

# STAR WARS

## DARKNESS RISING

### 5-04: HUNGER & THIRST

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While travelling back to the jedi temple on Coruscant the Udras stop at a settlement which is under attack by raiders. Agreeing to help protect the settlers the jedi investigate the source of the attacks only to discover that the situation is more difficult than initial presented to them...

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# 1.

"I've got a very bad feeling about this." Tylo Kurrast said when he heard a 'clump' sound coming from somewhere aboard his YT-700 class freighter *Swift Exit*.

Across the table from Tylo the two jedi that he routinely transported around the galaxy, Jayk Udra and the teenage girl who was not only his padawan but also his daughter, Brae looked back at him.

"I think we should investigate." Jayk suggested and he and Tylo both got to their feet just as a dark skinned man entered the lounge. Professor Dahlis Hebro was an art expert from the University of Coruscant who consulted with the jedi regularly as they hunted for the missing kiffar artist Thal N'Krey who had a dangerous interest in the culture of the Sith.

"Did anyone else just hear that?" he asked.

"We're just going to go and check it out. Stay here with Brae." Tylo told him.

"I think we should come with you two." Brae replied, "The cockpit does double as our only escape pod after all. If Tylo's failure to carry out routine maintenance means we need to abandon ship then I don't want to be left behind."

"Neither do I." a voice said from a nearby shelf, coming from a small crystalline cube. The cube was a holocron, part advanced data storage and part artificial intelligence. This particular example had been created by a jedi knight called Cal Udra who was a distant ancestor of Jayk and Brae and contained the experience of the original Cal.

"Brae, bring Cal." Jayk told her as he and Tylo headed for the cockpit and Brae picked up the holocron from the shelf before she and Dahlis followed them. Outside the ship all that was visible was the tunnel effect of hyperspace as the *Swift Exit* sped back towards Coruscant at many thousands of times the speed of light.

"So what's wrong?" Brae asked.

"Looks like we've got a power drain in the hyperdrive." Tylo replied.

"There's a red light on the positive ion flow regulator as well." Jayk added.

"Weird. That shouldn't even be active in hyperspace. How can it be reporting faulty?" Tylo said before he sighed.

"What's wrong?" Dahlis asked.

"I know what's causing the drain." Tylo answered, "Mynocks. We must have picked up a couple at Addressa."

"Can we make it back to Coruscant?" Brae said.

"Maybe but the authorities there will be furious if we do. It's a thousand credit fine for bringing them into the system." Tylo said.

"There is too much space traffic. The authorities don't want to risk mynocks spreading between ships." Jayk added, "Although the fact that this is technically a jedi vessel does mean you won't be fined."

"Maybe not, but it'll still go on my record." Tylo responded.

"Ha! As if adding that would matter to your record." Brae exclaimed. Tylo was a former smuggler who had entered jedi service only as part of a plea deal to keep him out of prison.

"It might." Tylo said.

"So what else can we do?" Dahlis asked.

"We're still in the Mid Rim region. We can drop out here and clear them off." Jayk said.

"That would mean doing an EVA." Tylo pointed out.

"Are there any habitable planets around that we could land on?" Brae said and Jayk checked the navigation system.

"If we drop out of hyperspace within the next sixty seconds then we'll only be one and a half parsecs from a planet called Viros. It's listed as sparsely settled but it has a type one atmosphere and there is one major city so we might be able to get any parts we need for repairs from there. At the very least we should be able to wait for assistance from Coruscant more comfortably than if we're stuck aboard the ship." he said.

"One and a half parsecs is a long way if we can't get the backup hyperdrive on line." Tylo commented, "I don't think the main one will survive another jump with a mynock chewing on it."

"It's our best option." Jayk said.

"Okay then hold on, I'm shutting down the hyperdrive now." Tylo said and he reached out for the hyperdrive's emergency shut down. As soon as the lever was pulled the *Swift Exit* lurched violently as it dropped out of hyperspace ahead of schedule and the bright tunnel of hyperspace was replaced with the stars of interstellar realspace.

"Plotting a course to Viros now." Jayk said and Tylo nodded.

"Well it's as I thought. Coming out of hyperspace has blown the main motivator. We'll have to use the back up so this will take a while longer. About an hour to be exact." he said.

"An hour is better than having to get there at sublight speed." Brae pointed out.

"Yes, now let's just hope the locals don't get too upset about us bringing these parasites to their system." Tylo replied.

Dropping out of hyperspace again close to Viros revealed a planet with few signs of habitation. The surface was largely barren with few bodies of surface water and the only areas of vegetation visible around the sole major city. Not wanting to risk the ire of the local government by simply landing with mynocks attached to their ship, Jayk signalled ahead to the city as Tylo set a course.

"Viros traffic control this is the transport vessel *Swift Exit* we request permission to land and carry out decontamination procedures. We have an external mynock infestation and require repairs." he transmitted and there was a lengthy delay before a response came back.

"Attention *Swift Exit* you are cleared for approach. You will be escorted down and your vessel quarantined. If you deviate from your flight path you will be fired upon. Do you understand?" a stern sounding voice said.

"Understood Viros control we will follow your escort." Jayk replied before shutting off the communication system.

The escort vehicle that was launched from Viros to guide the *Swift Exit* down to the surface turned out to be an old short range shuttle, useful for sub orbital hops or launching satellites but of limited other use and totally unarmed. With its single turret mounted laser cannon the *Swift Exit* could have shot it out of the sky easily had its occupants chosen to do so.

The shuttle manoeuvred in close as the *Swift Exit* descended, moving around the transport so that its pilot could inspect the outside of the hull from all angles and get a count of the number of mynocks attached to the ship as well as ensuring that none of them detached during the descent. Reproducing by fission, even a single mynock could become a swarm if allowed to survive in a new system and governments were naturally cautious about any ships that had them attached when they arrived.

"*Swift Exit* this is *Viros Shuttle* I can see you have two, I say again two mynocks attached to your hull." the shuttle pilot signalled.

"Copy that *Viros Shuttle*. That matches what we thought." Jayk responded.

"Look at that." Brae then said as the city came into view below the *Swift Exit* but it was not the city itself that was so unusual, instead it was what surrounded it. The city had naturally enough been built beside a large body of water that had obviously been dammed to keep as much in place as possible to supply not only the city itself but also the vast fields that surrounded it, these standing out as a region of green against the natural grey of the planet's surface. All of this had been obvious from higher altitude though and it was only now that the *Swift Exit* was lower that it could be seen that the city, the reservoir and all of the fields around them were protected by massive fortifications.

"Now I wonder why they need them?" Tylo commented as he looked at the walls, noticing that there were several sections that were still under construction.

"We can ask when we land. Do you have the beacon?" Jayk said.

"Yeah, looks like they're bringing us down just outside the city limits. Probably don't want to risk a mynock dropping off us and landing on top of an electrical substation. You'd have a dozen of them to deal with in a few hours." Tylo replied.

## 2.

Just as Tylo had said the *Swift Exit* touched down on a bare landing pad just beyond the urban sprawl of the city. This landing pad was surrounded by fields of crops and had the appearance of being intended for cargo air speeders that would be used to collect the produce from these fields before taking it into the city.

A group of locals stood waiting for the crew of the *Swift Exit*, most of whom wore protective clothing and carried long force pikes while another had the look of an official.

