

# STAR WARS

## DARKNESS RISING

4-02: RESENTMENT &  
REVENGE

BY STEPHEN J DUTTON



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Having escaped incarceration Morton Crayne's first act is to seek revenge against his enemies, starting with Teron Sharr. His plans become more complicated however, when the Udras arrive to hunt him.

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# 1.

The mission to capture the Force sensitive fugitive Teron Sharr had ended in failure for the crew of the YT-700 class *Swift Exit* and they returned to the Jedi temple on Coruscant empty handed. However, as the Jedi knight Jayk Udra walked down the freighter's access ramp into the temple hangar he smiled at the female Jedi waiting for him.

"Kat, it's good to see you." he said.

"No luck then?" Kat Maran responded and she smiled back at him.

"No, the Force was not with us on this occasion and Teron escaped again. But I sense you already knew that." Jayk said, walking up to Kat and kissing her on the cheek. Then she held up a datapad.

"From BoSS." she said and then she started to read from the device, "The Bureau of Ships and Services has been unable to identify the vessel you specified in any Republic system."

"So that's two ships we can't find. Thal N'Krey's and now Teron Sharr's." Jayk said, remembering the vessel that belonged to the missing artist Thal N'Krey whose work relating to the Sith had been the trigger for his hunt across the galaxy for him and any remaining pieces of art that he had created.

"Three." Kat said, holding up three fingers and Jayk frowned.

"Three?" he said and Kat nodded.

"Now you're looking for a gunship as well. Serial number undetermined but its crew blasted their way into and out of the detention facility that was holding Morton Crayne. He's gone Jayk, they took him and it looks like they had inside knowledge. A lot of inside knowledge."

"Kat, come to welcome Jayk home in style?" a man's voice then called out from the top of the *Swift Exit's* access ramp and both Jayk and Kat looked up it to see Tylo Kurrast and also Brae Udra just emerging from the ship. Tylo was the smuggler who had worked for the criminal Morton Crayne that owned the *Swift Exit*. Now he transported Jayk and Brae to wherever they needed to go as part of a plea bargain with the Jedi Order that had kept him out of jail. Brae on the other hand was Jayk's padawan learner and unusually for the Jedi she was also his daughter, the result of a relationship he had had with a woman during an extended assignment years earlier.

"Tylo Kurrast I don't need to be sensitive to the Force to know what you are suggesting and it's none of your business." Kat replied, looking at him sternly but then smiling at him as well, "Welcome back though."

"Do I get to kiss you?" Tylo asked.

"Try it and find out." Kat answered, resting a hand on her lightsaber.

"Fair enough." Tylo said, raising his hands briefly.

"It might be my business." Brae commented, "After all that is my dad as well as my instructor."

"You've been spending too much time with Tylo." Jayk said.

"Actually I've been listening to Cal." Brae said and she produced a crystalline cube from under her robes.

This was the holocron created by Cal Udra, a distant ancestor of Jayk and Brae. Cal had been a Jedi knight almost four thousand years earlier and during his life he created a virtual version of himself to act as gatekeeper to the information that he had placed in his holocron. Now this artificial intelligence formed the fourth member of the team aboard the *Swift Exit*, provided by the Jedi Order to advise Jayk on how to deal with a family member who was part of the Order as well, "He was telling me about his wife. Would Dad have married my mom if the Order still allowed it? Or would he and Kat be married instead?"

"Now that's the sort of awkward question that is more my style." Tylo said, grinning as he wrapped an arm around Brae's shoulders.

"Which is why I do not intend to answer it. I need to consult with Grand Master Ress. If Morton Crayne has escaped then he needs to be found and the longer he remains at large the more difficult that will be." Jayk replied.

"Would you believe that technically I don't have a single credit to my name?" Morton Crayne said to the bartender as he handed over several coins for the drink he had been served and then lifted the glass of pale red liquid.

"Then you pay for each drink before I pour it." the bartender replied.

"Oh I have plenty of funds. More than I have had for a long time. Ever possibly." Morton said, sipping at his drink, "I owe it all to a very beautiful but rather unforgiving lady."

The bartender smiled.

"So you charmed your way into her bed and into her bank account before running off with the credits?" he said.

"Oh nothing so crude. Although I must admit that the idea of giving her the a time she'd never forget is rather appealing. Oh the pleasures I could take with her. But no, she and I have a business arrangement. One that

was very profitable for me until one of my underlings decided that he was going to go into business for himself and made off with some rather valuable property. Now I owe my client for that, plus the expenses she recently incurred to sort out a little legal difficulty I was having. Obviously without any means to continue our association available to me she then had to advance a sum of credits that I am now interested in using to re-establish my operation. However, first of all I would like to draw a line under the difficulties I have been having with the law and some of my former employees and for that I understand that you can help me.” Morton explained and he subtly slid a pair of banknotes across the bar.

“You’ve come to the right place.” the bartender said as he took the banknotes and slipped them into his pockets, “I can put you in touch with the sort of beings that specialise in settling scores.”

“Grandmaster Ressa available is not. To me you will report,” Jedi Master Yoda told Jayk when he entered the council chamber to find only the diminutive Jedi Master present.

“Teron Sharr has escaped.” Jayk told him, “The information provided by Morton Crayne was incomplete. Although we were able to locate the hideout being used by Teron Sharr we did not realise that it was a disguised starship that took off before we could get aboard.”

“Known to us already this is.” Yoda replied, “But not Teron Sharr you seek now I sense.”

“No. I’ve been informed that Morton Crayne escaped with the help of the crew of a gunship. I want to go after him.” Jayk said.

“Ah, your own assignments you wish to choose. Decide what you do next the council will. Not you Jayk Udra. Remember your place young one.” Yoda said.

“I only meant-” Jayk began

“Know what you mean I do. Return to your padawan Jedi Udra. Continue her training until new orders we have for you both.” Yoda interrupted.

“Yes Master Yoda.” Jayk replied and he bowed to the Jedi Master before turning around and exiting the council chamber.

“These men are good?” Morton asked as he looked across the cantina to where a group of beings of various species were gathered, all of them armed and armoured with a variety of weaponry and equipment.

“Ex-Trade Defence Force. Their unit was downsized for economy. Word is they weren’t too worried about collateral damage and landed the Trade Federation with a substantial bill. Will civilian casualties and property damage be a problem?” the bartender asked.

“No, not at all. In fact it could be a bonus. The more indiscriminate damage the better. The people I need to settle scores with have ways of avoiding precise attacks.” Morton replied.

“Good. Then I suggest you go over there and make yourself some new friends.” the bartender said and Morton nodded before he crossed the cantina to where the small band of mercenaries sat drinking.

