, he found that my inspection sticker was expired and gave me a ticket for that, too. It took quite a while because, well, I started to...laugh and so he thought I was high and made me do the walk test AND the breath-a-lyzer test. He called in another police car and they didn't find anything else so the one gave me a ticket and let me go. I'm sure they'll remember me."

Scully bit her lip to fight the urge to laugh herself. Rae was obviously embarrassed by the whole situation. But the imagery was about to send Scully into giggles herself. She pitied any officer who'd pulled Rae over.

"You wouldn't happen to know what time the ticket was issued, would you?" Mulder asked.

Rae shook her head, "No, not exactly. But I do know that it was about 12:30 when they let me go, because I looked at the clock once I started the car."

"The newspaper said that the time of the fire was about 12:10," Mulder mused. He'd begun pacing around the bay. "Do you know how long they kept you there and how long it took you to get home and on-line after they released you?"

Rae tracked his movements with wide eyes, following his logic. "Yes, I was nearly home when they stopped me. They kept me at least 30 minutes, probably longer. When I left, I was home and on-line in say ten minutes."

Mulder immediately stopped his pacing and looked toward where CEstallia had been standing. She was gone. "Where'd CEstallia go?" he asked.

* * * *

Luke turned cool blue eyes on Threepio once the door slid shut behind them. "What is it, Threepio," he asked.

"Master Luke," Threepio began. "While everyone was in their resting phase I did a memory sweep. As you know, sir, all of this traveling around in hyperspace causes memory fragmentation and--"

Luke put up a hand, "I understand all of that Threepio." If he didn't stop the golden droid now, he'd never get a chance to meditate before they reached the co-ordinates.

"Very well, sir," Threepio answered. "I found an interesting coincidence during my memory optimization." He paused to be sure Luke was satisfied with his current method of telling the story.

"Yes," Luke urged when Threepio hadn't continued in a few seconds.

"The language that the three humans from Earth speak is the same one I programmed into the lapel-links for the children."

"What?" Luke asked, clearly amazed.

"The language that the three humans from Earth speak is the same one I programmed into the lapel-links for the children." Threepio repeated what he'd said verbatim. But Luke wasn't listening any longer, he'd sank to the cot and began thinking very quickly. There was something here and he was missing it.

"Master Luke," Threepio's voice insinuated itself into his thoughts.

"What is it, Threepio?" Luke asked, only half listening to the droid.

"Would you like me to have Artoo perform a diagnostic of my memory functions to make certain that I am not suffering a malfunction. I've checked the Falcon's system and it had no former record of the language it's been translating. In my opinion, sir--"

"Threepio," Luke cut in again. "Yes. Please have Artoo run a diagnostic on your memory functions."

"Very well, sir."

* * * *

Gien Becter scratched his scraggly orange head, musing it beyond its normal disarray. The equipment around him beeped and hummed as it monitored and recorded the subtle changes in space and space-time all around them. The readings gathered within hyperspace were of no interest to Becter beyond that of testing the link-up between his small science vessel and the Falcon.

Presently, the machines were in real-time auto-tracking mode, and the remote data had been assimilating well into the main control unit, which was situated to the left of the flight controls. But, when the last update had displayed on the control unit, the remote data was absent.

Becter glanced at the chronometer and began to feel a slight panic. The little group of ships would be pulling out of hyperspace in less than ten minutes.

* * * *

Han shut the panel on the Falcon's main breaker box. Everything seemed to be in working order. But all things

"Mr. Solo? Please come in," a tinny voice spoke from the comlink he'd attached to his collar.

"Yeah, what is it?" Han inquired gruffly after he'd removed it and pressed the activation button. Becter was the last person he wanted to speak to right now.

"Mr. Solo, would you be so kind as to go and check on my machinery for me?" Becter asked. "It appears that I'm no longer receiving the remote feed."

Han's 'no' was so conversational that Becter nearly missed its meaning. "Pardon me?" the orange-haired scientist asked.

"I'm a little busy right now to deal with your...scientific equipment." Han said, disconnecting the link. He didn't care if Becter knew 'scientific equipment' wasn't the phrase he'd been thinking of.

Becter, thankfully, let it drop. He chalked Han's touchiness up to the tension of the upcoming mission. He was partially right. While Han had been talking to Becter one of the indicator lights on the outside of the breaker panel that glowed green when all was well, suddenly turned a cautionary amber.

Han glanced at the chronometer as its countdown decreased. Two minutes to the co-ordinates. He made a dash for the supply box to replace the decaying breaker. Even though it was the breaker for the light in the john when one system failed on the Falcon, there tended to be a cascade effect.

* * * * *

Luke was sitting on the bunk mulling over what Threepio had said when his comlink went off.

"Mr. Skywalker, this is Becter. Would it be too much for me to ask you to check on my equipment for me? I seem to be missing the remote feed."

"Sure, it's no problem," Luke said. His opportunity was gone, anyway. "What would you like me to do to it, exactly?"

"Just make sure it's on-line," Becter said and signed off.

Luke rounded the corner in time to hear Mulder ask "Where'd CEstallia go?" Luke found himself looking around for her like everyone else.

"She was right there a second ago," Rae said, pointing toward the largest of Becter's scanning units. It had been flashing a steady green light. Now, it was dark, not a single light blinked.

onlookers he seemed to just disappear from the doorway and reappear near the machine. He took in the smashed controls, damaged beyond any quick repair and immediately knew who to seek out.

"CEstallia," Luke breathed before he vanished out the doorway again. He found her in the corridor near the main lavatory.

<Did you sabotage Bexter's machine?> Luke asked her, trying to hide the disappointment. He knew she was holding back, but he hadn't expected her to go this far.

CEstallia stared back at him, there was a bit of panic in her eyes. Then her focus changed and she looked beyond Luke.

A moment later, a deep whine began somewhere in the bowels of the ship. In his mind Luke felt something disconnecting and then reattaching. And then it was gone.

Luke turned a confused gaze on CEstallia. "What was that?" he asked.

<Luke, I told you that very soon you'd have to trust me,> CEstallia said, <now is that time.>

"Luke, get up here!" Han's voiced burst over Luke's comlink. Luke threw CEstallia one last look of confusion, before he sprinted off toward the cockpit.

* * * * *

When Luke reached the cockpit Han was pacing as much as the confined space would allow. Leia sat mutely in the co-pilot's seat watching her husband.

Han caught Leia's movement as her brother entered the cockpit. He turned toward the younger man. "Look out there, Kid. Tell me what you see," Han said, pointing toward the front view screen.

Luke obediently looked out of the view screen. All there was to see was a starfield and some very distant planetary bodies. He shrugged and turned back to his brother-in-law. What was Han getting at?

"Here's a hint," Han put in, "This is the aft view."

It suddenly made sense to Luke. He closed his eyes and took a very deep breath. "The other ships, they aren't there are they?" he asked.

"'Fraid not," Han replied nastily. "I think it's time we have a little talk with our diplomatic 'friend' from CEstallia," he added as he headed for the corridor beyond the cockpit.

"Han, wait," Luke began, trying to stop his brother-in-law. "I think you should let me talk to her." He could see that Han was about to argue but Leia must have said something to him over Luke's shoulder because he seemed to actually settle down a little.

"Alright," Han said. "But, I want an answer within the next ten minutes." He reluctantly stepped around Luke and dropped into the pilot's seat, where he sat glaring out of the view screen until Luke left to again find CEstallia.

end part nineteen.

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From: JackeeC <74363.266@CompuServe.COM>
Newsgroups: alt.tv.x-files.creative
Subject: NEW: XJEDI VOL FOUR 20/24
Date: 23 Jan 1996 04:04:26 GMT

Disclaimer: I don't think I have another one left in me. I think we all know the drill. But, just in case: Check out the last chapter or the one before or the one before or ... you get the picture.

XJEDI part 20 volume 4.

<MW> Millennium Falcon

Fox Mulder had a vague feeling that something was wrong. After Luke had left in such a hurry, there had been that whine that had occurred once before, during his cellular call with the AD. Mulder, always a man of action, couldn't wait any longer for someone to come and tell them what was going on. "I'll be back in a minute," he told Scully and Rae.

"Where are you going?" Scully asked from her perch near Becter's smashed machine. After Luke had left, they'd all gone to examine it. None of them could say just when it had been done, but the three of them were sure that CEstallia must have been the culprit.

Before Mulder could get out of the room, Luke entered, followed by a somewhat subdued CEstallia.

Mulder took a step back. He had been heading for the cockpit, but whatever was developing here was undoubtedly something not to be missed.

Luke looked around the room and back to CEstallia. No one broke the silence until Han and Leia entered the room. The droids were nowhere in sight.

"All right," Han said, "This better be good."

direction. She simply glared. After a few seconds of silent confrontation with Han she turned to Luke and began to speak.

"All the secrecy I have given the Gate is necessary. Whatever it is that I have to do to prevent knowledge of it falling into the hands of the general populace, I am honor bound to do." She spoke calmly and coolly to her one-time ally.

"Let's just take a short cut around the political excuses," Han cut in. "I just want to know what happened to those other two ships."

CEstallia turned away from Luke, who remained unaffected by her words. "I can't tell you," she told Han. "All I can say is that they are safe and that no one will be harmed. It's a matter for CEStallian internal security."

"Are you saying that the other two ships, that were following us, are gone?" Scully spoke up incredulously from her position on the cot, where she, Mulder and Rae had settled (ring side seats?) when everyone had arrived in the room. She was thinking of what Mulder had told her hours earlier in that closet, when she'd been berating him about giving out Earth's secrets.

"Told ya," Mulder whispered at her, unnecessarily.

"Yes, that's exactly what we're saying," Han supplied.

Luke had caught Mulder's whispered words to Scully, even though the translators had been calibrated so as not to pick up whispers. "Is there something you're not telling us, Mulder?" Luke asked, eyes narrowing. After what Threepio had told him and CEStallia's behavior, his circle of friends was understandably limited.

Mulder looked up, unsurprised by Luke's keen hearing. He was ready to tell all, anyway. It just wasn't Mulder to keep things quiet for long. He knew his eyes gleamed as they did when he was on to something. But, that was okay. He was absolutely sure of what he was about to say. However, he didn't know how CEStallia was going to take it and at the moment, it didn't matter.

Fox Mulder cleared his throat and stood. His eyes briefly fell on his partner. Then, he turned and deliberately reached into the overhead compartment and retrieved the suit he'd been wearing that first night. After digging around in his pockets, he pulled his hand out, satisfied.

All eyes watched as Mulder stepped toward Han. "Do you have one of these anywhere on your ship?" he asked. In his hand was the small metal cylinder he and Rae had found in the basement of Acme.

Han looked at the object curiously for a second and slowly shook his head, "No, I don't think--."

Luke stepped around Mulder to get a closer look at the object. "Yes, you do," he stated matter of factly, cutting Han off. "There's one of these in that box we found in the War room, back at the

Where Mulder was heading was quickly dawning on Luke. While Scully may have noticed the tenseness that had come over her partner, no one else, save CEstallia even had a clue.

"Where did you get that?" CEstallia demanded, focusing furious pupil-less gray eyes on Mulder.

"Several places actually," Mulder replied. "In the nostrils of the exhumed and badly malformed body of a teenage boy, a few individuals who claimed to have been abducted from Earth by extraterrestrials, a warehouse..." he allowed his voice to trail off. "Why don't you tell me if my guess is right. These are used for more than mind control and tracking aren't they? They also serve as a 'key' to your GATE," he spat the last word. "You knew the other ships couldn't pass through because they didn't have the 'key'."

Not waiting for CEstallia's answer, Fox Mulder stepped into her personal space. Since she was short, smaller than Dana even, he towered over her. "Now, I want you to tell me where my sister is!" he demanded, his voice a fierce whisper.

Six pairs of shocked eyes fell on Mulder in the ensuing silence. The rage nearly poured from his body. He was face to face with someone who, in his mind, conceivably had the answers to all he sought. And for a change, he had her cornered. Or so he thought.

"Fox Mulder," CEstallia spoke up, plastering a small smile across her otherwise stiff expression. "I know the pain you feel and I know the one you seek. But, what you do now endangers her more than you can possibly imagine. There are powerful forces at work. More powerful than you or I or time itself! My mission, my DESTINY must be carried out or you will never, ever find your sister. If I do not fulfill this mission she will be lost to you for all eternity."

Mulder stared down at the little woman, breathing heavily, unable to let go of the pain and the anger of not knowing. "I am sick of all the self-righteous excuses for keeping my sister away from me. They. Mean. Nothing. I *need* an answer. *Is* she here?"

Suddenly, CEstallia softened. "Yes, she is close. But this knowledge will only hurt you."

"So I trade one for the other," Mulder replied softly. Then louder, "Where?"

CEstallia shook her head. "No," she said simply.

Luke looked up suddenly, turning surprised eyes on his sister. "The woman," he said. "The woman with the children. She said her name was Fox. It was probably the only name she could remember!"

"Where?" Mulder's eyes darted toward Luke. Had he been so close all along?

"She was with the children we found on the Hinderer, the ship that was stolen from the security bay by Benjamin Adams. Threepio was right! Do you know of a place called Massachusetts? That's where she said she was from."

"That's where we grew up," Mulder responded, numbly now. Was he really going to see his sister? He went back and sat on the cot, a private smile on his face. "When can I see her?" he asked softly.

Luke's smile faded. "She was kidnapped with the children from the CEStallian system, presumably by Benjamin Adams."

Luke saw the dejection in the set of Mulder's shoulders. To be taken so high, only made the landing all the more painful. There had to be some hope he could offer. He turned his mind toward CEStallia <*Do* you know where the children are?> he asked her.

<Yes, Luke, I do. But it will do no good to tell him.> CEStallia responded. She still felt her failure keenly. True CEStallia had not told her all these things when she'd first given her this mission. CEStallia found that it was difficult to deal with people without her position as Matriarch; her word was not law here. And she wasn't altogether sure how to deal with that fact. She found that she couldn't even draw on the experiences of previous Matriarch's, because out here, without True CEStallia beneath her feet, those memories were as distant as home.

<Obiwan told me to trust my feelings,> said Luke, sensing a bit of CEStallia's confusion. <And my feelings tell me that if you wish to receive trust, you will have to give it in return. Han and Leia, I have and will again, trust with my life. Fox and Dana and Rae give every indication of being loyal. I am willing to trust them.>

CEStallia contemplated what Luke said for a few moments and then looked up at him and smiled. <Do you dare to teach an old woman, young Skywalker?> she asked. Her eyes wandered to the man sitting on the cot next to his partner. And for a change, she saw him as more than a player in the mission True CEStallia had given her. She saw him as a lonely little boy who desperately missed his sister. Then aloud, she added, "Fox Mulder, you will see your sister again. I know this."

"When? When will I see her?" Mulder asked, rising from the cot.

"Difficult to tell," CEStallia sighed. "The future is always in motion."

Va. Beach Virginia

Mandy finally reached the Blvd., as Virginia Beach Boulevard was called by the locals, just after dark. She'd decided that no one would think to look for her here at her father's beach house. He rarely used it and in her opinion only had it for bragging rights, like most of his 'toys'. Sometimes she wondered if that was what she was to him, a possession.

The house wasn't really situated on the beach, but sat at the end of a long, tree shrouded lane. But the ocean front was only a mile away.

Mandy slowed the van and was about to pull into the lane, when she noticed her gas gauge. In a rare moment, she decided to go ahead and fill up. She wasn't sure what types of unexpected events could

As Mandy pulled by the lane, she noticed a shadowy figure smoking against a tree. For one, heart stopping second, she thought her father was here. There was no way in life she could bring Big Foot here if her father were present. He hated the 'bleeding hearts' as he called them. Then in a flash of insight, she remembered THE man, the one who always smoked in Brunswick's office. Could they possibly know where she was? In retrospect, she realized that she hadn't been very careful. Surely, they wouldn't kill her or anything, would they?

"Stop it this minute!" Mandy told herself out loud. "There is no one here, it's all in your head." Having half convinced herself, she pulled the van into the Starvin' Marvin at the corner of 17th and Oceanside. Some cautionary bone urged her to pay in cash.

Before leaving the van, Mandy took a look at Big Foot. He was still out. She wondered again just how much Cordicorinal they'd given him, if it were even that at all? She'd never known Cordicorinal to last so long.

Inside the store, she picked up a big bag of Vinegar and Salt potato chips and a large lemonade soda. Then as a second thought she added a couple of banana nut muffins and a Gatorade for Big Foot. The Starvin Marvin wasn't the place to go for fresh veggies, and she couldn't risk leaving her sleeping Goliath alone for much longer, so the muffin and drink would have to do for now.

"Hello," greeted the man behind the counter when she approached.

"Hi," she returned, placing her items on the counter. There wasn't much business on this, a chilly autumn night.

"You work at Lynnhaven?" the man asked as he rang up her items. He'd noticed her nurses shoes and the white of her skirt sticking out beneath her big sweater.

Mandy looked up at the man curiously. He was sandy haired with a weathered face that reminded her vaguely of Ray from Dallas. Oddly enough his name tag read 'Ahmed'. "Uhh...." she stumbled as this information filtered through her brain, "how's Kenosha?"

The man tilted his head to the side, giving her an odd look. "Pardon me?" he said, smiling charmingly. Mandy saw that he had the deep cut dimples that drove her mother wild.

"Kenosha," she replied, vowing her voice not to shake. "She runs the place..." Mandy let her voice trail off as she gestured around the store. "Or at least she did last week."

"Oh," the male laughed a self deprecating laugh as if it were all a mistake. "She took the night off."

Mandy smiled back at him. "Yeah, well she needed to. A real work-a-holic if I ever saw one." With that Mandy picked up her items and had to force herself to walk calmly out the door.

"Hey!" the man called her back all of a sudden.

Mandy froze to the spot, half out the door. She closed her eyes

innocently as she could.

"Didn't you get gas?" the man asked.

Mandy sighed with relief. "Yes, I'm so sorry. Leave it to me to do something like that." She walked shakily back to the counter and placed the money for the gas on the counter.

"You look a little beat. My advice to you would be to go in and get yourself some rest. It's dangerous on the road by yourself when you're tired. You never can be too careful." The man smiled again. Under normal circumstances Mandy might have found this man warm and charming. But, never in her life had she ever known a Kenosha. And she didn't have a clue who ran the Starvin Marvin.

"Right," she said to the man. "I will." And then she beat a hasty retreat.

Mandy watched carefully through the rearview mirror as the man watched her leave the small parking lot. She headed in the direction of her father's house. But at the corner she turned the block. There was no way she would be going to her father's house, now. For the first time that day, Mandy began to wonder if she might just be in over her head.

The man behind the counter of the Starvin Marvin waited for the young woman to exit the parking lot before he pulled out his cellular phone. "She's here," he said to the person who answered.

Millennium Falcon

"...the dynamics behind them are a little complicated. But, I can tell you that this is the prototype Gate. It was grown thousands of years ago by my ancestors. True CEstallia feels that there is a great evil being carried out here. I felt it best that Becter not scan too deeply while the Gate was in operation because I didn't know what kind of affect such a scan would have on technology that is millennia old. It could have altered the balance in such a way that we might never have found our way to Earth or back home."

"You could have told us these things, CEstallia," Leia said. "You should have trusted us."

"Yes," CEstallia smiled, "so Luke tells me. But for now, the important thing is to rescue your friend because after this Gate is closed there won't be a second chance."

"I have a question," Scully said. "Just how do you propose to find your friend? He could be anywhere by now."

Han pointed a thumb in the direction of Luke and Leia. "The wonder twins," he said. "They find him and I get to do the dirty work," Han finished with a grin. Though the 'dirty work' was rescuing his friend and Han was looking forward to it, he didn't care for all this talk, he was ready to *do* something.

Scully was about to ask more, but Luke and Leia had settled on one of the cots. And there was an unmistakable air of ceremony about

Luke took one of Leia's hands and looked at her as if he were speaking to her, giving her some sort of mental guidance. Then, both their eyes slid shut as they reached out into the Force, toward Earth, in search of their friend.

"What are they doing?" Mulder whispered to Han, who'd wandered off to insure that their position remained behind the moon. Scully and Rae gravitated over as well, when after a few seconds Luke and Leia hadn't moved or even began to hum as Rae had secretly expected. CEstallia stood off a distance, since she didn't know Chewie, she couldn't get a feel for him.

"Oh, it's that Force of theirs," Han said dismissively as he punched up codes on the control panel. "I can't tell you how it works, I just know it does."

"So, Leia's a Jedi, too?" Mulder asked.

"Nah," Han shook his head. "Not really. Luke keeps trying to train her, but there's never enough time. Have either of you seen the droids?" Han asked, cutting the conversation short. It wasn't like them to remain out from underfoot so long. Besides, he wanted Artoo to check out the Falcon's precision navigation keeping. It seemed that it wasn't so precise anymore.

"Well, what do you think, Scully?" Mulder asked his skeptical partner when Han left in search of the droids. She was wearing that look, the one Mulder knew so well.

"I think I'm in the twilight zone, Mulder," Scully replied.

"You know what they say, 'one man's heaven...'" Mulder replied.

Alpha Point Base

The Hinderer slipped quietly into the Gate's vortex, but unlike the Falcon, it didn't continue on to Earth. The Hinderer came to a full stop within the heart of the Gate. Its passengers were overwhelmed by the joy of the living rock, of which the ship was made, as it was reunited with its brother the Gate.

Domar looked on with pleasure as the ship settled into the field. The cargo on this vessel was precious. The children and the young woman were the seed stock of the force they were building. They were kept in the isolated environment of the Hinderer to enhance the abilities of these ones. The Ka'dim had taken all of the strong adults as well as Omak. It was doubtful that they would return. Domar already had the exchanged Ka'dim in 'protective' custody.

The Hinderer's airlock slid open to reveal the small group of exiles, lead by Sarn. "One," he announced with a gleam in his eyes, "I have much to tell you."

Millennium Falcon

"Well?" Han questioned when he stepped back into the bay, followed by the droids.

"I'm sorry, Han," Luke said. "We couldn't sense him. But it could be that he's drugged or maybe something's interfering. I think we should go down and see if we can get a better feel on the ground. Mulder has a plan that I think might work."

"Okay, let's hear it."

* * * *

"When you hear the ring, just push this button and put it to your...uh...ear, like this," Mulder explained to Threepio. "Then we can communicate. Everyone and their brother has a cell phone so there's less chance that they'll catch the transmission."

"Would I be able to contact you as well with this...cell phone?" Threepio asked as he took the preferred instrument from Mulder's hand.

"It's probably not a good idea for you to do that," Mulder said. "All the boosting you're gonna be doing to pick up our signal might cause any call you make to Earth to bleed over into some other channels and end up broadcasting our conversation all over the planet. In fact we're gonna keep ours turned off til we need to contact you."

"Got that goldenrod?" Han said. "Don't call us, we'll call you." Han Solo didn't think much of the idea of leaving the ship in the care of the droids. But, Leia and Luke needed to be on the ground and as much as he hated to admit it, Cestallia would probably be helpful, too. And, of course there was no way he, short of being tied down would wait on the ship with Threepio."

"I quite understood, sir."

"All right, then. Artoo, are you ready?" Luke called over the comm link to the little round droid. Artoo's beeps and whistles could be heard as he responded in the affirmative.

The Millenium Falcon began its descent to the Earth just within the limits of the artificial gravity. The ship hovered on its repulser lifts slightly above the ground in the woods where the Falcon had first landed two days earlier.

When its human passenger's had departed, the Falcon again shot into the sky at top speed. Since there were no humans on board, the ability of the artificial gravity to compensate for the G forces exerted on the ship did not matter.

"Okay, we move fast," said Mulder. "We don't know if anyone picked that up or not. Anybody remember where we parked?"

* * * *

"What does it mean 'towed away'?" CEstallia asked as she stared through the darkness at her new friends from Earth.

"It means," said Scully with a heavy sigh, "that our vehicle is gone."

"So, what next?" Rae asked.

"Well, it doesn't appear that anyone picked up the Falcon, why don't we call them back down and have them take us to Washington?" Mulder asked.

"Mulder are you seriously suggesting we have a space ship land in Washington D.C.?"

"Well, yeah," Mulder nodded. "Have a better idea?"

"Unfortunately, no. But where could we land without being spotted?"

"What about National Zoo?" asked Rae. "I remember going there when I was a kid."

Scully and Mulder looked at one another and shrugged. "Great."

Silver Springs, Maryland

Walter Skinner finally arrived home from a meeting with the General. How he loathed that man. But there was still the matter of the assignment that he'd ordered given to the still missing Agents.

The assignment required Scully and Mulder to use their unusual resources in finding a fugitive who thought he was an ape man. And not just any run of the mill fugitive who thought he was an ape man, but one who stood over seven feet tall and *looked* like an ape man. It sounded too much like the Sasquatch Geoff Reenes had spoken of to Skinner. But even in light of that fact, there was no way Skinner was going to believe that his agents were no longer on the planet.

Right now, though, Walter Skinner had a headache that made thinking a painful task. Perhaps half a bottle of aspirin and eight hours down the road he would figure out the puzzle that one young woman's cry for help had become.

Before he could go to bed, though, Skinner had to try once more to reach his agents. It was irrational, but he couldn't allow himself to sleep if he didn't.

National Zoo

Seven pairs of eyes watched as the Falcon raced into the sky above National Zoo. Its lights were extinguished, but nothing

A soft growl drew everyone's attention to a shadowy form near a large boulder formation.

"I've got a bad feeling about this," Rae said as she fished carefully around in her pocket.

"Yeah, you took the words right out of my mouth," Han said and muttered something uncomplimentary about Threepio's piloting skills.

Rae withdrew her multitool, which also had a pen light appendage. She blashed the light around the shadowy outcropping they'd put down in. "Uh oh," she breathed as the narrow beam cut across a tan, heavily muscled torso. "We need to move," she whispered.

"Don't tell me," Mulder said, shaking his head. "*Inside* the lion's den."

The group as a whole began to back away from the general direction of the lion.

"Any idea which way is out?" she asked as they all backed away from the lioness who was now sidling gracefully in their direction.

"Excuse me," Scully whispered, "but wasn't this your idea?"

"Yeah, but you guys live here," Rae replied lamely. "I thought you'd take care of that part."

"Wait." Luke spoke so suddenly and so calmly that everyone started. "Everyone stop," he added.

The group paused, reluctantly waiting for the explanation. The lion continued to press forward.

"Kid, I sure hope you got a plan," Han said. "Cause I don't think I like the looks of his."

Luke turned to CEstallia. <How many did you count?> he asked her. Mental communication was so much quicker than verbal.

<Nine,> was Cestallia's immediate reply. She already knew what Luke wanted.

Luke then turned his mind to his sister's. <There's a fence thirty-five feet to the left. You get everyone over there while we hold these lions off.> He allowed her to see the fence in her mind as he saw it. <Watch out for the moat.>

"Everybody, come with me," Leia said. "I know the way out." Rae and Mulder followed without argument. Scully, however, seeing that Luke and CEstallia had remained, paused.

"Wait," Dana said, "what about--" Her words were cut off when Leia grabbed her arm, pulling her along.

"You don't want to break his concentration," Leia replied by way of explanation as she dragged the reluctant woman along.

Dana continued to look over her shoulder at the two figures standing in the field as the lions approached.

"He'll be fine," Leia assured her in a rough whisper. "Now get ready to jump!" She paused only slightly before she released Dana's arm and leapt across the canal of water.

Dana's attention was caught by the steep incline on the opposite side. Mulder, Rae and Han were already on the opposite side, climbing a service ladder toward the fence at the top of the incline. Leia was well on her way to the ladder, unfortunately, she hadn't quite cleared the water. And neither did Dana.

When the small group were on the opposite side of the fence, Leia called out to her brother and CEstallia that they were ready. Everyone watched silently as Luke and CEstallia backed slowly away from the animals.

The lioness' for their part didn't attack the interlopers in their world. But it was clear that they were not welcome. Luke was amazed at the intensity within the beasts when he'd touched their minds. They saw he and CEstallia as a direct threat to their domain. With the Force they'd been able to project the idea that the lioness' didn't want to strike just yet. But who knew what any sudden move might do.

They were near the moat and Luke could picture just what was necessary. A split second before he and CEstallia jumped they released their hold on the animals. Both Jedi summersaulted gracefully in the air and directed their landing to a point just behind the small group of humans.

end part twenty

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From: JackeeC <74363.2566@CompuServe.COM>
Newsgroups: alt.tv.x-files.creative
Subject: NEW: XJEDI VOL FOUR 21/24
Date: 23 Jan 1996 04:06:01 GMT

disclaimer: Hmm, let me see. These folks aren't mine. They belong to those persons and entities aforementioned and who forthwith, I hope, have no intention of suing the aforementioned(?) author of said work. As said author of said work is receiving no monetary compensation, unless sleep deprivation counts, and intends no copyright infringement, and has no money in the first place, the aforementioned entities would be wasting said time. Was that disclaimer suitably baffling for you? Well, see almost any previous chapter for a better one. Go on...I dare ya.

XJEDI 21

Va. Beach Va.

"Rudy, are you sure she'll come back here?" Dr. Brunswick asked from the leather wing back near the fire place.

"Of course I'm sure. Normandy is over-imaginative, yes. But she doesn't think things through, just like her mother." Rudolf Newman stood at the window gazing out at the autumn night sky. A cloud had floated in and obscured the waning moon. "I've no doubt that she'll come here. We already have word that she's in town. It's only a matter of time, now."

Newman turned to face his guest. "How are you going to explain this to the general if you get caught?"

Brunswick looked over the edge of a glass of dark swirling liquid and shrugged. "The general's been a bit distracted of late. I don't believe his decision's are to be trusted in this matter. Besides, I've examined the creature. He has an absolutely astounding metabolism. I think it might prove useful..."

Silver Springs, Maryland

Asst. Director Walter Skinner sat up on the edge of his bed and dialed the familiar number of Agent Scully's cellular phone. After a number of rings the now, beyond familiar message, that Skinner could quote in his sleep began.

"...party has either turned off the unit or is out of range. Recording C-12."

Skinner clicked the phone off and back on to try Agent Mulder's number. He was prepared to count the rings until the message began. It was almost like a countdown until the time when he could get some sleep. But to his amazement, someone answered.

"Hello?" came the oddly accented voice. Immediately Skinner's mind flashed to Mrs. Edwards, an English woman who'd once been a neighbor of his.

"I'm sorry, wrong number," Skinner replied and hung up. On a yawn, he dialed Mulder's number again. The same voice answered the phone.

"Who am I speaking to?" Skinner demanded. He was sure he hadn't dialed the same wrong number twice.

"I am See Threepio? How may I be of assistance?"

"Could I speak with Agent Mulder or Scully, please." Skinner requested, assuming Threepio was perhaps one of Mulder's school friends from England.

"I'm terribly sorry, sir. But if by Agent you refer to Fox Mulder and Dana Scully, they are not here at the moment."

"Do you mind telling me precisely where Agents Scully and

"Precisely, sir?" Threepio asked. "I can perhaps narrow it down to a few yards, but the precise co-ordinates would be difficult. If you wouldn't mind waiting, I'm sure my counterpart would be able to provide estimated co-ordinates with an acceptable degree of accuracy."

"What?" Skinner asked, dragging his legs into his pants. There would be no sleep tonight. "Just tell me where they are Mr. Threepio."

"I believe it was called National Zoo." Threepio answered. "And as for why I have this cell phone, it all began..."

ALPHA POINT STATION

Domar smiled at the new information that he'd just received. Finally, he had a way to return to his home galaxy. His brothers had returned with the bracelets that were the key and also with something else of near equal value. Benjamin Adams, the grandson of Palpatine was now under his control.

He now possessed the strongest of the trainees. The woman He'd have to be very careful in how he used him, though. The Ka'dim were very curious as to what was going on. Domar had told them that it was a routine mission that was returning. But still they were watching him carefully.

<MW> EARTH , Washington, D.C.

Seven strangely dressed individuals on the train in Washington D.C. near midnight wasn't much of an odd event. No one even gave more than a second look, dismissing them as foreigners. So, the small group made it safely through two transfers to their stop near Scully's apartment.

There had been some discussion on whose apartment they would be going to. But, Dana had been the victor when she'd pointed out that her apartment was clean, she had food, and there was less of a chance that dark government types on one of their quarterly sweeps of Mulder's apartment would show up. Dana wasn't sure which argument did the trick.

"Did you pick anything up?" Han asked Luke as they exited the train station.

"No," Luke said disappointed. "I could feel that I was close, but it seems that his mind is being smothered, probably drugs."

"I'm sure that's probably standard operating procedure for these guys," Dana said. She was sure they must have used some sort of drug on her during her own abduction and Mulder's, too, during his time in captivity at Ellens Air Base.

CEstallia asked. "Are we talking days, here?"

Mulder shrugged, "I have a few sources I'd like to check out. Maybe we can narrow that down a bit."

"Okay, we're here," Dana announced as they approached the front of her apartment building.

* * * *

As Dana Scully unlocked her apartment door, she heard the persistent ringing of the phone. She shoved down the nervous feeling that began in the pit of her stomach and made a dash for the phone. Her answering machine had just begun its message as she picked it up. She pushed the button to shut off the message.

"Scully," she answered breathlessly, pushing a strand of hair behind an ear. Her hand froze in mid motion as she realized who she was speaking to. Mulder could hear the unhappy voice of the AD from across the room.

"Uh, yes sir, that's approximately true...AWOL sir?...no sir. Illegal aliens...no sir...yes, s---, uh, we'll be here, sir." She put the phone down with a heavy sigh before turning to her partner.

"Skinner's on the way," she said unnecessarily.

"Who's Skinner?" Han asked.

"You don't want to know," both Scully and Mulder said simultaneously.

"Well, what do you want on your tombstone?" Mulder asked his partner, who stared back at him in complete confusion.

Mulder laughed, "I'm going to Jolene's for pizza. What do you want?"

Scully gasped in only half feigned shock. "You don't seriously mean to order pizza. Not everyone has the truly frightening metabolism you've developed over the years, Mulder."

"It would be a crime to NOT serve Jolene's pizza," Mulder replied.

Scully made a doubtful sound. "Well, I'm going to make some *real* food for those who don't wish to poison their systems," she announced.

* * * *

Twenty minutes later, Dana Scully stood in her kitchen looking nervously down at the plate of muffins. Mulder, Han, Leia and CEstallia had just left to pick up the pizza after Mulder had ordered it and checked his email. Dana had been amazed at the way CEstallia had made herself look more or less normal, those pupil-less gray eyes of hers weren't noticeable it seemed when she didn't want them to be.

eggs and sausage she'd prepared. She didn't know why she was so nervous about cooking for Luke and Rae. Deep down, she knew it wasn't Rae she was worried about.

After a few more seconds of silent debate, she called the two into the kitchen. "It's ready. Sorry the muffins look like an experiment, they really *are* edible."

Just then a knock came at the door. "Help yourselves," Dana added as she went to answer the door. An exhausted looking Walter Skinner was visible through her peep hole. She let him in, barely remembering to deactivate her translator in time.

"Good evening, sir," she said, standing back to allow him to pass. She wished Mulder and the others had waited a little longer, facing Skinner alone wasn't a pleasant thought.

"Good evening, Agent Scully," Skinner spoke formally, without a hint of warmth to his voice. It would be out of character for him to show how relieved he was that she and Mulder and Rae were safe. Instead he tried to summon enough energy to read her the riot act, at least the part he hadn't read over the phone. Instead, the smell of banana nut muffins, sausage and eggs caught his attention. He didn't remember the last time he eaten "real" food. The riot act could wait.

"Are those banana nut muffins I smell, Agent Scully?" Skinner asked, much to Dana's surprise, who was already preparing her argument.

"Uhh...yes, sir. Would you like something to eat?" Dana asked, muddling her way through Skinner's swift change of stance.

Skinner accepted Dana's offer and wandered into her kitchen. She then introduced him to Rae as Walter Skinner, her boss. Out of his sight, she signaled for Rae to turn off her translator.

"I'm glad to finally meet you, sir," Rae said, nonchalantly removing the translator from her collar. She added the sir automatically; Skinner just commanded such a response.

"And I'm glad you made it here safely. I assume Dana and I were capable aides in your rescue?" Skinner added with a gleam in his eye.

"You have no idea," Rae said. "You're just like my f--"

Skinner cut Rae off before she could finish her statement. "Pardon me, but I think I do have an idea, I just don't want to know about it. It's safer for my sanity that way."

Dana stood against the doorway in utter shock. She couldn't believe Skinner was actually standing in her kitchen joking with Rae. Skinner didn't joke.

When Skinner turned to Luke, Dana introduced him and Skinner as well. "Sir, this is Luke Skywalker, a...friend of mine. He doesn't speak very much English." Then, turning to Luke, "This is Walter Skinner."

Skinner. It's good to meet you." Although his words were spoken slowly, the intonation was correct as well as the pronunciation. Luke smiled and winked at her.

Dana Scully, for the third time in less than twenty-four hours, blushed. And Skinner didn't miss a thing. "I'll fix you a plate sir," she said as she made her escape from his scrutiny.

Five minutes later, Dana came to the conclusion that Skinner must have been starved and Mulder must have been lost. Skinner had wolfed down everything Dana had set before him and declared it delicious and Mulder and crew had yet to return. Dana couldn't find her appetite and so simply sipped on juice.

"Well, A--Dana, thank you for the food, but I think it's time that Theraesa and I be going," Skinner said after glancing at his watch. "I'll take care of paper work and follow up on the alibi you all were able to establish." Skinner rose from his chair and gathered his overcoat. "One more thing before I go," he added. "Could I have a word with you in private?"

Scully pushed herself up from her chair and led Asst. Director Skinner into a back room.

"Agent Scully, I really don't began to understand what is going on here nor do I wish to encourage you in this little charade. But, for now, you have a temporary stay until I handle Ms. Manning's situation. Do not, I repeat, do not mistake my present...," Skinner thought for a moment, "temperament as impetus to engage in mutual denial or creative expression of the facts. I'll expect a full accounting in my office at *my* earliest convenience. Is that understood?"

Dana swallowed, "yes, sir." Perhaps leaving the galaxy forever wasn't such a bad idea. Because, if Dana told it straight, her report was going to sound more 'out there' than any report Mulder had ever given to date. Mulder's report she didn't even want to contemplate.

Skinner allowed the subject to drop with her response. "Your next assignment comes from the top," he began, reaching into his overcoat for the sheaf of papers in a rolled manila envelope. "This assignment is on a need to know basis only. It was felt that with Agent Mulder's special talents he could find this individual. Everything you need is in the folder. Take care Agent Scully." With that Skinner handed Dana the envelope and left the room.

Dana made a detour to her bedroom and stuffed the envelope under her pillow. When she stepped back into the living room, Rae was waiting to say good-bye.

"Thanks, for everything," Rae said. "This was a weekend I'll never, ever forget. Tell Mulder for me, will you?"

Dana nodded, "Of course, I will." The two women embraced and then Rae was gone. Dana watched her go and wondered what type of future she would have. Would her life simply return to normal after all of this?

* * * *

Walter Skinner and Theraesa Manning exited the apartment building and got into Skinner's car before either of them spoke again.

"Did you know my father very well?" Rae asked him.

"Yes." Skinner said thoughtfully. "I used to know him quite well." He turned the key in the ignition and felt a slight prick in his hand, and dismissed it. But, a second later, when he heard a soft sigh escape Rae, a frightening thought came to him, but then it was gone because the darkness came.

The bearded man opened the driver's side door and shut off the ignition. Then, he placed the small remotely operated projectile throwers in his pocket and put his daughter in the back seat. After which he pushed Skinner over to the passenger side and drove off.

He was satisfied to see that Agent Mulder didn't even notice him when he passed at the corner.

* * * *

Scully was still standing, staring at the door when Luke approached with the translator that she'd left on the counter. Dana stood very still as Luke attached it to her lapel. She looked at him expectantly when he was done, he obviously wanted to talk.

"I didn't mean to shock you in the kitchen," Luke said. "I just picked those words up from before."

"It was a bit of a surprise," Dana admitted. "I didn't think anyone could pick up a language so quickly," she added, distracted. "Mulder said that you...helped me, that night. I didn't get the chance to thank you."

"It was no problem," Luke shrugged. "I only sped up your body's own natural processes."

"How did you do that?" Scully asked, truly curious. "Did you use some type of drug or hormonal response?" She was hoping for a purely scientific answer to what was meant to be a scientific question.

"I used the force," Luke answered simply. As soon as the translator was done with his words he felt her withdrawal. Always the skeptic, she could not accept that answer.

Dana had been faced with some pretty outlandish things during her partnership with Mulder. But this force thing was a bit much for her to swallow. "I'm sorry, Luke, I really see no evidence that there is a 'force' that's everywhere that allows certain people strange powers."

Luke remembered Han's skepticism concerning the Jedi. But, Dana even after seeing what he and CEstallia had done at the zoo and what he'd done for her, was still disbelieving. He didn't understand how that could be. He decided to try another tact, because he really wanted to understand this woman. "Dana," he started, "what are you

"Afraid of...?" Dana asked, startled. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Luke, "Why are you so afraid to believe? You allow yourself so little reign, but I can tell that deep down you want to let go, free your spirit. Why won't you, after all that you've seen, allow yourself to believe?"

Dana froze. Those words echoed through her mind. Someone else had asked her a similar question. What *was* she afraid of?

Dana started visibly when the front door opened.

"Pizza!" Mulder called as he and CEstallia spilled in, followed by Han and Isia. No one seemed to notice the tension in the air, or if they did they ignored it.

"Where's Rae?" Mulder asked as he sat the pizza on Dana's coffee table, ignoring the look of disapproval he received. The smell of melted cheese and sausage mixed with the smells of banana nut muffins when Mulder lifted the lid and grabbed out a slice.

"Skinner was here, you missed it." Dana said accusingly as she retrieved the pizza from the coffee table and placed a newspaper beneath it.

"It took a little longer than I expected," Mulder responded with an innocent grin before he headed to Scully's spare room to see if he'd gotten a response to his email.

"Ummm hmmm," Scully said to his back. "I'll be back with some plates and drinks," she said to the rest of the group.

When everyone was settled and eating Scully went back to see if Mulder had gotten anywhere with his sources. She made a stop by her bedroom first, to retrieve the case file Skinner had left. "Have anything?" she asked as she entered the room.

"Maybe," Mulder said as he clicked the mouse on his final piece of mail. "Strange lights in the sky, disappearances, the usual, really."

Scully nodded as she settled down to read the case file. There wasn't very much to it, but what was there was enough to make her sit up straighter. "Mulder, you are not going to believe this," she said.

"What's that?" Mulder asked, shutting off her computer and moving to stand behind her chair.

"It's a new assignment from Skinner," she said. "And it sounds like we just got an assignment to *find* Chewie because of *your* special talents."

"This is bogus," Mulder said after reading the first paragraph.

"Bogus!?" Scully exclaimed. "You only read, *maybe*, the first paragraph."

Mulder grinned indulgently down at her, "Okay, for you, I'll read the rest." With that, he headed to the living room for more pizza. "But, I'm still going to think it's bogus!" he called.

Scully left Leia and CEstallia in the kitchen chatting over her tea to see what Mulder had come up with. She'd busied herself placing the dishes in the dishwasher while she'd given him time to read the file through.

When she stepped in the living room, she found that Mulder had introduced Han to the art of channel surfing; he sat, head thrown back against the sofa, fast asleep with the remote control in hand. Luke was looking through a newspaper. Mulder was still reading the file as he munched on yet another slice of pizza.

"Well?" Scully asked, raising a critical eyebrow.

"Research," Scully said around a mouthful of pizza. "Don't be so uptight."

"Uptight!" Scully gasped, "I'll show you uptight!" In a very uncharacteristic move, Dana grabbed up one of her accent pillows and threw it in the general direction of Mulder's head. The throw was off and would have missed had it not made a rather odd detour in mid-air, angling around to hit Mulder squarely in the back of the head.

"Hey!" Mulder yelped, while Dana stood frozen in amazement.

Luke laughed out loud and winked at Dana, who, unable to help herself, dissolved into giggles.

"No fair helping!" Mulder exclaimed in Luke's direction and threw a pillow back at his partner. Luke made sure it bounced harmlessly away from her.

Mulder quickly caught on and tossed a couple pillows at Luke who was laughing too hard to block anything by then. The pillow fight was officially on.

Scully squealed when she was dragged to the floor by a pair of male arms. Whose she wasn't sure of because she'd taken to beating both Mulder and Luke with pillows. The pillow she had been wielding flew across the room and belted Han, who'd only just jerked awake at her scream, in the head. "Wha...?" he demanded groggily jumping to his feet, grabbing the pillow like a mortal enemy.

The three individuals on the floor froze realizing how silly they must look. When CEstallia and Leia rushed into the room seconds later to see what was wrong, all three were red-faced with embarrassment and at a loss to explain why they were on the floor. They were saved from explanation however, when the phone rang.

"I got it!" Scully exclaimed, more enthusiastically than the situation warranted. A second later, though, she hung up confused.

"Who was it?" Mulder asked, now up from the floor and replacing her pillows.

"The voice was oddly familiar, but the words were strange,"

"Well, what did he say?" Mulder asked with an undertone of excitement in his stance.

Dana shrugged. "Make contact."

Office of the Lone Gunmen

"We're being watched," Luke said as Mulder pulled Scully's car into the parking garage near where the Office of the Lone Gunmen was located.

Mulder nodded. The hair on the back of his neck had prickled before Luke had made his announcement, and it had nothing to do with the fact that they'd just squeeze six adults into Scully's car.
"Looks like someone is getting curious," Mulder murmured.

"Can you tell where he is, Kid?" Han asked from the front seat with Mulder.

"No," Luke said, "but wherever they are, they feel safe. Like there's no way we're going to find them."

"So, what now?" Leia asked. "Do we go in or are we going to try and get this information through some other means?"

"We go in," Mulder said.

* * * * *

"Who is it?" a voice asked as Mulder stood before the camera on the outside of the office of the Lone Gunmen.

"Mulder and friends," was Mulder's solemn reply as he glanced around him. No one had followed them into the building, nor had the mysterious watchers, according to Luke, changed their position.

"I thought we were your only friends, Mulder," was Frohike's laughing reply.

Mulder chuckled in spite of himself. "Don't worry, Frohike, you're still in the will."

There was a clang as the lock was released and the door opened and the group was allowed to move into the room beyond.

Va. Beach, Virginia

Mandy Newman didn't know what to think anymore and she didn't know where she could go either. If someone was indeed on to her, it wouldn't be long they figured out she wasn't going to her father's. She had to make a decision now.

Ahead a Wendy's sign shown in the night, "Driv-thru open twenty fours hours" it boasted. Mandy was struck with a sudden burst of inspiration. "Wave!" she exclaimed out loud.

When the turn came at the drive thru window, she asked if Waverly were working that night. A few moments later she was greeted by her old friend from her days working at the Franchise.

"Mandy! Where've you been, girl?" he asked, happy to see her. "Park and come on in, I want to talk to you," he added reaching for the building's keys, that hung on his belt.

Mandy parked the van with a grin and after a quick glance at her still sleeping Big Foot, she hopped out of the van to ask a very big favor of her friend.

Minutes later, Mandy thanked Wave as she walked off with his keys. He'd be working for the rest of the night and was allowing her to use his place to crash until he got home.

Washington D.C.

"I hope I didn't wake you," Mulder said as he entered.

"Are you kidding," Frohike returned. "This is our alt.conspiracy night. Who are your new friends?" he added, taking in the group that followed Mulder into the dim office.

Mulder introduced each person in turn to Frohike before he reactivated his translator. "They don't speak English," he explained. "This device translates English into their language."

Frohike's brows went up a fraction as he heard a replication of Mulder's voice speaking in a language he couldn't place.

"Interesting device," Byers said as he and Langley entered from a door in the back of the room. "The participants were unoriginal and the discussion was ordinary," he told Frohike. "So we left."

"Left where?" Dana asked, glancing toward the door they'd come through. She'd thought it was a closet.

"Alt.conspiracy relay chat. We were the guests of honor," Frohike grinned at Dana with a slight bow, removing his hat to cover his heart. Dana simply rolled her eyes.

"Scully, do you mind?" Mulder asked, gesturing toward the translator that was still on her lapel where Luke had placed it.

Dana remembered suddenly that the translator would not translate the words of the Gunmen since they weren't speaking Basic and weren't wearing translators of their own. She self consciously snapped it off and handed it to her partner. Mulder gave her a small smile as he took it.

"For me?" Frohike asked amazed when Mulder snapped it to his sweater. Mulder ignored him.

"Now," said Mulder when the translator was attached. "Tell me what you have."

Frohike immediately got to business. He told the group of the young woman with the sig 'spy chic without bounds'. "We met a while back at one of the alt.conspiracy meetings. Some of her posts were... shall we say, enlightened. She and Langley hit it off, then, yesterday she sent him a piece of email that you might find interesting."

Frohike showed them a hard copy of the email that Langley had received. He read it aloud for the benefit of the non English reading members of the audience.

"We think she's in trouble," Frohike said when he was done reading "She never E'd us back like she said she'd do if everything turned out all right."

Mulder read over the mail twice. "There's something missing, here," he murmured to Frohike.

"Yeah, well, she needed a little help with her plan. We thought it best not to keep incriminating information. But the references to Big Foot seemed similar to your...ah, Friend."

"Do you have anything else?" Mulder asked. So far the information suggested that someone had seen a tall hairy 'man' and was going to attempt to 'save' him. But, the file Frohike held was minus the sender's address.

"We did some checking," Frohike continued. "Her member profile said that her 'real' name is Normandy Newman and that she lives in Raleigh, North Carolina, it also said that her occupation is 'medical technician'."

Mulder snapped to at the new information. "Did she say where she was going to take 'Big Foot' once she saved him?" Mulder asked.

"The beach," Langley spoke up from one side of the room.

"The beach?" Scully asked. "What beach?"

"She just said that she was going to the beach, where her dad has a house that's empty right now."

"Normandy is an unusual name," Mulder said. "Think you guys can find anything on her. We seemed to have picked up company on the way here and I don't want to take any chances going to the Hoover building."

"Can do, my friend," Frohike said before turning toward one of

before he began to type at the keyboard.

"We'll check other sources," Byers said as he and Langley moved to other computers in the room.

Scully looked at three men busily typing away at their computers and stepped closer to her partner. "Alright, Mulder, while America's most paranoid is doing our job, maybe you could tell me why you think the case file is bogus."

"Just ask yourself a question," Mulder started. "If you kidnapped an extraterrestrial and were stashing him away wouldn't you want to hide him as quickly as possible?"

"Yes," Scully agreed. Thus far she followed his logic.

"Well, the file says that he was last seen in rural Montana," Mulder said, his eyes held Scully's willing her to understand.

"Yes, but Mulder, it's been two days, they've had plenty of time to get him to Montana and then lose him," Scully argued.

"Okay, but why call us in?" Mulder asked her.

"Your special talents like it said," Scully replied.

"No. They want to get us as far away from him as possible, so far off the beaten path that we wouldn't know which way was up. They wrote this file with me specifically in mind, Scully. They're baiting us. There's no 'wild man' in Montana, at least, not any that they put there."

end part twenty one

=====

==

From: JackeeC <74363.2566@CompuServe.COM>

Newsgroups: alt.tv.x-files.creative

Subject: NEW: XJEDI VOL FOUR 22/24

Date: 23 Jan 1996 04:07:14 GMT

DISCLAIMER <insert fav>

XJEDI 22

"Okay, I think I have it," Luke said as he looked down at the floor board of the van he, Mulder, Leia, Han, Dana and CEstallia now occupied. "This one is to go and it's pressure sensitive. This is to stop and it's pressure sensitive. This is to steer and it's so full of play that we'll just have to take our chances..." Luke was grinning as he repeated Mulder's words. When he caught a glimpse of his reflection

The Lone Gunmen had thought it would help them lose whoever was following them if they switched vehicles. The Gunmen's business owned a van and so they'd dressed Luke in Frohike's hat and spare set of glasses and sent the group out the back way, which led to a private parking area.

Nor Mulder was giving Luke a crash course in driving until they could get out of the reach of whatever organization had chosen to follow Mulder and Scully.

"Okay, looks like we're ready to go," Mulder said, glancing back at everyone else in the van. They were all concealed from the sight of anyone they might pass once they left the private garage.

"Uh, Mulder," Luke began worriedly, "I'm pushing the gas pedal and nothing is happening."

"Oh yeah, forgot good ol' rule number one. Start the engine." Mulder reached over and turned the key. "*Then* you move the gear shift to this symbol and push the gas pedal..."

* * * * *

Mandy stood in the open doorway of her father's van wondering just what she'd gotten herself into. Her 'Big Foot' was now beginning to stir and she didn't have a clue as to what to do about it.

When Mandy'd arrived at Wave's small house, she'd parked the van in the backyard, hoping to avoid the party obviously going on next door.

Then she'd grabbed a couple of blankets from the house, and despite the loud rock-n-roll coming from next door, fallen asleep.

But now, the creature was awakening and Mandy simply didn't know what to do beyond stare down stupidly at his very long, hairy limbs as they became more active.

Chewie opened his eyes and stared into the air while the darkness settled into the forms of a low ceiling and some sort of embedded light fixture. The next thought to enter his brain was how horribly uncomfortable he was. A chill breeze behind him caused him to roll into a sitting position a bit faster than his body was ready to handle. He couldn't stop the soft Wookiee moan. He grabbed a hold of his head with both hands in an attempt to steady it.

When Chewie's vision stabilized into a single image, he saw that a young woman stood staring at him from the open door. Unlike his previous jailers, she looked terrified.

She spoke, mumbling a few words Chewie didn't understand. Chewie tilted his head to one side and barked a few phrases in Basic. Or at least what passed for Basic in Wookiee talk. To Chewie's surprise, she jumped back nearly a foot at his words. She genuinely looked as if

Chewie made another sound in an attempt to reassure her and reached a hand in her direction. He sensed that his situation had changed; this young woman was not his captor. Suddenly a hazy memory returned to him of this young woman leading him out of that white room. She must have been his rescuer he realized.

He watched curiously as the young woman looked down at his hand, so large compared to her own, for a few seconds before hesitantly taking it. When her eyes lifted back to Chewie's face he gave her his best Wookiee smile, careful not to show his teeth.

"Mandy," she said, placing her other hand on her chest. "My name is Mandy."

Chewie took in her motions understanding clearly what she was trying to do. "Wwwwranwz" he growled her name in what was his best attempt, then laughed a deep Wookiee chuckle. This was going to be an interesting night.

Mandy laughed back at his attempt at her name. She thought she could almost decipher what he'd said. She was about to ask him what his name was when the party next door decided to spill out into the backyard...

* * * * *

Dana Scully jerked suddenly awake. It took a few moments for her to realize that they were all still in the van belonging to the Lone Gunmen. Leia was snuggled against Han and both were fast asleep, as best Dana could tell CEstallia was meditating and Luke and Mulder were in the front of the van talking softly.

Dana didn't know what had awakened her, but a glance out of the front window told her that they were at the Starvin Marvin. The smell of sea air assaulted her nostrils; they were at the beach. Dana knew that smell anywhere. She scooted up toward the front to see what was going on.

Both Mulder and Luke greeted her before she was even with them. "How'd you know it was me?" she asked. Both men just smiled secretly. 'Great,' Dana thought, 'Two spooky's.' Then aloud she said, "Okay, next question, how far to the Newman place?"

"According to this," Mulder said, pointing to the map now folded into a square. "The street is about two miles up that way." He pointed out of the parking lot and to the right."

* * * * *

"Brunswick here," Ian Brunswick spoke into his cellular as he paced before the fireplace in Newman's study. The fire had died down and the room had grown chilly, but Normandy Newman had not put in an

through, but check on the other lead while you're at it. Right." Brunswick clicked off his cell phone and placed it into an inside suit pocket. He wondered who Newman's guests were.

* * * *

Mandy and Chewie stood, caught off guard, as a man in ragged jeans with no shoes or shirt stumbled out onto the neighboring back porch. He wavered slightly on his feet as he relieved himself. When he was done he turned to go back into the house. Halfway to the door, he froze and turned fully in their direction, squinting against the darkness.

"What the...!" the man muttered before he turned and ran into the little house.

Mandy giggled nervously as she turned toward Chewie. "I think you scared him," she said. "But just the same, I think we'd better get out of here." She grabbed Chewie's arm to lead him into the van. But, just then a shot rang out, shattering the window near her head. Mandy felt the bullet whiz by. She screamed, covering her ears.

Chewie drug Mandy into a crouch on the opposite side of the van. Another shot rang around the van and then the sound of approaching footsteps.

Chewie cast around for anything that he might use as a weapon. Finding nothing, he did the only thing left to do, he grabbed Mandy by the hand and ran.

The street had been all but deserted, but now dogs were barking and porch lights were coming on and in the distance the sound of a siren could be heard.

"This way!" Mandy said directing Chewie through an alley between an old grocers and cleaning supply store. She was hoping she could somehow back track and get the van. Chewie followed, after all this was her world.

Mandy and Chewie burst from the alleyway into an intersection. A car slid to a screeching halt to avoid hitting the young woman and the ape man who'd run into the street. When the car began to move it was forced to stop again by a gang of scraggly biker types chasing the woman and the ape man. A couple of the men had guns and a German shepherd was also tied up in the scuffle.

The middle aged woman behind the wheel shakily dialed 911 into her cellular. She'd told her husband it was a waste of money, but when she got home tonight he was definitely going to be rewarded.

* * * *

"You know, I've got a really bad feeling about this," Han said as the van crept up the lane that led to Newman's house.

"With good reason," Luke said, "Someone definitely knows we're

moonlight, providing numerous hiding spots for any would-be watchers.

"There are seven of them," CEstallia spoke up. "All human, none of them female. I do not believe your friend is here," she added.

Just then, something on the police scanner, which had been turned down low, caught Mulder's attention. "Did you catch that?" he asked Scully as he turned the volume higher.

"No," Scully shook her head. "What?"

Everyone listened as the dispatcher repeated her words. The translator did not translate the words coming from the scanner, so Mulder repeated them for the benefit of those who didn't understand English.

Luke who'd developed a remarkable English vocabulary, was having difficulty with some of the police jargon, so he listened intently to Mulder's translator.

"They said that an ape man and a woman chased by a large group of deviants and a German shepherd just crossed Oceannaire Drive heading east toward the beach!"

Mulder brought the van to a quick stop before slamming into reverse and backing out of Newman Lane. Without needing to be told, Scully grabbed up the map and navigated.

* * * * *

The sound of booted feet and a barking dog closed in on Mandy and Chewie's position. The sirens also were nearing. Mandy could see the lights of the Blvd. ahead, but she didn't know if she dared go that way. Big Foot would be too easily spotted, but there was also the very real possibility that they would be caught by their pursuers. She wished she could run as fast Big Foot no doubt could if he were not holding back for her benefit.

Mandy's heart sank when she heard the roar of a motorcycle behind them, there was no chance now. Then, to her surprise, Big Foot lifted her bodily and assumed control of their escape. He ran through a fenced yard behind yet another convenience store before heading toward the lights of the Blvd.

* * * * *

"...hostage situation, I repeat the ape man has a woman hostage, last crossing Sentry Ave headed toward Va. Beach Blvd. All cars..."

"Where's Sentry?" Mulder asked urgently.

Scully was scanning the map as fast as she could. "Turn left on Thurman! Here!" she replied. Scully remembered the case they'd had of the so-called 'wild woman' in New Jersey, as did Mulder. They also remembered the reaction of the local police department; shoot first, ask questions later.

and then made another quick left on Sentry. The police lights were visible at about two blocks distance.

"The subject is cornered at Sentry and..." the voice on the scanner continued excitedly as Mulder suddenly pulled the van into a small parking lot. He parked the van quickly stopping just short of the building.

"I've got a plan," Luke said....

* * * *

Chewie stood frozen in the streets as the sirens wailed and voices yelled at him. He growled in frustration, he couldn't understand these people and they couldn't understand him. Mandy whispered something to him that was as incomprehensible as what the rest of the people said. The look on her face though, spoke of a different kind of fear than she'd experienced at the van. Something in her gaze reached across the language barrier. Chewie put her down as she'd requested.

When Mandy was on the ground, she raised her hands in the air to the policemen ducked behind their open car doors, blocking the road on both sides. She didn't want to think about how many weapons were trained on Big Foot. But one thing she did know was that he wasn't some ignorant wild man who didn't understand civilized behavior. He was intelligent and brave and a long way from home. She couldn't let these men shoot him.

"Please don't hurt him!" Mandy cried to the officer who'd been speaking into the bull horn. "He won't hurt anyone!"

"Ms., we're going to have to ask you to step away from the creature," the policeman repeated into the bull horn. "These situations can be unpredictable and we don't want you to get hurt."

"No!" Mandy cried as she spread out her arms as if to provide a barrier against these men. "I won't let you take him, I won't let you hurt him anymore!"

The policeman who'd been speaking to Mandy nodded to the man on the opposite side of the car. The man stepped out from behind door and slowly and deliberately replaced his weapon. Then he raised his hands into the air. His movements clearly said: 'See, I'm not going to hurt you.'

Mandy shook her head violently, "No! Stay back! I have a weapon!" She pushed her hands into the deep uniform pockets in search of something that would pass as a weapon, but there wasn't anything. She'd even left the security badge in the van. And the policeman continued to approach.

"Look!" Mandy pointed toward the men who'd chased them, now standing among the growing crowd of onlookers. "They are the ones you should be after! They shot at us! They're drunk and disorderly!"

Suddenly the officer made a grab for Mandy. Chewie, in an attempt to protect his new friend swung at the officer. Unfortunately, Chewie

other officer's signal.

The officer pulled Mandy from the scene kicking and screaming, it seemed to Mandy that a mountain of men had descended upon Big Foot. But he was holding his own. Then she saw a couple of officers pull out their sticks.

"NO!" she screamed, trying desperately to pull away from the officer who'd gotten her hands behind her back. Two more officers came to his aid and then she couldn't see Big Foot anymore because they'd taken her to the ground and cuffed her. The next thing she knew she was shoved roughly into the back seat of a police cruiser. She laid her head against the window and cried bitterly because she had failed her friend.

Despite Luke's plan that they mingle in with the crowds until he could provide a distraction, when the policemen took out their sticks, Han fought his way through the crowd into the thick of things. Mulder ran in right behind him.

Later

Dana Scully stepped toward the officer who'd placed Han and Mulder under arrest. "Are you the officer in charge?" she asked him.

"Yes, I am. Emmett Barnett," he told her, sticking out his hand in introduction.

"I'm Special Agent Dana Scully," she said, flashing her badge. "I have reason to believe that the man you have in custody is a fugitive that my partner, one of the *other* men you have in custody, and I are seeking." Dana thought it best not to tell the man that her partner had left his F.B.I. credentials on a spaceship piloted by droids, hiding behind the moon.

That gave Barnett pause. "This man here," he gestured toward Han who sat in the back seat of one of the cruisers.

"No," Dana shook her head. "*That* man." She pointed very deliberately toward Chewie, now in ankle irons as well as cuffs. "Although I'd appreciate it if you would release him as well," she gestured toward Han.

Barnett just stared at her for several seconds in disbelief. "You do understand that I have to check this out," he said.

* * * *

Fox Mulder watched through a half swollen shut left eye as Luke Skywalker stood talking earnestly to Dana Scully. He didn't know what they were talking about, but whatever it was Dana wasn't agreeing, she shook her head and stared stubbornly back at him. Mulder grinned when he saw Luke throw her a look that *had* to represent exasperation. Luke then seemed to calmly ask a softly spoken

Scully, skeptic extraordinariaire, gave in with a sigh and then a wry smile.

Mulder was equally surprised when Scully allowed Luke to lead her toward the patrol car where the officer in charge was speaking into his radio. Then the couple was lost from Mulder's vision as a crime van pulled in to transport Chewie; seemed he wouldn't fit into the patrol cars.

A minute later when Emmett Barnett stepped around the van followed by Scully and Han, Mulder's eyes saucered. And if it were possible they grew even rounder as Barnett opened the car door and undid Mulder's cuffs wordlessly.

Mulder was about to speak when Scully put a finger to her lips ordering her partner quiet. Han looked uncomfortably around the area as if waiting for his luck to run out. Emmett Barnett spoke in a sing song voice, "All charges are dropped," as the trio walked away.

"What's going on?" Mulder whispered as they faded into the crowd. "That was almost too easy."

Scully didn't look at him as she replied, "Jedi mind trick." Her peripheral vision caught the disbelieving grin, though. And she cringed inwardly when he drew in a breath to speak. Dana was saved from Mulder's reply, however, because just then Luke pulled up in the Lone Gunmen's van containing Leia, CEstallia and Chewie.

* * * * *

Sunday.

"The sun'll be up soon and I guess that this is just as good a place as any," Mulder said as he pulled the van to a stop along a deserted stretch of dirt road, surrounded only by fields. An old sign that had long since fallen from its mooring read: "Welcome to peanut country".

Mulder took a deep breath as if for strength before he turned to face Scully. Dana stared steadily back at him. He drew his eyes away and focused out the windshield.

"Why don't we go outside and wait for the droids?" Luke said in Basic to his companions. Leia and CEstallia were already moving toward the exit, while Han and Chewie stared, confused, after the women, wondering why they needed to wait outside in the cold. It was Luke's suggestive look that got Han moving, even though he still didn't have a clue as to what was going on. Han just shrugged and urged Chewie out into the darkness.

Luke was the last to leave, after Scully handed him her cell phone to make the call to the droids.

Mulder spoke first in the ensuing silence. "I'll...uh," he sighed, "give you my I.D. and my gun and a statement I've written for Skinner when the ship arrives." He continued to gaze out the windshield.

ran so deeply that she oftentimes felt that he was a part of her. She knew how important the search for his sister was. It was the driving force in his life and she would not think to even suggest that he choose between the two of them again. No, she'd have to let him go, to follow his own path. No matter how hollow her life might seem without him there.

So instead of saying the words that came to mind. Instead of pleading with him to stay with her, she simply whispered, "Okay." She drew her eyes away to watch as the Falcon settled to the ground.

"Dana," Mulder called softly. He stared silently for a moment before he spoke, gathering his words. "I cherish the memories we have. You've supported me when there was no one else who would, stood by me through all the battles and been a truer friend than any I've ever known. I can't hope for better. You know I'd give anything for your happiness, all you'd have to do is whisper the word."

Scully gazed into Mulder's eyes, so dark in the night. She heard the meaning behind his words and was touched by the offer. He was willing to stay here, with her, if she asked, and give up this chance to find Samantha. There was resolution in his gaze. He would do it, without complaint.

"No," Dana shook her head. "Find her Mulder. You've been kept waiting far too long as it is." She couldn't help but smile at the excitement that burst forth, and the thanks that was there, too. "Try to stay out of trouble, huh? You've got a bad enough reputation in *this* galaxy."

They embraced and with a last gentle touch to Dana's cheek, Mulder bound out of the van and up the ramp. Scully exited more slowly.

Luke stood silhouetted in the lights shining down from the Falcon's open rampway, waiting, as Mulder walked slowly backward up the ramp. Midway up, he gave a final wave and turned to enter the ship. Dana looked on through unshed tears, tightening her grip on his F.B.I. identification and the letter he'd written for the AD.

When Mulder reached the top of the ramp, Luke placed a hand on his arm and spoke softly as he passed. Dana closed her eyes to the scene and let the tears spill silently. Her last view was of the two men bathed in the light from the Falcon. She didn't want to spoil it by seeing them disappear inside.

"Dana," Luke whispered from the ramp, enhancing his voice so that she would hear. He didn't want to intrude physically into her private moment. Luke acknowledged that there was an attraction between Dana and himself, but there had been no time to explore it. He regretted that. But he would regret it even more if he left her like this, so lost and alone.

Scully looked up at Luke's whispered word, surprised to see that he was still at the top of the ramp. She wiped uselessly at the tears that just continued to fall. "Yes?" she whispered shakily.

Luke stepped toward her. "I know that you and Mulder have a very close relationship," Luke started, "just like Leia and I. You are

partnership."

Scully looked up at him curiously. "How can you know if that is really true? Can you predict the future, too?" she asked challengingly. "Well, tell me, is it worth it? Does he find his sister?"

"I don't know if he'll find his sister," Luke replied calmly. "All I can tell you is what the force tells me about the two of you. This isn't an ending."

Dana looked down with a sigh, she didn't want to take her hurt out on Luke. "You know you were right," she admitted. "I was scared to let myself believe. It was my...responsibility to be skeptical, especially where Mulder was concerned. It was the only way to keep him grounded. And now that I don't have that responsibility anymore, I find that I'm still scared. But...I want to believe. That's why I've decided that I'm going with you."

Silver Springs, Maryland

When Asst. Director Walter Skinner opened his eyes, he saw a patterned ceiling that seemed vaguely familiar. His eyes tracked along the pattern and to a wall. He slowly turned a head that seemed to throb at the hint of movement, and came face to face with a white floor board. A moment later, when he looked in the opposite direction he found his sofa pattern. That was when he realized that he was on the floor behind his sofa.

His entire body seemed to protest when he pushed himself to his feet. The pain in his head pounded in time with his too-rapid heartbeat and all 600 or so of his body's muscles put up their own individual protests. With a groan he wandered stiffly in the direction of the bathroom for a shower.

On the way, Skinner noticed that his computer was on. He couldn't remember having used it. In fact, he couldn't remember much of anything, least of all how he'd ended up fully dressed behind his couch. When he entered his spare bedroom/office to turn it off, he noticed that his mailbox icon contained envelopes. He had mail. Curious, Skinner clicked on the icon and waited to see who had written.

A piece of mail from "X" caught his eye. The message read simply:

"Now we're even."

It was unsigned.

end part twenty-two

=====

Newsgroups: alt.tv.x-files.creative
Subject: NEW: XJEDI VOL FOUR 23/24
Date: 23 Jan 1996 04:08:54 GMT

DISCLAIMER: <INSERT FAV...OR SEE ANY PREVIOUS CHAPTER> You must disclaim ownership. Resistance is futile. Self-determination is irrelevant.

XJEDI PART TWENTY-THREE

Millennium Falcon -- behind the Earth's moon

"Now what?" Han asked from the pilot's seat of the Falcon. He couldn't help but grin at his co-pilot who was back where he belonged. Han had gleefully kicked Threepio out of the pilot's seat as soon as he was back onboard his ship.

"We hold position here," CEstallia said from over Han's right shoulder. It had been a tight squeeze, but all the people had managed to fit into the Falcon's cockpit, effectively squeezing the droids out. Artoo and Threepio stood in the outer corridor of the open cockpit door during the short trip to the far side of the moon. Threepio, surprisingly had learned to be seen and not heard in CEstallia's presence.

"What are we waiting for?" Han protested. "I thought we were in such a hurry to get to this Gate for reasons other than 'holding position'.

The Falcon doesn't 'hold position' very well."

'And neither does her owner', CEstallia thought to herself. But aloud she said, "Surely at some point, Mr. Solo, you attended a mission briefing at least once? Where there is first no discussion, there is afterward no success."

Han rolled his eyes in Chewie's direction, he hated it when this woman started talking in riddles. If their mission was to go in and blow up the place then why couldn't they just do that?

CEstallia gave Han an admonishing look over her shoulder, before continuing. "I suggest we all retire to a larger area. The droids can monitor any approaching vessels or Gate activity."

5 minutes later...main cargo bay.

"First off," CEstallia began speaking to the assembled group. "I don't know everything there is to know about the Gates. I do know

needs to be destroyed.

"It was grown from the living rock within the infinity millennia ago by the ancients, using ancient technology. The rock itself is self-aware and can have a distracting effect on an unsuspecting or weak mind. You all have very strong minds, only, a little preparation is necessary.

"Fox, there was something I asked you to keep for me?" CEstallia asked of Mulder. He'd been wondering if she'd forgotten about it. She reached a hand out and took the little bracelet of stone he retrieved from his pocket. "Thank you," she smiled before turning to Luke.

"You must keep this at all times while you are in the infinity," CEstallia told Luke. She made a point of sliding the bracelet on the wrist of his artificial hand. "No matter what, Luke. It's important."

Luke considered the gray-haired woman's words. He wasn't sure why this was so important to him only. But the gravity behind her words was unmistakable. He nodded his understanding.

"And now," CEstallia continued. "Mr. Solo, since you and Chewbacca have no force potential, you will not notice that the Gate is trying to pressure you. You will just began to notice very bad headaches that worsen over time. I suggest you both take a pain blocker.

"The droids should be deactivated completely, all self-determination circuits shut down. The Gate is capable of influencing artificial intelligence and we don't need to have to wonder if they are for or against us."

"Luke and Leia, you both have already mastered the techniques of mental blocking. It is the simplest of all the Jedi lessons." CEstallia gave them both a motherly look before moving on. "Fox and Dana, neither of you have any training," she lamented with a shake of her head. "That makes the two of you the most vulnerable."

Both former F.B.I. agents stared mutely at her. Mulder recovered and spoke, "Doesn't potty-training count?"

"You both have force potential," CEstallia went on, "You're a bit old for training, but it is necessary. Fox, I will teach you how to block the Gate's influence. And Dana, Luke will teach you. We will discuss strategy when we get there."

Dana watched, still in stunned disbelief, as everyone left the large bay to prepare except for Luke, CEstallia and Mulder. CEstallia called Mulder over, leaving Dana and Luke alone on their cot. Dana looked on as CEstallia took Mulder's hands, who was grinning stupidly at her, and ordered him to close his eyes and clear his mind. And then Luke was taking her hands.

"But,...I can't...," Dana whispered. "I don't..."

<Yes, you can,> Luke spoke into her mind. He smiled as her eyes widened in shock. <You wanted to believe, Dana. So trust your feelings. Believe.>

She drew in a breath as if to again protest. But Luke put a finger to his lips to silence her, shaking his head.

<Talk to me this way, Dana, I'll hear you.> Luke pointed toward his temple.

Dana looked extremely uncomfortable for a second. Then, she turned to look at Mulder and CEstallia. When Dana turned back to Luke, she forced herself to relax. <Luke...?> she spoke uncertainly in his mind.

<Good,> Luke said, smiling at her. <Now close your eyes and I'm going to show you something...>

* * * *

"Now what?" Han asked, a feeling of déjà vu coming over him. He glanced over his shoulder at CEstallia who stood in the same position, wearing the same expression.

"Is this the precise location?" CEstallia asked.

Han shrugged and looked over at Chewie who gave him a gruff reply that the translators didn't even bother with. "Give or take a few inches," Han modified.

CEstallia sighed, "I need the spot where I'm standing to be precisely at the co-ordinates I gave you. When we are there, the stars will take on a reddish tint."

Han gestured for Chewie to go ahead and settle the ship into CEstallia's required co-ordinates.

A moment later, all the surrounding starlight turned a surprising shade of deep red. "Well I'll be..." Han murmured. All eyes were focused on the phenomena through the view screen.

"It's the red-shift effect," CEstallia explained worriedly. "But this shift is much too great."

"What does that mean?" Mulder asked. "What's the red-shift effect and how can you tell it's too great?"

"Well," CEstallia started, "within the infinity time is...different. It doesn't exist as we know it and so the Gates have to be temporally calibrated so that their time meshes with our time. This shift is very heavy. I fear the dark side has so tainted this gate that time is distorted with in. This explains much," she nodded thoughtfully.

Scully frowned at the woman. "Wait a minute," she said. "You can't just distort time. It's a universal invariant."

"No, dear," CEstallia said, "the force is a universal invariant. Time is a slave to the force."

"Well, this is all as clear as mud to me," Han said. "Why not let's say this all over again so everyone can understand?"

CEstallia started again. "At the beginning of a gate, which is this point where we stand now, there is a sort of temporal flux. We are in a time bubble stabilized by this cylinder." She pulled a chain from beneath her neckline that had a cylinder like Mulder's and the one found in the war room.

CEstallia continued, "This bubble extends all around the ship. Outside of the bubble time is and is not. The stars that we can still see are outside of the gate where time is. The bubble is inside the gate where time is not. So the shift is the stars moving incredibly fast in comparison to our relative lack of motion in time, hence the red shift effect. But this red shift is very dark, almost purple, actually. This means that the temporal setting of the gate has been distorted. It is no longer aligned to a specific time. A dark mind is operating the Gate, now. This is why it must be destroyed."

"I think I follow," Mulder said. "But what happens once we destroy it? Where will we all end up?"

CEstallia paused a long time before answering. "We are all where we belong at this point in time, Fox. And if we are successful in our roles, we will all end up just here, right where we belong."

Before anyone could ponder out the meaning of her last words, CEstallia changed the subject. "All right, so now we begin. Mr. Solo if you would move the ship vertically, please. We will fully enter the Gate."

Before everyone's eyes the star field seemed to rise, a plane of absolute blackness took their place. Within moments the Falcon was surrounded by darkness so thick that it felt almost alive, enclosing the ship in its infinite depths. The stars became a pin point of light directly overhead.

The darkness gradually gave way to mottled gray space. A hulking asteroid sat in the foreground as the Falcon continued its journey into the infinity. Faintly, in the distance a small speck stood out against the grayness. There was an eerie stillness all around.

"Is this the gate?" Leia asked as her eyes took in the strange sight before them.

"Actually, this is the infinity," CEstallia corrected. "The Gate is that asteroid straight ahead. That's where we're going."

"If there is no time, why is this called the 'infinity', " Mulder asked.

infinity is empty of time, you can fill it with time, any time."

"But how big is the infinity?" Mulder asked, "Could an entire galaxy fit in here?"

CEstallia smiled indulgently at Mulder's curiosity. "There is no time. There is no size. Size is infinite. It is every size. The infinity would be in your way of thinking, another dimension. One that your scientists have not even theorized about." Then CEstallia added thoughtfully, "Not yet, anyway."

"You can land the ship there," CEstallia pointed to a rocky plateau, beneath a slight outcropping. Should any ships pass the gate, they would not see the ship sitting in the shadows of the plateau.

"We will enter through the reclamation and waste system, located at the bottom most point of the Gate. Once we leave the ship, the air will be thin, but it will become more comfortable as time passes."

"Won't someone notice we're here?" Scully asked. "If this rock is aware, surely it knows we're here."

"We are in a time bubble created by this cylinder," CEstallia said. "The cylinder is made of the same material as the Gate. The Gate is only aware of something natural, its own. When we enter the gate, though, all of that will change. But then, it will be too late."

There was a soft hiss of air as the Falcon's systems settled in the odd atmosphere of the asteroid. Han secured the locking mechanism's with a manual code after everyone had exited the ship, save for the droids, who were deactivated.

Moments after they turned to leave the ship, the Gatemind pressed against the minds of those with force potential in almost physical way. CEstallia and Luke were prepared and already had their guard up when it descended. Leia had hers up barely a millisecond later. Scully and Mulder were taken off guard and gasped audibly.

"Use the techniques," CEstallia urged them. A few seconds later, they were ready. The Gatemind was held at bay, for the time being.

Alpha Point Station

One looked, unseeing, off into the distance. There was suddenly another very familiar presence, one that he hadn't felt in quite a long while.

One's eyes drifted back to his prisoner, who sat chained to a wall in the corner of his office. The chains were held tightly with the power of the force, but given time and sufficient power, Benjamin would be able to loosen them. With the toss of a hand, One dealt Benjamin a mental

time soon. With a gleeful grin, One left the room.

The Gate

The bright light from the small hand held light-throwers flashed against the rocky walls and reflected off the pool of knee-deep water on the underside of the asteroid. A loud groan erupted from Chewie as his toe struck something under the water.

"How much more of this is there?" Leia asked as she continued to slosh through the dank cavern behind Dana and Mulder.

"It's not too much further, now." CEstallia whispered back from the lead position. Han and Chewie followed Leia, while Luke brought up the rear.

"Is there a force technique to block the smell?" Mulder asked. The group had been following CEstallia through the watery cavern for nearly twenty minutes, and still the smell seemed to only worsen.

"Not one I could teach you quickly," CEstallia replied. This portion of the Gate was not meant for human habitation. The rock required the water as a back up energy source for the machinery in its control center. The water was also useful as a medium for waste products should there be any visitors who required such things.

The cavern was beginning to narrow and the water became more shallow. "Ahh, here we are," CEstallia breathed. They were now in a wide rocky corridor. Rocks seemed to have grown haphazardly here and there. There were outcroppings in the walls and even large chunks in the center of the corridor, partially blocking passage.

"It's this way," CEstallia said, now leading along the rock strewn corridor. After a few steps she came to an abrupt halt. She held a hand up for silence. A moment later, blaster fire seemed to come from the walls ahead of them. Everyone, though, managed to duck back behind an especially large rock formation near a side wall, extinguishing their light-throwers. In the scuffle, however, one of the light-throwers fell to the floor, leaving the corridor lit as their attackers stepped into view.