"Who is your captain?" the official asked as the *Swift Exit*'s occupants all descended the access ramp.

"I am. Tylo Kurrast, captain and owner of the *Swift Exit*." Tylo replied before he glanced at Jayk and added, "Although he's in charge of our mission."

"Mission?" the official added.

"I am Jedi Knight Jayk Udra and this is my padawan learner Brae." Jayk told the man.

*Surprise.*

*Fear.*

"You are jedi? What could possibly bring you to our small planet?" the official said nervously.

"We're not here by choice." Brae answered.

"We were on our way back to Coruscant when we detected the faults caused by mynockes on our vessel." Jayk explained.

"Ah yes, these beings will ensure that the creatures are removed and destroyed." the official said, "My name is Coro Legain, chief transport officer to the Viros City Council."

"Thank you for your hospitality." Jayk said.

"We might need some parts for the ship. Can we get them here?" Tylo added.

"We have machine shops that may be able to manufacture some spares for you. There will be a charge of course." Coro told him.

"We have twenty thousand Republic dataries." Jayk said and Coro smiled.

"Those will do nicely." he responded when all of a sudden a siren sounded.

"What's happening?" Dahlis exclaimed.

"It's another attack." Coros said and he turned to the armoured men behind him, "Forget the ship for now. Get to your positions."

"Yes sir." one of the men replied before they all turned and started to run across the fields, heading for the wall surrounding them.

"Perhaps we can help." Brae suggested.

"Although a little information would be useful. You said 'another' attack." Jayk added, "Does this have anything to do with why you are constructing?"

"I'm afraid so, yes. We've been suffering attacks by raiders for some years now." Coro told him.

"We didn't see any other ships in the system when we arrived." Tylo commented and Coro shook his head.

"No, sadly these raiders also come from Viros. You see there were other attempts at colonising the planet. Viros City is just the only one that was successful, the others all failed."

"Failed how?" Dahlis said.

"You may have noticed that there is not much surface water here on Viros. All this you see around you is possible only because we were able to construct our dam to trap enough water in the reservoir to supply us. Other settlements were located in places where this was not possible. Their crops failed and they ran out of food and water. We offered them sanctuary within our city but they refused to leave their homes even when it became obvious that they were doomed. Now the survivors scrape out a basic existence in the wilderness while others raid us for supplies instead. Sometimes they attack the dam because it gives them access to water while other times they attack the fields for food. That's why we're building the wall." Coros explained. Then a bleeping sound caused him to look at his datapad, "It's as I thought. They're attacking one of the construction sites, trying to get through the gap in the wall before it's complete."

"Which way?" Jayk asked and Coros pointed across the field, away from the city to where the defensive wall was just about visible.

"Brae, Tylo, come with me." Jayk said.

"What about me?" Dahlis asked.

"Stay inside the ship." Jayk told him.

"Hold on while I just get my rifle." Tylo added, rushing back up the *Swift Exit*'s access ramp

Breaking into a run Jayk, Brae and Tylo headed for where the wall was under attack. They did not have to run far though before a skiff loaded with armed troops pulled up alongside them and the driver looked down at them.

"I was told you were joining us. Get aboard." he said and the trio climbed aboard the vehicle before it starting moving again.

It was easy to see that the troops aboard the skiff were not part of a modern military. Their equipment lacked any uniformity and some even lacked the most basic of protective equipment such as blast helmets and vests. In addition to this many of the weapons they carried looked like civilian models pressed into service with this rag-tag militia.

"Not much of a fighting force

The alarm had been raised by lookouts who had seen the approaching raiding party well before they reached the wall and when the skiff arrived they were still well over a hundred metres away. This was close enough for the raiders to be exchanging blaster fire with some of the construction workers who had abandoned their tools and armed themselves with light weapons that were kept handy for just such events.

"Spread out. Section one get on the wall. I want that repeater firing in two minutes. Sections two and three with me. We plug the gap" the leader of the troops carried aboard the skiff as the troops it carried all leapt down to the ground. One group ran to the section of wall that was already complete and began to scale it with the only support weapon the force appeared to have while the rest instead deployed along the incomplete length of wall where the raiders would have to come through to reach the fields and it was these troops that the Udras and Tylo accompanied.

The weaponry of the raiders was even more basic than that of Viros City's militia and as Tylo positioned himself behind a concrete block that had yet to be moved into its position in the wall he was forced to duck as a projectile bounced off it and showered him with splinters of concrete.

"I'd say there are at least twenty of them." Brae commented as she peered over the containers she was using as cover at the figures concealed under ragged hooded cloaks but before Jayk could respond there was a 'pop' sound as a canister was fired by one of the raiders towards the militia position and it burst open to release a cloud of smoke.

"This is it, they're coming." the unit commander exclaimed.

"I think this is where our skills come in Brae." Jayk said and there was a 'snap-hiss' as he drew and activated his lightsaber. Brae copied him and the two Jedi charged forwards into the smoke. The glow from their lightsaber made it easy for the raiders to spot the Jedi and several blaster bolts flew towards them through the smoke but Jayk and Brae deflected them all, sending them back through the smoke.

*Danger.*

Jayk sensed a disturbance in the Force and threw himself to the ground just as there was a rattle of projectile fire and a burst of bullets flew over his head as a raider armed with an automatic slugthrower advanced out of the smoke towards him. The raider rapidly emptied his weapon's magazine and he fumbled with another. However, before he could reload a blaster bolt struck him in the chest and he fell backwards. Looking around Jayk saw the militia platoon leader and the man nodded at the Jedi.

Meanwhile Brae charged through the smoke, following the path of a stream of blaster bolts that came towards the wall. Emerging from the smoke she found herself facing a pair of raiders armed with battered blasters.

*Surprise.*

*Fear.*

The raiders had not expected to have to face a Jedi directly and the pair of them broke and ran as soon as they saw her clearly. One just turned and left immediately while the other began by backing away and firing his blaster at her only for Brae to parry every shot, deflecting the blaster bolts into the ground between them. Jayk emerged on the opposite side of the cloud of smoke where he saw a trio of raiders, one of them stood looking towards the wall through a pair of macrobinoculars while the other two crouched in front of him.

When they saw Jayk the two armed men got up and moved to stand between the Jedi and the man that Jayk could tell was their leader. They held their fire though, pointing their weapons at Jayk but not shooting them while their leader produced a flare launcher and pointed it up into the air before launching the illuminating projectile it contained. Then he along with his two bodyguards turned and ran.

The flare was the signal for the raiders to retreat en masse and when they saw it burning they began to pull back. Their retreat was disorderly though and most of the surviving raiders fell back individually, only a handful co-operating to cover one another as they continued to come under fire from the defending militia troops.

In the aftermath of the battle Jayk, Brae and Tylo watched as the Viros City militia gathered together the bodies from both sides. Only four of the militiamen had been killed in the fighting while a further seven had suffered injuries that were being treated. On the other hand eight of the raiders had been killed while any of them that had been wounded had been able to retreat with the others when the signal flare was launched.

"What will be done with the bodies?" Jayk asked one of the militia fighters gathering up the bodies of the raiders.

"Blood samples will be taken and tested to make sure that none of them are infected with any infectious diseases, then they'll be cremated." the militia fighter told him.