“Good evening.” he said, “I understand that you can help me settle a few scores.”

“That depends. How big are these scores?” one of the mercenaries, a heavily scarred blue skinned wroonian that had a woman coated in body paint sat on his lap said and Morton tossed a bundle of banknotes onto the table between the mercenaries.

“About three times that.” he said as the mercenaries looked at one another.

“Leave us.” the wroonian told the woman in his lap and she snarled as she got up and walked away. None of the mercenaries reached for the money just yet since that might indicate accepting whatever it was that Morton was offering though. Instead they let the wroonian continue to talk for them, “Those are some big scores. Take a seat and tell us about them.”

“Thank you.” Morton said as he sat down in a vacant seat, “I’m looking to settle an account with a former employee who stole from me.”

“Just one being?” one of the mercenaries commented.

“No, sadly he convinced a number of my other employees, including one whose loyalty I had considered unbreakable to join him. However, I am certain that with him out of the way the others can be convinced of the error of their ways.” Morton said.

“What’s the catch?” the wroonian asked, “One being just needs a sniper. Not all of us.”

“He has some skill with the Force.” Morton said and as he saw the mercenaries exchange looks again he added, “He’s no Jedi though. In fact they’re keen to get rid of him as well, something that’s important to the second part of my plan. You see I’d like to be rid of a couple of Jedi as well. Are your men up to that?”

“Up to it? It was the kriffing Jedi that got us canned from the Trade Defence Force. Their high and mighty principles make them blind to what’s going on out here in the Outer Rim Territories.”

“Excellent. That’s just what I’m looking for.” Morton said, smiling, “Now there is one other matter. Even if my old employees do seek to return to my service I’ll be looking for someone to make sure that they are kept in order. I don’t suppose I could convince you to accept a longer term contract could I?”

“We’ll talk about that later.” the wroonian replied as he finally reached out to take the money that Morton had

put down on the table, "But for now you just hired Aurek Team."

The man known only as Krovak knew he was being watched as he sat at one of the transport's flight stations. He could hear breathing from behind him and he could see the image of the woman standing in the entrance of the cockpit reflected in his control panel.

"Teron send you to spy on me Mara?" Krovak said without bothering to look around.

"Not Mara." the woman said and Krovak snorted, knowing that the reason for the otherwise human looking woman's pallid skin and pure black eyes was the Sith created creature that now inhabited her body. That creature had turned Mara Tosk from a thief who was totally loyal to Morton Crayne into a puppet of Teron Sharr.

"Whatever. Don't you have anything else you could be doing other than watching me?" he said and then he heard the sound of liquid flowing. Looking around he winced in disgust as he saw Mara now urinating on the floor through her clothing while she continued to stare at him, "You know this ship does have working refreshers? And don't expect me to clean that up." he said and he shook his head slowly as he turned to face forwards again, "Next time Teron gets a pet it had better be house broken." he muttered, reaching for the intercom, "Hey Teron," he said into the microphone, "you better send someone up to the bridge with a mop and bucket. Your new girlfriend just gave the deck plates a hosing down." however, before Teron could respond there was an alarm from the control console.

"Krovak, what's wrong?" Teron's voice asked over the intercom as he heard this from his quarters.

"Someone's trying to contact us. Who the hell would know how to do that?" Krovak said.

"I'm on my way. Don't respond. It could be a trap to establish a connection trace." Teron told him and then the intercom went dead.

Teron arrived in the cockpit a few minutes later and he frowned at Mara as he passed by her, still standing in the puddle of liquid in the doorway. In return she just looked back at him blankly.

"Don't you find that creepy?" Krovak asked, looking at Mara again, "Sometimes she seems just cold, other times it's like she's studying us."

"She probably is. If we show weakness I wouldn't be surprised if she tried to slit our throats in our sleep."

Teron replied.

"Why?" Krovak said.

"Why not?" Mara responded.

"Never mind that now, show me this signal." Teron ordered and Krovak pointed to one of the displays.

"There. The alarm was getting annoying so I turned it off, but the system is still picking up the signal. It's got our node ID in the prefix." Krovak told him.

"Yes, I see that." Teron said, nodding.

"They seem keen to get in touch." Krovak commented.

"Yes they do. Very keen." Teron replied, "But the question is 'why'? Do we have something they want or do they have something that we want? I think we should try to find out."

"What about the possibility of a connection trace?" Krovak pointed out, "If it's a trap-"

"We won't talk to them over subspace Krovak. Back trace it to its source. Then once we have their location I shall ask for guidance." Teron said and Krovak nodded.

## 2.

"Now this place looks interesting." Tylo said as he entered the cantina with the Udras and looked around.

"Really?" Brae replied, "To me it looks like a wretched hive of scum and villainy. Emphasis on the wretched part. I can see blood on the walls that looks like it's been there longer than I've been alive."

"Nevertheless this is where we were told to meet our informant. Whoever that might be." Jayk said, "Tylo I want you to take a look around and see if you notice anything odd."

"Sure. What will you two be doing?" Tylo responded.

"Getting a drink." Jayk told him and he started to walk towards the bar.

"Watch yourself in here kid." Tylo said to Brae and she nodded.

"I'll be careful." she answered before she followed Jayk towards the bar "Are we really going to sit here drinking?" she asked when she caught up to Jayk and sat beside him.

"To do otherwise would look suspicious." Jayk responded and as the bartender walked over he held up two fingers, "Two beers." he said, holding out a banknote and the bartender nodded as he took it.

"You're giving me beer?" Brae said softly.

"I doubt this is the sort of establishment that asks for ID before serving anyone." Jayk said, "Plus I think you can handle one. It's not like either of us will be piloting a ship for the next twelve hours."

Brae smiled.

"Tylo won't like that." she said.

"I am sure that Tylo will find himself some other way to relax." Jayk said as the bartender put two cups of beer down on the bar in front of the jedi and then he noticed Brae pulling a face.

"Ugh." she said, "I think he already has." and Jayk turned to look in Tylo's direction where he saw him standing resting an arm on a column. Stood with her back to this was a woman who was either human or a close near human from her features that was clad almost entirely in paint, "Isn't he supposed to be looking for whoever we came here to meet?"

"Give him time. I am sure he knows what he's doing." Jayk said, sipping at his beer as he watched Tylo.

All of a sudden Tylo and the woman both turned towards the jedi and began walking towards them.

"Oh great, now he's bringing his professional companion over here. I'm not lending him the money to pay for her." Brae said and then she picked up her drink and took a gulp from the top, "Stang that's bad." she exclaimed after spitting the beer back into the cup. Then she set it down.

"Hey guys." Tylo said as he walked up to the bar and stood in front of the two jedi, "Can I introduce the charming Miss Saza Tonn? She is the individual we came here to meet."