"Scully!" Mulder gasped out. "These are the aliens that so many abductees have described!" Dana just stared speechlessly at them.

Han frowned at Mulder, "Those aren't aliens! Those are the droids that attacked me on the Hinderer while I was fixing the engines. And let me tell you, they aren't too brilliant when it comes to combat technique, either."

"That's because these droids are probably controlled by the Gatemind. But they shouldn't be here, we did not leave any droids behind."

"Well, obviously somebody did and I don't think they're just gonna go away if we ignore them." With that, Han threw himself out from behind the rock and opened fire with his blaster slamming two of the droids into the wall in a pile of sparks. One of the shots

All five force sensitive individuals winced as the pressure of the Gatemind suddenly increased.

"Uh...everyone," CEStallia said, shaking off the remnants of the increased pressure. "The droid weapons aren't harmful to the rock, ours etc. You'd probably want to not miss."

"Right," Han grimaced, pulling the droid weapons, that he'd taken back on the Hinderer, from the inner folds of his jacket. He'd known they would come in handy someday. Han tossed two of them over to the group.

Mulder and Scully used the droid weapons, while Leia, Luke and CEStallia drew their light sabers. Chewie drew his crossbow. The battle began in earnest. After a dozen droids were put out of commission as soon as they stepped into the light, the droids seemed to realize their plan wasn't working and shot out the light. Only the eerie glow of the light saber's now lit the caves. The droids seem to literally spill into the space.

Luke ran into the source, slicing droids in half as he went. Leia and CEStallia followed his lead. The droids that managed to get by the three, were handled by either Mulder, Scully, Han or Chewie. Soon, no more droids appeared.

"Would you look at all those spare parts?" Han said with a grin as Luke, Leia and CEStallia returned from further up in the corridor. Leia retrieved her light-thrower from beneath a droid, triumphantly. It still worked.

"Is everyone ready?" CEStallia asked. "The control center is at the top of the asteroid. We still have a long way to go."

The corridor continued upward, all the while the rough hewn rock changed until the rocky walls became smooth and the outgrowths and upshoots in the floor became non existent. Openings in the wall began to appear at regular intervals that gave a view of the infinity outside.

"Hey, what's that?" Luke asked as they passed another 'window'. He pointed outside to the specks of light, barely visible against the mottled grayness, that were moving steadily toward them.

"Uhh ohh," CEStallia said. "We're going to have company. Looks like someone took the liberty of providing the exiles with shuttles so that they could come here. We'd better hurry. They are not coming over for a tea party."

The group picked up the pace. They entered a large flat room with a symmetrical opening at one end. The ships were so close that the outline of the pilots could be seen through the view windows.

"This is obviously the landing bay," CEStallia said as they passed through it toward a far wall. At her touch a panel opened. She pushed at a

she called urgently over her shoulder. Four oddly colored Imperil shuttles put down in the bay.

Just as the doors of the shuttles folded open, CEstallia slammed the doorway she'd just opened shut.

The new area was lit with artificial lighting along the walls and very much resembled a large observatory. They stood at the beginning of a wide bridge. Behind them the wall stretched perpendicular to the bridge, and was covered with myriad's of flashing lights and displays showing odd images and switches and levers that reached far overhead.

Beneath the bridge a large transparent tube was visible. Light swirled in random patterns within the tube. One end of the tube was far darker than the opposite end. At each end of the tube was what looked like a stone arch.

"What is this place?" Leia asked in an awed whisper, pausing to stare up and around them.

CEstallia was trying to urge the group of awed humans along the bridge. "This is the path," she answered continuing to rush along the bridge, hoping they would take her hint--they did. "At one end of the tube is the starting point and at the other end is the destination. The darkness indicates a flaw in the time calibration. But, there is no time for this, we *must move faster."

The doorway slid opened behind them when they were halfway along the bridge. "Matriarch!" a commanding voice boomed throughout the chamber causing the humans in the center of the bridge to cover their ears.

CEstallia halted and turned, "Domar, I see you are well. But, really our hearing is fine."

"Matriarch, what are you doing here in my domain--the only one left to me?" Domar asked as he stepped out onto the bridge proper. The small crowd of humans behind him followed.

"This is not your domain, Domar. This is your prison and you should not be here on this rock. You were exiled to the vicinity of the world ship. Tell me, who is that gave you the shuttles?" CEstallia slowly stepped toward Domar, so that she would be in front of her group of friends.

"Someone who no longer matters," Domar said with a flick of a three-fingered hand. "Give up, Matriarch, you are not the one to destroy me. I will instead destroy you." With that Domar threw his palm in the direction of the group at the center of the bridge. Blue lightning stretched out toward the group.

Luke whipped his lightsaber out and drew up beside CEstallia so that he could protect his friends from the worse of the blue lightning.

The instant CEstallia saw Domar's intent, she clapped her hands and stepped forward. She'd known that he would try something. And then the lightning was upon them. It bent and arched over her body but could not

"Come on," CEstallia called from behind the group.

Everyone in the room gaped in amazement. Even Domar hadn't known that trick. CEstallia had projected an image of herself at the front of the group, which also had the power to act as a FORCE-field against the blue lightning.

Luke replaced his lightsaber and spun on his heel to run after his companions. He didn't have any idea when that FORCE-field would dissipate, but he didn't want to be around to find out just what Domar would do when it did.

The door at the end of the bridge opened on their approach. "How'd you do that?" Luke asked as the door slid shut behind them.

"Let me just say, I don't have any other tricks up my sleeves," she hurried on in what was another corridor. A dark panel ran along the lower wall. No one paid it much attention to it until CEstallia stopped running and kicked at it.

The section of wall in which CEstallia had kicked slid up and open. Inside was a small room. "This is the lift that leads to the control center level. We will have to go in shifts," she said.

Han, Chewie and CEstallia went up first, after a moment of disagreement on Han's part; he wanted Leia to go first. The rest of the group stood restlessly in the hallway as the lift whined its way to the top of the asteroid.

As the lift was making its return trip, the running footfalls of their pursuers could be heard coming into the corridor. "Come on," Leia murmured under her voice in an attempt to rush the lift along its path.

"Please come on," Dana added as the footsteps began to close in on their position. Just as the footsteps were nearly upon them the lifts doors slid open.

While Dana, Mulder and Leia ran into the small space, Luke drew his lightsaber, blocking the volley of blaster fire aimed at the lift. Then he slipped through the closing door with only inches to spare.

There was a collective sigh of relief as the lift made a return trip to the upper level. The original trio was waiting outside the doors when they opened.

"Alright, here is where it's going to get a little tricky," CEstallia said. "I need a few minutes in the chamber alone. So, If you could split up, you could provide a diversion until I've started the sequence. Once it's set, you'll need to get back to the ship as fast as possible."

"Aren't you coming with us?" Han asked with an odd look. Her words had sounded pretty final to him.

"No," CEstallia said. "My Time has come. Now get started."

you time has come? Can't the destruct run on automatic?"

"You don't understand and I don't have time to explain it to you. Let me just say that your children will grow into great Jedi. But they will need their father, so please, do as I ask." CEstallia then turned to enter another lift that was to lead to the control center.

"Han wait," Luke said, catching his arm. "She knows what she's doing. And I don't think she has a choice." Luke spoke in such a way that CEstallia turned to look back at him.

"That's right, Luke. I don't have a choice. This is the focus of my life, right here and now." She looked around at the assembled group, touching each mind in turn with a feeling of affection. "I have to," she said. And then she left.

Han grumbled but followed along as they spread out along the corridor to act as bait. He was convinced that he would never understand the Jedi mindset.

A few minutes later as the everyone was staggered along the hall in groups of three. "Do you think they got lost?" Han called back down the hall in a stage whisper to Luke's group.

Luke shrugged. It had been a few minutes and the lift hadn't so much as creaked. A moment later, he stiffened. There was a single set of footsteps approaching. He relaxed when he noticed that it was CEstallia.

Everyone stood up from their positions when they saw her. "What happened?" Luke asked.

CEstallia sighed, "It seems that someone has rearranged things. That lift no longer leads to the control center. We are going to have to try all of the upper level lifts, there are 30 of them. Let's get started."

The group trudged along the corridor in the very slow process of checking each lift. Two people, CEstallia and Luke would take the lift to its preset destination, while the rest of the group waited and guarded the hallway. After they'd tried the thirtieth lift and found that it, too, lead elsewhere, they found that the lift that had brought them up, no longer took them down.

"Well, at least this explains why they didn't follow us up here. They were leading us into this trap," CEstallia said. "I should have expected something. This was too easy."

"So what do we do, now?" Leia asked.

"We go the hard way."

From: JackeeC <74363.2566@CompuServe.COM>
Newsgroups: alt.tv.x-files.creative
Subject: NEW: XJEDI VOL FOUR 24/24
Date: 23 Jan 1996 04:10:18 GMT

XJEDI PART TWENTY-FOUR

Disclaimer: Been there. Did that. I think I'll print up a T-shirt.
Check any previous chapter....

"I told you not to look down!" Han exclaimed as Chewie growled his displeasure at the current situation. The rocky sides of the asteroid were jagged and very large, not entirely suited for human climbing pleasure.

CEstallia had led them through a ventilation shaft that lead out to the side of the asteroid. The small currents of wind that had blown at the beginning of their trek seemed to have increased in force as they climbed higher and now threatened to blow them off the asteroid. The air, as if working against them also, seemed to thicken, making breathing difficult.

"How much further?" Dana gasped out against the force of the winds that threatened to steal her breath. Thunder began to be heard from the top of the asteroid, drowning out her words.

"About twenty meters," CEstallia called down to her, hearing in spite of the rumblings. She'd called for a pause so that everyone could rest a bit before the final leg of the trek. She had no doubt that they would have company waiting for them at the top. But now it was time to move.

The group again began to move along the side of the asteroid, climbing slowly against the forces that fought against them. When they finally neared the top, they found that the top plateau was barren, save for a raised platform at its center. The sides of the platform were covered with panels, much like the ones from the bridge room. Extending up from the platform was a shimmery transparent FORCE-field which extended up and into the infinity. The thunderings calmed to a loud eerie hum that emanated from the platform, itself.

"I have to get inside that field," CEstallia said, lifting a weary arm in the direction of the platform. "Those panels will unlock the FORCE-field. No one else must be allowed to enter."

Another sound was beginning to take prominence above the hum

entered the level of atmosphere around the asteroid, closely followed by the shuttles.

CEstallia turned to Luke. "I have something for you," she said, "You must return them safely for me. Remember." With that, she quickly removed the chain containing the cylinder from her neck and placed it on his. She then reached beneath her heavy shawl and withdrew the ancient lightsaber and clipped it to his belt. "One other thing," she whispered before grasping his temples.

Luke's mind jolted as if from a physical blow. When CEstallia released him, he stumbled back slightly, mind reeling from the many images and emotions and thoughts and voices screaming for attention. He shook his head to clear it and still the voices whispered on in the back of his mind. And then suddenly they were silent.

When Luke refocused on his surroundings, it was to find that only seconds had passed. CEstallia still stood before him and the ships were only just putting down between them and the platform.

"That's everything, now," CEstallia said with a quiet smile. "It's time." She'd wanted to do that later, when it would have been easier on him. But she could see that now there wouldn't be time. He would have to experience the Time with her.

People began to spill out of the shuttles in a steadily growing pool of gray clad humans. Though the door was open on the Hinderer no one came out.

"Suggestions?" Han asked, shifting uncomfortably as the crowd began to move toward them. Chewie growled something under his breath and Han chuckled a bit. "Never quote me the odds," he whispered back at him.

"Wait a minute," CEstallia said, calling a loose rock to her hand from the ground beneath her. She carefully chose a target near the front of the group and let the rock fly.

When the rock hit the man, there was a slight ripple and then the man disappeared.

"Projections with no substance," Luke said, understanding.

"Well, what are we waitin' for?" Han put in, already drawing the droid blaster. "Let's narrow this crowd down." He ran wildly toward the crowd. Everyone else followed his lead. It only took a few moments for them to realize that the droid blasters did not work here.

Luke and CEstallia took out a number of the projections by sending a small storm of loose rocks in the direction of the crowd. The crowd narrowed to fifty or so human males and females wearing no expression. A stray swing at a not-quite-real human revealed that at least one of the four shuttles was also a projection. Since it was Mulder's stray swing he decided to see what else wasn't 'real.'

Three kicks and a sore toe later, one shuttle and the Hinderer were the only ships left standing on top of the asteroid. That job done,

fighting with what appeared to be a 'real' woman among the two dozen still fighting.

When everyone seemed caught up in the fight, CEstallia made a run for the FORCE-field. She was half way through the unlocking sequence when the children began to come out of the Hinderer led by the young woman who'd been brought with them to CEstallia. Her sense of urgency intensified; these children were the equivalent of the big guns.

The dozen humans left fighting began a retreat. Those in combat stance simply stepped back. Those on the ground ceased fighting. Luke had been rendering those he fought unconscious as quickly as possible and moved on to the next; they were so much like zombies that it hadn't taken much. But when he felt the sudden tension in the air, he paused. The man he'd been about to render unconscious scuttled away from him toward his other retreating comrades.

From the corner of his eye, Luke saw CEstallia at the control panel trying to get the field down. He also saw Domar heading in her direction from the back of the Hinderer. Luke was amazed at how clear his objective was; protect CEstallia until her mission is complete. Before he even had a conscious thought to move he found himself between Domar and CEstallia.

"I am Luke Skywalker, Jedi Knight." The words left Luke's mouth unbidden and his lightsaber was up and ignited.

Domar paused at the man standing before him. He had his own brother to thank for this. "Stand down, Skywalker. I'll deal with you later," he said.

Luke continued to hold his fighting stance. "No, Domar, the time is now. You will not go any further."

Domar's mouth tightened. 'The future is always in motion,' he whispered softly to himself. Then aloud: "I am the master of my destiny!" With that he erupted in fury toward the young man standing before him. A piece of the rock beneath him liquefied and leapt toward the young Jedi, still liquid.

Luke blocked it with his right hand halting it in mid-air. The force behind it, though, was such that it pushed him backwards to land sprawling on the ground.

Domar took the opportunity to make a grab for Luke's lightsaber and attempt to cut him through with it.

Luke rolled away before the blade could break the skin. He did however get a nice singe mark on his tunic.

Domar halted the lightsaber millimeters from the asteroid's surface.

Luke shut down the lightsaber mentally just as Domar was bringing it back up to try another attack. And while Domar was in confusion over what happened to the blade, Luke dove at him.

"These are the kids we saved before," Han said. "I thought they were on our side."

"Well, not anymore, I'd say," Leia spoke up wryly from behind him. "And who are they?" she added when she saw the little aliens step out behind the children.

No longer required to control the now retreating humans, the exiles stepped forward to lead the battle personally. The woman and the children were of the new breed. They did not require direct mental control.

Both Scully and Mulder were staring oddly at the young woman. She seemed very familiar. The hair was longer, the expression very hard and intent. Not at all like the slack expressions the previous humans had borne.

"Sam?" Mulder whispered. "Samantha?" he called again, stepping away from the group toward the children.

Dana put out a hand to stop him. She didn't like the looks of this. If this was indeed Samantha, she didn't look at all friendly. "Mulder...wait," she said.

Mulder shook her hand off and continued forward. This was his sister. He couldn't imagine in his wildest dreams that she would mean him harm.

The young woman seemed to smile in Mulder's mind. The expression of malice faded into welcome; her arms raised to embrace. But to the rest of the group, the truth was obvious. Samantha did not smile.

Scully stepped cautiously behind Mulder, watching his back as she had always done. She ignored Leia's pleas for her to stay back and not follow, to remember to keep her guard. In the span of a breath, a white wall of nothingness overrode her defenses. The wall told her to sleep, and she was so tired. So very tired. She closed her eyes.

The children held Leia, Han and Chewie at bay with a torrent of wind that threatened to blow them off the asteroid as they loaded their recently acquired hostages unto the Hinderer.

* * * * *

CEstallia saw the events around her unfolding in her peripheral senses. The main focus, though, was to get that FORCE-field down. The last sequence fell into place just as she 'saw' the battle between Luke and Domar began. The field disintegrated into silence.

CEstallia ran the few steps up to the upper platform that was invisible to the plateau below. There embedded in the rock was the Dark Jedi who was now the Gatemind.

She pulled a small, deadly-looking weapon from a boot and very deliberately disintegrated the being. Dark acrid smoke rose in his

When CEstallia was sure no trace was left of him, she disrobed and settled herself flat against the rock. The rock melted around her and conformed to her body. As her last physical activity, CEstallia reinstalled the FORCE-field and destroyed the unlocking circuits. They were no longer required. There would be no new Gatemind.

In the instant the rock settled around CEstallia's body, the Gateknowledge washed over her. She could sense the richness of the Infinity, see the outcome of the scuffle taking place beneath her. The deep beauty of the music of Infinity tore at her. Before she could allow its influence full reign, she began the ending sequence.

* * * *

Luke and Domar struggled for the lightsaber both having the power of the force as their ally; one light, one dark. Luke suddenly let go of the lightsaber as Domar was attempting to pull it away from him, thus throwing the little man off balance.

Luke pulled the lightsaber back toward himself igniting it as he drew back.

The little man lay winded on the ground a hand thrown in the air for mercy.

Luke caught himself before he struck. He couldn't ignore such a plea, it was simply not in his nature.

"Fool." Domar whispered as he threw a bolt of blue lightning, full of all of his hatred. The blue lightning reflected off a stunningly brilliant FORCE-field, that suddenly erected itself before Luke. The blue lightning amplified and struck Domar, and penetrated into the rock of the Gate. A crack formed and a rumbling began beneath the surface of the rock.

Luke covered his ears in the ensuing violence that followed. Just as on the Hinderer, he was unprepared, but now he knew the cause. The Gate felt pain. Although the screaming wasn't as bad as it had been on the Hinderer, it was close. The thunders also returned and increased and the entire asteroid seemed to shake and swirl rocks in a violent whirlwind, which emanated from the point of the crack. After a few moments it died away to a manageable level. With a heaved sigh, he pulled himself up from the rocky ground to stand among the swirling winds. Domar was no where in sight.

Across the plateau, Luke could see Han helping Leia to her feet. Chewie was shaking his head to clear the ringing in his ears. Luke knew that CEstallia had managed to penetrate the field, and that she was one with the Gate. The Hinderer and the one shuttle could be seen against the backdrop of the infinity as they departed. "Where are Mulder and Dana?" Luke asked as he came up to his friends.

"They're gone," Leia said. "These little creature's took them away on the Hinderer."

"What?!" Luke asked. "We've got to go get them. There isn't much

"Much time before what, Kid?" Han asked. He didn't like the sounds of this already.

"I'm in contact with CEstallia, somehow," Luke said, "and she's already started the sequence. She's holding it off as long as she can, but when this rock blows, no life will survive here. We've got to get everybody off that planet or it will be too late."

"Well that's just great!" Han exclaimed. "She didn't happen to tell you a short cut back to the Falcon did she? It'll take us at least an hour to find it."

"I know a way..."

Hinderer

Dana Scully opened her eyes slowly. In the back of her mind she could hear music playing; beautiful music that haunted and demanded attention and begged her to follow. Follow where? Dana shook her head to clear it. Where was Mulder? Luke? Leia, Han and Chewie? Where was she? Her thoughts fought their way through what seemed to be an endless haze.

Suddenly memory returned, and with it renewed fear. Leia's words about remembering to keep her guard returned to her. The music was growing louder. She tried to focus her mind as Luke had shown her, to marshall her mental powers to block the music. It wasn't working. Was she doing it wrong? <You must reach for Jedi calm, Dana> a voice spoke in her mind, Luke's voice.

She relaxed. Luke was guiding her.

When Dana had her block in place, she pulled herself up from the floor in her rocky cell. She was surprised to find that the rock was warm to the touch. The small chamber that she was in opened into another larger chamber. One end of the chamber was open to a narrow corridor. Dana approached the open end cautiously. Even she had seen enough science fiction movies to imagine that there might be some kind of force field there. And unlike those she'd seen in the movies, she searched around in her pocket for something to throw at the opening.

Millennium Falcon

"I've found Dana," Luke said aloud from his seat behind Han. "She's got her mental block back up. I can't touch Mulder's mind right now, perhaps he's still out."

"So, do we have a plan?" Han asked, gesturing out the view screen. Their destination loomed ahead.

"I think so," Luke said. "Do you think you could disable the Hinderer? Just make sure it can't take off?" Luke asked Han.

Han grinned and threw a look at Chewie. "Are you kidding?" he asked. "Piece of cake." Chewie growled in agreement.

"So what are we doing while these two are off playing?" Leia asked with a smirk in Han's direction.

"We are going to be doing something that hasn't been done in decades. Since we can't bring the Gate to this world ship, we're going to bring the world ship to the Gate," Luke answered.

Leia gave her brother a confused look. "Why would we want to bring the world ship to the Gate?" she asked. She felt as if she'd missed a couple of steps along the line.

"I'm sorry," Luke apologized. "It's just that CEstallia's put all this stuff in my head. Information seems to appear as I need it. And right now, we need to get everyone on this world to the Gate. The fastest way to do that is to bring the world to the Gate."

Leia nodded her acceptance. Luke hadn't really answered her question at all. But she trusted that he knew what he was doing.

* * * * *

Domar limped into his office to see that his prisoner, Benjamin Adams, was still there, unconscious, as he'd left him. He ordered the limp form carried to what was now to be the Flag ship to his new Empire. There would be a use for this one, as well as for the other two from Earth.

When Benjamin had been carried from the room, Domar looked over the office that had been his personal place of meditation for over a hundred years. There was nothing here that he would miss. He had the stone bracelets and he had the seed stock for the newer breed of Jedi children and he had a ship. Nothing else was required. Except to kill Skywalker. He hadn't been able to do that at the Gate, because it must have been protecting the young Jedi. Even according to ancient knowledge, only the wisest and oldest of Jedi Masters could invoke a personal FORCE-field that repelled the blue lightning. But here, on the world ship, Skywalker would again be vulnerable. Domar allowed a smile to form as he headed back toward the Hinderer to plan his attack. He needed nothing more from this artificial planet.

* * * * *

Dana Scully sat in a corner of the cell in which she'd been placed. The, now non-functional, light-thrower lay beside her on the cell floor. She now wished she'd thrown something else to test for the force field, because the dim glow rods in the corners of the ceiling gave only sparse illumination, at best.

Dana must have dozed off again, because she startled when she heard the sound of a body falling to the stone floor. She gasped when she saw who lay, literally, at her feet.

hard cell floor. He was still dressed as he had been the last time Dana'd seen him, only the holsters were obviously empty.

After a half second of uncertainty, Dana went to him. Regardless of what he might have done, the doctor in her would not allow her to ignore the fact that this man might need medical attention. His pulse was steady and there didn't appear to be any broken bones. Dana rolled him unto his back to get a better look at his bruises. Because of the condition of the bruises, Dana guessed that he'd had previous facial contact with another hard surface.

As Dana gingerly examined one cheekbone more closely, Ben suddenly opened his eyes. She snatched her hands away from his face as if in fear of being burned, but she remained stooped beside him. The touch of fear and uncertainty in her eyes, though, was telling.

Benjamin focused immediately on Dana. Very carefully, he moved to a sitting position, not once removing his eyes from hers. Then, he blinked. "We've got to stop meeting like this," he said with a small smile as he touched a hand to the side of his head that was bleeding. He winced. When he saw that Dana's expression had not changed from one of watchfulness he added, "See, it's red like yours."

"Some of the worse monsters are red-blooded and walk upright," Scully said, pursing her lips. "What are you doing here?" she asked as she stepped back toward her light-thrower.

"Same as you," Ben said as he eased himself back down to the floor. "I'm a prisoner." Ben eyed her wariness for a few moments. She sat in farthest corner of the room from him, but kept him where she could see him. "For the record," he spoke up, "I'm not a monster."

* * * * *

Luke directed Han to land the Falcon near the 'underside' of the world ship. The controls for the biosphere were topside, on the surface of the world, but the maneuvering controls were embedded in the world ship's underbelly.

The increased humidity was immediately obvious once the Falcon penetrated the atmospheric barrier. All of the land area seemed designed to imitate a very large swamp.

'This takes me back,' Luke thought to himself when he saw the land forms. This world ship was a convincing imitation of Yoda's swamp on Dagobah, only the large organisms that had been present in abundance on Dagobah did not exist here.

"Leia and I will go from here and meet you at the Hinderer," Luke said as he and Leia headed out of the cockpit.

"The Hinderer's on the other side of this great big greenhouse," Han called after Luke and Leia. "Are you sure you don't want us to wait for you? It could be a pretty long walk."

"We're sure," Luke called over his shoulder. "I know another way."

"Alright, Kid," Han muttered under his breath as he monitored his wife and brother's departure from the Falcon.

Chewie growled a word in comment about Luke's 'knowing a way'.

"Yeah, spooky is the word, pal," Han said.

* * * * *

"Just how much are you in contact with CEstallia, Luke?" Leia asked as they wound their way through the thick growth of trees and brush.

"I know what I need to do almost instinctively. I think that CEstallia is doing that. She's giving me information I couldn't possibly know on my own. For example, even the exiles don't know where the maneuvering circuits are for this world and neither should I. But I do." Luke came to a stop before the mouth of a rather ordinary looking cave. It was similar to the other many caves that dotted the forest.

Leia could sense the difference in her brother. He was still the same old Luke, but there was an added dimension, something not entirely to the fore, but there nonetheless.

The cave was completely dark. Luke moved into the cave purposefully, and was immediately swallowed by the darkness. Leia followed more slowly after she turned on her light-thrower to illuminate the way for both of them.

Luke walked toward a pock-marked section of the cave's wall. Then, he reached beneath his tunic and removed the necklace CEstallia had given him and pressed the cylinder into one of the holes. When he removed it, the wall slid to one side and revealed a lighted tunnel beyond.

Leia's eyes widened with interest as she followed her brother into the tunnel. The walls were made of a thick transparent material which enabled them to view the inner supports of the world ship. The metal underpinnings reminded her vaguely of the death star.

After they had walked several hundred meters the walls began to darken until they were no longer transparent, but resembled obsidian. The white light that had emanated from the floor was now a soft purple. The purple lights led to an intersection. At the spot where the corridors intersected the lights in the floor flashed in a square pattern.

"Come on," Luke said as he grabbed his sister's hand and drew her onto the square. A few seconds after they stepped onto the square, four walls slid slowly into place around them. Luke placed a hand on the panel that appeared after the walls were secure, and uttered a word that Leia could not place.

"What did you say?" Leia asked. Sure, Luke knew quite a few languages, but so did she. And the one's she didn't know she could recognize, but this one wasn't at all familiar.

"Oh, I just told the transport to take us to the control room."

"Well, I guessed that," Leia said. "What language were you speaking?"

Luke looked confused for a second as if sorting through strange or unusual data. "You know, I really have no idea." He shrugged it off as the transport came to a stop with a soft 'ping'.

The transport opened into a square situated in the corner of a large oblong control center. The view screen and various panels and systems began to activate as they entered the room. A soft voice began to utter greetings and information in a language Leia couldn't decipher. Luke responded to the computer in the same language as he punched commands into the console in the center of the room.

Leia rubbed her arms where the goose flesh appeared. This was getting downright spooky, even for a Jedi. She looked on as Luke continued to operate the machinery with a solemn deliberateness to his movements. When Luke stood up from the console eerie red lights began to flash around the perimeter of the room.

"Alright," Luke said, leading Leia back toward the square of lights, "it's time."

* * * *

Fox Mulder opened his eyes to find himself lying on a raised platform in a white room. When he moved to sit up, he found that he was restrained by some sort of invisible field. His head was mobile, so he took in as much of the room as he could with that limited motion.

Displays and equipment were lined against a far wall. The rest of the room was painted a brilliant white. The light in the room seemed to come from the paint itself. At one end of the room was a door, which slid open as his eyes settled on it.

A short gray skinned figure dressed in brown robes entered the room. "So good to see you again," Domar said. "I am called One. I am the leader here. You will call me One also."

Mulder took in the creature that stood before him. He wanted struggle in defiance at being held down, but his curiosity got the better of him. "Where's Samantha?" he asked.

"She is safe, Fox Mulder." Domar responded. "She is very strong in the force. Her powers have blossomed under my tutelage, and so can yours."

Mulder watched the little man for a second before responding. "You kept her away from me," Mulder said. "Why should I believe anything you say?"

"She's nearby," Domar said, taunting. "Would you like to see her?" Domar stepped over to a view screen built into one of the walls and turned to await Mulder's answer.

"Yes," Mulder responded after a moments hesitation. He was sure that Domar was toying with him, but he couldn't dismiss the possibility that this little man might just keep his word.

Domar reached for the button on the screen and then drew back. He turned again to face Mulder. "Oh, yes. I forgot to mention. Who is it that you'd like to see? You see, I have Ms. Scully and I'm sure you'd like to see how she is. She's been with us before, you know. Why don't I give you a moment to decide?" With that the little man left the room, leaving Mulder with a very pained expression.

When Han poked his head out from behind the knarled branches of the giant paraka tree, he was amazed at the bustle of activity. Dozens of the gray-clad human zombies appeared to be loading things into the shuttle and into a side section of the Hinderer that Han hadn't noticed during his first visit. Han ducked his head back behind the tree when he noticed Domar exit the Hinderer.

Han watched as Domar walked quickly across the square and into a central building. Judging from the amount of light and noise emanating from the building, this was where the rest of the exiles were. Han took a chance and wandered out into the square, careful to walk slowly and expressionlessly. When he was near the entry door of the Hinderer, he ducked inside.

The familiar rocky walls greeted him as they had before. The zombies didn't seem to be in this section of the ship for the moment, so Han headed for the engine room. Even though he didn't know what would do the most damage to these engines to prevent them from starting, he did know what would happen if he removed the part that he'd originally replaced.

A few moments later, Han grinned in satisfaction as he held the small part in his hand. There was a wheezing sort of whine as the engine's power drained away. As he was about to make his way back toward the ship's entrance, he noticed that the door to the white room was closed. He paused in mid stride. Then, as if coming to a decision, he shook his head and went back toward the door to the white room. The door slid open at his direct approach to reveal Fox Mulder bound to the bed with energy straps.

Han jumped to action and hurled himself toward the low platform. Mulder struggled ineffectively against the straps.

Han reached beneath the platform, seeking the source of the straps' power. Of course with the engines down the power would drain away, but that could take an hour. They didn't have that kind of time. Someone was gonna figure out, and fast, that something was foul. Han's fingers finally caught on the source of the field and blocked it, allowing Mulder to break free.

"Come on," Han said urgently as Mulder got to his feet. They had reached the door when an alarm was heard ringing out over the camp.

* * * * *

Dana Scully sat in her position in the back corner of the cell she shared with Benjamin Adams. She continued to watch him as he closed his eyes and napped or meditated or whatever he was doing. Then suddenly his eyes flew open and his head jerked in her

"Come on!" he hissed, jumping to his feet and grabbing one of her arms.

For a second Dana went limp with shock as Ben dragged her toward the force field. When she saw where she was headed, she fought at his hand that gripped at her wrist and dug her feet into the cell floor.

"Stop fighting me!" Ben ground out under his breath. "The field is down!" He didn't let go of her wrist. "Do you want out of here or not?"

"How do you know that the field is down?" Scully asked as she yanked her wrist from his grasp. She moved toward the place that she'd been sitting and picked up the defective light-thrower and heaved it in the direction of the force field. It went right through and clattered against the far stone wall.

Ben gave her a sarcastic smile and gestured that she should lead.

Scully returned the sarcastic smile with one of her own and shook her head and gestured that he lead. And so she followed him down the rocky corridor. A moment later the alarms started.

* * * * *

Luke and Leia were again winding through the woods toward the exiles' camp when they heard an alarm sound. A knowing look passed between the two of them. Han must have been in the village. They broke into a full run, there was no more need for stealth.

They broke into a clearing just as the exiles began to pour out of a large central building. The sound of the Falcon's engines could be heard as the ship approached.

Leia was surprised when she looked out over the trees, searching for the Falcon against the grayness of the Infinity and saw the Asteroid right there sharp as if it were almost upon them. The Falcon broke into her line of vision as Chewie settled down in the center of the square, effectively separating the exiles and the Hinderer, at least for a few extra seconds.

Leia turned to Luke for confirmation that their job was done and then they both made a dash for the waiting Falcon. They saw when Ben followed by Dana ran into the waiting ship.

When Luke saw Dana run up the Falcon's ramp, he had a brief, sharp flash of a future event. He came to a full stop in the square. It was an image of Capitol City at Coruscant lying in ruin and himself standing in the middle of the awesome destruction with Dana looking at him with terror and betrayal in her eyes. Mulder laying dying at their feet.

"No," Luke whispered urgently against the sight, denying it. He didn't fully understand what it meant but he knew that he could not bear to continue on with Dana knowing what the future might hold. "The future is always in motion," he reminded himself. And then the answer popped into his mind. He silently thanked CEstallia for

the Falcon, nearly catching up to Leia before she headed up the ramp.

As soon as Luke entered the Falcon, Leia was turning to head back out. "What is it?" he asked her. He would have to talk to Domar later.

"Han and Mulder aren't here, Luke," Leia said urgently.

Luke's eyes reflexively took in the room. Dana, Benjamin Adams, Chewie and Leia were the only persons on the ship. His eyes went back to Benjamin Adams. Chewie stood menacingly over the man, who, though a Jedi himself, did not resist. Luke reached out into the force and felt both of the missing men. They were in the engine room of the Hinderer fighting with the zombies.

"I'll get them, Leia," Luke said. "Make sure everything is under control here." Leia nodded in understanding and let her brother go.

Leia re-activated the Falcon's force field as Luke exited the ship and then she turned toward the group behind her. "Lights out, Mr. Adams," she said to Ben as she stunned him.

* * * * *

The exiles were spilling around the Falcon as Luke came down the Falcon's ramp. He leapt over the side of the ramp and knocked one of the exiles off his feet.

The little men threw dirt and energy blasts at him with the force. Everything they threw at him was deflected by the FORCE-field that continued to protect him. Luke made his way unharmed into the Hinderer. Some of the exiles fled to their caves in fear at what they saw as the Gate itself protecting the young Jedi. Domar simply became enraged. He decided to bring out his secret weapon.

* * * * *

Luke made his way toward the engine room of the Hinderer. The sounds of the scuffle taking place there drifted to his ears as he entered the rocky corridor.

Han and Mulder were holding their own against the dozen or so zombies that were left standing. "Glad you could join us," Han called toward his brother-in-law as he decked another zombie. As best as Luke could guess they were both having the time of their lives.

"Well, everybody's waiting," Luke quipped as he took down a zombie himself. "Think you could hurry this up a bit?"

Suddenly, as they had done before, the gray-clad humans retreated. All of the zombies left conscious ran from the room. Han stood up from his position and looked at the other two men. "Why do I have a bad feeling about this?" he asked.

A light step sounded before the children and the young woman spilled into the room. "Sam!" Mulder called and stepped toward his sister.

"No...Mulder!" Luke tried to pull him back. But he was too late. Samantha raised her arms and shot a volley of the blue lightning at Mulder, knocking him into a bank of consoles. Han reached for his blaster, but it was knocked from his hand by a pocket of air sent by one of the smaller children. Mulder got back to his feet and tried again to approach his sister, this time more uncertainly.

Samantha sneered at Mulder as he limped toward her. When she raised her hands to attack Mulder this time, there was a dark murderous malice in her eyes. The lightning pushed Mulder against the only console that still stood.

"No!" Luke yelled and threw himself between Samantha and Mulder, breaking the connection of the lightning on the former F.B.I. agent. The lightning lit around Luke's field, crackling at its edges as it sizzled in the artificial air. Samantha continued her attack on Luke, determined to break through his barrier.

"Han, help Mulder and get out of here," Luke called to his brother-in-law. "And keep the shield up on the Falcon. It's me she wants."

Han backed slowly toward the now stirring Mulder as he continued to debate with his brother-in-law. "What does she want you for? And just how are you going to get back to the Falcon if we keep the shield up?"

"Domar sent them," Luke called, raising a hand to reinforce the field as the children joined in with a wind storm. "And don't worry about the shield, I know a way."

"Why didn't I guess?" Han muttered to himself as he half carried, half drug Mulder off the Hinderer and toward the Falcon.

When they were gone, Luke turned back to Samantha, mentally tracking Han and Mulder's progress. The wind buffeted the FORCE-field, but the Jedi stood firm.

"Can't you see that this isn't working?" Luke called to her, satisfied that his friends had made it to the Falcon. The field fell away as soon as Samantha stopped sending the lightning.

The children and the young woman linked hands and focused their minds to send the white hot mental energy wall at Luke. Luke clapped his hands and then he was gone. The group stood staring blankly at the empty spot where Luke Skywalker had stood.

* * * *

When Luke materialized on the Falcon, Han and Leia gaped at him.

"How'd you do that?" Leia whispered.

"Long story," Luke said. "Where's Dana?"

sedate him," Han said, gesturing his head in the direction of the back room.

"Go back to the Gate," Luke said as he headed toward the back of the Falcon.

* * * *

Dana sat beside Mulder's limp form as he lay on a cot. She rested her head in her hands and fought tears of futility. At least he was out of it for now and wouldn't have to think about what his sister had tried to do to him. They had searched so long for Samantha and now to find her only to have her try to kill him was too much.

She looked up as the door slid open. Luke stood in the doorway sadly gazing across the space toward her. With a heavy sigh he stepped fully into the room.

"Dana," Luke began, "I need to talk to you, but there isn't much time."

"Alright," Dana said, pulling herself together and standing up from the cot.

Luke took her hand and led her toward the other cot in the room. "Dana, I'm sorry about everything that happened here. And I deeply regret the fact that I will not get to know you."

Dana frowned at Luke in confusion.

"Dana, I'm sending you and Mulder home. It's safer that way for both of you."

"But Luke,...how?" Dana shook her head. "What...?"

Luke looked at her and sighed. The knowledge was all in his head, but he could not tell her. She wouldn't remember anyway even if he could. So he simply pulled her into his arms and held her.

After a moment he pulled away and looked softly into her eyes. "Dana," he said. "This is good-bye." With that he softly touched his lips to hers. Very gently, he rendered her unconscious.

* * * *

Luke walked into the bay of the Falcon carrying Dana. "I take it we're back at the Gate?" Luke said to his astonished family.

"What's going on, Luke?" Han asked, too casually.

"They are going back home. Bring Mulder and Adams," Luke's voice carried toward them as he walked down the Falcon's exit ramp to stand the top of the Gate near the platform. He laid Dana on the rock and brushed her hair away from her face.

A minute later, Han appeared carrying Mulder over his shoulder and Chewie appeared carrying Benjamin Adams. Luke arranged them all side by side on the surface of the rock. When he was done, the rock liquefied beneath their feet and the three humans sank beneath it.

Han and Chewie stared speechlessly at Luke as he stared at the point where three humans had once been. With a last sigh, Luke looked up at his friends. "It's time," he said.

* * * *

"What about the children, Luke?" Leia asked when her husband and brother and Chewie arrived back and headed for the cockpit.

"The gate will take care of the children. They will be fine. But for now, I don't think CEstallia can wait any longer."

As the words left Luke's mouth, a quake began beneath the surface of the asteroid.

"Well, you don't need to tell me twice," Han said as he powered up the Falcon's engines and lifted off the rock.

"Luke! Look!" Leia said, pointing toward an aft monitor. The Imperial shuttle had lifted off of the world ship and was headed out of the Gate.

Beneath them the rumbling of the Gate grew louder. Suddenly there was an explosion in one of the Falcon's aft panels. Before anyone could react to the explosion, Luke began to grab at his head.

"Luke! Luke! What is it!?" Leia cried out to her brother, his face was turning unhealthy shades of blue and white.

"Got...to...g-get...out of...here!" He gasped out. Then the screaming started. Deep awful screams. Chewie covered his ears and whimpered at hearing his friend in mortal pain. Leia cried and tried to help, but it was no use. She could not reach him. Han set his jaw and flew the Falcon out of the infinity as fast as he could.

By the time they reached normal space, Luke was catatonic. His mind was untouchable. All that Leia could do was hold his hand and wipe away the slow tears that crept down her face.

<MW> [a long time ago]

Chunks of hot meteorite flung into the atmosphere of a glowing blue planet. The boulders soon burned themselves down to large rocks, before crashing into the ground and borrowing themselves in the silent forest.

A lone Indian boy stooped, hiding in the mouth of a cave, watching the beautiful, yet fearful sight of the stars that came to the Earth. He would tell his grandfather when he returned to the village of the great things he'd witnessed.

THE END....

(OH YEAH, YOU MIGHT WANT TO READ THE EPILOGUE IF YOU WANT TO HAVE EVEN A CLUE OF HOW THIS ALL TURNS OUT) :)

From: Jmkeec <74363.2566@CompuServe.COM>
Newsgroups: alt.tv.x-files.creative
Subject: NEW: XJEDI VOL FOUR EPILOGUE <end>
Date: 23 Jan 1996 04:12:59 GMT

DISCLAIMER: Okay, folks, if you made it this far, we've been together for quite a while. Soooooo I'm sure you know that these folks aren't mine. They belong to straAsucaL and snoitcudorP3101> <1013Productions and LucasArts.
(sorry got a little turned around) No money made (or else I could buy better jokes/or a life). No infringement intended. On with the show.

EPILOGUE

[a long time ago]

<GFFA> CEstallian System
Millennium Falcon

"Well, there it is," Han said grimly as he stared down at the hazy atmosphere of the planet CEstallia. He glanced back at his still uncomprehending brother-in-law. It had been nearly a week and Luke still had not come out of the state he'd fallen into. The New Republic doctors were at loss.

Leia held onto Luke's slack hand as the Falcon traveled along the beam that would take them to the CEstallian landing bay.

"What took you so long?" Asked the tall man who greeted them in the bay.

"Huh?" Leia asked as she led her brother down the gangway. She'd only made the appointment with the CEstallian medical officials earlier in the day. The man at the bottom of the ramp simply shook his head in disapproval and led them to a transport tube.

Once they were inside, he studied Luke's eyes carefully. Then, with a satisfied smile he started the lift on its way.

"What was that all about?" Han demanded.

"Oh...uh, preliminary," the man said. "All is as it should be."

Han was gearing up for battle mode when Leia grabbed his arm and

The man led them to a plain wooden door and left them standing on the outside. Han and Leia stared at one another before Han reached out and opened the door.

"Welcome," a voice said, accompanied by the smell of flowers.
"I am S'carria, Matriarch of CEstallian. Please, bring him in."

The woman standing before them bore little resemblance to CEstallia save for the pupil-less gray eyes. Brown hair hang in a halo around her thin face, not a streak of gray was visible.

When they'd seated Luke on a chair, S'carria stepped over and sat across from him. She gently brushed his hair back from his forehead. "You are highly honored here, Luke Skywalker. Your name will go down in our books as a hero." The hand that had brushed his hair back, paused at his temple. For several seconds she stared intently into Luke's eyes.

When S'carria released Luke's temple, they both closed their eyes briefly. When Luke opened his, he was back. He stared at the strange woman before him. He turned and looked at Han and Leia. "What am I doing here?" he asked. "What is this place?"

"What is your name?" S'carria asked.

"Luke Skywalker," he answered immediately, looking to Leia in confusion.

"He will remember in time," S'carria said, removing the chain from his neck. "Thank you for bringing this home," she said.

Luke did not dispute her. The gray strands mixed in her brown hair, though, seemed vaguely familiar.

"He needs to rest," S'carria said. Immediately Luke's eyes closed and he slumped in the chair.

"Mr. Solo," S'carria turned to Han. "Would you help him to the sleeping chamber through those doors?" She pointed toward a curtain in the corner of the room.

"Yeah, sure." Han said, helping the groggy young Jedi to his feet and through the door.

"What happened to him?" Leia asked as she handed S'carria the other item CEstallia had given Luke.

"He carried within him the memories of all the Matriarch's since the start. The human mind does not have the plurality that the CEstallian mind is capable of, and so he essentially became CEstallian for a time. The bracelet saved him physically, but could not protect him mentally. The weight of dying destroyed all his barriers and eventually crushed his mind beneath the added pressure."

"I'm afraid I don't understand," Leia said. "What dying? And the bracelet protected him physically from...what?"

S'carria smiled understanding Leia's confusion. "It is difficult for those unaccustomed to these things to understand. CEstallia choose him to be her Intermediary. He became the carrier of her memories and those of the others who went before her, thus he became...CEstallian. He had to witness her death and essentially experience it...to pass it on to us. Becoming CEstallian increased his perception and heightened his senses. So when CEstallia died along with the Gate, he became overwhelmed by the intense pressure placed upon his mind.

"The bracelet protected his physical body from experiencing death. You see, the Gate itself is true CEstallian and because of the implanted CEstallian memories the Gate saw him as an extension of itself. But because the bracelet is made of DEAD rock, he was spared. That is why the Hinderer was destroyed, it was perceived by the Gate as a part of itself."

"So then, that explains why the panel with the cylinder exploded," Leia mused to herself. "But, were the exiles CEstallian, as well?"

"No," S'carria shook her head, "they were 'of the gate'. This was done artificially so that they could not reenter the galaxy and threaten society again. They perished with the Gate. CEstallia's memories mention those who had bracelets. Those ones were sent."

Leia waited for S'carria to finish her statement and when she didn't she shook her head, "Sent...sent where?"

S'carria gave her a strange look before she responded, "Where they belong."

[present time]

<GFFA> Somewhere in space.

A gleaming jewel shaped ship slipped into an entry port of Infinity. The young woman at the helm watched through the view port for evidence of that for which she waited. The ship's flood lights shone brightly against the rocky surface of the Gate.

"Is there any sign, yet?" A male voice called from a corner of the room. His pupil-less gray eyes scanned the view screen just as the young woman's had done.

"No," the young woman said. "But, everything will take place just as it should. The memory record that Luke returned was valid and besides, we've only been here two minutes. Patience." Though she spoke seriously, there was a mischievous glint to her pupil-less blue eyes.

"Just because you're gonna be Matriarch someday..." the young man said, leaving the rest of the familiar taunt unsaid.

"And just because you're..." she returned, but didn't finish her statement because just then they felt that for which they had been waiting.

"They're here," the young woman said as she gazed down at the group of humans lying against the surface of the rock. The young man did not need to be told what to do next.

CEstallian System

Samantha opened her eyes to see a white ceiling overhead. There was the pleasant scent of flowers in the air, in deep contrast to her rapidly beating heart. She'd hadn't expected peacefulness, but darkness...or at least physical pain. She wasn't sure why she expected those things. The reason was only a hazy memory. The softly lit surroundings and the warmth of the cot beneath her, though, were beginning to calm her, ebbing away her body's tenseness.

A soft swish announced the opening of a door out of her view. "Hello, I see you're awake," a voice said. The form of a blonde headed woman with pupil-less blue eyes came into view. "I'm Callie Skywalker and I've been waiting for you a very long time."

"Skywalker...?" Sam asked, brow furrowed. She remembered that name. Luke...Luke had been called Skywalker. The memories began to flood back into her mind. She remembered everything. Her breath caught and her face crumpled.

"Oh Fox! Fox! What have I done?" she began to cry. She pushed herself up from the cot, remembering with startling clarity the things that had occurred; the things she'd done to her brother.

Callie closed her eyes and briefly brushed her sense against Samantha's. "Child," she began. "He is all right. He's alive and he's fighting for you. Close your eyes and listen."

Sam shook her head sadly. "No! No! I can't be here! I've got to go to him...to beg him to forgive me!" She jumped from the cot and made ready to run out of the room's door.

Callie easily restrained her. "Sam, listen to me," she said, injecting the Force into her words. "He's not here. You can't go to him, now. Listen to me and I'll tell you the story. Listen to me. Close your eyes and listen to me."

Sam obediently closed her eyes as Callie had asked, but the tears slipped through and continued to roll down her cheeks.

Callie lead her back to the cot and began her tale.

"A long time ago, your brother was able to come here through a Gate. He helped one of my ancestors overcome an enemy, to set matters straight in this galaxy. You knew him as Luke Skywalker. That was over a thousand years ago. I am Callie Skywalker, mien-Matriarch of CEstallia. Because of what took place back then, Luke Skywalker's name has become great in the galaxy. Luke and your brother made it possible for a correction in time to occur. The duty to await your arrival here was passed on to me. You and the others have been cared for and in time, when it's safe, you and the others can return home."

Samantha opened her eyes and sniffed. "So, am I in the future? Will I ever see Fox again?"

Callie smiled, almost indulgently. "No, child," she said. "You are in what in your galaxy would be the present. Those things that you remember occurred in this galaxy's past. The gate sent you to us here, where we've been waiting."

Sam eyed Callie curiously. This was a strange story, but no stranger than what she had begun to remember of her life or of the past day. The thought of those events brought back the sight of her brothers face in the Infinity. Tears again welled in her eyes, "His memory of me will be of my trying to kill him," she whispered. "Why did I do that?"

"Sam," Callie said, covering one of her hands with her own. "He won't remember it. He won't remember a thing. You only remember because you had a cylinder within you."

Callie forced back her own tears at seeing the pain and confusion in those hazel eyes. She wanted so much to ease this young woman's pain. She'd suffered enough in her lifetime. Maybe there was something she could do...

[present day]

<MW> Earth

Silver Springs, Maryland

Skinner sat in front of his computer trying desperately to remember the previous day. Nothing made sense. He'd remembered going to Charlotte on Friday, but he had no memory of Saturday, much less returning to Maryland.

Tired of not remembering he clicked on the television. A news report caught his attention.

"On the outskirts of Arlington Va., a meteorite, heretofore undetected by scientists fell to the earth this afternoon, crashing into a mobile unit on a construction sight..."

Skinner chuckled, wondering at what type of conclusion Agent Mulder would draw from this incident.

His phone rang.

Georgetown Memorial Hospital

"There are eyewitnesses who swear you were found encased in a

room staring dumbfounded at one another.

"Sir," Mulder stammered, glancing uncertainly at Scully. "We woke up here." Dana nodded in agreement at their superior.

Skinner glared at the two battered and exhausted Agents and felt the beginnings of a real whopper of a headache. Where was that Exedrin?

Washington D.C.

Friday

Fox Mulder ran through the rain to his apartment building. The cool October wind combined with the rain cut through his shirt front as he bundled a stack of files under his overcoat to protect them from the elements. The rain, in his opinion, only provided a depressing end to a depressing week. As the elevator creaked its way to his floor, he mentally reviewed the events that had taken place since he and Scully had woken up in the hospital.

Because he and Scully had been unable to account for their whereabouts from Thursday to Sunday, they'd been been scheduled for a review by one of the federal psychologists; that was, of course, after they'd been grilled by AD Skinner and a board with Cancerman silently in attendance.

To add to the troubles, the construction company had filed a suit against the F.B.I., since its Agent's had been found embedded in the meteorite that had destroyed the trailer; it seemed that someone had a video camera. They'd claimed that a secret government experiment had gone foul, thus causing loss of their property.

The owner of the video camera had taken the liberty of sharing with the local news media, hence every talk show and tabloid in the continental U.S. was seeking an interview with the two Agents. And as the icing on the cake, at some time during the weekend, someone had stolen Scully's car.

Mulder simply could not imagine what could possibly happen to top the last two days. When the elevator dinged upon reaching his floor, he stood there with his back against the wall for a second before he could urge his tired body forward.

As Mulder stepped from the elevator, he noticed a shrouded figure standing near the wall. He couldn't tell if the figure belonged to a male or female, as a long gray hooded cloak obscured all tell-tell signs of gender. He moved to continue on toward his door with a nod.

"Fox Mulder?" a voice asked.

familiar. He turned back in her direction. "Yes?" A drop of rain hung on the edge of his nose. He wiped at it unconsciously.

"I have a gift for you." A small boned hand came out from one of the huge sleeves, to reveal a small tin box. It was decorated with intricate swirls of various colors and patterned indentations, all in all an odd looking box.

Mulder slowly reached out and took it from her hand. He looked at it silently for a moment. "What is it?" he asked at last.

A sound from behind him down the hall caught his attention. He turned briefly to see what it was. Seeing no one, he turned back to his strange visitor. She was gone. The entire hall was deserted, save for one F.B.I. agent dripping wet, files clutched to him in one hand and a tin box in the other.

There was but one thing that came to mind to do. Mulder decided he wanted to know what this gift was. It never occurred to him that there might be a bomb inside or some poisonous insect. This gift, he felt, must be precious indeed. He went into his apartment.

Mulder dropped his files on the table as he stepped into his entryway. Then he reached behind to flip a light switch and kicked the door shut. Not once did he remove his eyes from the box. He sat in the living room and removed the lid. The box contained a tea bag.

Mulder rested his chin on a fist, contemplating what to do. Maybe his instincts were incorrect. How could a tea bag warrant the delivery this one had gotten? The idea of poison now occurred to him. Maybe Cancerman was behind this whole thing...

* * * * *

Dana Scully sat at her computer desk writing field reports. She paused to arch her back, removing the thin rimmed glasses that were beginning to irritate her nose. This was taking longer than it should have. The knock at the door was a welcome reprieve.

When she looked through the peep-hole, she was surprised to see Fox Mulder standing on the other side. He seemed a little preoccupied. Not too unusual. She opened the door.

"What brings you to this neck of the woods?" she asked, a smirk on her face. "If you're hankering for a home-cooked meal, you're out of luck, Mulder."

Mulder barely smiled at her joke. Dana frowned at that, not that she felt the joke was remarkably funny, but she'd expected at least a rejoinder.

Instead Mulder produced a tin box, opened it, and held what appeared to be an ordinary tea bag in the air. "Do you know what this is?" he asked seriously.

Scully's eyebrows went up. "Well, at a guess, I'd say it's a tea

"Do you have any?" Mulder continued, ignoring her question.

"Y--es," Scully responded giving Mulder an odd look. She decided to wait him out on this one.

"Care to join me for some tea, then?" Mulder asked. Smiling for the first time since he'd entered her apartment.

"Mulder, please tell me you didn't come all the way to my apartment to get me to make tea for you."

"Nope," Mulder grinned, "I came all the way over here to make it for you, so go back to what you were doing and I'll be out in a minute."

Dana didn't even try to hide her surprise. What had gotten into Mulder? She knew they were both weirded out about their strange disappearance and reappearance, but this seemed different, somehow. "I don't think I want to leave you in this condition," she joked. "You might pass out from shock when you realize what you're doing. I think I'll just sit right here and watch--for the record." Dana sat at her table and watched her partner riffle through her dishes.

While they waited for the water to boil, he told her about a strange woman who'd come to his apartment building that day. When the pot began to whistle, he poured a good measure of hot water in each. He added sugar to Dana's and one of her bags of peppermint tea.

"What did she say?" Scully asked as he handed her the mug.

Mulder shrugged. "She said she had a gift for me." He dunked his tea bag, watching the water darken.

"Really?" Scully said, surprised. "What was the gift?"

Mulder gestured toward the odd tin that sat between the two of them on the table. As Scully picked it up for closer examination, Mulder took a sip of his tea. His brows lifted. It was good, in a rich fruity sort of way. He took another sip.

Scully looked curiously inside of the empty tin. "Is this it?" she asked. "Was there anything inside?"

Mulder nodded. His head was beginning to feel light all of a sudden, perhaps earlier would have been better for telling Scully about the tea. "This tea bag..." he got out in a slurred voice before his head began to nod forward. The last thing he remembered seeing was his partner's expression as she jumped up from her chair...

~~~~~  
~~~

Fox Mulder found himself standing in a garden. The sound of rushing water could be heard in the distance. His brow furrowed. How had he gotten here? He had been in Dana Scully's apartment drinking tea.

horse galloping. Mulder began to walk in the direction of the sound. For the first time, he began to notice a path. It lead off in the direction of the pounding hoof beats.

A young woman with long dark hair blowing freely behind her sat atop a beautiful bay gelding. She seemed to be looking for someone. When she saw Mulder she drew the horse to a halt.

Mulder stood there and watched the woman. A strange feeling came over him. It worked its way through his chest and his gut. A thickness arose in the back of his throat. A word came unbidden from his lips. He blanched when he realized what it was. "Samantha?"

The woman was off the horse and in his arms in the span of a second. "Fox! Oh Fox, it's true, it's true," she mumbled in his shoulder, through her tears.

Fox Mulder held his sister close for a while, then drew away. "What's true?" he asked, not removing his hand from her arms for fear she'd disappear. She felt so warm and alive and real.

A shadow crossed Sam's face. "That you're alive...and well," she said. That was good news. The last time she'd 'seen' him was when she tried to kill him. Callie had told her that he wouldn't remember that. She was glad he wouldn't. She cleared her throat, pushing the thought aside..

"Fox, there isn't much time," she said. "I just wanted you to know that I'm happy and safe. I'm with friends now. I'll be home for good, but I don't know when..." Sam paused, looking up at her brother. "I'm supposed to tell you that your work is very important and not to give up."

Mulder nodded at her words.

Sam looked back over her shoulder as if hearing someone. She turned back to her brother. "I have to go now, Fox." She stood on tip toe and kissed his cheek.

She then stepped back, allowing the hand that had been holding her arm to trail down to her hand and then her finger tips. She tilted her head slightly to the side as she looked up at her brother; a gesture Mulder remembered vividly from childhood. Then Samantha faded away.

And Mulder opened his eyes. He found himself on Scully's kitchen floor, her worried eyes looked into his. "Mulder, are you all right?" she asked breathlessly.

Mulder nodded a tear spilling from the corner of one eye. The memories of the dream flowed over him. Mulder sat up and took a deep breath.

"Yes..." he whispered, "I'm fine."

Later

From: <Accounting and Finance>AcctFin@gov.org
To: <SAgt Fox Mulder>1013@gov.org
subj.: Cellular phone charges

Agent Mulder, we received a confirmation of unusual roaming charges from our cellular carrier. An itemized bill has been placed in your inter-office mail. We would appreciate an immediate reply.

Thank you,

J. Morgan

From: <Accounting and Finance>AcctFin@gov.org
To: <Xfiles Supervisor>1013@gov.org
subj.: Cellular phone, gun, etc.

Agent Mulder,

Please confirm replacement request for two cellular phones and two sidearms and holsters for your division. Our records show that your division personnel list contains two names. Please send updated list if necessary.

Thank you,

J. Morgan

From: <Records>Rec@gov.org
To: <Xfiles Supervisor>1013@gov.org
subj.: Identification

Agent Mulder,

Please be informed that you did not complete the section of the form 1713 Request for Identification Replacement describing how your identification had probably been lost. Please be informed that Agent Scully was negligent in this duty as well. Please rectify situation.

Thank you,

M. Manness

From: EJFar@dfm.org
To: <F. Redlum>1013@gov.org
subj.: "Theory of Infinity"

Mr. Redlum, we are very interested in the article you submitted via

feel that it ranks in the same league as 'Newton and Gravity'.
Via postal mail (snail!) you will receive our standard contracts
and publishing statements. Mr. Redlum, please carefully consider
our offer.

Thank you,

E. J. Fahrenkrug,

Discovery Frontiers Magazine

To: <Fox Mulder> 1013@gov.org
From: annon@canyon-library.com
subj.: our weekend :

FORWARDED MESSAGE FOLLOWS

Hi there,

I didn't get to say good bye to you when I left. And since some rather unexpected things happened that might have caused worry. I'm E 'ing to say I'm fine. My name has been changed and I'm in a new place. It was all very mysterious. But, it's all right. So here's me saying Thank You! and good-bye. I was only allowed one contact and then I wasn't allowed to send it, so I don't even know your e-address!:(Please share this message with Dana. And thanks again to both of you!

remembering always, Rae

To: <Fox Mulder> 1013@gov.org
From: <Frohike> Lonegun1@lgm.com
subj.: My van

Hey Mulder,

I know you've been busy and all. But, my van, I need it, dude.

BTW, when are you coming to get Agent Scully's car?

Frohike

END OF STORY.

personal disclaimer: All of you brilliant mathematicians out there with logical theories on infinity and time and such, feel free to correct me

And bear in mind that any technical explanations sent my way will be read, but the reader (me) will be bogged down in a very deep mire of confusion as I made this all up based on nothing. I really did try to research it, which is why I *know* I will be lost.

And another thing, if anyone wants to carry on with this in any form, feel free, just let me know. I'm curious about any ideas of a sequel or alternate (read: more exciting) ending. I mean, where *did* the "exiles" go? There were quite a few threads I wanted to tie up, but, I kinda wanted to bring this story in at least under a Meg!

For all who stuck it out to these very last words: Truly my very deepest gratitude. Constructive, or non, criticism welcome, hoped for, begged for. No comment is too small...

e me at 74363.2566@compuserve.com or jackeec@aol.com

personal disclaimers: I took some really indecent liberties with National Zoo for all of you who live there. I asked my sister to describe it to me over the phone (I've only been there in my imagination and all, see) so it's the 74363.2566@compuserve.com enhanced version. Also, I wrote this story for fun, even though it did take over and on, respectively, my life and a life of its own.

This story is c. 1995 by Jackee C., and is submitted FREELY for your reading pleasure. For distribution in whole or in part on any medium, please contact the author for permission.

=====

From: JackeeC <74363.2566@CompuServe.COM>
Newsgroups: alt.tv.x-files.creative
Subject: NEW: XJEDI -- ENDNOTES (join in!)
Date: 23 Jan 1996 04:15:01 GMT

XJEDI ENDNOTES

You have now entered the realm of end notes... The disclaimers from all of the previous xjedi stuff in force in case needed. (ya never know)

=====

=
Following are a list of possible plot inconsistencies. If you don't want to ruin what you just read, bail now! Otherwise, join the game. These are answers that should clear up any "holes". They are multiple choice. If you find some that I didn't see, feel free to send them my way. I don't even mind if you add your own 'creative' (multiple choice, please) fixes.

Property of Jackie C and the other authors who helped her write this story

END NOTES: If you saw the fact that Mulder didn't make a connection between the kidnapped children, who were taken from CEStallia and one's taken from Earth as a plot hole, here's me paving it over:
(pink one)

1. The call came for CEStallia and she being all secretive anyway told Luke in a mind message".
2. The call came for Luke and he didn't tell a soul, just rushed out and told his sister. CEStallia was told later, perhaps by Luke. They did call in the Coruscant F.B.I, after all.
3. Mulder was too awed with the idea that he was in another galaxy to put two and two together and get five! ;)

If you can't make the mental leap to why Mulder figured CEStallia knew something about his sister:

1. His nickname is "spooky" for a reason. He was right wasn't he?
2. Dramatic liscense. Really, couldn't you see that one coming? I sure hope not. <EG>

Where are the droids when everyone finds out that CEStallia sabotaged Bexter's stuff and is forced to 'fess up by Luke?

1. Artoo is still doing the memory diagnostic therapy on Threepio and they(the droids) need privacy.
2. CEStallia requested that they not be there of Luke since she doesn't trust droids.
3. CEStallia "really" had something to do with it. After all somebody did something to the john. And Cestallia was there when Luke found her.

How did Luke force her to 'fess up?

1. He said, "Listen, chick, if you want my trust, you're gonna have to come clean."
2. He suddenly adopted a policy to "trust no one".
3. He said, "no telly, no potty" . :)

Plot inconsistency: If the rocks are alive, how come the ones on the Hinderer got cold in Volume one?

1. I hadn't decided to make them living yet.
2. They needed the energy from the engines.

For those who are super curious as to what happened after Luke and

1. Everyone jumped around clapping their hands and said "do it again!"

Mulder announced "10"

3. Duke lost his balance and fell on his butt. CEs laughed

How did Chewie get the cuffs and Chains off?

1. Come on folks, this one is a no brainer!

2. He did an incredible hulk impression.

3. He did a Hercules impression.

Why in the world did I spell CEstallia, CEstallia instead of say:

Cestallia

or Scestallia or C'est' alia?

1. Reaccuring typo.

2. For the express purpose of groupment.

3. Because I couldn't consistently spell CKJGL'mmaan'na thoaia!

Pillow fight: "But, why?!" you exclaim

1. <shrug>

2. whistling nonchantly pretending not to hear the question.

3. what pillow fight scene?

Don't forget to feel free to find your own and e me or post it on the group. I shall make a valiant effort to respond in kind to each and every one.

Okay, first off. For anyone who is confused about what the heck just happened. Here goes...in plain english. We all know that Lucas' galaxy is 'a long time ago and far, far away' right? Well, it still is in my story. (sorta) But fixing the gate rift caused everyone within the gate to be sent on their merry ways to their own time. With the exception of those embedded with the cylinders. We just couldn't let Mulder coherently remember all of this...he'd crack up!!! And Scully she'd be so deeply in denial it wouldn't matter if she remembered or not. But Rae...who knows? Also, there is this little phrase that sticks with me: "Take only what you need, but leave the land as you found it." I tried! I really tried! So basically: Nothing really happened? Also, this is not meant to be a story taken seriously. It was meant to be lighthearted and fun, so bear this in mind when the characters seem a little giddy/silly when the situation may have warranted tension and seriousness.

If this doesn't help in any way...well, then, e-me for the one on one therapy session... :)

--

Jackeeec@aol.com or 74363.2566@compuserve.com
X JEDI 2 A CROSS OVER

DISCLAIMER AND DENIALS

The usual cautions apply. We don't own any of this. Others do, and hopefully the toys are none the worse of the excursion. We sincerely hope that the fair use doctrine extends this far. We are, of course, very grateful to those who built the toys. We all deeply admire Chris Carter, George Lucas and Tim Zahn, and hope that they too, do not mind the liberties taken with their creations.

THANKS! GRACIAS! MERCI!

Special thanks to our beta testers, idea bouncers and inspirations, found most especially in the AOL Star Ladyz forum, on the Jade list and among Jackee's special friends. Additional gratitude to PG, BB, holo, the twins, ghits, dunc, qwi, Natalie, the 'shopper list, Tracey the Grammar Goddess, Darin Morgan and all the others. If you get at least ten of the inside jokes buried in the piece, than you become an automatic member in the club. At some point toward the end, with jokes about Ewoks, copyrights, red shoes, and Winona Ryder flying, we realized that we were parodying our parodies. Also thanks to the Ladyz and Marnee in DC who provided much needed local color and realism. There really is a club in Adams- Morgan called "Heaven and Hell" and Langley might very well frequent it.

SUMMARY: XF/Star Wars crossover. Action/adventure with a case (sort of). UST (but maybe not between who you'd expect). Humor. Angst. Upsetting imagery. Third season spoilers. A few bad words.

A few months after the end of X Jedi, Luke Skywalker, Han Solo and Leia Organa Solo realize they've left some unfinished business on Earth. Meanwhile, Agent Mulder is experiencing an usual physical anomaly. And both Mulder and Scully are beginning to have alarming flashbacks about flying primates.

For the unwary, we offer the following mini-summaries--

STAR WARS / ZAHN TRILOGY

According to the Star Wars cannon, three years after the end of Return of the Jedi, Han and Leia married. Two years later, they had twins, Jacen and Jaina. Coinciding with the birth of their children was the rise to

Grand Admiral Thrawn, bent on resurrecting the Empire. He enlisted a Dark Jedi, Joruus C'Baoth to help him, promising to deliver Luke and his sister and her children as acolytes. During these events, their lives became twisted with the smuggler, Mara Jade.

Mara was a woman with a past. The Emperor took her from her family as a child, training her to hear his voice from anywhere in the galaxy. She became his servant, his personal assassin and his Hand. She was sent to Jabba's Palace to kill Luke, and failed (obviously). With the death of her Master the Emperor, she wandered the dregs of the galaxy committed to one goal, killing Luke. At the end of Tim Lahn's Last Command, she and Luke are reconciled of sorts, and on the roof of the Coruscant Palace, he gives her his father, Darth Vader's, light saber, and touches her hand twice. This exchange has led to revisionist history of a magnitude rivaling that of the X-Files and RST of Scully and Mulder.

X-FILES-- "COLONY", "END GAME" AND "TALIMHA CUMI"
Read this if you have no idea who the "mighty morphin bounty hunters" are. In the second season two-parter "Colony/End Game" anonymous e-mails tip off Mulder and Scully to the mysterious murders of identical abortion doctors across the country. Apparently these doctors are alien clones sent here to colonize our friendly little planetoid. In the middle of the investigation Mulder is called home by his estranged parents. His long-lost sister has returned. She explains that she was raised by these aliens and that the bounty hunters want to kill her (in addition to their mission to wipe out all the colonists) because she knows how to kill them (an ice pick to the base of the skull). Meanwhile, Scully is kidnaped by one of the said bounty hunters. Seems these pesky ice picks for hire have the annoying habit of being able to morph into anything they want, in this case Mulder. Scully falls for it long enough to end up head first into a wall and is taken hostage. An exchange is arranged-- Scully for Samantha. Mulder thinks he can save them both. He gets Scully back, but Samantha is killed. In one of the most gut-wrenching scenes in XF history, Mulder has to tell his dad he's lost Samantha again. Next Mulder gets wind that one of the bounty hunters is returning to his UFO in the arctic. He chases after him in search of answers. He ends up getting his ass kicked by the bounty hunter and a bizarre retrovirus. Meanwhile, Scully has determined that "Samantha" wasn't

sister at all, but an alien clone. She then follows Mulder to the arctic and ends up saving him from the virus.

"Telitha Cumi" brings the return of our favorite bounty hunters, back on the trail of the colonists. Season finales are always a dangerous time for the Mulder family and this year doesn't disappoint. Mrs. Mulder suffers a massive stroke after a confrontation with the Cancer Man (photographed courtesy of Mr. X). It seems that Mulder's mom and our favorite black lunged monster may have a past. The whole mess ended with Mulder, Scully, the colonist and the bounty hunter poised for a messy confrontation.

X Jedi 2 takes place shortly after this confrontation. Since we have no idea how Chris Carter is going to resolve this little quagmire, you'll notice we've shamelessly glossed it over and have written on our merry way.

X JEDI
Okay folks, if you haven't read X Jedi or if it was so long ago that the mind boggles and you can't remember it... here you go. But be warned, if you haven't read it, some of this may confuse you.

In the galaxy far, far away (GFFA) there was a little cylinder. This cylinder turned up in the war room of the Imperial palace at Coruscant, where as of Zahn's trilogy, the New Republic headed up by our favorite band of used-to-be rebels resides.

A young woman, Rea, working at a warehouse in Charlotte, North Carolina, also found the same cylinders. After the warehouse burns down, our favorite Special Agents are called in to collect Rea. She just happens to have a cylinder or three handy.

The cylinders begin Scully and Mulder's journey to the GFFA, where among other things, they visit Coruscant Palace and meet a Jedi Knight, his sister, and some other interesting people. Agent Scully gets a new hair do and some really cool clothes and Agent Mulder decides that no draw string pants and beds that float are just two reasons why staying in the Galaxy Far, Far Away seems like a really good idea.

Regrettably, the investigation of the warehouse fire and being spirited away to another galaxy prevented Agent Scully from going on a date with a

good looking, nice guy named Ben Adams from Washington DC. Her favorable opinion became somewhat muddled when she and Mulder, in the woods behind the warehouse, witnessed Adams being enveloped in a beam of light and taken aboard an alien space ship. Scully's opinion became decidedly negative after she, unfortunately, ran into Ben in the halls of Coruscant Palace.

For, although she might have wanted to bring Ben home to meet Mrs. Scully, problems would arise if Ben tried to bring Scully home to meet *his* family.

His father is none other the Cancer Man, the X Files villain you love to hate. And the Cancer Man's father is the Emperor Palpatine ** the evil, twisted wizened guy with long finger nails and sizzling blue bolts firing out of his hands. Darth Vader threw Palpatine down the shaft at the end of Return of the Jedi.

Concurrent with Scully and Mulder's arrival on Coruscant, the GFFA folks discover a ship, the Hinderer, which is occupied with Force-strong children from Earth, led by a woman named ***Samantha***. The Ship also is filled with Dark Side Force users, in a state of sleeping stasis. Adams, proving that he is not just another blind date, appears on Coruscant, a galaxy from home, and steals the Hinderer, the children and the Dark Side users.

With the cylinders and the assistance CESTallia, the leader of a mysterious, very powerful race of Force-using telepaths, Dana Scully, Fox Mulder, Han Solo, Leia Organa-Solo, and Luke Skywalker travel through a "Gate" to Earth.

They rescue Chewbacca who has been taken hostage, wreck a little havoc, and then travel to the Gate, which CESTallia insists they must destroy to stop this commerce between the Galaxies.

In a very emotional scene, Mulder decides that he will return to the GFFA, and Scully decides to join him. An added incentive for Scully, may it seem, be Luke himself. She observes to Mulder at one point "what's not to like?"

All roads meet at the Gate. The children from the Hinderer and Samantha are there, and wholly under the influence of the now awakened Dark Side Force users. Adams is also at the Gate, as a prisoner. At the Gate, Mulder learns that he has a strong Force gift and that Scully also harbors some latent ability. Combining efforts the GFFA folks and the FBI agents destroy

Gate. As the Gate begins to fall down around them, Luke has a vision of his possible future: Coruscant lay in ruins; Mulder dead at his feet and a very frightened and untrusting Scully staring his way. He decides to return Adams, Mulder and Scully to Earth.

Scully and Mulder are found at the edge of a meteor, are in a hospital, and when they awake, have no memory of where they have been. At the end of X Jedi, a mysterious woman appears to Mulder, giving him a tea bag. With the infusion he has a vision of Samantha, his missing sister and the story ends.

So, without further ado... we give you

X Jedi 2 A Cross Over
by JackeeC, Gheorghe2 and ginef (allat@aol.com)

Chapter 1-- "Planes, Trains and Flying Saucers-- A Galaxy Far, Far Away"

Coruscant
Imperial Palace
2.3 Standard Months After X Jedi

Sounds of crashing and swearing reverberated down the Coruscant Palace corridor. To the denizens of the Palace it signaled but one thing.

The Jedi Knight and his student were at it again in the Palace Gymnasium.

Mara Jade slammed into her instructor seeing and blocking his feint, as their lightsabers collided. "So," she grimaced with the effort, "You going to try to tell me that I'm still too slow on the return."

With the one bit of his brain he dared spare from the duel, Luke Skywalker wished that his first serious student had not been such a quick study. Between short, rasping breaths, he continued his instruction, "I can tell, you're still thinking too hard, let the Force guide your muscle memory."

The goading seemingly successful, she moved in swiftly, with fury, but not, he realized, the kind of blind rage he had hoped to use as an example. Through gritted teeth and blazing assault, she muttered, "And

you should learn to watch your rear guard." Pressing in, Mara forced his retreat into a pile of tumbling mats. He tripped and fell backwards, and with a twist and thrust from her blade, his lightsaber flew out of his hands across the room to land with a thunk and a roll on the gym floor.

She continued to advance, the blue humming tip to within centimeters of his throat. For a moment he wondered whether after, all the times, the opportunities, the vulnerable moments, she would do it now, and finally, silence those voices that still howled through her. The black clad avenger raised her saber high above her head, staring at her prone instructor, eyes glittering with intense satisfaction. So poised for a fatal heartbeat, with a burst of glee, she swung her blade in an arc, closing it down with a fluid movement, convulsed with laughter. "You should see your face," she crowed.

"I sure had you going."

"Very amusing, you maniac. It's just a replay of the same nightmare I've had ever since I met you." Luke, still sprawled in the tumbling mats glared up with little amusement.

"Sure, Skywalker. How flattering that you dream of me. I've known it all along."

"Any dream featuring you, Jade, is a nightmare." Mara laughed again, not at all repentant for her rare, savored victory, and reached to take his upraised hand to haul him up. She should have foreseen this old trick of his; too late Luke firmly grabbed her wrist and with a smooth strong pull and well placed foot, flipped Mara over his head and onto her back hard. Before she could struggle to her feet, Luke pounced, straddling her.

"A Jedi," he admonished, "Should watch her front as well as rear guard."

She was flushed, sweating, incensed at having been so deprived of a fair dueling victory. He took the opportunity for further infuriating instruction, "Anger," he intoned pedantically, "Leads to the Dark Side."

With a growl she hissed, "You've never seen me really angry. This is positively playful for me."

He lectured further, "To be a Jedi takes the deepest commitment and

"Sure. And I just bet that the Master who instructed you made
a point of sitting on top of your stomach."

Luke considered with somber reflection, "Actually, he made me carry him around on my back. Once we move to the jungle phase of your training, I figure you'll be ready to do the same."

"Try again, Jedi." In spite of her acid response, for various reasons mostly but not entirely related to conserving her energies for the battles that truly needed to be fought, Mara had not tried to escape the clutches of her teacher. Circumstances such as this one were common in her training, and the methods, although frequently painful and certainly unorthodox, seemed to be working. Although there were plenty of false starts and dead ends, progress was being made.

With the sound of boots feet stomping down the corridor, teacher released student for the day. Standing, Luke called his saber to him, and only then offered to help Mara rise. She ignored his proffered hand, "What's all the racket?" Whirring machinery and the deafening noise of cutters on rock echoed into the gym.

"Some construction work." was Luke's response.

They made their way out of the gym, Mara turning towards the noise, although their routine typically called for a different direction. "What for?"

Luke was mildly puzzled at her curiosity, "I told you about the visitors we had here a coupla months ago, didn't I?" Jedi and apprentice paused, calling upon memory lessons, far more difficult for Mara than for him. "You know, the CEstallians, that bizarre trip to the other galaxy, the Gate, those," and here Luke winced only slightly with the memory, "Three people from Earth."

Mara was too distracted, making off in the direction of the work droids repairing the catacombed secret passages of the Coruscant Palace interior. "Yeah, I remember now. But why the work? It looks like ..." Luke caught up with her, as she stared intently at the droids working in a pile of dusty plasteel and stone, water dribbling in dirty pools on the marbled floors. A plasterer droid was feverishly shoring up the inner passage way exposed by the Palace interloper. Another droid waited, preparing to seal up the hole once again.

Mara spun around, accusingly, "You didn't tell me anything about someone using the passages."

"Yeah, well so?"

She stamped her foot impatiently, "Who got into them?" she demanded.

"Some man they called Ben Adams."

Mara sniffed with superiority, "I've never heard of him."

Luke sighed heavily, he had wanted a drink, a towel and something for the bruising she had given his arm, not twenty questions with Mara. "No surprise there, since he's a whole galaxy or more away."

Mara's air of condescension dropped abruptly, her eyes widening, "What?!"

He suddenly saw as well, and whirling around, slowed long enough only for her to catch up, "Security has said of him."

They made off at a purposeful jog down the corridors, barreling over the slow moving, unsuspecting, human and alien alike. Luke thought he knew already but queried, "Who knew about those passages?"

"Hardly anyone. I did, the Emperor of course. Maybe some of the retainers, the intelligence operatives. But..."

He finished for her, "Only those who were highly placed right?"

"He would have only told those who would have needed to move secretly through the Palace. There weren't many he would have trusted with that information." They stopped at a branching corridor to argue over which way Security was, Luke prevailing, and ultimately having the right of it.

It might have been more prudent if Luke and Mara had signaled their entrance to the security suite in a way more subtle than bursting in, grimy, excited, and in badly tattered work out wear. The duty officer's first instinct had been that the Palace was under attack by a shabby, deranged couple.

"Uhhh, excuse us Captain." Luke was eyeing a blaster trained on his gut with concern, "We wanted to look at the security tapes from a few months ago when we had the intruder."

that he had stopped to aim before firing and potentially injuring the New Republic's only Jedi and the woman they had all learned to steer clear of. Security had been warned about these two: odd behavior was to be expected, reported, but never discussed, and within reason and discretion, all but the most outrageous of requests were to be accommodated. No one knew quite what to expect with Jedi training.

"Of course, sir." Greet directed them to a terminal, and running a search, located the appropriate date and file. Mara sunk to the terminal chair, watching intently as the image of Benjamin Adams slinking through the Coruscant Palace Ops control room and out to the catwalks above the private landing bays where the Hinderer had been docked.

Luke felt her shocked recognition, asking softly, "You know him?"

Mara shook her head in the negative, but with the control froze a frontal picture of the man's young, dark good looks, began entering a series of swift commands into the computer, splitting the screen. Luke glanced over his shoulder at the mild disinterest of the Duty Officer, then muttered quietly, "Might want to be a little more discrete about just how much you do know about Palace security."

He heard a silent response, pleased that she was learning to converse on the private Jedi channel, "I'm looking for archived holos. Not the sort of thing requiring clearance. As if," she added with a smug silent smirk, "Security clearances would bother me."

Mara was rapidly scrolling through a menu on the split screen of what appeared, to Luke's surprise, to be a very old roster of Imperial Senators.