"May I take a look first?" Jayk said.

"Be my guest." the fighter replied and Jayk knelt down beside the nearest body.

The hood from the dead raider's cloak had already been pulled back and Jayk pulled the scarf covering the bottom half of his face down so that he could get a proper look at the corpse. The raider had been a rodian and Jayk's attention was immediately drawn to his antenna. One of these was badly damaged and looked to have been that way for some time rather than a result of the battle, the injury to it having scarred over and left it with a crooked appearance. Rodians were generally a slim species but even for one of them this being looked to have been very thin, with next to no body fat on him when he died.

"Find anything?" Tylo asked from behind Jayk and the jedi shook his head.

"Nothing definite but I sense something here is not exactly what it seems to be." he answered.

"I feel the same." Brae added, "I've fought pirates before and thee raiders felt different somehow. As if they didn't want to be here doing this."

"Conscripts maybe?" Tylo suggested, "I've heard of raiders kidnapping people, families and then using them as hostage to force other family members to fight for them."

"Maybe that's why they didn't leave their own settlements to come and live here." Brae suggested, "Perhaps they were being held captive."

"That would mean that there was someone directing all of this." Tylo pointed out.

"Yes it would and if we are going to put an end to this conflict then we're going to have to find out who." Jayk said as he stood up again and he turned towards the leader of the militia troops who was stood close by also overseeing the gathering up of the dead, "Lieutenant I need to speak to you council." he said.

### 3.

The council of Viros City consisted of fifteen beings in total, including their leader. These sat seven along each side of a table with the high councillor at the far end when Jayk and Brae were shown in.

"Jedi Udra, please take a seat." the twi'lek high councillor said, pointing to the two seats that had been placed at the far end of the table, "I am High Councillor Morven, elected leader of Viros City. I must say I was surprised to learn of your presence here although relieved at the same time. I understand you and your padawan were instrumental in driving off the most recent raider attack with minimal casualties."

"It is the role of the Jedi to bring peace high councillor." Jayk responded.

"So what brings you to this chamber master Jedi?" another of councillors asked as she looked straight at Jayk and Brae,

"I would like to know something of the history of these raids." Jayk answered, "When did they start and is there a pattern?"

"They began when the other settlements began to fail." Morven told him, "The first were directed against the construction site at the dam. We initially thought that they were taking equipment but then we realised that they were also taking water from our reservoir. Not much mind you, we could easily afford the loss at the time. But then the attacks started to increase and they also targeted other locations, equipment warehouses and our fields. Those were losses we could not so easily afford and we were forced to divert more resources into defending ourselves."

"Yes, we saw the wall." Brae commented.

"The resources we have been forced to put into that wall could have been used to expand our city greatly." another of the council said.

"I suspect that there may be a singular driving force behind these attacks." Jayk said and the councillors looked at one another nervously.

"What do you mean master Jedi?" Morven replied.

"The raiders we fought were not like those we have encountered before. They lacked the predatory instinct of most violent criminals." Jayk explained, "I believe that if whoever or whatever is directing the attacks can be located then we can put a stop to them."

Before any of the council could respond to this suggestion though the door to the council chamber suddenly slid open and a militiaman in a dust covered uniform rushed in.

"Councillors forgive this intrusion but my patrol found something that you have to see." he exclaimed and he plugged a memory stick into a port on the wall located beside a large display screen. The port read the data on the memory stick and immediately brought it up on the display, showing a number of still images taken by the member of the patrol. These images had been taken of a metal tube propped up against the side of a hole that had been dug in the ground while around it a number of short cylindrical objects with finned tails had been stacked up.

"What is it?" a councillor asked.

"It's a mortar." Jayk answered before the militiaman could respond.

"A what?" the councillor said.

"A weapon designed to launch projectiles in a high arc." Brae told her.

"I know what a mortar is and that is just a piece of pipe." she replied, pointing at the wall mounted display.

"That's all it needs to be." Jayk pointed out, "The side of the hole forms the support and it has probably been angled to fire at a specific target." and the militiaman nodded.

"We destroyed most of the ammunition but we sent some rounds to be examined. Hopefully once our chemists have studied the propellant charges they will be able to tell us how far it would have fired at the angle it was set to." he said.

"Do you think there could be more?" Morven asked the militiaman but again it was Jayk who answered first.

"Weapons such as this are easy to produce with even the most basic of tools. If your raiders are equipping themselves with them then it is imperative that we locate whatever is driving them." Jayk said.

"Jedi Udra we have attempted to locate where the attacks were being launched from." Morven said.

"What prevented you?" Brae asked.

"It's a simple question of the amount of ground that needs covering." another councillor told her, "We suspect that the attacks are launched from the other settlements but they are far away and the raiders post look outs just as we do."

"We lost more than twenty men to ambushes." Morven said, "I'm afraid that I can't authorise more men to go on such a suicidal mission."

"And I am not asking you to high councillor." Jayk said, "I will go alone."



"Wait, alone? What about me and Tylo?" Brae said when she heard this.

"You will both remain here to help protect the city." Jayk told her and she frowned.

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

Although Viros had only a single shuttle capable of leaving the planet's atmosphere and only a handful of cargo airspeeders it did have a reasonable quantity of ground vehicles in both private hands and owned by the city government, such as the skiff used to transport troops to the defensive wall around the fields and it was in a warehouse containing a number of such vehicles that Jayk, Brae and Tylo met with an officer from the city militia.

"This datapad has a map on it that shows the locations of the other settlements." the officer said as he handed the device to Jayk, who nodded as he took it and looked at the display.

"You suspect that the attacks are being directed from the other settlements then captain?" he asked.

"We've always assumed that was the case." the militia captain answered, "Of course we have no proof but it seemed reasonable to believe that the raiders would make use of what they already had, especially since we had no idea that they might all be co-ordinating their actions." then he extended an arm towards a row of vehicles, "So which one do you want to take? They're all fuelled up and in full working order."

Jayk looked along the row of vehicles. These were all civilian models of speeders although some of them had been modified with mountings for weapons that were not currently fitted. Given that he was going to try and trace the source of the raider attacks alone Jayk did not need a large vehicle such as one of the landspeeders, skiffs or repulsortrucks though and he instead pointed at a nearby speeder bike.

"That one will do. Assuming that it operates exactly as this model is supposed to then its speed and handling characteristics ought to be adequate for my task." he said.

"Are you sure you don't want Tylo and me to come along with you dad?" Brae said, noting the confusion on the militia captain's face when she indicated that Jayk was her father.

"A extra couple of pairs of eyes to keep watch couldn't hurt you know." Tylo pointed out.

"Maybe not but you can both be of more use here if there is another attack. On the other hand if I take you with me then we would appear more threatening. Alone there is still a chance that the raiders will either ignore me or if they do attack then it will be in far fewer numbers than otherwise." Jayk replied.

"I still say I have a bad feeling about this." Brae commented, folding her arms.

"Perhaps but I see no other way to free these people from their ongoing cycle of violence." Jayk said as he walked over to the speeder bike and mounted it. Then he tucked the datapad the militia officer had given to him into his robes and put on a pair of goggles that had been left hanging from one of the control sticks and put them on before he started the lightweight vehicle's engine.

"In that case I suppose the only thing left to say is good luck." Tylo said.

