

STAR WARS

DARKNESS RISING

5-02: LOVE & LIES

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Seeing Tylo as a weak link Neela Vortress targets him to steal information that she hopes will prove that the Udras have fallen to the Dark Side...

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1.

"So how long do you expect this to take?" Tylo Kurrast, the owner of the YT-700 class light freighter *Swift Exit* asked the two Jedi preparing to leave the ship now that it had landed.

"Not more than day in total." Jayk Udra, the senior Jedi knight among the pair replied. The teenage girl with him was Brae Udra who was not only Jayk's padawan but also his daughter from a relationship he had while on a long term assignment two decades earlier.

"The gallery staff are supposed to have already sorted out all of the items in question. If any of them do look like genuine Sith artefacts then we'll bring them back here." Brae added.

"Sounds like something the pair of you could manage without me." Tylo commented, "How about I sit this one out?"

"You're not worried about anyone trying to kill you while we're gone then?" Brae asked, knowing that there were people who would be glad to see Tylo dead for helping the Jedi Order as part of a plea deal to get out of prison.

"Security here is pretty tight. Have you seen all the enforcement droids wandering around?" Tylo replied, "Besides I won't be wandering far and wide. I'll just check out some of the local entertainment while your gone."

"And will you be bringing the entertainment back to the ship like last time?" Jayk asked.

"You mean when she stole it?" Brae added and Jayk nodded.

"Exactly." he said.

"Hey don't worry, I learned my lesson. I'll rent a room." Tylo said.

"Very well, you may enjoy whatever or indeed whoever this starport has to offer. We'll call ahead when we're on our way back." Jayk told him before he and Brae turned around and walked away, heading down the *Swift Exit's* access ramp.

"Do you really think he'll be okay?" Brae asked, looking back over her shoulder at the ship as they crossed the docking bay towards the exit.

"Tylo is an adult Brae and he is right about the level of security here at the starport. Why?" Jayk replied.

"I've got a very bad feeling about this. As if something's about to go horribly wrong for what must be the fiftieth time." Brae told him.

"Then we shall deal with whatever comes our way as we always have done." Jayk told her.

Tylo knew that the starport had a strict policy against the carrying of weapons. Normally being in the company of Jedi was enough for him to ignore such rules but he did not want to waste what little time he now had to himself sitting in a detention cell while he waited for Jayk and Brae to return and vouch for him so on this occasion he put his heavy blaster pistol in his locker with his other weapons and locked it before heading for the access ramp.

"Have fun while I'm gone Cal." he called out as he walked through the *Swift Exit's* lounge on his way to the access ramp.

"I expect that you'll be having more fun than I'm able to." a hologram of an older man in Jedi robes responded as it materialised beside the small crystalline cube that sat on a shelf at the side of the room.

"I hope so. Don't wait up." Tylo said, waving as he left the lounge.

Sealing the ship behind him, Tylo left the docking bay and took a look around. From just outside the docking bay he could see the entrances to several other such bays close by and also several of the businesses operating out of the starport that supported it. Most of these were directly related to the operating or chartering of starships but there were also several establishments catering to the needs of the crowds that passed through the starport every day. Among these was a cantina and Tylo smiled.

"The spacer's best friend. The cantina." he said before heading towards the entrance.

Unsurprisingly there was a weapons scanner just inside the entrance and before an inner door, the owners obviously concerned about off world starship crews flouting local laws and bringing weapons inside. Thankful that he had decided to stick with the rules and as soon as the scan confirmed that he was unarmed the inner door slid open to allow him into the cantina itself. Once inside he made his way directly to the bar where he ordered a drink and looked around while he waited for it to be brought to him.

"Will there be anything else?" the barman asked.

"Yeah, can you tell me whether I can find company for the night here? Or least for a couple of hours?" Tylo asked.

"Paid company sir?"

"Paid is good. Although if there are any giving it away for free without the need to spend all night talking convincing them first then-" Tylo began.

"I'm sorry sir but the management doesn't like that sort of business being conducted here." the barman interrupted.

"Then it'll just be this one drink." Tylo said and he quickly downed the drink before starting to walk back towards the exit from the cantina, intending to find somewhere else to get his entertainment for the night. However, as he walked he failed to notice a spherical piece of fruit rolling across the floor, somehow picking up speed as it went before inexplicably turning to be right under his foot as he brought it down.

"Whoa!" he exclaimed as he slipped on the fruit and from across the room there was a cheer from a group of spacers.

"Can't handle the drink here? There's a tea house down the street." one of them called out as Tylo frowned. He was just about to pick himself up off the floor when he saw a pair of feet appear right in front of him. These looked human and their size and slender width along with the high heeled shoes they were in suggested that it was a woman that wore them. Slowly Tylo lifted his head, looking at the slim legs above the feet. Only one was fully visible through the slit in the long red dress the woman wore than ran from the wearer's ankle up to near the top of her thigh. The other could be seen inside the dress through the slit though from where Tylo was and as he lifted his head further he realised that from this angle he was able to look straight up the dress of the woman standing over him.

"How about if you stop staring up my dress then I'll help you up and you can buy me a drink." an all too familiar voice then said and Tylo looked up into the face of the woman looking back down at him.

Neela Vortress had been a jedi knight who suspected the Udras of being in league with the Sith and her fanatical pursuit of them had led to the death of her own padawan. Since then she had become a renegade, consumed by her anger towards and hatred of the Udras who she blamed for her padawan's death.

Fear.

Tylo knew that even armed he stood little chance in combat against Neela but before he could say anything she waved her hand in front of him.

"You don't know me but you want to buy me a drink." she told him and a smile spread across Tylo's face.

"How about you lend me a hand down here and I'll buy you a drink?" he said, holding up his hand.

Neela reached back down towards Tylo, helping him back to his feet and the pair of them headed for the bar where he immediately ordered a pair of drinks.

"So what brings you here?" Neela asked, "I pass through this way quite regularly and I don't recall ever having seen you before."

"Strange, you don't seem like the sort to frequent a wretched hive of scum and villainy like this." Tylo commented, noticing the stern look coming from the barman when he overheard the remark.

"Maybe I prefer to see how the other half live. Now tell me about yourself - I don't know your name yet."

"Tylo. Tylo Kurrast. Captain of the independent trade vessel *Swift Exit* and frankly I'm something of a glorified taxi driver." Tylo replied and Neela feigned surprise.

"Oh really? Whys that?" she said.

"Well I'm chartered to provide transport to a pair of jedi and that takes me pretty far and wide." Tylo said, deliberately avoiding explaining anything about the deal including him not being sent to prison for helping steal and transport forbidden Sith artefacts.

"That sounds very exciting."

"Exciting is hardly how I'd describe it." Tylo said.

"So how would you describe it then?"

"Dangerous would be a good word. The jedi may say that they are keepers of the peace but that generally means they spend their time getting involved in other people's battles. Or worse."