"What are you looking for in a Senate that dissolved 60 years ago?"

She glanced up, serious, "Something I hope I don't find." With a deep sigh, she returned to the roster and highlighting a name that moved too rapidly for Luke to see, entered a command, and a picture and then biographical information appeared on the split screen next to the frozen image of Ben Adams. The two pictures were astonishingly similar, a family resemblance unmistakable: dark predatory eyes, hooked nose, similar coloring, high domed forehead. Mara buried her head into her hands with a

Captain Greet who was pretending to ignore them, then to study the chilling biography of the Senator that accompanied the holo.

Luke murmured in a horrified whisper, "How?"

Mara raised her worried, angry eyes to his, "I don't know. But to borrow a trite and overused cliche, I have a very bad feeling about this."

Luke nodded with no mirth and reached for his comm. His sister's response was so rapid, she had probably been attuned at least to the jolt of their discovery. "Where are you? What's going on?"

Leaning heavily against the console, he formulated his reply, "Mara and I are in the Security suite. Get Han and come on over. We've just run into an old friend."

end (1/4)

Chapter 1 (2/4)

Disclaimers in part 1

* * *

Luke and Mara shooed the curious Greet away from their terminal, downlinked the holo and bibliography to the Security suite's conference room, and retreated there to await a frazzled Councillor Leia Organa and her only slightly less rushed husband Han Solo. The Solos abrupt charge into the Security suite almost caused another round of blaster fire from the now very tense Captain Greet. He had specific instructions on dealing with such very important people: leave them alone and report everything. Shooting them by accident was generally deemed a poor method of seeking promotion.

Leia always wondered on entering a room her brother and Mara occupied if she was interrupting something. She never knew if she was, or if she was, what it was. Today was no different. As she pushed into the conference room of the security suite, Luke and Mara were huddled over a computer screen, and with her sudden entrance, broke apart with studied, deliberate casualness. Han strode in after his wife, closing the door firmly behind him, "What's going on?"

"Dim the lights would you, Solo?"

Leia.

The room's vid screen whirred to life, showing again the skulking Ben Adams.

"That's the man who broke into the Palace and stole the ship when Mulder,
Dana and Rae were here isn't it?"

Leia nodded "Yes," as Luke stilled the vid, split the life size image and imposed the other picture next to it. He explained, "Mara found this holo in the archived biography of the Imperial Senate."

Leia suppressed an involuntary shudder, feeling, but not yet knowing the reason for Luke and Mara's visceral reaction, "Who..."

Luke finished with a hard voice, "Meet Senator Palpatine, of the 433rd Imperial Senate, later self-proclaimed Emperor and enslaver and destroyer of worlds, lives and Jedi."

A chill stunned silence hung in the room, broken when Mara turned in her chair to survey those assembled with an accusatory glare, "Sooooooooo, someone want to explain to me what a clone of Palpatine was doing lurking in Coruscant Palace."

"Not a clone," both Luke and Leia injected immediately. Luke finished, "A strong Force user, no question of that, but he's not a clone."

They all turned to look again at the images, Leia suggesting, "Son?"

Then thinking aloud, she continued answering her own question, "Ages are wrong, probably grandson."

Han drawled into the silent space that followed, "I think the more interesting question is what a grandson of this galaxy's Emperor was doing on Earth."

"I may have some ideas on that," Mara began reluctantly, "But how about you all explain this to me from the beginning."

Leia and Han relayed the story, of the Hinderer, the ship they had found with the children and the sleeping Dark Side Force users; about the CEstallians, the trip to Earth; Dana, Mulder and Rae; of Adams' infiltration of the Palace and theft of the Hinderer from what had been the Emperor's private, and very secure landing bay, and Adams' attack on Dana; the return to Earth; and the final destruction of the Gate. During their long retelling

mute,
until they came to
the very end, the battle and fall of the Gate. With Leia's prodding,
Luke
finally offered reluctantly, "At the end, Mulder, Dana and Adams were
unconscious. We were all on the Falcon, the Gate was collapsing around
us
and ..." He finished with a whisper.

Mara shrieked, "You did what?!?"

Luke studied his feet, "You heard what I said. I sent them all
back."

She lectured with acid sarcasm, "Even apart from his obvious
Force
sensitivity, didn't you stop to wonder what someone from Earth was doing
with
intimate knowledge of Coruscant Palace, the ability to fly space craft,
hell," she rose so quickly from her seat, it fell to the floor with a
clatter. Stalking the length of the antiseptic room, she raged, "Didn't
you
wonder how he knew the Hinderer was here? Or why he would want to steal
an
entire ship of Dark Force users? Did you ever think that maybe if he
had
attacked Dana that this was not
the kinda guy who should be wandering around a pre-space flight
civilization?"

"Would you just lay off Mara?" Luke swore at his self
appointed
judge, "You weren't there. The Gate was falling around us, we had to
get out
of there, I was concentrating on getting Dana," he hesitated, blushing,
"And
Mulder back."

Mara swore just loudly for them all to hear, "I'll be."

Leia thought of playing the peacemaker, but was too angry
herself
for not having thought of the incongruities before. To her, Mara's
tirade
was justified, and for reasons Leia had suspected and that her brother's
rather poor response had just confirmed, Luke had been focusing little
attention on Adams. They were only now, months later, beginning to
appreciate the consequences.

It was Han who shifted the timber and direction of the
conversation,
"So Mara, did Palpatine have any heirs?"

His terse question, and turncoat tactic cooled her fire. With a
glare, Mara returned to her chair and righting it, sat primly, answering
Han's bluntness with a pained admission, "I don't know," she paused,
"For
certain. Leia, were you aware of any rumors in the Senate?"

speculation. No wife of course, but there were innumerable concubines and under the Imperial charter he drafted, "Leia's quiet snort conveyed her view of the man's conceit, "Any biological offspring could ascend the throne."

Mara picked up the tale, "There was rampant intrigue in the Court, particularly among the concubines. Palpatine occasionally had me arbitrate their more contentious and tiring disputes." A hint in Mara's tone indicated that it had not been her negotiation skills that had resolved the strife in the Imperial household.

Han mused aloud, "I suppose with that kind of domestic harmony, the only place an heir might be safe would be in another galaxy."

Mara nodded in agreement. "That's what I thought."

"Question is," Leia asked, turning to the practical, "What do we do now?"

Mara stated the obvious, "Do any of us think it's a good idea to just leave this as it is?"

When Luke remained stubbornly silent, Leia said, "I feel a certain responsibility here. The little we saw of him makes me think that he could be a very dangerous person. And from what we know from Dana and Mulder, they have no experience dealing with Force sensitivity."

Han added glumly, "Adams was trouble even without knowing anything of his parentage. I don't see how we can just sit here knowing that one of Palpatine's relatives might be lost." The mild censure that Adams was in that galaxy because those from this galaxy kept sending him there was implicit.

It had seemed to Leia that there was only one alternative, and she had hoped Luke would volunteer. When he did not, she offered, "I think we have to go back and find him. He may be perfectly harmless and benign . . ."

Mara interrupted this wistfulness with a quiet sneer, "Sure. Good guys always slam women into walls and steal ships filled with Darkside

Leia's definite answer brooked no argument, "I think we have to find out. If Adams is ours, from here, then he belongs here, not there. We will have to bring him back."

When Luke finally spoke, his voice was heavy with guilt and misery, "How? The gate is shut."

"I think," Han offered slowly, "the NR Space Agency has been working on intergalactic drive capabilities, but it's only theoretical at this point." Although revealing such confidential information in Mara's presence was a breach of over a dozen laws, regulations and protocols, Han figured the former smuggler probably already knew everything there was to know about that secret research.

"New Republic Intelligence may have leads on who might have intergalactic drive."

In response to Leia's weary suggestion, Mara muttered sourly, "Oh, that'll be useful." Leia agreed, probably grudgingly.

Luke exerted himself in an attempt to be useful, "What about the CE'Stallians themselves?"

Leia wished her brother would at least occasionally try to live on the same mental plane as the rest of them, "They've refused our every overture to join the New Republic. Having resolved the Gate, they've become even more xenophobic. They believe that we might be too tempted by what they are capable of doing and want no part of us."

In the long pause that followed, none of them said the word at the tip of their thoughts and tongues. Han finally raised the unspoken, "Karrde.

I'll speak to the few independents I know, but most of em have thrown in with Talon Karrde. If anyone has a ship that can get us to Earth, Karrde will probably know."

Leia began formally, "Mara, on behalf of..."

The former Liaison to the Smugglers' Alliance interrupted the Councillor, responding carefully and downcast, "I'll contact him." Her voice was as hard and brittle as cold glass, "Be prepared to pay a real high

Leia nodded, wondering what they all did, what kind of price,
and
for whom.

end (2/4)

Chapter 1 (3/4)

Disclaimer in part 1

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It was, once again, all Skywalker's fault. How someone who professed such wide eyed, demure, Galaxy scout innocence could so consistently and persistently screw things up was utterly mystifying.

Did

he, Mara wondered, purposefully set out to wreck havoc upon the universe generally and her life in particular? Had he set his life's mission to instigate as many crises as possible for those around him? A day did not

pass in which she thought that Skywalker was best suited as vronskr bait.

Days like the last few, and pretty much at every hour on the half she thought she should finish what Jabba had started, find a nice little Sarlacc

somewhere and pitch Skywalker in. Mere digestion was too good for him.

She was only on Coruscant because after a year and a half of persistent badgering, Skywalker had finally worn her down and got her to commit to six months of training. That had meant leaving the Smugglers' Alliance, and a severe rift with Talon Karrde. To secure her continued tenure with the Alliance, Karrde had come as close to pleading as that private, composed man could. Mara was unsure whether he more deplored her

betrayal, or what he had done to try to prevent it.

But for Skywalker's insistence, she would have never left the Alliance; and but for the Jedi's typical befuddled distraction with some woman a galaxy away, Mara would have never found herself in the unenviable

quandary of now begging Karrde for a favor he in no way owed her. It was a hell of bargaining position.

It took Mara two days of fingernail biting aggravation to track down Karrde, and another two days before he deigned to take her call. She knew his game, suspected he probably already even knew the nature of her request, and was certain that he was enjoying turning the tables on her to withhold something he might be in a position to give.

"Jedi Jade, to what do I owe this pleasant surprise?" Karrde affected a shocked look, "Oh, it is still *Jade*, isn't it?"

This was going to be far worse than she had even dreaded.

hasn't changed Karrde, and neither has the title."

Karrde smiled, slurring, "That's not what the tabloids suggest."

"You know better than relying upon the Coruscant Enquirer for your intelligence."

"I do indeed." As a point of demonstration Karrde began, "I understand you may require my services as a travel agent for a long trip?"

She had expected as much. "That is the itinerary planned."

"And I am to understand that your usual New Republic travel agents are unable to meet your needs at this time?"

"Wouldn't be bothering a busy man such as yourself if they could arrange the excursion."

"What is your interest?" Karrde pretended extreme indifference, staring at his fingernails, "The names of reputable tour companies?"

"That is certainly our hope."

"Ahh, but locating a trustworthy cruise line can be so difficult."

Mara wondered what he was getting at. "True. If you have other suggestions, we would certainly appreciate your valued consultancy."

"I do have some expertise in arranging these types of excursions."

His intonation slowing to carefully judge Mara's brutally suppressed shock, Karrde continued "Have you considered the merits of purchasing your own pleasure craft?"

Mara dared not betray her astonishment. She had thought the best Karrde would be able to do was provide names from whom they could beg or steal a ship with intergalactic drive; he was instead suggesting delivery of the ship itself, and not merely its maker. "I would, of course, value your advice on a good carrier, however I am not sure if I am in a position to make so large an investment in my own ship."

"Ahh, well, since you are only acting as an agent, it is difficult sometimes to discern what your customer truly wishes, and whether the convenience of your own craft offsets the necessary costs to purchase one."

Karrde gazed at her, and Mara stared right back. "Perhaps," he said

time, eyes dropping again, "When I call in a few days with my recommendations, your customer should join us."

"I will make that suggestion."

"And Jade," Karrde ceased the studied consideration of his manicure, with a smug smile more like his old self, "I am sure you will impress upon your client that a truly special vacation is a costly undertaking."

"My client understands. We will look forward to hearing your recommendations in a few days."

As she began to disconnect, he added swiftly, "It's good to see you again Mara."

Mara meant it when she responded, "You too, Talon, and thanks." Not that she thought for a moment that these warm fuzzies would interfere with Karrde hard on the trail of an enormous potential profit.

"Well that was a surprise," came Leia's voice from the corner, far out of visual range of the net receiver. "Do you really think he can get us a ship?"

Mara swiveled around away from the table towards the Councillor, "Hard to tell, I'd be prepared for anything. I wonder what he meant by having arranged these trips before?"

Leia was busy entering notes into her data pad, "I thought that was interesting too. She stood and began pacing the conference room with quiet frustration, "How do we begin to set the price for this kind of information or for a ship do you think?" Hopping up on to the table next to Mara, Leia handed over the data pad with her impressions of the conversation with Karrde. Mara added a few corrections and comments as Leia continued, her negotiator's mind whirring with possibilities, "We should have some basis for determining the value of his offer, apart from how large a percentage of the New Republic annual budget it's going to represent." Mara noticed that Leia's feet were swinging quite a distance off the floor.

Setting the data pad on the table, Mara added, "I'd take a look at your R&D budget for that intergalactic drive project. Karrde will know it

"He probably knows that budget, timetable and status of the project better than the Senate does."

Mara laughed, "I probably do too. But if you can get a working prototype, it could save years, and millions."

With a sly glance at Mara, Leia offered, "If we are only talking about a paltry million or two, I think we should have our Jedi Knight do the negotiating as perance, what do you think?"

Mara laughed again, "Now there's a thought, Leia. The New Republic government would have to assess every one of its billions of citizens a coupla hundred credits to pay the price for your brother's bargaining skills."

Drumming her fingers on the table Leia muttered with irritation, "I just wish we had some alternative. Karrde potentially has too much power over us in this."

"Han hasn't had any luck?"

"No." Leia flicked imaginary dust from her pant leg, "And neither has our Intelligence department."

"The NR intelligence still operates as if it were a guerilla Rebellion instead of a functioning government."

Leia nodded, always vowing to not be surprised at Mara's perceptive analyses, "And Karrde has effectively subsumed our other, less legitimate sources." She returned to studying the data pad entries, then observed, "Karrde still misses you, doesn't he?"

Mara swiveled again, and in a habit that could be very annoying to those not used to a body in perpetual motion, stretched her legs irreverently onto the table, leaning dangerously back in her seat, "Yeah, I'd say even more than before."

"Do you think it's personal or professional?"

Mara shrugged, "Some of both, obviously. Aves has been a lousy liaison for him."

"I've heard similar reports. Aves is a good man, but frankly does not have your savvy. Which way do you think this cuts?"

Sighing, Mara considered, then finally said, "One of two ways most likely."

"Leia became quiet, like Mara seeing the disquieting options, either he'll be a softer touch...."

Mara concurred in Leia's view of that remote likelihood with a harumph, "Don't bank on it. He's angry, and wouldn't be above refusing to deal with you just to demonstrate that the New Republic, or at least its Jedi, shouldn't be so cavalier with his valued employees."

Two sharp minds pulled at strings, contingencies and outcomes until Leia broke the silence, "We're probably in a seller's market here, Mara, with Karrde our only viable supplier. What do you think is the deal breaker for him?"

Reaching for the data pad again, Mara made an entry then handed it to Leia, explaining "There's only one thing Karrde won't be able to say no to." Mara tipped her head to contemplate the institutional, black white ordered acoustical tiles of the ceiling, "It's the most valuable, hell it's the only leverage you have with him."

Leia studied the cryptic entry and agreed, having come to the same conclusion. She surveyed the predatory, restless feline and would be Jedi insolently lounging over the chair and conference table. Leaning over she squeezed the toe of Mara's boot, "We may be overreacting. It may not even come to this."

Mara scrapped her feet across the smooth polished table surface, "Sure, and if you believe that I've got some beach front property on Hoth I'd like to sell you."

Leia flinched at harshness, but pushed her misgivings aside, knowing Mara was probably right. She hopped down from the table, "We've got some work to do before he calls again."

* * *

A summons at dawn a week later dragged them all from their beds.

Karrde's timing was far too inconvenient to have possibly been accidental.

had broken orbit with two ships. His Wild Karrde signaled with the proper responder codes and was duly identified and accepted for what it was. The ship in formation with the Wild Karrde however, was another matter. There was no record of its signals, its origin: it was incredibly, an utter unknown and it was this ship Karrde proposed landing at the Palace Security Port.

Still in her nightshirt, Councillor Organa had a tense hour with the Security and Command, finally rousing Admiral Ackbar from bed to force the obstinate Port Control to let the unknown ship and very well known pilot land. Even after the authorization had come, Leia did not permit it to be communicated to Karrde for another hour. The confidence and arrogance of Karrde's opening gambit was impressive, and she opted to play the game back at him. The communications officer patiently explained to an increasingly impatient Karrde that given the unusual nature of the ship Karrde sought to land in the seat of the New Republic government, he was certain Trader Karrde understood the delay, and wasn't he sorry, but sir, he was just a lone lieutenant everyone knew that bureaucrats who made such decisions had to be found, no one was awake....

"No, Luke," Leia insisted in mid-braid. "Under no circumstances are you to come anywhere near Karrde."

When Leia had returned from Port Control to dress, Luke and Mara had already invaded her and Han's apartment. Luke, rumpled and unempt, had it appeared, rolled right out of bed, down the hall, and into his sister's apartment to share his agitation. Mara had at least found something to wear that she had not apparently slept in, and although slumped into one of the cushy chairs, a tapping foot betrayed her own nervousness.

"Why?" Luke challenged.

With a silent plea to her husband to explain, Leia padded into the bedroom to find something to wear other than her bathrobe and slippers. Luke was prepared to follow her but Han put a restraining hand on his shoulder, "Because it's bad strategy."

"Why?" came Luke's second demand.

liaison and seeing you might make him raise the price higher. Two, he might suspect Jedi manipulation."

"But," Luke protested, "I'd never do something like that."

Mara injected in Han's explanation, "Karrde doesn't know that."

"Three, well..." Han began then thought the better of it under the angry scrutiny of blue and green glares. He started again, "Three, you and me and Chewie are going to be checking out that ship."

Leia emerged, cool, collected, alert, "Actually, Han, I had thought maybe Mara should be involved with checking the ship and you and I meet with Karrde, what do you think?" Jedi and would be Jedi erupted with protests, which Leia silenced with stamp and stare, as Han observed, "Takes a smuggler to know a smuggler?"

"He respects you."

"But trusts Mara," Han countered. "I think you should stick with the plan."

"I'd appreciate," Mara growled from her lair, "being consulted on this."

Leia moved serenely over to Mara, slipping to the seat next to her and reclaiming her abandoned tea, "You know how high the stakes are here."

With a meaningful glance, Mara nodded. Leia continued, stirring her cooling cup, betraying none of the anxiety, "Karrde has obviously done this to put us all off balance. Don't let him do that. Watch what he does and remember it.

Use the tactic to your advantage next time."

Han helped himself to another cup, "He's very confident we won't be able to say no with a ship sitting on our landing pad."

Leia turned to her husband, "That's certainly one take on it."

"Or," Han finished in the silent room, "It's the first real big mistake he's made."

* * *

conference room, she trailing only slightly behind, Karrde had been waiting but a few minutes.

If Karrde was intending to be sour, some of his expression sweetened on seeing Mara, who per instructions, awarded him a warm greeting and smile.

It was not an act.

The handshake between Karrde and Leia was not so warm, but every bit as politely cordial. As Karrde sat, Leia made a point of sitting next to him, with Mara across the table. It was, Leia believed, more difficult for an opponent to disagree with you if he is seated directly next to you.

"Trader Karrde we were not expecting you so suddenly."

"Councillor, I apologize for any inconvenience."

I'll bet, thought Leia, but with her gracious mask asked, "Can we assume from your precipitous arrival that you have information for us regarding transportation for a long excursion?"

"I do indeed, Councillor. As I explained, I have some experience with this type of travel."

"That's a very interesting statement. Have you traveled there yourself?"

"Goodness no, Councillor. I very much prefer staying close to home these days, wherever home may be." It was a none too subtle barb; they knew Karrde had loved his base on Myrkr and it was only involvement with Jedi generally and Skywalker in particular, that had brought down Imperial wrath and forced Karrde to withdraw from the strange and wild place he had claimed as home.

"But you have . . . friends?"

Karrde shook his head with humor, "Oh no, certainly not friends."

Leia persisted, politely, "Customers then?"

"Perhaps."

"Well for discussion's sake we shall call them 'customers' who undertake these types of excursions." She opened the bargaining, "Perhaps we should begin with a name, then."

With a sideways glance at Mara, Karrde countered, "Names are power, Councillor. Names are costly."

Leia inclined her head in assent, "Of course, on the other hand, you are likely to know better than we, the extent to which only a name might be useful to us."

His arched eyebrow indicated that Karrde had chosen not to grasp Leia's statement. She explained, "If, for instance, the name was Rodian, such information would be very valuable, the mere name likely to lead to something useful. If however their name was Rumpelstiltskin, well then it would be meaningless and worthless."

Karrde smiled, "What is a Rumpelstiltskin?"

"I have no idea, Trader Karrde. So do we understand each other?"

"I think we understand each other very well, Councillor. But you can certainly understand my reluctance to give away valuable information."

"Can you tell me Trader Karrde whether your traveling customer and the maker of that very unusual ship on Landing Pad 22 are the same?"

"I can."

"And are they?"

Karrde hesitated, then making a swift decision, said smoothly, "They are."

"May we assume that your traveling customer or someone else has taken that unusual ship on Landing Pad 22 on an intergalactic excursion?"

Again the hesitation, followed by assent, "Yes, you may make that assumption."

"Then, I offer you, for the mere name of the maker of the ship, a price equal to all costs incurred to pilot the ship here from your base and to return it there, including fueling, crew labor, and docking fees, contingent upon your provision of adequate substantiation for those costs, plus fifteen percent."

Given the unusual nature of the ship, Leia had considered not making this offer at all, believing that the name would be of no value. She

believed, however, that any race capable of developing intergalactic drive would not be unknown or unknowable to the resources of the New Republic.

It was worth parting with several thousand for this information, and she intended to make use of it in other ways as well. Dickering over percentages in the language of diplomacy, they eventually settled upon 28.5%.

Although he concealed it well, Leia sensed that Karrde, for all his concern for profit, was eagerly anticipating the disclosure. From lips pulled into a satisfied smile, the word "Urmari" dropped, like a heavy rock into a pool, causing waves to ripple and spread, disturbing the still expanse. For Leia and Mara both, the name was a jolt of pain and loathing, conjuring nightmare images of ruthless, cold hunters.

end (3/4)

Chapter 1 (4/4)

Disclaimer in part 1

Mara jerked out of her indolent slump with a curse, and cold disdain, "You trade with those bounty hunting pariah, Karrde?"

He shrugged affably, "Pariah who pay very well for some of the unique things that have fallen into my possession over the years."

Leia tried sending a strong, "Quiet" signal to Mara, who either did not hear her appeal or disregarded it. "What's happened to your principles Karrde? Even the Emperor was careful in his dealings with the Urmari."

"As well he needed to be, as you probably know, Jade. But since neither I nor any of my current staff have any Force sensitivity, I deemed the risk minimal. So successful in their assistance to the Emperor, they have, it seems, like yourself, moved on to other things."

Stilling her own revulsion, Leia began before Mara flung the forming retort, "We will, as you had surmised before giving us the name, now want to move to negotiation for the Urmari ship." The reviled word stuck in her throat like a claw. "I would like your permission to send a team aboard to inspect the goods as it were. I assume you have no objections?" Karrde entered a sequence on his data pad and handed it to Leia, "This is the code to open the ship." Leia glanced at and memorized it, then stood, "I

like to set that in motion before we go any further. If you will excuse us."

She swept out of the room, Mara following, both of them rebuffing Luke's persistent mental queries as to what had so staggered them. In the bustling corridor, they were quiet, pale, hurrying to the others, who when they met, were themselves flush with concern, having only Luke's report that something ghastly had been revealed during the negotiation.

Leia shut the conference room door behind her, grateful for its solid reassurance against her back, buffeted by Han and Luke's demands for the news. "Urmari, Karrde says it's an Urmari ship." The name cut through the room like a blade on raw nerves, stunned silence punctuated only by a fierce protest from Chewbacca.

Gesturing for them all to sit, Leia repeated to herself, we have to keep moving, we can't *think* about this now. Aloud she said, "We don't have much time. I don't want Karrde to think that we are as..."

Mara injected in a surly tone, "Stunned. Horrified?"

Leia continued, "As surprised as we are." She took Han's data pad and entered the entry code, "This will get you into the ship." Handing the pad back to him, his fingertips grazed her palm in a evanescent moment of understanding.

Han said, "Knowing it's supposed to be Urmari will help. Threepio and Artoo should be able to interpret the diagnostics, interface with the computer. On our way to the ship we'll dump everything in the Palace databank on the Urmari into Artoo, see what can kinda cross reference we can do."

She turned grateful eyes on her husband who had also seen the urgency in dealing with practical first, coping with the implications of Urmari and what they and Palpatine had done to eradicate the Jedi would have to come later.

In response to Chewie, Han added, "And we'll see if we can interpret the ship's log. We need to figure out if the ship can account for the

differences the way the Gate did." He was already on his feet, motioning for Chewie and Luke, "Based on the coordinates from our last trip to Earth, we'll see if the ship has ever been in that, or any other galaxy."

"Karrde said it had gone a long way," Mara contributed grimly. "As soon as we can confirm any of this, we'll call you up. Luke, you coming?" Han asked.

"Yeah." Rising Luke turned apprehensively to his sister, "If Karrde is dealing with the Urmari, this explains a lot about him." To Mara he entreated, "If you know anything . . ."

Mara cut in with icy contempt, the shock they all shared compounded for her by a sense of betrayal. "You *still* don't trust me, Skywalker?" Luke retreated with Han and Chewie, not wanting another argument with his sensitive student.

Answering Leia's own unasked questions, Mara grumbled, "I've never seen an Urmari that I'm aware of and I had no idea Karrde was dealing with them."

Leia's question was harsher than she intended it, "Do you think it's a coincidence that Karrde ends up dealing with purported Force stealers like the Urmari, that he trafficks in semi-domesticated vronks that hunt using the Force, is practically the only person in the galaxy who can keep Force repelling ysalamiri alive and used to live on the one planet home to both species?"

"I'm telling you, I don't know much more than you do." Mara buried a clenched fist into a knotted forehead, "I wish to skies I did."

"We've been away long enough. We need to get back." Leia became gently firm, "Can you still go through with this?" Not as if, Leia thought, there were many alternatives. Mara's "Sure." was committed and grim.

* * *

Karrde opened with a bid Leia was hard pressed not to laugh at, the sum, representing over 70% of the New Republic's annual military budget. As the grueling offers and counter offers ground on, Leia and Mara both

that the numbers were high, far too high for the credit-strapped New Republic. The feints and parries were clearly getting the better of Mara; in

this kind of waiting game she would have done well to imitate the studied

politeness of the Trader and Councillor. Leia had been born to this mental jousting and Karrde was relishing the challenge of a worthy opponent.

During a brief break, Leia queried, "If you could indulge my curiosity, I have assumed that it was not mere happenstance that you have come to trade with the Urmari and had your base on Myrkr. Perhaps you could share some of the story."

Karrde shrugged with feigned indifference, "We all know the tales of the Emperor's murder of the Jedi, and the various means he employed to accomplish the task. The Urmari, of course, were reputed to be one of those means."

Leia suppressed the shudder. "Of course the more gruesome stories claim that the Urmari did not actually kill their victims, but merely drained the Jedi of their ability to contact the Force." Leia attempted calm, adding, "In some languages, I understand that the word Urmari has come to mean 'soul-stealer.'"

Karrde remained unruffled, "Certainly I have never discussed their methods. By whatever means, they were undoubtedly successful and Palpatine assisted by supplying them with vronskrs and ysalamiri from Myrkr." Karrde casually continued, his breezy disclosures repelling and profoundly unsettling the two Force-adept women with him. "Vronskrs, as you know, are drawn to any strong Force aura; it is how they stalk their prey. And the ysalamiri, well they have that unique quality of rendering Force users helpless like the rest of us." The bitterness came only from the words, not the cheery tone.

"These animals obviously were very useful to an Emperor bent upon eradication of the Jedi and Palpatine supplied both to the Urmari. Many years ago, I learned of the unique qualities of this Myrkr wildlife, as did, you will recall, Grand Admiral Thrawn, likely from the same source. With the resurgence of the Jedi, for business reasons, Myrkr was an excellent base."

Again a bubble of anger carefully contained behind of facade of gentility.

representative contacted me, anxious to resume the trade that had ended with Palpatine's death."

Leia shook off with difficulty the nightmare images every Alderaanian child learned and feared, of a dark shifting image that would seep in as you slept to rob you of what had ever made you special and human, draining you and leaving behind only an empty shell, a brittle dried husk of your former self. Her chiming comm mercifully interrupted. "Yes?" She heard Han's carefully phrased answer, "All checks out as represented."

Leia returned to Karrde, firing off in the measured language of negotiation and compromise their offer, "With that verification Trader Karrde, we are prepared to deal. We will offer you ten million credits for the Urmari ship." Karrde derided, "Councillor, really--"

"No, Trader Karrde, there is more. Ten million credits and the return of Mara Jade to the Smugglers Alliance for one year." Karrde's eyes flickered to Mara, who remained impassive and unreadable. Leia had preemptively struck, playing their trump before Karrde had time to make the demand.

"Minimum three year commitment, effective immediately, and thirty five million."

Now Leia scoffed, "Three years? That's a lifetime in the world of smuggling Karrde. One year, ten million and not effective until we return from our planned excursion."

Karrde laughed, "Now Councillor, why should I accept such contingencies?" "And why should we accept anything less. You are not without justification demanding, a high price, but what assurance do we have that the ship will perform for the purpose for which it is purchased."

Karrde arched an eyebrow, "You are demanding a warranty, Councillor?"

Leia was implacable, "Indeed I am. I will not insult your intelligence, Trader, by implying that I am prepared to trust you. But, I do trust that you would not endanger Mara Jade. She is going on that excursion, and if the ship does not function as represented, you will be deprived of your liaison. Permanently." Karrde again glanced at Mara but she only stared back at him, enigmatic.

Locking her gaze, Karrde said slowly, "What warranty do I have that I

Jedi
has little credibility in smuggling circles." What else Mara might be
hung
unspoken.

Mara did not rise at the bait Karrde dangled. Softly, with
utter
sincerity, she said, "You know me better than that, Talon."

"I know the smuggler, the liaison, the lieutenant in my
organization, the person who once saved my life. But the Jedi...?" It
was a
bluff, Karrde wanted Mara back.

Leia repeated, "One year, effective immediately on our return,
ten
million."

"Thirty, two years"

Leia countered, "We know what has happened to your profit
margins
since Mara left the liaison post. This isn't about sentiment."
Instinctively, Leia felt to the contrary, and used that now to her
advantage, "Her return alone is worth at least five million per year."

"Very well, two years and twenty-five."

Leia took a gamble, person versus profit, standing she
indicated
Mara should join her. Over her shoulder she said firmly, "Two years and
eighteen."

"Your final offer, Councillor?"

"It is. With eighteen million credits, Mara Jade and the name
Urmari, we might just acquire our own ship. And you are not the only
one who
knows where to acquire vronskrs and ysalamiri."

Karrde clapped his hands slowly, truly impressed, "Well done,
Councillor. So seldom does the reputation match the reality." Leia turned
back around, bowing slightly but with no humor as Karrde relented,
"Eighteen
million, seventy five percent payable now. Mara Jade to the Smugglers
Alliance for minimum two year commitment, and the remaining twenty-five
percent, both payable upon your return. Mara, you'll see to the
transfer?"

And with that Karrde rose and strode out of the room.

Leia let loose a long deep breath, quieting her shaking resolve
and
limbs. She attempted to focus on Mara's reaction, but her own Force
sense
could not penetrate the smuggler's customary rigid composure, "You okay
with
this?"

whistling
absently, "Yeah. I guess so."

Leia had wondered if this might be an opportunity for Mara to escape from a commitment she had not been prepared to embrace. Some could never be fully domesticated, some birds' wings were not meant to be clipped and Mara had chafed at her return to the caged life of Coruscant. As if responding to Leia's thought, Mara added, "I don't think I'm cut out for Jedi serenity.

"But..." Mara abandoned all pretense of nonchalance, entreating, "Don't tell Luke. Not yet."

No, Leia thought, that was not a conversation she wished to have with her brother. Aloud, she said, "Of course not."

* * *

Han dubbed the Urmari ship the "Flying Saucer," reflecting the vehicle's odd resemblance to a piece of dinnerware. He could not believe that the huge, oddly shaped, brightly lit, and truly ugly ship was capable of what it was. In defiance of any law of physics he had ever thought he knew, the Urmari version of a navicomputer indicated three trips to Earth already undertaken, six standard weeks to make the trip now, and that approximately one half of Earth's standard rotations would have passed since their last visit.

Han had itched to tinker with the ship's drive; on principle he preferred trusting his and his wife's lives only to those things that obeyed natural laws and that he could comprehend. In truth, however, flying the Millennium Falcon was not all that different. The key distinction was that pulling the Falcon together with spit and glue was commonplace; trying the same tricks with alien machinery was likely to result in some fatal error of navigation or engineering and spectacular fireworks. Neither the Urmari nor Karrde had thought to provide a User's Manual, and even Han did not think it was a good idea to ask.

Violating the self-imposed prohibition on fiddling with anything, it was Chewie who discovered the ship's rudimentary cloaking device. It had not been all that difficult of a task: a big red button on the console said

Basic, "Push to Disappear."

Six weeks did give an even more insufferable than usual Threepio sufficient time to instruct them in some of the basic phrases in the language

Fox and Dana had used. Fortunately, translator comm devices eliminated the need for more detailed lessons with the fussy protocol droid and linguist.

Even so, Fox figured the odds of Threepio surviving the trip at no better than even money.

END-- CHAPTER 1

end (4/4)

X Jedi 2 -- Chapter 2 (1/4)

DISCLAIMERS IN CHAPTER 1

SUMMARY: XJ/Star Wars crossover. Action/adventure with a case (sort of). UST

(but maybe not between who you'd expect). Humor. Angst. Upsetting imagery.

Third season spoilers. A few bad words.

A few months after the end of X Jedi, Luke Skywalker, Han Solo and Leia Organa Solo realize they've left some unfinished business on Earth. Meanwhile, Agent Mulder is experiencing an unusual physical anomaly. And both Mulder and Scully are beginning to have alarming flashbacks about flying primates.

Chapter 2-- "Planes, Trains, and Flying Saucers-- Earth"

by JackeeC, Gheorghe2 and ginef (all at @aol.com)

Location Unknown

11:25 PM

The man sat in a high backed chair, a cigarette dangling from his lips, the smoke swirling around his head like a genie just released from a bottle. His demeanor was calm, but for a slight tremble of his hand. When the phone next to him rang, he did not move, waiting until the fourth ring. Then he answered. "Yes," he said, listening quietly as the person on the other end spoke. He took in a huge lung full of smoke and exhaled before replying. "What if I can assure that he will be ineffectual?" He listened silently.

reaching for the phone again, dialing from memory. "Take care of it... tonight," he said to the voice at the other end. Slowly he returned the phone to its cradle again and leaned back, lighting another cigarette.

Langley, VA
CIA Headquarters
Two weeks later
Monday
3:30 PM

Special Agent Fox Mulder cracked open another sunflower seed with his teeth and pocketed the shell. How his drycleaner hated him, lectured him on a regular basis about how the often forgotten shells bunked up his machinery. He shook his head and pocketed another one before turning his attention back to the man on the other side of the glass window. Despite the fact that he found himself in a standard interrogation room, this was no standard interrogation. Watching the mild looking little man, who happened to be the CIA's most proficient translator of Russian, struggle to read a page from Solzhenitsyn's "Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" was downright painful. Actually, struggling was not even the right word. He was staring at the page with a totally blank expression. He simply could not read a single word of it. The man finally put his head down on his arms, sobbing in frustration.

"Agent Skokie, what you're saying is that Agent Marselas a man with a PhD in Russian history from Columbia, a man who has been translating for this agency for 25 years could no longer find a bus station in Moscow?" Mulder heard Scully asking when he was finally able to tear his eyes away.

"That's exactly what I'm saying, Agent Scully," replied the disheveled CIA operative who sat at the table, working on a cigarette. "You just saw it for yourself."

"How could that happen? Was he involved in some sort an accident? Did he receive any type of head trauma?" Scully asked.

"Not that we could find. We ran a complete physical on him and he's perfectly healthy." The man took a drag on his smoke before going on. "We were sitting in Turkey monitoring Russian radio signals. One day he was fine.

next he was gone--"

"Gone?" Mulder asked from his seat in the corner. "What do you mean gone?"

Skokie turned his calculating eyes on him and considered his words a moment before answering. "Gone, Agent Mulder, like I said. He turned up 48 hours later on the other side of Trabizond."

"What kind of physical condition was he in?" Scully asked.

"He seemed to be fine, but like I said we ran a physical just to be sure."

"Why didn't you mention the disappearance before?" Mulder said, getting up and beginning to pace.

"Standard CIA procedure," Skokie shrugged, butting out his cigarette.

"Was he able to offer any sort of explanation for the disappearance?"
Mulder asked.

Skokie ran his hand through his short beard. "Nope. That was the strange part, he didn't even realize he'd been gone. He has no memory of those two days."

"Missing time," Mulder said under his breath, which earned him a stern stare from his partner.

"What?" Skokie asked.

"Abductees often experience periods of missing time."

"Abductees of what, Agent Mulder?" the CIA man asked, suspicion rising.
"And don't even start with your UFO crap."

Mulder ignored the statement, "Can we speak to Agent Marselas?"

* * *

Twenty minutes later Mulder and Scully sat across the desk from the Russian translator. Marselas was a slight man with large blue eyes. His unkempt hair looked like it could use a good washing as did his standard federal employee issue blue suit, which was a size too large. He was chewing nervously on the fingernails of his left hand. "So, what's this about?" he finally asked.

"Actually, that's what we wanted to ask you, Agent Marselas,"
Scully
said, in her best soothing voice. "Can you tell us about what's happened
to
you?"

Marselas looked at his partner, who was standing in the corner.
"Didn't
Skokie fill you in?" he asked.

"He did," Mulder said. "But we'd like to hear your version. What's
the
last thing you remember before you went missing?"

Marselas started on the on the nails of his right hand. "I was in
my
apartment.
Everything after that is a blank..."

* * *

Strained silence accented the ride back to DC as Mulder drove and
Scully
stared absently out the window. Mulder stole a sideways glance at his
partner
but she caught him and took the opening. "So you want to tell me what's
going on?"

"What do you mean?" Mulder replied, putting the onus back on her.

"You could start by explaining why this is the fourth case in the
last
two weeks where we went out to talk with people who seem to have lost
their,"
Scully struggled for the right word, "abilities. The pianist in New York
City. The painter in Cincinnati. The surgeon in Atlanta. And now this
translator."

"Missing time, Scully," he said, reaching for another sunflower
seed.

"Missing time."

"I think there's more to it than that. What gives, Mulder?"

"Don't you see anything inherently strange about these cases? It's
almost like..." he trailed off. Another glance assured him that Scully
wasn't
letting him off the hook that easily. "It almost seems as if something
was
taken from them."

"Taken? What? How?" Scully asked.

"I don't know. It's like their... life force or something," he
replied.
Scully stared idly out the window considering the word "force" and why
it

coolant spilling from its busted radiator. Something was tugging at the edge
of her consciousness...

Mulder noticed her distraction seized the opportunity to change the subject.

"Guess they should have checked the coolant," he commented. Scully barely nodded a response, her brows furrowed furiously. A heavy stale smell. Heat.

Being locked in a closet. No... not a closet... Mulder trying to pry something open. Coolant leaking all around her. Mulder's "Uh-oh" expression.

The door sliding open to reveal a man standing before them wearing a mutinous expression.

"Scully!" Mulder's voice snapped her out of the thought. "Your phone's ringing."

"Huh?" she replied. Then registered what he'd said and grabbed her phone. "Scully... Oh, hi, mom... You're kidding, she didn't..."

Monday
11:21 PM

Mulder fumbled with the keys in his door and hurried to grab his ringing phone.

"Hello?"

"Mulder, it's me. Where have you been?" came Scully's voice on the other end of the line.

"Out running. Why?"

"Skinner called me this evening. You probably have an e-mail. He wants us on a plane to Milwaukee first thing in the morning."

"Why?"

"That McDonalds killer. Wisconsin Violent Crimes finally asked for a consult." The silence on the line surprised her. "I thought you'd be a bit more enthusiastic, Mulder."

"Sorry. I'm just tired. What time's our flight?"

"Eight thirty. Want me to pick you up?"

"No, I'll meet you at the gate. E-mail me the flight info, okay?"

"Uh, sure. Night." she said, and hung up.

thought.

Then, resigned to his fate, trudged to his computer to get the flight info he was sure Scully would be sending him any moment.

As he waited for his computer to boot up he considered his predicament and his options. He could fess up to Scully. Not an attractive option. He could feign food poisoning and postpone the inevitable. Or he could go to Wisconsin and hope for the best. Door number three seemed the most reasonable. His computer beeped cheerily that he had four messages in his mailbox. One from Skinner. Two from Scully-- the flight information and copy of the McDonalds killer file. And one from Frohike. He scanned the note from Skinner, printed out both files from Scully and considered leaving the one from Frohike until he got home. In the end curiosity won out.

Subject: Thought you'd want to know

Mulder, Thought you'd be interested. Your friend from the CIA had a self inflicted accident tonight. The following just went out over the wire... "CIA veteran John Marselas was found dead of an apparent suicide in his McLean, Virginia home tonight..."

Mulder switched off his computer, unable to read anymore.

American Airlines Flight 101
Tuesday
10:03 AM

Well, moody and brooding seems to be the order of the day, Scully thought with a glance at her partner, who was seated next to her picking at his airline breakfast. Of course moody and brooding had seemed to be the order of the day for the past couple of weeks. Not that Mulder was ever cheerful, even at the best of times. But something was definitely going on with him. Something he was not ready to talk about. "Ah, I just love reconstituted eggs in the morning," he commented, shoving his tray away untouched.

"I've told you a million times to order the vegetarian special meal. At least the food is edible," she said as she looked down at her fruit salad and bagel. "You want half a bagel?"

"I'm not worried. Just concerned."

"To-mae-to. Tomato."

"Mulder, you have to admit you've been acting a little strangely lately."

"Scully, when have you ever known me not to act strangely?"

"You have to admit you've been acting more strangely than usual lately."

"I'm fine," he said, trying to keep the anxiety out of his voice.
"Really."

Scully pinned him with her gaze for a minute, then sighed and handed him half of her bagel.

end (1/4)

Chapter 2 (2/4)

Disclaimer in Chapter 1

Port Washington Blvd.
Crime Scene
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
11:30 AM

Mulder parked the rental just outside the area cordoned off by yellow police tape and turned off the ignition. He gripped the steering wheel, steeling himself for the ordeal to come. You can do this, he told himself.

"Mulder?" Scully's questioning voice brought him back. "Are you--"

"I'm fine," he said a little more sharply than he intended. For a moment he thought about apologizing, but instead climbed out of the car and walked toward the agent who was already headed their way. Scully got out of the car and followed.

"Agent Mulder?" said the dark-haired junior, extending his hand to shake Mulder's. "I'm Agent Ito. Thanks for getting here on such short notice."

"No problem," Mulder replied, scanning the scene. When Scully finally caught up to him he said. "Agent Ito, this is my partner, Agent Scully."

The young man smiled and extended his hand again. "Thanks for coming Agent Scully. I've arranged for you to conduct the most recent autopsy."

county coroner will assist you if that's okay."

Scully smiled at Ito. "That's fine. I know you, don't I?"

"Yes, ma'am. From Quantico. I was in one of your Forensics lectures, Dr.

Scully."

"Oh, right. I remember," she replied and then leaned a little closer and lowered her voice. "And it's just Scully."

She could have sworn that Ito blushed. "Okay, Scully," he said, trying out the name like a new toy. "If you'll follow me SAIC Bennet is right this way."

As soon as Ito was out of earshot Mulder leaned over and whispered, "Flirting with the youngsters Agent Scully. Shame on you."

"Jealous, Mulder?" she shot back.

"What if I was?" he replied, a little more seriously than he intended.

Scully laughed and giving him a bump with her shoulder, headed off after Ito. Mulder took a deep breath before joining her.

* * *

"The body was found over here. In a garbage can just like the others,"

Bennet was saying as they perused the scene.

"The trauma to the body matched that of the other victims?" Mulder asked, working on the shell of a sunflower seed.

"To a 'T', Agent Mulder," Ito replied.

"And the cause of death was strangulation?" Mulder asked.

Bennet nodded. "Time of death was approximately 14 hours before the discovery of the body."

"Scully, do you mind if I borrow your notebook?"

"Why?" she asked, startled.

"To take some notes," Mulder replied, as if he did so all the time.

Scully struggled to hide the surprise on her face as she handed her notebook over. Mulder's eidetic memory had always eliminated the need to take

notes in the past. He usually kept everything in that head of his. She watched in amazement as he really did jot down some information. Scully pulled the file open and looked at the preliminary forensics report and looked for something that had caught her attention earlier. "It says

was 12. That's about four years older than the other victims. Any idea why?"

Ito shook his head. "That's why we asked you to come. We heard you where the best there was." Ito said as Mulder wandered off.

"We'll do our best," Scully replied. "I better get down to the morgue. Will you bring Agent Mulder back to town after he's finished examining the scene?"

"Of course," Ito replied.

Lakeview Motor Lodge
8:07 PM

Seven hours later Scully knocked on the door of Mulder's hotel room. When he opened it she pushed a copy of her notes into his hand, walked past him and collapsed onto the bed. "My feet are killing me."

"How'd it go?" Mulder asked, plopping down next to her.

"Oh, fine. Except for the usual male chauvinist coroner," she sighed. "The autopsy turned up nothing new. The killer seems to be sticking to his pattern. What'd you find?"

"Not much. These guys seem to have a pretty good handle on it."

Scully made the supreme effort to roll her head to the side and look at him but then she decided she was too tired. "If you order Chinese, I'll be your best friend."

"Consider it done, Agent Scully. Now, go hit the shower," he said, opening the phone book to the restaurant section. He quickly selected a number and grabbed the phone as Scully got up to go.

"Good idea," Scully replied, as she watched Mulder double check the number three times before he dialed, struggling with his memory for the second time that she'd witnessed that day. She debated saying something but decided to wait.

"By the way, I booked us seats on the first flight home tomorrow," he called after her as he waited for the Golden Dragon to answer their phone. Scully stopped and turned around, waiting for an explanation. "I told them

the person on the phone. "Hi, I'd like to place an order for delivery..."

2:34 AM

Scully's head popped up as a short gasp escaped her lips. She looked around, surveying the empty Chinese food containers illuminated by the flickering television set. She turned her head to the side and saw that Mulder was out cold, his face hiding under a pillow. Scully sighed. This wasn't the first time they'd fallen asleep together, but she could never seem to shake the feeling that it was somehow inappropriate. Not that anything, except drooling and snoring, had ever happened. Mulder had always been a perfect gentleman. Which brought up the question, why he had never tried anything? Which led to the even more dangerous, how would she react if he did? Scully shook her head. She certainly wasn't going to explore those questions any further. At least not now. Reaching out, she gave Mulder's leg a slug and stated the obvious, "We fell asleep."

Mulder's head shot up, pillow flying, arms splaying, seeking his firearm. "What?"

"We fell asleep," Scully repeated.

"Well, let me be the first to thank you for waking me up to report that fact."

"My pleasure. We missed the end of the movie."

Mulder took in the television's snow storm. "So, is this fact based on your scientific analysis of the situation, Dr. Scully?"

"God, Mulder, you're awfully witty at," she rolled over to look at the clock, "at 2:30 in the morning."

"Well, yeah, that's me, Witty Mulder."

"I thought it was Spooky Mulder."

"I changed it, didn't I tell you? Witty just seemed to fit my free spirited personality so much more accurately. Don't you think?"

Scully threw her pillow at him, which he used to cover his face again.

"I should go," she said, but didn't make the move to leave. She could feel the pull of sleep begin to envelope her again, taking her back to the

dream she'd been having about... a talking primate who could fly a spaceship.

I have been around Mulder too long, she smiled as she went under.

"Scully," Mulder's voice brought her back to that place just between being awake and asleep.

"Huh?" she groaned.

"I was having the strangest dream before...about this big foot like creature who could fly a spaceship."

Scully sat up like she'd been fired from a cannon. "What?"

end 2/4)

Chapter 2 (3/4)

Disclaimer in Chapter 1

* * *

Half an hour later Scully sat huddled against the fake wood headboard, a pillow pulled tightly against her stomach. "What you're saying is that you honestly think you and I were flying around with a talking monkey in another universe," Scully exclaimed.

"Do you have a better explanation?" Mulder asked from where he was lying, sprawled out on the end of the bed.

"There are plenty of documented cases of people having similar dreams--"

"Scully, stop."

"Stop what? Looking for a rational answer?"

Mulder sat up and leaned forward till his face was mere inches away from hers. She hated it when he invaded her personal space like this. It was the same thing he did when questioning suspects. He was trying to use his physical size and those damn penetrating eyes of his to intimidate her into seeing it his way. "When there is no rational explanation can we not at least look to the realm of the irrational, Dr. Scully," he said smugly.

She shoved the pillow into his face, forcing him back down. "No," she said.

Mulder tossed the pillow back at her. "Does the name Luke mean anything

Her short intake of breath gave her away before she had the chance to deny it. "Scully, I know you haven't wanted to talk about it, but what if we don't know where we were before we woke up at Georgetown University Medical Centre."

Scully had to admit that was true. Neither she nor Mulder had any memory of getting there. But that's where they'd woken up with four unaccounted for days. And then there were those strange e-mails.... "Scully?" Mulder's voice derailed her train of thought. "What about a gold robot?"

Scully let her head drop to her knees. She was motionless for a moment and then nodded. "And a woman with..." she added bringing her eyes to meet his.

Mulder nodded. "A really, uh, unusual hair style."

Scully ran her hand through her hair. "We're in really big trouble. You know that, don't you?" she said, throwing the pillow at him again.

"Hey, it's not my fault," Mulder whined.

"Oh, I'm sure it is. I just haven't figured out how yet."

Scully's Apartment
Wednesday
10:01 PM

Scully sat in front of her computer checking out a couple of her favourite websites in the hopes it would relax her enough so that she could get some sleep. It was working so well that when the phone next to her rang she nearly flew out of her chair. "Hello?" she said, thinking it was a bit early for Mulder to be calling.

"Dana, it's your mother," her mom said, as if she needed identifying.

"Hi, mom. How are you?"

"Just fine. I was calling to see how your trip went?" she said.

Scully sighed. "Fine. Can't really talk about it."

Her mom, who was used to that answer by now, changed the subject. "How's

Scully smiled and wondered again how her mother had managed to earn
the
distinction of calling him that. Something special had certainly passed
between Mulder and her mother during the time that she'd been missing.
Missing. She felt her stomach tightened as she reflected a moment on the
fact
that she may have been missing again. Her fingers went unconsciously to
the
little scar on the back of her neck seeking a new implant. It was about
the
eightieth time she'd checked since she and Mulder had shared their
"dreams"
in that hotel room. "Dana?" her mother said softly.

Scully physically shook the thought from her head and said.
"Everything's fine."

"Dana," her mom repeated.

Scully's fingers now moved to the tiny cross that hung around her
neck
as she considered her words a moment. "The Capitals lost again so he's
in a
funk. But he's fine. Really."

Her mother, wise woman that she was, knew when not to push it.
"Will I
still see you on Sunday?"

"Wouldn't miss it. Seven o'clock, right?"

"Right. Night, sweetheart."

"Night, mom," Scully replied and hung up. She stared idly at the
computer screen her mind drifting to a galaxy far, far away. To a man
with
devastating blue eyes and the name... Luke. He seemed so real but at
the
same time like part of a dream. Had she and Mulder really visited
another
galaxy? The idea was absurd, but somehow she couldn't dismiss it
outright.
And could these people be the same ones Duane Barry had allegedly
delivered
her to. Duane Barry. Even the name was enough to send a shiver down her
spine
that left her feeling cold and exposed. Barry had turned her over to
people
who had ripped three months from her life, who had embedded that chip in
her,
who had.... Stop. There were so many questions. And, she realized,
again
fingering the tiny scar on her neck, she had no way to find the answers.

She was just returning to her perusal of Pathologist Report On-line
when
she was interrupted again, this time by the beep indicating she had

Probably Mulder, she sighed, clicking on the icon. Frohike. She silently cursed her partner for ever giving him her e-mail address. Not that he probably couldn't have hacked it up himself, she admitted as she opened the note.

Greetings to the Lovely Agent Scully,

Just wanted to drop you a note and express my concern about the redwood. He seems to be exhibiting some unusual behavior lately (how's that for an oxymoron?). Have you observed anything out of the ordinary?

Your ever-loyal servant and admirer, Frohike

Scully smiled despite herself. But that smile faded quickly when she considered the note more carefully. She was tempted to write back and ask what unusual behaviour he was referring to, but decided on different course.

She quickly, and with little enthusiasm, typed Frohike a reply, assuring him everything was fine.

Basement Office
J. Edgar Hoover Building
Wednesday
4:45 PM

Mulder pushed his wayward glasses back up his nose. He was tired. Maybe he should have taken the day off. He hadn't been able to sleep last night and his head hurt. And now Skinner was waiting for his profile. He scowled down at the file spread across his desk. It wasn't the one on the McDonalds killer. It was The Other Case. The one that had been consuming him for the past two weeks. How could a brilliant concert pianist suddenly be utterly unable to play the simplest Mozart? How could a talented painter be instantly reduced to creating works that looked like those of a two year old? And how could an FBI agent who's intuition allowed him to leap at will into the mind of a serial killer and had earned him the nickname "Spooky" be stumped by a run of the mill maniac?

He quickly closed the file as his partner entered their office. She cocked her head to one side and lifted an eyebrow. "Why do you look like I

"Who me?" he said, pulling the keyboard of his computer onto his lap.

Scully moved over to stand behind him, looking at his blank computer screen. "Guess I don't have to ask how that profile's going?"

"I don't really know if I have anything to add to what the Wisconsin guys came up with," he replied, trying to keep his voice even. What he didn't add was that he'd drawn a complete blank. Something that had never happened in his entire career.

Scully sat down on the edge of his desk. "Look, Mulder, I know you're not comfortable doing profiles. I know what it does to your psyche. But this lunatic is killing little girls. Lots of them. If you have anything to add--"

He dropped his keyboard on the desk and stood up, striding across the room. "Scully, you think I don't know that?" he said, turning to face her. He pulled savagely at the hair on the back of his head. "God, this isn't about me, about looking into that abyss again. If I could help, I would. I'd dive into his madness with both feet. But I don't have anything to add. Is that so impossible to believe?"

Scully stood up slowly, chewing on her lower lip briefly before answering. "Yes, Mulder, it is."

Mulder returned to his desk and grabbed his suit jacket off the back of his chair. "Well, believe it," he said and stormed out of the office.

Scully rubbed her chin and considered her options, her eyes falling on the file he'd been studying when she entered. She wasn't the least bit surprised when she saw what it was. She picked it up and returned to her desk.

Mulder's Apartment
9:23 PM

Mulder sat on his couch watching, but not seeing, this evening's hockey offering. He was scared. Terrified. Like he hadn't been since... since Samantha, since he'd heard Scully's voice cry out through his answering machine that she needed his help. But this time he was one who'd been

whole flying primate thing. Ironic, wasn't it? He'd believed, falsely it seemed, that he'd always be the bridesmaid and never the bride. But now he was the one with missing time. Yet, it was more than that. He'd been returned, but not entirely. Someone had taken something from him, and more than just the weekend. They'd taken a chunk of his soul. But who? And how? A knock at the door startled him out of his stupor.

"Who is it?" he called, as he reached for his gun and moved toward the door.

"Steven Spielberg," came the reply.

He smiled, holstered his weapon and answered the door. Scully stood there holding a pizza and a six pack of Labatt Ice, his favorite beer.

"I couldn't let you watch the Capitols get slaughtered all alone," she said by way of explanation as she headed for his kitchen. "Do you have any clean plates?"

"Plates?" he asked, following her. "Real men don't use plates."

"And I suppose you'd like to open your beer bottle with your teeth," she said as she handed him a cold one. He opened it and handed it back to her and then took one for himself. She busied herself getting plates and putting pizza on them. Then they returned to the livingroom.

"You know, Scully, real men don't eat veggies on their pizza," Mulder commented though a rather large mouthful.

"Oh, right, they just pile on the dead animal flesh."

"Now you're starting to get it," he replied, and slapped his head as Theo Fleury scored an easy goal on Jim Carrey. "Did you see that? My grandmother could have made that save."

"Mulder, your grandmother is dead."

"So, you see my point."

They watched in silence for a little while before Scully got up and headed for the kitchen. "Beer?" she asked.

Mulder nodded. "Thanks."

hand. The one he'd left on his desk, he noted. She sat on the coffee table in front of him, took the remote and switched off the TV. She handed him his beer before saying, "Are you finally ready to tell me what's going on?"

He stared at the blank TV screen and took a long drink of his beer. "I don't know," he finally said.

Scully reached down and took his chin in her fingers, forcing him to look at her. "Why don't you start at the beginning. Maybe we can figure it out together." There was gratitude in his eyes and something else... fear.

"Two weeks ago I came home from work, went for a run and then settled in on the couch to watch a movie, Copy Cat, I think."

"Right, I remember. You called and gave me a nice, albeit unsolicited, analysis of it."

"Talking to you is the last thing I remember that night."

"So, you fell asleep. An unusual occurrence, I agree, but certainly not paranormal."

"The paranormal part is that I didn't wake up until Sunday evening," he paused. "And I was on my bed."

Scully knitted her brows and stated the obvious. "You don't sleep in your bed."

He nodded. "And I usually don't sleep for 48 hours either," he pointed out.

"So, what do you think happened, Mulder? And what does it have to do with this," she asked, pushing the folder toward him.

He's eyes darted about, avoiding hers, until he finally confessed. "I'm like them, Scully. Ever since that night I... feel like something is missing. From me."

Scully rocked back. "Missing? How? What?"

"The killer, in Wisconsin," Mulder began, closing his eyes in despair.

"What about him?"

"I can't get into his head."

"Everyone draws a blank sometimes, Mulder. It doesn't mean you were abducted. It doesn't--"

His eyes popped open and the panic she saw there stopped her mid-sentence.

"Scully, it's not just that. My intuition, my gut feelings, my 'spookiness.'

Whatever you want to call it. It's gone."

"It can't be gone. You're just--"

Mulder grabbed her wrist. "No, Scully. It's gone."

Their eyes locked. She could see that he wanted, needed desperately, for her to believe him. Scully finally looked down and opened the file. "And you think that's what's happened to these people too?"

"I don't know, but I need to find out."

"Do you think this is at all related to our," she struggled for the words,
"Other situation?"

"No." He was almost certain of it.

Scully nodded her agreement and then combed through the papers in the file.

She reached over and picked up the phone, dialing quickly. "Yes, hello, this is Special Agent Scully, I'd like to schedule some testing time tomorrow.

Okay. That would be fine." She hung up and looked at her partner.

"What was that about?"

"Well, if you have lost something and it's not showing up in a physical manifestation perhaps it will show up in a psychological one."

"I guess it's worth a try," Mulder agreed, secretly appalled that the idea hadn't occurred to him.

"Mulder, we'll get to the bottom of this," she said, closing her hand over his.

end (3/4)

Chapter 2 (4/4)

Disclaimer in Chapter 1

Planet Earth
Washington DC
Thursday

Four humans and one Wookiee crowded into the cockpit of the Flying Saucer as dawn spread across the Washington landscape. Skimming along a muddy, dirty river and over low gracefully decaying bridges barely detracted from morning sun reflecting oranges and pink on marbled buildings. Han had seen a five sided huge squat building on one side of the river and had thought it might be entertaining to land the craft right in the pentagon's middle. Mara had espied on the river's other side, a white building, more house than monument, surrounded first by grass, then fence, then concrete abutments. Assuming that it must be an important place, she proposed landing on top of it, or at least hovering for a while and scaring everyone into thinking that aliens from outer space were taking over their world. In the end, Chewie gently navigated to the end of a peninsula, deserted, grassy, surrounded on three sides by the still, stagnant river.

The cloaked ship settled gently in the early morning chill, deposited her passengers and then shot back up into the sky, invisible to them but for the roar. Luke was transfixed, not by the sounds of a ship they could not see, but by the land itself. He pulled at his sister's sleeve, drawing her attention to an extraordinary feature on the flat landscape. "What is that?"

Leia turned to see massive stone arms and a head, embedded in the ground, thrusting up to the sky to be free from the earth. They stood, awestruck at the sight. The raucous call of shore birds punctuated the peace, morning bathing the entombed giant.

Han had little taste or interest in art, and tolerated Luke and Leia's contemplation. He had hoped to be drinking in fresh air, but found instead that both he and Mara, taking deep gulps, choked a little on the unmistakable odor of rotting fish and garbage. "City's not more than a kilometer or two away, let's stretch and..."

Mara chimed in, "And get away from this oh so pleasant stench." She and Han shouldered their bags and made off in the direction of the white marbled city, leaving Luke and Leia to study in quiet the Awakening giant rising

Haines Point.

Behavioral Science Lab
Quantico, VA
Thursday
11:00 AM

Scully nervously fidgeted as she watched her partner complete the last in a barrage of psychological and behavioral tests. She could tell he was tired and antsy because he'd been trying, and failing, to draw the psychologist into a debate about current psychological theories for the past twenty minutes. "So, what's your take on automatic processes versus cognitive processes as they relate to emotion?" Mulder asked, leaning towards the psychologist, who ignored him.

The man frowned, stroked his graying beard and recorded a note on the test. "Okay, Agent Mulder, I think we have everything we need. If you'll just wait here I can discuss the analysis with Dr. Scully."

"I'm not waiting anywhere," Mulder said, getting to his feet. "They're my tests. I'll be there for the results."

"Agent Mul--" the man started.

"I agree with him, Dr. Roberts. In fact, Agent Mulder is likely to have a better understanding of the results than me," Scully interjected.

Roberts nodded and motioned for them to follow him to his office.

Mulder leaned over as he walked past her and whispered, "I should hope so considering most of your patients are no longer breathing."

Scully smiled. "Watch it, Mulder. I have a gun and you know I won't hesitate to use it."

Mulder made a mock gesture like he'd taken a bullet. "Too bad you're such a horrible shot," he said and hurried after Dr. Roberts. Scully rushed to catch up.

Once seated in the well appointed office, Scully tried to keep from squirming. She hoped her nervousness didn't show. Mulder's certainly was. He had yet to sit down, but instead was roaming the office taking in the

knock a stack of books over. "Oops, sorry," Mulder said, as he started to pick them up.

"Leave them, Agent Mulder," Dr. Roberts said, his voice the picture of calm. "Why don't you have a seat." Mulder nodded and reluctantly settled in next to Scully. "Agent Mulder, since you're a trained psychologist I won't mince words with you. I'm quite alarmed by what I've seen in your tests."

"How so?" Scully asked.

"Agent Mulder is one of the Bureau's foremost behavioral modelists yet these tests indicate that he has almost no intuitive skills."

"What?" Mulder said, before he could stop himself. "Sorry, it's just that I've taken these tests in the past and that wasn't the case."

"I know, Agent Mulder. I checked your test scores before you arrived. I find the discrepancy disturbing."

"What could have caused the change? A head injury? An illness?" Scully asked.

"Have you had a head injury recently, Agent Mulder?"

"No. Not that I'm aware of," he answered and then glanced at Scully, obviously wondering whether he should mention the missing time. Scully's eyes told him not to.

"Did your tests indicate anything unusual about his memory? Agent Mulder has a eidetic memory but lately--"

Before Scully could even finish Dr. Roberts was nodding vigorously. "I noticed that as well. There's no question that there has been a change in Agent Mulder's intuitive abilities and his eidetic memory function, but it seems to have left everything else unaffected. It's very strange and I'll be honest. I've never seen a case like this."

Mulder and Scully exhaled at the same time. That wasn't what they wanted to hear.

"Well, to start, a complete neurological examination to rule out
the
possibility of head injury, tumor, or anything other biological
explanation.
Beyond that... I don't know," he admitted.

Mulder looked liked he'd been kicked in the stomach. Scully didn't
look
much better.

END-- Chapter 2

end (4/4)

Chapter 3-- "Brother, Can You Spare A Dime?"

Disclaimer and summary in Chapter 1.

Haines Point Golf Course
Washington DC
Thursday
8:15 AM

They made their long way on foot. At first the walk had been pleasant,
if a bit smelly. Water, birds, boats, people standing in lovely, very green
grass swinging sticks and chasing little white balls. Confounding, but certainly not unpleasant. Mara broke off to study one of the strange vehicles at rest near the road side. The others waited as she slowly circled

the stationery Ford pick-up. "It actually operates on wheels," Mara wondered. "There is no repulsor capability at all. What's its propulsion system?"

"Internal combustion run with fossil fuels," Han answered. Mara's eyes were wide with amazement, her first foray into this strange place tolerated by her companions.

"I can't say much for the shape and design of it though," she commented critically.

Luke pointed out the parking lot of the Haines Point Golf Course, "They are called 'cars,' and come in lots of different shapes and sizes." Leia was consulting the tiny pocket translator she had stashed in her pocket, trying to make out the letters affixed to the rear of the Ford that spelled "Graduate of Star Fleet Academy." Showing the translation to her husband,

capability
since we were last here?"

Han agreed that the literal reading would seem to indicate as such, but "Artoo and the Urmari chron computer both indicated that not even a half of a rotational year has passed. There's no way they could have developed true space flight in that time."

Mara had, in the meantime, strode off the path, making a straight line for the golf club parking lot and the red Mazda Miata convertible parked there. "This," she announced with satisfaction, "Suits me very well. Do you think I could try piloting one?" Luke had joined her, he admiring a black Porsche 940, with its sunroof popped up. He thought one of these would be more fun than that big van he had piloted before. He was speculating on aerodynamics when the activities in a flat, smooth piece of grass adjacent to the lot attracted his attention.

A man in very bright, clashing clothing of various patterns and colors was standing in the middle of the green patch, wielding a metal rod with a knob on the end and very carefully aiming and trying to hit a small white ball into a cup buried in the ground 3 or 4 meters away. Seeing Luke's preoccupation, Mara joined him, asking conversationally, "What's he doing?" The golfer irritably shushed them and returned to his game, missing his putt for the fifth time. He scowled at the observing couple and lined up his shot again. The sixth time the ball contacted the head of his putter and unerringly arrowed into the cup. The golfer celebrated with a little jig for joy.

Luke turned back to Han and Leia, Mara trailing, chuckling at the man's glee in sinking a putt, ignorant of the merits of a Jedi Knight as a golf caddy.

Leaving the park, they walked far too closely for comfort past the hundreds of vehicles careening across the river in the madness that was the DC morning rush hour. Over and past them, the cars flew, pouring into the city on the right. The four aliens made their way toward the cluster of looming buildings, Leia puzzling out the signs for Holocaust Museum, Bureau of Engraving and Printing and the massive Department of Agriculture.

Mara, Luke, Han and Leia stood on the corner of Independence and 14th Street, each facing a different direction, like four points on a compass. They were utterly lost and completely confused.

"Credits," Mara said. "We need credits."

"They call it money here," Leia corrected.

"Money," Mara repeated, turning the strange word over on her tongue.

"Any idea how we can get some?"

"Maybe," Han said as he spied a bizarre looking glass booth across the street. He began moving across the very busy street, ignoring the flashing red DO NOT WALK sign and was very narrowly flattened by a Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority bus belching black diesel fumes. A combination of Force and physical grasps brought him back to the safety of the curb.

"I think," Leia lectured, "In international language, red means stop and green," she paused looking at the WALK sign and the now idling cars, "Means go." She stepped out cautiously into the crosswalk, Han grumbling behind in her wake.

Interested in the pecuniary aspects of this place, Mara joined Han's assault on the Atlantic Bell phone booth. "I think," Han explained, pointing to the odd metal box stuck on the wall of the glass stall, "We can find some money in here."

"Oh? And just how do you plan on getting it out," Mara asked, joining him in the booth.

"I have yet to find a contraption on any planet, in any galaxy that I haven't been able to jimmy," Han said smugly, as he pulled out a tiny multi-tool and set to work.

Mara laughed. "This I have to see," she said, crossing her arms in front of her. She watched in silence for a moment before asking, "What in space is this thing anyway?"

"I think it's called a phone, it functions like a comlink," Leia said,

that
they carried around in their pockets. I don't know why anyone would need
such
a big one."

"Maybe it's for intergalactic transmissions," Mara offered.

Han laughed. "Yeah, right. Just going to their little moon is a
HUGE
undertaking for these people."

Mara pursed her lips and looked over Leia's shoulder at Luke, who
was
intently
watching a man making his way down the street emptying something out of
the
posts that lined the walkway. "What's the farmboy doing?" she asked
Leia.

Leia shrugged. "I'm not sure." They watched Luke approach the man
and
have a brief conversation. Suddenly the man handed Luke several of the
small cloth bags that contained whatever it was he was emptying from
those
odd looking posts.

Luke turned and headed toward them, in a hurry, but pretending not
to be
hurrying. "Let's go," he hissed, shoving sacks into his jump bag.

The other three fell in behind him beating a quick exit. They
followed
Luke around the corner, and nearly plowed into the back of him when he
stopped abruptly.

"Blast it, Skywalker. Ever heard of brake lights?" Mara snapped.

Luke shot her an annoyed glance but didn't comment. Instead he
pulled
the bags out again and divyed up the coins between them. "Stash these in
your
pockets." he said.

"This is money?" Han was incredulous. "You'd think they'd come up
with
something more portable."

"Excuse me, Jedi Skywalker, but could it be that you used the Force
to
coerce that poor man out of his money?" Leia attempted to scold, but was
unable to hide the amusement in her voice.

"I... well... yes I did," he admitted. "But it wasn't his money. He
was
just emptying it from those posts. People have to pay the government to
park
their ships, err cars along the road. So, I didn't really take money
from
him..." His voice trailed off.

Any further justification the Jedi galaxy scout might have offered for his pilfering was lost in the amazement they all shared on beholding an astounding spectacle. In another burst of black diesel fumes that left them all choking, a silver behemoth of a transport rumbled to a stop on the road where they were standing. Leia made out the words "Holiday Tours" on the side of the bus and was able to share her conclusions before people began pouring out.

Big people, men and women of varying ages and children all dressed in eye squinting neon colors, carrying lumpy brightly colored knapsacks strapped to their backs and around their ample midsections, stumbled out of the bus, staring and wandering aimlessly much like the four aliens from outer space.

Leia noticed that many of them had little insignias on their clothing that said "Land's End," "LL Bean," and "St. Stanislaus Dubuque, Iowa Fall Excursion." On beholding the sight, Mara muttered with disgust, "Tourists." In this universe or the next, tourists all looked exactly the same, right down to the fanny packs.

The neon-clad tourists were indeed a shocking contrast to the black, white and grey clad aliens. The somber attire would lead the unknowing to the conclusion that the aliens were all either color blind, or ignorant as to the merits of Perwinkle and Raspberry Polar Tec outerwear and LL Bean and Land's End Catalog shopping.

Many of the St. Stanislaus contingent were clutching pieces of paper and old fashioned books. Han whispered something to Leia and Luke, and the twins made their way to a friendly looking middle aged woman wearing a T-shirt which if they had understood English, would have translated as "Dubuque, home of mighty fine ham."

After a brief conversation the pleasant parishioner surrendered her map and DC Access tour book to the Jedi. They returned none too soon, barely in time to defuse a ruddy, sweaty man asking Mara loudly, "Were you on the bus?

"Do you know where the Mall is?" A woman behind him whined, "If this is the Mall, where are the stores?"

first, attempt politeness. The ear translators they all wore permitted them to comprehend English, but of course, the English speaker had to be wearing the translator to understand the response in Basic. Mara answered Mr. and Mrs. Dubuque in Basic, assuming that they would then realize that she had not joined them on the Holiday Tours Fall Excursion to the Nation's Capitol and had no idea where or what the "Mall" was. "I don't understand," she explained with abiding patience, "I don't speak your language."

The man was all amazement, "Margaret, look here, this pretty thing doesn't speak English!" Mara bristled at the term. Pretty things in her experience, were unlikely to be trained assassins. He spoke more loudly, "WHEEEEEE AREEEEE YOUEEEUUEE ROMMMMM?" drawing out each word as if volume and speed would bridge the language barrier.

Mara yelled back, "I'm not dead. I just don't speak your language."

The others interceded before it became ugly, pulling Mara away as Leia muttered apologies in several languages to the florid couple. Mara was demonstrating her own linguistic mastery of curses as they hastily fled from the St. Stanislaus tour group.

Luke being busy calming an irate Mara, Han took the point, herding the group down the path, "We need to find the Federal Bureau of Investigation."

Leia asked, "I'm open to suggestions." She saw Han track the dowdy, brilliantly clad tour group from Dubuque filing down a moving ramp underneath a sign that said "Smithsonian Metro."

Han gave a jerk of his head, "I say we follow the tourists."

They headed down the moving stair, the coins in their pockets jingling all the way. At the base of the escalator, Luke once again stopped too quickly, gazing about in wonder at the strange place and nearly causing another accident as friend and stranger alike smacked into him from behind.

Leia grabbed her brother firmly by the elbow, propelling him and guiding the others to a corner with what suspiciously looked like a grid map. Spelling out "Smithsonian" and "You are Here," they were able to decipher where they were and then once again parsing out "FBI" were able to locate the J. Edgar Hoover

As the others deciphered how to get from here to there, Luke was watching the sightseers, the station reverberating occasionally with the sounds of passing transports. In the dimness, the tourists' clothing did not pain his eyes at much. Seeing several people with what he thought were hand held vid recorders, he asked Leia, "Why do you suppose they are taking vid recordings of stationary dark objects?"

Leia was as mystified as he was. Why would a tourist want a video of things that did not move?

As Mara and Han continued arguing, Luke and Leia took the more useful approach of watching the other people in the station purchase fares from machines and move through turnstiles to waiting transports. The tourists were having tremendous difficulty with the task, getting stuck in the turnstiles and beating the ticket vending machines with frustrated fists.

Mara's voice could be heard over the din, "I'm telling you, it's not that far, we either walk, or go to L'Enfant Plaza to catch a Yellow line train and get off at Archives." Han was objecting, contending in Basic that they should take the Orange or Blue Line to Metro Center, transfer to the Red Line to Gallery Place and then transfer to the Yellow Line then get off at Archives. "We'll just get lost again," Mara insisted.

Han countered, "If we can find our way here from a galaxy away, we can find our way to 9th Street and Pennsylvania."

It was time to take control of the escalating situation. Thinking she had the best grasp of English and gifted with her diplomatic skills, Leia slowly approached a uniformed man assisting a voluble couple dressed in vibrant Land's End Tangerine and Columbine with matching fanny packs. Luke gave her a little nudge through the Force for reassurance, which she returned with a curse he would rather not repeat.

"Hello, I would like to be going the FBI please," she said, secretly pleased with how well she was doing.

"How many?"

How many? Leia's mind swirled with the possibilities of what that meant.

guard escorted her to the ticket machines. "How many people are going with you?"

Leia smiled and held up four fingers, hoping it was indeed a universal gesture and not an obscene symbol. With her other hand, she clutched valiantly at the coins now slipping through her fingers. As a trickle of quarters and dimes began to fall, Luke pushed forward through the throng to rescue his sister and their only source of cash. Obviously irritated with the pennies from heaven, the guard took the coins from Leia and began inserting them into the machines, handing Leia four fare cards and showing on their map, where to go. Leia and Luke mumbled thanks and retreated to the arguing smugglers.

Leia triumphantly produced the cards, "We go one stop to Federal Triangle."

For people who navigated well in space, the labyrinth system that was the District of Columbia Metro system nearly defeated them. Studying the map and the location of the FBI building, Han was the first to comprehend that they were going in the wrong direction when their train exited the tunnels and proceeded across the Potomac River and into the State of Virginia. Getting off the train at the Pentagon Metro station and changing directions, the trip could have been much more abbreviated, and very entertaining for all concerned if any of the crisply efficient members of the U.S. Armed Forces milling around had any clue as to the true identity of the arguing foreigners.

end (1/3)

Chapter 3 (2/3)

Disclaimer in Chapter 1

J. Edgar Hoover Building
FBI Headquarters
11:21 AM

Mara stood staring down at the huge emblem on the ground of this very odd lobby wondering what it said. Attempting to sound out the unfamiliar words, she assumed it said "Federal Bureau of Investigation." Han, Luke and

for
the "Inside the FBI Tour." For Mara, tours were an anathema, designed
for
those people content with placid, sidelined existences. Luke, however,
had
not been able to sense Mulder and Scully anywhere in the building -- and
looking for their offices while on the tour, regardless of how its tacky
complacency offended Mara's own more
action-oriented sensibilities, was the best means to locating the
agents.

Han and Leia had already cleared the odd metal gate contraption in
the
building's lobby. Some type of security screening Mara figured. Leia
had
insisted they all go unarmed, explaining that most of the people they
had met
before did not wander about toting weapons. Which was another reason
why
Mara was peeved. She felt naked without her familiar blaster; worse
even for
if the need arose, she could do without clothes. The blaster was the
essential accessory without which outfit was complete. Her blaster
went
with everything, daytime or evening, any season, never a concern for
mixing
browns and blacks or gold and silver, or
summer fabrics with winter weights -- more versatile than the little
black
dress, and far more practical.

Playing the rear guard, Mara watched as Skywalker placed his flight
bag
through the scanning device at the security check point. She could not
imagine that the technology here would be so primitive as to be unable
to
detect the light sabers, heavy blasters and the odd thermal detonator or
two
tossed into the bag for good measure. And sure enough, there was a loud
beeping and a rather large, heavily armed guard suddenly became very
interested in both Skywalker and the bag. She sidled over, waiting for
their
prearranged, get the hell out of here
signal, but Luke was very calmly talking his way out of the jam in that
soft,
annoying Jedi voice of his. "You don't need to look in bag."

"I don't need to look in bag," the guard repeated as if catatonic.

"We can go to our tour," Luke said.

"You can go to your tour."

Luke turned and gave her a wink -- the smugness almost enough to
make
her commit to a lifetime of Jedi training just to be able to wipe that
goofy
grin off his face.

Mara cleared security and she and Luke hustled down the corridor to catch up to Han and Leia. They all lagged a bit behind the tour, scanning

for a way to break off from the larger group, but the FBI had evidently planned for such contingencies as wayward sightseers. Looking over her shoulder for an open door or stairwell, Leia plowed right into a tall, neatly dressed balding man. She mumbled sorry's and excuse me's in several languages, including English.

The man smiled, and said, "No problem. You looking for something?"

Leia smiled in return and with Luke subtle prompting, acted on the impulse, "a friend who does working here."

"Who is it, I may know the person."

"Dana Scully or Fox Mulder."

With the man's face twisting into a sour and skeptical frown, Luke stepped forward next to Leia, saying carefully, "We meet before Walter Skinner."

Staring down at the two polite, confused foreigners, Skinner suddenly did recognize the man from that bizarre week over four months ago. He grunted, "Sure. Scully and Mulder are in the basement with their beloved X Files." Skinner pointed, launching into lecture mode, "Your tour starts down there. Better get going. Ask the guard afterwards and if Scully or Mulder are here, the guard will call down and they can come and get you. Despite what Mulder might have said, we'll haul you into the street if you try wandering around this building unescorted." He did not care if these creepy foreigners only understood every other word. From their expressions, they clearly got the message. Skinner turned smartly and headed down the hall, profoundly irritated at yet another reminder of his wayward agents.

"Thank you!" both Leia and Luke called out to Skinner's retreating back.

They hurried away to catch Han and Mara, who were none too happy at being herded into a large room lined with long padded benches. As Luke moved next to Mara, Leia slipped next to Han on the bench whispering, "They work in the basement."

Han arched an eyebrow in surprise, muttering, "Basement?"

Leia nodded, having come to a similar conclusion. "I wonder if

the basement' has the same negative connotation here as on Coruscant."