"And may the Force be with you." Brae added and Jayk smiled.

"Thank you both and may the Force with you as well." he replied before he took hold of the speeder bike's controls and it accelerated rapidly out of the warehouse.

It took Jayk just a few minutes to reach the edge of the city itself and just a few more to cross the fields that surrounded it, able to travel across them in a straight line without damaging them. This meant that he soon reached a gap in the defensive wall where it was still under construction and he sped out into the wilderness beyond. The change in Jayk's surroundings was abrupt and severe, instead of green fields filled with crops the ground beyond the wall was grey and devoid of any visible life whether animal or vegetable. The only signs of life beyond the wall at all were the tracks left in the ground by the raiders as they made their way to and from the wall and Jayk saw that these all converged on a single small area where they suddenly vanished. This pointed towards the use of a repulsortruck vehicle having been used to transport them that had left no tracks at all.

Having checked the map on the datapad given to him Jayk knew the location of the nearest of the other settlements on the planet and he guided his speeder bike towards this, moving as fast as the bike would go until it came into view at which point he came to a complete halt and lifted his goggles as he took out a pair of macrobinoculars and used them to study the settlement. It rapidly became obvious that this was as lifeless as the wilderness that surrounded it. The structures were typical for new settlements and bore the hallmarks of modular construction and rapid assembly from preformed components that could easily be combined to produce buildings of different sizes and configurations for different purposes. Standing out among these though were a number of transparent structures that were obviously greenhouses intended to provide the settlers with fresh food. These had obviously not been maintained in a long time and it was not possible for Jayk to see inside the greenhouses because of the amount of dirt that had built up on the initially transparent walls and roofs of the greenhouses.

Although he could see nothing from this distance Jayk still decided that the seemingly abandoned settlement deserved closer investigation and he put his macrobinoculars away before he placed his hands back on the controls to his speeder bike. Then he lowered his goggles over his eyes again and accelerated towards the

settlement.

"It's been a long time since they sent a patrol out this far from their precious walls." one of the pair of figures watching Jayk from the top of a nearby hill said.

"I only see one." the other responded, "Not much of a patrol."

"It could just be a scout for a larger force. Or maybe another of those do-gooders trying to get us to surrender." the first said, "Either way we should report this. You stay here and keep an eye on that guy."

"What if there are more behind him?" the other asked and the first shrugged.

"Then I guess you better hope that they don't see you." the first told him, slapping him on the back before crawling backwards to ensure that he did not reveal their presence on the hill until it was safe for him to get to his feet and hurry away.

Jayk felt a shiver go down his spine as he rode his speeder bike into the abandoned settlement as he sensed the lingering presence of the Dark Side of the Force. Whatever had happened here before the settlement was abandoned by its inhabitants it had been so abhorrent that it left a stain on the Force that could still be felt.

He rode the speeder bike to the centre of the settlement where the largest structure was located. Jayk guessed that this would have been where the local administration was based and if there were any records to be found about what happened then this would be where they were most likely to be found. Bringing the speeder bike to a halt outside the main entrance to the building Jayk climbed off it and lifted his goggles from his eyes. Just in case there was any danger that he could not sense in the Force, perhaps hidden from him by the lingering disturbance he could sense, he also drew his lightsaber although he kept this inactive for the time being as he waved his hand to open the door of the building and he proceeded inside.

The interior of the structure was darkened with a lack of power meaning that artificial lighting was not functioning while dirt on the windows prevented sunlight from entering the building. There was a 'snap-hiss' as Jayk ignited his lightsaber to provide him with enough light to see by and he saw that the building had obviously been visited by someone prior to him and they had stripped it of everything worth taking.

Computers and other electronic equipment had been removed from mountings to leave cabling dangling from holes in the walls.

Making his way from room to room Jayk found the same story everywhere he went, someone had gone through the building and removed everything of any value. They had even gone as far as ripping out the motors that operated the doors, leaving them all standing open. There were still a number of maps and signs left on the building walls though and using these Jayk was able to find his way to what had once been the main records office where he had hoped to find out exactly what caused the settlement to fail. However, this too had been emptied and even the racks on which the computer drives would have been stored had been removed. It was clear to Jayk that he would not simply be able to read about the failure of the settlement and so he decided to investigate the place where it had been suggested to him that that failure had begun and he left the administration structure to head for the greenhouses instead.

## 4.

"There he is now." the lookout who had gone to report Jayk's presence said to his superior when they saw Jayk emerge from the administration building through their macrobinoculars, "Wait, what's he got in his hand?"

"It's a lightsaber." his superior replied, "That man is a jedi. I saw him fighting alongside the Viros troops when we attempted our last raid."

"What's a jedi doing here on Viros?" the other lookout asked.

"How should I know. I doubt they'd come just because Viros City called them, it's not like there are that many of them and they're generally kept pretty busy." the lookouts' superior said before he handed his macrobinoculars to one of the other troops he had brought with him.

"So what do we do?" the first lookout said.

"You lot can stay here and wait," his superior told him as he drew his blaster from its holster, "but I'm going down there." and he looked towards the abandoned settlement.

Jayk felt the strength of the Dark Side grow the nearer he got to the greenhouses and he held his lightsaber at the ready as he entered the building that was connected to the nearest one. Just like the administration building this had been stripped of anything useful but Jayk was less interested in this than he was in what was inside the greenhouse itself. The supposedly transparent structure of the greenhouse had been too dirty to see through from the outside and so the first Jayk saw of what was inside was when he pushed his way through the flexible covering over the doorway that was designed to trap heat and his eyes widened in a mix of surprise and horror.

The greenhouse was covered in bones.

Some of these were tiny and looked as if they had come from the sorts of vermin that tended to get everywhere across the galaxy despite the efforts that were made to limit their spread. Others were larger but also had an animalistic appearance to them but there were some that could only be attributed to sentient species. It looked to Jayk as if someone had gathered every animal life form in the settlement together inside the greenhouse and slaughtered them all together.

Jayk crouched down and picked up a skull that looked like it had come from a human or near human being and inspected it for damage that might reveal a cause of death. There was no significant damage to the skull though and he put this back down and instead picked up another bone that looked like a leg bone from a humanoid that had been broken in half. The break was jagged and at first Jayk considered that whoever this bone had belonged to had suffered a severe fracture shortly before death so that the break could not heal and smooth the end of the bone but then he noticed several tiny scratches on the bone. Reaching into his pocket Jayk took out a pair of spectacles that he put on to get a better look at the scratches and he realised that he knew what they were.

They were teeth marks.

It was obvious that something had eaten part of the body that this bone had come from and that went against the idea of all life in the settlement being wiped out in one fell swoop. Obviously something had lived long enough to try and devour the corpse. Jayk then began to search through the bones and he found more that had the same markings on them whether they looked like they had come from animals or sentient beings.

Then he made a frightening discovery. Among the chewed on bones he found one that obviously proven too tough for the creature that had dined on the body and had caused a tooth to break off, a tooth that had been capped. The only conclusion that Jayk could take from this was that the skeletons inside the greenhouse, whether from animals or sentient beings had been eaten by other sentient beings.

All of a sudden the presence of the Dark Side made sense. Cannibalism was not a trait that the vast majority of sentient species considered acceptable and those who practised it were generally reviled.