"You're kidding." Brae said and Tylo shook his head slowly.

"No, Miss Tonn approached me to identify herself." he said.

"How did you know who we are?" Jayk asked.

"Look around." Saza said, "You two obviously don't belong here. Hiding your laser swords is one thing, but if you really wanted to be anonymous then you'd have worn blasters in their place. Tylo I spotted because he was with you. Now how about we get out of here so we can talk without being overheard?" and then she threw a look at the bartender who suddenly averted his gaze from them.

"As you wish." Jayk said.

"And I don't even get to have a drink." Tylo commented and Brae smiled.

"Here." she said, holding out her cup, "You can have mine. I don't want it."

"Thanks kid." Tylo replied, smiling as he took the cup and began to drink deeply while Jayk just looked on.

Then he lowered the cup and frowned, "Strange, that tasted better than I expected." he said.

"Maybe they have a secret ingredient." Brae suggested.

"Okay let's get out of here." Tylo said as he slammed the cup down on the bar and he and Saza headed for the exit.

"Brae you should not have done that." Jayk whispered.

"Don't tell me, spitting in beer is a path to the Dark Side. I notice that you didn't tell him though father." Brae whispered back.

"I might later on." Jayk said.

Returning to the *Swift Exit*, Tylo led Saza into the ship's lounge and sat down.

"Take a seat." he told her while the Udras followed them into the lounge.

"Thanks. Now when do I get paid?" Saza asked.

"When we get useful information about the whereabouts of Morton Crayne." Jayk told her.

"Fine, he was in the cantina three days ago." Saza said, "He came in and told a bunch of my regulars that he wanted to hire them for a job off world. A regular job."

"So that's what this is about? He was threatening your income?" Brae commented and Saza glared at her.

"Why do you care why I'm talking to you? If you aren't interested then I can-" she said.

"We want to hear your information." Jayk said and he laid a credit stick down on the table in front of her, "Two thousand credits, as agreed."

"Good. Enough to get me off planet." Saza said as she reached out for the credit stick.

"After you give us the information." Jayk said, putting his hand on top of it first to prevent her from picking it up.

"Okay, so this Morton Crayne came in and hired my customers. He told them he had an immediate job that could lead to something more permanent." Saza said.

"You've already told us that." Brae pointed out.

"It certainly isn't worth two thousand credits." Tylo added, "Where are they now?"

"Salatine. This Crayne guy wanted to recruit them for a job on Salatine." Saza said.

"Salatine's pretty remote." Tylo commented.

"What was the job?" Jayk asked.

"A hit. Morton Crayne was setting up a hit on someone called Teron. Apparently he stole-" Saza said.

"Yes, we know what Teron Sharr did." Jayk said, "Now how do you know that the man you saw was the man that we are looking for? You don't seem like the sort of person that follows information on fugitives from the Republic."

"I overheard what they were saying." Saza answered, "He told them about the job and he told them his name. Morton Crayne. I figured that if he was here setting up a hit then maybe he was worth something to someone so I looked him up. Can I have my money now?"

*Deception.*

*Fear.*

Jayk knew that Saza was hiding something and was afraid to be found out. However, he did not think that her entire story was false and that at the very least there would be clues to the location of Morton Crayne on Salatine even if he himself was not there.

"One last question." he said to Saza, "The men that Morton Crayne hired to help him kill Teron Sharr, who are they?"

"Mercenaries." Saza said, "They used to work for the Trade Defence Force. They went by the designation Aurek Team and they've kept the name."

"Thank you." Jayk said and he lifted his hand of the credit stick so that Saza could take it. As soon as she had the device in her hand she got up and hurried out of the *Swift Exit*, "Cal." Jayk said when she was gone and the hologram of Cal Udra materialised.

"Yes?" the hologram asked.

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

"It's in the Outer Rim Territories. When I was alive it was the site of a major engagement between Republic and Sith Empire forces. After the battle scavengers moved in and set up a colony." Cal said.

"A colony that's still there." Tylo added, "I moved some cargo from there for Crayne."

"So he's familiar with the planet." Jayk said.

"Do you think he's looking for a home field advantage of some sort?" Tylo asked, "Could the Jedi or Sith have left something behind that he can use to bring down a Force user?"

"It's possible. However, there is another question we may need to consider." Jayk said.

"You mean what was that whore lying about?" Brae said and Jayk nodded.

"Wait, if Saza was lying then why did you let her take the money?" Tylo asked, confused.

"Because I sensed that she only lied about her motives. She did not care about losing a few regular clients, she had something else to gain from selling out Morton Crayne. On the other hand what she said about his location and the unit of mercenaries he now has working for him was true. We will go to Salatine and find him. If the Force is with us we may just be able to catch Teron Sharr as well."

"I take it that you'll want information on this Aurek Team." Cal said and Jayk nodded.

"Yes, as much as is available. If they were in a regular military unit then the Republic should have them all on file." he said.

"You realise that we could be walking right into a trap laid for us?" Tylo said.

"I don't think that there's any 'could' about it." Brae replied, "It's a trap."

"So what do you propose to do about it?" Tylo asked and Jayk smiled.

"Spring the trap." he said.

Teron Sharr waited for the door to his ship's long range communication chamber to close behind him before he knelt in front of the holographic display platform and bowed his head.

"Master." he said before a glowing figure appeared on the platform."

"Speak my young apprentice. What brings you before me?" the figure asked from beneath the hood of its

robes.

"Master we have received a signal. I avoided responding just in case it is an attempt to pinpoint our location. However, we have been able to trace the source of the signal to the planet Salatine." Teron said.

"Salatine you say. Interesting." the figure that Teron called 'master' responded.

"Then you know of the planet master?"

"Indeed I do my young apprentice. Salatine was the scene of a great victory of the Sith Empire over the forces of the Jedi and the Republic. A fleet of their warships was routed and an army destroyed. The victory was not without cost, however and many Sith fell that day." the hologram said.

"Then it is possible that something of the Sith remains on Salatine." Teron said.

"Possible. Though I do not believe that you think the attempt at communication is from someone looking to sell you something. Am I correct my young apprentice?"

"Yes master. The signal reached us because the sender knew our exact communication node details and there is only one being in the galaxy not on this ship that knows that information."

"You speak of Morton Crayne, your former employer?"

"Yes master. Before you showed me the true path of the Force." Teron replied, "We have received word that he has escaped his imprisonment."

"Then he seeks revenge." the hologram said.

"I think so master. I shall ignore the signal."

"No!" the hologram snapped, "A true Sith does not back down in the face of a challenge, he confronts it. You will go to the Salatine system and face Morton Crayne. Prove to me that you are worthy of the title of Sith or I shall find a new apprentice." and then the image flickered and vanished before Teron could reply.