A man took to the stage and introduced himself as Agent Keelor. He proceeded to go through the rules of the tour... stay with your guide, don't touch anything, no photographs, yada, yada, yada. Han was already starting to fidget, there was something about rules being laid out that simply did not sit very well with the former smuggler. Rules, as he saw it, existed solely for the fun in breaking and bending them. He was only slightly relieved as the group was divided into smaller ones and ushered out of the room packed cheek to jowl with obnoxious tourists and their fanny packs and vid recorders. Of one mind, all four were scanned the room and every exit, looking for a way out of the tour from hell.

After an interminable wait of all of 15 minutes, Agent Cuddy introduced herself as their guide, and began leading them through the history of the FBI and someone called J. Edgar Hoover. The four aliens did not understand the humor in the pointed questions about Mr. Hoover's penchant for women's clothing.

The tour improved with the explanation of the FBI's 10 Most Wanted display. Han and Mara were enthralled. Engrossed in the photographs of the fugitives, this was one bit of alien culture they were eager to import to their own universe. They were still arguing over who among their mutual smuggling acquaintances should be so honored, when the group moved on to the forensics lab.

The lab was interesting, if the study of ancient and primitive cultures could be so called. Hanging back, and failing to get very excited about ho hum, DNA testing, blood stains and fur and fibers, Agent Cuddy kept trying to draw her four rather reluctant and bored foreigners into the discussion.

Their disinterest gave way to rapt attention at the gun repository. So many intriguing ways to conceal fire arms. Luke had never seen Mara so animated as when she got a look at a gun that doubled as walking stick. She was whispering to Leia how she was going to incorporate the design into a customized blaster when Han saw their opening. Agent Cuddy was ushering the group down an escalator to something called the firearms demonstration. After his last experience with just such a weapon, Han was in no hurry to be

the top of the escalator with Leia and Mara. Luke reached out, briefly distracting Agent Cuddy and the other tourists as Mara, Leia, and Han slipped quickly away, down the corridor. Once they were clear, Luke released his hold on the FBI agent and her tour, and quickly joined the others at the end of the hallway.

Leia pointed to what seemed to be the turbo lift, "I think we should take that down to the lowest floor. I think that's where we'll find Dana and Fox." She pushed the button with an arrow pointing down, and they waited a few tense moments while the lift took its sweet and slow time to arrive. Crowding in, another argument then erupted over which button to push.

"Well, obviously it's the one on the bottom," Mara was saying as the door slid closed.

"I think it's his one," Han countered, "that's the symbol for 'one' and the basement should be on the first floor."

Leia sighed and leaned forward, elbowing her contentious companions out of the way to push the button marked "B." With the sound of grinding gears, the lift began to descend.

"Now why'd you do that, your highness?" Han asked amused at what was to him rather misplaced confidence.

"Trust me," his wife said with a grin.

Han laughed, "Always sweetheart. But if you're wrong this could be a real short trip."

Luke's finger was poised over a red button, "What do you suppose this one does?"

Mara slapped his finger away. "Geez Skywalker, you're like a little kid who's gotta play with all the toys. Red in any language, in any culture means stop, bad or danger. Regardless, don't push it." His retort never came, for the lift lurched to a very uncomfortable stop and after a long pause, and the collective holding of breath, the doors slowly slid open to reveal a dark and grim hallway, confirming that indeed, being in the basement was one universal invariant.

Washington DC
11:45 AM

Mulder was lost in his own thoughts as they drove back into DC. Ironic that he'd always considered his so-called "spookiness" as a curse, another way that he was different from everyone else. Although he'd hated it, he hadn't hesitated to use it as the foundation of the barrier he'd constructed between himself and the rest of the world. And now that it was gone, he found he could barely function without it. Only one person had ever been able to breach that barrier. A quick sideways glance at the very perpetrator showed that she was still on the phone trying to find a way to put the pieces of his life back together. Right now that meant arranging testing for the others she and Mulder had visited over the past couple of weeks. They both knew what those tests would show, but they still needed to be done. He turned his attention back to the road and his mind to his own thoughts. "Isn't it nice to be suddenly so highly regarded." That was the first thing he'd ever said to her, followed in his next breath with the accusation that she'd been sent to spy on him. The corners of his mouth turned up slightly as he mused that rewriting Einstein had been the least of what he'd seen Agent Scully accomplish over the past three years. Sneaking another peek at his partner he noted he'd been right. It was nice to be so highly regarded.

Scully finished up just as they were approaching the J. Edgar Hoover building. "Mulder," she said softly. "We'll get to the bottom of this, I won't stop until we do."

Mulder pulled the car into a parking spot and turned off the ignition.

Despite himself, he believed her. "I know," he said.

As they got out of the car Scully said, "I'm hungry. How about you?"

Mulder nodded. "Yeah. You want me to go to Joe's and pick up sandwiches?" he asked as they walked toward the entrance.

"No, I'll go. You want the usual?"

"Sure."

"Okay, see you in a bit," she said and headed off in the direction

their favorite deli.

"Hey, Scully," he called after her. She stopped and turned around.
"Thanks." By her smile he could tell she knew he meant not just for the sandwich.

end (2/3)

Chapter 3 (3/3)

Disclaimer in chapter 1

* * *

They paused so long, the doors began sliding shut again, before Mara wedged her body across the threshold and then stepped into the hallway. Luke did a quick Force reconnaissance, announcing softly, "I don't think there's anyone down here."

With that all clear, they fanned out, checking doors and signs and directories. Guided by the Force, or maybe just the trail of dust on the floor, Luke located a door at the end of the hall emblazoned with symbols forming the names "Fox Mulder" and "Dana Scully." Sending a mental message to his sister, she, Han and Mara quickly joined him at the doorway. This time Han was right; although the door was locked, the mechanism was no match for his formidable skills with things forbidden and closed.

Forcing the door gently open, the four slipped in, the stood in stunned silence looking at the chaos in the room. The walls were covered with photographs, the desks and every other available space with books, files and a variety of strange equipment. Perhaps not polite, but very curious they spread out to investigate the fascinating clutter, finding it far more interesting than the tour.

They all jerked in surprise at the torrent of curses gushing from Mara.

"Karrde's a dead man." she swore through clenched teeth. She was staring at what most improbably, seemed to be a photograph of an Urmari space ship.

"What the hell are they doing with a pic of an Urmari saucer?" Han asked, wondering why they parted with 18 million credits for something they could have purchased off the lot on Earth.

Leia was studying the photograph, trying to make out the words

it. "I... want... to... believe..." she said slowly and furrowed her brow as she attempted the translation. She finally pronounced her verdict, "I think it has something to do with believing in the existence of such a craft."

Mara swore again. "Of course such craft exist. We came here in one.

Karrde took us but good--"

"I don't think so," Luke interjected, as he examined the other pictures adorning the walls. "Remember, this culture is essentially pre-space flight." He pointed at a couple of the photos. "I think these are photographs people have taken of space craft, but that the culture as a whole doesn't believe in their existence."

Han nodded his agreement as Mara snorted in disgust, "You mean these beings are actually egotistical enough to believe they are the only intelligence in the universe?"

"That's exactly what I'm saying," Luke replied as they all turned back to examine the pictures.

* * *

Mulder stalked down the hall to their office with vengeance on his mind. He had just run into Skinner, who was demanding the oh so insightful profile he was supposed to have been working on. Mulder had tried stalling, saying that he didn't have anything to add and Skinner responded with a very firm request for the pleasure of his and Scully's company in Skinner's office at 3 PM.

Damn. And then that snide aside about work before play, whatever that meant. Skinner was renowned for neither his humor nor his subtlety and both had been lost on Mulder with that comment.

What were they going to say to him? How could they possibly explain what had happened to him? He couldn't explain it himself. Mulder was still considering the extremely unattractive possibilities when he threw open the door to his office and nearly jumped out of his skin at the sight of four people crowded around his desk. With his sudden arrival, they sprang up, all five people instinctively reaching for weapons, whether of the blaster, saber or gunpowder variety in a tense standoff.

Sharp, loud, tracking his gun across the room, and not liking the odds,
Mulder belted out, "What are you doing..." and found he was drawn to
the
slight, blonde man on the left. Something about him was so familiar...
so.
"Luke," he surprised himself by saying the name out loud. The spoken
name
swept through the anxious room like a sigh.

The petite dark woman also very familiar approached slowly, holding
out
a small shiny device, speaking slowly, "Hello, Mulder."

Still training his gun on them, Mulder felt his own anxiety drop by
a
factor of ten or so. Thinking he should be very threatened, Mulder
instead
felt only trust and calm from these supposedly imaginary people who had
been
invading his and Scully's dreams. "Leia?" he pronounced tentatively.

She nodded with a winning smile, "Yes." She gestured to her head,
"translator in ear, see?" He did, a device like the one in her hand was
nestled in her right ear. Mulder took the translator from Leia's palm,
and
inserting it, suddenly understood her in mid-sentence, "..prised that
you
remembered, Mulder. Are you all right, you seem a little pale."

Mulder holstered his gun. "I'm fine. Scully and I have just been
trying
to convince ourselves that you were a figment of our imaginations. Guess
this
blows that theory out of the water," he finished, grinning wryly. As
the
tall man stepped forward, Mulder put out his hand to return the warm
clasp,
"Han, right?"

"Yeah. And I guess you already remember Luke." Mulder nodded,
wondering why Luke was looking at him so intently, before edging forward
to
exchange an embarrassed hand shake, "I didn't think you would remember
who we
are."

"You tried erasing our memories," Mulder accused, more than ever
disturbed that someone would so presumptively screw with his mind. Luke
withdrew startled and abashed, "I'm sorry. We'll explain all that. How
much
do you remember?"

"Not much, a giant primate, a gold robot ..." Mulder started.

"Chewbacca and Threepio. They're in orbit, hiding out behind your
moon,"
Leia explained.

here,"
Han added.

Mulder was barely listening as he fell under the raking scrutiny of the fourth person, an absolutely drop dead gorgeous redhead woman hanging back from the others in what he recognized as a classic combat-ready defensive stance. In the first second, he wondered if there were Irish in their galaxy and in the next second realized he knew only one other woman who so clearly communicated danger in the simple way in which she stood. She returned his gaped mouthed stare with an aloof and unblinking gaze, then abruptly broke off, saying something sharp and unintelligible in Luke's direction.

Mulder shook his head, pointing to his ear, "I didn't catch that." as Luke responded rapidly, again in a language the device did not translate.

Han answered, but still followed the conversation between Luke and Mara.

"You wouldn't. The translator only converts Basen into English and back, they're speaking in Corellian."

Something was going on, the frown crossing Han's features and Leia's darting glance, quickly schooled into a placid smile, communicating some tension or concern. "What're they..." Leia interrupted him so smoothly, Mulder might not have even known he was being diverted, "I don't believe you have met the last member of our group before."

No way, Mulder thought. If he had ever met her, the memory would never left him. She took a confident step forward, hand extended, "Mulder," she began in a deep slurring voice, testing the sound of his name, "I'm Mara Jade."

Dropping Mara's cool, firm hand, Mulder tore his gaze away to focus on Luke and Leia, finally to ask the obvious, "What are you doing here?"

Leia moved closer, again Mulder feeling that an accord existed between them to distract him from some other agenda. "It seems," Leia began, "We left some unfinished business." Han had joined Luke and Mara in a hushed conversation in what Mulder guessed whatever Corellian was, as Leia

calmly, "It's a long story."

Mulder sat down heavily on Scully's desk, running a hand through his hair, desperately wishing that he could have at least one day that more closely resembled that of other FBI agents, "What's the unfinished business?"

Again, Leia spoke as the others murmured, "We were hoping you could help us out with that. Is Dana around too?"

Mulder nodded and reaching for the phone on his partner's desk he dialed quickly. She answered her cell phone on the second ring and he could hear the sounds of Joe's in the background. "Scully," Mulder said, pausing for dramatic effect, "They're kuaackkkk."

During Mulder's rapid fire conversation with his partner, Han asked quickly in Corellian, "You sure?"

Luke knew Leia was listening in, even while attentive to Mulder, and told Han, "Yes. Mara picked it up first, but I sense the same thing."

Mara injected, "You sure he was before?" Since Luke hadn't bothered to think out Adams' role, and had obviously botched the memory wipe, she was more than a little skeptical.

Luke bristled at her blunt doubt. "Of course I'm sure. I just can't imagine why."

Leia answered in his mind, and Han aloud, both voices carrying the same heavy dread, "I can."

They all followed Luke's glance at the poster of the saucer ship all of one mind.

END-- Chapter 3

end (3/3)

X Jedi 2

by JackeeC, Gheorghe2 and ginef (all at @aol.com)

Chapter 4-- "Feeling Crabby"

Edgar Hoover Building
Agent's Entrance
12:00 PM

Mulder moved cautiously down the hall toward the back exit of the J.
Edgar Hoover building, the foursome of aliens in tow. This route was strictly for agents, but Mulder was friendly with Joe, the security guard, and hoping to sneak them out. Approaching Joe's desk, Mulder donned his best roguish grin. "Hey, Joe. How's it going?"

The man stepped away from his post, eyeing Mulder and his companions.

"Fine, Agent Mulder. Who do we have here?" he asked, indicating the visitors with the nod of his head and the arch of a skeptical eyebrow.

"Actually, they're aliens from outer space," Mulder replied without missing a beat.

Mara's jaw dropped and hand flew up to the tiny translator in her ear.

Either the damn thing was malfunctioning or Mulder's repulsors were off line. The security guard, however, threw his head back and laughed.

"You're as crazy as they say, Mulder."

"That's what they tell me." Mulder leaned over and whispered conspiratorially, "Joe, I need to get these people out of the building without attracting undue attention." He paused slyly to add, "And there's a pair of Redskins tickets in it for you."

Joe awarded Mulder an askance look, considering the offer, then lowered his voice, "But not a word to your partner, right? She's warned me not to encourage your behavior."

"Agent's honor, Joe," he whispered, and hustled his friends out the building and into the garage.

The parking garage was a tremendous disappointment to Mara, with none of the flashy cars she had seen before. What was it with this FBI that they all drove the same bland cars and wore the same dark, drab clothing anyway? "Why don't you have a red car, Mulder?" Mara accused as the agent fumbled for the keys to his four-door, automatic transmission sedan with sensible upholstery and no CD player. The most that could be said for Mulder's car was that the

gray.

property of

In response, Mulder dropped his car keys again.

Although not befitting her dignity and style, Mara would deign to travel in this vehicle, but on her maiden voyage she would insist upon the best seat in the house as it were. She grabbed Luke's shoulder as he was about to climb in the front. "Into the back, flyboy," she ordered.

With a wry grin at the temperamental assassin, and a wink at an apparently terrified Mulder, Luke acquiesced with good humor, joining Han and Leia in the cramped back seat. Mara settled herself in and promptly began fiddling with the buttons on the control panel in front of her, asking the flustered Mulder, "Since I'm in the co, what kind of nav and comm do you need, and where are you sensor and weapon arrays?"

It was only with the giggles and tuffaws from the back seat that Mulder knew he was being had. With some of his aplomb returning, he replied, "I do all the driving, Jade," surprising himself with how easily the jesting came to him. For some reason, he knew his next salvo could bother the redhead, "Your job is to look decorative and besides, I don't think your little feet would reach the pedals." Peals of laughter from the back seat greeted this statement, Luke's the loudest of all.

Mara swung back deadly serious, "You like living dangerously, don't you, Mulder?"

Not sure he wanted to teeter quite that far on the edge, Mulder decided it was time to get going. He turned towards Mara and pointed at the seat and shoulder belt, "You need to pull that and," he pointed again down at the seat, "Insert it into that holder."

He indicated where the same contraptions could be found in the back seat, and Han, Leia and Luke, used to this arrangement from the last trip quickly complied. Mara, however, was having more trouble, and Mulder finally leaned over and across her to pull and buckle the seat and shoulder belt. "Sorry," he muttered, strangely embarrassed.

"I'd be careful Mulder," came Luke's warning from the back seat,

eviscerated the last man who tried to do that to her."

"I did not," came the sharp retort, "I garroted him." Mulder attempted a weak laugh, some instinct for survival warning him that this was not entirely idle banter, as Han piped in with, "I thought you just cut his arm off, Mara."

Mulder felt a slight touch on his shoulder from the back seat, and Leia's soft, tactful voice, "Don't pay any attention to them, Mulder. Mara hasn't killed anyone in several weeks at least."

Great. Aliens from outer space who happen to be comedians. Mulder concentrated on getting them out of the morass of DC midday traffic, and providing a running tour of the less attractive sites DC had to offer along

New York Avenue from downtown to Route 50. For the millionth time he wondered why Dana insisted on living 30 miles away in Annapolis. Mulder's attempts to get them started on why they were here and how they managed the trip, were met each time with the same non-responsive response, Leia finally saying after his fifth or sixth attempt, "I know this is difficult, Mulder, but we really should wait until Dana can hear the story too."

As the city gave way to the rolling suburbs and farmland of Anne Arundel County, Mara stared resolutely out the car's side window, willing away the nausea to which she would never, ever admit. She knew some people became wretchedly ill during space flight, and it simply staggered her that she, a veteran of tens of thousands of hours logged in all manner of craft, was close to becoming car sick.

Luke asked quietly from the back, "You all right, Mara?"

"Fine." she replied shortly, annoyed that he would call attention to her discomfort. "Just wondering why we aren't going faster. Mulder, an awful lot of cars are passing us."

"That's because they're breaking speed limit laws."

"So?" came the challenge from both Han and Mara.

Exasperated, Mulder sighed, cringing at even the thought of trying to explain his passengers to a Maryland State Trooper. "Trust me," he said, only to become further mystified when they all erupted with laughter again.

Deciding to deflect the conversation he began jocularly, "So Mara, what

* * *

Mulder pulled into Scully's parking lot, relieved to see her car already in its usual spot. With everyone unfolding from the cramped car, Mulder told his companions, "I'll go up first and tell Scully ..." The rest of his explanation died on his lips as Scully suddenly appeared at the top of the stairs.

"What the hell is going on, Mul--," she stopped mid-sentence, her eyes falling on the four people trailing her partner, and settling longest on Luke's familiar face. A gamut of emotions washed over her, foremost among them, deep concern as to what had happened before that could now trigger such a strong reaction from her, and like Mulder, vexed anger that she did not have the benefit of an intact memory of the events.

Mulder approached a little sheepishly, "I found some nice aliens from outer space and thought I would bring them over to your house."

Dana said, low and throaty to him, "It wasn't a dream then, was it?"

Mulder shook his head. "No, definitely not." He handed her a tiny device, "Put this in your ear. It'll translate what we say to each other."

She stared down at the assemblage, "I had almost convinced myself that there was some other explanation and this whole thing was another one of your sick jokes. Like the annual Eugene Tooms liver and onions extravaganza."

Mulder laughed. "Even I couldn't come up with one this bad."

As the four ascended the steps hesitantly, Dana settled the device in her ear, quipping, "Mulder, next time just bring a bottle of wine, okay?"

Luke came forward first, extending his hand, clearly a little uncomfortable, when he abruptly stiffened, straightening his shoulders and looking cautiously about with wary, darting glances. By unspoken accord the two women tensed as well. The petite brunette Dana remembered as Leia and with a pang, she thought the other woman, a redhead, reminded her of Missy.

Leia hissed, "Where are they?"

Shaking his head fractionally still not turning around, Luke whispered

to Dana and Mulder, "You know you are being watched?" She exchanged a startled glance with Mulder, Luke's report alarming only because he had made it and the other women had echoed it without apparently even seeing the watchers.

Mulder inclined slightly down, saying quickly and quietly, "We get so used to it we tend to forget about them."

Dana looked out across the parking lot to the van parked down the street, "It's Thursday, so it must be Stanley."

She offered her hand to Luke, "Good to see you again, but..." Her smile faded to a frown as it occurred to her, "How did you know they were there?"

The shake, smile and warm "Hello" he returned were so familiar as to leave Dana with the very uncomfortable sensation that although she had no recollection of such an event, Skywalker obviously remembered something and quite fondly. Vowing to interrogate him unmercilessly at the first opportunity, Dana further had no intention of suggesting that she similarly harbored warm fuzzy feelings for a space alien with she in fact had no memory of what might have fostered them. In a subtle reprimand, she dropped his lingering hand shake to greet the others "Han... Leia."

As she settled on the last and unrecognized member of their group, the woman emitted a smirk of laughter in Skywalker's direction and uttered a quick phrase, that if Scully and Mulder had understood Corellian would have translated as "What is with you and redheads Skywalker?" Han and Leia broke into laughter as Luke blushed down to his ears and blonde roots.

Ignorant as to the precise translation but guessing as to its import, Mulder came to the rescue, making the introduction, and thinking not for the first time that the similarities were not merely physical, "Scully, this is Mara Jade."

"Nice to meet you. I've heard a lot about you from the farm boy."

Dana cocked her head, assuming that the appellation fit only one person.

Luke confirmed it, struggling for some poise. "That would be me." he injected,

"Farm boy?" Dana laughed. "This I have to hear." She looked back down the street at the omnipresent van, "Let's go in. We've already given Stanley more excitement than he's had in months."

Dana led the way with Mulder as rear guard. Holding the door, she waited for them to file into her living room, then once Mulder was in, slammed the door and threw the bolt. She and Mulder stood, shoulder to shoulder, backs to the door, staring at the aliens from outer space before them. Impatient from the drive and the delays, Mulder was not in the mood for polite chatter.

Even before their "guests" sat, he demanded, "So, just what is going here?"

Why are you back?"

As soon as Mulder began the inquisition, Dana found fragments beginning to reassert themselves into larger pieces, "How did you get here without the Gate?"

"Gee, Skywalker, you did a brilliant job of suppressing their memories," Mara said, her voice laced with sarcasm. Leia and Luke had sat next to each other on the couch, primly composed. Han withdrew slightly from the larger group, drawing a kitchen chair against the wall, positioning himself carefully in the uncomfortable seat, now having a vantage of the room generally, and the front door particularly. Something like a gym bag, sat open, on the floor at his right hand. Cautious, Mulder thought, very, very cautious.

Conversation was suspended as they all watched Mara pace about. Measuring out the kitchen, she then strode into the bedroom; they heard her turn on a light in the bathroom, then stalk back out, edging against the wall to peer from behind a blind, out the window at the van. Dana saw the same things Mulder had -- if Han was cautious, Mara was outright paranoid.

"There's only one of them, isn't there?" she asked in Luke's general direction.

"How do you know that?" Scully repeated. And she had thought Mulder was spooky.

Skywalker answered Mara's question first, "Yes, only one." He paused, slightly

surprised, I think, that you had visitors."

Mara demanded with an impatient stamp, "Why are you being watched?"

"Because," Mulder began firmly, "From my partner here on up, there are a lot of people who don't believe that you all exist."

There was a snort of disgust and murmured muted protest in the room.

Mulder began again, more aggressively, "Jade, you can stand guard until aliens blow up the White House, but I'm tired of the evasiveness from you all. It's our turn to ask the questions. You left us in a real bad situation four months ago, obliterated our memories, and now just appear on our door step. We want to know what is going on."

Dana added with a pointed glare at Skywalker, "The whole story. Now."

Leia began softly, apologetically, "We apologize for that." She nodded to her brother, "And are sorry that we had to take away your memory of what happened. But there were good reasons for what was done. And our decision to return was not undertaken lightly."

With a sharp edge, Mulder said, "You seem to take a lot upon yourselves, and at our expense."

Leia continued as if there had been no interruption, "It's as I said before. In the rush and chaos at the Gate, *we* left some unresolved business."

Dana noted noises of disgust and disagreement from both Skywalker and Mara and wondered at the cause. "What kind of business?" She shifted uncomfortably under their stares as Solo said quietly from his encampment, "Adams, Benjamin Adams."

Both Dana and Mulder erupted at the same time, "Who?"

And so Leia told the story as the shadows lengthened across the room.

When she finished, Mulder cast a crooked glance at his pale partner, sitting cross-legged on the floor next to him. He had long since abandoned his tie and suit coat, all thrown with the casualness of one who made himself at home. "Scully," he drawled, "You sure know how to pick your boyfriends."

"At least he didn't suck blood for a living, Mulder."

coming
on. Han had become bored during the recitation of the facts for the thousandth time and after some surreptitious canvassing of the room, ostensibly to patrol its perimeter, he located and appropriated the object of his search. He had remembered from the last trip that there was the remote thing to that vid thing with the 88 different channels of highly questionable entertainment. Thinking the silence meant the talking was over he activated the remote and the screen of the vid filled with the disreputable image of a bearded man intoning to a rapt audience, "Marriage after sex change operations --- we'll hear from couples who've made the switch after this commercial break."

Dana groaned, burying her head in her hand with mortification at explaining Geraldo as Leia missed, "Han, not now all right?"

"Yes, dear." he intoned with a not-at-all repentant grin. Han had thought the subject would be fascinating but reluctantly, and only after fiddling accidentally on purpose with the volume and channel controls, turned off the vid.

Stanley had driven off more than an hour earlier and Mara had, like Han, found her very short patience tried by the teatium. She had used the opportunity to practice Force skills, attempting to push buttons and flip on switches of the things in the room. She caught Skywalker's silent reprimand but chose to ignore him. She had not yet mastered the subtle command required for such delicate movements in the Force and was therefore very surprised when the large machine resting on the desk whirred to life, activated by her unseen prod. Her elation in the success was in no way diminished by Leia's reprobating frown.

"I did it," Mara crowed.

Dana and Mulder broke off the re-initiation of their argument to stare at her in amazement. Mulder stuttered, "How did you do that?"

Luke answered with a bemused, and slightly proud smile, "With the Force." In the hushed room they all heard the click as the computer turned itself off again.

Dana glared, "Who did that?" Three pairs of wide, innocent eyes turned to her, all denying any complicity. Han and Mulder were for probably the first and only time, the innocents in this escapade. "You all keep **your** Force away from **my** computer." With no confession forthcoming, and thinking she had reestablished some authority, Dana brought them back to

subject at hand, attempting to make at least the pretense of objectivity, "I still don't understand how on the basis of a simple picture, a" she fisted the word, "'holo', you can conclude that Benjamin Adams was related to this Emperor of yours."

Mulder answered, not merely suspending his disbelief so much as tossing it wholesale off a cliff, "I can't think of any better explanation Scully.

He got to their galaxy, knew the Palace, knew about the Hinderer. Those facts by themselves suggest he, at the very least, was from the same place they are and if not a relative of the Emperor, he was at least intimately acquainted with things very few other people knew of. And they said he was an adept Force user. We don't have anything like that." With a thin grin he added, "And if there were a bunch of people throwing Dark Side Force power around, don't you think we would have known about it?" Intent on convincing his partner, neither Mulder nor Scully noticed the ripple of askance glances and downcast eyes that swept the room.

It was a simple variation on an argument they had had for years -- what inferences the facts permitted and what wild speculation the facts suggested.

Dana countered, "Even ignoring logic Mulder, we are looking at a chain of events that defy any known laws of probability." Their guests were forgotten as the agents lapsed into their familiar roles and scripts, a respite from revelations shocking even to two people accustomed to the singular, unknown, and unexplained.

"Your charms notwithstanding, what do you think the odds are that of all the people on this planet, that an alien from another galaxy would ask you out on a date, Scully?"

She hesitated, not wanting to go where Mulder was dragging her. "Come on Scully," he cajoled again, "What kind of odds are we talking about?"

Dana said reluctantly, "It's either wildly, impossibly improbable, or--"

"What do you mean?" Skywalker asked, perhaps with more interest and intensity than he had intended.

When Dana answered only with a severe stare, Mulder said soberly, "If you tried telling your tale to practically anyone else, they would have you arrested and committed as criminally insane." With a gentle expressive squeeze to Dana's arm, he continued, quietly, "My partner and I have made a lot of enemies. You're right Scully, the improbabilities are too great. Adams was probably a plant, to find out through you how much we know."

She resisted, "Mulder are you actually suggesting some kind of conspiracy between Cancer Man, the Consortium, Benjamin Adams, and their Emperor?"

Mulder wagged a knowing finger at his doubting partner, "Don't forget the second gunman on the grassy knoll, the colonists and the mighty morphing bounty hunters from outer space."

In a rush of anxious voices, Mara Skywalker and the Solos all responded as one, "Bounty hunters?"

Scully's attention now diverted from her errant partner, she arched a knowing eyebrow, crossing her arms across her chest to gaze at her visibly shaken houseguests. "Perhaps Agent Mulder, there is still more that our *friends* are withholding."

"Not very considerate of them, is it?"

They all turned to Leia, by implicit agreement, the tactician for this outing. "What do you know about bounty hunters from," she gave the last words an ironic twist, "Outer space?"

Now Scully gave a grimace of distaste, "Aliens are Mulder's specialty."

Mulder began warming to one of his favorite topics, rubbing his hands together he leaped into the tale of the colonists and the bounty hunters that plagued them. He finished with, "Soooo, we showed you ours, now you show us yours."

With an encouraging nod from her husband and a mental caution from her brother, Leia resolved to tell the story, albeit by halves. She began with a

where
did you get them?"

Surprise rendered Mulder momentarily inarticulate, "Different places.

"They're generally disregarded as myth." He started in surprise at a rude guffaw from Mara's direction.

Han stood and walked to the couch to place a supportive hand on his wife's shoulder. "We think the holos, pictures, are of ships belonging to a race from our galaxy known as the Urmari." Here he hesitated, uncertain how much further to proceed.

Leia continued speaking harshly, "The Urmari are pariah, outcasts." She made the revelation in a more measured tone, "They also have intergalactic space faring capability. We came here in an Urmari craft nearly identical to the one on your office wall, Mulder."

Scully and Mulder blinked in amazement; although Mulder was a true apostle to the cause, and even Scully was occasionally forced to see the less rational explanations for the bizarre things she had experienced in Mulder's company, neither was fully prepared for so blunt confirmation. Both were stupefied that the pictures, acknowledged only by crazed and dazed believers and vociferously negated by every other rational and authoritative person in their acquaintance, should suddenly be so validated.

After a few moments of stunned silence, Scully finally stammered, "Yet another bizarre coincidence, but what does that have to do with the bounty hunters we have," she gave Mulder an askance glance, "*Supposedly* encountered."

Mulder argued, "No supposition about it, Scully."

Han picked up the tale, "None of us have ever seen an Urmari. We know them only by reputation, but that's bad enough. They are known foremost as ..." Han paused before finishing with hushed drama, "As bounty hunters."

Leia looked carefully at the numbed agents, "So you see, that you two are also acquainted with a race of alien bounty hunters is perhaps yet another coincidence, but..." She trailed off, there was no need to complete

Silent through virtually all of the tale for the last few hours,

Luke finally spoke, "The Emperor had extensive dealings with the Urmari. If they are here ..."

Mara interrupted him, harsh and brittle, "They're here. We know they're here, Skywalker."

Luke nodded with weary acquiescence, "When we started this, the only thing we knew was that Adams might be related to Palpatine. We didn't even know about the Urmari. But, finding out they are here, well, it's no great leap to assume that Palpatine's son or grandson is here too and probably with them."

Dana still felt that some part of the tale was missing. "In all of this long winded explanation you have never explained one thing."

Mulder nodded, "Why?"

As four quizzical faces turned to them, Scully finished, "The Urmari, Adams, why are they here?"

With only blank stares and no answer forthcoming, Mulder responded with relish, his more characteristic aplomb reasserting itself, "Well, if alien bounty hunters are involved, they've come to right FBI agents haven't they, Scully?" He stood, stretched and sauntered past his still seated partner with an insolent wink, "I imagine we know or can find out more about the agenda of the Urmari and Adams than you all can."

"Mulder, you are really enjoying the prospect of knowing more about space aliens than the space aliens in my living room, aren't you?"

"Scully say it again would you? Once just isn't quite enough."

"That you know more about space aliens than the space aliens in my living room."

Mulder nodded, irrepressible, "I can't wait to submit this report to Skinner."

end (1/4)

Disclaimer in Chapter 1

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* * *

Clouds swirled in smoky wisps above his head, an ever present, obscuring fog that followed wherever he went. The room was dark and dull, but his Force sense honed and trained by a father now dead for over five years, remained, or so he thought, sharp. He had sensed those two young strong presences almost as soon as they had broken orbit; Cancer Man fancied that he sensed from the Skywalker's some vestige of their powerful father.

But there had also been a new bright presence, pulsating with a raw, untrained power. He almost did not recognize her at first it had been so long.

Finally he remembered, a shining image fifteen or more years past of a girl with red hair and delicate features standing silently and composed behind the throne of a yellowed and gnarled man. He had only seen her once, but his father had spoken with pride and manipulative lust for the potential he saw in the child. Someday his father had promised, she will be my Hand, my assassin, my agent, deaf to all but my voice. And then someday she will be your's. Someday, Mara Jade will be your's Palpatine had promised, "I have foreseen it."

Had Palpatine also foreseen his own death, Cancer Man wondered? With the death of his father at the hands of Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker, Cancer Man ceased such futile exercises in fortune telling. To him, among the dull minds of Earth, there was no need for foreknowledge; careful planning yielded far more reliable results.

With stained fingers he extinguished the worn butt and lit another, sensing his own son approach with a quiet knock. With a mental acquiescence, the door to the neat, nondescript cubicle swung open and Benjamin Adams strode into the room. Adams tossed several photographs on the low, worn coffee table. "We were right, of course."

His father nodded. "There was no mistaking that Skywalker presence in the Force. And the others?"

Adams bent his imposing figure gracefully to finger the photos. He

one towards the impassive, unmoving shape in the armchair. "The man is Han Solo, Leia Skywalker's husband."

Cancer Man glanced at the photo, observing as an aside, "She has never acknowledged the name, going only as Organa."

Adams shrugged, then continued, "I don't recognize the other woman."

The older man blinked at his careless son, wondering if they needed to rehearse deep memory lessons. "She *was* the Emperor's Hand, Palpatine's private aide and assassin. Mara Jade." Adams jerked with recognition, as Cancer Man continued the brief history lesson, "I had always wondered what happened to her after Palpatine died."

There was the obvious explanation, "Thrown in with the New Republic, perhaps."

"Palpatine thoroughly penetrated her psyche, at a level and to a depth we could not hope to ever replicate. The shock of losing her mental tie to him should have driven her insane. It is interesting that it did not. It could make her all the more valuable to us now."

The two men stared for some time at the photograph, lost in private reflections of might have beens. The son eventually asking of the father, "I've never understood why Skywalker sent me back from the Gates."

"It was a rather rash act, even for a Skywalker. He may have still been under the control of the Cestellians."

Adams knew from what he spoke, "He may have also been distracted by things less galactic in nature."

The astute aside drew an echoing raspy chuckle from his father. "Indeed." The dry cackle sounded as dead leaves scrapping across the hard floor, "Two things, no, three things one may count upon from Skywalkers -- they are dutiful, they are fearless, and," his lip curled into a contemptuous leer, "They are romantic idealists."

Grateful to Skywalker's action in returning him, whatever the reason, Adams was a shade too defensive, "Such traits are generally considered admirable, even heroic."

"Such a sentimentalist, my son? Or perhaps you are being deliberately ironic. If the former, then it would seem I have neglected your training.

The talents of one's enemies are useful when as here dependable to the point of predictability."

Some part of Adams not wholly given over to such dark scheming futilely rebelled against a father's dominion. If Palpatine had pierced Mara Jade to her very soul, a father's penetration of his son was as complete and as nearly corrupt. The Force vested different skills to its adepts, and in the case of Cancer Man, his mastery had taken a hard, crooked turn. He was a connoisseur of human frailty, possessing the uncanny ability to discern the debilities and appetites of others and to exploit them. Under so knowing a touch, strengths were manipulated and weaknesses fed and savored. So perceiving such a delicate sensitivity in Adams now, with a deft, devastating mental thrust, Cancer Man struck, delivering a formidable, wrenching psychic reprimand. The blow from the father sent the son careening into the wall.

The silent lesson administered, Cancer Man returned nonchalantly to the subject at hand, "It may be that someone has finally begun to ask the obvious questions, how it is that a man who was supposed to be an 'intimate,'" again a dry chuckle, "of the lovely Dana Scully came to be in Coruscant Palace, with a strong Force gift and the ability to steal the ship."

Adams slowly picked himself up from the concrete floor, head pounding.

Even through the throbbing agony of his father's mental thrashing, he recognized a dangerous ambiguity in the statement. In a thick, pained voice he asked, "You don't think they know of the plan, do you?"

The malicious, knowing laugh again reverberated through the gray room,

"No. Palpatine was very careful and specific. The colonists had to be stopped and punished, I had to be protected from his scheming concubines and," he added with lip smacking satisfaction, "The Urmari required new fodder."

"Might Jade have known, and told them?"

privy
to all of Palpatine's most intimate schemes." He mused, "We must offer
her
the same illusion -- when the time comes." He snubbed out another
burning
ember, igniting a new one in between chilled thoughts that had lay bear
his
son's own nagging fears, "No, Palpatine hid the plan too well. I think,
Ben,
they have come for you."

The rare use of his given name shook Adams to the very bone. He
wondered which instinct coursed stronger in his cold father,
preservation of
son, self, or plan? Would the father forfeit the son in the interest of
the
other two? It was an interesting corollary to the legend of this planet
that
God sent His Son to Earth to be sacrificed. Love, it had been reputed,
was
the motivation, if such emotion could be attributed to Gods. He knew
his
father labored under no such weakness. Aloud Adams retreated, "Well,
regardless of why, we don't understand how. Could it be that there is
another Gate?"

"No. But I think our hunting and hungry friends may be able to
tell us
more." As if on cue, Cancer Man turned his sallow face to one side, as
if
listening for an elusive sound or melody.

The son felt the same disturbance a rapid heartbeat later and
shuddered,
"You invited one of them here?" Fear and disgust colored the tremor in
his
voice.

In answer, Cancer Man called out to the dark presence behind the
door,
switching into Basic, "You may enter, friend."

The Urmari stepped in, today in the form of a hardened, youngish,
scarred, white male, its malevolent presence filling the room. Although
Adams' own Force perception would allow him to penetrate the shape
shifter's
disguise, he avoided such applications when in the vicinity of the
bounty
hunters. Use of the Force drove an Urmari mad with voracious hunger as
surely as blood drove sharks into a killing frenzy. Even now, merely in
the
presence of two Force users, Adams could sense the monster's black
craving,
barely controlled. He had
spent all of his 33 years in the presence of Urmari and had never become
accustomed to the awful yearning they exuded in and for the Force, a
rapacious appetite that could never be sated. Of all the epithets and
rumors
that clung to them, soul stealer, vampire, demon, in a thousand

this one at least was true. As surely as a black hole devoured all light and matter, as a leech sucked blood from an unknowing host, so too did the Urmari feed on the essence of Force sensitives.

"Thank you for responding, my friend." The man's greeting was ironic. They all knew, Urmari were not friends and came only because it otherwise suited them.

"Why have you sent for us?"

Cancer Man clucked reprovingly, and gestured for the Urmari to sit in a facing chair. The scar-faced alien ignored the offer, resolutely standing, still and coiled. "You certainly know the reason for my summons, the Vespiary no doubt felt the same disturbance I did."

There was barely a flicker in the dull eyes of the Urmari. It said slowly, "We felt it."

"And so I offer a trade to the Vespiary," he began cautiously, "I will tell you who and why, if you will tell me how."

"We accept," the Urmari said simply, not shifting its stance.

"Of the three presences you felt, two are Skywalkerers." With a hiss of pleasure from the Urmari, Cancer Man leered and continued, "Yes. I see you know the name. They have likely come in search of my Father's heirs. The Force is strong with both of them; one, the man, is a trained Jedi."

Adams could have sworn the shape shifted; for a moment, he saw a grinning, fanged head and a tongue licking at hungry, dripping lips. The mirage vanished, leaving again only the tall, broad man. Its voice rang hollow and dry, "Hunger binds what the stars divide. The Vespiary knows of our long and successful labors in the service of your father who is now dead and that, but for the colonists, the nectar otherwise found here is both scarce and does not satisfy. The Vespiary has felt our hunger; they may have had a subtle hand in bringing sweet Jedi meat to us. The ..."

Cancer Man cut off the Urmari, with a swift glance at Adams. "So you think they may have come in an Urmari ship?"

The Urmari shrugged, an endearingly human gesture in so alien a personage, "We believe it so. Apart from our hunger, few things bridge

span between the here and the there." The creature wavered, a shadow moving across the bleak floor, then spoke again, a shivering chill wafting through the room, "What of the other, the third who is not a Skywalker?"

Cancer Man said, too quickly, "The other is not your concern."

The menace grew in the small space, growling with the rumblings of a petit betrayal. "Green and unripe she would be, but many among us crave such uncured nectar."

A fist came down on the coffee table, "The other woman, Mara Jade, she is mine. You may not take her."

Smiling, the Urmari said softly, "The Vespiary will take who they please. We make no such promises, but..."

Cancer Man waited as the Urmari before him counted and consulted those others with whom it shared a consciousness driven by appetite.

Finally it spoke, "We acknowledge the role you played in bringing Jedi to us. Should the Skywalker be as sweet and strong as we believe they will be, then we may discuss the fate of Mara Jade."

Like a cold wind blowing, the Urmari swept from the room. Adams felt free to exhale only then, and glanced at his father, also visibly disturbed.

As the darkness receded, Adams said slowly, "Dealing with Urmari, your father made a pact with the devil himself."

"The devil is a construct of this world, not our's, son." Cancer Man was not persuasive.

"Every culture has its own concept of hell. If the devil of this galaxy or another had a face, it would be Urmari."

Cancer Man laughed at his son's oh so serious histrionics, "And that would make Palpatine who, Faust? Selling his soul for Urmari power?"

"If that is the case, I would be careful, father." With excessive drama but telling sincerity, Adams entreated, "Palpatine never fulfilled his part of the Urmari bargain. The sins of the father may come to rest on the son."

Laughing again, as one trying to convince himself of something,

Man
threatened pleasantly, "Or on the grandson."

* * *

"You want to take them *where*?" Afternoon had worn into evening, leaving two hungry Earthlings and four ravenous space aliens.

"Mulder," Dana tried again. "Do you really think an Annapolis crab house is a good idea? Maybe they don't even eat crustaceans. What happens if one of them is allergic to the iodine content in shellfish?"

With a sigh of patient amusement, Mulder turned to the assembled guests,

"Do any of you have any known food allergies?"

A chorus of shaken heads greeted the question. "See, Scully?"

"Mulder, you don't even get forks and spoons in a crab house."

With a significant look at the skeptical Jade, Mulder grinned, "I know."

The activity around Han and his mysterious bag caught the agents' attention. "What are you doing?" Dana asked as Han handed Skywalker and Leia metal handles that seemed vaguely familiar. Mara was already strapping what looked suspiciously like a gun holster on to her wrist as Mulder watched with rapt fascination.

Solo answered for all of them, "Don't worry. We'll carry concealed.

But with Urmari and Adams loose, there is no way we are going unarmed."

Leia clipped the handle to her belt, where it dangled fairly unobtrusively, partially concealed by a loose jacket she wore, "And you all should be armed as well. We have to assume that the Urmari will know we are here."

As Scully asked, "How," she saw something subtle pass between Skywalker and Leia.

His sister turned away, to whisper something to Han as Mara piped in, "Mulder, don't just stand there. You know how to help a lady with a blaster holster don't you?"

It was a beautifully orchestrated diversion, Dana realized as Skywalker edged towards her with studied casualness. Pausing merely to, like his

With a quick glance at Scully's partner now enchanted by Mara, Skywalker whispered as he strolled by on his way to the window, "Without Mulder."

Oh yes, Dana thought. And I've got a few things to discuss with you.

Aloud she said, "Let's walk down to the waterfront."

* * *

Once out of her building, again by unspoken accord, Han, Leia and Mara bunched around Mulder. Skywalker put a light restraining hand on her arm, nodding at the others, "Let them go ahead a bit."

Dana shook free of him, wondering for the thousandth time since she laid eyes on him hours ago, what the hell had happened before to give him the right to assume such *familiarity, now. She saw Mulder turn with a puzzled, dark look, that disappeared into an flashed grin as Mara laced fingers around his elbow, asking, "So Mulder, tell me about the blasters FBI agents get." Intercepting the fleeting look that passed between Jade and Skywalker multiplied Mara's irritation. Ignorance and manipulation only underscored the unaccustomed and very unpleasant feeling of vulnerability.

Dana seethed silently until the others were a half block ahead, then snapped. "So what else is going on here, Skywalker. You four have finessed this situation beautifully ..."

He seemed unprepared for this assertive assault, "Dana, I really needed to talk to you. And I didn't want Mulder to hear."

"Why not?" she accused, her worst fears confirmed. "What is it you don't want him to hear?"

She jerked away as Skywalker touched her arm, stammering "Really Dana, it was important that we talk about ..."

Scully cut him off, "Talk about what?" She began striding faster, her temper rising. "Your memory seems pretty in tact, you obviously remember something ..." she spat out the words, "That I don't. In fact, you seem quite free to take liberties. You've got the advantage over me entirely."

Spinning around she forced him to pull up abruptly, and she poked him hard

with
the phrase 'slip a mickey'?" His confusion showed that he clearly was not.

"The origins," Dana bit harshly, and emphasized with another jab, "Involve a man sneaking a drug into a woman's food or drink, rendering her unconscious. At his leisure, he is then able to take advantage of her, sexually or otherwise. And when she wakes, she has no memory of what happened."

Skywalker actually sputtered and blushed. Dana knew she would comprehend at some point when she was calmer that this was not the reaction of a cad. He was visibly hurt even at the mere accusation. "Dana, I..." He took her accusing finger and wrapped it in both his hands, staring hard, into her eyes, "I'd never do anything like that. Nothing like that ..."

Dana pulled away, simultaneously galled at the audacity and charmed by the sincerity. She said more softly, "Now do you get it? Maybe I wasn't drugged, but I have no idea what happened the last time you were here. I have no reason, no basis for trusting anything you say."

She had expected some vehement defense or explanation. She did not expect another flush, a shake of his head and a smirk at the foursome now a block ahead. "What is it?" she asked.

He shrugged and with a rueful grin began walking again, staring at the cobble walks of old Annapolis, hands buried in his pockets. "Leia could tell this conversation wasn't going well and wanted to know if they should try it instead. Mara offered to attest to my annoyingly virtuous character."

A guffaw escaped her, involuntarily. Dana fell in step with him. "How...?" but she already knew the answer.

"It's what we told you about before, about the Force, Leia and I can communicate through it, and Mara's learning to."

"Oh."

Skywalker tumbled on, seeing an opening. "Listen, Dana, I'm sorry that you feel so much at a disadvantage. When we get a minute I'll try really to restore everything you've forgotten and then you'll see there's really nothing, well I mean nothing." He stumbled so awkwardly she almost, but not quite, felt sorry for him. Skywalker tried again, "You'll see that nothing

Scully did wonder if what might embarrass **her** had any relation at all to what in Skywalker's culture might embarrass **him.** Profoundly relieved at least at the assurance, but now unwilling to relinquish the advantage, Scully pressed, "Well, then, why the big mystery, why all the effort to separate me and Mulder just now?"

Skywalker stared ahead at Mulder and the others. Mara was leaning into Mulder conspiratorially. Han and Leia walked next to them, linked arm to arm, he shortening his long strides to match her smaller steps. A graceful canopy of colorful trees glinting gold and red hung overhead, their leaves littering the ground.

"Have you noticed any change in Mulder?"

The sudden change in the conversation rendered her momentarily mute as she flew to what had happened only that morning in Quantico. "What do you mean?"

Head now bowed, the look he gave was askance, but piercing, "I think you know exactly what I mean."

Now Scully lowered her head and voice, thrusting hands deep into her raincoat, "It happened about two weeks ago, but Mulder only told me yesterday. He says..." The admission was more difficult than she had imagined, "He says that he went to sleep one night and woke up two days later. And when he did, something was missing."

"What?"

She shook her head, repeating what they had learned, "Mulder's intuitive skills made him one of the best behaviorist's at the Bureau."

Skywalker puzzled over the word the translator did not recognize. She explained, "It means many things, but in this context, it's an uncanny ability Mulder has always had, an intuition, an insight into the criminal mind."

"And it's gone? Just vanished?"

"Yes. The tests he took today show that what he did, what he had a year ago, he no longer has. It's rather amorphous, but his intuitive skills are, well Mulder insists they're gone and the psychologist agreed. I might have just dismissed the whole thing as a phase or slump he is going through,

Mulder used to have perfect recall."

"His eidetic memory is gone too?"

Dana nodded, wondering what motivated her to confide these secrets, but Skywalker seemed only concerned and probing, not shocked. "You don't seem surprised."

"Do you remember what we told you before about the Force. How it binds things together and how some people are sensitive to it, and can tap into it.

To use it for strength and knowledge."

"You have it, and Leia and Mara, right?"

"Do you remember that Mulder was very strong with the Force too?"

"He *was*?" Dana's first reaction was to deny it, deny it all, but the memories of four months ago flooded back to her. She raised a hand to her temple, "I have it a little bit too right?"

Skywalker continued staring down at the brick lined walk. "Yes, some."

We taught you and Mulder some shielding techniques at the Gate. He didn't know it, but Mulder had a very strong Force gift. The Force manifests itself in different ways, and I think with Mulder it gave him the memory, and what you call his insight and intuition. And since you have some sensitivity, it probably heightened his link to you."

Dana whispered, "You are using the past tense Luke. Is that just a fault with the translator?"

He turned a pained look to her, "Mara noticed it first, almost as soon as we met Mulder in the basement. His Force sense is gone."

They walked silently, into old Annapolis, the cries of the gulls overhead mingling with the laughter ahead. Some of Dana's scientific intellect began to reassert itself. In her clinician's voice she asked, "Is this kind of lapse common among Force users?"

His long silence made the admission almost superfluous, "I don't think so." Sensing her sinking despair, he added, "But until we met Mara, Leia and I thought we were the only Jedi ..."

"Jedi?" The translator did not provide an explanation, but again the term seemed familiar.

"Trained Force sensitives of a sort. Anyway, we know so little about the Force. The ones who knew the most are all dead."

"What about Mara, does she know anything?"

There was an odd, almost protective silence, "Mara's training has been sporadic and unusual. But no, she doesn't know anything either."

"But you have a theory." It was not a question.

"Yes. It was the holo in your office of the Urmari ship, and then seeing Mulder again."

There was no mistaking the deep, serious dread in his voice. Dana waited, and Skywalker finally finished, "The Urmari are believed to be Force hunters; they supposedly can rob a person of his Force ability. We don't know, but..." he trailed off, leaving Dana to finish, aghast.

"You mean these aliens can somehow steal the Force, take away something that doesn't even exist except in a mental or psychic way?"

Skywalker gingerly placed a tentative hand to her shoulder, speaking urgently, "I know it's incredible, but we don't have any better explanation.

The Emperor worked with the Urmari, they killed hundreds, thousands of Jedi, somehow taking the Force from them. We think the Urmari got to Mulder."

Rationality demanded a rejection of what she felt, of what she had seen.

She could have never accepted this until she had seen what had happened to the surgeon, the painter, the pianist, the poor translator, and then Mulder.

In a twisted way, once the initial premise was accepted, the logic of it all was fantastic, surely, but also rigorous and inescapable. With a resigned sigh she gently disengaged from his earnest grip. They continued walking.

"That's why you think Adams is here with the Urmari, and why you think he is an heir of your Emperor."

"We didn't put it all together until we met up with you all again, but it all makes sense. Everything that happened to Mulder confirms it."

asked,

"There've been others besides Mulder?"

She answered shortly, "Your sister and Mara may not mind you rooting through their heads, but I do."

"Sorry. It's a bad habit."

"It certainly is. And very rude. But yes, Mulder has been dragging me throughout the country meeting people who report the same things he did, missing time, and then, on awakening, finding some part of them, some skill or ability is gone. Our last case was a very skilled translator. He killed himself four days ago. We set up testing for the others today. What concerns me most is that there must be many more cases that we haven't heard of. And I wonder why they suddenly now targeted Mulder. I don't think it's any more accidental than Adams asking me on a date."

Coming down the cobblestone lane, they entered the old town of Annapolis, at the harbor on the Chesapeake Bay.

"Skywalker, please don't say anything to Mulder. He, well, he'll need to hear this from me."

"Sure. Any of us would be glad to do whatever we can."

"I'll tell him after dinner. I just wish I knew what to say."

end 2/4)

Chapter 4 (3/4)

Disclaimer in Chapter 1

by JackeeC, Gheorghe2 and ginef (all @aol.com)

* * *

The Annapolis Crab House sat on the old town square, where the Chesapeake Bay met the cobblestones and 18th Century buildings of old Annapolis. Army would be playing Navy that Saturday, so the town and its Naval Academy denizens were appropriately festooned to commemorate the historic match up.

The Crab House was packed to the gills as it were, boisterous patrons elbow to cheek to jowl, crowded on picnic tables covered with newspapers, pitchers of golden beer and saltine crackers. And of course crabs --

crustaceans, all sacrificed in a gourmand ritual deemed barbaric by most west
of the Appalachians -- the reaction of those west of the Milky Way was
still
to be ascertained.

Mulder was the considerate and effervescent host, "So, do you all want
the crabs or the crabs?" Dana, wedged between Han and Luke on the bench began passing out the bibs, which were considerably wrapped around the only utensils to be found at a Crab House. Mara unrolled the bundle then looked up wonderingly.

Dana nodded at the unspoken question, "Yes, you use those to extract the meat from the crabs, and of course, you use your hands."

Mulder, opposite Dana and knee to knee with the ladies, leaned over to Mara grinning broadly, "I just knew you would love a restaurant where you get a mallet and a knife to eat your meal."

Mara ran a light finger along the knife, then pointedly looked past Mulder at Leia, "I don't think it's really sharp enough to do much damage."

Leia was inspecting her own table setting, "Pity."

Mulder took care of the ordering, always simple at this restaurant. "Crabs," he told the surly, harried waitress. "Lots and lots of crabs, a box of Saltines and a couple pitchers of Bud."

The beer and crackers arrived first, then the waitress reappeared with a bushel basket, dripping water and crab detritus out the bottom. They rescued the crackers, beer and utensils in time; with no ceremony, the waitress up ended fifty or more crabs on to the table. Luke and Mara both recoiled, fully expecting the crustaceans to slither away and snap at such indignant treatment. One tumbled off the pile landing right in front of a startled Mara, who with the practiced ease of an assassin, plunged her knife into the crab's back, neatly pinning it to the table. Mulder burst into laughter, only now feeling vindicated for Mara's pranks in his car. "Don't worry Jade, they're already dead."

She eyed her skewered dinner with deep skepticism, then yanked her knife out of the table and the crab. With slow deliberateness she turned to Mulder, caught his admiring eye with a dazzling smile, and then in a blindly fast movement, rammed her knife into a crab resting but inches from his

Mulder blanched, retreating with a stammer, "Really, they are very good, taste just like chicken."

The four aliens all looked at one another with expressions of mingled horror and amusement, prompting "what?" from the earthlings.

"Chicken?" Leia asked.

Mulder nodded. "It's just a joke," as Scully explained, "Chicken is a bland firm meat from birds."

Han was now laughing hysterically, Mara but a step behind. With a glare at her husband, Leia explained, "I think the problem is with the translation.

Our translator translated your chicken into Ewok."

Already hard at work with his knife and mallet, Han pried a large piece of crab meat out and with a satisfied gint, said, in English, "Tastes just like Ewok."

Both Leia and Han quickly got into the Crab House spirit. For Leia, a royal upbringing meant savoring all manner of delicacies including things with eyes, shells and legs still attached. Her husband loved her for many reasons, not the least of which was her adroit use of cutlery. And for Han, his Corellian physiology and temperament were admirably suited to things that were boiled alive, served by the dozen, and where consumption ended, not with satiety, but because the Old Bay Spice that coated the crabs had worked its way too thoroughly into fingers cut on sharp edged shells.

Dana had to coach a good-natured Skywalker through a meal that for him, ended up consisting primarily of Budweiser and Saltine crackers. Mara fared little better, under Mulder's amused instruction, occasionally threatened to use the knife on her dinner companion rather than her dinner.

Deftly prying the apron off one crab, Leia intoned, "You do have to wonder at the temerity of the first human," she lifted her dinner up by a dangling leg, "Who beheld one of these creatures, and said, 'Let's eat it.'"

When the check came, Han offered to pay with a fistful of quarters, leaving Mulder and Scully in hysterics at the generous offer. "What did you

indicated
that Mulder's jest should be taken more seriously.

Scully waved it off, "Never mind. Don't answer that." She wanted to get moving, anxious to talk to Mulder and becoming concerned at what appeared to be a developing knife throwing contest between Han, Skywalker, and Mara.

They left the crowded, smoky restaurant and walked into the busy square and salty tang of a soft October evening on the Chesapeake. Again, the four operated by some unspoken accord, Leia and Han peeling off to wander to the water front, and Skywalker tugging on Mara's sleeve with boyish enthusiasm, and an entreaty suspiciously close to a whine, "Come on Mara, you *know* I want to see the ocean." She grumbled, grinned and allowed the farm boy to pull her towards the sea wall, docks and squawking water fowl.

Mulder watched them go, fixed on the withdrawing Jade and Skywalker.

"They are really good at that, aren't they?"

Scully glanced up at the pair, wondering whether the short distance between them indicated a long, familiar friendship, different cultural notions of personal space or something more intimate. "Yes, I think they have been working together for a long time."

"The Force link doesn't hurt either, does it?"

"Well, that wouldn't explain how Han does it." They turned at the waterfront to follow the others, along the sea wall. "Mulder ..." Scully began, and then found everything she had rehearsed over dinner seemed inadequate. She stopped, and sat on the wall, taking his hands in hers, bringing him around to face her. She began again, "Mulder..."

He looked down, then up, over her shoulder across the Bay and the winking lights. A tinkling laughter, probably Leia's, drifted along the water. "Just say it, Scully. I'm not blind. What's going on?"

"It's, well, they think they know what happened to you, what happened to that translator and the others."

Wild hope, fear, despair. Scully thought she saw them all in those seconds. Mulder tried pulling away from her, but she held his hands fast in her own, "Do you remember at the Gate, how CEstallia taught you how to keep

why
we had to learn how to do it?"

"Some. All of it is vague, but..."

"Mulder, the reason we had to learn that was because you are Force sensitive, like Skywalker, and Leia and Jade. Do you remember now?" As he nodded slowly, understanding emerging, she went on, "They think the Force gave you the eidetic memory, your intuitive skills. Skywalker said that they could sense the Force in you before and that they can't anymore. They think that's what you are missing now."

He whispered, eyes shut, seeing, remembering now, "You mean somehow, or something took away my *Force*?"

She nodded.

Utter mystification and incredulity, "How?"

"The Urmari, the bounty hunters, Mulder. They think the bounty hunters can steal the Force sensitivity from a person."

Mulder jerked his hands away, pivoted one way, then another, and with deep resignation, saw no where to run. He slumped next to her on the wall, studying his shoes. After several minutes she was prepared to break the silence, when he did. "I've always wondered why they haven't just killed me.

I assumed that it was because they didn't want to make me a martyr to the cause." He ran disbelieving hands through disheveled hair, "looks like they found a way to neutralize me without killing me."

"Mulder, I ..."

He cut her off, "Don't, Scully. This makes more sense than anything we've learned today. Even if this Emperor of their's isn't here, and the space ships aren't Urmari, or whatever the hell they say, and even if their Urmari aren't the bounty hunters we know and love, even if everything they have told us is an outright lie, we know who's behind the bounty hunters here, and we know he'll stop at nothing to stop us."

Mulder looked down the walkway; Skywalker and Jade, in defiance of local ordinances, were tripping along the top of the sea wall. "We'd better collect our aliens before they are called upon to explain their behavior to

She laughed, but with little mirth. "What do we do with them. Hotel?"

"I think that would take too many phone booths and I don't want to submit that expense voucher to Bureau accounting. Let's go back to your place and divvy up their gear. I'll take the Solos back to my place, and we'll meet back here tomorrow."

Action, movement, activity, plans, investigations. They had to move forward with this. "I'll go back to the office tomorrow, look through the files, run some searches, see what we can find on Adams, on the bounty hunters and the colonists."

"Might as well pull up what we have on Cancer Man and the consortium, too." They pulled themselves up from the wall, and moved towards the others.

Mulder continued, already looking ahead, "I thought maybe Jade, Skywalker and I should visit Frohike and company."

Scully smiled, thinking that, for a host of reasons, Mara among the Lone Gunmen with both Mulder and Skywalker in attendance would be very entertaining. "You just love making trouble don't you?"

Deliberately misconstruing her, he teased, "Scully, you know you are first in my heart. Now if I was blonde and blue eyed, maybe it would be reciprocated."

"Well, as soon as I find out what happened the last time, you will be the first to know." Fast approaching the others, Scully stopped and tugged on her partner's sleeve, "And Mulder, you should have learned by now, better watch your step around us redheads."

end (3/4)

Chapter 4 (4/4)

Disclaimer in Chapter 1

by JackeeC, Gheorghe2 and ginef (all @aol.com)

* * *

Even after Mulder and the Solos left, Dana was up with Mara and Luke for hours, hearing more of the story. She had the sense that Luke still wanted to have a talk she wanted to avoid, and she felt that Mara was subtlety

what she could forestall it as well. Whether Mara was coming to Dana's aid, merely enjoying thwarting Skywalker, or acting out some agenda of her own, Dana could not discern.

Scully had been prepared to take the couch and offer them her bed, but after puzzling out the dynamics, felt such an offer too blunt for the subtle undercurrents. And for whatever reason of misplaced gallantry, she was certain Luke would have refused to throw his hostess out of her bed. So well passed midnight Dana gave a yawning Luke a pillow, blanket and the couch and headed to her own bedroom. Answering the only question put to her all evening, Mara got up from the chair and followed.

Borrowed nightshirts and scrounging for toothbrushes from previous dentist's visits, then tossing, turning and thumping in the shared bed -- if the situation was painfully brand new and awkward to Mara, it was poignantly familiar to Dana. Dana felt a sorrowing wave break over her, a pang in the dark with the brutality of her sister's murder. With a lump forming, her throat tightening with the memory, she turned hurriedly away, wiping a tear that would, without some immediate control, be followed by many more.

Softly, Mara asked, "I remind you of someone?"

Dana replied shortly, in a thick voice, "I've been over this with Skywalker. You may not mind someone in your head Mara, but I do."

"Sorry." Embarrassed, Mara explained, "I just got a very strong image of one of the women in a holo in your living room."

Haltingly, Dana murmured, "The picture is of my older sister Missy. She was murdered over a year ago."

"I'm sorry."

And Dana could tell that she really was. "I was supposed to be killed, not Missy. She just got in the way."

"Of one of those enemies you and Mulder have made?"

"Yes." Dana felt the pressure ease in her chest, "The same people who killed Missy, killed Mulder's father and probably kidnapped his sister. They are probably behind this whole thing now, Adams, the bounty hunters, the loss

Mara Jade had few soft empathies or vulnerabilities. Dana's own story, as fully twisted as her own, however, moved her, to deep pity, a new dawning respect, and anger. Mara gave the response she herself would have wanted to hear, "You've got help now Dana. We'll get them."

It was very considerate and hopelessly naive. Dana pushed the pain aside. "Thanks Mara." The bedtime silence where a person finds sound sleep or none at all hung between them, every tiny sound and light loudly magnified.

Mara finally spoke, "May I ask you something?"

What was it about girls and slumber parties, Dana thought. "Well, whether I answer depends on the question."

Mara seemed not at all put off by the bluntness, "The arrangement you have with Mulder, is that typical of your culture?"

"Nothing about Mulder is typical."

Mara chuckled quietly, as Dana offered "We've been partners at the Bureau for three years. We work well together." Dana sensed an odd stiffening sense of recognition from Mara and pressed a question she had wondered about all day. "Why did you come?"

With the sharp intake, and abrupt turn, Dana knew Mara did not welcome the question, but having started the confessions, was in no position to stop it now. There was another heavy sigh in the dark. "It's cause of my ties to the Emperor."

"What kind of ties?"

Another long, reluctant pause. "Palpatine was my Master. I don't remember any of it, but he took me from my family as a child because I was able to link with him mentally. I could hear him and do whatever he wanted from anywhere in the galaxy."

As Mara had intended, the admission did stun Dana into silence, but only momentarily. "It was a telepathic link, in the Force?"

"Yes."

"But if you worked for the Emperor, how come you are working with Skywalker and the Solos now?"

Dana was asking for it. "Skywalker and his father got to the

and killed him. Right before Palpatine died, he planted a command in my mind, and ordered me to find Skywalker and kill him."

With this extraordinary revelation, Dana turned on to her side to face a pro-Mara. "He could do that? Plant a subliminal message telling you to murder someone?"

"Oh sure. Did it all the time," Mara responded with deliberate, chilling indifference.

"But you obviously didn't kill Skywalker."

Mara was wondering what would get this woman to back off. "I tried for years. But circumstances threw us together for a while. We ended up going on a mission and I killed his clone instead."

"His clone?" Dana echoed in stunned disbelief.

"Yeah."

Dana pressed further, "And killing the clone cured of the compulsion to kill the real Skywalker?"

"I dunno about cured. Killing him still seems like a good idea when he gets me involved in things like this."

This time Dana took the hint, "Good night, Mara."

With a hesitation suggesting that such civility was uncommon to her, Mara muttered, "You, too."

After what seemed like only moments of sleep, the ringing yanked Dana to consciousness. That damn phone, that damn Mulder. Fumbling for her phone on the third ring, Dana hoped she had been quick enough to get it without waking Mara or Luke. "Mulder," she hissed, blinking at her clock, "Don't you ever sleep?"

"Uhhhhh, sorry" came the whisper at the other end. He stated the obvious, "I couldn't sleep."

"It's 3:30 in the morning, what could possibly be so important that you'd have to talk about it now?" Feeling no response from Mara, Dana tried easing out of the bed then was startled to realize she needn't have bothered with delicate, stealthy maneuvering since Mara wasn't there. Interesting.

She slid from under the covers and on to the floor, as the mournful voice at the other end intoned, "Scully, did Skywalker tell you how I can get the Force back?"

Having deliberately avoided that topic before at the Harbor, Dana found she was oddly unprepared for that obvious question now. Her cautious long silence was greeted by an even longer one on the other end of the phone. "That's what I thought," Mulder said glumly. "What if they don't know how? What if they can't? What if ..."

She sighed, quiet irritated at the egoism, at the fatalism, but also hearing a very frightened friend. "Mulder, you haven't talked to Han about this yet have you?"

"No... He wouldn't understand."

Dana prickled. Just like you think I wouldn't, but that doesn't stop you from calling me to moan about it, she fumed. "Don't be too sure. He's not Force sensitive but look at what he's done." Look, she thought, at what I've done.

"It's like I'm blind," he finally muttered.

"And you know what the blind do, they compensate by developing other skills."

From his gloomy silence, she knew this was not working, that he was sinking deeper, and tried another tact, "Did you know that Han and Leia haven't seen their two children in months?"

Mulder was puzzled enough to respond, "Why?"

"Their kids are hidden somewhere so secret that even their parents don't know where it is."

"I don't see what that has to do--"

She interrupted him, "It has everything to do with it, Mulder. The children are very Force sensitive, being around any destructive influence might warp them." At some intellectual level Dana couldn't believe she was talking like this but she continued on. "They could turn to the Dark Side."

"Oh."

child,
that she has no memory of who she was until she went to him, and all
because
~~she had a Force gift that allowed her to hear him telepathically?"~~
Mulder
was silent, and Dana continued ruthlessly, "Did you know that Luke and
Leia
were separated as infants, and hidden to keep them away from their
father who
had fallen to the Dark Side and that Leia was tortured by him and that
Luke
was supposed to kill him."

She knew that with these tales she was summoning his memory of
Samantha,
and maybe that as devastating as his loss was, he might see that there
were
far worse things a child or sibling might suffer. "Mulder," she
whispered
entreatingly, "Look at what the Force has brought them. Do you think
they
are happy? Do you really want that?"

Dana heard a sound behind her and realized Mara had been standing
at the
door.

"But," came the plea from the other end. "It's what made me
different,
special."

Dana wondered at Mara's timing and intrusion but chose to ignore
it.

Even without the evidence of this most recent foray, after seeing the
interactions this evening, Mara, she suspected, probably recognized a
familiar role and script, "Mulder," she said softly, "You are special,
you
always will be. There are things even the Force doesn't give."

There was a long pause, then, "Scully," came the distant, hoarse
whisper, "You're coming on to me aren't you?"

"Maybe if you went to sleep Mulder, you could at least dream about
it."

She caught a stifled laugh from Mara.

He persisted, some sense of perspective returning, "It'd be easier
to
dream about you if I knew what you were wearing, or why don't you tell
me
what Mara's wearing, too."

"No need for me to tell you, why don't you ask her yourself."

He was so sophisticated, squeaking, "Mara's awake? She heard?"

"Of course she's awake, we are," Dana glanced at Mara, "After all,
sharing a room." Dana raised her arm with the phone in it, and Mara
with a

gestured
Dana closer so that they could both listen in to the fun.

"Mulder..." Dana could swear Mara was affecting a sultry accent,
"Now why do you want to know what we are wearing?"

Dana overheard the muffled curse from her thoroughly embarrassed partner. "I don't think that term translates well Mulder, but I'm sure I know exactly what you meant. So tell me, why are you bothering Dana at this hour?"

He was recovering, Dana thought, his comeback sly enough to have been prodded by some weird Force sense, "Ahhh Jade, don't you know anyone who sometimes needs to talk to his best friend in the middle of the night?"

Dana gestured to retrieve the phone, sparing Mara a response to that loaded question, "Very sweet Mulder, but even best friends need to sleep."

"Good night, partner."

She hung up, setting the phone on her nightstand and clambered back into the bed as Mara settled back in, "Does he do that frequently?"

"Call me late at night, or make suggestive comments laden with sexual innuendo?"

Mara chuckled, then after long pause, began hesitantly, "About ahhhh..."

Dana interrupted her, "Sometimes he just needs to talk to his best friend."

"Right."

Inspiration striking, Dana queried, "Can I ask you something?"

Recognizing a replay of earlier, with another quiet laugh, Mara said, "Well, whether I answer depends on the question."

Dana stared up at the ceiling, as if in deep contemplation. "You said earlier that killing Skywalker's clone has kept you from murdering the real one."

"So far." With a pause, Mara finally asked the follow up that was begging to be said, "Why do you want to know?"

but it
hasn't really cured me of my compulsion to kill him. I thought it might
help
if I could get a Mulder clone somewhere and kill him."

They both burst into laughter, until Mara "shushed" Dana. "Quit
eavesdropping, Skywalker," she called out.

A voice came from the next room, "Hey, it's just a poor, lonely guy
trying to get some sleep with you two cackling like a pair of mynocks."

"Mynocks?"

"I'll tell you later," Mara promised.

They drifted off to sleep.

END-- Chapter 4

end (4/4)

X Jedi 2 A Cross Over

Chapter 5: Disco Inferno

Disclaimer in Chapter 1

by JackeeC, Gheorghe2 and ginef (all @aol.com)

Whatsa Bagel
Bethesda, MD
9:30 AM

The next morning Scully and Mulder introduced space aliens to bagels.

Somewhere between the explanation of cream cheese and lox and the discussion of what made a mensch and why Ben Adams wasn't one, it was decided that Mara and Luke would accompany Mulder on a visit to the office of Mulder's favorite subversive newspaper, the Lone Gun Man, while Scully and the Solos would see what they could dig up at FBI headquarters.

Dividing up in the parking lot, Scully pulled Mara aside and whispered,
"Don't accept any gifts or trinkets from any of them. Especially Frohike."

"Why?" Mara asked, her back stiffening.

"Let's just say that on my first visit they gave me a pen which I later determined contained a surveillance device..."

"Hey, Jade," Mulder called from his car. "Hurry up." Then he rolled

his eyes at Luke and added, "Women."

Mulder certainly liked living dangerously; Luke laughed and started to get in the car.

"I heard that," Scully and Mara said at the same time. Mara sped to Mulder's car, intent on shattering any illusions Skywalker might have had about riding "shotgun". "Hey, Mara," Scully called after her. Mara stopped and turned around to hear the final ominous warning. "Don't use the bathroom."

"Aw, Scully. And I was looking forward to watching that tape," Mulder whined. Mara looked between the two FBI agents, trying to determine if they were serious. She opted to take Leia at her word.

When Scully climbed in her own car and started the engine, Leia said from the backseat, "I take it I lucked out going with you."

She laughed. "And how."

FBI Headquarters
Washington, DC
10:30 AM

Scully used the same method to get the Solos into the building that Mulder had used the day before to get the entourage out. "Hi Joe. Uhuh," this kind of prevarication did not come easily to her.

The guard gave her a reproving grin. "Agent Scully, I think you've been hanging around Agent Mulder too long." Joe stared at her, then at Han and Leia. Sighing, he waved them all past. "Tell your partner it had better be a good game."

"Thanks, Joe."

"What's this about a game?" Han asked as they wove through the building to the elevators.

"Football," Scully responded shortly.

Han's sham of disinterest was interrupted by a knowing poke to the ribs

already you're looking for a fix."

"Football is the mania here five months out of the year," Scully explained, thinking that a solution to the weekend's entertainment dilemma had been found. "Football is replaced at intervals by basketball, baseball and hockey."

"Hockey?" Han's sporting sensibilities permitted some conjecture as to the meaning of the three "ball" games; hockey was untranslatable.

"Men play it on ice and get large sticks that they use to hit each other and a frozen disk of vulcanized rubber called a puck. The joke goes, I went to a fight last night and a hockey game broke out."

"Just my kinda game." Han said, quite seriously.

Office of the Lone Gunman
10:30 A.M.

Mulder entered the cluttered, familiar sanctuary of the Lone Gunman. Perched on a stool, Frohike jumped down to greet his favorite FBI agent.

Frohike was rumpled, short, graying, conspiratorial, and had one single eyebrow puckered over thick glasses. "Mulder! What brings you here?"

"You know, the usual. Government conspiracy. Aliens from outer space...." That being their introduction, Mara and Luke peeked their heads in the door. "Speaking of which, I'd like you to meet Luke Skywalker and Mara Jade, friends of mine from, uh, the Czech Republic. This is Frohike."

A shocked looked of recognition passed between Frohike and Luke. Realizing that he had met Frohike the last time, the Jedi acted quickly, holding out his hand and saying slowly, in English, "We have not met before."

Frohike returned the shake mechanically, repeating, "We have not met before."

Handy thing the Force, Mulder thought. As he had expected, Frohike now focused his considerable attention on Mara, taking her hand and clasping gently. Still clinging to her hand, Frohike turned to Mulder. "She's hot too. Geez, Mulder, where do you keep finding the babes?"

Mulder laughed. "I'd unhand her if I were you or she may unhand

literally."

Under her frosty, compelling stare, Frohike relented, releasing Mara's hand, and probably just in time. Luke sent her calming thoughts, which she returned with a few of Corellia's more colorful words.

"So, Mulder, where's the lovely Agent Scully?" Frohike asked, attempting and failing to sound casual as his eyes traveled back to the lovely Mara Jade now roaming the office.

"She sends her love, as always," Mulder said. "But had business to attend to back at the office. Where're Byers and Langly?"

"Sent out for reinforcements, they'll be back soon." On cue, the door flew open and the remaining Gumen appeared. Byers, bearded, slight and suited was carrying a huge box of donuts; Langly behind him struggled in with a stack of newspaper and magazines. "Mulder!" they cried in unison.

Now after Frohike, Mara figured she was ready for anything, but the sight of Langly proved her wrong. The gawky man dropped the stack of periodicals he was carrying on a jumbled desk and eagerly pumped Mulder's hand. She attempted to sound out the words glancing the front of his black, tattered T shirt and came up with "The Dead Daale." She made a mental note to ask Mulder later what that meant. "You'll *never* guess who I had lunch with this time."

"Who?" Mulder asked, taking the bait.

Langly tucked his long blonde hair behind his ears, pushing his glasses further up the bridge of his nose. "Charles Manson's therapist. Seems there's a possibility he was the result of a government experiment gone awry."

"Has there ever been a government experiment that hasn't gone awry?"
Mulder
questioned.

Settling the precious donuts and firing up the coffee machine, Byers said quietly, "who are your friends, Mulder?"

All eyes turned to the well groomed young man, who obviously didn't enjoy the attention. Mulder swung into action. "Oh, sorry. These are my friends, Luke Skywalker and Mara Jade, from the..."

"Czech Republic," Luke supplied, then repeated the, "No, we haven't

before." mantra. Jedi Mind tricks. Don't leave home without them.

In an awkward silence, the Gunmen alternately watched Mara pace about their office and waited for Mulder to be rude, funny, or spooky. The agent behaved in an even more unpredictable fashion, getting right down to business. "We're looking for someone. A criminal, of sorts, and we're hoping you might have some information on him."

Byers moved to one of the numerous computers scattered about the room and stretched his fingers on the keyboard, as if preparing to play a Mozart concerto. "What's his name?"

* * *

Scully booted up the computer and introduced Leia and Han to the X Files. Not really certain what they were looking for, Leia began searching the cabinets, trusty microprocessor hand. She silently thanked Threepio for creating the little scanner that would translate English text to Basic and then download it into her ear translator. Mulder's eclectic filing system at least made locating the pertinent files easy with tags such as "bounty hunters" and "colonists."

Han left Leia to it and joined Scully at the terminal. Searching through a Finder database of thousands of Benjamin Adams, Scully asked, "How was Mulder doing?"

Han shrugged, trying to follow her rapid keystrokes and the foreign language biographies flying by on the screen. "About as you would expect, I think. He seemed pretty disturbed."

"Well, wouldn't you be disturbed? It's a terrible loss for him." She did not mean to snap at Han and stammered a little with an apology that was evidently not necessary.

"How long have you known Mulder?"

"Three years, almost four years."

He chuckled a little, then lowered his voice, with a sly glance at his wife, engrossed in a file, mumbling to herself. "I've known Luke and Leia for over ten years, well, of our years anyway. We've been married for

years, and Scully, your time with Jedi is just beginning."

"Mulder's not a," she fumbled with the word, "Jedi."

"No, but if he got the Force back, he could be."

"Really?"

"Luke said his gift was that strong. With training, yeah, probably.

Not that I'd wish that on him, or on you."

A part of her bristled at the implication, but another part recognized a kinship. She returned to the computer screen, scrolling through tax, real estate, birth, death and court records, before finally asking, "So you wouldn't want to be one?"

"A Jedi?" Han's chortle was deep and genuine. "Hell no." He paused, looking askance. "Did that term just translate?"

"Hell? Yes, Solo." Scully thought how much she really liked him, this anchor to the team.

"My brother-in-law and closest friend is a Jedi, my children in all likelihood will be, and my wife too, if her brother has his way." He sighed, a little wistfully, she thought, "I don't know how much you've learned, being around Mulder, but I'll let you in on a few secrets about dealing with these spoon benders." He held up a forefinger, then looked at it. "Uhh, that's not an obscenity or anything is it?"

Scully shook her head, laughing.

"Ohh, well, good. Anyway, one, Jedi can get so wrapped up in their abilities that they sometimes can't see what's right in front of them. Second," he held up two fingers, "They sometimes think that the fates of all the galaxies rest on their every decision."

"I heard that," came Leia's indignant voice from the other side of the room. "And Solo, the fate of your universe at least sometimes does rest with my every decision."

"Absolutely, your Worship." With a jaunty wink Solo continued. "Three, it's up to people like you and me to keep them grounded, to keep them from going too far out on that limb, to keep them from making too many mistakes because of one and two. Am I sounding familiar yet?"

She nodded, charmed.

"And finally, Dana, lemme tell you, I wouldn't want to be a Jedi
for all
the credits in the universe." The good humor fell from his face like a
mist.
"What they go through, the burden of it, it changes them." With a
glance at his wife that was full of fear and love, he whispered, "And the changes
aren't necessarily for the better."

* * *

"A slippery little dude, isn't he," Frohike commented, from his
customary bar stool roost. The entire group was standing around Byers,
watching him work. Except Mara, who impatient with the whole process,
was
slyly exploring the office, amazed they managed to get anything done
with all
the clutter. There were piles of computers, printers, vids, recorders,
scanners, attenuators, surveillance and communications equipment and a
variety of cables, wires and other jetsam and jetsam she couldn't even
begin
to identify mixed in with hundreds upon
hundreds of old fashioned books and magazines.

"But no match for our Byers," Langley smiled, as a grainy
surveillance
photograph filled the screen. "Is that him?" he asked, turning to
Mulder.

Mulder, in turn, looked to his companions. Mara quickly returned to
Luke's side and examined the screen. Mulder and the Gunnin guessed the
answer
was yes from Mara's sharp intake of breath. They both nodded in
confirmation.