Taking the damaged bone as well as the capped tooth with him Jayk rushed back outside where he suddenly found a figure that looked familiar despite its facial features being hidden by a cloak, hood and scarf. It was clearly the same being who had led the raid on Viros City.

"Desperate times call for desperate measures jedi." the masked figure said as he reached up to lower his hood and scarf, exposing his gaunt face and white hair.

"A level of desperation that leads to cannibalism must be great indeed." Jayk replied.

"Hunger and thirst are very strong motivators." the gaunt man said, "Now what are you doing here jedi? Not in this place specifically, just on Viros." he added.

"We arrived by chance. Our vessel became infested with mynocks and this was the most suitable place for us to deal with them." Jayk told him and he smiled.

"A co-incidence then. Is this what you jedi refer to as the will of the Force?" he said.

"Perhaps. That depends largely on what is really happening here." Jayk replied.

"Ah, now that is an interesting tale. Are you ready to listen jedi?" the gaunt man said and Jayk nodded slowly. "Tell me what is going on on Viros." he said and the gaunt man sighed as he looked around for somewhere to sit down.

"Do you mind if he do this over there?" he asked, pointing to where there was a scattering of empty cargo containers, "I'd rather like to take the weight off my feet if I can."

"After you." Jayk said and he followed the man over to the containers where they both sat down, "Start at the beginning." he then told the gaunt man.

"That is generally the best place to start." he said before he began his explanation, "It all started when the colonies were first established I suppose. Obviously water was critical to the survival of our settlements and we built them where this could be obtained. Rain on Viros rarely falls at low altitudes and unfortunately the resources that justified setting up a colony could only be found at these low altitudes. Fortunately even though our hydrosphere is well into the arid portion of the scale there were just enough sources of water to allow us to set up a number of settlements where other resources could be found. Few rivers flow down from the mountains and there were few springs and wells where underground water could be accessed and these became the locations of our settlements."

"Couldn't moisture vaporators be used?" Jayk asked.

"They could but that technology is scarce and many areas are prone to violent wind storms that kick up debris that can smash a vaporator to pieces in under a minute. Creating fertile soil to grow crops was also an issue, very little existed here on Viros and chemical fertilisers were needed to get us going. Making these required even more water, as did running the fusion generators needed to power everything. But we persevered and less than a year after landing there were more than thirty colonies on Viros."

"All but one of which has now failed." Jayk commented and the gaunt man nodded.

"Yes, we are victims of their success I'm afraid." he said, "You see the limited supplies of water also limited our ability to expand our colonies. We had plans of course, shipping in water in the form of ice from elsewhere in the system and then storing and recycling it. None of these were impossible schemes but they needed money and resources that we didn't have yet. On the other hand the high council of Viros City itself came up with another solution to their water shortage."

"Their dam." Jayk said and the gaunt man nodded again.

"Exactly, their dam. You see Viros City was built by the bank of a river on relatively high ground and the first colonists also drilled wells to reach some of the underground water supplies. But this wasn't enough for their increasing needs and so they began to construct their dam to trap the water before it flowed away and in doing so they cut off the supplies to the other settlements. The river that they dammed was the source of most of our water as well you see and they cut the flow by more than three quarters and the water delivered by the river to the rest of us was cut by the same amount. Even those settlements with wells were affected although it did take longer since some of the river flow finds its way underground and it also supplied the wells. The difference was that it took months for the water to reach the wells instead of days by river." the gaunt man explained.

"I see a dry river over there." Jayk said, looking towards a stretch of dry river bed that ran past the settlement and the gaunt man nodded again.

"Yes, that broke off from the river dammed by Viros City and when they finished their project the people here found themselves without any water in under a day. Viros ignored pleas to dismantle their dam and instead ordered all other settlements to dismantle their operations and relocate. "we'd put our lives into our homes though and we weren't about to leave so we tried to carry on."

"By becoming cannibals?" Jayk said.

"Here that is what happened, yes. The lack of water meant that no food could be produced either and the people here faced starvation. No-one had any food to spare and these people became so desperate that some of them resorted to consuming their own dead."

"And the others?" Jayk asked.

"They left, made their way to other settlements while they still could. Some even went to Viros City and told them what happened but the response of the high council was to simply send people here to strip the settlement of anything left of value." the gaunt man continued, "As supplies of food and water in other settlements began to dwindle we continued to try and get Viros City to dismantle their dam but they refused. By trapping the water in their new reservoir they were able to massively expand their farmland. They didn't even need greenhouses any more and that was when it was decided that more drastic measures were needed."

"An armed attack." Jayk said.

"Yes I'm afraid so. Some of us considered appealing for help from off world but that was impossible when the only subspace communication systems on the planets were to be found in Viros City. They were hardly likely

to request help from the very Republic that might order them to dismantle their dam so we decided to attack. We had no military of course but then again neither did Viros City and a number of settlements were able to band together and provide a few armed men each to attack the dam. The first attack took them completely by surprise of course and we did succeed in damaging the dam and letting out a great deal of water but they soon repaired the damage and in retaliation they cut the amount of water they were letting through even further. Of course this led to more attacks. We expanded our forces by drafting in beings whose livelihoods had been destroyed by the lack of water and produced what weapons we could but Viros City responded by organising a proper defensive force and constructing defences. The wall they're building will make it very difficult to attack the targets we need to hit to capture the resources we need so more recently we've been concentrating on hitting the construction sites but we still attack the dam and the fields for food and water." "So what about your own settlement? How has that fared during this?" Jayk asked. "My home was lucky. You see it was built on the shore of one of the few lakes here on Viros but it was fed from the same river that Viros City dammed. For a while we had a reserve of water but even that was not enough when we took in refugees from here and some other settlements. Now the lake is all but gone and if things keep going as they have been then more settlements could end up like this one. Empty buildings and piles of gnawed bones." the gaunt man told him and Jayk paused to consider his next course of action. "Then the dam has to be destroyed." the jedi said and the gaunt man smiled. "That's easier said than done." he said, "Our supply of explosives is limited and we don't know enough about the structure to be able to find weak points where we can let the weight of water behind it do the job for us." "Yes but until now you haven't had a pair of jedi fighting with you." Jayk responded.

## 5.

Dahlis was reading from his datapad when he heard the *Swift Exit's* communication system activate.

"Who would be calling us?" he said.

"Hang on I'll find out." Cal responded as he connected with the communication system, "*Swift Exit.*" he said, directing his words into the ship's transmitter.

"Cal are Brae or Tylo there?" Jayk asked.

"No it's just Dahlis and me. I haven't heard from the others." Cal answered, "Can't you reach them directly?"

"Maybe but I want to make sure that we can talk privately without any of the locals listening in." Jayk explained.

"I don't like the sound of that." Cal commented, "Obviously I could call them and ask them to return to the ship but if the locals hear that they may become suspicious."

"We're going to have to involve Dahlis." Jayk said, "If the Force is with us then he can find Brae and Tylo and let them know that they need to return to the ship without arousing any awkward questions."

"Okay I'll connect you to him.." Cal said, linking the *Swift Exit's* external communications to the intercom so that Dahlis could hear what was being said while he sat in the lounge rather than the cockpit, "You're on." he added.

"Dahlis it's Jayk." Jayk said.