"What's worse than a war?" Neela said and Tylo smiled.

"Lady you don't know the half of it." he said, "You know all those stories about the Sith? All the power they had and the things they could do?"

"Yes but they're just stories aren't they? If the Sith were so powerful how did the Jedi Order wipe them out centuries ago?"

"I'm not up to speed on how the war ended but I'm not so certain that all the Sith were destroyed. Let's just say that I've seen a few things over the last couple of years that would terrify you, all left behind by the Sith for almost anyone to find and there are people out there who will do anything to find and control them." Tylo said.

"You must be very brave." Neela said before she gulped down what remained of her drink and then she leant close enough to whisper into his ear, "I have a room nearby." she told him and he smiled.

"Then what are we still doing here?" he said.

Hand in hand Neela led Tylo to a small hotel located at the starport and to her room. Both the exterior and interior of the hotel looked cheap to Tylo and although it was the sort of place he could see himself checking into the woman he was with looked as if she could afford much better and as she pulled him into her room he stopped and looked around. The furnishings were as basic as those in the common areas. The bed was the

only piece of furniture in the room that looked like it intended for planetary use while all of the storage units had the look of being re-purposed from starship crew lockers. Although the door to the bathroom was open Tylo could not see enough of the interior to determine whether it too could have been recovered from an old starship.

“What's wrong?” Neela asked when she sensed his hesitation.

“I've got a bad feeling about this.” he said.”

“A bad feeling?” Neela commented.

“I mean I don't even know your name.” Tylo replied.

Neela then kicked off her shoes and standing right in front of him she reached up to the back of her collar and released the clasp that kept her dress in place, letting it drop to the floor as well. Standing naked in front of Tylo she then placed one hand on his shoulder while moving the other in front of his face.

“Do you really care about my name or getting into my bed Tylo?” she said and he smiled as he started to remove his jacket.

2.

Neela lay on top of Tylo, resting her head on his chest.

"That was better than I expected." she said.

"Well I do try my best." he said, "Although I think I really should-"

"We haven't finished yet. You want to stay." Neela said, using the Force to reinforce the suggestion.

"You are keen aren't you?" Tylo commented.

"Keen to hear more about the jedi you work with while you get your strength back." Neela said.

"Well there's two of them. Jayk and Brae Udra. Jayk is a full jedi knight while Brae is his apprentice, or padawan to use the technical term. Anyway Jayk and Brae aren't just a master and apprentice, would you believe that she's his daughter?"

"How can that be? Everyone knows that the jedi don't get married."

"Maybe not but that doesn't stop them doing what it takes to have children and no method of birth control is one hundred percent reliable. Which reminds me, do you-"

"Never mind me. Tell me more about the jedi." Neela interrupted, "What is their objective?"

"Apart from dragging me around the galaxy? To find some kiffar called Thal N'Krey. He's an artist."

"I've heard of him. What makes him so special?"

"He's obsessed with the Sith. He collected stuff they made and used it to create his art. Paintings, sculptures, you name it. If it could be hung on a wall or otherwise put on display then he'd make it. The thing is that some of the original Sith artefacts he acquired are banned because of the power they hold and he copied some of that into his art before he just vanished."

"Vanished?"

"Yeah vanished. Left behind a bunch of fancy art and a girlfriend almost as hot as you."

"Why thank you Tylo. You are good looking yourself."

"You're welcome and I know. Anyway, this Thal N'Krey may have disappeared but there seems to be a lot of his art left lying around that the jedi now need to rush around and see what's too dangerous to be left on show in art galleries or in private collections. To make matters worse when he vanished a bunch of the original Sith artefacts were mistaken for his art and sold as well. The jedi are really keen to get their hands on them." Tylo continued and Neela lifted her head.

"Tylo I need you to do something for me." she said, stroking his hair in a way that allowed her to subtly wave her hand in front of him.

"Anything. Name it." Tylo replied.

"I need you to bring me all of Jayk and Brae's records. All the data they have gathered. I need to know what they have done with everything they found." Neela told him, "Bring them to me here."

"If that's what you really want I can go and get them right now." Tylo said and he started to sit up.

"Wait not yet. I need you to do something else for me first. Something far less onerous." Neela said, leaning in to kiss him.

"Eventful evening Tylo?" Cal said when Tylo returned to the *Swift Exit*.

"Very. I met the most incredible woman with the best taste in underwear." Tylo replied.

"I take it then that you obtained proof that she wasn't wearing any." Cal said and Tylo grinned.

"Before I even bought her a drink. Then she took me back to her room and demonstrated how easy everything else came off." he said.

"One of the local professionals?"

"Oh no, real high class lady even if she did like slumming it."

"With you? Clearly." Cal said.

"That's the sort of comment I'd expect from Brae." Tylo said.

"It must run in the family so to say, So if she is such a wonderful woman why are you back here? She didn't want to introduce you to her parents did she? Take it from me Tylo if you marry her then your in-laws can't be worse than mine. They tried to become Sith worshipping fascist dictators."

"No, there's just something she wants to see and I said that I'd get it for her." Tylo said and then he walked out of the lounge, heading for the cabin he shared with Jayk and Brae where he tried to open their lockers. Both of the jedi sealed their private lockers though and Tylo was unable to open them at first. However, he quickly remedied this problem by removing his blaster pistol from his own locker and simply shooting off the locking mechanisms on the other two. Then he reached inside and grabbed hold of all of the memory sticks he could find.

"These should do." he said to himself as he tossed his blaster onto his bunk and stuffed the memory sticks into his pocket. Then as he was walking back through the lounge Cal called out to him.

"Tylo what the hell is going on? I heard shooting."

"Yeah I needed to get into Jayk and Brae's lockers quickly. I can't wait for them to get back to ask them to open them up for me." Tylo responded.

"Tylo listen to yourself. Something isn't right about this woman if she has you stealing from Jayk and Brae for her. Sit down and wait for them to get back. I'm sure we'll be able to figure out what's wrong with you between us." Cal said and Tylo hesitated.

"Hey you're a holocron right? The most advanced form of data storage ever created?" he said.

"Yes, what's that got to do with what's happening?"

"She did say bring all the data storage devices." Tylo said and he walked up to the holocron and picked it up, Cal's hologram vanishing as he stuffed the crystal cube into his jacket pocket before leaving the ship again.

Neela looked at the screen beside her door when Tylo pressed the intercom.

"It's me. Let me in., I've got what you wanted." he said and Neela smiled at him as she opened the door wearing only a robe.

Tylo immediately jumped forwards, embracing Neela and kissing her but she took his arms from around her waist and backed away.

"There'll be time for that later Tylo. I want to see what you've brought me." she said and Tylo smiled as he reached into his pocket for the memory sticks he had taken from Jayk and Brae's lockers.