"What've you got on him?" Mulder asked, not suppressing his
excitement
particularly well.

Byers shook his head. "Not much I'm afraid."

"I remember taking this one," Frohike interrupted. "The Thinker,
may he
rest in peace, managed to hack up the time and place of a meeting
between
this guy, Adams, and that Cancer Man of yours."

"Why am I not surprised," Mulder murmured with cool, cynical
disdain.

After the revelations of yesterday, he would have been surprised if the
two
were **not** linked in some way. "What's the connection?"

"Not known," Byers commented as they studied the picture of the
men. "We

who
this Cancer Man really is, has still managed to get by us."

With the confirmation, Mulder plunged into the intrigue and plots that had both defined him and now deprived him of his very way of being. "He might know about Krycek. Know where he is..." Mulder was pacing the room, fists and jaw clenched, now seething with frustration at the murderer and thief who had eluded them for so long.

Startled at the ferocious outburst, Luke tried bringing Mulder gently back, saying softly and in Basic, "This isn't about revenge, Mulder."

The Gunmen looked to one another, wondering what he had said, and in what language. To their further astonishment, Mulder seemed to understand, but was not to be placated. "Is that right, Skywalker?" he demanded. "Whatever problems you all have and brought here, Krycek is one of mine, one of ours. He's Cancer Man's favorite henchman. I'm talking about the man who killed Scully's sister and my father. If anyone has a right to extract revenge, I do."

Mara stepped forward and grabbed him by the arm, stopping him in his tracks. She stared him down, spitting out hotly in Basic, "Revenge is fine.

Go ahead, chase him down if it makes you feel better. But that's a fight for another day. We're here for another reason. We're here to stop them from doing to other people what they did to you."

The Gunmen were rooted, staring at the interplay, astounded at the interaction, the emotion, and the liberties these strangers felt they could take with their favorite G-Man. The Gunmen, no strangers to oddities and idiosyncrasies themselves recognized that whatever eccentricities they and Mulder harbored, these two so-called Czech nationals had both feet firmly planted in mid air.

Now Luke cajoled as Mulder regained a semblance of focus, "We need you to keep your head. Got it?"

Mulder nodded reluctantly and shook free of Mara's physical restraint and Luke's apparent mental one. He nodded again, muttering, "I'm fine." He now turned to Byers, "What else do you have?"

* * *

Scully and Han worked through the computer searches. Although operating with a foreign language, and strange technology, Han was a quick study, rapidly learning the basics and helping her move through the files and data bases. "I'm no slicer," Han observed at one point, "But bureaucratic record keeping looks pretty similar, regardless of the galaxy."

Before long, they found several candidates, some in the Washington, D.C. area who appeared to be the right age to be Benjamin Adams, Dark Side user.

Han injected with much satisfaction and no regret, "Not bad work for a couple non Jedi, right Dana?"

The comment struck her hard, realizing that although surrounded by people who were, to Scully's mind, way off the paranormal scale, Han had found his place, and was comfortable with it. Deep down, Scully knew that she and Mulder were a team, but so often it seemed that her methodical contributions were lost in the flash of Mulder's more eccentric methods and intuitions. She had occasionally battled with envy; but seeing Han's own contentment, she found a measure of the same peace herself. "Creativity and insight don't just come from the Force, do they, Han?"

No Force link was needed to comprehend his perceptive gaze. "That's an important truth that they may forget, Dana." But don't you forget it he seemed to say. "You can do a lot of things with skill, training, hard work, practice, hunches. The Force is a short cut, that also gives them some other pretty amazing skills. But, I can get through a day without reading someone's mind or opening a door without hands."

The ringing office phone interrupted her response. She grabbed it with a terse, "Scully." A pause, her voice then softening, "Where are you? ... You did? Great. We have some possible addresses..." She reached over to the keyboard and became typing furiously, then hit the enter key. "I'm uploading the data to you as we speak... You got it. Good... Okay, we'll see you at my place in a couple of hours... just want to check out a couple other things here... don't you dare give him my love... Mulder! Mulder!" she glared at the now disconnected phone before returning it to the cradle.

files
in hand.

"A couple of surveillance photos of Adams. Mara made a positive
ID.
They're going to run the addresses through their system and see if they
can
come up with a match."

Han gently dislodged the files from Leia's hands, with a question
that
was more a statement, "You've found something."

She nodded, gesturing that Han and Scully should join her at the
table.
"I don't know that I have any particular insight, but, Dana, I think I
can
explain some things for you and Mulder."

At the table, Leia had set various files out in neat piles,
methodically
organized
diagrams and notes to one side. "We know from the configuration of the
ship
that the Urmari are humanoid in form, and indeed they would have to be,
or at
least be able to assume a human shape in order to operate here. Mulder
and
Dana's reports confirm that."

Han asked sharply, "Do you think they may be shape shifters of some
sort?"

She shook her head, "It's possible, but I think, given what we know
and
assume about Urmari that there is another explanation. What intrigued
me
Dana, was your and Mulder's description of how it changed shape when it
came
after you all and the colonist Smith."

Scully was now flipping through the file, recalling that horrifying
night when she saw that thing advancing upon them, pick in hand. The
night
had devolved into a gruesome mess...

Leia's extrapolation interrupted Scully's thoughts. "I think the
most
logical explanation is that the Urmari not only feed off the Force, but
probably also use it, to alter their physical appearance,"

Now she balked, "How could such a thing be possible? I..." Scully
hesitated, trying to come up with some other rational explanation. She
failed miserably.

Han gave her a wry grin and a squeeze to the shoulder, "I told you
Dana,
the Force can give these spoon benders some pretty amazing skills." To
Leia

the
Force merely to change someone's perception of them?"

"I don't know. There is so much about the Force we don't know."
With a
smile to her husband she added, "And although Luke is the most
accomplished
spoon bender among us, he hasn't learned these kind of skills yet."

"And the colonists?" Han asked, already guessing the answer.

Again Leia nodded, turning now to her notes and the colonist file,
"Dana
and Mulder report that the colonists can heal wounds and illnesses and
change
shape. And of course the Urmari hunt them. They are no doubt
Force-sensitive as well."

Han leaned against the table with a bump that sent it jumping
across the
floor.

Righting himself with an abashed look, he picked up Leia's speculation,
"A
whole race of Force sensitives... Dana, do you know why they're here?"

Scully shifted back and forth, foot to foot. Staring at her toes,
her
intellect warred with everything else. She opted for a cagey,
uncommitted
answer, raising her head to look Han square. "The name Mulder gave them
explains it all. His theory is that they came here in an attempt to
colonize."

Leia picked up Han's thought, "If they are from our Galaxy, and are
strong with the Force, they might have come here to escape Palpatine.
He and
the Urmari spent decades killing anyone with Force sensitivity, not just
the
Jedi." Bitterly, bile rising, she said, "He would wipe out entire
continents
to get one Jedi. Imagine what he would do to get an entire race."

The ringing of the office telephone interrupted Dana's question.
Grabbing it, she swore silently at the clipped, irritated voice of AD
Skinner on the other end. "No sir, Agent Mulder isn't here right now.
Yes
sir, I'll be right up."

As she set the phone down Leia asked, "Bad news?"

Scully slipped her suit coat back on. "Maybe. I need to speak to
Skinner. Hopefully I can stall him."

"And if not?" Han asked.

"Then I make something up." The pre-Mulder Scully would have
recoiled
at such a blithe lie, now it was just a fact of life, as common as corn
flakes for breakfast and a shower every morning. She wondered

what her father would think and silently assured herself that he'd understand.

end (1/6)

From Ginef@aol.com Sat Sep 28 22:23:40 1996
Return-Path: owner-x-files-fanfic@chaos.taylored.com
Received: from chaos.taylored.com (chaos.taylored.com [206.53.224.58])
by sh1.ro.com
(8.7.6/8.6.9) Path SMTP id BAA03508 for <kelsy@ro.com>; Sun, 29 Sep 1996
01:37:42 -0500
Received: (qmail-queue invoked by alias); 29 Sep 1996 03:26:11 -0000
Delivered-To: x-file-fanfic-outgoing@chaos.taylored.com
Received: (qmail-queue invoked by alias); 29 Sep 1996 03:26:09 -0000
Delivered-To: xff-outgoing@chaos.taylored.com
Received: (qmail-queue invoked by uid 1003); 29 Sep 1996 03:25:05 -0000
Received: (qmail-queue invoked from smtpd); 29 Sep 1996 03:24:12 -0000
Received: from emout19.mx.aol.com (HELO emout19.mail.aol.com)
(198.81.11.45)
by chaos.taylored.com with SMTP 29 Sep 1996 03:24:11 -0000
Received: by emout19.mail.aol.com (8.6.12/8.6.12) id XAA16645 for
x-files-fanfic@chaos.taylored.com; Sun, 28 Sep 1996 23:23:40 -0400
Date: Sat, 28 Sep 1996 23:23:40 -0400
From: Ginef@aol.com
Message-ID: <960928232340_113542687@emout19.mail.aol.com>
To: x-files-fanfic@chaos.taylored.com
Subject: NEW: X Jedi 2: A Cross Over -- Chapter 5 (2/6)
Sender: owner-x-files-fanfic@chaos.taylored.com
Precedence: bulk
X-UIDL: 9c47e680f606d4f723f34fae8ff625e0

X Jedi 2

Chapter 5 (2/6)

Disclaimer in Chapter 1

by JackeeC, Gheorghe2 and ginef (all @aol.com)

* * *

"Gentlemen, uh and lady, we have ignition!" Frohike exclaimed from where he was seated next to Byers. He backed away from the computer screen to allow the others to see a copy of a driver's license baring the picture of Ben Adams. Underneath his frowning mug appeared a Woodbridge, Virginia address.

Mulder grabbed a piece of paper and jotted down the address, sorely aware that three weeks ago his eidetic memory would have made it unnecessary.

Frohike noticed as well, asking, "What happened to that perfect recall of yours?"

response.

"Uh, it's to put in the official record."

"Oh," Frohike replied, "right." Mulder was a very unconvincing liar.

"Well, for the record then, here's a list of the other Benjamin Adams addresses we found." Byers pushed a button with the implicit request and the printer spewed the locations.

"Yeah, well, we'd better go check these out. Thanks for your help."

Mulder wanted out, fearful that another example of his weakness would become glaringly obvious to the Gunmen.

"Our pleasure," Langly replied. "And nice meeting you," he added for the benefit of Mulder's new friends.

"We'll let you know if we turn anything else up," Byers promised.

"Great. Thanks again." Mulder edged towards the door, stumbling over a pile of magazines, then bumping into a heap of VR's and electronic equipment.

Frohike now approached Mara, instinct warning him to do so cautiously.

"Allow me to give you this pen, Ms. Jade, as a small token of affection."

Mara seemed to be taken aback. "Uh, thank you," she blurted in halting English, fleeing past Mulder out the door. Luke made a little half bow and followed. Mulder closed the door firmly behind them.

Frohike waited a full ten seconds before he said what they all had seen, "Something is seriously wrong with that dude."

"Yeah, he didn't even insult us once," Langly agreed.

"And who were his friends?" Byers asked.

"I don't know," Langly said, pulling a fingerprinting kit out of a drawer. "But won't it be interesting to find out."

Byers was already calling up the U.S. State Department Visa records on the computer as Frohike began rummaging through their Czech extraterrestrial file.

* * *

yesterday at three o'clock." Scully grimaced at AD Skinner's words. "When you did not appear, I thought, foolishly, that perhaps it was because Wisconsin VC had already received the profile I had personally promised them. And now, of course, I just received a call from a very irate and concerned Special Agent in Charge Bennett. There has been another murder and yet, he has received no profile. Would you please explain why, instead of helping track down a violent, deranged child killer, you and partner are playing tour guide?"

Mulder she fumed, wishing her errant partner were here so that he could be the one shredded limb from limb. "I'm sorry sir, I was unaware of the meeting. And..." oh what the hell, she was so far out on a limb already. "The foreigners are friends of mine sir, not Agent Mulder's."

"Enlightening I'm sure, Agent Scully. But somewhat beside the point.

Where is Agent Mulder, and more importantly, where is his profile?"

She opened, and shut her mouth, staring at the AD. With a weary sigh, Scully made a quick decision, and sunk to a chair. "I'm sorry, sir. One of us should have explained."

Skinner swiveled in his chair, wary eyes bearing down on the more stable of his erring agents. He was, Scully realized, trying to anticipate what extraordinary disclosure or bizarre report would follow. He tried a neutral gambit. "Yes?"

"Agent Mulder and I spent yesterday morning at Quantico, sir. Agent Mulder underwent a full battery of psychology testing for a problem that has recently manifested itself."

This was clearly not what Skinner was expecting, and demanded cautious inquiry, not immediate censure. "Is he all right? What's happened?"

There was no way Scully would or could explain it all. "You may speak with Dr. Roberts, sir. The problem is very unusual, among other things, but the bottomline is that Agent Mulder's eidetic memory has disappeared. He also scored very poorly on certain components of the examination he has done

Skinner was dumbfounded, the reproach dropping with his eyes. "I see."

He did not of course, and the empathetic pause did not encourage further disclosures from Scully.

"Although we sincerely regret it, at this time, Agent Mulder and I do not have anything further to add to the profile of the McDonald's killer, sir. I can contact Wisconsin V--"

Skinner shook his head. "No, Scully, I'll take care of that. What," he stammered, paused, then began again. "What is being done, what is Agent Mulder doing?"

"Dr. Roberts suggested a full neurological examination. We made those arrangements yesterday, sir." "Also a true statement, just simply one that was now irrelevant. "Agent Mulder has taken leave today, and I will not be working a full day either. By Monday, we may know more, sir."

"Of course." Scully knew that Skinner was the primary reason they had not been shut down: gruff, obnoxious, demanding, and supportive, both of them and of what they did. It was, she thought a gamble, to confide in him, but probably a safe one. He would leave them alone to solve this problem, and only demand an accounting later.

Skinner stood, escorting her to the door. "Thank you for your candor, Agent Scully." Hand poised on the door, he added, "I would ask you to convey my, ummm, hope to Agent Mulder for a speedy recovery, ..."

"No, sir. I think it best if you not say anything to him right now."

Maybe she thought, with the sinking feeling of one who knows such optimism is misplaced, everything will be back to normal by Monday.

"Please let me know if I can provide any other more discrete assistance."

She was genuinely touched by the generous and concerned offer. Whatever else Skinner might be and berate them for, he was sincere. She nodded and left the office.

* * *

Mulder was driving slowly down a street in a charmless and grim industrial neighborhood of Woodbridge, Virginia. Mara, who had once again demanded the front seat, was struggling with a map. She had it open all the way, partially obscuring Mulder's view out the windshield.

"Space!" she cursed. "Why in the universe don't they have this computerized? It's like reading an ancient star chart."

Luke laughed. "That's what you get for offering to play navigator."

Mara wadded up the map and turned around to face her heckler. "I should have killed you when I had the chance."

"And yet you did not. Despite ample opportunity," Luke intoned back in that ever annoying, I am Jedi/I am peace voice of his that was calculated to drive her into a killing rage.

"It's not too late." Mara was halfway into the back seat when Mulder slammed on the brakes flinging her forward again. "What the hell was that, Mulder?" she demanded, picking herself up off the floor.

Mulder indicated a burnt out old factory with the nod of his head, then pounded his hand on the steering wheel. "That's the address on the license."

Mara frowned in disappointment. "Are you sure?"

Mulder nodded. "Fraid so."

Luke's strangely disconnected, chilling voice coming from the back seat caught them both by surprise, "Call Dana. Now."

Mulder and Mara whirled around. Luke's head was thrown back, and lolling to the side, his eyes half closed, glassy. Mulder grabbed his cell phone and dialed the number he knew so well.

* * *

Scully wasn't sure what particular element set off her internal alarm.

What she did know was that it started as she was waiting for the elevator, which was taking a long time, even by the standards of government buildings.

Waiting, impatient to get back to Han and Leia, staring at the floors ticking off one by one on the elevator controls above the door, she noticed

got

in, pressed the "B" and began to drop, wondering who had stopped in the basement, why, and not liking any of the possible explanations.

Exiting the elevator into the dark hallway, the nagging became more insistent. When she had left the office, she had heard Han and Leia's voices, even through the shut door. Edging around the corner, she drew her gun as she noted the eerie silence and the open office door.

She swept down the hall when she heard her cell phone, ringing unanswered. Flat against the wall, she eased, into the door jam, and saw it.

He was huge. His dark back to the door, he was bearing down on, towering over an inert form on the floor. Scully's mind barely registered the grotesque image. Bursting into the room, gun sighted on his back, she barked, "Get away from her now."

Such things always seemed to her, in retrospect, to happen in slow motion. Not so this time. The man spun around, blindingly fast, snarling, more animal than human, a long arm stretched towards her, bolts of blue fire flying from his fingertips. The impact threw her out into the hallway.

Smashing into the concrete floor left her gasping; only her annoyance at the ringing phone kept her conscious. She staggered to her feet only to be knocked down again as the intruder fled down the hall and into the stairwell. Heaving to her feet, she staggered back into the office and dropped next to Leia, limp and unconscious on the floor. Scully quickly scanned Leia's vital signs, absently wondering the use of it all on alien physiology.

"Leia, can you hear me?" More entreaties, another shake, and Leia emerged, dazed, rubbing her head, "Dana?" Leia looked around. "What happened?" Her shaky voice rose, "Han?"

Hearing a groan in the corner Dana went to check on Han, who was rousing on his own. Assured they both seemed uninjured, she finally went to find her still ringing cell, fumbling for it in her rain coat pocket. "Scully." She heard a very worried Mulder and a frantic Mara in the background, "Scully, where are you? Luke just lost contact with Leia. Something's wrong..."

She cut him off, "I know Mulder. She and Han were just attacked but I think they're okay. We're at the office. Lemme call you back." Han had crawled to his feet and made his unsteady way to Leia, helping her rise.

"We were attacked?" Han asked blinking and mystified.

Scully nodded. "Are you both okay?" With tentative, but reassuring words, She quieted her shaking voice, trying to compose herself. "There was a man. Big, tall, very broad, Caucasian, mid thirties, he..." She stopped, grasping for composure that had scattered like the dust on the floor. Resolutely ignoring the implications for her sanity she pushed on. "It was I bent over you Leia. Then it came after me, and threw something at me, like blue lightning, that blew me into the hallway. And he just... took off. I know it sounds crazy..."

Leia shook her head. "No, Dana. Maybe unusual for you, but not uncommon where we come from. It's a manifestation of the Force."

Han reached out to touch a bleeding cut on his wife's cheek, asking softly, as she winced with the touch. "Leia, can you heal that yourself?"

She gulped convulsively, hand reaching tentatively to her face. Closing her eyes, standing very still, Leia breathed deeply. Scully knew she had seen evidence of the Force these people claimed to use, reach and touch. She knew at some level that it was responsible for their communication, their apparent empathy with one another, and also, supposedly for Mulder's own unique talents. But, it was this simple act of healing happening before her eyes that tested everything Dana Scully had every seen or believed. The welt slowly faded with each breath Leia took, the cut scabbing over slightly, then disappearing entirely, leaving only a small, white mark at her cheek.

"Did it leave a scar?" she asked her husband softly.

Han ran his fingers slowly over the tiny mark and flashed a lopsided grin. "Just another one for your collection." Then he folded Leia in his arms as she sagged with what had obviously been a deceptively simple and very arduous task.

Dana retreated back to her cell, giving the Solos a little physical and psychic privacy. Mulder answered before the first ring ended. "What happened?"

Acknowledging this would be irrevocable--- the final concession to Mulder clearer than anything else she could ever do or say. "I had to go up

something, a ..." Her voice broke and then ruthlessly pushed on. "Large white male, over six feet tall, at least 200 pounds, wearing a gray suit.

"Whatever it was, it was on top of Leia, its hands were completely enveloping her head. It knocked me into the hallway with a bolt of lightening and took off."

She heard Mulder relate the story. There were mumbles, then he asked slowly, "Did it get Leia?"

Dana exhaled her relief, knowing what Mulder meant, "No."

She heard him relay the news to the others, then asked, "Scully, how did it get into the building?"

"I don't know. I'll check with the guards, see if they know anything, but..."

Having guided Leia to a chair, Han gestured for the phone, "Mulder, could you lemme talk to Luke." A pause and then, "yeah, no, Leia's fine.

Bad headache, pretty shaken. But Luke, watch yourself. We didn't see it coming. Knocked us both out before Leia could even sense it." Another pause, a nod, and a deep frown. "No, positive. That was the first thing she did. Leia was able to heal a cut she got when she fell. From the sounds of it, Dana got here just in time."

Leia looked up, pale, "Tell him it went after Dana with what she describes as blue lightening and that they can alter their appearance."

Han did so, then another pause, "Yeah. We think so too."

He handed the phone back to Dana, and she began talking, "Mulder..." but it was Luke still on the other end. She heard the tense concern and deep relief, and a whispered, "Thanks Dana." She could feel herself flushing at the gratitude and was thoroughly relieved when Mulder came back on and could return to clipped, official business. "We're finished here, and it's getting late, I don't think we should stick around. I'll talk to the guards, then meet back at the rendezvous. Did the address check out? Oh. We've got others right? We'll have to check them tomorrow."

end (2/6)

From Ginef@aol.com Sat Sep 28 22:23:57 1996

Received: from chaos.taylored.com (chaos.taylored.com [206.53.224.58])
by sh1.ro.com
(8.7.6/8.6.9) with SMTP id BAA09189 for <kelsy@ro.com>; Sun, 29 Sep 1996
01:57:00 -0500
Received: (qmail-queue invoked by alias); 29 Sep 1996 03:26:20 -0000
Delivered-To: x-files-fanfic-outgoing@chaos.taylored.com
Received: (qmail-queue invoked by alias); 29 Sep 1996 03:26:18 -0000
Delivered-To: xff-outgoing@chaos.taylored.com
Received: (qmail-queue invoked by uid 1003); 29 Sep 1996 03:25:30 -0000
Received: (qmail-queue invoked from smtpd); 29 Sep 1996 03:24:28 -0000
Received: from emout15.mx.aol.com (HELO emout15.mail.aol.com)
(198.81.11.41)
by chaos.taylored.com with SMTP; 29 Sep 1996 03:24:27 -0000
Received: by emout15.mail.aol.com (8.6.12/8.6.12) id XAA24088 for
x-files-fanfic@chaos.taylored.com; Sat, 28 Sep 1996 23:23:57 -0400
Date: Sat, 28 Sep 1996 23:23:57 -0400
From: Ginef@aol.com
Message-ID: <960928232356.113542861@emout15.mail.aol.com>
To: x-files-fanfic@chaos.taylored.com
Subject: NEW: X Jedi 2: A Cross Over -- Chapter 5 (3/6)
Sender: owner-x-files-fanfic@chaos.taylored.com
Precedence: bulk
X-UIDL: d9d4877cf853fd2b3ee2caae1e32342

X Jedi 2

Chapter 5 (3/6)

Disclaimer in Chapter 1

by JackeeC, Gheorghe2 and ginef (all @aol.com)

Annapolis, MD
5:00 PM

"You want to take them **where**?" The others sat in silence in Scully's living room, watching this latest match between the agents.

"Chinatown," Mulder replied with reasoned finality, sneaking a glimpse at Mara.

Scully saw the look and knew what Mulder was playing. "You just want to see them try to eat noodle dishes with chopsticks and pick the flesh off of a Hunan Crispy Whole Fish, don't you, Mulder?"

He nodded with glee, adding, "And if we order Peking duck, they'll carve the entire carcass right there with a really sharp knife."

With Luke and Han once again struggling over the remote and flabbergasted at people whose clothing was as loud as their singing, Leia injected a note of reason, "Do we want to be out in the open like that? We've already been attacked once."

Han muted the television, the strategist now serious, "But sitting around waiting for them to find us is no good either. We don't want to hide from them."

"If we keep moving, they'll find us," Luke added with a significant glance at Mara who was curled in chair, silent, staring out the front window.

She responded to the unspoken question he had directed without taking her eyes from the darkening street, the emotional temperature of the room rising several degrees. "I haven't tried to reach Adams, and he hasn't tried to contact me," she said tightly. "If he had, I'd've told you."

"What makes you think he'll try?" Mulder injected, a shade too quickly.

Luke cut through the deafening silence with the cool assurance of foreknowledge, "He will."

The words fell into the room with such dread certainty, Leia asked softly, and to the utter confusion of Mulder and Dana, "Have you seen something, Luke?"

Even as he shook his head in negation, Mara interrupted. "It doesn't take any vision to know that Leia. The Urmari knew we're here. And if Adams is alive, and if he has any of the ability that Palpatine did, he knew I was here from the minute we broke orbit. He'll find me." She pulled her gaze back to the room, to five faces wearing masks of distrust and grudging admiration. "But I don't think he'll try if he has to go through a Jedi and two FBI agents to do it."

Now Luke objected, knowing what she meant, "Mara, we can't just..."

She interrupted curtly, "yes we can, and yes you are. He's not going to contact me if he senses that you are listening in."

Bringing everyone around to what he had known when the conversation started, Han said, "Mara's the decoy. And to dangle the bait, we can't just sit here." With a warning glance to Luke, he added, "And that means Mara's gotta be in the open without you checking up on her."

Mulder started to protest, but Dana silenced him with a look even as she herself cringed at the cold stratagem. She stood, smoothing imaginary wrinkles away and walked quickly into her room, returning a moment later

"What are those?" Han asked as Scully began handing out ice picks.

"Party favors," she replied. "I like to keep a supply on hand."

"They're ice picks. The weapon of choice for killing Urmari, Force sucking fiend bounty hunters," Mulder supplied helpfully.

"You never know when one might show up uninvited and spoil the fun,"
Scully added

"According to Miss Manners the best way to rid yourself of the unwanted guest is with a swift stab to the base of the neck, like this." Mulder demonstrated the proper motion as their alien counterparts observed and took mental notes.

Han asked the obvious. "Why can't we just blast em?"

It was Leia who added the explanation, the wiser having spent the day with the X Files, "You can, but you must pierce the base of the skull. Their blood is toxic to humans."

Dr. Scully added, "With exposure to bounty hunter blood, your blood coagulates and you die without immediate and fairly complicated medical attention." She now walked to the door and held it open, gesturing to the disreputable male assemblage. "Mara, Leia and I can get cleaned up and change here. Mulder, why don't you see if you can scrounge something for our guests to wear that makes them look less like they really are from the Czech Republic's extraterrestrial fan club."

* * *

An hour later Scully, Mara and Leia were jostling for space in front of the bathroom mirror. Scully was finishing up with the blowdryer while Mara and Leia sampled her large assortment of cosmetics. Alanis Morrisette was blasting from the CD player. The feminine competition for mirror, sink and space was so reminiscent of the preludes to date nights, Scully felt again the pang of Missy's death that was never far from her consciousness. The quick mental correction that they were trying to attract, not members of the male sex, but Force sucking aliens and a psychic megalomaniac spoon bender

another galaxy was all Scully needed to avoid lapsing into melancholy regret.

Mara picked up a lipstick and popped the top, unwinding it entirely from the base. "What's this again?" she asked.

Scully put down the blowdryer and took another lipstick from her collection. She opened it, considered the color a moment before handing it to Leia. Then she selected another one for herself. "Okay, here we go. Lipstick 101.

"I'm sorry?" Leia asked.

"I'm going to show you how to use lipstick."

"I think the more important question is why you use this stuff in the first place," Mara said, checking out the results of the eyeliner she had just finished applying.

"Actually, I think it's kinda cool," Leia said. "I haven't worn lipcolor since the Rebellion. Come on, Mara."

Mara rolled her eyes. "All right. But one word about this when we get home," she warned.

* * *

Meanwhile over at Mulder's, the boys were sprawled out around the livingroom watching TV and munching on pizza proving that food, electronic

equipment and lazy men truly were trans galactic bonding experiences.

"What's this show called again, Mulder?" Luke asked, using the Force to call another piece of pizza to him and eyeing the remote in Mulder's hand.

"Star Trek. A science fiction classic on this planet," Mulder replied, tightening his grip on the device. He was damned if anyone else was going to drive in **his** home.

"Science fiction is right! Everyone knows that warp technology is an impossibility," Han grumbled from his strategic position on the floor near both pizza and television. "It defies the laws of physics."

"Well, now we at least know what Star Fleet Academy is," Luke commented.

"Here, give me the remote. I want to see that MTV again."

"No way," Mulder replied, hiding it behind his back.

Luke wagged a finger at his host. "You think I really need that thing to change the channel?" he asked.

"No," Han replied, rolling over to the TV and demonstrating that a smuggler is always both adaptable and a quick study. "All you have to do is push this button..."

* * *

"We're supposed to wear these?" Leia asked, her eyes wide as she held up a very pink and frilly bra.

"I don't think so," Mara said, hands firmly planted on her hips.

Scully burst out laughing. Demonstrating their intergalactic foraging skills, Leia and Mara had evidently discovered the lingerie drawer while she had fired up her Amanda Marshall CD. She strode to the other women, snatching the offending item and shutting the treasure trove, "I said," she reminded them archly, "the *bottom* drawer." She opened it, by way of demonstration and pulled three pairs of jeans out, "we're wearing these."

Brandishing the pink bra Scully explained, "don't you have anything like this? We wear them underneath our clothing."

Opening the drawer again, Mara drew out a forest green demi bra that had caught her eye before. She asked innocently, "if you wear them under your clothes then why are they so fancy?" Ignoring Dana's sputtering mortified protests, she and Leia began rummaging through the drawer, ooohing and ahing at every item.

"Oh, Leia, I think Han would loooove this," Mara said with a sickeningly sweet voice, dangling a lacy red camisole and matching thong.

"Oh, really?" Leia replied, arming herself with a floral strapless number. "And this one looks like Luke's speed."

Mara's face tightened into a scowl. "The minute your brother sees me in something like that will be the last thing he ever sees," she vowed.

Teetering between amusement and dismay watching her unmentionables on parade, Dana finally settled on the former. Snagging Wonderbras, bikinis, and

threats,
"Not a word of this to Mulder or I'll tell Han and Luke that you both
were
looking for black ones with extra padding. We'd better move this along.
both of you, into the closet."

* * *

"Space, Mulder!" Han exclaimed, surveying the other man's closet.
"Do
you think you have enough clothes?"

"Those are work clothes," he explained, digging through his own
drawers
and tossing things over his shoulder in the general direction of the
bed.

"The idea is to go for as long as possible without doing laundry. Then
I
take everything I own to the cleaners and make them do it.
Fortunately,
you are at the beginning of my wash cycle."

"Ah," Luke said, not entirely sure he understood. "Can't you just
throw
them in the refresher?"

"They don't even have repulsor technology on this rock, kid," Han
humped.

"Yes, but we do have Levis, so there is hope for our planetoid,"
Mulder
said, ripping them out of the cleaners' bags and handing Luke and Han
each a
pair. "Put these on. We can't have you going out dressed for your
galaxy's
finest." Mulder continued on to his closet and began examining its
contents.

Luke and Han exchanged looks and set about removing their boots and
trousers. Mulder returned holding a couple shirts, all of which Han
immediately rejected because they weren't white, black or gray. "I'm
not
wearing something that makes me look like a **trozneya**" he responded
stoutly.

Luke's burst into laughter, then explained to a confused Mulder,
"no,
there's no problem with the device." He smirked, "*trozneya* is
untranslatable." To Han, Luke queried not at all innocently, "Not even
for
Leia?"

He was adamant, "Not even." Han plucked a gray mock turtle off the
pile
on the bed, "This'll do." Somber, nondescript and every bit befitting

dignity of a smuggler.

As Luke pulled a shirt over his head, it was immediately apparent that this wasn't going to work. His slight frame was swimming in Mulder's blue henley and the arms were a full six inches too long. Closer examination revealed the same problem with the jeans. Mulder rubbed his jaw, contemplating the conundrum, turning to check out Han. No problem there, so he returned his attention to the Jedi.

* * *

Scully walked around Mara and Leia inspecting her handiwork. Leia was dressed in black jeans and a rose silk blouse with black half boots. Her hair didn't quite look of this planet, but wrapped as it was in braids around her head, it would do. Mara, sporting a short white cotton sweater over standard blue jeans looked more conventional, but for the shoe problem. Dana would not have expected someone so petite to have what was probably a size nine women's foot. Even if she could have squeezed into Dana's lace up boots or sneakers, Mara would have none of it, insisting that she would only wear shoes that allowed for concealment of something called a vibroknife. Sure, Scully thought, ice picks, knives, blasters, light sabers and her own gun in its sheath at her back; just what every woman wears on a Friday night date.

"One last thing ladies," Scully said. "Allow me to introduce you to the wonderful world of perfume..."

* * *

Mulder was lying on his back on the floor hemming Luke's jeans with a stapler when his phone rang. Han looked up from where he was stuffing the toe of a Rockport with newspaper, "Should I get that?"

Mulder nodded and punched a final staple through the jeans and stood up to survey his handiwork. Not bad for someone who didn't own a needle and thread, he thought. With the waist of the jeans belted tight so they didn't fall down and an untucked flannel over a T shirt, Luke looked pretty much any

explain the nuances of grunge to Luke on the way. He heard Han hang up the phone.

"That was Dana. She said to hurry up."

"Put your shoes on, Luke, and let's go."

Heaven & Hell
Adams Morgan District of Columbia
10 PM

"Heaven and Hell?" Scully inquired suspiciously. Dinner had been hilarious, if otherwise uneventful, the spinning lazy susan in the middle of the table at the Chinese restaurant an opportunity to demonstrate another heretofore unknown application of the Force. They were all now standing in the line outside the oddly named club, impatiently awaiting their turn to get in.

Mulder smiled. "Fitting isn't it?"

"A little too fitting," she shot back.

"I asked Langly for the name of a good club and he said, and I quote, 'The place for older folks like you is Heaven and Hell.'"

"He did not!"

"Did so."

"That little..."

"What is this place again?" Mara asked, stepping away from her conversation with Luke.

"A night club. It's a place we go to drink intoxicants and pick up members of the opposite sex," Mulder deadpanned.

"And does it work for you?" Mara asked.

"Not very often," he admitted.

"You forgot about the dancing," Scully added.

"Dancing?" Mara visibly brightened. "There's dancing?"

* * *

Very, very bad dancing in fact because as luck would have it, this Friday was 70's retro night. They were greeted by the agonizing strains of "Do the Hustle". The foursome from outer space stood with their new

friends in Heaven, the top floor of the two story bar and gawked. The music, bizarre gyrations on the dance floor, and spinning lights stood as a testament to a scarier time in Earth's history. "Downstairs in Hell they have normal music," Mulder assured them.

"What's wrong with this?" Mara asked, her feet already moving to the pounding disco rhythm.

"Yeah, Mulder? What's wrong with this?" Scully smirked. "I'm getting a really clear mental image of you at your high school prom. Powder blue tuxedo. Ruffled shirt. Shoulder length hair, parted down the middle..."

Mulder crossed his arms. "I didn't go to my prom," he replied just a tad defensively.

"Loser," Scully whispered into his ear and headed for the bar. Mulder followed.

Leia reached down and took her husband's hand. Saving the universe in her younger days had not allowed much time for clubbing, but she suspected that her husband probably knew his way around such establishments. The practiced eye with which he surveyed the room confirmed it. "Tables along the back," Han said, leading the way.

"Okay," Leia said. "But you'll dance with me later."

Her husband stopped short, mock horror in his voice, "I don't know about that."

"Then you'll force me into the arms of one of these dashing younger men," she threatened.

Han wrapped one arm around her waist and pulled her close, brushing his lips to her ear, "I don't think so, your worship."

Luke interrupted her intended challenge, "Hey, hey, break it up." He pushed past, muttering just audibly to them, "Eyes open, head clear."

Han and Leia reluctantly broke apart, and followed Luke to a vacant table, which afforded a wall behind and a good view of the entire bar. From the encampment, they all watched a very brave young man approach Mara. Han and Luke quickly wagered on how much time would transpire before Mara lobotomized him, and whether she would perform the brain surgery with her

joined
the man on the dance floor.

Scully and Mulder arrived at the table carrying six bottles of something that was marked Miller. "It's beer, like we had last night," Mulder said by way of explanation.

"It's a mild intoxicant," Scully added.

"An intoxicant?" Han repeated, brightly.

"Intoxicant?" Mara added her voice to the chorus as she took her place at the table and grabbed a bottle. She sniffed the beer and took a long drink. Her face screwed up like a kid who'd gotten hold of an extra sour Space Pop. "This tastes like bantha dung!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, and you'd know?" Luke asked.

"Watch it, Skywalker, or you'll end up like him." She pointed over her shoulder at her former dance partner, who was writhing on the floor. "He got a little too friendly," she offered. The loser of this round, Luke flipped a quarter in Han's direction as they all erupted in laughter, save Mulder who swallowed hard and fretted between the former assassin and the man on the floor.

Before he could think of a sharp witted comment another victim approached the table and asked Mara to dance. "You're taking your life in your hands," Mulder warned, pointing to the hapless, inert man on the floor.

"That's what she did to the last one."

With foolish and misplaced courage, the man winked, all unknowingly. "I'll take my chances." Mara shrugged and led the way back to the dance floor.

Han tossed another coin on the table. "I'll bet this one lasts the full song, Mulder."

"I'll bet he doesn't," Mulder said, pitching a quarter, then slid out of his seat to observe the fun from a better vantage, laughing to himself that the song just happened to be "Stayin' Alive." He wondered if Mara's partner would manage it.

"How about that dance?" Leia said to Han, then leaned over and

Han presented his arm like a proper Alderaani escort. Leia took it and they were gone, leaving Luke and a very uncomfortable Scully at the table alone. "Dana," he said softly. "We need to talk."

Scully sat, mute, cursing fate and everyone who had just fled. She concentrated on peeling the label off her rapidly warming beer bottle while Luke waited for her reply.

"Dana," he prodded gently.

"I don't know what to say," she finally muttered, irritated. "What do you expect me to say? You know I have no memory of what happened between us before. And I frankly I find it hard to believe that I willingly went back to your universe with the intention of staying."

"Yet you did," Luke assured her. "Although the fact that Mulder was going probably had as much to do with it as anything."

Now that did make sense. Her feelings for Mulder ran deep. How deep was something she avoided dwelling upon at any length. But how far had her feelings for this man gone? She detested this vulnerability, hated being at a such loss, with someone else having all the control, all the knowledge, and the ability to simply pluck time and events from her mind. And here was the very man who had stolen it all, sitting next to her, seemingly with expectations that the woman she was here and now couldn't possibly fulfill. "So, Skywalker, what exactly did happen?" Scully's resolve dissolved as she suddenly considered how different inter galactic views on **that** subject might be. For all she knew...

He mercifully interrupted that very uncomfortable speculation.
"No!"
Luke reached out, touching her arm in an effort to reassure her. "It didn't go that far. I know you feel..."

Reassured, Scully was now very angry. She pulled her arm away, interrupting him, resenting once again his presumption. "You not only know what happened before, you also have the advantage of reading my every emotion and thought. So you should know now that if it all meant as much as you seem to think it did, I want to know how could you have taken the memory away from

Luke flinched and stared into his beer, running his finger around
the
rim of the bottle looking to Scully like an intergalactic protagonist in
a
bad country and western song. "I didn't feel I had a choice," he
replied.

"There's always a choice."

Luke looked up at her and considered a moment. "Then I guess I made
the
wrong one."

"I guess you did." Scully said as she slipped off her barstool and
disappeared into the crowd.

end (3/6)

X Jedi 2 A Cross Over

Chapter 5: Disco Inferno

Disclaimer in Chapter 1

by JackeeC, Gheorghe2 and ginef (all @aol.com)

Whatsa Bagel
Bethesda, MD
9:30 AM

The next morning Scully and Mulder introduced space aliens to bagels. Somewhere between the explanation of cream cheese and lox and the discussion of what made a mensch and why Ben Adams wasn't one, it was decided that Mara and Luke would accompany Mulder on a visit to the office of Mulder's favorite subversive newspaper, the Lone Gun Man, while Scully and the Solos would see what they could dig up at FBI headquarters.

Dividing up in the parking lot, Scully pulled Mara aside and whispered, "Don't accept any gifts or trinkets from any of them. Especially Frohike."

"Why?" Mara asked, her back stiffening.

"Let's just say that on my first visit they gave me a pen which I later determined contained a surveillance device..."

Mara scowled. "Just let them try something like that with me."

"Hey, Jade," Mulder called from his car. "Hurry up." Then he rolled his eyes at Luke and added, "Women."

Mulder certainly liked living dangerously; Luke laughed and started to get in the car.

"I heard that," Scully and Mara said at the same time. Mara sped to Mulder's car, intent on shattering any illusions Skywalker might have had about riding "shotgun". "Hey, Mara," Scully called after her. Mara stopped and turned around to hear the final ominous warning.
"Don't use the bathroom."

"Aw, Scully. And I was looking forward to watching that tape," Mulder whined. Mara looked between the two FBI agents, trying to determine if they were serious. She opted to take Dana at her word.

When Scully climbed in her own car and started the engine, Leia said from the backseat, "I take it I lucked out going with you."

She laughed. "And how."

FBI Headquarters
Washington, DC
10:30 AM

Scully used the same method to get the Solos into the building that Mulder had used the day before to get the entourage out. "Hi Joe. Uhhh," this kind of prevarication did not come easily to her.

The guard gave her a reproving grin. "Agent Scully, I think you've been hanging around Agent Mulder too long." Joe stared at her, then at Han and Leia. Sighing, he waved them all

"Thanks, Joe."

"What's this about a game?" Han asked as they wove through the building to the elevators.

"Football," Scully responded shortly.

Han's sham of disinterest was interrupted by a knowing poke to the ribs from his wife.
"You haven't been away from smashball for two months and already you're looking for a fix."

"Football is the mania here five months out of the year," Scully explained, thinking that a solution to the weekend's entertainment dilemma had been found.
"Football is replaced at intervals by basketball, baseball and hockey."

"Hockey?" Han's sporting sensibilities permitted some conjecture as to the meaning of the three "ball" games; hockey was untranslatable.

"Men play it on ice and get large sticks that they use to hit each other and a frozen disk of Vulcanized rubber called a puck. The joke goes, I went to a fight last night and a hockey game broke out."

"Just my kinda game." Han said, quite seriously.

Office of the Lone Gunman
10:30 A.M.

Mulder entered the cluttered, familiar sanctuary of the Lone Gunman. Perched on a stool, Frohike jumped down to greet his favorite FBI agent. Frohike was rumpled, short, greying, conspiratorial, and had one single eyebrow puckered over thick glasses.
"Mulder! What brings you here?"

"You know, the usual. Government conspiracy. Aliens from outer space...." That being their introduction, Mara and Luke peeked their heads in the door.

like you to meet Luke Skywalker and Mara Jade, friends of mine from, uh, the Czech Republic. This is Frohike."

A shocked looked of recognition passed between Frohike and Luke. Realizing that he had met Frohike the last time, the Jedi acted quickly, holding out his hand and saying slowly, in English, "We have not met before."

Frohike returned the shake mechanically, repeating, "We have not met before."

Handy thing the Force, Mulder thought. As he had expected, Frohike now focused his considerable attention on Mara, taking her hand and clasping gently. Still clinging to her hand, Frohike turned to Mulder. "She's hot too. Geez, Mulder, where do you keep finding the babes?"

Mulder laughed. "I'd unhand her if I were you or she may unhand you... literally."

Under her frosty, compelling stare, Frohike relented, releasing Mara's hand, and probably just in time. Luke sent her calming thoughts, which she returned with a few of Corellia's more colorful words.

"So, Mulder, where's the lovely Agent Scully?" Frohike asked, attempting and failing to sound casual as his eyes traveled back to the lovely Mara Jade, now roaming the office.

"She sends her love, as always," Mulder said. "But had business attend to back at the office. Where're Byers and Langly?"

"Sent out for reinforcements, they'll be back soon." On cue, the door flew open and the remaining Gunmen appeared. Byers, bearded, slight and suited was carrying a huge box of donuts; Langly behind him struggled in with a stack of newspaper and magazines. "Mulder!" they cried in unison.

Now after Frohike, Mara figured she was ready for anything, but the sight of Langly proved her wrong. The gangly man dropped the stack of periodicals he was carrying on a

out the words
gracing the front of his black, tattered T shirt and came up with "The
Dead Daalas." She made
a mental note to ask Mulder later what that meant. "You'll *never* guess
who I had lunch
with this time."

"Who?" Mulder asked, taking the bait.

Langly turned his long blonde hair behind his ears, pushing his
glasses further up
the bridge of his nose. "Charles Manson's therapist. Seems there's a
possibility he was the result
of a government experiment gone awry."

"Has there ever been a government experiment that hasn't gone
awry?" Mulder
questioned.

Settling the precious donuts after firing up the coffee machine,
Byers said quietly, "who are
your friends, Mulder?"

All eyes turned to the well groomed young man, who obviously didn't
enjoy the attention.
Mulder swung into action. "Oh, sorry. These are my friends, Luke
Skywalker and Mara Jade,
from the..."

"Czech Republic," Luke supplied, then repeated the, "No, we haven't
met before." mantra.
Jedi Mind tricks. Don't leave home without them.

In an awkward silence, the Gunmen alternately watched Mara pace
about their office and
waited for Mulder to be rude, funny, or spooky. The agent behaved in an
even more
unpredictable fashion, getting right down to business. "We're looking
for someone. A
criminal, of sorts, and we're hoping you might have some information on
him."

Byers moved to one of the numerous computers scattered about the
room and stretched his
fingers on the keyboard, as if preparing to play a Mozart concerto.
"What's his name?

* * *

Files. Not really certain what they were looking for, Leia began searching the cabinets, trusty microprocessor in hand. She silently thanked Threepio for creating the little scanner that would translate English text to Basic and then download it into her ear translator. Mulder's eclectic filing system at least made locating the pertinent files easy with tags such as "bounty hunters" and "colonists."

Han left Leia to it and joined Scully at the terminal. Searching through a Finder database of thousands of Benjamin Adams, Scully asked, "How was Mulder doing?"

Han shrugged, trying to follow her rapid keystrokes and the foreign language biographies flying by on the screen. "About as you would expect, I think. He seemed pretty disturbed."

"Well, wouldn't you be disturbed? It's a terrible loss for him." She did not mean to snap at Han and stammered a little with an apology that was evidently not necessary.

"How long have you known Mulder?"

"Three years, almost four years."

He chuckled a little, then lowered his voice, with a sly glance at his wife, engrossed in a file, mumbling to herself. "I've known Luke and Leia for over ten years, well, of our years anyway. We've been married for three years, and Scully, your time with Jedi is just beginning."

"Mulder's not a," she fumbled with the word, "Jedi."

"No, but if he got the Force back, he could be."

"Really?"

"Luke said his gift was that strong. With training, yeah, probably. Not that I'd wish that on him, or on you."

A part of her bristled at the implication, but another part

returned to the computer screen, scrolling through tax, real estate, birth, death and court records, before finally asking, "So you wouldn't want to be one?"

"A Jedi?" Han's chortle was deep and genuine. "Hell no." He paused, looking askance.

"Did that term just translate?"

"Hell? Yes, Solo." Scully thought how much she really liked him, this anchor to the team.

"My brother-in-law and closest friend is a Jedi, my children in all likelihood will be, and my wife too, if her brother has his way." He sighed, a little wistfully, she thought, I don't know how much you've learned, being around Mulder, but I'll let you in on a few secrets about dealing with these spoon benders." He held up a forefinger, then looked at it. "Uhh, that's not an obscenity or anything is it?"

Scully shook her head, laughing.

"Ohh, well, good. Anyway, one, Jedi can get so wrapped up in their abilities that they sometimes can't see what's right in front of them. Second," he held up two fingers, "They sometimes think that the fates of all the galaxies rest on their every decision."

"I heard that," came Leia's indignant voice from the other side of the room. "And Solo, the fate of your universe at least sometimes does rest with my every decision."

"Absolutely, your Worship." With a jaunty wink Solo continued. "Three, it's up to people like you and me to keep them grounded, to keep them from going too far out on that limb, to keep them from making too many mistakes because of one and two. Am I sounding familiar yet?"

She nodded, charmed.

"And finally, Dana, lemme tell you, I wouldn't want to be a Jedi for all the credits in the universe." The good humor fell from his face like a mask. "What they go through, the burden of it, it changes them." With a glance at his wife that was full

whispered, "And the changes aren't necessarily for the better."

* * *

"A slippery little dude, isn't he," Frohike commented, from his customary bar stool roost. The entire group was standing around Byers, watching him work. Except Mara, who impatient with the whole process, was slyly exploring the office, amazed they managed to get anything done with all the clutter. There were piles of computers, printers, vids, recorders, scanners, attenuators, surveillance and communications equipment and a variety of cables, wires and other flotsam and jetsam she couldn't even begin to identify mixed in with hundreds upon hundreds of old fashioned books and magazines.

"But no match for our Byers," Andy smiled, as a grainy surveillance photograph filled the screen. "Is that him?" he asked, turning to Mulder.

Mulder, in turn, looked to his companion. Mara quickly returned to Luke's side and examined the screen. Mulder and the Gunmen guessed the answer was yes from Mara's sharp intake of breath. They both nodded in confirmation.

"What've you got on him?" Mulder asked, not suppressing his excitement particularly well.

Byers shook his head. "Not much I'm afraid."

"I remember taking this one," Frohike interrupted. "The Thinker, may he rest in peace, managed to hack up the time and place of a meeting between this guy, Adams, and that Cancer Man of yours."

"Why am I not surprised," Mulder murmured with cool, cynical disdain. After the revelations of yesterday, he would have been surprised if the two were **not** linked in some way. "What's the connection?"

"Not known," Byers commented as they studied the picture of the men. "We know they've met

Man really is, has still managed to get by us."

With the confirmation, Mulder plunged into the intrigue and plots that had both defined him and now deprived him of his very way of being. "He might know about Krycek. Know where he is..." Mulder was pacing the room, fists and jaw clenched, now seething with frustration at the murderer and thief who had eluded them for so long.

Startled at the ferocious outburst, Luke tried bringing Mulder gently back, saying softly and in Basic, "This isn't about revenge, Mulder."

The Gunmen looked to one another, wondering what he had said, and in what language. To their further astonishment, Mulder seemed to understand, but was not to be placated. "Is that right, Skywalker?" he demanded. "Whatever problems you all have and brought here, Krycek is one of mine, one of ours. His Cancer Man's favorite henchman. I'm talking about the man who killed Scully's sister and my father. If anyone has a right to extract revenge, I do."

Mara stepped forward and grabbed him by the arm, stopping him in his tracks. She stared him down, spitting out hotly in Basic, "Revenge is fine. Go ahead, chase him down if it makes you feel better. But that's a fight for another day. We're here for another reason. We're here to stop them from doing to other people what they did to you."

The Gunmen were rooted, staring at the interplay, astounded at the interaction, the emotion, and the liberties these strangers felt they could take with their favorite G-Man. The Gunmen, no strangers to oddities and idiosyncrasies themselves recognized that whatever eccentricities they and Mulder harbored, these two so-called Czech nationals had both feet firmly planted in mid air.

Now Luke cajoled as Mulder regained a semblance of focus, "We need you to keep your head. Got it?"

Mulder nodded reluctantly and shook free of Mara's physical restraint and Luke's apparent mental one. He nodded again, muttering, "I'm fine." He now

"What else do you have?"

* * *

Scully and Han worked through the computer searches. Although operating with a foreign language, and strange technology, Han was a quick study, rapidly learning the basics and helping her move through the files and data bases. "I'm no slicer," Han observed at one point, "But bureaucratic record keeping looks pretty similar, regardless of the galaxy."

Before long, they found several candidates, some in the Washington, D.C. area who appeared to be the right age to be Benjamin Adams, Dark Side user. Han injected with much satisfaction and no regret, "Not bad work for a couple non Jedi, right Dana?"

The comment struck her hard, realizing that although surrounded by people who were, to Scully's mind, way off the paranormal scale, Han had found his place, and was comfortable with it. Deep down, Scully knew that she and Mulder were a team, but so often it seemed that her methodical contributions were lost in the flash of Mulder's more eccentric methods and intuitions. She had occasionally battled with envy; but seeing Han's own contentment, she found a measure of the same peace herself. "Creativity and insight don't just come from the Force, do they, Han?"

No Force link was needed to comprehend his perceptive gaze. "That's an important truth that they may forget, Dana." But don't you forget it he seemed to say. "You can do a lot of things with skill, training, hard work, practice, hunches. The Force is a short cut, that also gives them some other pretty amazing skills. But, I can get through a day without reading someone's mind or opening a door without hands."

The ringing office phone interrupted her response. She grabbed it with a terse, "Scully." A pause, her voice then softening, "Where are you? ... You did? Great. We have some possible addresses..." She reached over to the keyboard and became typing furiously, then hit the enter key. "I'm uploading the data to you as we speak... You got it. Good... Okay, we'll

couple other things here... don't you dare give him my love... Mulder! Mulder!" she glared at the now disconnected phone before returning it to the cradle.

"What do they have?" Leia asked, coming to lean against the desk, files in hand.

"A couple of surveillance photos of Adams. Mara made a positive ID. They're going to run the addresses through their system and see if they can come up with a match."

Han gently dislodged the files from Leia's hands, with a question that was more a statement, "You've found something."

She nodded, gesturing that Han and Scully should join her at the table. "I don't know that I have any particular insight, Dana, I think I can explain some things for you and Mulder."

At the table, Leia had set various files out in neat piles, methodically organized diagrams and notes to one side. "We know from the configuration of the ship that the Urmari are humanoid in form, and indeed they would have to, or at least be able to assume a human shape in order to operate here. Mulder and Dana's reports confirm that."

Han asked sharply, "Do you think they may be shape shifters of some sort?"

She shook her head, "It's possible, but I think, given what we know and assume about Urmari that there is another explanation. What intrigued me Dana, was your and Mulder's description of how it changed shape when it came after you all and the colonist Smith."

Scully was now flipping through the file, recalling that horrifying night when she saw that thing advancing upon them, pick in hand. The night had devolved into a gruesome mess...

Leia's extrapolation interrupted Scully's thoughts. "I think the most logical explanation is that

alter their physical appearance,"

Now she balked, "How could such a thing be possible? I..." Scully hesitated, trying to come up with some other rational explanation. She failed miserably.

Han gave her a wry grin and a squeeze to the shoulder, "I told you Dana, the Force can give these spoon benders some pretty amazing skills." To Leia he asked, "Do you think they actually morph into another shape or use the Force merely to change someone's perception of them?"

"I don't know. There's so much about the Force we don't know." With a smile to her husband she added, "And although Luke is the most accomplished spoon bender among us, he hasn't learned these kind of skills yet."

"And the colonists?" Han asked, already guessing the answer.

Again Leia nodded, turning now to her notes and the colonist file, "Dana and Mulder report that the colonists can heal wounds and illnesses and change shape. And of course the Urmari hunt them. They are no doubt Force-sensitive as well."

Han leaned against the table with a bump that sent it jumping across the floor. Righting himself with an abashed look, he picked up Leia's speculation, "A whole race of Force sensitives."

Leia picked up Han's thought, "If they are from our Galaxy, and are strong with the Force, they might have come here to escape Palpatine. He and the Urmari spent decades killing anyone with Force sensitivity, not just the Jedi." Bitterly, bile rising, she said, "He would wipe out entire continents to get one Jedi. Imagine what he would do to get an entire race."

"Dana, do you know why the colonists are here?" Han asked.

Scully shifted back and forth, foot to foot. Staring at her toes, her intellect warred with everything else. She opted for a cagey, uncommitted answer, raising her head to look Han square. "The name Mulder gave them explains it all. His theory is that

project to catalog humans through immunization records and are attempting to colonize, using a clone work force ..."

Han interrupted sharply, "Clones?" He looked to his wife, and she nodded slowly, pale.

"One of the colonists showed Mulder a farm being worked by children. He said they were clones." Leia showed Han the photograph Scully has already memorized. "The little girl, Mulder says it's his sister."

The father groaned, incredulous, swearing, "They're cloning children?"

Scully interrupted, trying to bring reason to the stricken parents, "Cloning is impossible, we don't have the technology, it's..."

Leia injected harshly, "Dana, you may not have the technology to clone humans, but we do. The Emperor did."

The ringing of the office telephone interrupted the grim silence. Grabbing it, she swore silently at the clipped, irritated voice of AG Skinner on the other end. "No sir, Agent Mulder isn't here right now. Yes sir, I'll be right up."

As she set the phone down Leia asked, "Bad news?"

Scully slipped her suit coat back on. "Maybe. I need to speak to Skinner. Hopefully I can stall him."

"And if not?" Han asked.

"Then I make something up." The pre-Mulder Scully would have recoiled at such a blithe lie, now it was just a fact of life, as common as corn flakes for breakfast and a shower every morning. She wondered momentarily what her father would think and silently assured herself that he'd understand.

* * *

"Gentlemen, uh and lady, we have ignition!" Frohike exclaimed from where he was seated next to Byers. He backed away from the computer screen to allow the others to see a copy of a driver's license baring the picture of Ben Adams. Underneath his frowning mug appeared a Woodbridge, Virginia address.

Mulder grabbed a piece of paper and jotted down the address, sorely aware that three weeks ago his eidetic memory would have made it unnecessary. Frohike noticed as well, asking, "What happened to that perfect recall of yours?"

There was an awkward silence before Mulder stuttered out a response. "Uh, it's to put in the official record."

"Oh," Frohike replied, "right." Mulder was a very unconvincing liar. "Well, for the record then, here's a list of the other Benjamin Adams addresses we found." Byers pushed a button with the implicit request and the printer spewed the locations.

"Yeah, well, we'd better go check these out. Thanks for your help." Mulder wanted out, fearful that another example of his weakness would become glaringly obvious to the Gunmen.

"Our pleasure," Langley replied. "And nice meeting you," he added for the benefit of Mulder's new friends.

"We'll let you know if we turn anything else up," Byers promised.

"Great. Thanks again." Mulder edged towards the door, stumbling over a pile of magazines, then bumping into a heap of VCR's and electronic equipment.

Frohike now approached Mara, instinct warning him to do so cautiously. "Allow me to give you this pen, Ms. Jade, as a small token of affection."

Mara seemed to be taken aback. "Uh, thank you," she blurted in halting English, fleeing past Mulder out the door. Luke made a little half bow and followed. Mulder closed the door firmly behind them.

Frohike waited a full ten seconds before he said what they all had seen, "Something is seriously wrong with that dude."

"Yeah, he didn't even insult us once," Langly agreed.

"And who were his friends?" Byers asked.

"I don't know," Langly said, pulling a fingerprinting kit out of a drawer. "But won't it be interesting to find out."

Byers was already calling up the U.S. State Department Visa records on the computer as Frohike began rummaging through their Czech extraterrestrial file.

* * *

"I asked your partner for the pleasure of his and your company yesterday at three o'clock."

Scully grimaced at AD Skinner's words. "When you did not appear, I thought, foolishly, that perhaps it was because Wisconsin had already received the profile I had personally promised them. And now, of course, I just received a call from a very irate and concerned Special Agent in Charge Bennett. There has been another murder and yet, he has received no profile. Would you please explain why, instead of helping track down a violent, deranged child killer, you and partner are playing tour guide?"

Mulder she fumed, wishing her errant partner were here so that he could be the one shredded limb from limb. "I'm sorry sir, I was unaware of the meeting. And..." oh what the hell, she was so far out on a limb already. "The foreigners are friends of mine sir, not Agent Mulder's."

"Enlightening I'm sure, Agent Scully. But somewhat beside the point. Where is Agent Mulder, and more importantly, where is his profile?"

She opened, and shut her mouth, staring at the AD. With a weary sigh, Scully made a quick decision, and sunk to a chair. "I'm sorry, sir. One of us should

Skinner swiveled in his chair, wary eyes bearing down on the more
stable of his erring
agents. He was, Scully realized, trying to anticipate what
extraordinary disclosure or bizarre
report would follow. He tried a neutral gambit. "Yes?"

"Agent Mulder and I spent yesterday morning at Quantico, sir.
Agent Mulder underwent a
full battery of psychology testing for a problem that has recently
manifested itself."

This was clearly not what Skinner was expecting, and demanded
cautious inquiry, not
immediate censure. "Is he all right? What's happened?"

There was no way Scully would or could explain it all. "You may
speak with Dr. Roberts,
sir. The problem is very unusual, among other things, but the
bottomline is that Agent
Mulder's eidetic memory has disappeared. He also scored very poorly on
certain components
of the examination he has done very well on in the past, including
measurements of intuitive
function."

Skinner was dumbfounded, the reproach dropping with his eyes. "I
see." He did not of
course, and the empathetic pause did not encourage further disclosures
from Scully.

"Although we sincerely regret it, at this time, Agent Mulder and I
do not have anything
further to add to the profile of the McDonald's killer, sir. I can
contact Wisconsin V--"

Skinner shook his head. "No, Scully, I'll take care of that.
What," he stammered,
paused, then began again. "What is being done, what is Agent Mulder
doing?"

"Dr. Roberts suggested a full neurological examination. We made
those arrangements
yesterday, sir." Also a true statement, just simply one that was now
irrelevant. "Agent
Mulder has taken leave today, and I will not be working a full day
either. By Monday, we
may know more, sir."

"Of course." Scully knew that Skinner was the primary reason they

down: gruff, obnoxious, demanding, and supportive, both of them and of what they did. It was, she thought a gamble, to confide in him, but probably a safe one. He would leave them alone to solve this problem, and only demand an accounting later.

Skinner stood, escorting her to the door. "Thank you for your candor, Agent Scully."

Hand poised on the door, he added, "I would ask you to convey my, ummm, hope to Agent Mulder for a speedy recovery, ..."

"No, sir. I think it best if you not say anything to him right now." Maybe she thought, with the sinking feeling of one who knows such optimism is misplaced, everything will be back to normal by Monday.

"Please let me know if I can provide any other more discrete assistance."

She was genuinely touched by the generous and concerned offer. Whatever else Skinner might be and berate them for, he was sincere. She nodded and left the office.

* * *

Mulder was driving slowly down a street in a charmless and grim industrial neighborhood of Woodbridge, Virginia. Mara, who had once again demanded the front seat, was struggling with a map. She had it open all the way, partially obscuring Mulder's view out the windshield.

"Space!" she cursed. "Why in the universe don't they have this computerized. It's like reading an ancient star chart."

Luke laughed. "That's what you get for offering to play navigator."

Mara wadded up the map and turned around to face her heckler. "I should have killed you when I had the chance."

"And yet you did not. Despite ample opportunity," Luke intoned back in that ever

drive her into a killing rage.

"It's not too late." Mara was halfway into the back seat when Mulder slammed on the brakes, flinging her forward again. "What the hell was that, Mulder?" she demanded, picking herself up off the floor.

Mulder indicated a burnt out old factory with the nod of his head, then pounded his hand on the steering wheel. "That's the address on the license."

Mara frowned in disappointment. "Are you sure?"

Mulder nodded. "Fraid so."

Luke's strangely disconnected chilling voice coming from the back seat caught them both by surprise, "Call Dana. Now."

Mulder and Mara whirled around. Luke's head was thrown back, and lolling to the side, his eyes half closed, glassy. Mulder grabbed his cell phone and dialed the number he knew so well.

* * *

Scully wasn't sure what particular element set off her internal alarm. What she did know was that it started as she was waiting for the elevator, which was taking a long time, even by the standards of government buildings. Waiting, impatient to get back to Han and Leia, staring at the floors ticking off one by one on the elevator controls above the door, she noticed that the elevator now ascending, had *originated* in the basement. She got in, pressed the "B" and began to drop, wondering who had stopped in the basement, why, and not liking any of the possible explanations.

Exiting the elevator into the dark hallway, the nagging became more insistent. When she had left the office, she had heard Han and Leia's voices, even through the shut door. Edging around the corner, she drew her gun as she noted the eerie silence and the open office door.

She swept down the hall when she heard her cell phone, ringing unanswered. Flat against the wall, she eased, into the door jam, and saw it. He was huge. His dark back to the door, he was bearing down on, towering over an inert form on the floor. Scully's mind barely registered the grotesque image. Bursting into the room, gun sighted on his back, she barked, "Get away from her, now."

Such things always seemed to her, in retrospect, to happen in slow motion. Not so this time. The man spun around, blindingly fast, snarling, more animal than human, a long arm outstretched towards her, bolts of blue fire flying from his fingertips. The impact threw her out into the hallway. Smashing into the concrete floor left her gasping; only her annoyance at the ringing phone kept her conscious. She staggered to her feet only to be knocked down again as the intruder fled down the hall and into the stairwell. Heaving to her feet, she staggered back into the office and dropped next to Leia, limp and unconscious on the floor. Scully quickly scanned Leia's vital signs, absently wondering the use of it all on alien physiology.

"Leia, can you hear me?" More entreaties, another shake, and Leia emerged, dazed, rubbing her head, "Dana?" Leia looked around. "What happened?" Her shaky voice rose, "Han?"

Hearing a groan in the corner Dana went to check on Han, who was rousing on his own. Assured they both seemed uninjured, she finally went to find her still ringing cell, fumbling for it in her rain coat pocket. "Scully." She heard a very worried Mulder and a frantic Mara in the background, "Scully, where are you? Luke just lost contact with Leia. Something's wrong..."

She cut him off, "I know Mulder. She and Han were just attacked but I think they're okay. We're at the office. Lemme call you back." Han had crawled to his feet and made his unsteady way to Leia, helping her rise.

"We were attacked?" Han asked blinking and mystified.

Scully nodded. "Are you both okay?" With tentative, but reassuring

her shaking voice, trying to compose herself. "There was a man. Big, tall, very broad, Caucasian, mid thirties, he..." She stopped, grasping for composure that had scattered like the dust on the floor. Resolutely ignoring the implications for her sanity she pushed on. "It was bent over you Leia. Then it came after me, and threw something at me, like blue lightning, that blew me into the hallway. And he just... took off. I know it sounds crazy..."

Leia shook her head. "No, Dana. Maybe unusual for you, but not uncommon where we come from. It's a manifestation of the Force."

Han reached out to touch a bleeding cut on his wife's cheek, asking softly, as she winced with the touch, "Leia, can you heal that yourself?"

She gulped convulsively, hand reaching tentatively to her face. Closing her eyes, standing very still, Leia breathed deeply. Scully knew she had seen evidence of the Force these people claimed to use, reach and touch. She knew at some level that it was responsible for their communication, their apparent empathy with one another, and also, supposedly for Mulder's own unique talents. But, it was this simple act of healing happening before her eyes that tested everything Dana Scully had every seen or believed. The welt slowly faded with each breath Leia took, the cut scabbing over slightly, then disappearing entirely, leaving only a small, white mark at her cheek.

"Did it leave a scar?" she asked her husband softly.

Han ran his fingers slowly over the tiny mark and flashed a lopsided grin. "Just another one for your collection." Then he folded Leia in his arms as she sagged with what had obviously been a deceptively simple and very arduous task.

Dana retreated back to her cell, giving the Solos a little physical and psychic privacy.

Mulder answered before the first ring ended. "What happened?"

Acknowledging this would be irrevocable--- the final concession to Mulder clearer than anything else she could ever do or say. "I had to go up and see Skinner. When I got back, Han and Leia were unconscious and something, a ..." Her voice broke and then ruthlessly

wearing a gray suit.

Whatever it was, it was on top of Leia, its hands were completely enveloping her head. It knocked me into the hallway with a bolt of lightening and took off."

She heard Mulder relate the story. There were mumbles, then he asked slowly, "Did it get Leia?"

Dana exhaled her relief, knowing what Mulder meant, "No."

She heard him relay the news to the others, then asked, "Scully, how did it get into the building?"

"I don't know. I'll check with the guards, see if they know anything, but..."

Having guided Leia to a chair, Han gestured for the phone, "Mulder, could you lemme talk to Luke." A pause and then, "yeah, no, Leia's fine. Bad headache, pretty shaken. But Luke, watch yourself. We didn't see it coming. Knocked us both out before Leia could even sense it." Another pause, a nod, and a deep frown. "No, positive. That was the first thing she did. Leia was able to heal a cut she got when she fell. From the sounds of it, Dana got here just in time."

Leia looked up, pale, "Tell him it went after Dana with what she describes as blue lightening and that they can alter their appearance."

Han did so, then another pause, "Yeah. We think so too."

He handed the phone back to Dana, and she began talking, "Mul..." but it was Luke still on the other end. She heard the tense concern and deep relief, and a whispered, "Thanks Dana." She could feel herself flushing at the gratitude and was thoroughly relieved when Mulder came back on and could return to clipped, official business. "We're finished here, and it's getting late, I don't think we should stick around. I'll talk to the guards, then meet back at the rendezvous. Did the address check out? Oh. We've got others right? We'll have to check them tomorrow."

Annapolis, MD
5:00 p.m.

"You want to take them **where**?" The others sat in silence in Scully's living room, watching this latest match between the agents.

"Chinatown," Mulder replied with reasoned finality, sneaking a glimpse at Mara.

Scully saw the look and knew what Mulder was playing. "You just want to see them try to eat noodle dishes with chopsticks and pick the flesh off of a Hunan Crispy Whole Fish, don't you Mulder?"

He nodded with glee, adding, "And if we order Peking duck, they'll carve the entire carcass right there with a really sharp knife."

With Luke and Han once again struggling over the remote and flabbergasted at people whose clothing was as loud as their singing, Leia injected a note of reason, "Do we want to be out in the open like that? We've already been attacked once."

Han muted the television, the strategist now serious, "But sitting around waiting for them to find us is no good either. We don't want to hide from them."

"If we keep moving, they'll find us," Luke added with a significant glance at Mara who was curled in chair, silent, staring out the front window.

She responded to the unspoken question he had directed without taking her eyes from the darkening street, the emotional temperature of the room rising several degrees. "I haven't tried to reach Adams, and he hasn't tried to contact me," she said tightly. "If he had, I'd've told you."

"What makes you think he'll try?" Mulder injected, a shade too quickly.

Luke cut through the deafening silence with the cool assurance of foreknowledge, "He will."

The words fell into the room with such dread certainty, Leia asked softly, and to the utter confusion of Mulder and Dana, "Have you seen something, Luke?"

Even as he shook his head in negation, Mara interrupted. "It doesn't take any vision to know that Leia. The Urmari know we're here. And if Adams is alive, and if he has any of the ability that Palpatine did, he knew I was here from the minute we broke orbit. He'll find me." She pulled her gaze back to the room, to five faces wearing masks of distrust and grudging admiration. "But I don't think he'll try if he has to go through a Jedi and two FBI agents to do it."

Now Luke objected, knowing what she meant, "Mara, we can't just..."

She interrupted curtly, "yes we can, and yes you are. He's not going to contact me if he senses that you are listening in."

Bringing everyone around to what he had known when the conversation started, Han said, "Mara's the decoy. And to dangle the bait, we can't just sit here." With a warning glance to Luke, he added, "And that means Mara's gotta be in the open without you checking up on her."

Mulder started to protest, but Dana silenced him with a look even as she herself cringed at the cold stratagem. She stood, smoothing imaginary wrinkles away and walked quickly into her room, returning a moment later carrying a Walmart bag.

"What are those?" Han asked as Scully began handing out ice picks.

"Party favors," she replied. "I like to keep a supply on hand."

"They're ice picks. The weapon of choice for killing Urmari, Force sucking fiend bounty hunters," Mulder supplied helpfully.

"You never know when one might show up uninvited and spoil the fun," Scully added.

"According to Miss Manners the best way to rid yourself of the

a swift stab to the base of the neck, like this." Mulder demonstrated the proper motion as their alien counterparts observed and took mental notes.

Han asked the obvious, "Why can't we just blast em?"

It was Leia who added the explanation, the wiser having spent the day with the X Files,
"You can, but you must pierce the base of the skull. Their blood is toxic to humans."

Dr. Scully added, "With exposure to bounty hunter blood, your blood coagulates and you die without immediate and fairly complicated medical attention." She now walked to the door and held it open, gesturing to the disreputable male assemblage. "Mara, Leia and I can get cleaned up and change here. Mulder, why don't you see if you can scrounge something for our guests to wear that makes them look less like they really are from the Czech Republic's extraterrestrial fan club."

* * *

An hour later Scully, Mara and Leia were jostling for space in front of the bathroom mirror. Scully was finishing up with the blowdryer while Mara and Leia sampled her large assortment of cosmetics. Alanis Morrisette was blasting from the CD player. The feminine competition for mirror, sink and space was so reminiscent of the preludes to date nights, Scully felt again the pang of Missy's death that was never far from her consciousness. The quick mental correction that they were trying to attract, not members of the male sex, but Force sucking aliens and a psychic megalomaniac spoon bender from another galaxy was all Scully needed to avoid lapsing into melancholy regret.

Mara picked up a lipstick and popped the top, unwinding it entirely from the case.

"What's this again?" she asked.

Scully put down the blowdryer and took another lipstick from her collection. She opened it, considered the color a moment before handing it to Leia. Then she selected another one for herself. "Okay, here we go. Lipstick 101."

"I'm sorry?" Leia asked.

"I'm going to show you how to use lipstick."

"I think the more important question is why you use this stuff in the first place," Mara said, checking out the results of the eyeliner she had just finished applying.

"Actually, I think it's kinda fun," Leia said. "I haven't worn lipcolor since the Rebellion. Come on, Mara."

Mara rolled her eyes. "All right. But not one word about this when we get home," she warned.

* * *

Meanwhile over at Mulder's, the boys were sprawled out around the living room watching TV and munching on pizza proving that food, electronic equipment and lazy men truly were trans galactic bonding experiences. "What's this show called again, Mulder?" Luke asked, using the Force to call another piece of pizza to him and eyeing the remote in Mulder's hand.

"Star Trek. A science fiction classic on this planet," Mulder replied, tightening his grip on the device. He was damned if anyone else was going drive in *his* home.

"Science fiction is right! Everyone knows that warp technology is an impossibility," Han grumbled from his strategic position on the floor near both pizza and television. "It defies the laws of physics."

"Well, now we at least know what Star Fleet Academy is," Luke commented. "Here, give me the remote. I want to see that MTV again."

"No way," Mulder replied, hiding it behind his back.

Luke wagged a finger at his host. "You think I really need that

channel?" he asked.

"No," Han replied, rolling over to the TV and demonstrating that a smuggler is always both adaptable and a quick study. "All you have to do is push this button..."

* * *

"We're supposed to wear these?" Leia asked, her eyes wide as she held up a very pink and frilly bra.

"I don't think so," Mara said, hands firmly planted on her hips.

Scully burst out laughing. Demonstrating their intergalactic foraging skills, Leia and Mara had evidently discovered the lingerie drawer while she had fired up her Amanda Marshall CD. She strode to the other women, snatching the offending item and shutting the treasure trove, "I said," she reminded them archly, "the *bottom* drawer." She opened it, by way of demonstration and pulled three pairs of jeans out. "we're wearing these." Brandishing the pink bra Scully explained, "don't you have anything like this? We wear them underneath our clothing."

Opening the drawer again, Mara drew out a forest green demi bra that had caught her eye before. She asked innocently, "if you wear them under your clothes then why are they so fancy?" Ignoring Dana's sputtering, mortified protests, she and Leia began rummaging through the drawer, ooohing and ahing at every item.

"Oh, Leia, I think Han would loooove this," Mara said with a sickeningly sweet voice, dangling a lacy red camisole and matching thong.

"Oh, really?" Leia replied, arming herself with a floral strapless number. "And this one looks like Luke's speed."

Mara's face tightened into a scowl. "The minute your brother sees me in something like that will be the last thing he ever sees," she vowed.

Teetering between amusement and dismay watching her unmentionables on parade, Dana finally settled on the former. Snagging Wonderbras, bikinis, and Victoria's other Secrets, she stuffed all into the drawer, with dire threats, "Not a word of this to Mulder or I'll tell Han and Luke that you both were looking for black ones with extra padding. We'd better move this along. So, both of you, into the closet."

* * *

"Space, Mulder!" Han exclaimed, surveying the other man's closet. "Do you think you have enough clothes?"

"Those are work clothes," he explained, digging through his own drawers and tossing things over his shoulder in the general direction of the bed. "The idea is to go for as long as possible without doing laundry. Then I take everything I own to the drycleaners and make them do it. Fortunately, you are at the beginning of my wash cycle."

"Ah," Luke said, not entirely sure he understood. "Can't you just throw them in the refresher?"

"They don't even have repulsor technology on this rock kid," Han humped.

"Yes, but we do have Levis, so there is hope for our planetoid" Mulder said, ripping them out of the cleaners' bags and handing Luke and Han each a pair. "Put these on. We can't have you going out dressed in your galaxy's finest." Mulder continued on to his closet and began examining its contents.

Luke and Han exchanged looks and set about removing their boots and trousers. Mulder returned holding a couple shirts, all of which Han immediately rejected because they weren't white, black or gray. "I'm not wearing something that makes me look like a **trozneya**" he responded stoutly.

Luke's burst into laughter, then explained to a confused Mulder,

with the device." He smirked, "*trozneya* is untranslatable." To Han, Luke queried not at all innocently, "Not even for Leia?"

He was adamant, "Not even." Han plucked a gray mock turtle off the pile on the bed, "This'll do." Somber, nondescript and every bit befitting the dignity of a smuggler.

As Luke pulled a shirt over his head, it was immediately apparent that this wasn't going to work. His slight frame was swimming in Mulder's blue henley and the arms were a full six inches too long. Closer examination revealed the same problem with the jeans. Mulder rubbed his jaw, contemplating the conundrum, turning to check out Han. No problem there, so he returned his attention to the Jedi.

* * *

Scully walked around Mara and Leia inspecting her handiwork. Leia was dressed in black jeans and a rose silk blouse with black hair boots. Her hair didn't quite look of this planet, but wrapped as it was in braids around her head, it would do. Mara, sporting a short white cotton sweater over standard blue jeans looked more conventional, but for the shoe problem. Dana would not have expected someone so petite to have what was probably a size nine women's foot. Even if she could have squeezed into Dana's lace up boots or sneakers, Mara would have none of it, insisting that she would only wear shoes that allowed for concealment of something called a vibroknife. Sure, Scully thought, ice picks, knives, blasters, light sabers and her own gun in its sheath at her back; just what every woman wears on a Friday night date.

"One last thing ladies," Scully said. "Allow me to introduce you to the wonderful world of perfume..."

* * *

Mulder was lying on his back on the floor hemming Luke's jeans with a stapler when his phone rang. Han looked up from where he was stuffing the toe of a

"Should I get that?"

Mulder nodded and punched a final staple through the jeans and stood up to survey his handiwork. Not bad for someone who didn't own a needle and thread, he thought. With the waist of the jeans belted tight so they didn't fall down and an untucked flannel over a T shirt, Luke looked pretty much any other Kurt Cobain wanna be. He made a mental note to remember to explain the nuances of grunge to Luke on the way. He heard Han hang up the phone.

"That was Dana. She said to hurry up."

"Put your shoes on, Luke and let's go."

Heaven & Hell
Adams Morgan, District of Columbia
10 PM

"Heaven and Hell?" Scully inquired suspiciously. Dinner had been hilarious, if otherwise uneventful, the spinning lazy susan in the middle of the table at the Chinese restaurant an opportunity to demonstrate another heretofore unknown application of the Force. They were all now standing in the line outside the oddly named club, impatiently awaiting their turn to get in.

Mulder smiled. "Fitting isn't it?"

"A little too fitting," she shot back.

"I asked Langly for the name of a good club and he said, and I quote, 'The place for older folks like you is Heaven and Hell.'"

"He did not!"

"Did so."

"That little..."

"What is this place again?" Mara asked, stepping away from her conversation with Luke.

"A night club. It's a place we go to drink intoxicants and pick up members of the opposite

"And does it work for you?" Mara asked.

"Not very often," he admitted.

"You forgot about the dancing," Scully added.

"Dancing?" Mara visibly brightened. "There's dancing?"

* *

Very, very bad dancing in fact because as luck would have it, this Friday was 70's retro night. They were greeted by the agonizing strains of Do the Hustle. The foursome from outer space stood with their newfound friends in Heaven, the top floor of the two story bar and gawked. The music, bizarre gyrations on the dance floor, and spinning lights stood as a testament to a scarier time in Earth's history. "Downstairs in Hell they have normal music," Mulder assured them.

"What's wrong with this?" Mara asked, her feet already moving to the pounding disco rhythm.

"Yeah, Mulder? What's wrong with this?" Scully smirked. "I'm getting a really clear mental image of you at your high school prom. Powder blue tuxedo. Ruffled shirt. Shoulder length hair, parted down the middle..."