"Yes Jayk I hear you. What do you want?" Dahlis responded.

"I need you to find Brae and Tylo. Bring them back to the *Swift Exit* but don't tell them that I want to speak to them." This has to remain a secret from the locals. Jayk told him.,

"Why, what's wrong?" Dahlis asked.

"That's not important right now, just understand that I need them to come back to the ship." Jayk said.

"Then what should I tell them to get them back here?" Dahlis said.

"Anything that isn't to do with something that the locals can check on." Jayk replied.

"Might I suggest a problem with either the galley or the bathroom?" Cal suggested, "The locals won't care about either of them."

"So I should call them?" Dahlis said.

"No, a minor problem like either of those could be dismissed if you just call. You should go and find them in person." Cal told him.

"Okay I'll go now." Dahlis said, putting his datapad down on the table and getting up.

Disembarking from the *Swift Exit* he realised that he had no idea where Brae or Tylo were and so he walked up to the nearest of the locals he could find, a man who appeared to be responsible for directing the loading of the cargo transport speeders that landed here outside the city.

"Excuse me." Dahlis called out to the man.

"What do you want?" he replied.

"Oh, err, I need to find Brae Udra and Tylo Kurrast. That's the jedi padawan and the captain of-" Dahlis began.

"Yeah I guessed." the man interrupted as he took out a comlink, "Control I need to know where the jedi and the spacer are." he said into the device.

"They're in the command centre." a voice responded, "Do you want me to get them?"

The landing pad controller then looked at Dahlis.

"Oh no thank you. I'll go and speak to them in person. What's the fastest way there?" he said.

Hitching a ride on a patrol speeder, Dahlis was soon at the administrative building at the heart of Viros City and it was here that the high council also maintained the command and control centre for the city militia and Brae and Tylo were both in there studying the information laid out on the table that dominated the room. This showed a detailed map of the city itself as well as the surrounding fields, the dam and the defensive wall that was under construction. Most recently the location of the mortar found by a patrol had been added to the map and the senior militia officers were currently discussing how they intended to deploy more patrols to search for more of the weapons. There was a guard just inside the door and he moved to block Dahlis when he tried to enter the room but Tylo noticed this and smiled.

"It's alright he's with us." he called out and the guard backed away.

"Thank you." Dahlis said as he made his way to where Brae and Tylo stood.

"So what brings you here professor? Curious about strategic planning and operations?" Tylo joked.

"No, no. I'm here because there's a problem with the *Swift Exit* that I think you should both come and see for yourself." Dahlis said and Brae frowned as she looked at him while Tylo sighed instead.

"What's up with my ship now? Have the locals broken something?" he asked.

"I don't think so but there's water leaking out of the kitchen unit and I'm worried that it might be getting into the electronics." Dahlis said.

"I doubt it. Just shut off the supply and I'll take a look at it when we get back to Coruscant." Tylo said.

*Deception.*

Brae knew that Dahlis was lying about why he wanted them to return to the *Swift Exit*.

"Perhaps we should go and take a look at it Tylo." she said.

"What are you talking about kid? Don't we need to be here just in case there's another raid? What if-" Tylo began.

"Tylo I'm sure that the militia will call us if there's an attack." Brae interrupted and then she smiled before taking his hand in hers, "Besides I think we've earned a bit of time to ourselves. Don't you?" and then she used her other hand to pull his head down low enough for her to kiss him on the lips.

*Surprise.*

It was now obvious to Tylo that something was wrong and he grinned as Brae let go of him.

"Oh right. Me and you, While Jayk's away we can play, right?" he said, "Then what are we waiting for? Let's go."

"Ah there you are." Cal's hologram said as Dahlis brought Brae and Tylo back to the *Swift Exit*, "Jayk's been waiting for more than twenty minutes now."

"Tylo just took some persuading, that's all." Brae replied, smiling as they all made their way to the cockpit and sat down.

"Okay Jayk, what's this all about?" Tylo asked.

"I've made contact with the raiders. As we expected there is more going on here than we first realised." Jayk answered.

"Wasn't that what we expected?" Brae said.

"Yes but the answer is not. It is the actions of Viros City that began the conflict on this planet, not the raiders themselves." Jayk told her.

"What do you mean?" Tylo said, "The people here are just sitting behind their wall."

"Yes but before they began work on building their wall they built their dam and in doing so they destroyed the other settlements, all of which depended on the water that flowed down river. Now nothing gets to them and they are dying." Jayk explained.

"Then the dam has to be destroyed." Dahlis commented.

"Are we able to intervene?" Brae asked.

"Yes, there is an immediate threat to life and a representative of the other settlements has requested our help." Jayk answered.

"So what do you need from us then Jayk?" Tylo said.

"I need you and Brae to gain access to the dam itself as well as any structural drawings you can find. The people here have only a limited supply of explosives so destroying the dam will take careful placement." Jayk said and Tylo nodded.

"I get it. It's like putting charges on a safe door. Do it right and you only need a small amount to get the weight of the door to tear itself open. Only in this case we've got the weight of a few million tonnes of water to do the trick." he said.

"Trust you to know about safe breaking." Brae muttered.

"Hey only out of curiosity kid." Tylo protested, holding up his hands defensively, "I was a smuggler, not a safe cracker."

"I can see us talking our way into the dam easily enough." Brae added, "But how are we supposed to get the structural drawings?"

"I suggest framing your request in the form of a security issue. Tell the Viros City officials that you are looking for ways by which the raiders could infiltrate the dam."

"Okay so once we've got these drawings, what then?" Tylo asked.

"Then we hand them over to experts from the other settlements to find the critical points of the structure while you carry out a survey in person to make yourselves familiar with the layout. When I return I'll bring the charges with me."

"Do you think we'll be able to get the charges into the dam without being seen? Isn't it guarded around the clock?" Brae pointed out.

"I think I can arrange for a diversion that will keep the attention of the militia elsewhere." Jayk said, "There will be some guards left of course but I expect that we'll be able to avoid them while we plant the charges. Then we'll trigger them by remote control."

"You know the locals are going to be pretty mad when you blow up their dam and cut off most of the water for their fields." Tylo commented, "How do you intend to deal with the entire militia coming after us?"

"By leaving." Jayk responded, "Only Brae and I will plant the charges while you remain aboard the *Swift Exit* and keep the ship ready for take off. Viros City has nothing that can shoot us down once we're in the air. After that the Republic can send negotiators and a force of Sector Rangers to come up with a more permanent solution to the conflict. For now though we need to restore the water supply to the other settlements as fast as possible. I take it that the ship is now flyable?"

"Yes, the repairs are complete." Cal answered.

"Then that sounds like a plan." Tylo said, looking at Brae and she smiled back at him.

"So let's go." she said and Tylo frowned.

"What? No kiss this time?" he replied.

"What was that about kissing?" Jayk's voice said over the communication system and Brae's eyes widened.

"Sorry dad, can't hear you properly. You're breaking up." she said quickly and she reached out to turn off the communication system, glaring at Tylo.

As Brae and Tylo walked towards the dam they saw a pair of sentries standing at a checkpoint. Just beyond this was the top of the dam itself where it was possible to walk across to the other side as well as the top of a set of stairs leading down into the structure of the dam and it was this that drew the focus of Brae and Tylo.