"I knew I could rely on you Tylo." Neela said as she took the memory sticks from him and walked over to a nearby desk that had a portable computer set up on it. Sitting down she immediately plugged a random memory stick into the computer and began to search the contents while Tylo sat down on the edge of the bed.

"These look like reports to the Jedi temple." she said and Tylo nodded.

"Yeah, that's pretty much what they all are. Why, what were you hoping for?" he responded.

"I want to know what the Udras are keeping from the Jedi Order. All the things they've found out that they haven't passed on." Neela said and then she turned around in her chair to face Tylo, "You must know more though. What haven't they told the rest of the Jedi about?"

"I'm not really sure I should-" Tylo began before Neela got up and walked over to him, leaning over him and kissing him.

"You can trust me Tylo. You want to tell me." she said, using the Force to push the suggestion deeper into his mind and he smiled.

"Well we did accidentally meet their family recently." Tylo said as Neela sat in his lap facing him, "We had to go to the sector they came from and we bumped into them."

"Jayk and Brae sought out communication with their family?" Neela asked.

"Not at first no. But later on it was obvious that Jayk wanted to meet with them again." Tylo said, smiling, "So he concocted an excuse using me."

"What did Jayk want?" Neela said and Tylo shrugged.

"Oh just to find out where he'd come from I suppose. Most Jedi never get to meet their parents in a meaningful way. Brae is obviously an exception to that."

"And what did they find out about their family?"

"Oh just that apart from one rather obnoxious niece of Jayk's even though they aren't Jedi they all seem to honour the Jedi Order. Seriously though that niece was a real rancor cow, a typical know it all teenager. I was just waiting for Brae to punch her lights out. One good swing was all I think it would have taken. I'm telling you, Brae may be tiny but she's stronger than she looks. A couple of years ago I think she would have too but she's changed since I first met her. She's got a lot more control over her actions than she did back then." Tylo told Neela but she frowned, "Hey, how about you forget about the Jedi for a while and I find a way to turn that frown into a smile?"

"I like the sound of that." Neela said, kissing him again passionately as she leant closer and began to pull at his clothing.

Pushing Tylo back onto the bed as she finished undressing him, Neela slid a hand around his neck as she continued to kiss him, placing it just under his jaw before tightening her grip and applying strong pressure to the arteries carrying blood to his brain. For a moment Tylo began to struggle as he felt the pressure but Neela maintained her grip as well as continuing to kiss him with continued vigour and all of a sudden he blacked out.

"Goodnight Tylo." Neela said, letting him fall back onto the bed, "The sad thing is that you really are an excellent lover."

Neela then walked over to one of the lockers in the room and opened it to reveal a holdall that she took out and opened. Inside this were the belongings she took almost everywhere with her, including her lightsaber as well as a number of other items she found useful. At this time it was something far more mundane than her

jedi weapon that she was interested in though and she took out a pack of plastic cable ties, removing four of them and taking them over to the bed where Tylo was lying unconscious. Lifting his arms up above his head she then used two of the cable ties to secure him to the frame of the bed with his arms spread apart before also binding his ankles to the far end of the bed.

“Sweet dreams Tylo, now I have work to do.” she said, leaving Tylo securely tied to the bed with his arms and legs spread wide while she returned to the desk and started to go through more of the memory sticks, hoping that there would be something more incriminating against the Udras on them.

Much to her annoyance though all she could find was more mission reports compiled by both Jayk and Brae. It occurred to Neela that she might be able to find mistakes made where the reports from Jayk and Brae contradicted one another when information had been withheld from the Jedi Order but unfortunately for Neela the way that Tylo had just grabbed the memory sticks from their storage racks before mixing them together had destroyed any order that they had been kept in and meant that she had no idea of what might be on a stick before she examined it. This made just finding the reports from both Jedi for a single mission difficult and this was before she even tried comparing the two sets of reports that were written in the different styles of a padawan and a Jedi knight with decades of experience.

However, after searching through several of the memory sticks Neela suddenly came to one that held a report that interested her. The report was only a few months old and had been written by Jayk, regarding an incident with Neela had also been involved. She had located a number of paintings by Thal N'Krey that depicted landscapes at night and showed clear star patterns in the sky. After stealing the paintings she had discovered Neela had also found that some of them could be placed next to one another to form a single larger image. The purpose of this had been immediately apparent to Neela and the Udras had also spotted it for themselves.

If the complete set of paintings was put together then they would show the skyline and star pattern of a particular spot on one particular planet, unique in the galaxy. This was obviously somewhere that Thal N'Krey had been and wanted to remember but at the same time was somewhere that he wanted to keep hidden from others while at the same time secretly taunting them about its existence. Twelve of the paintings had been accounted for but this was obviously only a small portion of the total in existence and the Jedi had calculated exactly how many of them there were in the full set – seventy-two.

If the Udras had reported all of this to the Jedi Order then it suggested that the Udras were not seeking out whatever Thal N'Krey had found for themselves but Neela was certain that they were hiding something. Everything about the pairing of Jayk and Brae was irregular and Neela was fully aware that they were a prophecy that went back more than three thousand years that claimed the Udra family would serve the Sith. That prophecy was what had begun Neela's quest to uncover what the Udras were really doing and led to her fall and disgrace as well as the death of her own padawan and she did not intend to give up until she had the proof that she had been right all along.

3.

Jayk and Brae returned to the docking bay where the *Swift Exit* was berthed with a labour droid carrying a large case containing items taken from the art gallery they had come to visit.

"I don't think anyone's home." Brae commented as they entered the docking bay and saw the darkened ship, "Tylo must have met a woman who was either attractive or cheap enough."

"He will return when he is ready. In the meantime I think that after we've loaded these items aboard we should get something to eat." Jayk suggested, opening the *Swift Exit's* access ramp, "Load the cargo." he then told the droid and the machine strode up the ramp, carrying the case into the cargo hold at the top. The two Jedi followed the droid into the ship and while it set the crate down and then turned to exit it again they made their way into the adjoining lounge.

"I'll inform the Jedi Order of what we found. Then we'll go for dinner." Jayk said and Brae smiled.

"Great. I'll just put my datapad away." she replied and then while Jayk headed for the ship's cockpit she headed for the crew cabin. Finding the doorway to the cabin open she walked straight in but then came to an abrupt halt when she saw that both her and Jayk's lockers had been blasted open.

"Stang!" she exclaimed and she rushed to her locker to see if anything was missing.

Jedi typically had few personal possessions and Brae saw that none of the ones she kept in the locker had been removed. However, all of the memory sticks she kept her study notes, mission reports and personal records on had been removed. Looking into Jayk's locker she saw that there were no memory sticks left in it either. Tylo's locker was the only one that was not wide open but Brae checked and found it unlocked, opening this she was unable to pick out whether anything was missing although she did see a blaster that looked like one of Tylo's lying on his bunk. Tylo was normally very careful about keeping his weapons secure and for one to be left lying around was unusual. The implication was that someone had used the blaster to force open both her and Jayk's lockers before stealing the memory sticks. However, quite how they had opened Tylo's locker to begin with or why they would not use the same means to open the other two lockers was not apparent.