Getting back to his feet Teron turned around and left the communication room before returning to the cockpit where Krovak and Mara waited.

"So what did the guy in the robes have to say?" Krovak asked.

"He said we're going to Salatine." Teron answered, "Morton Crayne has issued a challenge and I must answer it."

"Checking the database for the jump co-ordinates of Salatine now." Krovak said but as he reached out to the console Teron grabbed him by the wrist.

"No." he said and he looked around, "Morton Crayne's intent could be to seize this ship. He knows what treasures it contains and what they are worth to his client. We'll take a shuttle and a small number of men."

"What about her?" Krovak asked and he glanced at Mara.

"Oh we're taking Mara as well." Teron replied as a smile spread across his face, "In fact I have a plan for which she is absolutely essential."

"So we're finally going to kill Crayne?" Krovak said.

"No, not kill him. Crayne has information I think we can use." Teron replied and Krovak frowned.

"Information? What information could he have that we don't?" he said.

"The identity of his client of course, the mysterious woman who has been buying artefacts that belong to me by right. I'm going to find out who and where she is and then I'm going to take back everything from her. After that neither she nor Morton Crayne will be of any more use to us and we can dispose of them."



### 3.

Although Salatine had been settled for more than three and a half thousand years its inhabitants had never formed a planet wide government. Instead each of the original salvage camps had expanded into self governing city states that acted according to their own interests and smaller settlements sprang wherever and whenever there was a need. Some of these prospered and expanded while others stagnated and remained small outposts in the wilderness where there was little or no authority to be found. The rest either came to the end of their usefulness or failed in their purpose and were abandoned or destroyed by the bands of raiders that inhabited the vast unsettled areas of the planet.

Had the planet been a member of the Republic with a single government, well equipped law enforcement agencies and the ability to summon help rapidly then Morton Crayne's plan would have been massively different to what it was. However, the chaotic nature of the planet allowed him to carry out his plan in one of the larger settlements where he could count on the sheer number of inhabitants to hide the presence of him and his new force of mercenaries in the Force from Teron. The settlement chosen by Morton was known for having a government in name only, where it was easy to find people who would look the other way for a few credits. This meant that for a reasonably small sum from the money his client had advanced him Morton was able to have one of the city's landing pads isolated while his mercenaries set up heavy weapons to cover it and he gained access to the local space tracking facility from where he could watch for the arrival of Teron Sharr.

Very little space traffic came to Salatine and so the city's tracking facility was nothing more than a small room close to the top of one of the city's towers in which a pair of traffic controllers spent most of their time finding whatever they could to occupy themselves while the tracking system monitored the largely empty sky and space above them. In fact Morton found himself watching the various sensor readouts more closely than any of the controllers as he waited for any sign of a ship dropping out of hyperspace.

"There." he said suddenly when one of the sensors picked up the telltale flare of cronau radiation that marked a ship either entering or leaving hyperspace and since there had been no ships in the area to enter hyperspace that had to mean that one had just arrived in the system.

Sighing, one of the controllers leant over to his control console.

"Doesn't look very big, its probably a shuttle or light freighter. Sending standard communication packet. If they head this way we'll contact them directly." he said, pressing a single button before returning to his game of cards with his co-worker.

"Is that it?" Morton asked.

"That's it." the controller said without looking up from his cards, "If they don't want to talk then as long as they stay away from us there's nothing for us to say to them."

"Well I've got something that they need to hear." Morton muttered as he took out his comlink and activated the device, "Rayton do you read me?" he transmitted.

"Right here Mister Crayne." the voice of the wroonian mercenary responded.

"Rayton we've got company. Send the signal now, one half second burst only. If this is Teron then I want him and his crew to know we're here but not be able to establish voice communication. Understood?" Morton said.

"Yes I understand. I know what I'm doing." Rayton said and then the channel went dead as he shut off his comlink.

"If that ship comes this way then I want it sent to docking bay seven but the crew are not to be told anything about my presence. Is that clear?" Morton then told the controllers, looking at the two bored men as he put his comlink away again.

"Like your employee told you, we know what we're doing. You paid us to send them to you so that's what we'll do." one of the controllers replied.

"There's the signal again." Krovak said when the shuttle's communications picked up the subspace transmission from the surface. However, before Teron could respond the signal stopped.

"Very clever Morton." Teron said, "Make sure we know where you are but don't let us talk to you."

"The signal came from one of the larger settlements right here." Krovak said, pointing to a map of the planet Salatine on one of the console displays and Teron nodded.

"Then that is where we need to head for Krovak. Take us in at full speed." Teron ordered and Krovak turned the shuttle towards the source of the signal.

"They're heading this way after all." one of the flight controllers said when he noticed the newly arrived sensor contact turning towards them and both men put down their cards and rolled their chairs to their

consoles.

"Unidentified vessel this is Trill Station control." the other controller transmitted.

"Trill Station control this is the independent transport *Lurgan*. I request permission to land at your facility." Krovak's voice responded and behind the controllers Morton smiled when he heard this. It had been just over a year since Krovak had turned on him and joined Teron Sharr but he still recognised the man's voice.

"Understood *Lurgan*. We are activating our beacon. Please follow it to docking bay seven. Trill Station control out." the controller said and then he shut off the communications and turned to Morton, "See?" he said, "Easy. Now you've had what you paid for so get out of here and let us get on with our work."

"Thank you gentlemen. You've been most helpful." Morton replied, smiling at the two controllers before he turned around and left their tiny control room, "Work. Poodoo." he muttered to himself when the door slid shut behind him and he began to head back towards the landing pad where the ambush had been prepared for Teron and his crew.

A red light at the top of a pylon was pulsing when Morton returned to the landing pad. This was part of the beacon system and would be the final marker to guide the approaching shuttle in to land.

"The ship is on its way. Is everyone prepared?" Morton asked Rayton as he stood beside the wroonian on a covered observation platform and looked down onto the landing pad.

"Everyone's right where they need to be." Rayton replied, "As soon as you give the word we'll hit the ship with the blaster cannons we've got hidden in the towers to the left and ahead. They should take out the ship and the pad itself. Anyone on the two or three levels below is in for a real bad day as well. Those energy blasts have more than enough penetrating power for what you want."

"That's fine. I don't know what Teron's capable of but even if he senses that he's about to come under attack I doubt that he'll be able to stop two volleys of blaster cannon fire. Just remember that your men are not to fire until I give the word. I know that Krovak is here but I want to see Teron himself before we do this." Morton said.