Mulder crossed his arms. "I didn't go to my prom," he replied just a tad defensively.

"Loser," Scully whispered into his ear and headed for the bar. Mulder followed.

Leia reached down and took her husband's hand. Saving the universe in her younger days had not allowed much time for clubbing, but she suspected that her husband probably knew his way around such establishments. The practiced eye with which he surveyed the room confirmed it. "Tables along the back," Han said, leading the way.

"Okay," Leia said. "But you'll dance with me later?"

Her husband stopped short, mock horror in his voice, "I don't know about that."

"Then you'll force me into the arms of one of these dashing younger men," she threatened.

Han wrapped one arm around her waist and pulled her close, brushing his lips to her ear,
"I don't think so, your worship."

Luke interrupted her intended challenge, "Hey, hey, break it up."
He pushed past,
muttering just audibly to them, "Eyes open, head clear."

Han and Leia reluctantly broke apart, and followed Luke to a vacant table, which afforded a wall behind and a good view of the entire bar. From the encampment, they all watched a very brave young man approach Mara. Han and Luke quickly wagered on how much time would transpire before Mara lobotomized him, and whether she would perform the brain surgery with her bare hand or a lightsaber. They were stunned when Mara smiled and joined the man on the dance floor.

Scully and Mulder arrived at the table carrying six bottles of something that was marked Miller. "It's beer, like we had last night," Mulder said by way of explanation.

"It's a mild intoxicant," Scully added.

"An intoxicant?" Han repeated, brightly.

"Intoxicant?" Mara added her voice to the chorus as she took her place at the table and grabbed a bottle. She sniffed the beer and took a long drink. Her face screwed up like a kid who'd gotten hold of an extra sour Space Pop. "This tastes like bantha dung!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, and you'd know?" Luke asked.

"Watch it, Skywalker, or you'll end up like him." She pointed over her shoulder at her former dance partner, who was writhing on the floor. "He got a little too friendly," she offered. The loser of this round, Luke flipped a quarter in Han's direction as they all erupted in laughter, save Mulder who swallowed hard and fretted between the former assassin and the man on the floor.

Before he could think of a sharp witted comment another victim approached the table and asked Mara to dance. "You're taking your life in your hands," Mulder

hapless, inert man on the floor. "That's what she did to the last one."

With foolish and misplaced courage, the man winked, all unknowing, "I'll take my chances." Mara shrugged and led the way back to the dance floor.

Han tossed another coin on the table. "I'll bet this one lasts the full song, Mulder."

"I'll bet he doesn't," Mulder said, pitching a quarter, then slid out of his seat to observe the fun from a better vantage, laughing to himself that the song just happened to be "Stayin' Alive." He wondered if Mara's partner would manage it.

"How about that dance?" Leia said to Han, then leaned over and whispered. "I think Luke'd like a moment alone with Mara."

Han presented his arm like a proper Alderaani escort. Leia took it and they were gone, leaving Luke and a very uncomfortable Scully at the table alone. "Dana," he said softly. "We need to talk."

Scully sat, mute, cursing fate and everyone who had just fled. She concentrated on peeling the label off her rapidly warming beer bottle while Luke waited for her reply.

"Dana," he prodded gently.

"I don't know what to say," she finally muttered, irritated. "What do you expect me to say? You know I have no memory of what happened between us before. And I frankly I find it hard to believe that I willingly went back to your universe with the intention of staying."

"Yet you did," Luke assured her. "Although the fact that Mulder was going probably had as much to do with it as anything."

Now that did make sense. Her feelings for Mulder ran deep. How deep was something she avoided dwelling upon at any length. But how far had her feelings for this man gone? She detested this vulnerability, hated being at such loss, with someone else having all the control, all the knowledge, and the ability to simply pluck time and events from her mind. And here was the very man who had stolen it all, sitting next to her,

expectations that the woman she was here and now couldn't possibly fulfill. "So, Skywalker, what exactly did happen?" Scully's resolve dissolved as she suddenly considered how different inter galactic views on **that** subject might be. For all she knew...

He mercifully interrupted that very uncomfortable speculation. "No!" Luke reached out, touching her arm in an effort to reassure her. "It didn't go that far. I know you feel..."

Reassured, Scully was now very angry. She pulled her arm away, interrupting him, resenting once again his presumption. "You not only know what happened before, you also have the advantage of reading my every emotion and thought. So you should know now that if it all meant as much as you seem to think it did, I want to know how could you have taken the memory away from me."

Luke flinched and stared into his beer, running his finger around the rim of the bottle looking to Scully like an intergalactic protagonist in a bad country and western song. "I didn't feel I had a choice," he replied.

"There's always a choice."

Luke looked up at her and considered a moment. "Then I guess I made the wrong one."

"I guess you did," Scully said as she slipped off her barstool and disappeared into the crowd.

Mulder slid smoothly onto the bar stool that Scully had just vacated and took a long, slow sip of his beer before speaking. "Don't mess with her," he warned, with a subtle straightening of his shoulders, unmistakably signaling that if Luke had any intention of doing so, he'd have Mulder to deal with.

Luke was touched at this overt protectiveness that Mulder would no doubt deny if pressed. "I wouldn't think of it," he replied, taking a sip of his own beer. The small sigh of relief that escaped Mulder left too big an opening for Luke to resist. "Still, do you think an FBI agent

"No," Mulder cut him off.

Luke howled with laughter. It was almost like being in a time machine, but this go around he got to be the one with the fun lines. The realization that he was laughing alone took some of the glee out of his coils. "Sorry, it's an old joke. I didn't mean to and have no intention of interfering."

Mulder's denial was swift. "You're not interfering. It's just..." He broke off to scan the room and saw Scully headed toward the bar. "Leaving us like you did last time is too much like her abduction ..."

"Abduction?" Luke echoed stunned.

"Yeah, she disappeared for three months. Came back in a coma and woke up with no memory of where she'd been." Mulder's grip tightened on his beer bottle. "She... she had the remnants of branched DNA in her system. They'd experimented on her like she was a lab rat. God knows what they did to her." His voice broke on the last few words and he paused to regain his composure before whispering. "It almost killed her."

And you too, Luke thought, but stayed silent. Mulder continued. "Then with the murder of her sister last year . . . well, Skywalker, I'd say you all are more the problem than the solution."

"I see." Luke thought he did, but resisted the urge to barge uninvited into Mulder's mind for the answers to the questions he had yet to ask.

Raising some questions of her own, Mara reappeared at Luke's elbow, and helped herself to his beer. "This stuff actually grows on you," she said.

"Well, it's not Corellian," Luke replied, wrestling with her for his bottle.

"Thank the Force. We all need our wits about us." She shifted her gaze between Mulder and Skywalker like a spectator in a repulsor tennis match. She'd obviously walked in on the middle of something. Something, that by the looks of it, would be best broken up. "Okay, so which one of you lucky men is going to dance with me?"

"I don't dance," they replied in unison.

"Did you kill your last partner?" Luke added.

"Very funny, farmboy," Mara fired back, grabbing Luke's hand. "Oh, and don't think you're off the hook, G-Man. I love to dance," she added before dragging her next victim off to the dance floor.

end Chapter 5a

X Jedi II - Chapter 5b

* * *

Han sat at the bar eyeing the odd assortment of bottles neatly lined up beneath a rather large mirror with the letters G*U*I*E*N*E*S*S scrawled across it and struggled to discern which one was most likely to be more palatable than this concoction called beer in front of him. Unfortunately, the dim lighting was conspiring with Han's weak grasp of English to make the task impossible. He thought about asking the bartender for help, but he wasn't quite that confident of his language skills. His thoughts were interrupted when a woman with the biggest blonde hair he'd ever seen took a seat next to him. "Mind if I sit here?" she purred, leaning forward to make sure that Han got a good look down her top.

Now here was the challenge. While the tiny translator in his ear made her completely understandable, he would have to reply in English to be intelligible. He considered his response carefully as he did a quick scan for any sign of his wife. He didn't really want to talk to this woman, but he didn't want to make a scene and in particular wanted to determine what anti gravity device was making it possible for certain of her, uh, extremities to be in the position they were. Being from off planet, he'd obviously never heard of the Wonderbra. "Okay," he finally answered.

"Oh! An accent. Where are you from?" she exclaimed more than she said.

Quickly deciding that Corellia wouldn't be the correct response, he struggled to remember the name of the place that Mulder and Scully had been claiming they were from. "The Czech Republic," he finally managed.

"How fascinating," she said, leaning closer. "Did anyone ever tell you that you bear a striking resemblance to Harrison Ford?"

"No," Han replied, edging back slightly. He had no idea who this For character was but he was beginning to wonder if what people said about everyone having a twin somewhere in the universe was true. The blonde with the big hair was the third person who mentioned the resemblance tonight.

"So, can I buy you a drink?" the blonde whispered. "In the interest of international relations?"

Now, that was getting a little too friendly. Han wasn't so worried about the blonde, figuring the creative tactics he had used in the past to get rid of such pests would work as well here as they had in every lousy cantina he had slummed in. No the problem was not what he would do to her, but what his wife would do to him. As he considered the idea of blasting the woman, hair and all, out of her seat, a voice from behind him came to the rescue. "Sure, we'd love a bottle of champagne to celebrate our engagement, wouldn't we sweetheart," Scully said, wrapping her arm possessively around Han's shoulders. "How nice of you to offer."

The blonde disappeared faster than five free hours on American Online and Dana commandeered her vacated seat. "Thanks," Han said.

"Now, can I buy you a drink?" Scully asked.

"No, but I can buy you one. What would you like?"

"What do you think of beer?"

"Not much. It's a bit... bland."

Scully's eyes lit up. "I have just the thing." She signaled the bartender and whispered something to him.

The man nodded and grabbed one of those bottles from under the mirror. He placed two small glasses in front of them and poured a thick, amber liquid into each. Then he placed two small wedges of fruit and a shaker of white powder in front of them. "Six dollars, please," he said. Han dumped a large handful of quarters onto the bar, receiving a strange look from the bartender who began counting them out. "What'd you do?" the bartender asked. "Rob a phone booth?"

Scully convulsed with laughter. Recovered from her fun at Han's expense, she felt she owed him one. By way of demonstration she held out the shaker, "salt."

To Han's amazement she then licked the inside of her wrist and sprinkled the salt on the dampened area. Pushing the shaker toward him, he followed suit. She handed him a piece of the fruit, saying "lime. Put it in your left hand." Han did so. "Okay, here's the procedure. Lick, drink, bite. Got it?"

Han nodded. "What are we drinking to?"

Scully grinned. "How about us normal people?"

Han raised his glass in salute, "To us normal people."

A moment later, Han removed the lime from his lips and smiled broadly. "Now that's more like it. What's it called?"

"Tequila or To Kill Ya. It's from a place called Mexico."

"I think I'd like to go there."

Leia moved to stand between them. "What are you two up to?"

"No good, your highness" Han replied.

"No good at all," Scully echoed.

"I'd expect nothing less," she replied, sliding up on the barstool with Han. "Speaking of no good, have you checked out Luke and Mara?"

All three of them turned their eyes to the dance floor. Luke was doggedly trying to keep up with Mara, who was dancing up a storm. "What's the deal with them anyway?" Scully asked.

Han and Leia burst into laughter. "If you find out, could you tell me please?" Leia pleaded as Han added, "Yeah, and then we can sell it the Coruscant Enquirer for half a million credits."

"What's so funny?" Mulder queried, joining them at the bar.

"Yeah, what's so funny?" Luke repeated, as he and Mara arrived to more peals of laughter from Scully, Han and Leia.

"Nothing," Leia affected wide eyed innocence.

Scully added, "Absolutely nothing."

"Honest," Han added.

Out on the dance floor, the rhythm of the Macarena began to an excited roar. Mara lifted an eyebrow in a move entirely too reminiscent of Scully for Mulder's taste and said, "You're my next victim, G-Man."

Mulder shook his head. "I don't do the Macarena," he declared, leaning firmly against the bar, immovable object meeting irresistible force.

"Well, I do," Scully said, taking Mara's arm. "This is a girl's dance anyway. Come on Leia. We'll show 'em how it's done."

"Scully, you've been holding out on me," Mulder said.

"I keep telling you, Mulder, that I *have* a life," she shot back over her shoulder as she hauled her friends on to the floor.

Mulder and Luke helped themselves to the recently vacated stools and settled in to watch "their" women, such possessiveness likely to be denied vehemently by all concerned. Han took his eyes off his wife only long enough to trouble the man behind the bar for three tequilas. "Now this is a drink," he said as he handed Mulder and Luke each a shot and a slice of lime.

Mulder grimaced. "How'd you learn about this stuff?" he asked, holding the glass away from him like it was a snake. "You know what they say about it... one tequila, two tequila, three tequila, floor."

his face.

Mulder was taken aback. "Scully? My Scully?"

Luke leaned over and whispered, "Seems you don't know *your Scully* as well as you think you do." then directed Mulder's attention to the dance floor.

When I dance they call me Macarena
and the boys they say que soy buena
they all want me
they can't have me
so they all come and dance beside me

Dana began explaining this newest edition to the Scully family tradition of the Chicken Dance, Bunny Hop, and Electric Slide. Swinging her hips in time to the electric Spanish rhythm, she demonstrated, "At each beat, a different movement, right hand forward, left hand forward, right palm up, left palm up, right hand on left arm, left hand on right arm, left hand on head, right hand on head, right hand on behind, left hand on behind, sway three times." Then she jumped, doing a quarter turn, "And repeat, got it? Move your body as much..." with a glance at the enrapt males she added, "As you feel comfortable." Scully underscored her instruction with a well-practiced thrust and gyration learned from years of practice dancing with the Scully ladies at family wedding receptions, first holy communions and graduation parties.

I am not trying to seduce you
Come and find me, my name is Macarena
always at the party con las chicas que soy buena
come join me,
dance with me
and you fellows chant along with me

By the next chorus, Mara had picked it up, adding the unique touches of a professional dancer's training and physique. For the slightly more restrained Leia, getting into the groove as it were required another chorus and the enthusiastic encouragement of her partners. Scully called to Mara over the din of the music, "We'll really give something for Mulder to dream about tonight."

Mara laughed so hard, she missed the quarter turn.

raising his glass.

"And princesses, " Han added, then admonished, "Mulder, close your mouth, gaping in astonishment will not impress them."

As the song blared to an end, Dana grabbed Leia's hand and ordered Mara to take the other. Dana dragged them with a flourish into a bow to acknowledge the wildly cheering crowd. At the first polite moment, Leia and Mara both extracted themselves from Dana's good natured clasps, Leia muttering to Mara, "It's a little strange isn't it?"

Mara knew exactly what Leia meant, both of them wondering if this is what it would have been like to have normal friendships, with normal women. She and Leia had a formal, familiar relationship, but with Dana around it was different. She'd obviously grown up around lots of other women and was comfortable with the interaction. Mara realized that, albeit for different reasons, neither she nor Leia had ever had this opportunity before. And now that they perhaps had the time, neither knew how or where to begin.

It was here, as she reflected on her childhood that Mara felt an all too familiar, very private, tug on her consciousness. Dana was now pulling them back to the bar and their applauding admirers. Mara shook her head, knowing it would not, but hoping nonetheless that the physical action might dislodge the surreptitious, knowing touch.

"You okay, Mara," Dana asked, offering a steady hand.

Mara nodded. 'Yeah, fine. Where are the ...uhh?"

"Downstairs, behind the bar," Dana responded. "Want me to go with you?"

"I think I'm perfectly capable of handling this myself." Mara said a bit more sharply than she'd intended.

Dana's quizzical surprise faded to a shrug, "Okay. We'll be at the bar," and she turned to follow Leia. Mara slipped away. Glancing back from the top of the stairs, she wished someone would stop her.

* * *

Ben Adams leaned casually against the wall in Hell, knowing it was just a matter of time before she would respond to the summons. He didn't need to look up from his beer, he felt the fearful yearning of her Force presence when she descended into the smoky, jarring, red tinted pit of a bar. He hid a satisfied smile; what a fitting place he thought, for Mara Jade to meet her new Masters. Over here, he called through the Force. She turned towards him, and then hesitated, seemingly reluctant to make a final commitment to this bottom rung of perdition. "Come here," he ordered now, softly, entreatingly as his father had taught him. Slowly he reeled her in, one halting step at a time across the blackened floor.

She came to stand before him, head down, as had been her place and was his due. "Welcome to Hell, Emperor's Hand," Ben spoke in a silky tone, grazing a fingertip along her cheek, down her jawline. The sense of power over her was intoxicating. His every doubt, weakness, and reservation faded away as she fell into his orbit, drawn by his presence in the Force like a moth to a flame.

Mara jerked her head up, grabbing his hand, eyes burning. "I'm nobody's pawn. Not anymore," she snarled.

Adams moved closer, even as her fingers bit into his wrist. His lips moved warm against her ear, though the words were in her mind. "On the contrary, Mara Jade, you are whatever my father and I say you are."

Locked together, her eyes widened, the red lights a patina obscuring her green gaze. She whispered in a heated, hateful voice, "Your father?" As her Force sense pulled to his, searching, Adams felt how even this light, unschooled contact with her heightened his own awareness and strength in the Force. A sudden craving for more of the power she lent and amplified overwhelmed him and he understood why three generations of Emperors would search the galaxies to have Mara Jade at their side.

Adams drew her to him, bringing his free hand to her ear, fondling the lobe, and stroking lightly the special place in her mind Palpatine had created for them to

exhilarating thrill, she bent ever so subtly to the mental touch.

"That's right. My father.

Your Master's son." His voice was now sweet and dulcet. "You'd like to see him, wouldn't you?"

His mind and lips brushed her again, with the familiarity of an old lover. Her nails dug harder into him, drawing welts, but she nodded, a whimpering gasp escaping from a tortured being. In a knowing murmur, he nuzzled again the vulnerabilities his grandfather had implanted. "He is waiting for you."

Trembling and obedient, Mara allowed herself to be led out the door.

* * *

Mulder scanned the crowd looking for Mara. "Stop being such a mother hen, Mulder,"

Scully scolded. "She's a former assassin, for God's sake. I think she can take care of herself."

"Sure, fine, whatever you say, Scully," he replied as he continued to study the crowd.

Then he turned his attention on her as if he'd suddenly remembered something. "And since when do you drink tequila?"

"What?" she laughed.

"Tequila. Han said you told him about tequila."

She laughed again and then leaned in a little too close in a briefly wonderful and terrifying moment. "Guess you don't know as much about me as you thought." Then she spun around and tugged on Luke's sleeve. "Come on farm boy, let's dance." Mulder repressed a scowl, enigmatic Dr. Scully was right.

* * *

Mara barely felt Adams fingers laced at her arm as he guided her to

sedan outside the club. Casting about in the Force, she suddenly felt *him* waiting there for *her.* With the shuddering shock, she halted, transfixed by the presence, so familiar and yet evasively different. Like the child of an abusive parent she was both repelled and drawn, part of her wanting to turn and flee, another part wanting to weep with relief. "Come," he whispered. "Come to me." She stumbled, almost to the pavement at the call, only Adams' rough jerk propelling her forward to the car. Adams yanked the door open, and Mara sagged in the haze of smoke that billowed out.

Through the choking fog she saw him, sitting tranquilly in the frayed red interior of the car's back seat. She gaped, incredibly, recognizing him from the photograph as the one they had called the Cancer Man. "YOU?" Hovering, resisting at the entrance to that maw, Mara flailed. One hand finding the cold metal of the door frame, she thrashed wildly in the mental riptide.

"Come," Cancer Man repeated again, calming the feral feline, deftly caressing the void within Mara that had nearly swallowed her with Palpatine's death. She took a tottering mental and physical step to him. He teased, feeling her aching hunger for completion. She was a kitten following a toy on a string, as he dangled the vow of fulfillment before her, just out of reach. "Come." The command was softer, more urgent, permitting no refusal, and the hint of pain if not obeyed. The son's hand at her neck, pushing her forward, the expectant father pulling her in. With a strangled, tearless sob she fell into the car, crawling on her knees, towards the Master.

* *

Luke was struggling mightily to follow her lead as they danced to an old Nirvana song. Maybe not polite, but Scully couldn't help it, laughing at his discomfiture, this slight man in Mulder's clothing. Were those actually staples hemming up his jeans? Through the pounding music she yelled, "Did Mulder explain grunge rock to you?"

Luke nodded earnestly. "He told me to tell anyone who asked that Nirvana is my favorite band." He looked down at his oversized clothes and gestured at the strange outfit. "I guess I'm

"This is Nirvana, by the way." Scully grinned, gesturing about with her hand.

"Oh really? I guess I do sorta like this," he lied, quite poorly.

She was finally beginning to see what she must have found in him before. Smart. Check. Funny. Check. Trustworthy. Possibly. Scully didn't hand out her trust these days as easily as she once had. And she still didn't see how she would have even considered dropping everything in this universe to follow him into his, but he *was* cute. Such a horrible word, but so apt. He looked a lot like the guy who played the oldest brother on that TV show "Eight Is Enough." Scully'd had a bit of a crush on him when she was a teen.

Detecting some softening, rather at odds with the blaring guitars and drums, he pressed,
"So, do I look the part or should I just stick to the Galaxy scout routine?"

She took pity on the poor guy, stopping the gyrations to sling a companionable arm around his shoulders. "If the galaxy scouts are anything like the boy scouts, I suggest you stick to that."

Luke laughed, relieved, and more at ease than he had been since seeing Dana again.
"Story of my life."

"How about we go get a drink, find the others."

"I thought you'd never ask," he said, smiling shyly.

* * *

Han and Leia were following Mulder to what he promised was a fair imitation of "hockey." Glimpsing Dana and Luke leave the dance floor, Han observed, "Mara's gone."

"Luke knows," Leia said following the unspoken thought.

Leia shook her head. "No, he knows what he has to do, even if he doesn't like it."

"You don't like it either do you?" Han was not apologetic.

"It has to be done. Mara said she would tell us if Adams made contact."

Han's eyes darted to the hole into which he had seen Mara descend. "Right," he said, still bothered by that weak link in the plan.

* * *

"Mara Jade," the Cancer Man mouthed the words with pleasure. He brought his yellowed fingers to her downturned face, tilted the delicate chin upward, saying her name again, an abomination, "Mara Jade. We gave you even your name. Isn't that so?"

Mara recoiled with the scalding touch. Her eyes darted to the driver in the front seat, in a silent plea. He pointedly closed the panel that divided the front from the rear seats in the car. Pitching back towards the door, she felt Adams set his warm, moist palm flat at her back, fingers now weaving into her hair, "Not so fast." His voice was low and threatening as he pushed her again, to his father, "Where do you think you're going, back to the Jedi?"

"My son, my son," Cancer Man gently chided. "This is not how we treat the Emperor's Hand." By way of demonstration, he fingered her with a black stinking touch of the Force, trickling into the places within her empty since Palpatine. Something within Mara leapt out of its own volition, free of her control and will. Kneeling before him on a tattered car seat, she swayed with the torment, Adams' hand steadying her at the neck. Smiling, the father taunted that susceptibility, toying with her. Hesitantly at first, Mara reached through the Force, and felt his warm approval. "That's right," he coaxed. Mara grasped further for his tempting lure with the Force, and this time, he let her win the tidbit. She began to nibble delicately at the offered morsels of support and belonging that had once been hers.

It was the pattern that had replayed itself for years with Palpatine. Mara barely flinched as Cancer Man delved now, with a barbed hook, deeper into her consciousness. Like his son and his father, he felt the rich surge as her sensitivity augmented and intensified his own Force sense. He began to suck greedily of the power that flowed from her into him, a bloated parasite to a host.

*

Luke, Mulder, Leia and Han crowded around a fussball table; Mulder and Luke against the Solos. In a show of perversity, Dana was wildly cheering on Han and Leia.

"Gilmour to Clark, Clark to Mulder. He shoots! Oh, what a save by Fuhr! He really stood on his head for that one." Mulder was entertaining himself with a running commentary. "Here comes St. Louis. Over the blue line, Hull to Gretzky. He's walking in..." In what would have seemed a miracle to the average Earthling, the puck suddenly changed directions and buried itself soundly in the Solo goal at the other end of the ice.

Han narrowed his eyes, his voice low, "No using the Force, Luke."

Luke smiled. "Who, me?" he said all wide eyed innocence.

"If I got the Force back, could you teach me to do that?" Mulder asked in awe.

Luke swallowed hard, not wanting to answer that question, and suddenly providing to everyone a reason why Mulder might never want such a gift back. Luke staggered, clutching the table, nearly dropping to the floor, floundering against Mulder; Leia, a heartbeat behind, sagged against Han.

It was Han, quicker than anyone, and with the benefit of ten years experience with them who recognized it first. He roughly pulled his wife to her feet, "Mulder, Dana" he shouted. "Take Luke, Mara's in trouble."

"She's outside," Luke heaved, staggering to his feet and bolting

Mulder right behind.

* * *

It was there, coursing through her mind and memories, that he found it. Drinking in the power that pulsed through his link with her, Cancer Man paused in his feasting and laughed softly. "So, Skywalker gave you Darth Vader's light saber? How very sentimental." He laughed again, plunging through her mind, "And how very fitting that you wear the blade. You shall be my champion too, my sword arm and my Hand."

This theft of precious events roused her as the plundering of her psyche had not. Even as Mara ached to be filled once again with his dark purpose, the self respect and pride so recently found rebelled from the degradation. She jerked away, spinning a mental barrier around her.

"Get out of mind," she hissed, blazing

He spat at her, jaundiced eyes vicious with fury. "You dare keep me away?" Cancer Man backhanded her with a slam of the Force that hurled her against Adams.

She struggled as Adams pinned her effectively against him, holding her down for the punishment to be meted. Now she made a desperate call to Luke in the Force, knowing with dread what would happen next, would have always happened when she dared defy the Master.

He clambered across the seat towards her, bearing down on her, his hands imprisoning her face. Mara shut her eyes, clinging to the mental barrier between them, but her mind filled with his maniacal leer and the smell of stale smoke. Foul laughter poured into her. "You think the same shield we taught you will protect you now?" With a brutal needle of the Force, he pried her mind open, then savagely lashed through her with malicious wrath.

Mara fought, as she never had before, against Adams' physical restraint, against his father's mental assault. Somewhere deep she felt a strong pulsating presence and then another, calling to her, "Hold on Mara, we're coming." Her assailants felt the Skywalkers' presence too, and Cancer Man, near blinded with rage, intensified his attack,

with bloodied claws.

* * *

Mulder was the first to the door. He skidded to a stop, pulled his gun and surveyed the area, scattering the few people still waiting to get in. A bouncer's protest died in the making as he and Mulder both heard a whirring hiss. Mulder realized that Luke, displaying rather poor tactical judgment, had ignited his green sword thing right there in the exit. Luke shoved Mulder aside, "Outta my way, we've got to help her." His eyes were crazed, darting and winching.

Dana put a rough, restraining hand to Luke's shoulder, belting out, "No, not so fast," as Mulder quickly scanned the street. There. The non descript sedan parked half a block away. And two more, parked further down the street.

Luke shuddered again, now pushing Mulder away, "She's there, I've got to get to her." Ignoring their protests, he launched down the remainder of the steps, patrons and other pedestrians screaming and fleeing the crazy man with the bright green sword. Scully and Mulder tore after him, both thinking that some back up would be a really good idea right about now.

Buttressed by Luke and Leia's mental support, Mara redoubled her defense, leveling a Force blow that shoved Cancer Man off her and back across the seat. Grappling now with a cursing Adams, her hand found the vibroknife tucked in her boot. Whipping it out, she sunk the knife into Adams' restraining arm, opening a bloody gash. Screeching with pain, he fell back, clawing at her. Dimly, in the span of time that moves so quickly it seems not to move at all, Mara heard, saw, and smelled a green lightsaber smash through the side window of the car. In her mind or ears she heard Luke calling to her and the car door flew open with a snatch in the Force. She tumbled out into the street, Adams on top of her, shrieking, blood splattered from the gash she had opened in his arm. Her head hit the pavement and everything went black.

Luke flung Adams off of Mara, hurling the much taller man to the ground. Falling to his knees next to Mara, Luke brought his hands to her head, stilling his

to reach her. He barely noticed as Mulder and Scully skidded to a stop next to him.

Mulder hauled Adams to his feet, the two, tall dark, slight men staring at one another with wild, unthinking recognition. Adams aimed an aggressive swipe of the Force at Mulder, then snapped it back, stung, croaking "Mulder?"

Mulder slammed the man against the side of the car just left of the still open door, shoving his gun up under his rib cage. "Adams, I presume."

Scully dropped next to Luke, and seeing his eyes shut and hands resting on Mara's head. She thought fleetingly, "Jedi Mind" and darted around looking for the other watchers, alert for the next threat. There. Three men were running towards them when they all suddenly dove to the ground under flashing rain. Over her shoulder, Scully saw that Han and Leia had emerged from the bar, blasters drawn, and were firing, keeping the bad guys pinned down. The oppressive smell of smoke made Scully turn back around to look into the car, right into the yellowing eyes of Cancer Man, and the gun he had leveled at her head. "I suggest you tell your partner to let him go," he hissed.

Mulder tensed at the sound of the all too familiar voice. Adams seized the distraction, pummeling Mulder in the mid section. Mulder crumpled over, and Adams launched himself into the car. Spewing glass, the door swinging wildly, and they sped away, the two other sedans close behind. Choking, Mulder pulled himself upright, chasing after the speeding cars, firing his gun but hitting nothing. The cars turned the corner with a squeal of tires. Mulder kicked at the ground in frustration.

"Hey, someone call the cops," a voice yelled at the crowd of people gathering at the back door of Hell.

Scully looked up and saw Han and Leia headed in their direction. To Luke she said, "I think this would be a good time to get out of here. Is she mobile?"

In response Mara opened her eyes, jerking away from Luke's cradling touch. "Yeah," she said shortly, shrugging off the assistance. She rolled to her feet with surprising grace,

* * *

"Next time, she'll seek us," the one known only as Cancer Man commented as their car hurled away. To the driver, he said, "Drop us off at the usual place. Then destroy the car." Even without the damage inflicted by a lightsaber and the blood, given the episode at the Club, the car would have to disappear regardless.

"You don't think we've lost her?" Ben asked. He had been convinced of their utter defeat.

A suck of air with the still throbbing memory of his powerful bond to Jade coincided with another draw on the cigarette. Aloud he said, "She's a fighter. Wouldn't be worth pursuing if she wasn't. The connections Palpatine placed in her are still very strong, she will be unable to resist us, or go mad trying."

Fighter is right, Ben thought as he looked down at the vicious slash on his arm. His father sneered with reproach, "Heal that immediately. We could not possibly explain a virbo wound to the Georgetown Hospital Emergency Room."

Ben lowered his head obediently, gently placing his hand over the injury, letting the Force flow through him. Tremors rocking his body with the effort, he slowly mended the worst of the damage, only a long ugly red scar remaining. That would heal, he reflected, but what of the other wounds?

The smoke from another of those infernal cigarettes invaded his nose even as the father's practiced eye bored into him, sensing the son's rising disquiet. Ben looked away, avoiding the knowing, discerning gaze. He was not yet ready to seek the answers to questions he did not want to ask. He knew what the Urmari were and of what they were capable. But when confronted with it, presented with their handiwork: beholding Mulder as an empty, Forceless shell, a shadow of the person he had encountered before, he had been appalled. Shocked. Angry. Incensed.

Ben ignored the inquisitive stare, and did not bother to raise a barrier to his father's Force probe. How hypocritical. How utterly hypocritical, he thought, staring moodily out at the lights of the monuments reflected at the Potomac's edge. Like the people in the villages around Auschwitz and Dachau who lived for years with the stench of burning bodies, the soot polluting their lungs as they clung desperately to their false security and complacency. The car sped on, returning him to a dark, ignorant, ash-ridden existence. Ostriches. Everyone of them. Deny everything. Bury your head in the sand. He was no better. No better at all.

* * *

"Mulder?" There was no response. "Mulder?" Leia's voice was a little louder than time. "Mulder!!"

He nearly jerked the car into oncoming traffic on the GW Parkway. "Don't ever do that."

Leia, used to plenty of pilot second guessing, was not fazed in the least. "In most cultures, a red light means stop. And you just went through one."

"I did?"

Han piped up from the back, "And if you don't slow down, Leia here is going to knock you out, and I'm driving us back to your place."

Mulder did ease up on the gas, the car dropping to a more sedate and mere 40 miles per hour, still far too fast for city streets, but far less life threatening. He finally found a voice in the tense, silent car. "What happened there tonight? What..." here Mulder's mind balked at what he had seen and at what the episode had done to Mara. He began again, concentrating on words and keeping the car in one lane. "What the hell did he do?"

His taut question was met with another. "Can you tell us who that man was?"

Mulder swung back at Leia. "Can you tell me?"

Leia was as tightly wound, but matched his heat with cool. "We can tell you what he is, but can you tell us who he is?"

Hate, bitter anger, loathing spewed from the driver's side, the intensity of Mulder's animosity to the man pressing Leia back into her seat. "We don't know his name. We call him Cancer Man because he always smokes. He's a part of some secret other government, a .." Mulder clenched the steering wheel, as if the man's neck and not mere plastic was between his hands. "He's made my life, our lives a hell. My father, my mother, my sister, Dana's sister, he's taken everything from us, he's..."

Han broke in quietly from the back. "He's from our galaxy."

Leia finished with anxious certainty. "He's also the son of Palpatine and a very strong adept at the Dark Side of the Force."

Mulder swerved to the side of the road, and slammed on the brakes. He swiveled and stared at Leia, looking for what he might have at one time been able to sense, some sham or doubt. He only saw icy assured determination.

Eventually Mulder's mind caught up with his emotion and imagination. He let up on the brake before he pushed his foot through the floor and eased back into the traffic. "I don't know why I should be surprised. We know, from very personal experience, he is utterly unscrupulous, completely corrupted and so powerful, everything he does and touches just disappears as if it had never been."

Han said with a dangerous, murderous glint and his own very personal grudge, "In our Galaxy we call them dark Jedi."

They drove on, until Mulder finally screwed up the courage to ask, "What about Mara, why did he go after her?"

A flat, dead hush, only the sounds of the car, a muted radio and a

punctuating the stillness. With an edginess of one who will not be denied, Mulder said, "I already know that she used to work for your Emperor and had a telepathic link with him through the Force."

When Leia finally responded, it was if she were disembodied, her voice miles away.

"The link obviously extended to the son. He found her at the club, and called to her."

Han laid bare an ugly, nagging truth, "And she went."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Mulder asked, his hands stiffening again on the car wheel, a note of warning creeping into his tone.

Han continued in a professional's voice. "That Mara's got some pretty divided loyalties."

Mulder erupted in defense, swearing, "Look what he did her tonight, how could she be divided about that?"

"Han ..." Leia began, more tense than patient.

He was not in a mood to be placated. "Come on. I know you both like her, feel sorry for her, and what she's been through. I do too. But I just don't trust her."

"What does she have to do Han? Remember, she's the one who took us to Wayland, she killed C'Baoth and Luke's clone."

"Clone?" Mulder echoed in amazement.

"It's a long story." Han muttered and continued this old unresolved question with his wife with a hint of acrimony, "I know Leia, remember, I was there? I know she warned you, and that cause of her, the kids weren't kidnapped." After a brief pause, Han collected himself, able to continue with embittered ferocity at the not forgotten outrage perpetrated upon his home and family. "But she was only dealing with C'Baoth, and he wasn't the Emperor."

He persisted. "Can you honestly say that you or Luke understand what the Emperor did to her?"

After a time, a grudging and reluctant "No."

Mulder was sharing Leia's protective testiness, "What are you saying, Han?"

"What I said before. That I don't trust her, that you shouldn't, and that if Leia and Luke thought hard and objectively about it, they'd realize that they don't either."

"She didn't turn before, Han, I can't see her doing it now."

"But what if she does? What happens then?"

"We'll deal with it if and when it happens, but I still don't see that--"

"I'm just saying," Han warned. "We can't afford to have the Emperor's Hand turned loose on an unsuspecting universe. I'll do whatever it takes to make sure that doesn't happen," he finished, his voice low and terse.

"I'm not sure I like what you're implying." Mulder said, making eye contact with Han in the review mirror.

"I don't either." Han admitted, and broke the contact as he looked out the window.

Leia shifted uncomfortably in her seat. Perhaps regretting his harshness, Han's aggressive tact became an implicit defense. Leaning forward, he rested a gentle hand on Leia's stiffening shoulder. "We know better than anyone why a Dark Jedi wants children." She jerked away, ignoring Mulder's muted hiss. Han persisted, "Mara was with Palpatine all her life. And now she's back in contact with someone who is a lot like her old Master, and obviously knows, better than we do, how to reach her. We can't begin to imagine the effect it has had on her, what it has done to her."

A flashing red siren in the back of the car forestalled any further conversation.

* * *

As they stumbled into the apartment, now laughing, Mulder urged, "Next time Leia, forget about the mind tricks, okay? I can't afford it on my civil servant's salary."

The FBI badge might have been worth \$50 off the speeding ticket; however, Leia's gentle Force 'nudge' of "you don't need to give him a ticket," had succeeded only in giving the Virginia police officer a walloping headache. In his sore temperament, he assessed the full fine and added insult to injury by citing Mulder for a slightly dimmed left rear turn signal.

As she saw him gather the pillow and blanket for the night, Leia, already guilt stricken, attempted an act of contrition. "Mulder," she insisted, "I really hate tossing you on to the couch for another night."

If she only knew the ugly truth. Mulder shook his head with a rueful grin, "That's my bed in name only." He sat down with proprietary pride and finality on the couch, "I sleep *here*..."

"But..."

"Believe me," he repeated firmly. "I need the tv, I need the couch."

"Mulder..." she began, only to have the remainder smothered as Han picked his diminutive wife up and threw her over his shoulder, in perhaps his own act of atonement. "The man said he sleeps on the couch, and I for one, will take him at his word."

Colorful curses unbefitting a princess and diplomat issued. Mulder caught something he thought sounded like "nerf" and the more intriguing, "How many times have I told you, not in public." as Han strode with his protesting package towards the

get the door please?" More curses and then, "well cause if you don't I might have to drop you."

Mulder last image was of Leia, framed in the door way, slung over Han's back, waving, "Good night, Mulder." The door slammed and Mulder heard a thud as two bodies hit the bed or floor, and then peals of laughter. He found the remote under the cushion where he had hidden it from Luke what seemed days ago, and turned the tv on, flipping moodily through the boring late night offerings. Star Trek, yeah right. My Favorite Martian reruns, I don't think so. Invasion of the Body Snatchers, if it were only that simple. He idly surfed with the ennui of a man with 184 possibilities for entertainment and not a one satisfying. On FOX he found Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Now there's a possibility. After what felt like hours, but was in fact only about 45 minutes, he picked up the phone, and hit the one of two preprogrammed speed dials.

"Hello, Mulder."

He flipped back to Buffy, who was taking a break from vampire killing for high school cheerleader practice. Cute, petite, way lethal. Too bad she wasn't a redhead. "Get back okay?"

"Well, I'm talking to you, aren't I?"

"Scully....," he warned.

There was a sigh, and she answered his question. "Yeah, we're fine."

"How's Mara doing?"

"Fine."

Mulder stared at the phone, then mimicked in disbelief, "Fine?"

This time he listened harder. "She says she's fine, Mulder," Dana said just a little too neutrally.

He heard in the background some untranslatable curse, and then,
"Tell everyone I'm
just **fine.**"

The conversation with Han and Leia had agitated demons already disturbed from slumber by the psychologist's recognition of an all too familiar pattern in Mara. The question was how to proceed with so touchy a personality, whether she would let him, and if he even should. Mulder made a decision. "Tell Mara I want to talk to her."

"Mulder, I--"

He cut Scully off. "Just tell her."

He heard Scully's soft, firm inquiry, Luke's even voice and Mara's heated, "I'm fine, I don't feel like talking to anybody."

Scully came back on, "See? Everything is just fine."

Mulder thought hard, wishing fervently that the insight that had served him so well for so long had not picked this inopportune time to be yanked away by Force sucking fiends. He kept Scully expectantly waiting then said, "Tell Mara I wanted to tell her where to send the bill."

"Huh?"

"Tell her."

He heard her relay the message, and a stunned silent response. There was a movement. He exhaled with relief as Mara's clipped, tight voice came on. "What the hell does that mean Mulder?"

Mulder muted Buffy and concentrated on the trained killer at the other end of the phone. "It's an expression, a way of saying thanks. Means you can bill me for your troubles."

"I don't have any troubles," was the acid reply.

"No, but I do Jade. I just wanted to thank you for coming all the way to help."

"Oh."

No expression of gratitude from her, but that would be a long time in coming. Mulder reasoned, she needs to talk this through, she wouldn't have come on the phone otherwise. He spoke with casual, conversational sincerity, "I'm sure it wasn't easy for you to make this trip."

She erupted, "What the ..."

Don't hang up he whispered silently. Aloud, the same lackadaisical, breezy tone. "Easy, Jade, don't get all bent out shape. I just meant that it was obviously a hard and dangerous trip coming here and I wanted you to know that I appreciate it."

She hesitated, wary, not certain how to respond, looking for a trap. "Well," she began cautiously, "It's been hard for all of us." He could hear her pacing about the room.

"Oh sure," Mulder agreed. "It's just that they'd been here before, and felt they had to come back to fix a problem they thought they created. Not," and he switched to her first name, "Mara, you weren't responsible for what happened before."

"Damned right," she said stoutly, mollified, lulled.

"And," Mulder now began softly, gently springing the trap, "You came anyway."

He heard the pacing slow, and imagined she was now staring into the phone. Again he whispered stay, don't hang up.

"Yeah." was her only halting response.

Mulder let the quiet settle, let her think about that, then asked, with a hidden purpose
she would see, "Why did you come, Mara?"

was the only one
who could find Adams."

"Really?" Mulder injected proper doubt into the statement. "Even though Skywalker's
a Jedi and with Leia to help, don't you think that..."

"I don't expect anyone to understand." She responded hotly, a thin
patina of control
over wrenching pain.

Now Mulder confessed, quickly before she shut him out. "That's the
thing, Mara. I
think I do understand.

Anger, an explosion, "How could you possibly ..."

He interrupted, repeating, insisting "I think I do."

This time, she seemed to listen to what he hadn't said,
challenging, "How?"

"Because," he confided, her need outweighing his own reluctance to
make the
admission, "Sometimes I can't stay away from things I know are bad for
me, either." He heard
another movement, praying to the God he didn't believe in that she
wouldn't slam down the
phone. Instead he envisioned her moving into Scully's bedroom, and
shutting the door behind
her, leaving, he thought, the others in the living room. He continued
softly, "That's why I
think I know exactly why you would come back, Mara."

There was less question and more statement in her words. "You do?"

"Yeah," he said, now leading her, "I was just wondering..."

This time Mara followed, slowly, but willingly, "What?"

"I was wondering if you do."

* * *

with Skywalker.

Not a great believer in conspiracies until recently, she was beginning to wonder if she was becoming as paranoid as Mulder.

With anxious looks at the close door, Skywalker paced in front of the couch, chafing at the pointed lock-out. "What do you suppose that's about?"

She was curled tightly on the couch, as unsettled as he. "I don't know."

"What could Mulder possibly tell her? He doesn't know anything about Palpatine, about the Force..." A note of peevish resentment snuck in, and under Scully's unforgiving glare, was quelled. Skywalker shuffled uneasily, finally admitting, now downcast. "It's just hard to want to help someone so much and to not be able to do anything."

She was beginning to guess at why Mulder wanted to talk to Mara and hinted, "it sounds like Mulder wanted to know why she came here, and why she went to Cancer Man without telling anyone."

He responded simply. "Well he called her through the Force, so she went."

"But why? She looked away, a worried, darting glance at the door, then her eyes dropped to the floor. "This may not have much to do with the Force at all. Mulder may understand what happened, and may be able to help her understand why she did what she did."

He jerked suddenly with the realization, his eyes widening, wondering now for the first time why he had not asked the same questions. Skywalker sunk down next to her on the sofa, not too close, preoccupied with weightier concerns. "So, Mulder..." he began the question, and then stopped.

Scully wasn't sure how much of this line of thought she wanted to share. "Uh, let's just say that Mulder's childhood wasn't exactly a Norman Rockwell painting either." she finally settled on.

"Norman Rockwell?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. Norman Rockwell was an artist renowned for depicting what was, and to a certain extent still is, considered to be an idyllic childhood in our society."

"And Mulder's childhood wasn't ideal?"

"No."

Luke snuck a sidelong peek at her. Scully was fiddling with the tiny gold object that hung from a chain at the base of her throat. Even apart from the obvious he sensed in the Force, her fingers anxiously plucking at the chain were a sure sign that she was nervous. He wondered at the talisman. "What does your necklace mean?"

She clutched the chain, then looked up at him, abashed at being caught in the act. With a measure of will she unclenched her hands, and brought them to rest in her lap. "It's a symbol of my faith, I guess. My father gave it to me," she paused a moment. "Theologically, it's a Christian icon symbolizing salvation and forgiveness."

"Christian?" Luke asked.

"One of the many religions that populate our planet."

"And you and Mulder are Christians?"

She shook her head. "No. Mulder's Jewish."

He was surprised. "Do all these people of different religions get along as well as you and Mulder?"

Scully laughed, but not in good humor. "Hardly."

"We have... similar problems where I come from."

"A universal invariant, huh?" she said, staring at the closed door and worrying about her partner. Dredging up childhood memories was one sure fire way to bring about the legendary Mulder angst-- that he was willing to do that for Mara was touching, and intriguing.

Skywalker's anxiety now,
she wondered for the thousandth time what exactly was going on between
him and Mara and
whether she and Mulder had somehow unwittingly been caught up in an
unacknowledged
agenda between the pair.

A flinch and stammer next to her indicated that her speculation had
not been a private
one. "Skywalker," she turned on him now blazing, "I told you access to
my mind is NOT
part of the accommodations!"

"I didn't mean it. It was an accident." The words flowed out of his
mouth. He finally
stopped and added, "I'm sorry."

Scully leaned back against the couch corner, chin up, arms crossed,
fighting mad.
"Well, the least you can do is answer the question."

"What question?" Luke asked innocently. The look on her face making
it clear that his
attempt at the same type of denial used so successfully by Artoo all
those years ago wasn't
going to work from him.

Scully lifted an eyebrow. "Answer the question."

Luke searched for the words. What was his relationship with Mara?
"It's
complicated. She's my friend, my first student, my partner on many a
dangerous mission.
She's saved my life and that of my family. She's brilliant,
exhilarating, exhausting,
intriguing, maddening... she challenges me like no one else, pushes me
to my limits..." Once
he started, he found it hard to stop, but finally trailed off as he
realized his relationship
with Mara defied mere description. Noting a rising level of discomfort
at the end of the
couch, with a sudden flash of insight, he added quietly, "You know what
that's like don't
you... Scully?"

She shifted restlessly, staring him down, defiant, "I was the one
asking the questions,
Skywalker." Respecting her privacy he did not delve further, as he had
also been tempted to
do with Mulder. Luke reached over and taking her hand gently in his,
squeezed it. Then with
no lingering, he dropped her hand, and rocked back away from her. They

moments listening to laughter of a couple passing by on the sidewalk.

"You could have killed Adams tonight. Why didn't you?" Scully finally asked.

Luke took a deep breath, contemplating how he could possibly explain. "I was angry at what was being done to Mara."

"And rightay so."

"Getting angry is a very dangerous venture for me."

"But you had every right to be angry!" Scully's own Irish temper erupting to the surface. "They were brutalizing her!"

"But I was able to break their hold on her without killing them, and without giving into that rage. I can't kill in anger, even if..."

"What?"

"Had I struck him down in anger, I would have taken a big step toward the Darkside of the Force," he answered, staggering under the weight of his own words. "If I ever did that, the damage to our Galaxy could be immeasurable."

"Aren't you being a little overdramatic?"

Her light, half-hearted attempt at teasing fell quite flat. "No, actually, not." His gut twisted at the memory, so glorious then, so wrenching now. "I've managed to kill over a million people so far, without the benefit of the Dark Side. And with it, my father and Palpatine killed billions. So, no, I wouldn't say I'm overstating the danger."

Dana flushed, with mingled embarrassment, chagrin, horror. He felt chastened, never intending to be so harsh to someone who had been so good to him. "I'm sorry. I tend to forget that others don't know the story. It's just that I've come so close to turning before, and what happened tonight is a very disturbing reminder of how it could happen again."

She stammered, "I guess since I'm not that sensitive, I can only see the effect, like Cancer Man, I can't see the reasons, how or why something like that could happen."

His jaw tightened with the recollection. "It's happened twice. The first time my... my father..." the two little words obviously still not coming easily, even now, "had already murdered my friends, the only family I had ever had, my teacher. He captured Leia and Han and tortured them, knowing that I would feel it in the Force and try to rescue them." He finished simply, "I fought him, he beat me, he cut off my hand and then told me he was my father. At the time, I didn't think I could live with the knowledge and tried to kill myself." He gazed moodily out, a light pooling under the window in the night. As an after thought, he concluded. "The second time, the Emperor and my father figured out the lever that would move me, and it almost did."

Her voice was shaking, "Lever?"

"Han and Leia again, and all the others in the Alliance. That I would die, that they would all die, that I wouldn't be able to protect them, and that Leia would be turned to the Darkside."

Another heavy silence weighed on them, muted, suffocating. After a time, Scully offered the only inadequacies she could, "I'm sorry." The doctor in her was unable to resist looking at his hand, trying figure out where skin ended and prosthetic began.

He waved off her sympathy. "Everyday is a struggle. I wanted to..." He searched for the words, fighting back a fresh surge of anger, "...strike out and kill Adams and your Cancer Man for what they were doing to Mara. I wanted to hurt them for hurting her. I don't think you can understand how badly I wanted that."

He was wrong. She could. Her mind flooded with images of Mulder pointing a .45 at his own head and pulling the trigger, his will completely eclipsed by a madman. She felt the familiar lump in her throat growing bigger as her memory shifted to when he had turned that gun on her. She'd been absolutely certain that he would not shoot her,

the look of agony in his eyes and fully understood what this was doing to him, to her best friend, she'd resolved to kill Modell, no matter what it took. Mulder had ultimately made the decision for her, but she had known then that she would kill to not only to protect him, but to avenge him.

Her next words deepened his own rising sense of futility and helplessness. "Can't you kill to protect others? Adams and Cancer Man are likely to wreak havoc, cause the deaths of more innocent people."

He offered an explanation that seemed rather hollow now. "Perhaps they can be turned back to the good side of the Force--"

Scully's short burst of laughter underscored his own doubts. That's a bit naive, wouldn't you say? I can tell you from experience that Cancer Man isn't going to be donning a white hat any time soon." Thoughts of Missy clouded her head. With bitterness, Scully murmured, "Not every one is redeemable."

He reached over and lifted the cross at the base of her throat. "Isn't your own religion based on that very tenet? On the idea that everyone is?"

She had not known until the words came out of her mouth. "The God I thought I knew would not have let that man kill Missy." With an act of will she kept her lip still, and her voice even. "A loving God would not have let that man abduct me and steal the memory of it." Scully blanched, turning away, sickened at her despairing confession.

He could only dimly comprehend how profoundly this loss of faith and trust had wounded her. Luke softly pierced the miserable haze, whispering low. "Will you let me try?"

"What?" Her voice wavered, recoiling at what she feared he would propose.

"I might be able to find those memories for you, if you let me in."

let him sift through her thoughts and feelings. That alone made her hesitate. She weighed the fearful burden of not knowing, and the agony of what the knowledge might do to her. Unlike Mulder, she was not driven to seek every truth. If truth was Mulder's holy grail, her's was justice. But justice had not been meted, murderers and kidnappers had walked free without retribution, while she and others important to her had seen their personal losses mount in an awful toll. Only justice done would still the demons she now carried, and that need gave her the courage to face the possible horror of enshrouded memories. Scully bowed her head towards him, a gesture of assent.

Luke buried his fingers in her hair, marveling at the softness, at the trust, then pushed the extraneous aside, to ease into her mind. Aching agonizing minutes passed before he withdrew, stricken, pulling away from her, failure stamped on every feature.

Dana said quietly, "You couldn't find it could you?"

"I tried, I really thought I could. I'm sorry ..." Again, his voice wandered off. He stared at hands, cursing the circumstance that seemingly made it impossible to protect the people closest and most important to him.

They heard an odd burst of laughter from the bedroom. Luke stood hurriedly, quipping, "Well that's a surprise. Maybe she's found something to torture."

Scully stood as well. "Or maybe something else in one of my drawers."

"What?" Luke asked, interest piqued.

"Nevermind," Scully replied quickly, not wanting to have to explain the contents of her underwear drawer to Luke.

Mara burst brightly back into the living room, phone in hand, gesturing with her free hand, "The remote thing for the vid, get it!! Quick!!"

the "vid."

Cursing, "Hang on, Mulder, I can't get it to work."

The expert now, Luke brought the remote with a jerk of the Force, into his hands, interrupting the beginning of Mara's harangue, "What channel?"

"What channel Mulder?" Mara asked impatiently, then blurted, "Twenty-five"

Buffy, California girl and killer of the undead, appeared on the screen. Mara now pulled Dana and Luke by the arms, dragging them to the couch, "Mulder says this is one of the best parts." They all had to agree as Buffy executed a neat somersault, grabbed a stake and hurled it cleanly into the heart of an advancing vampire. Mulder participating by phone, the four watched to the romantic end, Buffy riding off into the sunset on a motorcycle, arms encircling the dashing Luke Perry.

END OF CHAPTER 5

X Jedi 2

by JackeeC, Gheorghe2 and ginef (all @aol.com)

Chapter 6 -- "Guns and Lovers"

Disclaimer in Chapter 1

Alexandria, Virginia
10:00 AM

When Scully, Luke and Mara arrived at Mulder's the next morning, ominously, the television was already tuned to NCAA football pre-game. Han and Mulder were sprawled on the couch with a half-eaten pizza between them, confirming what the crab feast might have left in doubt; Mulder's appalling appetites were admirably suited to Corellian physiology. Apparently not finding Dana's breakfast offerings sufficiently fortifying, Luke launched himself at the couch, the pizza and the remote. A struggle ensued. Slices of Leona's pepperoni and onion, the remote, a football, one alien, sundry and all slid, fell, or were wrestled to the floor.

Leia was working through the Saturday Washington Post, and resolutely ignoring the chaos around her. Her Alderaani nanny had impressed upon her that males were not merely different sexes, but occasionally truly different species. She had years ago perfected her audio and visual filter. With nary a glance at the bummeling, cursing males, Leia stated the obvious, "Dana, Mara, I'm so glad you're here."

Dana raised her voice a little. "I'm sorry Leia. I imagine it's been like this all morning. Did you at least get some coffee or breakfast?"

Leia pointed to a styrofoam cup at her hand. It was tepid, murky brown, and there were things floating in it. "Mulder tried to make something, he called that coffee, but ..." The remainder was interrupted as Mara dove down to avoid the football Mulder had lobbed at her. The pigskin landed with a gentle splat in the sink on top of a pile of dirty, wet paper plates.

Mulder scolded. "Jade, that was a perfect pass. You were supposed to catch it."

Slowly rising, Mara folded her arms across her chest, neither amused nor charmed and offering her very best contemptuous glare. "Any pass of yours is unwelcome, Mulder."

He sauntered by her on the way to the sink, only a fleeting hand at her shoulder acknowledging what had transpired but hours before. Han's voice broke over the din. "Now see, kid, that would have been an incomplete pass. That means the team with the ball will only have three more tries to move 10 yards and then they'd havda punt."

"What's a yard?" Luke asked his mouth full of pizza and his feet hanging over the edge of the sofa.

Mulder tossed the ball at him, "About twice that distance." His aim was no better this time and he hit a lamp.

Dana had had enough. Striding across the room she fetched the remote from the floor and to a chorus of protests, silenced Terry Bradshaw, "Mulder..."

He grinned, geez he loved it when she looked like that, eyes flashing, infuriated, all **at him**. He knew no one could get a rise out of her the way he could. "Scully..." Mulder said, his very suave best with tomato sauce dribbled down the front of his sweatshirt.

"Work, not football, is on the schedule for today. We need you all conscious and alert, not comatose brought on by testosterone poisoning."

"But Scully ..." he whined. "Han and Luke wanna see the Navy-Army game ..."

Han interrupted, "Army-Navy game."

"Navy-Army game," Luke contradicted.

From Han, who was a quick study, "The plebes are gonna whip those shippies"

Leia interrupted with a very large bellow from one so small, "ENOUGH!!!"

Mulder's eyes went wide. "See, now you got my friends in trouble." Scully glared so threateningly, he finally relented, lowering his head with a grin and mock repentance. "Okay, Scully, how many addresses do we have to check out? We can split them up."

Scully withdrew the list, very, very casually saying, "I thought we might take the ones in Virginia."

"We?" Mulder asked quickly.

Damn, this was hard. Scully nodded. "I thought I would take Leia and Mara."

The others were now silently watching the subtle jockeying. Mulder said blandly, "I think that would work. What's in Virginia?"

"A place in Chantilly, a storage warehouse in Haymarket, ... and..."

Mulder stared down at his stammering partner, now pretending suspicion, "Yes?"

It all came out in a rush. "Well, Mulder you can take the boys to Macy's at Tyson's Galleria if you want to but I really wanted to hit the cosmetics counter while we were there."

Hooting male laughter and chagrined female expressions greeted this confession. Mulder now consulted the list, very pleased that he would not have to reveal his own agenda. Within the division, Scully had already made it possible for him to accomplish one objective-- the innocuous home in Rockville was in a neighborhood Mulder knew quite well. The next address was far less interesting, but for the prospect of starting trouble at "Blockbuster in Gaithersburg" was nevertheless intriguing. "Suppose we could become acquainted with some nice matrons driving those dark green sports utility vehicles with the infant carriers and slobbering dogs in the back seat."

Scully was now staring at her partner, trying to discern his purpose and easy acquiescence. She offered, "Well, there's also a work address for a Circuit City, at Montgomery Mall." She hesitated, then offered a compromise. "I suppose we could take that one...."

Mulder interrupted hurriedly, "Nah, I think we can manage one shopping mall."

The talking had gone on long enough; Dana felt a tug, the remote beginning to move involuntarily out of her hand. With a glare, she took a firm grip on it, pointing it at Luke. "Cut it out, Skywalker, or I'll alter your functions." Demonstrating a

chest as if stricken by a command to change his vertical hold, and did a neat flip over the side of the couch. With some effort she returned to her hysterical partner, saying again "Mulder ..."

"Scully...." he repeated.

She ignored his teasing mimicking mirth. "Do you think you can manage a day without killing, starving or losing our aliens from outer space?"

He intoned with mock solemnity, "I'll try, Agent Scully."

Luke piped up from the floor, "There is no try, only do," then broke into laughter at his own joke.

Mulder smirked, shrugged and with a glance at a disgusted Mara added, "So, we'll stay in touch, and meet back here."

Han added a serious but redundant warning. "Make sure you're all armed."

Dana surrendered the remote to Mulder. "Anything else?"

"If these addresses don't give us any leads to Adams, Cancer Man and the Urmari, then what?" Mulder asked.

Luke slowly picked himself up from the floor, and with a glance at Mara, quieted her intended snarl. "Then we try something else."

Breaking the tension, Dana moved deliberately back to the table where Mara and Leia were encamped. With distaste she picked up Mulder's notion of coffee and tossed it in the sink, adding the styrofoam cup to the detritus piled there. As Mulder began an explanation of cheerleaders, the ladies swept out of the apartment to a male chorus of "Good bye, dear." When the door slammed shut, Mulder sauntered to the television, and the old fashioned way, increased the volume, just to make certain the ladies would hear it all the way to the parking lot. Standing in front of the TV, he arched a conspiratorial eyebrow at his partners in perversity.

Stretching indolently across the sofa in a posture of disinterest, idly tossing the ball in the air, Han asked, "They gone yet?"

Luke put a cautious finger to his lips, listening for the retreating presences. Catching a whiff of feminine disgust and a car door slamming, he nodded and then let out a sigh of relief. "Mulder, what was that all about? I was worried we were overdoing it."

Han flipped the ball to Mulder who caught it easily, no fumbling or misplaced aim with the audience gone. As Mulder muted the TV, Han answered, "Nah. Although I thought Jade was gonna make fish bait outta Mulder."

Luke laughed, enjoying a bit of private vindication. "Better watch your step with her."

Mulder snapped the ball to Luke, the sound of the leather smacking the hands of the intended receiver indicating some force behind the pass. "And what's it to you, Skywalker?" Mulder asked pleasantly.

Luke turned the ball over, then gently, and without the Force, arced it back to Mulder. "Only that Jade's got a ... what're the words I'm looking for Han?"

Han knew the game here and played into it. "Well, since she stalked you for five years trying to kill you, I'd call it a real well-developed sense of revenge."

"That's it exactly." Luke said, with another smug chuckle. "It'll be fun while it lasts, but be sure we know who your next of kin are."

Mollified, Mulder began with relish, "Soooo, how about we go do a little sightseeing?"

Tyson's Corner, Virginia
11 AM

Without a male to boss around, Mara had settled for the back seat this time, ceding "shotgun" to Leia. As Dana drove into the giant Tyson's Center Mall, the Mecca to northern Virginia consumerism, Mara asked, "So, what is this place, and why are we going here?"

"The lead is a federal tax return for one Benjamin Adams, hair stylist, Macy's Department Store."

Leia observed dryly, touching a heavy braid wrapped around her head, "If your hair stylists are anything like our hair stylists, I don't think Ben Adams will be here."

"Frankly, I don't think so either." Dana arrowed her car into a slot, agreeing. "But you never know, and after our lipstick 101 last night, I thought we should stop at a cosmetics counter."

Leia greeted this news with enthusiasm; Mara was disdainful. "I told you, there is no way I'm wearing colors and powdered stuff on my face when we go back, and anyone who says that I did is a dead woman."

They had to pass through Ladies' lingerie, providing Leia and Mara with the opportunity to behold the hype that was the Wonderbra first hand. Leia's interest waned when she saw the adjacent children's department. To Dana she said, "Just give me a moment would you?" and without waiting for the response wandered toward the toddler toys and clothes.

The paraphernalia were not all that different Leia mused, than what was in her own world. She picked up a soft brown animal with long ears and a dapper blue waist coat, thinking how much Jacen would like it. Clutching the animal, she toured the

striped coveralls would probably fit Jaina by now. Not that there would be any point in plunking down a bag of coins for the outfit; her little girl would have long outgrown the clothes by the time her mother would be able to give them to her.

Leia stroked the stuffed animal's plush fur, now moving towards the infant section. The dependency of her children when they were so small had been hard for her. When Luke had demanded that the twins be hidden, she had reasoned that at least they would be with someone who knew what she was doing. And although she and Han would have died to protect their children, even that parental sacrifice had almost not kept them safe the night Thrawn's commandos cut down the door of their home to steal Jacen and Jaina. So, she had readily agreed that it was better that the twins be guarded from every despot who coveted hostages or Dark Jedi who desired to convert. But Jacen's first word had been "Winter" for their nanny, and Jaina's had been "Noghri" for their bodyguards.

Leia puzzled out the tag on the animal, reading how "Peter Rabbit" had stolen into Mr. MacGregor's garden, lost his coat with the shiny brass buttons, fell into a rain barrel, and did not get berries and cream for dinner. She gently stroked the bunny's ears and reflected on the child who would one day own this toy. What kind of future did he or she have? Palpatine had destroyed the girl Mara had been, shredded whatever remnants of innocence Leia and Luke had ever had, murdered who knew how many billions of children in the War, and now his legacy was poised to visit another generation of misery on this world. She returned Peter to the shelf with his sisters, the good little bunnies, Flopsy, Mopsy and Cottontail, fresh resolve now steeling her soul. The dark plunderings should have ended years ago, should not have seeped into this galaxy, and could not permitted to corrupt childhoods here as well. It was the incentive she needed to press on with this escapade.

Leia rejoined Dana and Mara, who were standing a solemn, melancholy vigil. Dana placed a gentle hand on Leia's arm, but she shrugged it off, "I'm fine. Let's see if Adams is hiding here."

Their approach to the Macy's hair salon was quiet and cautious. At the entrance, Mara stopped hard. "I'm not going in there."

"But" Leia began to object, then discerned Mara's reluctance. "Of course. I can scan the area first."

Dana offered, "You watch our retreat if we need it?" Mara nodded abruptly and melted off to the side entrance to the salon. Leia heard Mara's silent, mental touch, "Stay in contact, holler if anything goes wrong."

Standing quietly, Leia composed herself. She could feel Dana's wondering stare, but ignored it, concentrating first on the people closest, noting their differences, searching for that resonance that came when she found another sensitive in the Force. She reached slowly, moving through the area, one person at a time, losing the sense of time and of physical sensation,

labored gasps, she withdrew, shaking slightly with the effort.
"I don't sense anything in there, or around here. Certainly
nothing like the presence last night."

Dana had tried to shield Leia during the some ten minutes it
had taken. But the salon was next to Housewares, and she could
feign an interest in blenders for only so long, although she did
like the looks of the Margarita pitcher. Dana said briskly,
"Well, let's just check inside to make sure."

A thin, weedy young man, in very fashionable neon stood
behind the redactionist booth. Soft music was piped into the
mauve and dove gray tastefully decorated salon. Leia stilled the
urge to wrinkle her nose at the foul chemical odor. As they
approached the desk, the man looked up and gasped with
astonishment, gaping at Leia. "Darling," he gushed, "You simply
must tell me who braids your hair."

Leia quelled the laugh that bubbled forth, knowing "My
housekeeping droid." would be the wrong answer.

Dana, smirking at the exaggerated mannerisms, spared Leia
the ordeal of such a conversation. "She doesn't speak English
well." Leia nodded idiotically, underscoring the point as Dana
asked, "We're looking for Benjamin Adams. I understand he works
here."

The man glanced at the ledger before him. "Oh, are you my
eleven thirty?" With only their confused looks, he said, "I'm
Bennie, are you my eleven thirty?" He moved artfully across to
Dana and began, uninvited, to run his fingers through her hair.
"Honey, I don't think Miss Clairol Henna Number 3 is really you."

With a laughing all clear from Leia, Mara joined them, spied
Bennie and muttered "trozneyha." Leia gave her a hard nudge to
be more polite. However, the situation quickly escalated, for
Bennie, breaking away from his simultaneous adoration of Leia's
braids, and condemnation of Dana's cut, shrieked on seeing Mara.
"Ladies, ladies, what is with these bad hair days and cheap dye?"

"I don't dye my hair," Mara snapped in Basic.

Bennie's eyes went way wide and he looked at Dana
inquisitively. "She understood what you said, and says she doesn't
dye her hair."

Bennie shook his head, tsking, not believing a word, "Girls,
that is what they all say." Foolishly, unknowingly Bennie boldly
sacheted to Mara, and began fingering her hair. "You need a
deep conditioner, a trim to get rid of the nasty split ends, and
ohhh, that color. What is that, Preference by L'Oreal Brown
Spice?"

Mara growled, "Dana, tell him my hair is red gold."

Dana did so, and Benny just laughed. "So which of you is
first?" The ladies fled.

end (1/5)

From Ginef@aol.com Sun Sep 29 13:51:46 1996
Return-Path: owner-x-files-fanfic@chaos.taylored.com
Received: from chaos.taylored.com (chaos.taylored.com [206.53.224.58])
by sh1.ro.com
(8.6/8.6.9) with SMTP id TAA23921 for <kelsy@ro.com>; Sun, 29 Sep 1996
19:21:04 -0500
Received: (qmail-queue invoked by alias); 29 Sep 1996 18:54:24 -0000
Delivered-To: x-files-fanfic-outgoing@chaos.taylored.com
Received: (qmail-queue invoked by alias); 29 Sep 1996 18:54:19 -0000
Delivered-To:kff-outgoing@chaos.taylored.com
Received: (qmail-queue invoked by uid 1003); 29 Sep 1996 18:53:15 -0000
Received: (qmail-queue invoked from smtpd); 29 Sep 1996 18:52:18 -0000
Received: from emout09.mx.aol.com (HELO emout09.mail.aol.com)
(198.81.11.24)
by chaos.taylored.com with SMTP; 29 Sep 1996 18:52:18 -0000
Received: by emout09.mail.aol.com (8.6.12/8.6.12) id OAA12575 for
x-files-fanfic@chaos.taylored.com; Sun, 29 Sep 1996 14:51:46 -0400
Date: Sun, 29 Sep 1996 14:51:46 -0400
From: Ginef@aol.com
Message-ID: <960929145146_320136224@emout09.mail.aol.com>
To: x-files-fanfic@chaos.taylored.com
Subject: NEW: X Jedi 2: A Cross Over -- Chapter 6 (2/5)

X Jedi 2

Chapter 6 (2/5)

Disclaimer in Chapter 1

by JackeeC, Gheorghe2 and ginef (all @aol.com)

Montgomery County, Maryland
11:45 AM

"So, what is it we're REALLY doing, Mulder?" Han asked as they arced off the Washington beltway on to a wide, busy and truly ugly suburban shopping strip. He was all for going along with misleading the women, but now it was time for Mulder to fess up. Whatever Mulder got them into, Han knew he would have to face Leia afterwards. He had learned long ago that with Leia, knowing was only a matter of time.

Mulder grinned wickedly. "Relax. I told you, we're just going to check out the addresses, have a little fun, do a little... sightseeing."

Han and Luke exchanged wary looks. Neither thought Mulder seemed like the tourist type. Even without Force-enhanced suspicions, both figured there was going to be plenty of explaining to do before day's end.

Luke looked on with interest as Mulder brought the car to a stop beside a large metallic box and slid a thin card into the slot. "What's this place?" he asked.

"Oh, an ATM. Automated Teller Machine." Mulder explained as

gives you money, for a nominal fee, of course."

"We've got money," Luke offered, shoving the bag of coins over the seat to jangle near Mulder's ear. Although Luke thought the thin cards that Dana and Mulder had used to pay for dinner were more efficient, he had brought the bag of this planet's money along just in case.

Han injected, "Yeah, Mulder, we actually should stop at a phone booth and get some more."

Mulder chimed back a laugh at the logo on the side of the bag. "Uh...no, that's okay," he managed. "My treat."

Fifteen minutes later they pulled up to a typical suburban home, children's toys littering the front, neat rows of orange and yellow mums dotting the walk and a Humvee parked in front. A bumper sticker on the back bumper read, "Lawyers Do It In Their Briefs." One look at the place, and Mulder, Han and Luke all muttered with one voice, "I don't think so."

Sitting in the car, Luke nevertheless went through the routine, scanning the area through the Force. "There is a man, a woman, three children I think, and some animals."

Mulder got out of the car, "You two wait here, I won't be long."

Han and Luke watched as he went to the front door, and spoke with the woman, and then the man who appeared at the threshold. Monitoring the tenor of the conversation, Luke picked up a very strong, visceral, and distasteful reaction from Mulder. He told Han, "Mulder is very disturbed about something."

Han was halfway out the car before Luke stopped him. "No, nothing alarming... just disagreeable."

Mulder returned a few moments later, face screwed into a grimace. As he started the car, Han asked, "What happened Mulder? We almost came after you."

Shaking his head with disgust, Mulder swore. "I wasn't in danger unless I tripped on the Big Wheel in Adams' front yard or rear ended his suburban assault vehicle."

The translators were ineffective, Luke asking, "Uh, in English please Mulder."

"Sorry. I just really hate those guys," Mulder muttered with revulsion.

"Who?" Han and Luke both asked, mystified.

"Benjamin G. Adams the Third, Esquire. He's a lawyer."

The car reverberated with expressions of loathing and fear, confirming that parasites of one galaxy are indeed much like parasitic life forms in another. Mulder sprinted them away from the True-Green Chem Lawn perfect landscape, thinking, now, even

next stop: food with a view."

A mile later, Mulder pulled the car into the parking lot of a squat orange and brown building. A large orange sign decorated the front with some kind of bird and giant O's where the bird's eyes should be. Han and Luke looked at the sight with mild interest. Mulder's obvious attraction to the place could certainly not be attributed to its outside decor. Perhaps the food was good.

"Come on," Mulder urged as he headed up the wooden walk. Entering the front door, the allure of the restaurant was immediately apparent as a young woman dressed in a gravity-defying halter top approached. "Smoking or non?" she asked with a smile.

Luke made an effort not to gape, while Han and Mulder returned the pleasantries. "Non," Mulder answered.

"Right this way then." She grabbed three menus and swayed towards a table. Seating the human and two aliens, she motioned another young woman near the bar. "Drinks?"

Believing in contributions to the franchise, even if it meant inappropriate product placements, Mulder spoke for the group, "Pepsi, all around."

Luke was thinking something to drink might be a good idea since his mouth had just gone dry. "Very good," the hostess purred with a dazzling flash of white teeth. "Holly, your waitress, will be with you in just a moment."

"Sightseeing, huh?" Han murmured in Mulder's direction as the hostess swung toward the bar.

"...and a little physics all rolled into one," Mulder deadpanned, as Holly now approached.

Holly's hair was almost as big as the blonde from the night before, Han noted with detached interest. And she was similarly providing instructive lessons in the science of movement and gravity. "I'm Holly, and I'm here to serve you today." She set the three drinks on the table, then slid into the fourth seat, smiling so broadly her jaw might crack. "Are you ready to order or do you need more time?"

"Uh...we're ready," Mulder spoke up. "Three manly-man combination platters."

"Okay." Holly smiled her approval and laboriously wrote the request down on a little pad, one careful letter after another. "And would you like yours' mild, hot or really hot?" she turned boldly, with an extra large smile, to ask Luke.

The Jedi flushed deep red, embarrassment rendering him even more inarticulate than usual around the fairer sex. "Uh...?" He looked pleadingly to Mulder for assistance, but the FBI agent was choking on his Pepsi.

"Oh, I can tell. You're shy." She gently touched his arm.
"I'll bet you like your's *really* hot."

Luke jumped as Han kicked him under the table, Holly evidently taking the startled prod as a "yes." "I thought so." She smiled and turned to the other two men for their preferences. As she swung one deliberate hip at a time away from them towards the kitchen, Mulder and Han burst into laughter as Luke dropped his face into his hands, mortified. "Just try not to drool, okay, kid? It embarrasses us." Han chortled.

Mulder was about to make a comment of his own when familiar theme music and raucous laughter spilled out of the slowly closing doors of a private meeting room. A young, blonde waitress, leaving the room, was juggling a tray of empty beer mugs and wearing a very disgusted look and, Han discerned, another of those anti-gravity devices that seemed so common in the restaurant. Mulder waved her over. "What's going on in there?"

With a weary sigh, she confessed the ugly truth to an incredulous, and thrilled, Mulder. "You're kidding?" He asked with barely contained excitement.

"I wish I were."

Mulder glanced at his friends, then uttered a distracted, "Be right back."

Luke and Han watched curiously as Mulder sauntered towards the room. As he disappeared behind the swinging door, Luke said, "You know, I've got a really bad feeling about this."

A moment later, Mulder poked his head out of the door, and waved his friends over.

Luke and Han entered the meeting room with mild trepidation and cautiously peered around at the dozen or so individuals staring fixedly at a large vid screen centered along the far wall. When a dark-haired man carrying a fuzzy ball-like object appeared on the vid, every man in the room shouted, "Drink!" and tossed back the yellowish liquid Han and Luke had come to know as "beer."

They looked to Mulder for explanation. "Trouble with Tribbles drinking game," he answered with a grin, then added, "Welcome to the Hooter's Fifth Annual Redneck Trouble With Tribbles Convention.

* * *

On Macy's first floor, Dana was, like the investigative agent she was, scanning the cosmetic counters. With glee, she grabbed Mara in one hand and Leia in the other and dragged them towards the white, silver, and green displays to stand in line with ten other impatient women. If Leia went willingly, Mara was more

Clinique Bonus Time Again."

Dana gushed, "Clinique is offering a really good bonus this month, so I thought we should pick something up."

Leia was stunned. "Dana," she asked, "Is Clineek the name of a brand of women's cosmetics here too?"

"Well, I think the pronunciation is a little different, and I doubt very much that Clinique here has licensed a franchise in your galaxy. Examining the eye shadows, Dana added, "And besides, the line is copyrighted and trademarked. A galaxy's distance would not keep the copyright attorneys from protecting the Clinique intellectual property."

Leia simply nodded, bewildered.

There was a rude growl from Mara as she inspected the sample blushes and highlighters on the counter. With an evil glint, she asked "Leia, wasn't Clineek one of Rogue's Squad's old attack patterns during the War?"

"Mara, you **know** there's no truth whatsoever to those old rumors," Leia said through a scowl.

Dana did not miss the edge that had crept into the conversation, even through the translator. "Rogue Squad?"

Leia became mute with a glare at Mara, who went on with merry malice, "Rogue was Skywalker's old flight squad during the War. They had a flight maneuver they called Attack Pattern Clineek, named after a brand of high-priced women's cosmetics. Let's say that it fueled certain rumors . . ."

Leia flushed, with a little anger, more humor, and knowing just the comeback, "Mara, are you saying that you don't know the truth by now from personal experience?"

Their approach to the counter prevented any further salvos, Dana buying Dubonnet lipstick for Leia and First Blush for herself. Mara resolutely refused, only to relent when she saw the wisdom of a bottle of Dramatically Different Moisturizer for those long, intergalactic space trips. All received their bonus packages.

On the return to the car, Leia first and then Mara stopped dead, transfixed, puzzled expressions on their faces. That their abrupt halt occurred in a revolving door out of the Mall nearly caused a serious accident. With Han's example, Dana was beginning to identify the symptoms-- "Crazy Jedi Thing". Without a word, she hurriedly dialed Mulder's cell phone. In the background she heard loud music that nearly drowned out the voice, "Mulder."

"Mulder, it's me. What's going on?" With one hand she was holding the phone and with the other extricating Mara and Leia from the door.

The unmistakable words "DRINK" echoed over the phone.

Leia and Mara were now listening, Leia explaining, "I was picking up some very strange feelings and images from Luke. Mara did too."

Scully heard again "DRINK!!" and what she thought was Mulder's muffled laughter. "Mulder, where did you take them?"

More laughter, then Mulder's voice. "Well, we checked out the first address, wrong Adams. And we were hungry, and you **told** me not to starve or lose them, so we stopped at a restaurant."

Scully heard "Drink! Drink! Drink!" and the more disconcerting sounds of men hooting. She suddenly remembered where that first address was on Mulder's list and what establishments were in the immediate vicinity; establishments that she knew appealed to her partner's proclivities. "Mulder!" she said the name like a curse. "You didn't!!."

"Uh huh."

"You took Han and Luke to ... !!" Dana could not finish the sentence, simply too mortified to words.

"Uh huh."

She hung up on him, fuming, infuriated. Leia and Mara were staring, leaving Dana to wonder just what images from Luke had prompted the reaction in the first place. She definitely agreed with Han; there was not enough money in the universe that would be worth that kind of telepathic link with someone.

Leia looked a little flushed, exasperation, anger and amusement warring across her face. "Why do I think that I will be demanding an explanation from my husband?"

end (2/5)

From Ginef@aol.com Sun Sep 29 13:52:04 1996
Return-Path: owner-x-files-fanfic@chaos.taylored.com
Received: from chaos.taylored.com (chaos.taylored.com [206.53.224.58])
by sh1.ro.com
(8.7.6/8.6.9) with SMTP id TAA31216 for <kelsy@ro.com>; Sun, 29 Sep 1996
19:42:21 -0500
Received: (qmail-queue invoked by alias); 29 Sep 1996 18:54:25 -0000
Delivered-To: x-files-fanfic-outgoing@chaos.taylored.com
Received: (qmail-queue invoked by alias); 29 Sep 1996 18:54:20 -0000
Delivered-To: xff-outgoing@chaos.taylored.com
Received: (qmail-queue invoked by uid 1003); 29 Sep 1996 18:53:32 -0000
Received: (qmail-queue invoked from smtpd); 29 Sep 1996 18:52:36 -0000
Received: from emout09.mx.aol.com (HELO emout09.mail.aol.com)
(198.81.11.24)
by chaos.taylored.com with SMTP; 29 Sep 1996 18:52:35 -0000
Received: by emout09.mail.aol.com (8.6.12/8.6.12) id OAA12651 for
x-files-fanfic@chaos.taylored.com; Sun, 29 Sep 1996 14:52:04 -0400
Date: Sun, 29 Sep 1996 14:52:04 -0400
From: Ginef@aol.com

To: x-files-fanfic@chaos.taylored.com
Subject: NEW: X Jedi 2: A Cross Over -- Chapter 6 (3/5)
Sender: owner-x-files-fanfic@chaos.taylored.com
Precedence: bulk
X-IDL: 5c475632ffb438ed5dab2c9122f7ce5e

X Jedi 2

Chapter 6 (3/5)

Disclaimer in chapter 1

by JackeeC, Gheorghie2 and ginef (all @aol.com)

* * *

After Scully hung up, Mulder directed them to a table in the back. "Souvenirs," he explained. "You have to have something to remember this galaxy by." A sign on the table stated: Tribble Accessories.