Brae promptly turned and rushed from the cabin, hurrying back through the lounge and into the cockpit.

"Dad!" she exclaimed.

"Brae calm down. Tell me what the problem is." Jayk replied, turning around in his chair.

"Dad we've been robbed. Someone broke into the ship and stole our memory sticks."

"Let me see." Jayk replied, getting to his feet and Brae led him to their cabin.

"This is exactly how I found it." she told him.

"Very little looks to have been disturbed. I suspect that the thief knew exactly what they wanted." Jayk said.

"I don't understand why Tylo's locker was opened without damaging it though." Brae said, "If someone could open his locker then why not just open ours as well?"

"You are missing the obvious answer Brae." Jayk replied, "Tylo opened his own locker, perhaps tricked into doing so or maybe coerced somehow. Then his blaster was used to open ours. Perhaps we should check with Cal." and then the Jedi both returned to the lounge, expecting to find Cal's holocron still on the shelf where it was normally kept. However, it too was missing.

"Cal's gone." Brae said, "What do we do now?"

"Normally I would suggest contacting Tylo but if he is in trouble then that could just draw attention to the fact that we know something is wrong. Better to leave the culprit unaware of how much we know. Fortunately the starport has a number of security cameras in place, the entrance to every docking bay is covered. I'm sure that whoever came aboard the ship will have been caught on at least one. Hopefully we can use that footage to track them to wherever they are holding Tylo." Jayk said.

"At least this time our ship wasn't stolen." Brae commented, sighing, "Maybe next time we'll be lucky and they'll only steal Tylo."

Although the security patrols around the starport were conducted by droids the security stations themselves had organic staff, consisting mainly of personnel whose function it was to monitor not only the feeds from the static cameras but also from the patrolling droids and with a small number of commander officials. Unusually for a government security force none of the organic staff carried blasters, instead typically relying on their droids to deploy such force as was needed while they merely carried out administrative roles.

"My name is Jedi Knight Jayk Udra. I need to speak to your senior officer." Jayk said when he and Brae entered the central security station and the young man behind the desk nodded.

"Please come this way sir." he said before opening a doorway that gave the Jedi access to the areas of the security station not normally open to the public. He then escorted them to a large room filled with control

consoles where the security feeds from around the starport could be monitored and at the back of this room was a larger desk at which a stern looking woman sat.

"Commander Juprey there are two jedi to see you." the young man told the woman.

"Jedi? Here?" she responded.

"Yes, I am Jayk Udra and this is my padawan Brae." Jayk said, stepping forwards to introduce himself.

"I am Commander Maglain Juprey." the woman replied, standing up to greet the jedi, "I like to pride myself that this starport is safe. What could possibly command the involvement of the Jedi Order?"

"Someone broke into our ship and stole a number of items. One of which is very valuable. Priceless in fact." Brae answered.

"The items relate to our operations. We'd like to access your security recordings to see if a suspect can be identified." Jayk added.

"Of course. Lieutenant Grevet will assist you." Commander Juprey said and she looked towards a duros officer sat at a nearby console.

"It will be my honour." the duros said.

Jayk and Brae walked over to the duros' station and stood behind him.

"What is your docking bay number?" the duros asked.

"Seven." Jayk told him.

"Docking bay seven." Grevet repeated as he called up the data for the docking bay that held the *Swift Exit*,

"Do you know when the theft happened?"

"Sometime between about sixteen hundred and twenty-one thirty." Jayk said and Grevet nodded.

A fixed camera covered the entrance to the docking bay and Grevet called up the feed, starting at the time mark for sixteen hundred hours. To avoid having to sit through several hours of footage, by which time a culprit could be long gone, the playback was carried out at an accelerated rate that Grevet paused whenever it showed anyone entering or leaving the docking bay.

The first instance of this was just a few minutes into the recording when Jayk and Brae were seen exiting the docking bay together.

"That's us leaving for the gallery." Brae said.

"Carry on." Jayk added and the rapid playback resumed briefly until Tylo was seen exiting the docking bay as well.

"That will be Tylo off looking for a drink and a woman. Though not necessarily in that order." Brae commented.

"The ship will be empty at this point. The next person through that door will be our prime suspect." Jayk said before the playback resumed again.

This time there was a much longer stretch of time between pauses. A number of beings were seen moving past the entrance to the docking bay but none of them so much as paused, let alone tried to access it. That was until Tylo was seen returning and Grevet paused the playback again.

"That's just Tylo again." Brae said.

"He must have returned for something." Jayk added.

"Look at the time. It's less than an hour before we returned and discovered the theft." Brae pointed out.

"Then we must have missed the thief only narrowly. If the ship had already been broken into when Tylo returned then he would have contacted us." Jayk said.

Grevet resumed the playback for just a short time before Tylo reappeared once more when the duros paused it again.

"Continue." Jayk told him and the feedback was set into motion once more.

"The thief is cutting it fine." Brae commented as she watched the feed show crowds seeming to dash past the docking bay at high speed but once again none of them as much as stopped to loiter outside the docking bay, let alone attempted to gain access to it right up until Jayk and Brae appeared with the labour droid.

"How can that be?" Brae said, "The thief must have got into the docking bay at some point between Tylo leaving again and us arriving. So why didn't we see them on the camera?"

"Are there any other ways into the docking bays that an intruder could have used?" Jayk asked, looking at Grevet.

"No, the only other ways in other than the main door are the launch door in the roof and the utility tunnels.

The launch doors are kept sealed while a ship is in port and opening them would be obvious." the duros said. "And the tunnels?" Jayk said.

"Security sealed. Without a special key they just won't open. Forcing one would trigger an alarm." Grevet replied.

"But that means Tylo must have taken Cal's holocron and the memory sticks." Brae said. Then after a moment's hesitation she added, "Wait, what if it was a shape shifter of some kind? A clawdite or shi'do?"

"Can you call up the last image of Tylo again?" Jayk asked Grevet and the duros returned to the point on the surveillance footage where Tylo had been leaving the docking bay shortly before the jedi returned to it, "Now can you zoom in close on his face?" Jayk added and Grevet expanded Tylo's image to fill the entire screen.

"That looks exactly like Tylo." Brae said and Jayk nodded.

"Which means it is highly unlikely to be a clawdite. They can impersonate a species but lack the fine control needed to exactly duplicate an individual." he said, "On the other hand although many shi'do are capable of such impersonation their species is incredibly rare. I think we need to face up to the obvious, it was Tylo himself who took Cal's holocron and the memory sticks."

"But if he was alone. There was no-one there to force him to take them and surely he would have left some sort of message for us if someone was forcing him." Brae said and Jayk nodded.

"Which gives us two possibilities. Firstly, that Tylo committed the theft of his own free will. This seems unlikely however, if he had done so then he would have taken the ship as well and left us stranded here while he made his escape." Jayk said.