"This is Kerrek, target incoming. Bearing one four nine." another of the mercenaries reported and both Morton and Rayton used macrobinoculars to study the sky. Sure enough they saw a small craft heading towards the landing platform and as it drew closer it extended its landing gear.

"Here they come." Rayton said as he activated his comlink, "Stand by. Safeties off but hold fire until the command is given." he ordered.

The shuttle came in close to the landing pad before decelerating rapidly and hovering above it for a few seconds before it finally set down. Then as the noise from its engines began to die down the access ramp lowered beneath the craft.

"He we go." Morton said, smiling as he trained his macrobinoculars on the landing pad.

Morton did not have long to wait before a figure came striding down the ramp and looked around. Dressed in scruffy clothing and with a cut down blaster carbine cradled in his arms, Morton did not recognise the man and so he withheld the order to open fire until he could be certain that his primary target was present. This happened moments later when Teron appeared with Krovak, both men coming down the ramp together.

Morton's smile widened.

"That's Teron." he said.

"Target sighted." Rayton told the mercenaries, "Open-"

"Wait!" Morton snapped.

"Hold. Weapons hold." Rayton broadcast to the mercenaries and he glared at Morton, "What's wrong? Isn't that the guy you want dead? He's right in our sights now."

"Yes but he's not alone down there. Look behind him." Morton replied and Rayton used his macrobinoculars to look at Teron. He could see that Teron held the end of a chain in his hands that stretched out behind him to where a woman had the other end fastened around her neck. Clad in filthy clothing and with her hands bound in front of her with binders, the woman's face was partially obscured by the lengths of cloth tied around her head to blindfold and gag her. However, Morton immediately knew who she was.

"Mara." he said.

"You know her?" Rayton asked and Morton nodded.

"Yes. Mara worked for me before Teron kidnapped her. Order your men to stand down Rayton." he said.

"Stand down?"

"Yes stand down. I'm not killing her. We need to come up with a plan to rescue her. Then we'll deal with Teron." Morton said and Rayton snorted.

"It's your money." he said.

"Oh Morton." Teron muttered to himself as he and Krovak walked towards the hatchway that led from the landing pad into the structure that it was attached to, "You should have killed me when you had the chance."

"What was that?" Krovak asked.

"Morton's watching us. I can sense him, along with a number of others whose minds are so open I can feel their confidence in their weapons to be able to turn this entire landing pad into scrap and kill us in the blink of an eye." Teron answered and Krovak looked around, searching for wherever Morton was watching from, "You're wasting your time. They are quite well hidden. I expect that they spent a long time preparing this place for their ambush. Now all that effort is gone to waste."

"Shouldn't we do something?" Krovak said.

"No, there's no need just yet. Just as I expected he wouldn't kill the woman he thinks is his friend. We're quite safe while we have Mara as an insurance policy. All we need to do is get inside and find somewhere that we can be sure will draw Morton Crayne close to us in person." Teron told him. Then as they got to the hatchway Krovak reached out to open it.

"You first." he said as he continued to look around and he kept on searching for Morton while Teron, Mara and the three other gang members that they had brought with them went through the hatch and disappeared from sight. Only when he was alone on the landing pad did he give up his search and follow the others through the hatch.

"You should have let me bring my armour." Krovak said to Teron, referring to a set of ancient Sith built plate armour that they had come into possession of. The armour melded itself to a wearer and in addition to providing greater protection than such a primitive protective suit ought to be able to it granted him superior strength and speed by acting as a conduit for the Dark Side despite him not being Force sensitive.

"No. The armour is a blunt instrument when I need a surgeon's fine blade." Teron replied, "We don't need your armour to take down Morton Crayne and his new followers. We have more than enough right here." and then he looked over his shoulder at Mara as she followed behind him, the blindfold doing nothing to prevent her from sensing what was in her path while Teron was able to link to the mind of the creature that dwelled within her.

## 4.

"Exiting hyperspace in five. Four. Three. Two. One." Tylo said before the *Swift Exit* dropped back into realspace in the Salatine system.

"Looks pretty empty." Brae commented, looking at the ship's sensor display and noting the near total lack of contacts.

"There are a handful of contacts in orbit around the settled planet but they look more like space stations than ships. I suggest we head for one of them." Jayk said.

"Do you think that Morton will have gone to a station instead of a planet?" Brae asked.

"It is possible. It depends on what his plan is." Jayk answered before Cal's hologram appeared at the rear of the bridge.

"Your father has realised that the space stations are more likely to have kept track of incoming ships than the surface settlements will." he said, "Risk of collision and all that."

"Precisely." Jayk added.

"Well we've got a station two hundred thousand kilometres ahead." Tylo said, "Is that good enough or should we look for another?"

"From the looks of these scans there are only a handful of orbital installations. We may as well start with that one and if they can't help us then we'll try another." Jayk said and Tylo nodded.

"Setting course now." he said, steering the *Swift Exit* towards the space station.

As the light freighter drew closer to the space station it became clear that the facility had been constructed from four larger freighters, each of which had been connected together by their prows so that they formed a cross shape with their now dismantled drive sections pointing outwards.

"Attention approaching light freighter, identify yourself or you will be fired on." a voice said suddenly over the short range communication system.

"Not exactly friendly, are they?" Brae commented

"I'm not picking up any weapon locks. They might be bluffing." Tylo added.

"Just answer them Tylo." Jayk said and Tylo reached for the communication system.

"This is the light freighter *Swift Exit* out of Coruscant requesting permission to dock." he transmitted.

"Confirmed *Swift Exit* you are cleared to dock, we are opening our landing bay. Landing fee is two hundred credits and berthing is one hundred per day." the voice from the space station replied as a large hatch midway along the hull of one of the old freighters used to construct the space station opened, a magnetic field activating to hold the atmosphere inside the hangar within.

Tylo flew the *Swift Exit* into the hangar. Inside there were markings drawn out on the deck that suggested where ships were supposed to land, eight of them in total but none were currently occupied and so Tylo set the ship down in the nearest. Then as he was shutting down the *Swift Exit's* engines a group of figures in armoured overalls and helmets that hid their faces entered the hangar. All of these individuals were armed to some degree, about half with blasters while the rest carried long force pikes.

"Not much of a welcoming committee." Brae said when she saw this through the cockpit canopy.

"The perhaps we should go outside and introduce ourselves." Jayk said, getting up from his seat and exiting the cockpit.

Jayk was the first down the ramp into the station hangar with both Brae and Tylo following a few steps behind him.

"My name is Jayk Udra, Jedi knight." Jayk said to the armoured figures.

"You're a bit outside your jurisdiction Jedi Knight Jayk Udra." the lead figure responded, "You have to pay the fees like everyone else."

"Of course. Two hundred credits." Jayk said, holding out his credit stick.