"This area is restricted." one of the sentries said, stepping into the path of Brae and Tylo.

"I am Padawan Udra and this is Captain Kurrast. We are here to carry out a security inspection of the dam." Brae told him.

"I'll need to see some identification." the sentry said and Brae sighed.

"You don't need to see our identification." she said, waving her hand at him as she used the Force to manipulate his mind.

"We don't need to see their identification." the sentry then said to his comrade and the pair of them backed out of the way to allow Brae and Tylo to pass.

"Hey kid you know we could have just shown them our IDs?" Tylo whispered and Brae smiled.

"I know but it's more fun this way." she said as they began to descend the stairs into the dam.

As well as being used to hold the water in the reservoir, the dam was also the heart of the system that filtered the water and pumped from it to the settlement and the surrounding fields and the interior was filled by the sound of the machinery running.

"I think we need these." Tylo said loudly and he pointed to a rack of ear defenders before he took two sets, handing one to Brae while keeping the other for himself. Guided by a schematic on Brae's datapad the two of them walked deeper into the dam, noting how the various passages and walkways provided access to the pumping machinery.

"Look up there." Brae said, pointing to a wide pipe that came out of the wall that was on the side of the dam facing the reservoir outside, "That's probably an intake for the water."

"Blow that and this place would flood." Tylo replied, "Although I bet that there's some sort of safety system to seal it if the pressure changes suddenly. We'd need to take that out as well."

"So we can flood the inside of this place, what about making sure the other side gives way?" Brae said and Tylo leant closer to look at the schematic on her datapad.

"There are gates all along the base of the dam for draining waste water." he pointed out, "I bet if even a few of them were blown then the pressure of a dam full of water all trying to get out at once would rip the structure apart and it would collapse."

Brae then smiled.

"They're also a way in." she said, "Dad could cut through with his lightsaber and get inside. That would take care of one of them for a start."

"Then we meet him inside and guide him to the inlet pipes. Half a dozen charges or so and we can bring this entire thing down." Tylo replied, smiling back at her.

The sun was setting as Jayk mounted the speeder bike again and the gaunt man handed him a bag.

"A dozen detonite charges." he said, "Each one with a remote fuse that can be triggered by your comlink."

Jayk glanced inside the bag at the bundle of explosive charges, scavenged from several mining settlements and representing almost the entire supply of commercial explosives available instead of the improvised types that were used more frequently by the raiding parties.

"They should be enough. Your engineers were able to examine the plans provided by Brae and Tylo." Jayk replied. Then he looked at where a number of masked troops were boarding a trio of repulsortrucks, "What about your assault force? Do they know what they are doing?"

"We'll hit the walls on three sides with our mortars. We've not been able to make that many rounds for them yet but we should be able to draw out the city militia reserves. If they come out after us then we'll fall back slowly. If not then we'll see what a few snipers can do to keep them pinned down."

"Very good." Jayk said, nodding, "In that case I will be waiting for the alarm to sound. I'll wish you luck and



may the Force be with us all.”

Then he lowered his goggles over his eyes, started the speeder bike's engine and accelerated away.

## 6.

Brae and Tylo had positioned themselves close to the dam as the sun was setting and they were perfectly placed to see the brilliant flare shoot up into the sky several hundred metres beyond the defensive wall. With raiding parties positioned on three sides and only limited wireless communication available visual signalling was the most reliable method of co-ordinating different units of troops.

"There's the signal." Tylo said.

"Dad will have seen it too. He'll be coming." Brae added and the pair of them began to head for the dam just as the alarms began sounding, summoning the militia into action.

The sound of distant explosions heralded the beginning of the mortar bombardment. As the gaunt man had explained to Jayk the raiders possessed only a limited number of these crude weapons and the bombardment was sporadic and inflicted minimal damage to the city's fortifications. However, the effect was just as Jayk had hoped and the militia deployed the vast majority of its troops to the walls on the other sides of the city than the dam where only the standard garrison remained.

Once again the sentries blocked Brae and Tylo's path to the dam and in the fading light they could see a number of other troops stationed along the top of the structure keeping watch. Although they could have just walked up to the sentries and presented their identification Brae and Tylo did not want the militia to know where they were. Therefore, rather than approach the dam openly they remained out of sight and as one of the sentries began to turn away Brae waved her hand towards him, implanting a subtle suggestion in his mind.

"What was that?" the sentry said, looking into the gloom and certain that he had seen something moving. He and the other sentry raised their weapons and watched for any further signs of activity in the darkness and with their attention directed away from Brae and Tylo the pair dashed past them without being noticed and hurried to the stairs leading into the dam.

"Ear defenders." Tylo said, grabbing two sets from the rack for himself and Brae. Then before they moved on he took a third set in anticipation of Jayk's arrival, knowing that the jedi knight would also need a set.

Jayk also saw the flare that signalled the start of the diversionary attack. This was his cue to get his speeder bike moving once again, heading along the almost totally dry river towards the dam. What would happen if the guards on the dam saw him as he approached was open to question, if they realised who he was then they might think he was returning to help protect the city and at worst they would contact their command centre to tell them that he was heading for the dam. On the other hand if they failed to recognise him, a very real possibility in the dark then he might have to dodge some incoming fire as he neared the dam.

The noise of the speeder bike's engine carried far in the night air and Jayk suddenly found a spotlight shining towards him from the top of the dam as the guards heard the sound of his approach. Although the powerful spotlight gave the guards a clear target to aim at it also helped them identify Jayk and no blaster fire came from the dam as he continued to race towards it as fast as the speeder bike would allow, slowing down only to avoid crashing into the base of the structure.

As soon as the speeder bike was moving slowly enough Jayk leapt from the lightweight vehicle, plucked his lightsaber from his belt and ignited its blade with a 'snap-hiss'. Landing beside one of the doors meant for letting water drain out of the dam, Jayk swung his lightsaber at it and sliced it out of its frame. Then after shutting off his lightsaber he leapt up through the hole this had created into the interior of the dam.

All of this was witnessed by the guards at the top of the dam as they peered over the edge.

"What's he playing at?" one of them said,

"I don't know. You better get down inside and find out. Something must be wrong." his superior told him and the junior guard nodded before rushing towards the nearest access point to the dam.

"This way!" Brae exclaimed as she and Tylo descended to the lowest level of the dam and she ran along a walkway until she saw her father climbed up onto it from the drainage hatch he had just jumped through.

"Jayk catch." Tylo called out and he tossed the spare set of ear defenders to him.

"Thanks." Jayk said as he caught them and put them on.

"Are those the charges?" Brae asked, looking at the bag over Jayk's shoulder and he nodded.

"A dozen of them. From the plans you sent I suggest that we place three on some of the outlet hatches and the other nine on the inlets and seals. We'll also need to disable the controls for the drainage gates so they can't be opened."

"So we'll have far more water coming in than can drain properly." Tylo said.

"Exactly. Now lead me to the controls, we'll start there." Jayk replied.

Brae and Tylo showed Jayk the way to the control box at one end of the dam that allowed the drainage gates to be opened either individually or all together.

"This is it." Brae said.

"Good. Then I'll leave you to destroy it while I set one of the charges down here. Then we'll set two more before we head up to the inlet pipes." Jayk told her and Brae smiled as she activated her lightsaber. However, just as she swung the weapon at the control panel and destroyed it with a single blow there was a shout from a platform above them.