"You said there were two possibilities." Brae replied.

"Yes. The other is that someone is exerting some form of mental control over him." Jayk responded.

"Mental control? As in 'Force' control?" Brae asked.

"Correct. Which means that Cal's holocron is now in the possession of a Force user opposed to us. I've got a very bad feeling about this." Jayk answered.

4.

Tylo's eyes flickered open and the first thing he realised was that he was tied to a bed in a somewhat dingy hotel room, his arms and legs spread out wide. The next thing he realised was that he was totally naked and he tried to remember how he had got into this situation. Looking across the room he saw a woman in a robe sat at a desk working at a portable computer. With only the back of her head visible he could not see her face but when she spoke he immediately recognised the voice.

"Ah, you're awake." Neela said, sensing that he had regained consciousness and she turned towards him and smiled.

"You!" Tylo exclaimed, "Look, how about you just let me go and I won't say a word about you kidnapping me?"

"Oh Tylo I didn't kidnap you." Neela said, getting up and returning to the bed where she sat on top of him, with one leg either side of him and looking down into his face as she placed her hands on his chest, "I invited you here and you came of your own free will. Then after I gave you what you came here for you agreed to get me what I wanted."

"You mean we-? You and I, we-" Tylo began.

"Made love?" Neela interrupted, "Of course and I meant it when I told you that you were better than I expected." she added and despite being bound Tylo smiled.

"Well I've never had any complaints." he said, "But if you have what you want then why keep me here?" then a thought occurred to him about Neela's plans for him occurred to him and his eyes widened, "You're not thinking of-"

"No Tylo I don't intend to keep you as a sex slave." Neela replied, "You're good but you're not good enough to be worth forming an attachment to that is forbidden by the Jedi code."

"Err, you do realise that you're not a Jedi any more don't you?" Tylo said before wincing at the thought of giving Neela a suggestion.

"I am a Jedi!" Neela snapped, "Right now I'm the only hope the Jedi Order has of surviving. The Udras will serve the Sith, that's what the prophecy says and I'll do whatever it takes to prove that they have fallen. The Jedi Order and I may have parted ways temporarily right now but when I find what I need then they'll see I was right all along and welcome me back."

"So what do you need from me?" Tylo asked.

"The memory sticks you brought me are obviously just the files that Jayk and Brae are passing to the Jedi Order. I need to know what else they have uncovered. Especially about Thal N'Krey's map. Where does it lead to? I have to get there before they do." Neela said.

"Hey look lady I've been dragged from one end of the galaxy to the other by Jayk and Brae following up every damned clue about that lunatic kiffar with the stripper girlfriend and not once have I ever seen them keep anything from the Jedi Order." Tylo told her.

"What about meeting their family? Or Jayk taking Brae to meet her mother? Did those meetings find their way into their reports? Because if they did I haven't found any mention of them yet." Neela pointed out.

"Those were special. It's not like Jayk or Brae were planning on maintaining regular contact with their family. They were just getting answers to questions about where they came from, that's all." Tylo said.

"But they broke the Jedi code to get those answers. They are obviously breaking the code other times as well." Neela said.

"If they were then I'd remember them doing it." Tylo pointed out and Neela smiled before leaning forwards to lie on top of him as she kissed him again while he was unable to move out of the way.

"Do you remember me doing that to you before Tylo?" she asked when she moved her head back slightly so that her face still filled his entire field of view.

"No." he responded.

"So how can you be so certain about what the Udras have done? Or what they've had you do that you don't remember?" Neela said.

"Because I trust them. They've saved my life when there was no benefit to them. I can hardly say the same about you now can I?" Tylo replied and Neela's expression changed to one of anger.

"Then I'll just have to find the proof myself." she said as she got up off the bed and removed her robe, letting it drop to the floor as she walked over to one of the lockers serving as wardrobes and opened it to reveal some of her clothing inside, "I'm going to leave you here for a while now Tylo." she said as she began to dress, "I would gag you but I don't want to risk you choking while I'm gone so I'll leave you with a warning instead. The other guests at this oh so charming establishment are somewhat unsavoury. If they find you like this then they may not be as kind to you as I have been so I think it's in your best interests not to do anything

stupid like call out for help. Do you understand?"

"Trust me lady, the vulnerability of my situation has not escaped my notice." Tylo replied.

When she was finished getting dressed Neela walked back over to where Tylo's clothes were lying on the floor and picked up his trousers, rifling through the pockets until she found the access key to the *Swift Exit* as well as to the docking bay the ship was berthed in.

"I'll be back when I have what I want." she told him, "Remember what I said about calling for help while I'm gone." then she kissed him on the lips once more before leaving the room and Tylo groaned.

"She's gone. Do you have anything to say?" he said.

"Stang Tylo, sometimes you are a real nerf herder." Cal's voice responded from Tylo's jacket pocket where Neela had failed to search.

"Tylo must have met with someone else." Jayk said, "Can your security system track his movements after he left the docking bay?"

"Possibly. Our coverage only extends as far as the starport perimeter." Grevet replied, "If he left to meet someone somewhere else then we'd lose him."

"He was intending to find a woman to spend the evening with. I doubt he'd want to wear himself out by walking too far beforehand." Brae said and Jayk frowned.

"I think Tylo is having too much of an influence on you." he commented. Then he turned back to Grevet and added, "Please show us what you can find. Start with when he first left the docking bay just after us."

Grevet nodded as he called up the correct point in the security recording to show Tylo leaving the docking bay and let it play, once again at an accelerated rate but not as fast as previously now that specific details were being looked for. As soon as Tylo left the area covered by the security camera outside the docking bay Grevet checked to see whether he had entered an area covered by another of the devices and when he saw that Tylo had he called up the feed from that.

"Looks like he didn't go far initially. Just across the street to this cantina." the duros said.

"What can you tell me about it?" Jayk asked.

"Let me check." Grevet answered, calling up the records for the cantina, "It's licence is in order although there have been several citations for noise and the disorderly conduct of its customers as they leave. Enforcement units have also been summoned by the staff more than a dozen times in the past two months alone."

"So it's not exactly a high class establishment then." Jayk said.

"No, but the infractions have all been minor enough that the licence hasn't been revoked." Grevet said.

"Obviously." Brae muttered.

"I don't suppose you have access to security footage from inside the cantina do you?" Jayk asked.

"No, sorry. I don't even know if there are cameras inside. If there are then we could submit a request for the footage. A court order would take longer." Grevet said.

"Let's just see how long Tylo stayed first. There was a gap of about four hours before Tylo returned to the docking bay. He may have gone elsewhere first." Jayk said.

Grevet continued to play the footage from the security camera that covered the entrance to the cantina, again at an accelerated rate as they searched for Tylo reappearing. However, it was not Tylo exiting the cantina that caught Jayk's attention.