"Luke," Mulder, handed a black T-shirt to the Jedi, "this is for you, and Han, this one's for you. These are for the girls." Mulder held up three pink shirts with the words: "I accessorize with Tribbles." Mulder also snagged a plastic bag filled with the varicolored furballs. Just what Scully would want for Christmas, he was certain. Mulder was already wearing his choice for a T-shirt. "What do the Enterprise and toilet paper have in common?" was splattered across the front beneath a still of a space ship. Turning, he displayed the back of the shirt for Han and Luke, which meant nothing to his two friends, aside from the picture's uncanny resemblance to the seventh planet in the Earth's system.

Luke wiggled into his shirt and gazed down at the indecipherable words printed across the front: "I'm an EBE in the highest order."

"What's an EBE?" Luke asked.

Mulder grinned. "Oh nothing," he said breezily, not about to admit that it was ufologist speak for "Extraterrestrial Biological Entity."

Han's shirt had one word: "Engage." "What does Han's say?" Luke murmured warily, unsure if he really wanted to know. There was something about Mulder's sense just now.

Mulder was saved from a reply when the word "Drink!" was again yelled in unison around the little room, followed by frantic guzzling of more beer and boisterous laughter.

"What'd you say this was again, Mulder?" Han asked with interest.

"The Trouble with Tribbles drinking game," Mulder explained again. "You see a tribble, you drink. You see a Klingon, you drink. Simple rules."

"Tribbles? Klingons?" There was obviously no translation into Basic for those words.

"Yeah," Mulder pointed out the furry critters on the wide screen. "And the green guys with the funny eyebrows are the Klingons."

"What? You never heard of Star Trek?" one of the men boomed louder than was necessary from nearby table.

"Careful," Mulder murmured. "Watch yourself. These trekkies tend to get a little up tight about--"

"Who you calling a TREKKIE?!" A burly bearded man wearing green vulcan ears grabbed Mulder about the collar and shoved him toward the table.

"My mistake," Mulder held up a hand to ward off the angry giant. "Trekker."

After a lingering look, the assailant man growled under boozy breath, "No problem. We just take exception to that label." The man's face then burst into a wide grin and he clapped a beefy arm painfully around Mulder's shoulders. "I like you!" he announced. "Come on over here and sit down."

"No...I can't," Mulder objected. "My friends and I have our food waiting...out..." he pointed vaguely in the direction of the dining room.

"Sit!" the man commanded pulling up a chair. He spied Han and Luke edging towards the door and ordered, "Tell your friends to come, too."

Catching a desperate look from Mulder, Han muttered to Luke, "Better do a Jedi thing, real quick."

Luke nodded, and with a deep breath and flick of his finger, Mulder's new found, voluble, volatile friend collapsed, sliding with a crash to the floor and almost bringing Mulder down with him. Mulder bolted up, getting clear of the wreckage.

The rednecks all rose as to the man, indignant that one of their own had been struck down. Ignorant to the cause, but suspicious as to the means, they turned on the strangers in their midst. "He hit Chris!!" a man shouted. Picking up a chair, he hurled it in Luke's general direction, large men in yellow and red polyester shirts and strange ears following right behind the chair.

Fists, chairs, beer, Trekkers, ears and fur flew, finally interrupted with the squealing whistle of the Hooter's bouncer. He hustled Han, Luke and Mulder out of the room. The three were none the worse for the exercise. The same could not be said for the bloodied noses and black eyes the rednecks now sported. The very irritated management insisted that Mulder fork over his VISA card to cover the costs for the t shirts, three Pepsi's, three manly-man-meals-to-go, four broken chairs, a tray of smashed mugs and thirty-five beer-soaked tribbles.

Haymarket, Virginia
110 PM

An electric blue oldsmobile screeched to a sudden stop. It then reversed until it was even with an old mailbox, mostly obscured by tall grass, looking as if the next stiff breeze would be its last.

The two red heads and the brunette gazed measuringly at the first sign of life for the past 10 miles. The faded, peeling remnants of the words 'Rural Storage, Inc.' marked the old box as the object of their search.

"This must be the place." Dana was the first to speak.

"Doesn't look like anyone's been here in a while, though," Leia pointed out, looking beyond to a narrow dirt path nearly overtaken by tall grass and assorted natural debris.

"Appearances can be deceiving," Mara spoke up. Something about this place didn't sit well with her. And it wasn't the furry woodland creatures.

Dana, quietly agreeing with Mara, cast a look back down the narrow road. It stretched as empty behind them as it had during the majority of their journey. Satisfied that they had not been followed, she pulled slowly on to the dirt path.

The car twisted and bumped along the narrow path for another mile or two before the top of a large brick structure became visible through the trees. Dana pulled to a stop where the path ended, at a barbed-wire fence and sturdy metal gate, complete with a padlock and KEEP OUT sign.

They approached the barrier cautiously, peering through the wire at the decrepit warehouse. "Do you think they mean us?" Mara asked dryly when she saw the sign's translation on Leia's scanner. Her blaster was already out of her holster.

"No, Mara, wait!" Dana exclaimed as Mara took casual aim. "We don't want to leave any evidence that might lead to us, or be otherwise unexplainable. Give me a sec."

Mara and Leia exchanged curious looks as the red headed FBI agent headed for her trunk at a jog. She reappeared with a large device vaguely resembling a pair of giant pliers. Both moved in for a better view as she slid the device around the lock and with a grunt, pushed the two handles together. The lock snapped in two.

While the other women looked on, unimpressed, Dana efficiently picked up the pieces and headed back toward her trunk.

Mara watched her go, eyeing the unwieldy contraption disdainfully. She could think of half a dozen better ways to deal with such a pesky and archaic device. None of them involved much

world, their ridiculous tools.

The warehouse sat several dozen yards beyond the gate and was surrounded by a lower gate. To one side was a circular cement-topped clearing with green markers around its perimeter.

"Helipad." Dana stated, gesturing for the benefit of her companions. "They can airlift things in here. That explains why that road wasn't used. I wonder what a little--" Suddenly the sound of sneaking motion interrupted.

All three women snapped to high alert status, all eyes focused on the gate, weapons waiting.

There was no one there.

The low gate had simply been left unlatched, swinging gently in the fluttering, warm breeze.

Dana and Leia lowered their weapons with shaky sighs. Mara, however, did not, continuing to scan the area. "Do you sense anyone here?" she asked Leia.

Leia shook her head, understanding. Though there was all manner of life, she had not as yet detected any other humans. "No. Nothing Force sensitive, anyway."

Mara nodded her acceptance. Still, each whether fed by the Force, or some other instinct of training and self-preservation, kept her weapon at the ready as they started toward the open gate. The fact that the cement walkway and the mass had been cared for recently did not go unnoticed.

Expecting the warehouse to reflect the same crumbling disuse and decay as the fences and road, it was instead, tight and securely shuttered, and thoroughly impenetrable. "Should we just ring the bell?" Dana observed as they approached the front door. The door itself was unusually tall and wide with no visible handles or knobs, only a small recessed control pad. Dana couldn't recall having ever seen one of its like. Leia and Mara, though, had no such trouble.

Seeing the glance pass between Leia and Mara, Dana queried, "What is it?"

"Standard Imperial locking device," Mara uttered the words grimly. This was the place.

"Can you break it?" Leia asked

Mara was already at work. "If they've stuck to the standard code structure, there should be a back door for little old me," she said with an edge of bitterness. Swiftly entering the code, the three stepped back, gazing expectantly at the big door.

Nothing happened.

"And then again, there's more than one way to filet an ewok." In one fluid motion, Mara retrieved her lightsaber and

another swath and another, creating a ragged doorway. She stood back with a satisfied smile. "Leia?"

Leia returned the smile, "My pleasure, Mara dear." And Leia Organa Solo, New Republic Senator, expertly kicked the 'door' in.

Seconds after the plate hit the floor, Leia and Mara were inside, swallowed up by the dark interior. Dana entered a little slower, her eyes having been caught by what used to be six inches of some quasi-metallic material, melted and singed where it had contacted the blade. So much for leaving no evidence. A heavy metallic clang drew her out of her hypnotic study of Mara's handiwork.

Gun ready, she turned toward the sound, Leia and Mara at either side. The clanging continued, drawing closer in the thick darkness. All three women dashed away from the light that filtered into the door, seeking scant cover in the gloom. At their movements, the sounds picked up the pace, moving more quickly toward their position.

Mara reached out with the Force, searching for the source and was surprised to find nothing. A second later she lost touch with the Force all together. It was obvious from Leia's gasp that she'd felt it too.

"What?!" Dana whispered aloud with sudden dread. "What is it?!"

"Something's blocking the Force," Leia replied. "Probably ysalamiri."

"Ysalamiri?" Dana echoed.

Mara muttered something the translator didn't even bother with. "They repel the Force. If Leia or I are within their sphere, we can't reach the Force." As the metal thunking grew ever closer, Mara swore again, and turning toward the sounds, ran off into the darkness.

"Mara!" Dana hissed into the darkness, then spun toward Leia. "What's she doing?"

"Oh, just being Mara," Leia shrugged. "Ideas?"

"Yeah, feel along the walls and let me know if you find anything."

Both women edged along the cool concrete. Dana was the one to find it. "I think I got it," she called to Leia. Leia's reply was cut off by a loud curse and a metal clang.

"Mara!" Leia called out worriedly as Dana clicked the breakers in rapid succession, dimly illuminating the cavernous space.

Dana's relief at the small victory was short-lived. The light revealed Mara tangled at the foot of what looked to Dana to be the cartoon Giagantor robot of her youth come to life. It

toward the breaker box where she stood.

Meanwhile, Mara scuttled up from the floor, barely even with the thing's jointed kneecap. "There!" Leia yelled, calling to Mara. "The pack on its back. The ysalamiri are in there." Dana saw small furry, mammal-like creatures staring out of a transparent pack affixed to the robot's back.

Spying it too, Mara quickly ignited her light saber, throwing it up toward the pack. She scored a direct hit. The case shattered and fizzled out, killing the animals inside. In mid-air the light saber arched unnaturally and came to rest in Mara's right hand. The blaster was already firing in her left.

At the first sign of aggression, the robot's once flat black pupils, began to glowed. A moment later twin bursts of flashing laser fire shot out, tearing up the concrete floor around its intended prey.

Leia and Dana, not to be left out of the fun, took the opening and moved in toward the robot as it shot another laser salvo at the former assassin. As Mara blocked a burst with her light saber, Leia came up on one side of the robot, firing her blaster toward the left side of the monster's head. Its glowing pupils split tasks, one focused on Mara and the other on Leia. The laser battery alternated between the two women, churning up cement shrapnel with each blast.

Realizing the thing's attention was divided, Dana seized the moment. Ducking behind a crate, she aimed for the eyes directly. Taking out one of the laser batteries would give Leia and Mara some relief. A squeeze of the trigger, and one of the red pupils exploded in a flash of smoke and fire. The other burst in a shower of sparks seconds later as the one set off the explosion in the other.

In the aftermath, the robot tilted forward and crashed to the warehouse floor. Mara and Leia were standing over it breathing heavily when Dana approached. She gave it an experimental nudge with her foot, "What is this thing?"

"It's a BUF220 robo-sentry," Leia informed them. "And obviously protecting something pretty important. Looks like from over there." A door stood invitingly open at the opposite end of the warehouse. "What say we have a look?"

"BUF?" Mara queried as the women started off toward the door. "I don't remember that one. Was it Imperial?"

Leia nodded. "Actually it was Old Republic commercial, Big Ugly...uh, it was a project that never really got off the ground. They were used for diplomatic transport and as sentries. Residential guardians of sorts. Unfortunately they had a bad habit of ...um, eliminating their charges. It seems that many diplomats exhibited the same erratic behavior as criminals."

Dana harmumped. "Well, Robocop should feel right at home in this galaxy."

choked on that word.

"Nevermind," Dana murmured. They were at the door, and all were surprised to find that it was an elevator.

All three women stepped cautiously inside. The only choice available was down. Dana did the honors. When the elevator finally came to a stop, all three women felt that they were ready for whatever lay on the other side of the door. None were.

The sounds of creaching insects and wild life spilled into the elevator as the doors opened, followed by dense, cool humidity. The three stepped stunned out into what appeared to be for all intents and purposes a chilly jungle. The sound overhead of a large slithering creature and scales against foliage brought them all around sharply. Mara shot it. It hit the ground with watery thunk and continued to twitch.

Mara shot it again.

Dana tried to hide the chills, not entirely due to the cold, that she got at the sight and sound of the maliciously fanged and very large lizard's last dying scruples. She did not want to think of whether or not it had buddies, or what those buddies ate. That speculation abruptly ceased when her eyes fell on something glowing white along a row of giant black leafed plants. The unmistakable shape of a human skull told the story.

When she turned to report her findings she saw that Leia and Mara had vanished among the dark, damp foliage. She cast about, gun drawn, trying to discern what had happened to the women. Her heart skipped a beat and must have stopped altogether when she heard blaster fire coming from within the forest.

"...that should do it," Mara was saying as she stowed her blaster in a holster. She and Leia stood examining a small grouping of trees, all smoldering. They glanced up casually at Dana's rapid approach.

"What? That should do what?" Dana knew her voice was a little higher than usual.

Mara leveled her with a considering look before answering. "Ysalamiri have a symbiotic relationship with these trees. They feed off of them, live in them." Mara explained. "Or used to," she smirked. Gazing around the habitat for something else to use for target practice, her expression suddenly froze.

A low growl sounded to the left of the little group. A second later, a hulking black shadow of a creature with a writhing whip-like tail shot through the air toward Mara. Dana and Leia had their weapons up in a flash, the creature was dead before it hit the ground.

"Vornskrs!" Mara swore, kicking at the dead animal. "And there's more coming this way."

"How many?"

a clue as to the direction the attack might come from.

Dana checked her gun and prepared for the assault. It was a short wait. One snarling gray shape hurled itself at Mara as another leaped from a tree directly in front of Dana, crouching, to spring. Mara shot the first. Dana blocked out what the animal's rendering front claws and fangs would do to her. As the vornskr lunged, Dana got off two shots and Mara added blaster fire. With the combined impact, the thing flipped over, its momentum knocking Mara to the ground face first. In the next instant, snapping vornskrs streamed into the smoky clearing.

Another of the howling creatures was stalking Leia, who was backed up to a tree. She shot it in mid-leap, and it fell heavily, landing on top of Mara and its fallen companion. Mara struggled to free herself from beneath two heavy, foul, black carcasses.

Mara had her light saber trained on another as Leia fended off two more of the advancing creatures. Leia buried blaster bolts into one as Dana squirmed free to fire off her remaining rounds into the other. How many had Mara said there were? Seven?

Leia had obviously already come to the same conclusion because she too was frantically searching the dense foliage for any sign of the final animal. Dana struggled to her feet, slapping another round in her gun, joining Leia in an anxious scan.

Just as Mara sliced the head off the animal that had been circling her, the last vornskr appeared silent and deadly. It timed its attack beautifully, as Mara was most vulnerable, pulling her saber from the decapitated vornskr. Its tail whipped out to strike her around the neck. Mara barely saw it coming.

Leia vaulted forward, slicing the tail off as Dana buried two shots into the vornskr's exposed flank. Its hind quarters smashed Mara in the shoulder, knocking her to the ground. Her light saber rolled into the bush.

The wounded animal landed several feet away, howling ferociously with pain. In a half a second it focused its rage on a slightly stunned Mara. She turned over just in time to see it spring.

Dana shot again, as Mara, rolling out of the path of the leaping vornskr, called a blaster into her hand and nailed the creature in the head. Leia, simultaneously, threw her light saber end over end at the creature in mid-lunge.

When all was said and done, the creature was shot by three bullets, blasted in the head and sliced by Leia's saber. Very dead. Unfortunately, Leia had not yet mastered the art of calling the saber back to her after an end over end toss. It landed tip first into one of the reinforced walls before automatically closing down.

"Oops," Leia murmured as a thin spray of water erupted from

"I think you hit a pipe," Dana informed her. The water was beginning to come in faster.

"You know," Leia spoke up, reclaiming her lightsaber. "I think we've more than met our damage quota. Let's get out of here."

end (3/5)

From Ginef@aol.com Sun Sep 29 13:52:20 1996
Return-Path: owner-x-files-fanfic@chaos.taylored.com
Received: from chaos.taylored.com (chaos.taylored.com [206.53.224.58])
by sh1.ro.com
(8.7.6/8.6.9) with SMTP id UAA06920 for <kelsy@ro.com>; Sun, 29 Sep 1996
20:06:13 -0500
Received: (qmail-queue invoked by alias); 29 Sep 1996 18:54:46 -0000
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Received: (qmail-queue invoked from smtpd); 29 Sep 1996 18:52:52 -0000
Received: from emout05.mx.aol.com (47.20 emout05.mail.aol.com)
(198.81.11.96)
by chaos.taylored.com with SMTP; 29 Sep 1996 18:52:52 -0000
Received: by emout05.mail.aol.com (8.6.12/8.6.12) id OAA09806 for
x-files-fanfic@chaos.taylored.com; Sun, 29 Sep 1996 14:52:20 -0400
Date: Sun, 29 Sep 1996 14:52:20 -0400
From: Ginef@aol.com
Message-ID: <960929145220_320135552@emout05.mail.aol.com>
To: x-files-fanfic@chaos.taylored.com
Subject: NEW: X Jedi 2: A Cross Over -- Chapter 6 (4/5)
Sender: owner-x-files-fanfic@chaos.taylored.com
Precedence: bulk
X-UIDL: 32fb32058eca6765f26a94b6e3512cde

X Jedi 2

Chapter 6 (4/5)

Disclaimer in Chapter 1

by JackeeC, Gheorghe2 and ginef (all @aol.com)

Gaithersburg, Maryland
2:15 PM

Mulder had warned them, but the intrepid aliens had assumed that after Death Stars, Dark Jedi and wampas, how bad could it be, right? Nothing however, had prepared them for the pandemonium of a suburban video store on a Saturday. Dodging the minivans, matrons, toddlers and Golden Retrievers, they wove their treacherous way into the Blockbuster. With a phone jammed in his ear, glasses askew, multi-colored spiky hair, and pierced nose, Ben Adams, assistant manager, was simultaneously arguing with a woman about a late charge for "Red Shoe Diaries," stacking

black celluloid tape of "Sabrina" with a pencil.

Mulder's cell rang again while he was paying for previously viewed copies of "Reality Bites" and "Dracula." He let go of his newly acquired treasures only long enough to put the phone to his ear. "Mulder." He listened a moment before speaking again. "Vornskrs?" he asked, bewildered, fumbling for bag and wallet.

Han snagged the phone from Mulder, and he and Luke headed out the door. Mulder rejoined them as Luke and Han were disconnecting; grim concern stamped on their features. "Vornskrs?" Mulder repeated, realizing there was a long story to tell.

Han spoke, "Yeah. No Adams, but we're on the right track. Dana, Mara and Leia just killed a bunch of animals from our galaxy that hunt through the Force. And for good measure, killed a slew of ysalamiri."

Responding to the unasked, Luke explained, "It's an animal that repels the Force. If a Force sensitive person is too close to ysalamiri, he or she loses contact with the Force."

Hurrying now to the car, with nervous glances about them, Mulder queried, "What were they doing in a Virginia warehouse?"

Luke was uncharacteristically harsh. "Palpatine and the Urmari used vornskrs to hunt Force sensitive and ysalamiri to render them helpless. They are probably being used here for a similar purpose."

Back in Mulder's car, they crawled out of the crowded parking lot, now headed to the last Adams on their list. Han finally broke the worried silence, "We're getting closer, aren't we?"

Luke nodded.

Location Unknown

He felt the creature's wrath long before it even entered the building. He had hoped to forestall the encounter, but the Urmari would not be denied their audience. It burst into the smoky, closed room, red eyed and wild, and in a not-too-subtle aside, sporting the form of the late Grand Admiral Thrawn. Saliva dribbled down its chin, more beast than human. Cancer Man remained seated, with years of practice, he was able to face down even the Urmari killing wrath.

"You have heard," the monster accused.

"Yes. Most unfortunate. How many did you lose?"

It hissed, "All that were there are dead. The women killed them all. The Skywalker and the one you called Jade were there.

Now Cancer Man was sharp, "What of the ysalamiri? Do any remain at the Vespiary?"

"Of course some remain," it said, with a malicious, hungry grimace. "We could not feed there otherwise."

He waved his hand irritably, hoping to dismiss the monster. "This is a minor setback. We can continue, the plan is unaffected."

With a glowering, angry stare, it advanced, now standing over the seated, smoky one, "Urmari care nothing of your plan. There is only the bargain and our hunger. There must be compensation for our loss, for this outrage. The Skywalkerers are as difficult here as there. The Vespiary demand Jade."

Animal lust was met in kind, softly, threat lacing the words, "I told you, Jade is mine."

An exhaled, smiling puff, and the Urmari now stepped back, more uncertain, smelling a barter. Licking its lips, it said after a time, "But we must be compensated, or we will not continue our work."

"Of course. I believe we may bargain. I can deliver the elusive Skywalkerers to you personally."

Hunger warred with mistrust, as the monster consulted silently with the others in the Urmari Vespiary. Cancer Man waited.

Finally it spoke. "The loss is too great. Merely delivery of the meat will not suffice. We still will take Jade. You cannot stop us."

With a gesture of finality, Cancer Man extinguished one butt, and deliberately lighted another before continuing. "But my friend, I did not explain **how** I shall deliver them to you."

Route 66
Faquier County, Virginia
2:45 PM

The adrenaline was still pumping as the lethal ladies crawled through the morass of traffic typical to Northern Virginia on a Saturday. Dana had known, at some intellectual level, that Mara and Leia were as fully competent as she. Until she saw them both calmly blast those leaping, raging creatures, however, she had never actually thought of these two petite, cool women as trained killers. Experience had proven otherwise.

Leia looked up from her careful inspection of Mara's hold out blaster. "This is a custom job, isn't it Mara? I've never seen one with this kind of power pack."

"Karrde has a special supplier. He's kept me in blasters and packs for a couple of years now."

"Power's always such a problem with the standard Q2. I really like the configuration. Do you think he could make one for me?" Leia was frankly admiring.

Mara guffawed from the back seat. "I can't quite see a New Republic Councillor with a blaster that's been banned in over twenty systems."

Leia shrugged and returned the weapon to Mara. "My husband carries one that's been banned in more than that, including Coruscant. I'd like to try it."

"Well, you've got a nice looking Defender there," Mara said, peeking over the seat at the blaster cradled in Leia's lap. "That's the new model year isn't it? Dana what do you carry?"

Dana matched the casual one. "It's what we call a semi-automatic. Smith & Wesson Compact, ten millimeter, equivalent to a 40 caliber. FBI standard issue 10. Carries eight rounds in the magazine, that's in the ammunition."

"Eight!!" Mara gasped, aghast, Leia adding her own chagrin, "So in the middle of a fire fight you have to reload?"

"We haven't quite reached blaster technology yet." Dana was a tad defensive.

"Dana, you should try something with real fire power," Leia urged.

She hesitated, then confessed, with a glance at Leia's blaster, "Actually, I'd love to try one."

"Is there somewhere we can go for a little target practice?" Mara was very obliging, having a hankering to try Dana's old-fashioned, but very capable fire arm.

"According to Commonwealth of Virginia property tax records, Benjamin Adams is the proprietor of the Couldn't You Just Die Gun Shoppe. I'm sure we can find a spot nearby."

Flexing her fingers, Leia commented, "Didn't you all get enough vornskr meat?"

Dana saw the opening and asked, "What were those things anyway?"

Mara becoming sullenly mute again left Leia to explain. "As we said, ysalamiri and vornskrs are native to a planet in our galaxy. You can't reach the Force, or use it, sense or be sensed if you are within a ysalamiri Force bubble. Vornskrs are drawn to any Force aura; that's how they hunt."

"So that's why they went after you and Mara?"

hunt and incapacitate Force sensitives here."

Mara added ominously from the back seat, "And I can't see them being all that pleased with us that we killed their pets."

With the looming threat, Leia's fingers convulsively sought the hard, cold metal of her blaster, and then the rounded smoothness of her light saber. "No," she said softly, "I don't imagine they will be very pleased at all."

Couldn't You Just Die
Chantilly, VA

The "Couldn't You Just Die" Gun Shoppe was one of those places that dot rural four lane highways throughout the Southeastern United States. signs proclaiming "Good" as opposed to "palatable," "fresh," or "edible" food; convenience stores; vegetable stands; flea markets; Veterans' of Foreign Wars outposts; gun shops. "CYJD" was typical of the genre; a modest frame building with a giant plastic bear on the roof, just above a bright red sign which declared "GUNS GUNS GUNS."

As Mara and Leia gaped at the not very life like animals, Dana wondered how she was going to explain Mid-America kitsch. She pulled into the gravelly lot, parking next to a gray El Camino with a gun rack and bumper stickers that read "God, Guts And Guns Built America; Let's keep all three" and "God Bless Ollie." The lot was dotted with similarly battered, American made cars, similarly adorned: "Impeach Hillary"; "More people have died in Ted Kennedy's back seat than from nuclear power"; "protected by Smith & Wesson"; and to inflame the ladies' further, "I got it at Hooters." The crack popping of gun shots echoed, prompting Dana's observation, "Sounds like there's a shooting range in the back."

They watched the building from the car. Repeating again the exercise from Macy's, Leia shut her eyes, rhythmically breathing, searching for senses that were invisible to Dana, and which Mara now shunned. She pulled out of her trance with a sigh, "Nothing remotely Force sensitive in the area that I can tell."

Dana muttered, "And probably not much intelligent life either."

They bundled out of the car, all now feeling a bit edgy from their last encounter, but at this location more likely to encounter hazards of the testosterone variety, every bit as alien as a vornskr, and almost as frightening. The ladies entered the building cautiously, moving past the vending machine distributing nightcrawlers, and cardboard signs declaring "Live Bait" and "Booze and Ammo Sold Here."

The inside was as inspiring as the outside was not: floor to ceiling weapons. Mara and Leia both gasped, awed. It was an incredible sight, which save the arsenal, could only be described as post-modern tacky. Multiple animal corpses adorned the store, and, had Mara and Leia had a better grasp of North American

one very large bear holding a copy of "The Road Kill Cookbook" in his long dead paw. Battling for space among the carnage were several ancient video games, including Space Invaders, Scully noted with a twinge of nostalgia. Coolers with an alarming amount of Old Milwaukee and Lucky Lager beer lined the walls.

Again, Mara covering the retreat, Dana and Leia approached the beaten wooden counter of the small crowded shop. Boxes of ammunition, tackle and hermetically sealed Twinkies, evidently long passed their 20 year half-life, were littered over every surface. Fishing flies dangled from the slowly turning overhead fan. More stuffed heads, including a wild boar, a snarling mountain lion, and a gorgeous four point buck were mounted on the walls.

The identity of the proprietor left little doubt. Entrenched behind a cash register, buried in last month's issue of Soldier of Fortune, he was not much taller than Dana and outweighed her by a full measure of her body weight. A T-shirt stretched across his stupendous mid section proclaimed, "I'm Bobby Ben Adams, American Patriot." Dana nevertheless asked the obvious. "We are looking for Benjamin Adams."

He looked over the magazine at Dana and Leia then spit the wad of chew lodged between his lip and gum into a plastic bucket on the floor. He laughed, his shirt pulling rather further and even more improbably, "Well, little ladies, you've found 'em. Did your men say you'd find 'em with me?"

Leia spoke quickly, in Basic, and with an instant distaste, "He's not lying, but I don't like the tenor of his thoughts."

Mara now joined them, lovingly testing the weight and heft of a long hunting knife. "Can we try some of the blasters too?"

Ben's eyes widened, and he leered pleasantly, "Not only pretty girls but foreigners too."

Dana had had enough. She pulled back her jacket and whipping out her badge, flashed it within a belly's distance of Ben's nose. "Mr. Adams, it's Agent Scully to you, FBI. These women are marksmen from the Czech Republic here on an exchange program to test a prototype weapon. If you love your country, show us where we can blow some holes in things."

For emphasis, and looking very serious, Leia now gently set her Drearian Defense Conglomerate Defender new model year on the countertop. It had been a gift from Han before they left, and she was very fond of it. Mara, for good measure, flung the knife with a flick of the wrist, where it embedded solidly in the wall, just past Adams' ear. She smiled, then in an unblinking flash, dropped her hold out blaster into her right hand, bringing it to bear between the eyes of the blanching shopkeeper. "If he's Ben Adams, can I kill him?"

A nervous giggle escaped Adams. "What did she say?"

"She wanted to know if it was a crime in this country to kill rude men who imply that she doesn't know how to shoot," Dana

Another twitter escaped as he stared down the barrel of Mara's evil little blaster. "Agent Scully, you and your guests may take lanes fifteen, sixteen and seventeen. And I'll waive the fee," the now terrified, sweating and magnanimous Adams offered.

"Nonsense." He did flinch as Dana reached into her back pocket for her wallet.

As they made their way out the back, on to the range, Dana saw it, in a daze, by the door and stopped. Mara was already outside, but Leia caught a scent of a sweet memory from Dana and returned to stand next to her. "What is it?" she asked.

"An M-1 Garand. It was a very popular weapon in the navy for years. My father taught me to shoot with one. It's mostly used for drills and parades now."

They both admired the gleaming, elegant construction. Leia lightly caressed her own blaster. "My father," she, like Luke, choked a bit on the words, "My real father, the one who adopted and raised me, was a pacifist. Our whole culture was very opposed to weaponry. But he gave me my first blaster, and taught me the basics. I have very fond memories of those times."

Dana nodded wistfully, "Same for me."

Leia made the suggestion without the need of the Force to prod her, "Can you try it out? Will they let you do that?"

Turning her head over her shoulder with a glance at the observing, smirking Adams, Dana shrugged. "Maybe. But I really shouldn't..."

Mara stuck her head back in, almost whining with impatience, "Come on."

The range was standard, Virginia fare, lined and shielded with large graceful trees, stunted shrubs and barbed wire to keep the unwary and unsuspecting away. The short range, twenty-five/fifty meter lanes were closest, the long distance shooting range over a low rise. The warm September air mingled with the odors of gunpowder, sweat and unwashed male. As they walked along the dirty rocky path of the rear of the range to row fifteen, one by one, the guns fell silent, as each man, from row one to fourteen, stopped to stare at the three slight, tiny, very attractive women.

At their designated row, Dana began setting up the target, a large bull's eye, explaining, "we set the targets up here, and push this button." She did so, and they watched as the target floated down the divided lane on the runner, stopping at the twenty-five meter mark. Although chafing to try Dana's gun, once she handed it over, Mara demanded an explanation of the mechanics of the semiautomatic S&W: the magazine, hammer, the firing pin, discharging the bullet, powder gas recoil, spring follower which forces fresh cartridges up, and the sliding breech block which expels the spent cartridge.

During the explanation, two men from lane fourteen had congregated behind them, not-so-helpfully offering suggestions to Mara and Dana. The largest, a bearded man had a pack of Camels rolled up in the sleeve of his faded yellow t shirt, the significance of which was lost on Leia even after she translated it. "Vote Republican, It's Less Taxing." He snidely commented with a belch, "Hey Billy Ray, the lady's got taste in her S&W."

His companion, shorter, squatter, and more pock-marked, snorted with laughter and a leer. "America-- Love It or Leave It" adorned his shirt. "Jim Bob, you know, it's her man who's got the taste."

Dana, in the midst of her explanation, raised her voice, "Of course Mara, there is a significant debate regarding the merits of the nine versus ten millimeter. I prefer the ten because, although you cannot carry as many bullets, the ten has more mass, so it's more likely to bring my targets down with only one shot. I consider it the perfect balance of nine millimeter compactness and fifty caliber power."

Leia said carefully, in English, "Better for human targets, yes?" Both Mara and Dana responded, "Yes." Jim Bob and Billy Ray took a long step back.

Only after the exhaustive discussion of the semiautomatic pistol did Mara then feel comfortable to fire the weapon. Jim Bob guffawed from row fourteen, "Miss, I'd be glad to show you how to shoot that pretty Smith & Wesson."

Annoyed at this interruption, Mara spoke softly in Basic as she stared down the sight to the target, "Tell him I've killed better men than he."

Dana obliged, "The little lady here asked me to tell you that as an assassin in the Czech secret police, she has shot men better than you."

The burst of rude laughter was silenced as Mara carefully sighted and fired off eight quick shots. The silence became muted whispers among the multiple named men as Mara recalled the target. They all admired her handiwork, eight, neat clean holes, dead center.

Now it was Leia's turn, and she, like Mara insisted upon the same explanation, then reloaded herself. Overhearing Billy Ray whisper to Jim Bob, "I wonder if she worked for the Secret Police too," Dana responded, "No, this little lady was in the Czech Underground."

Leia fired off her eight rounds, then commented blandly, "I didn't expect it to kick back so much."

"Whatcha expect Leia? It's a slug-thrower," Mara offered with a mild snort.

"It's called recoil," Dana explained. She added softly, "I suppose artificial gravity and energy beams make you forget Newton's rules."

Dana pushed the button, and the target floated back, as Mara asked, "Newton? What kind of creature is that?"

"Person, not animal," Dana said. She and Mara complimented Leia's shooting, which although not quite as clean as Mara's was nevertheless impressive. Billy Ray and Jim Bob now beat a hasty, embarrassed retreat.

"Newton's second law of motion states something to the effect that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. When you hurl a bullet away from you at 300 meters per second, the hand holding the gun has to absorb the reaction force."

"Uh-huh. Whatever you say," Leia shrugged with mystification.

"I get it. It's like our Twin Ion Engine fighters," Mara put in enthusiastically. "They create thrust by throwing off millions of minute particles at near-light speeds."

Now Dana looked at Leia, but her wordless, bemused expression indicated that Mara's explanation fared no better in the original Basic.

"Uh-huh. Whatever you say." Dana responded.

"So, Dana, do you want to try my blaster?" Mara offered her hold out.

They all glanced around, but with the rapid retreat of Jim Bob and Billy Ray, they had three lanes of unoccupied space on either side, and were seemingly unobserved. Dana nodded and the tables reversed, with Mara explaining the basics of blaster power and operation. Leia, with her Defender casually slung over her hip, kept a watch, and although she noted no one paying them any particular attention, could not shake the feeling of idle curiosity at their activities.

They sent a new target down, to the fifty meter mark, with Mara's final admonishment, "As they said in the Alliance, point and shoot."

Dana was hoping only that she would not embarrass herself with something that felt so alien in her hands. Using a classic two handed stance to steady herself, heart pounding, she slowly squeezed the trigger. Bolts flew out, striking and igniting the target.

Dana was very pleased, recalling the smoldering paper as Mara gave her sound clap on the arm, "Good job Dana. We really should find you something more solid to hit."

Leia was certain; when the bolt contacted the target, she felt in the Force, an astounded oath. They had just startled someone quite profoundly, someone who did not want to be seen. She muttered to others, "We're being watched, I think we'd better go."

towards a clump of trees at the perimeter, "I think he's in there." Scully cursed the curiosity that had led them into this precarious position. Without another word, the women pivoted hard and walked firmly to the parking lot.

The watcher did not follow. He set his macrobinoculars down gently and pulling out a cell phone, entered a number from memory.

end (4)

From Ginef@aol.com Sun Sep 29 13:52:34 1996
Return-Path: owner-x-files-fanfic@chaos.taylored.com
Received: from chaos.taylored.com (chaos.taylored.com [206.53.224.58])
by sh1.ro.com
(8.7.6/8.6.9) with SMTP id UAA16581 for <kelsy@ro.com>; Sun, 29 Sep 1996
20:35:03 -0500
Received: (qmail-queue invoked by alias); 29 Sep 1996 18:55:05 -0000
Delivered-To: x-files-fanfic-outgoing@chaos.taylored.com
Received: (qmail-queue invoked by alias); 29 Sep 1996 18:55:01 -0000
Delivered-To: xff-outgoing@chaos.taylored.com
Received: (qmail-queue invoked by id 1003); 29 Sep 1996 18:54:14 -0000
Received: (qmail-queue invoked from httpd); 29 Sep 1996 18:53:06 -0000
Received: from emout15.mx.aol.com (HELO emout15.mail.aol.com)
(198.81.11.41)
by chaos.taylored.com with SMTP; 29 Sep 1996 18:53:06 -0000
Received: by emout15.mail.aol.com (8.6.12/8.6.12) id OAA22663 for
x-files-fanfic@chaos.taylored.com; Sun, 29 Sep 1996 14:52:34 -0400
Date: Sun, 29 Sep 1996 14:52:34 -0400
From: Ginef@aol.com
Message-ID: <960929145233_320135668@emout15.mail.aol.com>
To: x-files-fanfic@chaos.taylored.com
Subject: NEW: X Jedi 2: A Cross Over -- Chapter 6 (5/5)
Sender: owner-x-files-fanfic@chaos.taylored.com
Precedence: bulk
X-UIDL: 7c9581414e282872e4797615aaaf71ccc

X Jedi 2

Chapter 6 (5/5)

Disclaimer in Chapter 1

by JackeeC, Gheorghe2 and ginef (all @aol.com)

Location Unknown

Ben entered the house, responding to his father's summons after hearing the report of the assault upon the warehouse and the killing of the Urmari vornskrs. Ascending the stairs to the second floor, preoccupied with what recompense the Urmari would demand, he was therefore quite surprised and unprepared when he felt a cold wind blow down the dim hall towards him. He quailed, hesitating at the landing, thinking how easy it would be for the Urmari killer. Sensing the brutal driving lust of the creature,

ached to call on the Force to block the creature's dark yearnings. As they passed each other on the landing, Ben could not suppress the shudder of the close proximity, and instinctively a protective warding shield sprung up around him in the Force.

The monster spun around, hissing, even this simple Force application sufficient to enrage it. It approached Ben, its shape suddenly growing, expanding to fill the cramped stairway. Menacing, it backed Ben into the corner of the landing, trapping him between the rail, the drop to the floor below, and the wall. "Control Jedi," it whispered, "You must learn to control your fear." The shadow leered, raising its fingers to Ben's head in the Urmari gesture of feeding. Ben wanted to scream, but even the sound died in his throat. As abruptly, the Urmari dropped its stinking assault. Laughing softly it shrank into its former shape, and oozed down the stairs. But before leaving through the door, it hesitated, turning to gaze at a still paralyzed Ben. It bore into him with craving black eyes and thoughts, then it was gone.

Gasping, Ben ran through a calming regimen. The exercise slowed his pulse and heart, but not his racing thoughts. With fresh resolve he strode up the stairs prepared for the confrontation he had been unable to face the night before. Ben burst into the familiar room, knowing that his father knew it was he and had felt the entire ghastly encounter. "Why didn't you just kill him?"

The outburst was greeted with another exhalation, a blinking feigned astonishment. "Who?"

Ben was too angry and frightened to play the game, "You know who. Mulder. Why didn't you just kill him?" He paced the room, stalking the dark corners, "Why did you let the Urmari get him?" The scream that had choked on the stair now burst out angrily, "How could you do that to someone?"

Ben saw what very few had ever seen before, his father flinched. Sensing the weakness, he tentatively reached out through the Force to touch his father's consciousness. He saw a tiny house on a lake, the ocean? The smell of salt, grass and fresh wind replaced the omnipresent stench of smoke.

"You've been protecting him all these years. Why?"

Two tiny children played on the shore. A girl, about five, and a boy, maybe nine. They were building a sand castle. The girl dropping globs of wet sand on the pile as the boy meticulously sculpted the structure.

"Why?"

The girl stood and twirled around, playing with the skirt on her gingham swimsuit. The boy turned to watch her little dance and Ben saw his face. His breath caught in his throat as he looked at what he thought was his own image as a boy. But he didn't remember the beach house or his playmate...

The old man pulled a pack of cigarettes from his pocket and placed one tenderly between his lips. As he raised a shaking hand to light it, Ben strode forward, snatching the offense from his mouth, flinging it away. "Goddamn it. Answer me!"

So like his brother, the old man mused, the children on the beach dissolved to another image. A Sig Sauer shoved in his face, another cigarette slapped away. "Why her and not me... ANSWER ME! The voice frantic, the eyes blazing, just like Ben's were now.

"Brother?" Ben whispered, recoiling from his father's mind, fleeing for safer ground. A drowning victim struggling to keep his head above water. Gasping with the awful realization, "Mulder's my brother?"

"You should know better than to rummage around in my mind, Ben," the father to both men said calmly, taking another cigarette out and lighting it. "You may not like what you find."

Ben found his back now to the firm assurance of the wall, the remainder of his life collapsing around him. "Why didn't you tell me? About him?"

"Because it was of no consequence."

No consequence to whom? Through clenched teeth, Ben managed, "You let them do that to your own son."

"It seemed the best course of action, given the alternative," he said with a tone usually reserved for discussing football scores or the weather.

He wondered if his father had sold his son's soul with such ease. With a nagging doubt, and flashing insight Ben recalled their conversation of only two days before, and the veiled threat on the stairs. Through a haze of smoke, grayed, pitiless eyes stared at him. His father's thoughts were now, as usual, closed; the brief ephemeral vulnerability had vanished like the ash. But Ben suddenly knew, with dread, horrifying certainty, he **knew.** Without another word, he whirled, and fled, out of the room, down the hall, into the darkening street of the bland suburban neighborhood.

From the second story window, Cancer Man fingered the yellowed, lacy curtain, watching his son scamper into the street. He smiled.

Montgomery Mall
Montgomery County, Maryland
3:50 PM

The Benjamin Adams at the Circuit City Express in Montgomery Mall was about sixteen years old, pimply and his electronic skills guaranteed that he would be working for the National

the known and unknown universe. The Force did not enter into the youth's no doubt meteoric rise to galactic domination.

Strolling out of the store, Han spied a display, his explorer's mind intrigued with the possibility of cross-cultural education and thinking that a peace offering may be necessary. "What's that Mulder?" Han asked, discerning that the FBI agent was similarly, an expert in this subject.

Mulder looked in the direction Han indicated, a smirk then breaking across his face, "Victoria's Secret. It's a women's lingerie store."

Han stopped at the store's entrance, studying the photograph at the doorway of a very attractive brunette, wearing what he thought was an anti-gravity device like the ones he had observed at Hooter's and on the blonde in the bar last night. "What's that?" Han asked, pointing and in no way sharing Luke's increasing horror as he divined what was going to happen next.

"It's called a Wonderbra," Mulder instructed, quite the connoisseur.

"And what does the sign say?"

"That they're on sale, buy one get one free."

"Really?" Han was now very interested and Mulder very obliging, also recognizing the necessity of a bribe in the interests of familial harmony. "Let's check it out, maybe you can find one for Leia."

Han nodded enthusiastically, then noticed Luke hanging back, head down, reddening to the ears. "Come on, kid. There's no Rancor or Dark Jedi in there."

"No," Luke muttered, following. "It's much worse."

A lovely dark haired woman approached them immediately. "Can I help you gentlemen?"

Mulder stepped in. "Yes," he made of point of reading her name tag, "Jeannie. My friend here is from the Czech Republic and is interested in acquiring a Wonderbra for his delightful wife."

"Of course. Sir, do you know what size your wife wears?"

"VBG" Han responded promptly. To quizzical stares, he explained to Mulder in Basic, "That's her size in our Galaxy, but I have no idea what the conversion is here."

Mulder explained the problem to Jeannie who was quite understanding. "Eastern European sizes can be very difficult. Can you describe your wife then?"

Han did so, in Basic, with Mulder translating, as they made their way to the racks of frilly, colorful bras that blanketed the entire back wall of the store. At one point Han held his

important fit. Unable to establish more than the basic parameters, Jeannie suggested that they look at the other women in the store, which Han and Mulder were glad to do, all in the interests of proper sizing, of course. At Mulder's suggestion, Jeannie also helpfully offered the visually detailed catalog. Mulder lamented they had not thought of this sooner, since he had a catalog at home and Han could have consulted with Leia.

Luke was playing the hang dog, eyes to the floor. So he never saw it until it was all over. As two young, giggling women pushed past him on their way to some selection of something, their heavy shopping bags knocked against him, igniting a chain reaction. Bags hit Luke, who tripped, and bumped into a formidable rack of tap pants, slips, negligees and other frilly items. The rack hit the underwear table, and bikinis, thongs, french cut briefs, matching tops, garters, and strapless items, in florals and solids, cotton, silk and rayon all crashed to the floor.

Han and Mulder spun around from their debate of black versus red to behold the commotion and the New Republic's last Jedi, ace fighter pilot, and war hero, standing amid a pile of women's undergarments, looking as if he wished nothing more than for the whole store to collapse in on him and swallow him whole. Bending down to right the table and rack, Luke's clumsy efforts succeeded only in causing more things to slip and slide. He wrestled to right the upturned rack, it now caught. Giving the rack a firm yank, his light saber, always dangling at his belt, flew off, skittering across the store's polished floors. Luke gasped in horror, too frozen to call upon the Force, and saw the blade roll away, into an alcove and under a dressing room door.

"Holy Sith," he muttered, with a frantic, terrified look at Han and Mulder.

Han burst into laughter, calling from across the store mercifully in Basic, "Hey, kid, not the best way to get a girl."

A girl did emerge from the dressing room, clad only in... Luke could not look. "Excuse me, did one of you lose this?" She was carrying the light saber, wearing a pleasant smile and not much else. Luke stammered, blushed a color deeper than the red she was wearing, took the light saber from her, mumbling thanks in every language he knew, and fled to a corner vowing revenge for this indignity.

* * *

Luke led the retreat out of Victoria's Secret, Mulder and Han on his heels, noses buried in the catalogue they had lifted. "I'm an Emma bra man personally," Mulder was saying as he pointed out a particularly nice floral number to Han, who nodded his approval. So occupied, Han and Mulder were completely unprepared for Luke's full stop; they plowed into the back of him like some scene out of a Three Stooges flick.

on his lips when he spotted the object of their search, Ben Adams, leaning complacently, arms crossed, against the railing outside the shop.

Adams straightened abruptly, swallowing hard, betraying for all the world, paralytic nervousness. His eyes never left Mulder as if seeing him for the first time. Expecting hostility and fear, Luke was caught off guard by other strong emotions surging from the man, grief, guilt...and... joy? That didn't fit...

Mulder was quicker than any of them, lunging at Ben, grabbing him by the front of his leather jacket and bending him backwards until he was hanging precariously over the railing, forty feet above the food court below. "Where is he?" Mulder gritted.

Han and Luke joined Mulder, leaning over Adams, an added menacing presence. "You better start talking, Adams. I don't think Mulder here would hesitate to let you drop. And there's not much chance that Luke or I would do anything to stop him," Han assured their captive.

Mulder loosened his grip slightly, letting Adams drop lower. A crowd was gathering, voices were raised, the pounding feet of mall security could be heard coming to the rescue. Adams grimaced, "Somehow, Mulder, I doubt you'd want to have your brother's blood on your hands."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Mulder hissed, his fingers relaxing, Adams slipping further over the railing.

"I'm your brother, Mulder."

For Mulder the world came to a shattering, horrible stop, and only started moving again with the arrival of the cavalry. "Pull him up and step away." The voice of a security guard ordered, backed up by the metallic click of a cocking gun.

Somehow the message penetrated to the eye of the hurricane raging in Mulder's mind. He yanked Adams up and then, without releasing the grip of his right hand, reached into his coat pocket for his badge. "FBI. I'm taking this man into custody." Dragging him by the coat, Mulder hauled his brother out of the mall.

Luke and Han hurried after them, Han leaning over to whisper, "It's true, isn't it?"

Luke nodded. The connection, when pointed out, was obvious. It had been the same when he learned of his relation to Leia. It was like they had always known on some deeper level. Long gone, a galaxy away, and Palpatine had beautifully scripted yet another family tragedy.

Echoing the thought, Han muttered, "I really thought once he was dead, no one else would have to go through this again."

Outside the doors, Mulder slammed Adams against the wall.

it under Adam's chin. "Or I blow your head off, brother." Mulder twisted the last word into a sneer of contempt and sarcasm.

"He's your father, too," Adams whispered.

Mulder pushed the gun harder into Adam's throat, feeling it give under the pressure of the barrel. Dimly, he felt a hand at his elbow, heard a soft, commanding voice. "He's telling the truth."

Staring into the frightened pleading brown eyes of a stranger, Mulder thought he saw a reflection. He wavered, then again shoved the gun higher, driving Adams' rough shaven neck into the wall. They were, he realized, the same height. Mulder released the safety. Again that entreating voice, "Mulder, he is your brother."

Pulling the trigger would silence those voices, quiet the storm, bring them all back to they way they had been before. Again that damn voice, strong fingers at his elbow. Crushing his gun to Adams' windpipe, Mulder turned his head to stare at the damn Jedi who wouldn't let him do what demons and justice demanded. He rasped, "How do you know?"

With a flicker to Adams, Luke whispered, "Sibling ties are very strong in the Force. I just know. So does he. If you had the Force back, you would know it too."

Adams choked out, "Even without it, you know it's the truth."

Mulder slumped against the wall next to Adams, his gun hand falling away. So there was the truth. He had finally found it. Scully was right, it was his white whale. The thing that would destroy him. Only the cool brick against his forehead connected him to the here and now, a tenuous tether, as his mind raced to the past filling in the answers to a million questions. Why Samantha and not him. Why Scully, while he remained safe. Why the man he thought was his father had held him in such contempt despite all his efforts

to please him. Why he managed to survive while others, less a threat to the Cancer Man and his Consortium, were eliminated. Oh God. Ohgodohgodohgodohgod. Cancer Man his father. It would be hilarious if it wasn't so damn pathetic. He'd sell his soul to go back to being blissfully ignorant. He laughed bitterly. Of course, his "father" had already taken care of that for him, hadn't he. Selling his own son's soul to the Urmari.

"That's why I'm here," Adams said in response to his brother's thoughts.

Mulder's head snapped up, the gun returning to Adams' throat. "Stay the hell outta my head."

"Mulder, give me the gun," Han said, reaching out and gently prying the FBI agent's fingers from the weapon and pocketing it. He looked around, casing the area. Mall security was watching this little melodrama, as were about 30 spectators. Time to make

reunion somewhere else."

END-- Chapter 6

###end (5/5) ###

X Jedi ?-- Chapter 7 -- Hornets' Nest

Disclaimer Chapter 1

by JackeeC, Ghenghie2 and ginef (all @aol.com)

Fauquier County, VA
Route 29
Seven Eleven Parking Lot
5:00 PM

Having nearly lost and killed the aliens in her charge, Scully was determined not to stalk them. The burger flipping stands that dotted Route 29 were however certain to disappoint. While discussing the meager options in a Seven Eleven parking lot, the cell phone rang, startling all three women. Fumbling, she brought the phone to her ear, "Scully."

"Dana, it's Han."

Scully's heart missed a beat or ten. "What's wrong?"

"Mulder's had some difficult news. He's not responding to Luke or me. I think you better get over here."

"Where are you?"

"His apartment."

"On our way," she replied, turning the car around and pulling into traffic.

Alexandria, VA

Han hung up the phone and sat back with a deceptive air of ease on the chair near the kitchen, his blaster trained on Adams. Adams, for his part, was settled on a living room chair, facing Han. To Han's trained eye, Adams' attempts to conceal his anxiety were comical.

Adams leaned over and picked up one of three small framed photographs resting on the end table, a boy and a girl at the beach, the boy's arm flung around the little girl. The same children from his father's vision, he realized, perhaps a couple of years older. Samantha and Fox. He replaced the picture and picked up another. The same

the type taken by a professional photographer. Everyone looked nervous. Edgy. Posed. He looked closely into the eyes of Bill Mulder and wondered if he had known than that was the son whose shoulder he so proudly rested his hand on wasn't his own. He replaced that photo and picked up the last and only one taken in recent years. Not surprisingly it was his brother's partner, Scully. She was wearing a blue FBI wind breaker, back to the camera, her head turned around as if her name had just been called. Her hair was wind blown and she was laughing. Somehow he just knew that Mulder had been the photographer.

He replaced the picture and returned his gaze to Solo. The smuggler was immobile, hand resting casually on the heavy blaster resting in his lap, impassive, eyes flickering, watching every move. In this state of alert control, Adams doubted any of his Force tricks would work on the wary smuggler. Maybe old Bail Organa would have been proud of his adopted daughter's scandalous choice in a spouse; her real father, Darth Vader certainly would have been.

Adams looked out the window. Skywalker and Mulder were outside talking. If anyone would understand what Mulder was going through it would be Skywalker. The choking bitter laugh did not escape his throat, and Solo already had his blaster up, finger at the ready. "Go ahead and give into it Solo, jus try 'n take me out," he taunted in colloquial Corellian slang.

A smirk broke across the big man's face. "Within personal, Adams," Solo responded in kind, not at all ashamed of his native dialect. "I jus got a real special grudge 'gainst your kind. Hunted like an animal, tortured, my wife's torture, the murder of a couple billion people on Alderaan, cloning innocent people so they can kill even more innocent people, tryin to kidnap my kids. I figure the universe is a lot safer place without your kind in it."

Adams now did laugh. "That's not a very nice way to describe your wife, your children, or your brother in law."

Never taking his eyes from Adams, his right hand still firmly on the heavy blaster, Han pulled Mulder's gun out of his pocket with his left and expertly released the safety. He aimed now a second barrel at the staring Adams. Still speaking in unrepentant Corellian, he slurred, "They'd all be better off dead than dark. An' so's everyone else. Only thing stoppin me from blastin you into the next quadrant now is that Mulder should have the honors."

Solo, he realized, was a man with a cause, a clean conscience, and no fear. Adams said archly, with furtive and misplaced arrogance, "If you honestly think Mulder would kill me, now that he knows the truth, you're a bigger fool than I've heard."

The grin broadened, as if the Force empty clod had read his mind. "That may be true Adams," Han said, now in

hesitate to kill you, nor am I afraid to die trying." He switched effortlessly into the crudest Corellian. "I only wanna make certain that you're dead before I go."

Whipped, the games over, Adams muttered pathetically, "Aren't you forgetting that my father traded me for the Emperor's whore?"

Solo's head twitched in a movement of disagreement. "No, I'm not forgetting," implying that such details never escaped him. "And a common concubine is not worth, and would not cause, all this trouble." The expressive face across the room became more serious, attentive, but no less alert. "All that does is tell me the lengths he'll go to get her. Which leads me to two other conclusions."

Ben bit. "What are those?"

"That the only things more important than killing you are making sure he's dead, and that Jade never gets the chance to be near him again while he's still alive."

* * *

The warm October day had turned brisk and cool, threatening gray rain. A brisk wind picked up colorful leaves from the pavement outside the building, playfully tossing them. They crunched underfoot as Mulder paced out the distance in front of his apartment.

Luke silently observed from his seat on the steps. He did not dare leave Mulder alone, he could not penetrate the wall of destructive self loathing, and had to dissuade Mulder from following Adams on a damn foolish junket to certain suicide. "Mulder, I think I might understand how you're feeling right now" he started.

Mulder whirled on him, his voice low and threatening. "You have no fucking idea how I'm feeling."

Luke persisted, at his most annoyingly sincere, "I think I do. You've heard what my father did to all of us, what kind of a monster he was. But in the end, I was able to accept him, and find the good that was in him."

Mulder scowled at the naivete, but ceased his prowling. He sunk down next to Luke on the steps. "That black lunged bastard is my *father*. You're sure of it?"

"Ben isn't lying," Luke assured him. "And I can... sense a connection between the two of you. It was the same with Leia and me."

"We had a saying where I come from that goes something like
'sometimes the truth is
blind.' It can be staring you right in the face and we don't see it."

Mulder covered his face with his hands. "God. He took my sister,
killed my..." the word
"father" caught, lost and irretrievable. "He killed Mellissa, he took,"
again the voice broke in
whispered misery, "Scully."

* * *

Scully screeched to a stop at Mulder's building, wondering
fleetingly what Mulder's
neighbors must make of her. They must think them both total nut cases.
She climbed out of the
car, striding toward the entrance without waiting for Mara and Leia.
Mulder and Luke were
sitting on the front steps; Mulder huddled into a ball, head down, arms
clutched tightly around his
knees, slowly rocking back and forth. Scully picked up her pace.
"Mulder, what's wrong?" she
asked, quelling the rising fear. She sunk down next to him and looked
to Luke for an explanation.

Luke stood up to greet Mara and Leia, coming behind slowly, "I
think we should leave
Mulder and Dana alone for a few minutes." Glancing at Mulder, Mara and
Leia followed Luke up
the stairs, leaving the devastated pair huddled on the front stoop.

With the entry door shutting behind them, Leia asked with wondering
dread. "What
happened?"

It was to Mara that Luke actually responded, as they entered the
lift and rose to Mulder's
apartment. "Mulder found out that the one they call Cancer Man is his
father."

Stunned, abhorrent shock surged from both women. Leia gasped. "So
that means
Palpatine was ..." Luke nodded and his sister thumped heavily against
the wall with an
exclamation of deep empathy. "It explains so much, doesn't it?"

If Leia's reaction was sympathy, Mara's was of rising anger. "How'd
he find out?"

Luke gently placed a hand to her shoulder, bracing for the storm,
"Adams told him."

She jerked away as the lift door opened, and spun from Luke, "That
malicious ..." The
curse died as she reached out in the Force and felt... Luke now grabbed
her roughly, "Mara,
don't..."

With a combined Force and physical shove, Mara pummeled Luke back into the elevator, pushing him into Leia. Dropping her blaster into her hand, she took off down the hall towards the apartment.

* * *

Scully reached over and placed a hand on her partner's back. "What is it, Mulder? You're scaring me."

"He's my father," he finally managed, his voice ragged.

"Who?" Scully asked, completely confused.

"The Cancer Man."

Mulder flinched at her sharp intake of air, burying his head deeper into his arms. She brutally smothered the wave of repulsion, wanting to know how he had found out, how he could be sure it was true. The Cancer Man! Mulder's father!? The man who'd killed her sister and stolen three months of her life was father to her partner and best friend?! How in the world could this be true? Could it be true? Some small part of her intellect still in place recognized the same coincidences he had, and that yes, grotesque as it was, this was one explanation. Scully put a hand at his shoulder, wanting him to look up, but Mulder resisted, staring now at an ant marching across the concrete, carrying an enormous insect remnant in its tiny jaws.

As the ant disappeared into a crack in the pavement, he finally responded to the unasked questions, groaning miserably, "Adams is upstairs. He told me. Skywalker confirmed it."

He's blaming this on himself, she realized, like there was some way he could have possibly influenced his own paternity. He expects me to reject him now. To blame him too. How utterly Mulder, she mused as she reached out again, and gently pulled him into her arms. He hesitated a moment and then collapsed into her embrace.

* * *

Skidding to a stop at the apartment, without a moment's hesitation, blind with killing rage, Mara threw open the door.

Ben and Han both leaped up, Han thinking clearly enough to keep his blaster trained on Adams. In a gesture of self preservation, as if tossing a pebble, Adams

fingers; the blow threw Mara against the wall. Seizing the distraction, Han smashed the butt of his blaster on Adams before Mara hit the floor. Luke and Leia burst through the doorway in time to see Adams collapse.

The three standing stared at the two hapless and groaning on the floor. Luke went to Mara, indicating to Leia that she should help Han with Adams. For one who was supposed to still be reeling from a Force assault, Mara made a sudden and quick recovery. As Luke first relieved her of her blaster and helped her to her feet, she launched at Adams again from across the room, prepared to rend him limb from limb. "Out of my way, Skywalker, or you're the next to go," she swore, as Luke now physically held her back, wrapping his arms around her clawing, furious storm.

"No. Mara!!" Now he was shouting as well, trying to penetrate her fury. "Not like this. You can't, not like this."

"Watch me." Luke dragged her into a chair, and with a Force and hand restraint, pinned her there. Adams, now standing between the muzzles of Leia and Han's blasters, said quietly, "Jade, I'm the one with cause to kill you, not the other way around."

She squirmed, spitting. "The only person I'll take greater pleasure in killing is that fiend father of yours."

"Mara," Luke began. She struggled, infuriated, and he repeated, "Mara!"

"What!" the hellion spat.

"He's right. His father, **Mulder's** father, traded him to the Urmari for you."

Mara's murderous ire now focused on Luke. He was nearly sitting on top of her, face centimeters from her own. She finally heard him, but did not believe. "What?" She repeated, her voice wavering and rough.

Adams whispered. "Because you all killed the vornskrs, the Urmari demanded another Force sensitive. They wanted you, and so did my father. He was going to give me to them, so he could have you."

Han now spoke firmly, wishing with all his soul that he could end this blight on both galaxies with a squeeze of the trigger, "Jade, I want to kill him as badly as you do. And if he's not dead at your hand by the end of this, you can bet that I'll be the one to do it, or die trying." Han

blaster closer to Adams, as firmly resolute. "But first, we've got to get their bastard of a father, and those hell spawn the Tamari. And this," he pushed his blaster contemptuously against Adams again for emphasis, "Soddy son of a Sith is the only way to get to the father." He nodded to Luke, in a gesture of dismissal. "Get Jade out of here."

"I'm not going anywhere, Solo." With a fierce struggle, she broke free of her teacher's restraint, lunging again at Adams. She made it barely halfway, stopping cold, frozen and stricken, as Adams, with a casual finger snap, sunk Force fangs into her. Mara shrieked, writhing and immobilized in crushing, tearing teeth.

Both Luke and Leia mentally staggered under the weight of his devastating assault on Mara. Surrendering to a billowing fury he had denied the night before, Luke struck with the Force, slamming into Adams with a wincing mental blow. Caught in her brother's outrage, and an overflowing measure of her own, Leia shoved the cold metal of her blaster tip under Adams' ear, driving his head up. She ground through clenched teeth, "If you don't let her go, I'll finish what she started."

Adams' Force throttling abruptly dropped and Mara sagged against Luke. Han took control, not needing the Force to know what had just occurred, "Luke, I think you, Mara and Leia need a few minutes away from here. I'm not going to let you all risk the Dark Side by killing this piece of filth in a fit of anger." With an abrupt, rude jerk of his head at Adams, he added, "Unfortunately for you Adams, I don't have those kind of restrictions that keep me from slaughtering you in cold blood." Han took a step back, pulling Adams with him, and pushing Leia forward. She helped Luke wrestle a less resisting, but vociferously cursing Mara out the door.

With a rough hand, Han shoved Adams back into a chair. "Sit on your hands, facing forward. Otherwise, make yourself comfortable."

In the lift, Mara yanked free of her captors. "Damn it, just let me go."

"Not if you're going to bolt back up there and blow his head off," Luke swore back.

"I'm not stupid," Mara snapped. "Why the hell did he show up?"

Luke explained quickly, the stress and high emotion taking its toll on him as well. "He just

get the Force back."

For a second time, Leia and Mara were dumbstruck, Leia finally stammering, "How does he propose to do that?"

With events spiraling out of control, Luke shrugged irritably. "Adams says killing an Urmari releases the Force, and that Mulder can regain it that way." Mara burst, "By killing an Urmari?!?" as Leia injected incredulous, "that's absurd. And insane."

"Adams isn't lying. He really thinks it will work." Luke was clearly skeptical that such a thing was possible, and even more frustrated with his own ignorance as to why.

The door opened, revealing Dana and Mulder standing huddled in the hallway. With an arm firmly around Mulder, Dana began, "Where...?" as Luke finished, "Tempers got a little hot upstairs." Another jerk and curse from Mara confirmed his statement. "We're taking Mara just down the street, we'll be back in a few minutes."

Mara pried Luke's vise like grip from her elbow, and decisive, stepped forward to a crushed Mulder. Putting her fingers to his chin, she forced his face up, and then was in the disconcerting position of looking way up at him. It doesn't matter a damn who your father is Mulder. Don't believe a word Adams says."

Startled, Mulder stuttered, "But Mara, I... he's my brother, he can help me get the Force back, maybe then I could ..."

She repeated firmly, "I told you, don't believe him. He might believe it himself, but you have no idea what poison his father has fed him. The grandfather was no better. You don't need it Mulder. You don't need the Force. I wish to the skies I never had this curse. You do just fine without it."

Luke now jostled her elbow, and with pain and resignation, Mara allowed herself to be led, between Luke and Leia, out the front of the building.

* * *

Scully was pacing Mulder's small apartment like a caged animal. "We'll have to run full genetic testing. DNA analysis... I can arrange that right now," she said pulling her cell phone from her pocket and started to dial.

"It's not necessary, Scully," Mulder said softly, from where he leaned against the wall near Han.

"The hell it isn't," she hissed, turning on him. "You expect us to believe him?" She pointed a finger in the general direction of Ben, but refused to look him. "He's probably lying..."

"I'm not lying," Ben said. "Besides, with Mulder's half alien physiology you don't really expect the results to be conclusive, do you Dr. Scully?" slight mocking in his voice.

Scully disconnected her phone and fought a rising wave of nausea. Mulder an alien. This was entirely too much like a bad episode of the Outer Limits.

"And besides," Adams continued, slowly getting to his feet. "Don't you trust your Jedi friend?"

She whirled on Adams, shoved him back down into the chair by his shoulders and pinned him there. "The *only* person I trust is Mulder. And you've done such a number on him that he doesn't know if he's coming or going." She released him and started pacing again. "I'm not buying any of this until we find a way to get the scientific evidence we need to back it up."

"But Scully, if I get the Force back, then I'll know for certain." Mulder said. He raked a hand through his hair before continuing. "I've got to try it."

"You don't need the Force, Mulder," Scully stressed, voice rising in fear and exasperation. She willed some self control, "Han, please talk to him."

"She's right, Mulder. Haven't you seen enough yet, to understand what the Force does to people? You're doing fine without it. I don't think it's worth the risk..."

"But I do. I think it is worth it," Mulder said, resolved, now striding to the couch and sitting next to his brother's chair. He leaned forward, eager and determined, "Explain to me how this works again?"

Adams shrugged, "You take a light saber, ram it into the base of the skull of an Urmari, the Force is released, and it flows to you."

"That's ridiculous," Han scoffed as Scully blinked in stunned amazement.

In a warning, condescending voice, Adams lectured. "Even Skywalker, the all knowing,

"Only everything I've seen from being with Jedi for over ten years, Adams."

Seeing the familiar warning signs, Scully urged, "Mulder, we have to talk about this, you can't just run off. We need to find out what Luke and Leia think, maybe there's some other way."

The response from Adams was so adamant and familiar, it was as if it was Mulder speaking, "There is no other way."

She glared at him, and entreated Mulder, "You can't just take off with him to try this Mulder. We have to go with you."

"You can't do that," Adams put in quickly.

The sound of a blaster being brought to bear again sounded in the room. "And why's that?" Han asked casually.

"The Urmari hunt by searching the Force. Using the Force around them, even a Force strong aura or mental shield can drive them into a killing rage. Your Jedi try any tricks at the Vespiary and you are all dead."

"Vespiary?" Mulder, Solo and Scully all repeated.

"It's both where the Urmari live and feed and how they describe their shared consciousness."

"You mean like a collective intelligence?" Mulder asked, wide eyed.

Ben scoffed, "You've been watching *way* too much Star Trek." The words, the tone, the demeanor, were so much like Mulder that Scully felt as if she had been kicked in the stomach. She sat down heavily in the chair next to Han.

Ben took a deep breath. "Think of them as dozens of mouths, joined together through the Force into a single stomach."

"Charming," Han commented.

"Don't underestimate them, Solo." Ben glared at Han, "you have no idea what you are dealing with. An Urmari claw has been in this from the very beginning. The Urmari from your galaxy knew the ones here were hungry and felt cheated by Palpatine's bargain..."

Han swiftly challenged, "What bargain?"

Urmari. He didn't just slaughter the Jedi, you know. He went after entire races of Force strong people. And he enlisted the Urmari to do it. When a race from your," he stumbled, "our galaxy came here..."

Mulder pounced, "You mean the colonists, the Smiths, the Gregors... and the others?"

He nodded and continued, "They came here when Palpatine went after the Jedi. He promised the Urmari every colonist they could consume and sent ou...", Adams swiftly corrected, "my father to oversee the operation."

Both men leaned back in their seats at the same time, sighing. Scully felt the blood drain from her body.

Despite his cautious vigilance, Han was absorbing every word, the suspicions and pieces of the puzzle confirmed. "What makes you think the Urmari were involved in getting us here?"

Hesitating with a wary glance, Adams explained. "It was another part of the bargain, but Palpatine got sloppy. He promised the Urmari every Jedi, but then didn't let them drink Vader or Jade. And of course the Skywalker's survived." A thin, cynical smile pulled across his face. "The Urmari don't just give away galactic drive unless it otherwise suits their ends. The Urmari in both galaxies see taking you all now as fulfillment of the bargain Palpatine breached."

Mulder leaned closer to Adams, enthralled. He had that look on his face, like when he was totally consumed by a case. An expression that was mirrored on Ben.

Scully closed her eyes under the weight of the realization that this nightmare might actually be true. Mulder asked, "How can they communicate across the galaxies?"

"The Urmari focus on two things, hunger and the bargain. All of their Force energy is directed to those two goals. It's strong enough to bind them to the Vespiary in another galaxy."

Mulder's eyes were wide with wonder, "You mean like a hive mentality?"

Adams gave Mulder an incredulous look, then laughed. "This isn't a bad Kevin Anderson sci fi novel." Scully's heart sank when Mulder returned Adams' grin. Two sides of a coin. Her fingers went to her small cross and began to twirl the necklace ruthlessly.

"So, bottom line. If I kill one of these bounty hunters I can get

"That's what our fath," Ben stopped short when he felt his brother's chest tighten, "he said."

"Mulder, stop," Scully said. "Think about what you're talking about here."

"Scully, this is something I have to do," he brushed her words off like an annoying fly buzzing around his face.

"No. No, it's not," Scully said, getting to her feet.

"She's right, Mulder," Han said, also standing. "Think a minute" Suddenly Scully collapsed into him. Grasping the floundering woman, Han was distracted, his wavering attention the opening Adams had waited for. With a struggling, strangled curse, Han dropped to the floor, Scully gently following, falling next to him.

Mulder turned on his brother, accusingly. "What the hell did you do!"

"They're unharmed," Adams assured him. "But they weren't going to let you go."

Mulder knelt down by Scully. Her pulse was strong, her breathing even. He gently brushed her hair off her face and silently apologized for leaving her behind. Again. Then he stood and headed for the door. "Let's go."

* * *

The brothers hurried down the stairs, not bothering with the elevator, and rushed out into the parking lot.

"No, we can't take your car," Ben said dismissively when Mulder moved to get his keys.

"Why not?" Mulder called after the retreating back.
"Let's just say its movements are very well known."

"Why am I not surprised?" Mulder had to jog, and caught up with his brother at a black Nissan Pathfinder half a block away.

Adams climbed in and had released the automatic lock by the time Mulder reached him.
"Seeds?" he extended a half eaten bag toward his brother after he was settled.

Mulder froze. "No thanks," he finally managed, softly. That small, unconscious gesture had spoken volumes. How many times had he himself asked that same question of others?

Ben, noticing the change, tossed the bag of seeds aside, starting the car and pulling out with an anxious look around. "What is it, Fox?"

The comment had the desired effect; it brought a small smile to the FBI agent's stricken expression. "My brother you may be, but don't think it means you can get away with calling me..."

Ben laughed, "I know. You hate it."

Mulder nodded, again sobering. They rode for a time in silence, whipping past the flat, brightly lit suburban sprawl that lined Route 66. He asked, "You seem to know a lot about me, while I know next to nothing about you."

Ben shrugged, focusing his eyes on the road ahead. "Ask away."

Mulder thought for a second before he asked the burning question. "Why now?"

"Why now, what?" Ben stalled, shifting uncomfortably in his seat.

Mulder continued patiently. "Why now after all he's done?"

"You know why," Ben insisted. "I explained all that already."

"No. I know what you told us, that he was going to trade you for Mara and so you decided to ... defect. Aren't you afraid that he's going to kill you for betraying him?"

"No," Ben shook his head. "He won't kill me."

"How do you know?" Mulder persisted with irritating patience.

"I'm blood. You don't kill blood."

"But you can betray it? Maim it?" Mulder softly reasoned, adding with a cynical hump, "dysfunctional with a twist."

"No, Mulder. You just don't understand him. Use us as pawns, yes, but he wouldn't kill his own sons." Mulder wondered which of them he was trying to convince.

"Oh? And he just conveniently forgot that in New Mexico when he ordered that train burned with me inside?" Mulder's question was dry and his tone derisive.

When Ben did not reply, Mulder continued the interrogation. "So, why did you stay so long?"

Long seconds passed. "Having a father like ou--, like he is, well

for obedience. I did what I was told."

"And now you're doing penance? Save your dear brother and preserve your own hide?"

Mulder spoke with more vehemence than he had intended and muffled the remaining thoughts before they flowed out unbidden.

Anger was met and raised. "Look, he didn't tell me everything!! I didn't even know what he'd done until last night. And then when I found out you were my brother... I was in shock, I couldn't believe it, I--I didn't know what to do. I just--" Ben broke off with a sigh, forcing himself to calm down. "Mulder, we're blood."

"Yeah? Well, so's he and I think he's capable of killing his own mother if it meant more power."

A heavy silence weighed in the car. When Ben did not respond, Mulder asked, "What? What did I say?"

Now an even heavier sigh punctuated the stillness. "It's just that that's what he did."

Mulder was confused. "What do you mean?"

"He traded me for power."

The wrenchingly bitter, flat sentence was baffling. "I thought he was trading you for Mara."

Ben's bark of ironic laughter was harsh, "Why do you think he wanted her Mulder? Wanted her so badly he'd trade his son's soul for her?"

"I don't know," Mulder stammered slightly. "I guess I thought ..."

Picking up the tenor of Mulder's speculation Ben again snorted with disgust. "Your limited world view is showing. Solo had said a common concubine wouldn't be worth all of this and he was right. Not that she wouldn't be ..."

At Mulder's objection to the crude expression, Adams laughed again. "This isn't about sex. When you get the Force back, you'll see what I mean." Even now, his breath and voice quickened with the memory of it. "Jade is a lens for our power in the Force, she augments it, increases it." He wandered, recalling the thrill with a shudder, then concluding matter of factly to Mulder's disgust. "When we touch her in the Force, she acts as a catalyst, it's almost like a drug."

"What do you mean 'we'?" Mulder was aghast.

"Our grandfather did it, Mulder. Hasn't that registered yet? You think our father is bad?

You should have met Palpatine." Ben shook his head wonderingly, bemused at Mulder's palpably horrified reaction. "He planted in her mind places for him, for us, so that when we connect with Jade, she amplifies our Force awareness. I think she would have the same effect on any Force sensitive, if he knew how to tap into her."

Mulder was reeling with the generational tragedies and legacies. At every turn, more truths, ugly, stark truths rose from the deep that he now knew he could have happily lived his life never seeing. Ben continued, musing, perceptive, and ruthless, "In fact, I bet that's part of Skywalker's attraction to her, although he's too obtuse to realize it."

"Come on," Mulder objected, heatedly denying the disturbing observation. "He'd never do anything to hurt Mara." He finished with a sneer, "Like you and dear old dad did last night."

Ben scoffed at the irony Mulder had missed, "I wouldn't think that you would be the one to so casually dismiss the allure of power and knowledge, brother."

Stung, Mulder turned his head away to stare moodily out the window at the dark rolling Virginia countryside. The Matthew Sweet tape ending with a whirl, Adams reached down, and casually flipped the cassette, partly with his fingers, partly Force-aided. The movement interrupted Mulder's brooding. He watched the effortlessness of the maneuver with a pang of longing.

Comprehending this as well, Adams said softly, "You'll learn to do it too, Mulder."

"Do you think you could teach me some of things you and the others can do?" Mulder could not banish the wistfulness entirely.

Adams' cheery "Sure," faded into a frown.

Now Mulder retreated. "Sorry, I just thought..."

His brother interrupted. "No, that's not it. Of course I would. I just don't know if I'll be able to."

A hint of warning and concern. "Why?"

Another quiet, tense moment spread out before them, as Ben weighed his words. "I just don't know if I'll be around once this all is over."

Once again, Ben had completely lost Mulder. "What are you talking

Slowly, Ben made the admission. "Your new friends came all the way here just because of who I **might** be. I can't see them leaving me behind."

"How can you say such a thing, Adams? Leia, Han, Luke, they're...they wouldn't hurt you. Not now."

Ben's bardonic laughter filled the car. "If Solo doesn't kill me outright, his wife will take me back in restraints, in a ysalamiri lined cell, to stand trial for war crimes. There is no way they are going to let a grandson of Palpatine wander free in any galaxy."

"They wouldn't do that."

Another interrupting laugh. "Mulder, I know you think they are nice, fun, albeit heavily armed people. But do you really understand who they are? What they've done? Do you know how many millions they have killed, how many billions they have watched die? What they have been through makes Hitler look like an amateur."

Mulder tried reasoning. "Sure, Solo's got a lawless streak, but what about Leia? She would be reasonable..."

Adams shattered that illusion as well. "On our grandfather's orders, she watched her father and another man obliterate her entire planet - the planet she grew up on, mind you. And she still wouldn't tell them where their Rebellion was based. She's as nuts as the rest of them Mulder. And if she isn't, she should be."

"Well, Skywalker's a Jedi," Mulder protested, understanding that was important without knowing why. "He wouldn't..."

"Skywalker is a disaster waiting to happen."

The utter certainty and lack of rancor surprised Mulder. He asked. "What do you mean?"

"If Skywalker ever figures out what Jade could do for him, he'd be unstoppable." With Mulder's complaint at the characterization, Ben only smiled, secure and discerning. "I know what I am talking about here. As it is, a half-trained Jedi is far more dangerous than a weak one. Skywalker's had to do most of it on his own, and it shows. He's idealistic, angry, very powerful, and under this marked delusion that lives and universes depend on him." Ben paused for a breath, eyes wandering along the now very empty and dark road as they traversed the Shenandoah Valley of rural Virginia.

Mulder respected the silence, watching and listening too, wondering what it would be like

to really see and hear again. Ben began philosophically, reflectively.
"The Force doesn't just run
in families Mulder. There are traits in the Force that are passed along
as well. In the Skywalkers
you see a lot of arrogance, righteousness and idealism. With us ..."

He trailed off, allowing Mulder to conclude the thought. "It's not a very attractive picture, is it?"

"No," Ben said shaking his head. "Our family is very gifted with the Force, but tend to the aggressive side, obsessive, domineering, and," here he shot a meaningful glance at his brother.
"There is a strong self-destructive tendency."

The knowing comment shook Mulder more than all he had yet heard. Miles passed before he spoke again. "Mara said the Force wasn't worth it."

Looking ahead to things that Mulder did not yet see, one brother reflected to the other.
"She may be right."

They continued on.

* * *

She knew when Fox and Ben left and surmised what had happened. He's done it again she mused, ascending in the elevator to Fox's apartment, and wondering for the millionth time why she stuck it out with him. She hesitated only a moment before letting herself in; Dana was lying on the floor next to the infamous man she knew only by reputation. She knelt beside the FBI agent, hazarding a guess as to just how furious Dana would be on awakening. "Agent Scully, wake up."

A groan from the smuggler made rousing Agent Scully all the more urgent. She did not want to try to explain her presence to a no doubt very skeptical Solo unless Scully was conscious, and besides, her Basic was so rusty as to likely be unintelligible. "Agent Scully, you must wake up... NOW!"

Scully's blue eyes flew open and a colorful curse flew out as she comprehended what had happened. "He's done it again, hasn't he?"

She nodded, now helping Scully up, then turned slowly at the sound behind her. The muzzle of a Blas Tech DL heavy blaster stared back at her.

wishing to avoid any unpleasantness with the heavily armed alien, she pivoted back to Scully. "Fox is going somewhere that he should not be."

"The Vespiary?" Both Scully and Solo asked.

"Yes." Still looking at Scully, knowing that a large blaster was pointed at her back, she said, "I am going to put my right hand into my pocket and get a piece of paper with an address on it. I hope your friend, who by the way, it is an honor to meet, does not blast me and the paper."

Scully smirked, enjoying being on the other end of the blaster so to speak with her ally of convenience. "I guess that depends on what's on the paper."

She slowly reached into her pocket to retrieve the slip containing directions to a retreat in the Shenandoah of Virginia. "You understand that certain of your new friends should not go with you, although I doubt that will stop them."