"Hey! What are you doing?" the guard sent to investigate Jayk's presence called out.

"Stang! I've got a very bad feeling about this." Tylo said, raising his blaster rifle but before he could shoot the guard retreated from the edge of the platform and activated him comlink.

"Both of the jedi are down here. They've turned on us, they're attacking the dam!" he yelled into the comlink over the sound of the machinery inside the dam.

"We're going to have company. I'll deal with this guy. You two set the other charges." Tylo said, running to a nearby set of stairs and rushing up them in pursuit of the guard who had decided to withdraw rather than face him and a pair of jedi on his own.

Tylo fired his rifle as he climbed the stairs, hoping that a lucky shot might hit the fleeing militiaman or simply being shot at would slow him down but as Tylo was chasing the solitary guard up through the dam his comrades were already descending to join him and as Tylo fired upwards a volley of blaster bolts came back down towards him, forcing him to take cover.

"Oh kriff! What have I got myself into?" he said to himself before firing a burst upwards that hit a militiaman who screamed as he tumbled over a safety railing before plummeting down the inside of the dam.

Tylo held his position, exchanging fire with the militiamen above him but it was clear that he could not remain where he was indefinitely. The militiamen were reasonably well trained and they rapidly organised themselves into two groups, one laying down covering fire while the other continued to descend and Tylo knew that they would soon overrun his position. Therefore, he fired another burst from his rifle as he emerged from his hiding place and he began to retreat.

As Tylo withdrew he saw Jayk and Brae applying explosive charges to one of the inlet pipes and he ran towards them.

"They're right behind me." he shouted.

"How many?" Jayk asked.

"At least a full squad. I think they've brought in a few friends." Tylo answered.

"We've only placed the three charges on this pipe and its seal though." Brae pointed out and Jayk nodded.

"Then we'll just have to hope that destroying this one is enough. Perhaps if we place the others around it we'll weaken the structure of the dam enough to widen the hole. Hand me another charge."

While Tylo kept watch Jayk and Brae quickly placed the remaining charges against the inside of the dam around the pipe they had already prepared for destruction and when the final charge was in place he drew his lightsaber.

"That's it. Now let's get out here and blow this thing." he said just as the militiamen who had been chasing Tylo appeared and opened fire.

Jayk and Brae both reacted quickly, parrying the incoming blaster bolts with their lightsabers as they retreated.

"There's another set of stairs this way." Tylo said, pointing further along the walkway they were standing on and he broke into a run while the two jedi covered him. However, when he saw the stairs at the other end of the dam he saw that there was another group of militiamen descending this as well, "Looks like we're not getting out this way either."

"Then we climb. Straight up." Jayk said, looking up through the superstructure.

"But there's no way out up there." Tylo pointed out.

"Haven't you been around us long enough to know that a jedi can always make a doorway?" Brae responded and Tylo frowned.

"Don't get cocky." he told her.

The trio then began to climb up the inside of the dam with Jayk and Brae leaping from level to level of the walkways and piping then helping Tylo up after them until they reached the uppermost level, right beneath the top of the dam.

"We won't make it back to the *Swift Exit* with the militia after us the entire way." Jayk said, "Cal will have to pick us up."

"I'll make the call." Brae said.

"Give Tylo your lightsaber. He can help me make us a way out." Jayk told her and Brae handed her weapon to the confused looking Tylo.

"Take it, it's easy." she said.

"Yeah, I've tried these before kid. I just prefer a good blaster at my side." Tylo replied, fumbling with the

activation switch until there was a 'snap-hiss' and the lightsaber came to life. Then he and Jayk held the weapons above their heads and slowly they began to cut their way through the dam.

"Cal can you hear me?" Brae said into her comlink and there was a brief burst of static before Cal's voice was heard.

"Just about Brae. What's your situation?" he said.

"The locals discovered us and we're cut off. We need a pick up from the dam. Are you plugged into the *Swift Exit's* controls?" Brae asked.

"Yes but remember I'm not a combat pilot." Cal said.

"That's okay. Just get to the dam and pick us up."

"If you say so. I'm on my way now." Cal told her and Brae returned her comlink to her belt just as Jayk and Tylo finished cutting a hole in the top of the dam and they both leapt back to avoid the section of dam that they had cut free as it dropped down between them before bouncing down through the dam.

Jayk jumped up through the hole to stand on the top of the dam with his lightsaber held at the ready.

"Clear." he called out and then Brae jumped up after him after taking her lightsaber back from Tylo.

"Hey how about a hand down here?" Tylo called out and both Jayk and Brae then reached out through the Force and used it to lift him up through the hole, depositing him between them, "Thanks but it looks like we're still surrounded." Tylo added, looking in each direction as squads of militia closed in from both sides, surrounding him and the jedi.

"Brae go defensive." Jayk said and he and Brae stood back to back either side of Tylo with their lightsabers held up in front of them and as the militiamen opened fire they parried one shot after another. Although they did not specifically aim the deflected bolts back at the militiamen Jayk and Brae still sent them back towards the approaching troops so that their advance was slowed.

This meant that there was still a significant gap between the militia and the jedi as the *Swift Exit* swooped down and hovered above them. The freighter's access ramp then lowered to reveal Dahlis standing at the top.

"Come on!" he called out waving the others aboard as Cal gently lowered the *Swift Exit* toward the top of the dam.

Tylo was the first to climb onto the access ramp and hurry into the ship followed by Brae and then Jayk before Dahlis closed the ramp behind them.

"Time to end this." Jayk said as he took his comlink from his belt and sent the trigger signal that would detonate the charges he and Brae had set.

As the *Swift Exit* rose back up into the sky the charges inside the dam went off in unison. Each of the charges set against the outlet hatches created new breaches on that side of the dam, leaving it with four relatively small holes along its base. At the same time the charges on the other side of the dam not only blew apart one of the inlet pipes it also created fissures around the hole and as the water rushed into the dam these widened and increased the size of the hole, further increasing the flow.

Had the bottom of the dam still been sealed then the water flooding in would have collected there, rising up to fill the inside. However, the existence of several small exit points meant that the water could pour out of the other side, creating a continuous current that battered the pumping machinery within the dam and ripped it apart, causing more explosions as electrical systems shorted out. These explosions in the pumps allowed even more water to rush into the dam and the increasing pressure of the flow tore open more of the outlet hatches. Although this served to release some of the pressure these hatches were not designed to let such a massive volume of water escape and the dam around them began to crack under the pressure until the entire structure gave way.

"There she goes." Tylo said from the pilot's seat of the *Swift Exit* as the freighter circled high overhead and the occupants saw the water from the reservoir pouring out and sweeping along the riverbed.

"Do you think the people from the other settlements will be okay now?" Brae asked, looking at Jayk.

"Hopefully that water will help keep them alive until relief ships can arrive from the Republic. For now though I think we've done enough here. Tylo, take us home." Jayk replied and Tylo smiled as he pulled back on the flight controls.

Down on the ground the gaunt man heard the sound of the explosions from the direction of the dam and all around him a cheer went up as his men realised that the jedi had been successful.

"They did it!" one cried out, "The dam has gone."

"What now?" another asked.

"We fall back." the gaunt man ordered, "There's been enough fighting here."