"Stop there!" he exclaimed suddenly and he pointed to the screen as the image was frozen, "Brae do you see who that is?" he added and Brae's face fell.

"Oh no, not her. It can't just be a coincidence that she went in there after him." she said.

"You know that woman?" Grevet asked, looking at the human woman in the red dress about to enter the cantina, "The way she's dressed I'd say that place was far more downmarket than she'd be used to."

"Yes, we know her and if she is here then you have a problem lieutenant." Jayk said, "A very big problem in fact."

"Can you use that image to put out an alert for her?" Brae added.

"Yes, I can pull her face and relay it to our droid patrols. They'll flag her and alert us if they spot her around the starport." Grevet said.

"Droids are good." Jayk said, "They don't have emotions that she'll be able to pick up on."

"Okay her face is logged in the system now." Grevet continued, "We'll get an alert whenever she's seen by a droid or picked up by a fixed camera."

"Is there anything she can do to escape being picked up?" Brae asked.

"The less of her face she shows the harder it will be for the system to automatically identify her so wearing a mask or a hood might shield her. We don't have a powerful enough system to penetrate that." Grevet said.

"Then we better hope she sticks with that dress. That revealed more than enough skin to identify her." Brae commented.

"Tylo is definitely having an influence on you." Jayk added.

When she had still served with the Jedi Order, Neela had moved among the higher echelons of Republic society in her quest to root out the influence of the Dark Side and as such her style of dress had never followed the standard drab robes and cloak worn by most Jedi. However, since her fall from grace she had more often found it useful to be able to conceal her appearance and this was one of those times. She had no way of knowing whether the Udras would have returned to the *Swift Exit* by this time and did not want them to be able to pick her out of a crowd by her appearance if either of them sensed her presence nearby. Therefore, she had put on a cloak over her other clothing and before leaving the hotel she lifted the hood to help conceal her features.

Despite the strict laws forbidding the carrying of weapons at the starport Neela still had her lightsaber with her, knowing that few scanners were capable of correctly identifying them as such but she still made sure that this was kept hidden. Having it seen by passers by would be tantamount to identifying her to them all as a Force user and thus attracting more attention than was desirable. With her identity hidden Neela was able to walk out into the crowded street without being noticed but as she made her way across the starport towards the docking bay where the *Swift Exit* was berthed she still did her best to avoid looking towards any of the fixed security cameras or stepping in front of any of the patrolling security droids that she encountered along the way. She moved at a steady pace to the docking bay where she held out the access key she had taken from Tylo to the sensor unit beside the entrance. This beeped as it accepted the code and the door rapidly slid upwards to allow her inside where she immediately closed the door behind her before approaching the *Swift Exit* itself.

She could sense nothing from inside the ship through the Force and this suggested to her that it was empty. As far as she knew the Udras did not use any droids and she was confident that she would sense either Jayk or Brae quite easily. Therefore, with the access key to the ship also in her possession Neela was able to quickly release the security seal and she stepped back as the access ramp lowered before walking aboard the silent freighter.

"There, that's Tylo leaving with Neela." Jayk said when the camera footage showed the pair of them leaving the cantina.

"And they both look pretty friendly to me." Brae said when all of a sudden an alert sounded on Grevet's console and he and the two Jedi all looked towards the source.

"What's wrong?" Brae asked.

"I set my console to alert me if anyone accessed docking bay seven." the duros replied.

"Let me guess someone just did." Brae said.

"Can you show us the camera feed from outside the door?" Jayk said and Grevet nodded, switching to the feed from the camera located just outside docking bay seven. He was just in time to catch the door dropping shut again after having been opened but whoever had done this was already through the doorway.

"Go back. See if we can see who opened the door." Jayk ordered and Grevet rewound the footage to a point just before the door was opened and this showed the hooded figure beside the access control panel.

"That's not Tylo. It looks like a woman. It has to be Neela." Brae said and Jayk nodded.

"Then we have her." he said, "Lieutenant I want you to establish a cordon around the docking bay. Have your droids prevent anyone from entering or leaving until we get there to deal with the suspect."

"Of course sir." Grevet responded.

"Brae, let's go." Jayk added and he and Brae hurried from the room.

5.

Pulling at the plastic ties binding him to the bed only demonstrated to Tylo that they dug into his flesh painfully rather than stretched or snapped and he relaxed before injuring himself.

"So Cal has anything like this ever happened to you?" he said.

"As a matter of fact yes. Well something similar happened to me and Lara." Cal said.

"Wait, you and your sister ended up naked together? What sort of family do you come from?"

"It wasn't like that. We ended up wrapped like mummies and abandoned in our apartment." Cal explained.

"Oh right. So how did you escape? It doesn't need me to suddenly develop the ability to manipulate the Force does it?" Tylo asked.

"No it's quite simple really. You just need to wait for someone to find you and untie you. In mine and Lara's case that happened to be my girlfriend and her two harpy sisters who proceeded to try and dump Lara in the bowels of a space station that had become the hunting ground of an anzat." Cal told him.

"An anzat? Wait I thought they were made up."

"If only."

"That doesn't really help me much though does it?" Tylo pointed out, "The only person who may be coming here to untie me is Neela."

"If this hotel was of better quality then there would probably be a computer network that I could access to send for help but it seems that the owners don't want their guests accessing material that they could be held liable for. Therefore, I suggest that you focus on ways to convince Neela that harming you will hinder her objective of proving that Jayk and Brae have fallen to the Dark Side." Cal told him.

"Thanks Cal. You're a real help."

"You're welcome. That is why the Jedi Order allowed me to be taken from the archives after all."

Jayk and Brae ran as fast as they could through the starport back to the docking bay where the *Swift Exit* was berthed. As they approached the docking bay they saw that as Jayk had instructed there were now a number of security droids deployed outside the entrance, directing passers by to move on without getting too close and as the two jedi ran up to them one of the droids turned directly towards them.

"Your appearances match those of Jedi Knight Jayk Udra and Jedi Padawan Brae Udra." the machine spoke, "My orders are to permit you to enter the docking bay."

"Thank you has anyone else attempted to get in or out?" Jayk asked.

"Negative. The perimeter remains secure." the droid responded and both Jayk and Brae drew their lightsabers.

"I'll need a section of your units for support." Jayk said.

"Roger roger." the droid said and it and three others formed a square behind the jedi as they walked up to the doorway where Brae held out her security key.

"Remember that Neela will likely sense us." Jayk reminded her before she pressed the key to the reader and the door slid upwards to reveal the *Swift Exit* inside the docking bay.

"The access ramp is down. Someone's obviously been aboard." Brae said to Jayk as they advanced with the security enforcement droids following them.

"Do you sense anything?" Jayk asked and Brae nodded as she reached out into the Force and felt a cold disturbance coming from aboard the freighter.

"Yes. She's still aboard." she said, nodding and Jayk looked around at the droids following them.