Solo answered for Scully, in halting English. "You are right about that." She noted that with a casual thumb, Solo engaged the safety on his blaster.

"It's a trap, isn't it?" Scully's voice was weighted with suspicion and resignation.

"Of course. The Cancer Man knows you will follow Fox and if your friends go with you, all you will do is save the bounty hunters the effort of tracking down their bargained for meal."

Scully asked, "Is Adams in on it?"

She spoke now with genuine and fearful uncertainty. "I believe Fox will be the first to find out."

Han now put in, the hesitancy only in the language skill, not the resolve, "How many Urmari at Vespiary?"

"Maybe fifty, maybe more, maybe less." She reached into her coat pocket and placed several small items in Scully's hand. "Place these over your nostrils before you go in."

"Why? What are they?" Scully questioned as she fiddled with one.

Han injected, "Bio-filters."

Yes, the man matched the reputation she thought. Aloud she said only, "indeed. Your friends will show you how to use them."

"Everything dies, Dana. But somethings should not die yet." She minced toward the door, urging. "Don't waste anymore time." She swiftly left the apartment.

* * *

Within the hour, Scully was driving the alien commando team into the night, to the Blue Ridge mountains of the Shenandoah. She remembered the last time she'd been in the area, on one of Mulder's wild UFO chases. He'd been giddy, almost manic with the prospect of a promising lead and had sung John Denver songs to her... "country roads take me home... to the place I belong..." as he consumed sunflower seed after sunflower seed, the shells carelessly discarded on the floor. By the time he'd worked his way up to "Thank God I'm a Country Boy," she'd wanted to kill him. She wanted to kill him even more now.

During the hushed, taut drive, Scully mused how much this was a replay of the last four years. Mulder had left her behind, again. He had jumped headlong into a trap, again. She was charging after him, again. She was vowing that if he did not get himself killed, she was going to the honors, again.

The past hour had confirmed that the others were similarly following a different, but equally well rehearsed script. Each member of the team lapsed into his or her assigned roles with comfortable ease. Skywalker was the Jedi, Organa Solo, the negotiator, and Mara Jade the assassin, all, as Scully had already seen, competently deadly in their own right. But for all their proficiency, the three now yielded with subtle deference to the command of "General Solo."

Even with the urgency, Han made them run through a checklist clearly long since committed to memory and honed to a practiced edge. They all checked their equipment and inspected the thermal detonators; given the respect afforded these devices, Scully concluded they were quite lethal. Han even made Scully examine and reload her gun, and after asking inordinate questions about the number of rounds per magazine, time to reload under fire, range and accuracy, watched as she stashed extra rounds in her coat pockets. Then, one by one, Han made them rehearse where each person had stashed his or her ice pick, and with Mara's willing assistance, demonstrated where and how to drive the pick into an Urmari and still pierce the base of the skull.

Han also briefed them; there was no other better description, on what they had learned from Adams and from Mr. X. He was succinct: "unknown target, they're expecting us, and use of the Force is prohibited. Once we do our reconnaissance, the objectives are simple, get Mulder out, blow up as many Urmari as we can, take down the Cancer Man, and hit orbit running." He then placed a brief transmission to Chewbacca to be certain the Wookiee was ready for pickup.

If his team smirked, it was not at their leader, or his terse briefing, but at the familiar tradition of it all. Leia put in, "Seems like old times, General," as Luke quipped, "Should we call up Artoo to get the odds?"

Han responded with a wry grin, allowing himself to be set up, "You **know** what I say to that one, kid."

The team chorused, like a ritual mantra before battle, "Never tell General Solo the odds!!"

* * *

"So, ever killed one of these things before?" Mulder asked, trying not to let his anxiety show, knowing Ben would sense it regardless. Truth be told he was feeling pretty guilty for leaving Scully behind. Past experience had proved this to be bad strategy. Then again, it wasn't fair to drag her into this mess. His mess and that of his brother and... father. He reached for his brother's bag of seeds and started in.

Ben shook his head, glad of at least the change in subject. "No, but I've had a very active fantasy life in that regard. They're as creepy as hell."

"You have a plan?" Mulder assumed this was true and was simply awaiting details.

Ben nodded not all together reassuringly. "I know where to find them."

"Which means you have a plan," Mulder insisted.

"Yeah, sure," Ben shrugged.

"Do you at least know how to kill one?!" Mulder was incredulous. After all this time they'd been driving...

"He didn't tell me everything!!" Ben repeated. "But I've overheard things. I ... I know things from the Master who taught me.. I can do it."

Mulder pinched the bridge of his nose. "All right," he began with a heavy sigh. "And what about their toxic blood, the retro virus? Is there any thing we can do about that?"

Ben reached under the seat and produced a small black cassette case. He removed the one labeled Red Hot Chili Peppers and opened it one handed. He shoved the tape in Mulder's direction. "Here, take these and put them on." Inside were a number of figure eight shaped transparent plastic pieces.

"Um...how?"

Ben reached over, picked up a pair and demonstrated. "See?" he said after placing the device directly over his nostrils. The thing immediately vanished against the surface of his skin. "It melds with your skin and allows you to breathe through an invisible bio-filter."

Mulder was impressed. He pocketed a couple extras.

"All right, we're here," Ben said, slamming the tapes back into the case and shoving all beneath the seat.

They had traveled at least two hours, the last 10 miles on a narrow, and utterly deserted one and a half lane rural route. The journey had brought them to a metal gate, an empty guardhouse and discrete lighting illuminating a hand carved sign that read: 'Blue Hills New Age Retreat.' As the car rolled forward, a brilliant light suddenly shone from above, calculated to temporarily blind any drivers who approached the automated entry.

Ben was obviously prepared for this. While Mulder shielded his eyes, against the unexpected glare, Ben simply scanned his card through the slot and waited for the gate to swing up out of the way.

"We're in," he let out a calming breath before heading slowly beyond the guardhouse into the compound proper. They continued on past several sheds and what looked like storage tanks. If Mulder had expected Force sucking fiends to surround them upon breaching the sanctuary, he was disappointed. It was deserted, modestly, lit, quite peaceful and thoroughly, and deceptively innocuous. One large concrete block building, four stories high, sat ugly and undefended in the middle of the compound. The building only became peculiar on closer inspection. Mulder saw but one door, all the windows were shuttered and blinded. No light, no life, no movement could be discerned within. Ben pulled the vehicle to a stop behind the

building.

Mulder felt a change in his brother almost as soon as they passed the shack. He put it down to tension. It wasn't everyday one got to betray a family member, regardless of how evil. As Mulder moved to open the car door, Ben stopped him. "Wait. There's something you need to know." Mulder turned back.

"I know you know about the picks. But that won't help in releasing the Force. They have to be cut down in the presence of another Jedi. When that happens, the Urmari's captive Force is released. But..." here he hesitated, until Mulder urged, "Yeah?"

With another deep breath, Ben continued. "For this to work, we have to link, mentally. have to channel the Force back to you and that means you are going to have to open your mind to me." He paused. "Do you trust me enough to do that?"

Mulder looked away, the familiar words, Trust No One, dancing through his brain. No one but Scully. Those words had become a way of life. A protection. Could he let go of them so easily? But he wanted the Force back, needed it. A thought struck, and he turned again to his brother. "Who do you trust?" he asked.

Ben was taken aback at the blunt challenge. "I used to trust my father, but now... no one." He seemed equally surprised at the answer.

Mulder grinned at him. "I trust you."

Ben returned the smile with an odd look. "One other thing," he added. "Once you get the Force back, you may feel some pretty strange things. The Urmari shied a very aggressive aura in the Force. You may feel like you are in the middle of a dumpster full of rotting garbage. I'll help you, but you'll need to follow my lead. Okay?"

"All right, already," Mulder nodded his agreement, with no understanding of what Ben was talking about. He was suddenly impatient to be underway.

"That building is the Vespiary. That's where they are." Ben pointed to a concrete block building two hundred yards away. "At this time of evening most are there preparing to link to the collective. It's a way of joining with the others here, kinda like discussing your day over dinner. It strengthens them. After that they like to feed. I'd like to hit them before they feed, that's when they're the most vulnerable."

"Exactly how many of *them* are we talking?" Mulder asked. He'd

hunter could do. He wasn't all together sure he cared to know what a whole group could do, even vulnerable.

"Maybe fifty or so," Ben shrugged, checking a blaster before handing it to Mulder. "Back up," he said. "In case you loose one or something."

"I get your point," Mulder assured him as they crept along the last stretch of clearing toward the main building. "Which way?" They'd reached the side of the building.

Ben gestured a silent reply to the left. Both men, virtually identical in the dark, slunk down alongside the wall and crept toward the door. Ben pulled a card from a zippered compartment in his boot and ran it through the door scanner. A light pinged green to allow them entry.

* * *

Following the instructions, Scully turned into a graveled road, lights of the Vespiary shining less than a half mile away. The area was heavily wooded, the moon and stars barely visible through the thick, strong scented pine. Han, riding shotgun, ordered, "Pull over to the side, turn around so the car's facing out, toward the road. We go the rest of the way on foot." Scully almost responded, "Yessir, General, sir," but merely complied.

The only sounds were the soft ones of the night and the crunch of booted feet on gravel. Solo veered off the path, leading them, under cover of the trees, by a circuitous route towards the Vespiary. He and Scully taking the point, they climbed a low rise, and by unspoken accord, crept along the needle sharp ground, edging up and forward. The compound was softly lit and but for an unmanned guard house, and gate to the main road, unfenced and not patrolled. One large concrete block building squatted in the center, shuttered, closed. Encircling the main building, like scattered beads, were small sheds; vehicles, equipment, and storage tanks peeped out from their darkened interiors.

Scully had moved next to an attentively scanning Han. He muttered to her sardonically, "Doesn't **that** look inviting."

She agreed, "A little too easy, I think."

Han studied the scene, then asked, pointing, "Those tanks, over by the sheds, what are those do you think?" He handed her an oddly shaped pair of binoculars, and she was startled to

Peering through them, Scully finally concluded, "A place this remote is probably not serviced by typical utilities. I think one tank may be part of a septic system, another is probably for water. The ones nearest and furthest," she pointed, "are propane, heating or fuel oil of some type."

"Flammable?" Han asked.

"Very."

Looking over his shoulder, he asked, "What's wrong with the others?" Leia, Mara and Luke were huddled at the base of rise, under sheltering trees. Han and Scully snuck back down and found the others blanched and badly shaken.

Scully asked, "What's wrong," even as Han concluded curtly, "Jedi thing right?"

Luke nodded, ashen. "The whole place reeks in the Force..."

In a shuddering whisper, Leia said, "It stinks of death and cold, and..."

"Hunger, ravenous hunger," Mara finished.

"As we got closer, we all had the same reaction," Luke explained. "It's almost instinctive, you want to put up a mental barrier in the Force to block it out."

"Adams said the Urmari can detect that," Scully said, heart sinking, eyes darting from one shivering Force sensitive to another.

"Bet they use it to make their prey give itself away," Han concluded.

Three nods, Leia adding, "It's very effective."

Han ran an anxious hand over his face, making some swift decisions and changes in the plan that had been forming since Adams first described the Vespiary. "There's one main building; nothing else looks like it's used for anything except equipment. The building is very solid, too big to blow with a single charge. Even with the three we have, it'll be a tight shave. Luke, Dana and I go inside, we'll look for Mulder and plant one, as deep in as we can."

Both Leia and Mara began muted protests, but Han put up a warning hand. "If it's that difficult to keep from springing a mental barrier, I don't want any of you inside. But Luke's got better control than either of you do, right?" With their grudging nods of assent, Han reached into a bag slung over his shoulder. He removed two detonators and handed

"Dana spotted flammable fuels. You both will need to figure a way to get those tanks or the fuel as close to the building as possible, plant the detonators on a time delay, and then meet us back here."

Agreeing on the timing, the five then crept back up the hill. With a squeeze to his wife, Han's delivered the final instruction, "Remember, from the time we enter the building thirty minutes. Then it blows."

Scully gave in to the fear, "What if we can't find Mulder in that time?"

"We will Dana," Han promised, with genuine assurance, "we will." With a jerk of his head, he indicated Luke and Scully should follow him; slipping slightly on the slick carpet of needles, the three stole slowly down the hill. Mara and Leia both marked on their wrist chronos when, with fleeting glances up to them, Han, Luke and Dana disappeared into the building.

* * *

The building was very quiet, very dim and very cold; none was unusual for the Urmari. Ben, though accustomed to the aggressive stench multiple Urmari leaked in the Force, had to stop and clear his head upon entering the building. He didn't dare use the Force just yet.

"What is it?" Mulder asked concerned as his brother leaned heavily against the wall.

"Nothing. It's just that it can be difficult to not block them when one is a trained Jedi." He pushed off from the wall and moved forward. "It's all right," he assured a still worried Mulder.

"Shouldn't we be seeing one or something," Mulder whispered as they slunk through the bare concrete corridor. There were occasionally doors with colored key pads glowing red and locked. Corridors wound into darkness, but there were no windows, no life, no light, no sound.

"No. These are the work rooms. They live and eat upstairs. That's where most of them are now, meditating. There is an atrium further down this hall, they have a communications setup there, some video games..."

"You're kidding?"

Ben turned, flashing a grin. "No. Get this, they really like the

Mulder stifled a laugh as Ben continued, edging again down the hall.

"After the meditation, they will trickle down one or two at a time to the atrium. They congregate there for their link to the Vespriary. They are very hungry, so it makes their joining to the collective easier. But physically, they are at their weakest, so that's when we'll get one."

The hall widened, emptying into a doorway. A pool of glowing light beyond the door, and the promise of opening space, beckoned. Adams slowed, moving even more cautiously. He muttered. "It's always really tempting to use the Force to try to sense if there is anyone in there, but that's just what they want you to do." Flat against the barely sheltering dark corridor, Adams now gestured Mulder closer. They peeked around the doorway.

Mulder saw a small, utterly ordinary, auditorium like space open up. Fed by the hallway at their end, on the far side, at the room's corners, twin sets of steps marched upwards, and faded into darkened stairwells. In between, clusters of folding chairs, and as Ben had said, the shiny black tables that housed old fashioned video games. It was deserted.

With a jerk of his head and another cautious look around, Ben stepped into the atrium, and moved towards one of the stairs, his plan now immediately clear: lie in wait for an Urmari to emerge, strike it down and get the hell out of there.

They did not have the anxiety of dawdling in the cold, utilitarian room. They both heard the sounds of light steps descending. Ben produced his light saber and quickly demonstrated for Mulder what was necessary. At Mulder's nod of understanding Ben passed the weapon to his brother.

Mulder took the saber, it glowing blue and alive in his hands heart thudding against his ribs, his shirt sticking to him despite the cool. Was he really about to do this? The hum filled the room in the stillness. The steps on the stairs quickened. Mulder shifted his feet, and raised the saber up, preparing to strike down the slight form that suddenly emerged on the stair.

* * *

Leia and Mara waited a full five minutes after the building swallowed the others. The oppressive weight of the black Urmari voracity pressed them into the dirt and pine needles. It was a palpable, rank manifestation of the Force; the compulsion to simply block it out was overwhelming, almost paralyzing. With a shake of her head, Leia tried

fetid presence that filled her mind and nostrils, clung to her skin, coated her mouth and eyes.

Leia glanced at Mara. The other woman had buried her head in her hands and the ground; she was breathing hard, in short, despairing gasps. She squeezed Mara's slim shoulder, "You okay?"

Mara nodded into the dirt, "It's worse than anything I ever felt with Palpatine. It's..."

With another shake, Leia cut her off, handing Mara the macrobinoculars, "Take a look. Let's see if anyone's about."

With a steady hand, Mara peered through binocs, adjusting the controls to compensate for the light of the building. "I see the tanks Solo and Dana mentioned."

She handed them to Leia who now searched the area as well, "Nothing's moving. Let's get down there, set up the far tank first." Mara was already on her feet, skittering down the slope, Leia right behind her.

They circled wide, avoiding the building, staying out of sight of the shuttered windows, hugging the rear of the storage sheds, and sweating with each edgy and labored step to not do what every instinct for self preservation demanded that they do; hide from the voracious Urmari hunger. Clutching the trunk of a tree like a raft in a storm, Leia muttered, "I never thought I was this dependent on the Force."

Mara finished, "Until now."

They reached the first tank with no interruption. It was nestled halfway into a shed, jutting out like a white tongue from a dark mouth. Studying the tank more closely, they were gratified to spy red flames decorating its surface and the words Leia translated as "CAUTION HIGHLY FLAMMABLE." Mara reminded her, "red means danger or stop in nearly every language." More daunting was that the tank was nearly three meters high, twice as long and a full twenty meters from the rear of the Vespiary.

The women slowly circled it, Mara abruptly pulling up at one point. "What is it?" Leia hissed, alarmed.

Dressed in black, framed in black, Mara stood still, turning slowly, listening, blaster and pick drawn.

Leia ached to reach out with the Force, something in her mind prompting her to tap ever

and Mara were truly alone with Shenandoah night. She ruthlessly beat back the impulse.

Hearing only the sounds of their pounding hearts, they returned to their reconnaissance of the tank. Mara spotted it first and heaved with relief. "Leia!!" In the still night, even her whisper seemed too loud. "It's on wheels."

Leia joined her at the rear of the tank, "Sometimes old fashioned ways work best. Do we dare just push it?"

Mara was already putting her scant weight into it, "I don't have any better ideas." She grunted, with the effort, and Leia joined her. "Besides we don't have that much time."

A creak so loud it split the quiet compound reverberated through the air as the tank began to roll across the spongy turf. It picked up speed, and for a panicked moment, they thought it would crash right into the wall of the Vespiary. Scrambling, digging their heels in, Mara and Leia grasped frantically at the tank's rungs. With a bump and feminine curses, the tank slowed to a stop, but a meter from the building.

They both leaned heavily against the tank, panting heavily. Leia was sucking on her hand. "You okay?" Mara asked with surprising solicitude.

Leia nodded. "Just broke a nail."

"Commando occupational hazard," Mara quipped. "We should all get hazard pay for this assignment." Leia's retort died in the making, as they both heard the snapping twig at the same instant. The women whirled around, blasters already drawn, picks in hand, pulse and hearts hammering.

"There!!" Mara rasped. Leia squinted and saw it too. They waited watching a dark shadow lurking lightly across dried, dead leaves. As Leia and Mara slowly mastered their pounding fear, the hulking blackness devolved. What had been a monster, became with calm returning, a small furry mammal, hopping out on to the grass. Mara pointed her blaster at it, but Leia stopped her, reaching a hand on top of the cool metal, pushing the weapon back down.

"No," she whispered. They watched as the animal stood on its hind legs, nose in the air, sniffing cautiously, then with a furtive glance in their direction, hopped back towards the woods. Leia felt a creeping, wistful smile, "It's Peter Rabbit." She watched the rabbit until it disappeared

She tugged Mara sleeve,
"Plant the detonator, set the timer, let's go."

* * *

Luke and Scully took the point, Han as rear guard. The keypad-padded front door had been but a minor annoyance to the smuggler. It had been easy, far too easy. They snuck slowly, quietly down the long corridor, every other avenue locked, unlit, and forbidding. No one liked this feeling of being herded forward, like animals to the slaughter.

Scully shivered. It was freezing in here, like a morgue. And she'd know, she mused. The place had a similar feel. Sterile. Silent. Oppressive. She glanced at her watch, they had less than seventeen minutes to find Mulder, plant the bomb, and get the hell outta there.

"I'd say it's just a little too quiet around here," Han commented quietly. Scully nodded her agreement.

"Yeah, I can't sense anything," Luke replied, peering around.

"Luke," Han scolded. "Don't use the Force!"

Luke grimaced. "I used the Force," he confessed.

As if on cue, the light on a securely locked door clicked green and slid open. Two black shapes, gross caricatures of humans, flowed through the maw, teeth gnashing, voices like whispers of the dead, flinging themselves like rabid dogs at Luke. He stumbled falling back, and fortunately clear. Scully whirled and so close she could smell the stink of rotting flesh, buried her gun in the neck of one. Han's swift and deadly accurate blaster bolt ripped through the skull and face of the other.

Luke looked almost casually down at the smoking, stinking carnage.
"Oops."

Scully slugged him in the arm. Hard. "What part of don't use the Force didn't you understand, Skywalker?"

* * *

Mulder froze, disbelieving before the person that had descended the steps.

"Mulder! Now!" Ben hissed at his stupefied brother.

"Samantha?" Mulder croaked, ignoring the pesky fly calling his name so far away. He only

stairwell to stand before him.

She smiled, tears in her eyes, joyous. "Fox? What are you doing here?"

Ben took control. Heedless, with a snatch of the Force, he tried yanking the saber out of Mulder's white knuckled grip. But Mulder, and the glowing light saber in his hand were firmly rooted.

In the instant Ben accessed the Force, the black evil of the creature spilled out of the form of a beautiful child. It spun like a sucking whirlpool towards Ben, grasping now at the Jedi with desperate hunger. "Nice of you to come for dinner," its black tongue licked dripping lips.

The sight thawed the ice that had frozen Mulder in place. He lunged at the creature knocking it off balance and falling atop it. The cold, dark flesh writhed beneath his stunned sense and flowed away to reform into a fist that punched him squarely across the jaw. He fell back against the hard floor and hit his head Hard. The saber rolled away.

Through stars he saw the Urmari envelop Ben, its arms everywhere. Mulder heard his brother's muted screams and other sounds but no words, urgent, pleading, like a hungry wind seeping through cracks. He blinked, as the image devolved, something so tall its head brushed the ceiling, and more horrible, a large mouth, plunging down toward Ben.

Mulder dived for the saber and charged at the pain locked in a starving embrace. The Urmari, intent on feeding, brushed the FBI agent away like a bug, then returned to cajoling its prey to use the Force and halt the stinking ravenous assault. Mulder slammed into the wall, and threw himself forward again, igniting the saber. With a ferocious blind attack, Mulder swung at the Urmari's ravening jaw, bent over his brother. It reared up and back screeching in agony, and crashed to the floor.

"Kill it!" Ben gasped, struggling up. "That wasn't enough..."

Mulder straddled the large, twitching body. Holding the lightsaber pointed down, in both hands, he began the driving, killing stroke, when the body transformed again, his little sister. "Help me, Fox! Help!" she screamed, her hands clutched over her head in pleading helplessness.

Mulder closed his eyes and plunged the saber downward.

* * *

Seven minutes. Seven minutes to find Mulder and save him from himself... again. Scully ran through a repertoire of curses in her mind that would have made the man on her father's ship blush as she continued her age old debate about whether to rescue her partner or shoot him herself. Oh, and she kept herself alert for the next onslaught of Force-smacking vampires. She glared back at Luke. There was another one she wouldn't mind putting out of her misery. And if he used the Force again, she just might give into the impulse.

Han, who was currently taking the point, stopped and motioned to them to follow suit. He seemed to consider the open hallway gaping in front of him. They'd already run into a number of such passages. The building seemed to have been designed by an architect fond of wide halls, high ceiling and many passageways. Scully added him or her to her shit list. She watched as Han tensed and then flung himself out across an open corridor, firing wildly. No one fired back, so he casually rolled to his feet and motioned them to join him.

"Even after all these years you haven't managed to master the sneak attack," Luke commented wryly as he joined Han on the other side.

Han ignored him, all business. He surveyed the three hallways laid out in front of him and furrowed his brow. He didn't like the odds, but time and options were conspiring against them. Again.

Luke straightened and flinched as voices and the death knell of an Urmari echoed down the corridor. He pivoted to his right and brought his saber to bear, just in time to behead an Urmari emerging from one of those sliding doors.

And then all hell broke loose. Doors flew open and Urmari emerged from the walls like cockroaches scattering in the light. Firing wildly, Han called to Scully, "Luke and I will clear the exit. You get Mulder."

Scully was halfway down the hall at a dead run before Han even finished.

* * *

Mulder drove the blade through the little girl's neck, felt the hot laser slice through flesh and bone. A dark, noxious cloud issued from the body, its fetid stench flowing over him. He dropped the saber and it clattered away, rolling across the floor. And then nothing.

fast decaying body, tainted, rancid and wholly repulsive. Inhuman. He felt Mulder turn bewildered eyes on him and then he felt something else.

A tall form now stepped into the room from the other staircase, enshrouded in smoke and an all too familiar cackle. They heard the soft sounds of clapping. "Really, boys, well done. Very well done. Such brotherly camaraderie. But you didn't really think that would work, did you?"

"Father," Ben gasped. He climbed slowly to his feet, bowed under the weight of his father's treachery. "You lied."

The older man turned toward him, using his finger to fling his son back to the floor like a gnat. "And you betrayed me."

Mulder suddenly came to life and launched himself at his father, catching him around the middle and driving him to the floor where he pinned him with a knee to the throat. "Don't think that I'll hesitate to end your pathetic life this time."

"Don't try and threaten me, Fox, I've watched Emperor's die."

"And I'm looking forward to watching you die, dad," Mulder sneered, adding his hands to the assault on his father's throat. "I'm going to laugh as I slowly choke the last breath right out of you."

"I'm proud of you, son," he rasped.

Mulder increased the pressure on the man's windpipe. "What'd you use to get her in your bed? A Jedi mind trick? Did you force yourself on her?" His voice dropped to a whisper.

Cancer Man laughed through his collapsing airway. "She came to me... she begged."

"Liar!" Mulder, screamed, eyes glazed with blind rage. Hands shaking at his father's throat, rage, disappointment and utter hopelessness warred for attention in his tortured psyche.

His father's face purpling beneath his hands, the hated man whispered, "You're finally in the game, son." And then with a sudden, brutal Force blow, the father reassured his dominance, backhanding his son across the room to land next to his brother.

He smiled, thin lips pulling across yellow caked teeth and surveyed his boys, sprawled on the cold concrete. As Mulder struggled to his feet, he felt another physical push, shoving him

bad, Fox, that you can never get
the Force back. You are quite dark. You would have been a worthy
successor to Vader." He
nodded his head to one side as if listening, then smiled. "They
followed you, Mulder. You knew
they would. **I** knew they would."

Mulder erupted in another protest, Ben right behind, both men fell
gasping with a Force
hand now firmly clutched about their throats. "I told you before Ben.
An enemies' strengths are
useful when defendable to the point of predictability." Another puff,
and a lustful grimace, "Jade
should be unconscious by now. Organa Solo and her brother will be
absorbed and that irritating
smuggler quite dead. And..." Here he paused, and as they all listened,
heard the sounds of
pounding feet in the corridor.

The father looked up over his hapless sons, to the hallway behind
them. "And I do believe
that is the lovely Agent Scully now. So attractive to both my sons."
He reached out with his arm,
pointing towards the gaping hallway blue light flickering at his finger
tips. "Hmmmm, boys what
do you think? Should I just kill her outright as she leaps through that
door to fearlessly rescue
you? Or, you know she does have some small Force sensitivity. Maybe
she should join you at the
Urmari meal Ben?" He laughed again, maniacally the blazing electricity
dancing on his hand.
"Then my two Forceless sons can fight to the death for the honor of the
Forceless Dana Scully."

* * *
X Jedi 2 -- Chapter 8

disclaimer in Chapter 1

by JackeeC, Gheorghe2 and ginef (all @aol.com)

Going round again, now towards the front of the Vespiary, the
identical tank presented a
more difficult challenge. "No wheels," Mara muttered with a curse.
"How much time?"

Leia checked her chron, it seemed as if ages and but seconds had
past. "Ten minutes."
She gave the tank an experimental push; it wasn't going to budge.

Circling round to the front, Mara whispered urgently, "Leia!!"
Mara was crouched down
at the front of the tank, manipulating a spigot when Leia joined her.
Liquid began gushing out of
the tank, and Mara hurriedly sealed it off again. "Pretty straight
forward I'd say." Glancing up at
Leia, she knit her brows, nose wrinkling with the fumes that had

just empty the tank."

Shaking her head, Leia pointed out the topography, "Fuel may just run down the hill."

Glancing at the darkened side of the building another twenty five or thirty meters away, she added, "We need to get the fuel closer to the building, even if we can't get the tank there."

She scuttled down next to Mara, and the women studied the configuration. Mara finally offered, "Hose? A hose would work."

"Like this one?" Leia spied a black coil, hanging on her side of the tank; it appeared to be several meters long and wide enough to fit over the spigot. "We've gotta move fast Mara, it'll take time for enough of this tank to empty to do much good. Check out your side, see if you can find some more hose."

With a curt nod, Mara rose, and edged along the side of the mammoth tank. Hearing Mara move and search, Leia concentrated on the hose. She yanked the length from its hook, and quickly tightened the mouth over the spigot, then standing, stretched the hose out, towards the building. As she was measuring out the distance, working a kink out in the tubing, she felt it.

Her skin prickled, senses alert, a foul, cold stinking odor wafting by. Leia looked quickly up, but saw only Mara, emerging out of the dim gloom now waking towards her, one hand trailing along the side of the tank, a coiled hose in the other. "I found some more," she hissed.

Leia stared at the approaching woman, unable to shake the sense of fundamental wrongness. She whispered urgently to Mara, "Do you sense it? Something's close by."

Mara paused, poised, testing the air. She shook her head in negation, "I don't feel anything," and continued her stealthy advance. She was less than three meters away, when an awful wave broke over Leia. Something was wrong, very wrong; she was enveloped in a rising blackness, an intense, insatiable thirst. Leia wavered, her Force sense demanding to protect her from the filthy ravishing. The warning call died in her throat, mouth dry as dust, and feet rooted to the ground. Leia knew she was being mesmerized, a rodent unable to tear itself away from a serpent's unblinking gaze.

A pleading entreaty spoke to her, cajoling sweetly, "Use it. Use the Force, Leia." She realized with horror it was Mara, eyes black and murky, face distorted,

her shattering resolve, approaching slowly, impossibly long arms, like tentacles reaching into her, reaching into her mind.

Mara's smile twisted, revealing a row of fanged teeth and a black, darting tongue. Now within arm's reach, she raised her arms, hands encircling Leia's head. "Leia," the fiend whispered, "you have such beautiful hair." Leia shuddered with the icy touch, felt the tendrils now working through her. Mara's black stare filled her vision. Leia clenched her fist, warding off the assault. Searching for the will to resist; her hand found the handle of the pick she had never abandoned.

"Now," Mara whispered, a cold wind on Leia's face, "use it now." With all the might of training, courage, and blind, raw fear, Leia swung her right arm up, driving her pick up, ramming it hard through Mara's throat. She felt it connect through tissue and flesh and finally hit deep, on unyielding bone. With a curse and a cry, she pushed, and Mara tipped back, falling to the ground writhing, the pick lodged in her white, frail neck. With her foot, Leia flipped Mara over, ignited her light saber and drove the tip down, through the woman's lush red hair, into the back of her head. Mara squealed in death, thrashed, and then lay still.

Leia turned away, quailing at what the Urmari would dissolve into. Shaking, she stumbled and crawled the length of the tank, finding Mara on the other side, unconscious. She fell next to her, "Mara, Mara, wake up." Leia shoved harder, now slipping her, urgent.

Groaning, Mara opened her eyes, then with comprehension returning, frantically cast about in the Force, and ... found her sense still remained.

Leia shook her, warning, incoherent, "It knocked you out. We're after me. We're running out of time. Have to get the tank."

Mara rolled to her feet, now helping Leia stand. Together, clutching one another against the reeking Urmari molestation, they staggered back along the tank, retrieving the hose the Urmari had dropped. With a glance at the black, smoking carcass polluting the ground, Mara pulled a shattered Leia back to the task at hand. "Come on. Connect the hose." Leia was staring stupidly at it. "Leia!!" Mara ordered, more stridently, penetrating the shock. "Hold it together."

With another shake, Leia nodded and swiftly connected the two hoses. Mara dashed towards the Vespiary, running the hose from the tank to the building. Checking her chron, Mara

five minutes. Hearing a gurgling sound, Mara whipped around and realized that Leia had already turned the spigot and fuel was gushing out on to the ground. Mara, noted with chagrin, that the liquid was soaking her body and pant legs.

The task done, Mara sprinted back to Leia and the two women now ran back up the hill, away from the Vespiary. At the crest of the rise a sudden, powerful release of energy in the Force threw them both to the ground. "What was that?!?" Leia gasped.

Recovering first, Mara dragged Leia to her feet. "I don't know. But they'd better get out of there quick."

* * *

An Urmari head rolled to a stop at Han's feet as he rammed a pick into another that was stalking Luke. "Are we having fun yet?" Han yelled.

"Next time, let's just go to a resort, okay?" Luke shoved the last Urmari with a Force blow.

It landed hard on the concrete, and Han shot it in the head. "You don't think that crazy idea of Ben's will work, do you kid?"

"Huh?"

"For getting the Force back?" Han persisted.

"How the hell should I know?" Luke replied as he wiped the dripping sweat with a sleeve, and checked his chron.

Han was already plastering the detonator behind a doorway, and caught up with Luke as they jogged in the direction Dana had gone, where Mulder and Adams were and now Luke sensed, their father as well. "We've got three minutes."

* * *

Scully eased into atrium, gun drawn, taking in the scene. Adams and Mulder were stricken, lying on the floor, at her feet, their hated father standing less than ten feet away, his left hand casually holding a cigarette, the right outstretched towards **her**. Behind him, matching staircases spiraled upwards. She spared a glance at the darkened stairwell, seeing movement there. She barked, "Mulder, Adams I want you to get up and move towards

getting outta here."

Their father was acting far too casually for someone who had a gun pointed at him, and was exposed behind. "Really Agent Scully," he cackled. "You don't expect it to be that easy, do you?"

She stilled the shudder prompted by the maniacal laughter, and at the black shapes that were oozing out of the back stairs. Her mind told her that she did not see blue electricity dancing from Cancer Man's right hand; her emotions told her differently. "The only thing easy about it will be pulling the trigger and blowing you away," Scully hissed, then chanced a glance at Mulder and Ben, who were still unmoving on the floor. She pushed Mulder with her foot, urging, "Come on, let's go."

Cancer Man's upraised hand tightened, the blue light flashing more brilliantly. Scully gasped, against all reason, feeling her throat tighten. This was one Force application, she realized she had not encountered before. She aimed her gun, and an invisible hand yanked it from her grip. She was still trying to work out the physics of all this as she sank to her knees, struggling for air. Hand clutching at her throat, head up defiantly Scully pried her eyes open. Just beyond her blackening vision she saw ten or more Urmari now moving stealthily toward Cancer Man. Keep fighting, she swore silently, make him use the Force. The grip on her throat tightened, a roaring in her ears, she labored to rise.

Mulder also saw the stalking Urmari, comprehended what Scully was trying to do. Tearing free of his father's paralyzing grip, he staggered to his feet. Grabbing Ben's light saber he ignited it, and threw himself forward. So splitting his attention was simply no effort to Cancer Man, to one as strong in the Force as he. With his son's pathetic efforts to defend his dying partner, Cancer Man grinned, and extended his hand, releasing blinding bolts of blue lightning into Mulder.

With the impact, Mulder felt fire burn through his veins. Dimly, through smoke and shock, he saw the Urmari tense, then advance again on his father. Oblivious, he turned again to Scully. Leering, crazed, he laughed again, "I think my boys, I prefer knowing that for the rest of your lives, you will know that your selfish pursuits were responsible for Dana Scully's death." He turned both hands on the kneeling Scully; she grappled wildly in his chortling grasp. Cancer Man let loose a stunning blast of blue fire at Scully.

It never reached the target.

Ben had exploited his father's divided attention, and in a monumental effort, freeing from the choke hold, hurled himself in the path of the killing shock waves. The Father's bolts smashed into Ben, igniting his son, singeing his skin, setting his clothing afire. The impact sent Ben flying, over Scully, back into the corridor.

The powerful burst of Force energy was the final provocation. Driven mad, fighting, the Urmari swept across the room, enveloping Cancer Man, sharks driven to a killing rage with the smell of hot blood. With flailing tentacles and dark whispers, the fiends exacted their bargain.

Mulder staggered up, scooping the light saber, he stumbled headlong to Scully. She was already on her feet, grabbing her gun in one hand and Mulder's sleeve in the other. She shouted over Cancer Man's desperate screams and howls of the Urmari, "This place is blowing in two minutes. We've gotta go, gotta get out."

Mulder hesitated, glancing into the atrium; he saw the black feeding frenzy, heard the cries. His brother's groaning roused him. He nodded at his partner, and they rushed forward to Ben, helping Mulder's charred brother up. Luke and Han appeared a moment later. "Minute thirty" was all Han said, and they began to run, the sounds of the savage gnashing of demon teeth fading behind them.

* * *

Looking back, Leia would always be glad that Han set his chzo one minute faster than the rest of them. Anxiously, fighting rising panic, she knew she stilled a cheer when she saw the flash of Luke's green light saber cut through the door. In the depths of the building, there was a muted roar, and a rending shriek in the Force. The Vespiary rocked to its very foundation. Dana emerged, right behind Luke, and then Han, carrying someone over his shoulder. Before they could absorb, comprehend or mourn, Mulder came running out behind Han, with ... Leia did not register the image at first, a blue light saber. The five of them now arrowed up the hill. The concussion of the second, and then third detonator throwing them all to the ground.

Fed by the oil, flames ripped up the building, the first tank exploded, shooting a fiery whirlwind into the dark sky. A tongue of flame wound from the building

following the hose they had strung. Leia could see the flame daintily lap at the tank for moments, before it too exploded, adding a fourth explosion to the conflagration. Fire swept through the compound, heat and soot now raining down on them. The cry in the Force pierced sound and consciousness, slicing through their ears and minds. They heard the keen of the Urmari death knell.

She and Mara raced down the hill, meeting the others halfway. Bent under his burden, Han trudged up, then eased the blackened Ben Adams to the ground. Mulder fell to his knees, and swearing threw the light saber away. Deactivating as it left his hand, it rolled down the hill, coming to a gentle stop at the base of sapling pine. The others stood in a circled silent vigil as Mulder grasped his brother's hand, the burned skin sloughing off in his fingers.

Adams rasped, "The Urmari got him, didn't they?"

Mulder nodded, "Don't try to tell us we'll get you out of here." He raised desperate eyes to Luke, "Can't you do something?"

It was Scully who answered, kneeling next to her partner, "Some things even the Force can't heal Mulder."

In answer and acceptance, Adams struggled a bit. "She's right, brother. Better this way." A dry laugh escaped bleeding, scorched lips, "I warned that bastard he'd made a bargain with the devil. Looks like I did, too."

"No," Mulder pleaded, now softly, urgently. He clutched at Ben's shirt but it shredded in his hands, "Not you."

Adams choked, gurgled, a thin red stream trickling down his nose and ear. "Everything dies, Mulder. When the time comes, you'll understand. No one's that strong." Weakening, he coughed, spittle and blood. A gentle rain of ash began to fall. Scully brushed the flakes away as Ben's eyes followed the floating, playful soot. "I finally opened my eyes, Mulder. I'm sorry it came too late."

Ben now reached for Mulder's hand, croaking "But when I go, you can take something of me with you, brother. Something to remember." The bloodied, burned hand gripped the dirtied one. "Open yourself to me, Mulder. Try to feel the Force again."

Mulder was stricken. Aghast, he stammered, "I can't. It's gone."

"Trust me. Believe."

The hand went limp and Mulder clutched it tighter, bending his head, murmuring forgotten prayers to ward off approaching death.

A faint blue light shimmered, seemingly illuminating Ben from within. It rippled, like a still pond stirred by a gentle hand. It began in Ben, and washed slowly over Mulder, enshrouding the two brothers, the bond of siblings in the Force. Scully rocked back on her heels, feeling a subtle, profound power. As the light began beating stronger, the others also stepped back, involuntarily shying from the sweet, potent energy that enveloped Mulder, bowed over his brother's body. The light emanated clearly from Ben, with each throb, pulsating from the hand of the dying to the hand of the living. With every weakening beat in Adams, it pushed stronger into Mulder, flowing from one brother into the other. It finally faded altogether, and Ben, now one with the Force that had bound him to this corporeal existence, melted away, his hand dissolving in Mulder's own.

Mulder stared at his hand, stared at the ground, at the place his brother's body had been. Looking up, he found Luke's sorrowing face and felt Scully's shaking arm about his shoulders. He stammered, "Where did he go?"

Luke stepped forward, comprehending what had happened. Speaking softly, wanting to ease the piercing pain, he said, "Ben turned away from the Dark Side, Mulder."

Mulder blinked, staring first at the solemn Jedi, then into Scully's tender, worried eyes, then to the ground and the pile of burnt clothing. He saw Scully's trembling hand find the gold cross at her throat, and then perceived some profound current pass between her and Luke.

It was Mara, the first to realize it was gone, who was now the first to grasp what had happened. It was fittingly, an observation punctuated by a curse, "Sith, Mulder!! You have the Force back."

Mourning quiet was now replaced by Scully's gasp and then stunned silence. Breaking the frozen tableau, Luke strode to Mulder, offering a hand to pull him up from the ground. The shock of the contact in the Force reverberated through Leia and Mara as well.

Scully scrambled to her feet, resting a guiding hand on his arm, "Mulder? Is it back?" she asked throwing scientific reasoning to the side with a shovel. No, make

feel the Force?"

"I, I don't know," he stammered, uncertain and fearful.

END-- Chapter 7

XJedi2 A Cross Over

Chapter 8-- "Perdition's Wheel"

JackeeC, Gheorghe2 and ginef (all at aol.com)

The Grounds of the Vespiary

12:47 AM

The squealing of tires and slamming car doors roused them. Mara's eyes darted through the trees. "Better hurry up and decide, Mulder, because we need to get out of here."

Mulder, trudging with the weight of all the universes on him, retrieved Ben's light saber. The sounds of the release of a blaster safety halted them. As one, they all swung to Han in amazement. "Mara's right," he said quickly, shifting weight and weapon slightly towards her, sparing a glance into the thick trees. "But, we're not going anywhere until you all scan this place in the Force."

Protests now erupted, Luke's the loudest of all. "Han," the Jedi reasoned. "We all felt the Urmari die."

He shook his head, implacable. "Not good enough." Turning, blaster and all, bluntly now to Mara, he said, "Mara's got to search for the Cancer Man."

"The hell I am Solo," Mara blazed.

Unmoved, Han now focused on Mulder, as if Mara had not interrupted. "And Mulder has to help." They heard shouts, lights from down the hill flickering closer. "We're not leaving unfinished business this time. And we're not leaving Palpatine's Dark Jedi son here alive."

"Han's right," Scully put in, as Leia added her agreement, cajoling Mulder and Mara, "We can't leave unless we're sure. You won't do it by yourselves, but it must be done."

Leia stepped up and with a glance at her brother, Luke now moved to Mara. They all saw something quiet and unknowable pass between the Jedi and his hostile student, a gentle touch

acquiescence. Luke led Mara forward, and Leia stretched out a hand to Mulder, "We'll show you." With a prod from Scully, Mulder stumbled toward the Jedi, placing his right hand in Leia's.

Leia sensed in all of them a variation on a theme; differing in intensity, each person emanated fear and loathing. Pushing aside her own apprehension, she led by example, searching the area in the Force. She felt the residual stain of the Urmari, and sought deeper, now reaching to her brother. Immediately his familiar sense strengthened and buoyed her, and he now gently encouraged Mara. Leia concentrated then on Mulder, his sweaty, gritty hand clasped tightly to her own. She touched him in the Force, and the shock of the connection with his black, rank despair nearly drove her off again. She heard a mournful voice, "Leia? Is that you?"

"Yes, Mulder. It's all right," she assured. "I'll help you." Steeling herself, she twined more firmly with him, speaking silently, "I know this is difficult. When I found the truth, it nearly destroyed me. I will never accept that I am a Skywalker's daughter. You will fight to not be your father for the rest of your life, Mulder. But we must do this."

He eased toward her, step by step, accepting her tutelage. Guiding now, she led Mulder by the hand and with her support, felt him tentatively reach out into the larger world of the Force. Together they cast about, sweeping the area, Mulder first unsure, then with more confidence. As they brushed closer to Luke and Mara's Force bond, Leia was startled to feel Mulder suddenly tug, away from her, towards Mara with a hungry yearning. "No, Mulder," she said firmly, drawing him back.

She felt a surge of rage as he furiously rebelled against her prohibition. In her mind, Leia sensed Mulder rearing back to strike her. She severed their connection, still grasping his right hand, wondering if he would physically do to her what he had been prepared to do in the Force. Opening her eyes, Leia stared into a wild, tortured face that she had once known as Mulder. He had indeed raised his left hand high; in it he clutched the light saber handle.

But Han had been nearly as swift. Moving in quickly, he grabbed Mulder's upraised arm. "All clear?" Han asked pleasantly, only the rigid grip on Mulder's wrist and a glint of understanding in his eyes communicating what he had seen and likely prevented. Leia nodded.

then did Han and Leia release him from the physical and mental restraint. In a hoarse, tomb-like voice he whispered, "I couldn't find him."

With an outreached hand, Leia gestured to Scully to take her place next to Mulder. "I think you should stay close, Dana," Leia said softly.

Luke spoke up, pulling from his rapport with Mara and, apparently, unaware of what had occurred, "We didn't sense him."

"Satisfied Solo?" Mara asked acidly.

Han was already moving down the hill towards Dana's waiting car. "Yeah. I think we've overstayed our welcome. Let's go home." They all hurried after him, Scully now pulling a reluctant Mulder from that ash-laden hill.

Alexandria, VA
3:22 AM

The others left Scully and Mulder on the steps. As they entered the building, a subtle hand gesture passed between Leia and Han. She moved back into the shadows of the apartment's foyer, standing as a sentry, just inside the door, keeping watch over Mulder.

Luke, Mara and Han said nothing until they reached the apartment and using Dana's key, let themselves in. It all seemed so ordinary. Han put in bluntly, "You have to wipe Mulder's memory, Luke."

He had seen the request forming, and was as adamant in refusing as Han had been in making it, "I can't. Not again. It almost killed them before."

Mara joined Han, an unlikely ally. "He doesn't need to know what he learned today."

The Skywalker stubbornness began to assert itself, as Luke stuck a chin out defiantly. "I won't do it. It's not fair. Leia and I both managed this kind of news. Mulder can too."

Han strode across the room to his brother in law, laying a heavy hand on his shoulder, challenging. "How? A grandson of Palpatine will be loose here, with some knowledge of the Force, a whole lot of anger, a light saber and no one to train him. We can't do that."

"Maybe we can take Mulder with us. He's very powerful. I can train

reasoned.

"And what about Dana?" Han interrupted. "You'd take him away from her? Leave her here to face their enemies alone?"

"Your vision of a dead Mulder and Coruscant in ruins is why you sent them back the last time," Mara reminded quietly.

Luke hung his head, eyes meeting the floor, "What does Leia say?" He then looked about, "Why did she stay downstairs?"

Han dropped his hand away, moving restlessly about, the room too small for some spirits.
"She wants to keep close to Mulder."

Both Luke and Mara echoed, "Why?"

Snaking a kitchen chair, Han took his familiar post and sat, staring at his hands. "It happened when you all were searching for the Cancer Man. Leia says she felt a very strong Dark Side presence in Mulder." He hesitated, then with a measuring glance to Mara, said, "and he tried to connect with Mara. When Leia stopped him, he almost lost it."

Mara swore, blanching and sunk to a chair.

"You have to do it Luke," Han repeated.

* * *

Mulder sat shivering on the front steps of his apartment building. A ship lost at sea. The moon poured over him, casting him in an eerie light. Somewhere between the Vespiary and DC he had stopped functioning. Stopped responding. Now he was staring out at the street without seeing anything. He gently fingered his brother's lightsaber, turning it over in his hands. Occasionally his lips would move, but no words escaped them.

Scully had seen him like this before, but it had never been so extreme. Mulder had always managed to toe the line and stay just this side of sane. But Ben's death and the discovery of his parentage had pushed him somewhere deep and dark, into a chasm that Scully could not reach. She went to him, kneeling down and resting her hands on his knees. "Mulder," she said softly.

He did not even acknowledge her. She took a deep breath, weighing what to do, when he finally spoke, his voice disembodied. "'In truth we know nothing, for truth lies in the depth.'"

He's quoting ancient Greek philosophers. At least the photographic memory is back, she reflected. But at what cost? Scully rested her head on his knee and closed her eyes, fighting the tears demanding to be turned loose. Well, Ahab, you finally caught your white whale. The truth was out there and we reeled it in, kicking and screaming. But it was bigger than we thought. More insidious. We didn't anticipate the damage. She fought the urge to giggle, hysteria rising. As Starbuck, I'm ready to go down with the ship, she half laughed, half sobbed. She let his hand rest on the top of her head, a life preserver. A reprieve. "I'm sorry, Scully," he whispered.

"Mulder, none of this is your fault," she started, now looking up to him. Mulder didn't hear her, didn't see her. He rocked back and forth slowly, his arms wrapped protectively around his ribcage. He was gone again. Out to sea. Sucked back into the abyss. She raked a hand through her hair. There has to be a way we can both be Ishmael.

Scully stood, and saw Leia staring inside the doorway. "I won't be long, Mulder. I'll be right back." He did not respond when she got up and slipped in the doorway. She and Leia stood, staring at one another, until Leia said with firm understanding, "He shouldn't be left alone."

"No." After a pause, Scully asked, "How did you and Luke manage once you found out who your father was?"

Leia's back stiffened, eyes glimmering in the dark. "Dana, I found out at the end of the War. Palpatine was dead, the Rebellion had won, my worst enemy was my father and dead, and my home and family destroyed. At that time, I truly thought there were no more battles to be fought. Without Han and Luke, I might have..." She halted the confession abruptly, her warning delivered and clear.

With the frank acknowledgment, and the weight of the responsibility, Scully reeled, seeking the solidity of the wall. "Leia, I don't have a Force link. And..."

She was spared the ordeal of that admission with Leia's intervention, "No, I understand. You see don't you, Dana? I was there for Luke, and Han and Luke were there for me. But it could have easily been otherwise. When the time comes, you may not be there for Mulder..."

Scully glanced outside, through the smoky glass at her huddled partner. Oh God, she thought, why? Why these choices, why were the only alternatives only

watch him," Leia said. "You need to go inside and convince Luke to do something about it."

* * *

Once inside Mulder's apartment, Scully immediately headed to Luke
"You have to erase
our memories again," she demanded.

Luke shrank back from her words. "No. I can't do that to you again. I won't."

"You have to," Scully entreated, grabbing the front of his tunic.
"He's..." she choked, then
resolutely continued. "He's not going to make it otherwise."

Hearing Han mutter "Better dead than dark," Scully took Luke's hands in her own, bowing her head over their clasps. The plea, even though driven by desperate need and fear, was, he thought, beneath her. Luke looked to Mara for support; she pointedly turned away.

Dana delicately rubbed his right hand with her fingers, a light, grazing touch, a surgeon's caress. "What else does he have to lose?" she murmured.

They all waited, until Luke finally acknowledged what had to be done. "You're willing to do this," he asked slowly. "To have memories and time taken from you?"

Head and eyes downcast, Scully nodded. "If the alternative is losing him... then, yes."

Luke pulled her into his arms, holding her tightly. "Okay," he whispered.

* * *

Han went to help Leia with Mulder as the others prepared. They would, it was decided, blame it all on the Czechs.

When Han and Leia reappeared, they brought only a shadow of Mulder. It was the final persuasion Luke needed. Setting down the pizza boxes, Scully hurried forward, guiding her stricken partner to the couch. She sat next to him, and tried gently to loosen his grasp on Ben's light saber handle. Mulder's head shot up, with a snarl, he jerked away from Scully. But her hands followed his, "It's all right Mulder. I'll keep it safe."

"Promise?" Mulder asked, forlorn and lost. She nodded and he grudgingly surrendered the last memory of his brother. "Scully, it's dark here."

unresisting into
the void.

Luke now joined them, sitting next to Mulder on the other side, thinking that at least he would not be worrying about the Gate collapsing.

As if in answer to his musing Mara said, "Hey, Skywalker, get it right this time."

"Mara," Leia admonished.

"What? I was kidding." She turned and returned to what she was doing with glee-- making it look like Mulder had had the mother of all parties with his new buddies from the Czech Republic. Never let it be said that Mara Jade couldn't make a mess as well as she could clean one up.

Scully rose, leaving Luke and Mulder together. Taking Mulder's hand, Luke slowly eased into his mind, touching and prodding gently. He realized with stunning clarity that Han and the others had been right. Rage, revenge, and guilt played freely. He perceived a wide swath of destruction, directed at self, at others, at the world. There were wild feelings, fury and pulsating power barely contained. Even the places not wholly given over to dark were tinged with despair. It was all Luke could do not to recoil from Mulder's mind and head for the stars. Urgently seeing the need to halt this disastrous fall, he redoubled his efforts.

Suddenly, Mulder began to fight the cleansing. His aggressive Force blow nearly threw Luke to the floor. Instantly, Mara and Leia were at his side lending their support. There was another brief struggle, and then with a sigh, Mulder relented, slumping finally into unconsciousness. Han picked up Mulder's crumpled form and flung him over his shoulder, taking him to the bedroom.

Scully was leaning against the wall by the door, arms crossed in front of her, tears pulling at the corner of her eyes. Luke approached her slowly. "You know, Dana, we don't have to erase your memory too," he said softly, his voice a gentle breeze, reassuring and pure.

She shook her head resolutely, voice firm. "I could never lie to him."

"Then let's do it."

"I just have a few things I want to give you, as a thank you." She went quickly to the kitchen, then to a drawer by the television. She scanned the contents

she went to the bookshelf, running her finger down the line of books and removed one.

Han returned from the bedroom and threw Leia a questioning look. Scully approached the smuggler first and handed him a large bottle of tequila. "Think of us fondly when you drink this," she said. "And don't curse us during the hangover."

Han smiled and ruffled her hair. "Not a chance, Dana."

"Thanks...for everything. I wish I'd be able to remember what you've taught me." Solo took her hand and gave it a quick squeeze. Scully looked away and moved toward Leia.

"I think you'll get a kick out of this," she said handing her friend a videotape.

Leia looked down at the case and then at Dana with a quizzical expression.

Scully smiled. "Trust me."

Leia returned the smile. "Always."

Mara was rummaging through the drawer containing the tapes. "Are most of these what I think they are?" she muttered in disgust.

Scully turned toward her. "Yeah. Let's just say that Mulder doesn't have the greatest taste in cinema." Scully pulled her S&W out of the holster at her back and pushed it into the hands of the woman who reminded her so much of Missy. "Take care of yourself," Scully whispered, and then barely audibly, "and him."

Mara, never one for sentimental good-byes, was at a loss for words, but finally nodded her assent. Then she reached into the drawer, removing one of Mulder's sultrier movies and began to pull the tape out of the cassette, a mischievous grin adorning her face. "What? It's supposed to be a party. And it isn't a party till something gets broke."

Scully laughed and made her way to the couch. She sat slowly next to Luke, like someone reporting to a firing squad.

Luke reached out to brush her cheek with his fingertips. "You're sure?"

Scully nodded and carefully set a threadbare and frayed book in his hand. It opened to one of the last pages and she read, "And so the bird of heaven, with archangelic shrieks, and his imperial beak thrust upwards, and his whole captive form folded in the flag of Ahab, went down

dragged a living part of heaven along with her, and helmeted herself with it." She closed his hands around the book, blinking hard to stop the tears spilling down her cheeks. "Read this and maybe you'll understand why."

Luke looked down at the text he held and struggled for the strength to do what he knew he had to. Scully took his hand, gently placing it on the side of her head. "It's time." Luke softly kissed her forehead before he began.

* * *

Shutting the door firmly behind them, they trudged down the steps of Mulder's apartment. "Where's Chewie picking us up?" Luke asked through a yawn.

Han pointed down the dark street, "There's a park at the end of the block. He'll land there, cloaked but we'll still probably scare a few people half to death."

Han swung back around, noticing then that Mara had not joined them. She was standing at the top step of the building, casting about, looking anxiously first up, then down the street. Han was immediately alert, "Mara, what's wrong?"

She held out a warning hand, as Luke and Leia now stopped as well, both feeling what Han saw, that Mara was searching in the Force.

Luke returned up the steps, asking quietly, "What is it?"

She hesitated, poised, then shook him off. "Nothing."

"Positive?" Luke insisted.

"Yes," was the curt response.

They descended the stairs together under Han's skeptical eye. "What did you sense Mara?" There was the merest hint of accusation in his voice.

"Nothing!!" Mara responded hotly.

Han, however, would not be intimidated. "You **sure**?"

She exploded, "What do I have to do, Solo? Rescue your kids again before you trust me?"

With Luke and Leia joining Mara's indignant denouncements, and the muted hum of the approaching ship, the stand off ended. The four jogged to the end of the block, to watch the trees bend and sway under the strain of the landing flying saucer. As night

morning, they boarded.

After hurried, warm greetings, Chewie shot back up into the sky. Mara and Leia however, immediately relieved him of his piloting duties. "Everyone out of the cockpit," Mara commanded.
"The women are breaking orbit."

Leia added her own imperious order, "Into the back flyboys."

Mara and Leia settled in, Leia announcing, "You fly Mara, since I know how to read a Washington street map."

"Oh, now there's a useful skill. You sure you know where we are going?"

Leia nodded, spreading out a map of Montgomery County, Maryland on the console. She pointed, "Head that way."

They arrived in moments, Mara hovering the ship.

"You sure there is no one there Mara?"

"Positive, look at the scanners yourself."

Leia did so, as the comm pinged, with both Luke and Han's voices, breaking into a worried, crackling din. "What's going on up there?"

"Up to no good," Leia intoned.

"No good at all," Mara repeated.

"Okay," Leia said with a satisfied sigh. "It's empty. Uncloak." Mara did so, and Leia poised her hand over the laser battery. "Do you do the honors or should I?"

Mara put her hand over Leia's squeezing it lightly. "I say we both do it."

Moments later, the Urmari ship bolted up into the Earth's atmosphere, then out, on a course home.

Location Unknown

Far away, in a darkened room, the Cancer Man exhaled, stroking the fur of the ysalamiri next to him. So he did not know when the Emperor's Hand broke orbit. The phone call from a loyal watcher told him when the ship shot into the morning light. And then he smiled.

The Bedroom of Agent Mulder
Alexandria, VA
6:3 AM

Scully slowly but firmly pulled herself out of what felt like a drug induced sleep. She had the mother of all hangovers, all the signs were there. Was that tequila she detected? Well that would certainly explain why her head was doing the mambo and her stomach the tango. But what about the weight that seemed to be bearing down on top of her. What was I doing last night, she wondered. She tried to move only to discover that there was indeed a weight bearing down on her. She heard a snore. A snore?

Upon opening her eyes, even bracing for the worst, she was unprepared to see her partner, sprawled half across her like some sort of bizarre human blanket. Fighting a rising sense of panic, she tried to survey the scene calmly with the detached professionalism of the scientist she was. On the positive side of the equation, she did know his name.

There had to be a rational explanation although she was hard pressed to come up with one at this time. She was flat on her back, Mulder face down. She sighed with relief as a glance confirmed that they were both fully clothed. Mulder was still sleeping, his head resting in the curve of her neck, an arm flailed off to the right, one hand gripping the pillow, his other hand, OH MY GOD, cupped firmly on her breast.

It was at this very inopportune moment that Mulder chose to return to the land of the living. "Scully," he rasped, as if he hadn't used his voice in a very long time, "what happened?"

"I don't know, Mulder. Perhaps you could start by explaining why you're in my bed."

"Uh, sure, Scully, I could do that except that you're in mine."

Scully looked around, indeed confirming that fact. "Oh. Well, Agent Mulder, perhaps we can move on to why your hand is on my breast."

Mulder slowly looked down to confirm this fact. "That is a very good question, Agent Scully."

"Perhaps you could move it."

"Perhaps I could," he commented as he did so.

"Right again," he said, rolling away on to his back. They both took
an unusual interest in
his ceiling for a moment.

Finally Scully spoke. "What do you remember?"

He lifted his head and surveyed the disaster that was his room. Scully's eyes joined in the examination of empty beer bottles, pizza boxes, and unspooled video and audio tapes littering the floor, covering every surface, and trailing out of the bedroom and into the living room. "Must have been quite a party. Hope our friend's from the Czech Republic enjoyed it."

Scully laughed, sort of. "Right. Our Eastern European buddies," she paused. "I'm really starting to become alarmed by the fact that we seem to be having the same bizarre dreams."

"What do you mean?"

"First the flying primate. Now imaginary friends from Czechoslovakia."

"The Czech Republic," Mulder corrected.

"Whatever."

He pointed out what the state of the room made obvious. "Imaginary friends don't drink beer and eat Leona's. Perhaps," he concluded, "they're not imaginary."

"Then what do you propose they are?"

"Close encounters of the third kind?" he asked hopefully.

"Mulder, you're--" her evaluation of his current mental state was interrupted by the shrill and insistent ringing of his phone. He rolled across Scully uttering "steamroller" to answer it as she attempted to slap him away.

"Mulder." He listened silently a moment and then sat up, suddenly alert. Scully wondered if they really had been in outer space because gravity had certainly abandoned Mulder's hair. "Where? When? I'll get Agent Scully and we'll be right over." He hung up, grinning like a kid on Christmas. "Someone blew up the Hooters in Rockville."

"And you're smiling about this? I would have expected tears," Scully replied, getting slowly to her feet.

"Multiple eye witnesses report seeing a circular flying object hovering above it just before the explosion," Mulder exclaimed, pacing the floor.

"I'm starting to like these aliens more all the time."

"Someone may even have gotten pictures," he added giddily.

Scully sighed. "Just let me brush my teeth." She headed towards his bathroom, fearful as always of what she might find there.

"Okay, but hurry up."

"And I expect bagels after this, Mulder, and coffee," she called from the bathroom as she examined her reflection in the mirror. Well, Dana, you certainly look every moment of your 33 years, she thought. She grabbed a washcloth intent on giving her face a good scrubbing.

"Scully," Mulder called from the other room.

"What?"

"Any idea why there are canvas bags from the Washington DC Parking Authority in my living room and change all over the floor?"

"Maybe we played drinking games with the Czechs?" she yelled back.

"Could be, especially because..." Mulder's voice trailed off, and she heard sounds of rummaging in the next room.

"What?"

"Would we have played quarter shots with two bottles of tequila?"

Now her eyes fell on an incongruity sitting on the countertop.
"Mulder?"

"Yeah?"

"Why is there a plastic bag full of tribbles in your bathroom?"

"Tribbles?"

"Uh huh."

"Maybe the tribbles are in the bathroom for the same reason there is a floral strapless bra in my kitchen, size.... 32C."

He joined her in the bathroom, brandishing the aforesaid item.
"I'd like to meet the woman who has such good taste in lingerie," he commented.

Scully eyed the bra that had somehow teleported from her lingerie drawer to Mulder's apartment and did what came naturally. She denied everything.. "I think you did Mulder. And she's now on her way back to the Czech Republic."

Mulder slipped out of the bathroom only to return a moment later.
"Scully?"

"Yes?"

"Any idea why the Czechs would leave a barbell?"

"A barbell?"

"Well, I don't know what this thing is, do you?"

Scully examined it after rinsing the soap from her eyes, "It looks like a handle or some kind. What happens when you push the switch?"

"Nothing." Mulder manipulated the metal handle, holding it in his right hand, swinging it back and forth. "Seems a little light to be a barbell."

"Paperweight?"

"I wonder what it was doing under the seat cushions of the couch. And I still haven't found the TV remote," he said.

"Oh no! Not the remote," Scully gasped in horror.

A man with a mission, she smirked as Mulder wandered out of the bathroom again. She reached into the holder and pulled out her toothbrush, not examining too closely the fact that she kept a toothbrush and even an extra pair of sweats at his place and that he did the same at hers. Instead she turned her mind to their new case. A UFO blowing up Hooters, she mused, putting a healthy dollop of toothpaste on her brush. I'd like to meet those extraterrestrials. "Hey, Mulder," she called again, "What's that saying about intelligent life avoiding this planet?"

"Sometimes I think the surest sign that intelligent life exists in the universe is that none of it has tried to contact us' Bill Watterson," Mulder replied, coming into the bathroom and leaning against the door frame. "Why?"

"No reason," Scully said through a mouthful of toothpaste. "I hope you're planning on brushing your teeth because believe me they need it."

"Gee, thanks, Scully, I can always count on you not to mince words. To tell it like it is," he fired back, reaching for his own toothbrush.

Scully shrugged. "That's what partners are for."

Mulder used his shoulder to muscle Scully out of the way as he grabbed his own toothbrush from the holder. "No one else would probably understand this

She stopped brushing for a moment to consider the question. "I'm not sure I do."

"What's so hard to understand? We're friends, we have an understanding," Mulder replied as he shoved the brush in his mouth.

Scully started to brush again but couldn't let it go. "Mulder?"

"What?"

Scully stopped brushing again and considered her partner in the mirror. "Do you suppose this is what old married people are like?"

"No. I imagine they normally use each other's first names."

Scully started in on her teeth and then stopped yet again. "Mulder, how'd you know that Watterson quote word for word?"

"Same as I always do," he replied, spitting into the sink.

"What was the phone number of the Chinese restaurant in Milwaukee?"

"514-98--" he stopped mid-number. Their eyes meeting and locking in the mirror. "I'm back to normal," he gasped.

"Are you sure?" Scully asked, spitting out the toothpaste.

"Yeah... I feel..." he struggled for the word, connected again. They shared a brief smile, then Mulder added, "Come on, let's go find some UFOs."

Imperial Palace
Coruscant

Touching down at Coruscant Security platform, each thought that this galaxy never looked so good. As they made their way down the ramp of the flying saucer, with a glance at Leia, Mara pushed passed, moving across the bay with resigned grace to speak to the Deck Officer in charge of the prep crews for the ships hangared there. As Han and Luke saw her go, Han queried, "I thought we'd get cleaned up, get some real food, where's Mara going?"

Leia circled her fingers around her husband's elbow, propelling him towards the Palace quarters, "Come on."

Leia shrugged off both the restraining hand Luke placed on her shoulder and the light

She said curtly, "You'll have to ask Mara," and with that half pulled half pushed her reluctant and protesting spouse into the Palace, Chewie and the droids following, leaving Luke to stand foolishly and irritably in the darkened hangar. He heard a sharp, "stop eavesdropping," and rebuked withdrew from Mara's technical conversation with the Deck Officer, overhearing enough to know that she was ordering the flight crew to prep her Z 95.

The task completed, Mara slowly walked towards him, eyes down, feet dragging across the tarmac. Attempting another probe, her protective shield flew up in the mental equivalent of a slap across the face. She snapped, "I didn't invite you into my head," and snatching her bag spun around towards the Palace. He had to hustle, and did not catch up to her until they were into the lit and crowded corridor.

"Why the hell are you getting your ship prepped, we just got back." His tone and feelings were angry and frustrated; somewhere deep, buried where both could barely see it, maybe there was hurt as well. With the idle curiosity of the onlookers they passed, Luke lowered his tone, even if Mara's stubborn silence made him want to grab her, shout, and shake an explanation out of her. He realized she was striding towards her apartment quarters and with mounting dread, demanded again, "Where do you think you're going?"

"Don't ask questions you already know the answers to Skywalker."

Damn the inquisitive spectators and scandal sheets, he grasped her arm, yanking her around. "You know what I meant, why are you leaving?"

She glared at him, at the hand clutched at her elbow. "Not here" she hissed, and with a hard jerk that sent him careening into an observing Sullustian, freed herself, and stormed down the corridor. Muttering apologies, Luke pursued, overtaking her in a crowded lift.

Mara ignored his Force-directed inquiries and stayed sullenly mute until they reached her quarters. He did wonder if she would even admit him, and Mara seemed to be weighing the advisability of slipping into her room and slamming the door on him. Luke solved that dilemma by keying the room open himself, walking in, leaving Mara standing in the doorway, studying the patterns in the carpeted entryway. "Did you forget that I knew the lock combo to your room?" He sat down heavily in one of the familiar chairs, vowing to not go anywhere until she spilled whatever was going on. "Running off isn't like you. You owe me an

Mara looked up from contemplation of the floor and strode into the room, "I'm not running. I've got a commitment to keep." She made her way to the cupboard, and with an angry pull spilled the drawer's contents on to the floor. She threw her bag on to the bed, jerked a larger one out from the wardrobe and began tossing things into both.

The only sounds for some time were her slamming and shoving furniture, wrangling up clothing and personal effects and stuffing them into her bags. Luke watched from his vantage point, anger giving way to some slight betrayal, eventually interrupting the brooding silence with a sulky, "I guess I was wrong thinking we would just be picking up where we left off."

Mara slumped, sinking to the edge of the bed. She unclipped her lightsaber from her belt, and with heavy, deliberate movements, began carefully wrapping it in a towel. She finally sighed. "It was part of the deal. I have to go."

His voice was a chill through the stillness. "What deal?"

Pulling the flight bag to her, she gently rested the enshrouded saber there. "Where I'm going, I won't be carrying this."

Calmer, he was able to focus on her own pain and rising, crossed to join her on the edge of the bed. "What deal?" He repeated.

Mara reached and taking his hands in her own wanted to convey the regret she thought she felt but knew she could not say. "Part of the deal with Karrde. If the ship got us to Earth and back, I agreed to return to the Alliance."

He bolted up, furious. "You and Leia agreed to this?"

"We had to get Earth remember? Karrde held out for the highest price. He wasn't going to give us the ship otherwise."

With a pang of guilt, Luke knew that it had been his unreflective and careless act in sending Adams back that had perpetrated this escapade in the first place. More quietly, pacing the room, he half entreated, "Maybe Leia could shake some more credits loose . . ."

Luke did not finish, he knew even as Mara said it, "Karrde's got credits. It's me he wants."

"You aren't some kind of chattel."

Mara bit out her retort, "It was my decision. I made a commitment,

"What about your commitments here, to" he stammered, "your training?" Only then did she meet his gaze. With her stare she laid bare the unspoken between them and Luke retreated, looking away.

As Mara returned to her packing, he wandered to the window, staring out into the dark, feeling a blackening void creeping within himself as well. Her strong, restless sense washing by stirred him from the moody reflection. The gentle, unschooled mental touch mirrored the physical one of her hands on his shoulders, "I'm sorry. There just didn't seem to be any other way."

Some things they had not yet come to say, think, or do. He moved into her arms and emboldened, tested that limit. But her response to the tentative foray was in the negative, "I don't think so. Not a good time, I think." He knew she was right, but had thought it at least worth a try.

He would have given much to hold on to this instance of rare peace in their endless circling, feints, attacks and parries. You may have had better luck with redheads in another galaxy," she whispered. Luke clasped tightly the redhead from his galaxy, wondering for the first and probably not the last time if this was where they both belonged and that he was not to find that out now.

Sensing his rising resigned fatalism, Mara mumbled into his shoulder, "I'm not the only Force sensitive around you know. There are others."

Stroking the head bent to him, he answered with ebbing confidence, "Maybe."

"You might get a school going or something, then I could meet you there."

Feeling her hands roam down his back, he murmured, "You'd finish what you've started then?"

Mara pulled away, leaving him standing at the window now submerged in a darkened pool of advancing shadow. She had not wanted a scene, and this was the wrong way to avoid it. "It may take a while, but I'm not going that far."

Always in motion the future, he thought and in a glimpse ahead knew that they would not recapture this fleeting intimate moment of understanding for a very long time, if ever. Her commitment to remain in some distant orbit of his was the most she could

uncertainty and the most that he could expect. Even if she could meet him halfway, he realized he might not have been able to go that distance. He trudged toward the door, "You have a lot to settle so I'll leave you to it. How long to prep the ship?"

He heard her brusque efficiency return and the shared empathy burst like a tiny, ephemeral bubble, "Coupla hours."

Standing at the door, poised to leave, he stared down at the floor, "Give me a call when you're ready to boost, I can see you off if you want."

"Thanks but..."

She faded away and Luke only nodded "Right. Well, good bye then."

After he left, Mara spent some time simply staring at the towel wrapped saber nestled in her bag, before closing it with finality, "Good bye."

* * *

Standing on the Palace roof, Luke felt Mara's light dim as she climbed to stars and space. He steeled himself, and with a rippling shudder, hyperspace took her away, leaving him pained and breathless, alone in the dark.

J. Edgar Hoover Building
FBI Headquarters
Monday
9:29 AM

Mulder methodically brought a sunflower seed to his mouth and cracked it open, removing the jewel and tossing the shell on the floor. He sat in the dim gloom of the basement office, transfixed, staring at his collection of UFO pictures. He returned, again and again to the one depicted in his "I Want To Believe" poster and the grainy, blurry picture taken only yesterday. There was a truth there, somehow connected to that ship. He didn't know how to explain it, he could just feel it, sense it without a doubt.

He thought he could almost feel his partner's impatience; seconds later he heard the telltale sounds of Scully's sensible pumps clicking on the concrete floor.

"Hey, Mulder," she called as the door flew open, exasperation clear in her voice. "Our flight to Milwaukee leaves in less than hour, and you're sitting in here

Ito is expecting us."

"I know," he replied, a slight smile playing on his lips.

Even with his back to her, he clearly imagined Scully standing in the doorway, hands firmly planted on her hips. "Well, are you coming?" she demanded.

Mulder slowly got to his feet. "Wouldn't miss it." He followed his partner out and quietly closed the door behind, sparing one final glance at the poster.

* * *

From: FMulder@fbi.gov
To: DScully@fbi.gov
Re: More missing items

Did you borrow my copy of Moby Dick?

From FMulder@fbi.gov
Return Path: FMulder@fbi.gov
[129.89.34.2]) with SMTP id LAA20233
Version: 5.3 Copyright (c) 1991, Anastasios Kotsikonas

* * *

From: DScully@fbi.gov
To: FMulder@fbi.gov
Re: More missing items

No, I don't have your book. But I can't find my tape of Raiders of the Lost Ark? Do you think the Czech women developed an interest in Harrison Ford?

From: DScully@fbi.gov
Return Path: DScully@fbi.gov
[129.89.34.2]) with SMTP id LAA20233
Version: 5.3 Copyright (c) 1991, Anastasios Kotsikonas
To: FMulder@fbi.gov

* * *

To: DScully@fbi.gov
From: MPatterson@firstnational.visa.com
Re: Billing Inquiries

Dear Dr. Scully:

After a thorough investigation of your inquiry, First National Bank Visa has concluded that it is indeed your signature on the charge at the Annapolis Crab House on the day in question. Please remit \$165.37 to Visa within 30 days. Should you wish to challenge this

submit an appeal, in writing to First National Bank, Visa Charge Appeal,
P.O. Box 1324,
Washington DC 20008.

Sincerely,

Meredith Patterson
Account Service Representative

From MPatterson@firstnational.visa.com
Return Path: MPatterson@firstnational.visa.com
ESMTP id KAA22370 for <DScully@fbi.gov>
Received: from LOCALNAME (nor va4
X Mailer: Windows Eudora Light Version 1.5.2
Mime Version: 1.0
Content Type: text/plain; charset="us ascii"

* * *

From: AWithers@fbi.gov
To: DScully@fbi.gov
Re: Reported Missing Gun
File Attachment: Affidavit

Agent Scully:

We are in receipt of your report that your side arm is missing. The FBI Weapons office requires that you complete the attached Affidavit, describing in detail, the circumstances under which you, as you described, "misplaced" your weapon. Please provide complete details, including the time, place and manner of the loss. Provide names of any witnesses and telephone numbers. We will also require an affidavit from your partner who, we understand was also in attendance.

Arnold Withers
FBI Weapons Procurement and Supply

From AWithers@fbi.gov
Return Path: AWithers@fbi.gov
[129.89.34.2]) with SMTP id LAA20233
Version: 5.3 Copyright (c) 1991, Anastasios Kotsikonas

* * *

Mr. Fox Mulder
Alexandria, VA

Dear Mr. Mulder:

Although the Clean & Bright Dry Cleaners appreciates your long, loyal and considerable business, I regret to inform you that we are including a repair bill for \$86.75 for our laundry machine. Also

trained our staff to inspect all of your clothing before cleaning to remove the shells. Moreover, we have consistently performed miracles on the ruined, bloodied, torn, and stained garments you have presented to us over the last three years. We have, however, never before had occasion to inspect your clothing for staples. This past Saturday, while laundering your dark clothes, the machine stuck, and nearly ignited. The repair man determined that staples from your Levis were responsible.

Please take your business elsewhere.

Sincerely,

G. O'Malley

* * *

From:: <Accounting and Finance>AcctFin@fbi.gov
To: FMulder@fbi.gov
subj.: Visa charges.

Agent Mulder,

Please be informed that a bill for miscellaneous expenditures in the amount of \$207.12 was reported for miscellaneous damages from a local eating establishment. If you feel that this bill is in error please respond via inter- office mail on form 13212-A.

Thank you,

J. Morgan

* * *

From: <Accounting and Finance>AcctFin@fbi.gov
To: FMulder@fbi.gov
subj.: Re: Visa Charges

Agent Mulder,

As an update to our previous email: We'd requested an itemized bill from the eating establishment, now known to be Hooters. Unfortunately, the fax did not reach our office. If it has reached you in error, please forward to accounting and finance at your earliest convenience.

Thank you,

J. Morgan

* * *

From: <Accounting and Finance>AcctFin@fbi.gov
To: FMulder@fbi.gov
subj.: Re: Visa Charges

Agent Mulder,

As a second follow up to our previous email: We would like to inform you that we no longer need for you to forward the fax to us. It seems that the itemized bill was inadvertently faxed to Distribution. Unfortunately, we were unable to track the item before it was 80 % distributed.

Thank you and have a nice day,

J. Morgan

* * *

To: Fmulder@fbi.gov
From: Frohike@ghost.net
Re: Our Loss

Received a call yesterday from Geraldo. They are investigating our tragic loss in Rockville. Noticed that you and your lovely partner were in attendance, and it seemed to us, a little worse for the wear. Geraldo has received a tip confirming what we have suspected all along. There is a race of alien feminists (is that merely redundant?) known as the Amazonians who have vowed to destroy every vestige of the capitalist oppressive male regime which dominates our planet. The Amazonians, Geraldo reports, have targeted the Playboy and Hustler Empires, all male country clubs and, regrettably, Hooters. I thought maybe we should try Bunny's next week instead?

F.

* * *

To: Fmulder@fbi.gov
From: Byers@lgman.net.com
Re: State Department

We hope that your friends returned safely to the Czech Republic. We were concerned since the U.S. State Department has no records of their visa applications. To correct the error, we hacked into the system and should your friends ever return, they will encounter no difficulties clearing Passport Control at Dulles Airport, assuming of course that they go through Dulles. Should they land somewhere else, please advise.

B.

To: Dscully@fbi.gov
From: Langly@vapor.com
Re: The Macarena

I've been watching the tape but still can't get the sway three times part right. Do you think you could teach me?

To: Dscully@fbi.gov
From: Frohike@ghost.net
Re: The Macarena

Saw the tape. Mara's hot. You're hotter.

To: Dscully@fbi.gov
CC: FMulder@fbi.gov
From: IIPD@fbi.gov
Re: Replacement firearm

Agent Scully,
It has come to our attention that this is the second replacement firearm you've requested in the past 6 months. Per bureau policy, you have been registered to attend the seminar "My Gun, My Friend." The seminar will be held in a week's time at the "GND, Inc" gun shop. You will receive confirmation through inter-office mail.

To: DScully@fbi.gov
From: BBAadams@patriotnet.com
Re: Seminar and M 1

Dear Agent Scully:

I have received confirmation from the Bureau that you will be attending my seminar in two weeks. I very much look forward to seeing you again. Noticing your interest in that fine M1 Garand, I can arrange for you test it on the range after class. I would very much like to see you, and your friends, with that weapon.

Also, there is a Monster Truck Rally and Tractor Pull at the Timmonium Fairgrounds this

Yours forever,

PB Adams

* * *

Author's end notes--

Yes, we know. It's not a happy ending. Having dragged you through all this, we apologize as you now realize that we are in fact, slaves to the continuity gods.

At least on the SW side, the canon states that in a few months, Luke falls to the Dark Side and we suffer through his despondency for another 10 years of books. On the X-side, we obviously don't know how Chris Carter will play with our minds next. We did try to respect the basic timelines of both universes.

For happy endings, the SW fans must wait for Hand of Thrawn, and for X fans, we must see what happens when the series finally ends. Regardless, Gheorghe, at least, doesn't recommend holding out much hope under either scenario, firmly believing that Uncles George and Chris do not wish relational bliss for their heroes. Ginef and JackeeC still want to believe.

Thanks for reading! Comments welcome! Flames will be used to light our sambuca. We can be reached at JackeeC, Gheorghe2, or ginef@aol.com

property of JackeeC and the other authors who helped her write this story