"Five." the figure said as he took the device and produced a datapad, "Two hundred to dock. One hundred to berth for the first day or part thereof and two hundred for compulsory mynock inspection."

"Two hundred to look for mynocks? Hey buddy there are no mynocks on my ship." Tylo protested, jabbing his finger towards the figure.

"The price is acceptable." Jayk said, looking back at Tylo.

"Fine. As long as you're paying it." Tylo muttered, "But there are still no mynocks on my ship."

"So what brings you to our little corner of the galaxy Jedi Udra?" the leader of the ground crew asked as he returned Jayk's credit stick to him.

"We are hunting an escaped fugitive called Morton Crayne. We suspect that he came to the Salatine system." Jayk replied.

"Well you're the first ship to have docked here in four months." the ground crew leader told him.

"I wonder what could be keeping them away?" Tylo muttered and Brae smiled.

"But your station does keep sensor logs, yes?" Jayk asked and the other man nodded.

"Yes, but access to them is not free." he said and now it was Jayk's turn to smile.

"I never thought it would be." he said as he held up the credit stick again.

Morton and his mercenaries hurried from their pre-prepared firing positions down into the maze-like structure of the city. With Teron already inside the city Morton's aim now was to find out where he had gone to and after that come up with a plan to rescue Mara. Mara's presence was troubling for Morton though, it suggested that Teron knew of his plot to kill him and intended to use her either as a shield against attack or as a lure to draw Morton in. However, she also meant a great deal to Morton and so he could not pass up the opportunity to free her from captivity.

"This is Kerrik, I have them." one of the mercenaries signalled and Morton tried to remember which one of the mercenaries he was.

"Where?" Rayton responded.

"A passageway heading south towards the main gallery. Section fourteen, level six." Kerrik replied.

"They'll be looking for somewhere to stay out of sight. They can find someone to hire them space there." Rayton said.

"Yes and in the process leave plenty of informants to tell us where to find them." Morton commented, "I've got a very bad feeling about this."

"You've already called off one strike. Are you canning the whole operation now?" Rayton asked.

"No of course not. I want Mara back and besides, you don't come across as the sort of person to offer a refund." Morton answered.

"You got that right." Rayton said and then he lifted his comlink again, "Follow them but make sure to stay out of sight."

"Everyone slow down. We're being followed." Teron said as his group made their way through the crowded gallery. All around them were market stalls that mainly sold produce from around the planet but there were also a handful that had goods imported from off world. None of this interested Teron though, the only good that now concerned him were those with a close connection to the Sith and he sensed nothing of interest among anything he saw here. Teron and his group looked sufficiently intimidating that the beings in the gallery moved out of their way, doing their best to avoid making eye contact while still curious about why the group had a bound captive with them.

"Where?" Krovak asked.

"Don't bother looking. Our pursuer is good at hiding his physical body but not so good at hiding his thoughts in the Force. He wants to-" Teron began before a pair of uniformed security officers suddenly stepped out in front of them and two more appeared behind.

"That's far enough." the leader said sternly.

"Is there a problem here officer?" Krovak asked, careful not to make any moves that could be interpreted as hostile.

"That's what I want to find out. Who's she?" the security commander responded, glaring at Teron.

"She is no-one and there is no problem here." Teron answered, staring back at the commander and he took a breath as he used the Force to push the idea that he should not be bothered into the man's mind. A Jedi might have tried to distract the officer but the Sith way was simple to bend his mind to Teron's will. The commander flinched for a moment and then raised a hand to his face, dabbing at the trickle of blood coming from his nose.

"Move along. Move along." he said before backing away.

"Impressive." Krovak said softly, "I thought the shooting was going to start early."

"No, not yet. I want to be away from here when that happens." Teron said and then he smiled as he saw an office unit with a sign that simply read 'TRANSPORT' mounted above it, "Ah, just what we need." he said.

The space station's control centre had been converted from the bridge of one of the four freighters used in its construction. However, since the station had no need for some of the functions required of a starship it appeared more spacious than it would have been before it was converted.

"How far do you want to go back?" the sensor technician asked and Jayk, Brae and Tylo all sat down around him.

"We don't have an exact time frame, we're just looking for anything odd." Jayk told him.

"Wouldn't it be quicker to let Cal handle this?" Brae suggested, "He could just connect to the logs and-"

"Is this Cal a droid?" the sensor technician asked, "You're not plugging a droid into our system. I don't care who you are in the Republic."

"No, Cal's not a droid, he's a-" Brae began before she was interrupted again only this time by Jayk.

"We are fine with you searching the logs." he said, "All we need are the details of ships that have arrived

unexpectedly or behaved oddly. Perhaps as if they were trying to avoid being identified.”

“Well just turning up right now is odd.” the sensor technician said, working at his console to bring up the log files.

“How so?” Tylo asked.

“Well normally we get about four or five ships per year here. Most traffic consists of shuttles running between the orbiters and the ground stations. Only you're the third ship to have arrived from out of system in less than a week.” the technician said.

“Morton was putting out a hit on Teron.” Tylo pointed out, “He'd have to either lure or follow Teron here to do that.”

“Let us see these ships.” Jayk told the sensor technician.

“Sure, though there isn't much.” and he called up the sensor traces of both vessels. Neither of these was very detailed. The space station's crew had tracked the path of the two ships as they approached Salatine and then entered its atmosphere, but with neither of them heading towards the station they had been largely ignored. Even the transponder signals broadcast by the ships had not been processed so neither of them could be identified from those.

“Tell me about the settlements on the surface.” Jayk said to the technician, “How many of them are equipped to handle starships?”

“I don't know. I suppose it depends on what you're looking for.” the man replied, shrugging his shoulders, “If you want a full overhaul then you're pretty much out of luck in this system. The parts and equipment for some repairs are available at some settlements but you're more likely to have to order them in specially, which will cost of course. On the other hand if all you want is to set down for a while then your options are open. Everywhere has at least a pad or two for airspeeders and small starships can use those.”

“So for both of the last two arrivals to have headed for the same place is something of a co-incidence.” Tylo said, pointing to the sensor display and moving his finger along the path that one of the craft had taken.

“But those ships are in different sectors.” Brae pointed out.

You're forgetting the time difference kid. This station isn't in a geosynchronous orbit so its position above the planet shifts over time. Take that into account and those two traces both lead to the same place.” Tylo explained.

“A place that we need to go to as well.” Jayk said and then he looked at the sensor technician and added, “Thank you you've been very helpful.”

“And you're sure about this?” Morton asked Kerrik when the man returned with his report in person.

“Of course he is. He wouldn't have told you if he wasn't.” Rayton said.