"Remain here. Brae and I will go inside the ship. If the intruder attempts to escape then detain them. Our suspect is trained in the use of the Force so take no chances. If she doesn't surrender then use your weapons in unison and above all do not let her get close to you." he ordered before he and Brae ignited their lightsabers with a pair of rapid 'snap-hiss' sounds and then charged up the access ramp into the ship. As soon as they reached the top of the ramp the two jedi heard a crashing sound from the adjoining lounge followed by a scream.

"Where is it?" Neela's voice exclaimed as Jayk and Brae darted to the doorway and saw Neela standing over the smashed remains of the large video screen that Tylo had had installed aboard the ship when he discovered that the Jedi Order could be made to pay for any alterations that could be explained as being required for the mission to find Thal N'Krey and his work. It was among the many objects that were lying broken on the floor where Neela had discarded them after taking them from their original places as she searched randomly for evidence of the Udras' supposed wrongdoing. Her focus on this activity had been so absolute that it had consumed all of her attention and she did not sense the approach of Jayk or Brae until they were standing in the doorway behind her, at which point she spun around to face them.

"You!" she hissed at them.

Anger.

Hatred.

"Neela Vortress you are under arrest." Jayk said and Brae sighed.

"Oh like that ever works." she said, bringing her lightsaber up and adopting a fighting stance.

"The council may have been taken in by you Jayk Udra but I haven't." Neela responded as she dropped her cloak and used the Force to summon her lightsaber before igniting it. Then all of a sudden she waved her hand to create a wave of telekinetic energy that picked up all of the debris scattered across the floor and hurled it towards Jayk and Brae.

Jayk reacted by ducking and turning his head to shield his face from the cloud of objects thrown towards them while Brae instead opted to leap back through the doorway and use the bulkhead for cover. As soon as she did this though Neela waved her hand again to close the door and lock it from inside the lounge.

Jayk then leapt forwards with his lightsaber held out in front of him, hoping to get an attack in before Neela could react but she was too quick for this and she twisted her body to avoid the strike while bringing up her own lightsaber for a swing of her own that Jayk was then forced to parry to avoid being cut in half as he leapt.

Inside the cargo hold Brae knew that she could easily cut through the door to the lounge with her lightsaber but with her father somewhere on the other side she did not want to risk accidentally impaling him on her weapon so instead she turned and ran across the hold to the other exit. This led to the *Swift Exit's* port side air lock so that cargo could easily be transferred from one ship to another in space and from there Brae knew that she could get to the central corridor that would enable her to get back into the lounge almost exactly where she had been forced out.

While Brae was running Jayk continued to duel with Neela, forcing her across the lounge to the door on the far side of the lounge and when Brae reappeared behind him less than a minute later he was on the verge of pushing Neela into the central corridor from the other end.

"Why didn't I go the other way?" Brae said to herself, realising that if she had gone all the way around then she would have caught Neela between her and Jayk.

It was too late to change this now though as Neela stepped back into the corridor and then rolled sideways into the *Swift Exit's* starboard air lock that was located right outside the lounge. With another wave of her hand she closed the door before Jayk could follow and then used her lightsaber to destroy the opening mechanism so that when he tried to open the door all that happened was that there was a dull 'clunk'.

"She's going out of the air lock." Jayk told Brae, "After her."

6.

Neela leapt down from the air lock before Jayk or Brae appeared and the four security droids in the docking bay all turned towards her.

“Neela Vortress you are under arrest. Surrender your weapon and get down on your knees.” one of the machines said as they all aimed their blasters towards her.

“Sorry boys I've already heard that today.” she said, reaching out towards the droids and using the Force to pick one up and hurl it at another. Then as the remaining two opened fire with their blasters she quickly parried their shots with her lightsaber. However, being security enforcement rather than military battle droids the machines' weapons were set to 'stun' and when they were struck by their own reflected blasts they remained unaffected.

“Neela Vortress you are-“ one of the droids repeated as it continued firing, its limited reasoning ability preventing it from adopting tactics more suitable to fighting an opponent armed with a lightsaber and skilled in its use.

Neela charged at the droid, continuing to deflect the stun blasts aimed at her. Although Jayk had warned the droids about letting her get close to them she moved too quickly for the closest to be able to avoid her and with one swing of her lightsaber she cut the machine in two. Although this would have been almost instantly fatal to most organic beings the result for the droid was for its legs to begin staggering around randomly as the control mechanisms found themselves without meaningful input until their remaining charge was depleted and they finally toppled over while the torso released its grip on its blaster as it dropped to the ground and began flailing its arms around wildly in confusion.

The two droids that had fallen when Neela threw one into the other had by this time got back to their feet and now all three fired at her simultaneously. This proved to be more effective than previously as they were firing from different angles and Neela could not cover them all with her lightsaber at the same time so she instead resorted to trying to dodge the shots as she headed for an access point to the utility tunnels. She was about half way there when Jayk and Brae came rushing down the *Swift Exit's* access ramp.

“Stay where you are Neela.” Jayk called out to her and she turned around.

Rather than charge at the two jedi or adopt a fighting stance in anticipation of being attacked by them though Neela used the Force again, this time ripping a gas cylinder that was part of the docking bay's maintenance equipment free from its mounting and sent it flying across the docking bay between her and the Udras. The cylinder's sealing valve was ripped off when Neela tore it free from its mounting and the contents immediately began to escape, forming a dense cloud of gas that quickly expanded to conceal her from the droids and the jedi. Without a clear target the droids' programming forced them to cease fire and wait while Brae took a step forwards, intending to go through the cloud after Neela.

“No Brae stay back, that's repulsorlift coolant. It's toxic.” Jayk warned her, putting his hand on her shoulder to stop her. Then he looked at the closest droid, “We need to vent this gas. Get the launch door open now.” he told the machine.

Moments later there was a rumbling sound as the large door that covered the docking bay began to retract, enabling the lighter than air coolant gas to escape rather than continue to build up inside. This was not an instant process though and while she was still shielded by the gas Neela used her lightsaber to cut through the access panel and enter the utility tunnel behind it. By the time that the gas had cleared enough for Jayk and Brae to see where she had stood, Neela was already gone. The two jedi rushed forwards and peered into the tunnel but by this time Neela had had ample time to make her escape and there was no sign of her inside it.

“Now what do we do?” Brae asked.

“We contact starport security. Perhaps they can keep Neela trapped in there until we can find a way of locating her.” Jayk answered as he took out his comlink, “This is Jedi Udra calling Lieutenant Grevet.” He said into the device.

“Grevet here master jedi.” The duros' voice responded.

“Lieutenant our suspect has fled into the utility tunnels. What can you do to seal them off and keep them secured?” Jayk said.

“There are more than a thousand access point to the utility network spread across the starport Jedi Udra.”

Grevet told him, “That's why we alarm them, so we'll know if anyone tries opening one without us needing to keep them all guarded.”

“In that case we'll need transport that can get us to wherever she comes out quickly. Also if you have any maintenance teams in the tunnels right now then have them evacuate for their own safety.” Jayk said.

Inside the utility tunnels were large enough for Neela to stand up straight as she went but she kept her lightsaber active, using the light cast from its blade to illuminate her way in the absence of any other light source. Along either side of the tunnel the walls were lined with individual ducts that contained power, water and data carrying lines and pipes. So that they would not have to cross the path of anyone inside the tunnel these went up to the ceiling at the junctions where the tunnels met and widened out to form small rooms with enough ceiling area to permit this. It was as Neela was approaching one of these opened out rooms that she heard the voices of a technical team.

"Control didn't say why we had to evacuate, they just told us to get out as fast as we could." someone said.

"It must be a gas leak." another voice added.

"Let's just get out of here before whatever it is reaches us." a third said and as Neela got closer to them she heard the sound of equipment being hurriedly packed into cases.

Stepping from the tunnel into the junction room Neela shut off her lightsaber, and the work crew turned towards her.

Surprise.

"There's no need to be afraid." she said, smiling at them, "My name is Jedi Brae Udra and I seem to have got somewhat lost down here. I'm trying to get to the transport in docking bay twelve."

"Jedi Udra I have every enforcement droid available on patrol and I've contacted the city police to send additional forces to help. There'll be three tactical units here in under a quarter of an hour." Commander Jupray said when the Udras returned to the main security office, finding it busier than the last time as the starport security force searched frantically for Neela Vortress.

"Hopefully they won't be needed. The potential for confusion and accidents among regular troops when dealing with a Force user are grave." Jayk said.

"In the meantime I've been tracking the movements of your fugitive." Lieutenant Grevet added.

"Have you found the ship she used to get here?" Jayk asked but the duros shook his head.

"I'm sorry sir but no. However, I was able to track her and your friend to a hotel. The camera feed then showed him leaving this hotel alone before returning to your ship, then going back to the hotel again later. It was after that that a hooded figure that could be the fugitive left the hotel alone." he explained.

"Then Tylo is there." Jayk said.

"Should we go after him?" Brae asked.

"No. I need to remain here just in case Neela is spotted. You go and make sure that Tylo is okay." Jayk told her and she nodded before exiting the control room again.

With Brae gone Jayk waited beside Lieutenant Grevet as reports continued to come in from around the starport confirming that the network of utility tunnels was being evacuated and secured. However, this pattern was broken when the leader of one of the starport's maintenance teams checked in.

"Security this is shift leader Terro, I just wanted to confirm that we got the jedi to her transport and she's away." he said and Commander Jupray frowned.

"Explain that Mister Terro. What jedi?"

"She said her name was Brae Udra. She got lost down in the tunnels and we guided her to docking bay twelve. It's all sealed up again now and her ship has just taken off." Terro said.

"What ship was in docking bay twelve?" Jayk asked and Grevet checked his console.

"*The Tenth Sun.*" the duros responded, "She took off about five minutes ago. She's already out of the atmosphere."

"Then Neela has escaped." Jayk said, "Now all we can do is hope that Brae finds Tylo safe and well."

At the hotel Neela had been tracked to Brae held up her datapad to the shift manager, showing her images of both Tylo and Neela.

"Which room are they in?" she asked but the obese woman did not even look at the screen.

"Never seen them before." she said.

"You want to look at the image and tell me the room number." Brae said, frowning and waving her other hand at the manager as she used the Force to affect the manager's mind. At first nothing happened and Brae was considering the possibility that the woman's skull was so thick that not even the Force could penetrate it when she finally turned and looked at the datapad's screen.

"The woman rented room forty-six. I saw her take the man there as well." she said and Brae smiled.

"Thank you." Brae responded, "Now you want to give me a pass key." she added as she returned the datapad to her belt and then held out her hand as without thinking about what she was doing the manager handed her an electronic key card.

Brae followed the faded signs mounted on the walls of the hotel to room forty-six, located on the building's fourth floor. Before she presented the key card she pressed her hand to the door and reached out through the Force.

Fear.

Impatience.

Having spent two years in Tylo's company, Brae recognised his presence and was relieved to find him alive but sensing that he was afraid was concerning. Wasting no further time she drew her lightsaber and held it ready as she held the key to the reader, at which point the door slid open and Brae gasped when she saw Tylo tied naked to the bed.

"Holy kriff!" she exclaimed, dashing into the room and closing the door behind her, "Tylo what happened?"

Embarrassment.

"Oh hi there Brae." Tylo replied as he lifted his head to look at her, "Let's just say that after starting well my evening out didn't go quite as I'd hoped. Look could you just cut me loose so I can get dressed?"

"So I take it that Neela tricked you into stealing our memory sticks and Cal's holocron?" Brae asked.

"Kind of, yes. I had no idea it was her at the time of course. Not even when we were both in this bed." Tylo answered, "Now about untying me."

"We'll get to that. Where's Cal?" Brae said.

"Don't worry I'm safe." Cal's voice said from inside Tylo's jacket pocket, "And also rather glad that Tylo never took me out of his pocket so I haven't had to see him as he is now. Although I guess this makes the pair of you even. Tylo did see you naked when he walked in on you and that other young padawan after all."

"Thank you so much for reminding me of that." Brae said.

"Okay so we've both walked in on one another naked. Can you cut me free now Brae?" Tylo asked.

"Hold still." Brae said and there was a 'snap-hiss' as she ignited her lightsaber.

Panic.

"Hey what are you doing? I said cut me free not cut off my arms and legs." Tylo exclaimed.

"Just hold still." Brae said.

"It's not like I can move now is it?" Tylo commented before Brae touched the blade of her lightsaber to one of the cable ties binding his ankles where it wrapped around the bed frame. The lightsaber instantly melted through the plastic tie and it snapped, freeing Tylo's ankle. She then repeated this with his other limbs, freeing him from the bed.

"Do you want me to leave you alone while you get dressed?" Brae said as Tylo was picking up his clothes.

"That's alright kid. You've already seen everything." Tylo replied as he began to get dressed, "The memory sticks I took are still over there on the desk by the way. Does Jayk have a plan to catch Neela?"

"She went into the starport utility tunnels and tricked a maintenance team into getting her aboard a starship. She's gone Tylo." Brae said and then she frowned.

"What's wrong?" Tylo said when he noticed this.

"You seem very calm after what's happened." Brae responded, "If Teron Sharr had used the Force to make me have sex with him and then left me tied naked to the bed I wouldn't be as accepting of it as you are."

Tylo shrugged as he thought about this.

"Kid I went to that cantina looking for an attractive woman to sleep with and that's exactly what I got. I've had relationships turn sour before, this just happened a bit more quickly than usual." he said. Then he paused for a moment and added, "Mind you I can't help but have a very bad feeling that sleeping with Neela Vortress is going to have consequences down the road."