“They boarded a transport.” Kkerrik said again, nodding. He had already told Morton that he saw Teron and his small team at the city's main transport terminal.

“What sort of transport?” Morton asked.

“A repulsor train heading north.” Kerrik answered.

“It's a trap.” Rayton said, “They don't need a repulsor train, they have a ship of their own.”

“Of course it's a trap. Teron must know that it's me that brought him here. Maybe he even knew before he arrived. Now he wants me to follow him.” Morton said.

“So what do you want to do?” Rayton asked, “Are we still going after them?”

“Of course we are. Only we're not getting on that train with Teron, that's what he'll expect. We'll get some speeders and follow it. Then we'll climb aboard when he thinks that he's left us behind here and that his plan has backfired. That's when we'll have him.”

## 5.

The repulsor train was made up of eight large barges, all connected to one another. Unlike the mass conveyors that operated on many other planets this train used no tracks to run on. Instead it travelled over land in the same way as an ordinary landspeeder only much larger. With minimal ground clearance available the train also mounted a large particle shield generator at the front that it could use to smash obstacles out of its path. Teron and his group had acquired a set of compartments aboard the barge that was next to last in the train and in one of these Krovak secured Mara's binders around a narrow supporting column.

"You okay?" he asked but the blindfolded and gagged woman did not even twitch.

"She doesn't care about discomfort any more." Teron said from across the room and then he used the controls to open the shutters over the windows that ran along all one wall, revealing view of the terminal outside.

It was then that the repulsor train began to move, pulling away from the city and heading out into the barren wilderness. Seeing this Krovak took out his comlink and activated it.

"Report. Is Crayne aboard?" he broadcast.

"No Krovak." one of the other gang members who had accompanied them aboard the train answered.

"Then your plan has failed Teron." Krovak said, turning to his leader, "If Morton Crayne hasn't-" and then he suddenly felt his throat tighten as Teron spun around and reached out a hand towards him.

"Morton Crayne will come to us, I have foreseen it." Teron hissed, "Now make sure that everything is prepared because he will be joining us soon and when he does we'll-" then he let go of the grip he had on Krovak through the Force and the other man let out a gasp when he was able to breathe again, "Morton Crayne isn't the only one coming here Krovak. The blundering nerf herder has given himself away to the Jedi."

"There's the city." Tylo said when the *Swift Exit* penetrated the lowest level of cloud and the city came into view below them.

"Do we know anything about it?" Brae asked.

"A wretched hive of scum and villainy." Cal's hologram replied, "I've been monitoring the comlink signals on this planet since we arrived in orbit and I'd say that this is a place to watch your back."

"Sounds like your kind of place Tylo." Jayk commented.

"Master." Brae said suddenly, reaching out in front of her to grab Jayk's shoulder.

"What's wrong?" he asked, taking her hand and looking around at her.

"I can sense the presence of the Dark Side. It's strong here." Brae said.

"All that scum and villainy together in one place." Tylo said but Brae shook her head.

"No, I don't think it's in the city. It's moving and I think it's something I've felt before." she said.

"Where?" Cal asked.

"When I encountered Mara Tosk the last time." Brae answered.

"You mean when you said she begged for help in between trying to kill you?" Tylo said and Brae nodded.

"Yes. I think I'm sensing whatever it is that is controlling her." she said.

"It's possible that your proximity to Mara left an image with you that you can detect now." Cal said, "It may fade over time."

"For now though it's something we might be able to use. Brae, where is this coming from?" Jayk asked.

"Heading north." Brae replied.

"I think I've got something." Tylo said, "A mass conveyor of some sort. Hang on, there's something else as well. Looks like a cluster of landspeeders or something headed after it. They're on an intercept course and they'll get there before us."

"Take us down." Jayk ordered.

The landspeeders were easily able to outpace the repulsor train and despite its head start they caught up with it soon after leaving the city.

"Bring us alongside. I want to take a look at it." Morton said and Rayton pulled alongside the train, matching its speed so that Morton could carefully study the vehicle through macrobinoculars.

Although each of the train's barges were enclosed they featured a number of external balconies and walkways and Morton examined these to see if anyone he recognised was standing on any of them.

However, as he moved along the massive vehicle it was something inside it that caught his notice. One of the balconies had a windowed wall running along its length and on the other side of this was a room sufficiently well lit that Morton could see Mara inside it, her arms wrapped around a column so that she could not move. Morton could see that she was alone and he decided that he was unlikely to get a better

opportunity.

"I've found her." he exclaimed, "Take us up there." and he pointed to the balcony.

"Okay, hang on." Rayton replied and he turned the landspeeder sharply towards the repulsor train, driving it towards the barge Morton was pointing to.

"Up. We need to go higher." Morton said and the sound from the landspeeder's engines became louder as Rayton put all the power into them that he could, increasing the vehicle's altitude to match that of the balcony, "Closer." Morton shouted and as Rayton carefully moved the landspeeder closer to the train Morton stood up, supporting himself on the windscreen and holding out his hand. As soon as the railing around the balcony came within reach Morton grabbed hold of it and leapt from the landspeeder, pulling himself onto the balcony and then drawing his blaster.

Looking into the room on the other side of the glass wall Morton could still see no-one other than Mara inside but he could now see that there were doors in all three of the other walls that someone could be hiding behind and so he decided to wait where he was for a while.

"I'll need back up." he signalled using his comlink and then another of the landspeeders closed in bearing three of the mercenaries, including the driver. The two passengers made the leap across from their vehicle as soon as they were close enough and Morton helped both men onto the balcony before they headed for the doorway that led into the room.

The door from the balcony was not locked and it slid sideways slowly when Morton pressed the button beside it. He hesitated for a moment, his blaster in his hand just in case someone was about to leap out from one of the other other access points to the room but when no-one did he crept through the open doorway and towards Mara.

"Mara." he whispered, "It's me, Morton. I'm here to rescue you."

"Stang." one of the mercenaries said softly, "When did she last take a shower?"

It was obvious to Morton that the man was referring to the stale smell coming from Mara but he put this down to her not being able to bathe while a prisoner and as he crept closer to her he holstered his blaster.

"It's okay, I'll get you out of here." he said as he reached out and pulled down the blindfold from her eyes. At which point he saw the jet black orbs in her eye sockets, "Kriff!" he exclaimed right as Mara's binders suddenly gave way, leaving her free to lunge at him, wrapping her hands around his throat.

"Blast her!" one of the mercenaries snapped but as he brought up his rifle one of the other doors slid open to reveal one of the members of Teron's gang who had accompanied him to Salatine and he fired at the mercenaries with his own blaster. The shot hit the closest of the mercenaries and the man fell dead while his comrade was turning towards the doorway. However, before he could get off a shot the gang member fired again and he was hit as well.

Seeing both of the mercenaries supposed to be protecting him killed, Morton reached for his blaster again while still trying to claw Mara's hands from around his throat with the other. However, she saw what he was doing and as soon as he had pulled the weapon from his belt she knocked it out of his hands and then kicked it across the room when it fell to the floor. In doing this Mara had to take one of her hands from Morton's throat though and this gave him the chance to pull free, gasping for breath as he scrambled to get away from her.

"Mara! What did they do to you?" he shouted at her but all Mara did in response was pull the gag from her mouth and grin at him.

Another flash of blaster fire passed over Morton and he ducked. This was not aimed at him though, instead it came from outside as Rayton fired his blaster pistol, keeping just one hand on the landspeeder's controls as he sprayed blaster bolts around the room as quickly as he could. One of these hit the gang member in the doorway and he fell backwards into the corridor while a second clipped Mara in the side. Mara barely reacted to the blaster hit and Morton's eyes widened when he saw the black fluid that oozed from the wound.

Elsewhere in the train Teron's eyes suddenly snapped open and his mouth opened wide.

"What's wrong?" Krovak said when he saw this.

"Mara is injured." Teron replied.

"Then we need to go and help her." Krovak said, checking his blaster carbine.

"No!" Teron snapped, "There is no time. They're here."

Rayton fired his blaster through the window until he heard the roar of repulsorlift engines from overhead as well as around him and he looked up to see the *Swift Exit* descending towards the train, its landing gear already deployed.

"Morton, we've got company." he transmitted as the freighter set down on the train's rearmost barge. As soon as the freighter set down the access ramp opened and both Jayk and Brae came rushing down it with their lightsabers already ignited, "Jedi!" Rayton exclaimed.



## 6.

"Brae, there's a hatch over there." Jayk said, pointing to a hatch in the top of the barge and the two jedi rushed towards it.

"Hey! Wait for me." Tylo called out after them as he came running down the ramp with a rifle in his hands. Jayk swung his lightsaber at the hatch then waved his hand to open it using the Force.

"Inside." he said and Brae nodded before jumping down through the hatch, followed quickly by Jayk and then Tylo, "Brae, which way?" Jayk asked as they looked around inside the train, watched by a startled passenger.

"This way, forwards. I can feel Mara ahead of us." Brae replied and the three of them all headed towards the front of the barge.

"Take these. You know what to do." Krovak said as he handed a pair of grenades to the other two gang members who had accompanied him and Teron. The pair took the grenades and then hurried from the room, at which point Krovak turned to Teron, "Are you sure about this?" he asked.

"Of course. The jedi have miscalculated and now we have an opportunity. I can sense the apprentice in my link with Mara. She will be able to lead her master and Tylo right to us. Those two should be able to slip around them and we will have them between us. The train driver's mind is mine, he will not interfere no matter what happens." Teron answered.

"What about Mara?" Krovak asked.

"She is injured but alive. I think the time has come to call her back."

Morton crawled across the floor, hoping to reach his blaster before Mara could catch up with him but just when he was reaching out for the weapon he felt her grab hold of his ankle and pull. Rolling over onto his back he looked up to see Mara's pallid face and black eyes looking straight back at him.

"Mara if you're still in there then I'm sorry." he said before he used his other foot to kick Mara in the face, his heel striking her nose and there was a 'crunch' as the blow landed. The attack was enough to make Mara let go of Morton and he started towards his blaster again. However, Mara now leapt to her feet and unexpectedly ran from the room, leaping over the body in the doorway.

"It's Mara!" a familiar voice called out from the corridor and Morton rolled away from the door just in time to prevent Jayk, Brae or Tylo seeing him as they ran past.

"Stang. How the hell did they get here?" Morton said to himself. Although he wanted revenge on the jedi and Tylo he had not planned on facing them at the same time as Teron. On the other hand it occurred to him that if the jedi were here now then they might just be able to deal with Teron for him and he took out his comlink, "Rayton I need a pick up." he signalled, "We're getting out of here." then he picked up his blaster and ran for the balcony.

The two gang members given grenades by Krovak had headed down to the lowest level of the barge and from there headed towards its rear end, stopping only when they reached the short connecting bridge that joined it to the barge behind.

"This is it." one of them said as he pulled the pin from his grenade and as he opened the door to the bridge his comrade armed his grenade as well. Both gang members then tossed their grenades into the bridge before closing the door again and running as fast as they could to get away from it before the grenades detonated in rapid succession.

The target of the grenades had not been the bridge itself, instead they were intended to destroy the coupling that was below it. The double blast did not quite sever the coupling but it did fracture it and there was the sound of tearing metal as the mass of the rear barge proved too much for the damaged coupling to bear and it snapped, ripping out power cables as the barge fell behind.

The rear barge rocked as it broke free and the passengers inside it cried out in panic as they were thrown against the walls. With no power from the main engine at the front of the train the repulsorlift system keeping the barge aloft failed quickly and it ploughed into the ground, the force of the impact sending the *Swift Exit* flying forwards until it fell from the top of the barge and came crashing down to the ground.

"What was that?" Tylo said when he heard the sound of the explosion and then Jayk's comlink sounded.

"Hey I don't want to worry anyone." Cal's voice said, "But you know this train? Well the back fell off and now the ship is lying in the dirt. I think she'll need a bit of work."

"My ship? My ship is damaged?" Tylo said, his eyes widening.

"We'll deal with that later. Right now we have more important things to worry about." Jayk said, returning his comlink to his pocket.

*Danger.*

"Lookout!" Brae yelled as she felt a disturbance in the Force and Krovak appeared at the end of the corridor they were standing in, firing his carbine at them on fully automatic.

Jayk and Brae both used their lightsabers to block as many of the blaster bolts coming towards them as they could while Tylo threw himself to the floor. As he landed he saw the first of the other two gang members appear at the end of the corridor behind them. Seeing the blaster in the man's hand Tylo fired his own weapon first and the shot struck the gang member in his chest, killing him instantly.

The second gang member held his blaster around the corner and fired it blindly down the corridor.

"Back to back!" Jayk ordered and Brae spun around, leaping to position herself directly behind Jayk so that the two jedi were protecting one another.

"I'm fine by the way." Tylo said from the floor as he took a grenade from inside his jacket, "Ready kid?" he asked.

"Do it." Brae replied, nodding and Tylo pulled the pin from the grenade and tossed it towards the newly arrived gang member. At the same time Brae extended her hand and released a wave of telekinetic energy that caught the grenade and hurled it along the corridor before she stopped it dead right at the corner where the gang member was hiding.

It was then that the grenade went off but it did not release a storm of lethal fragments or flames, instead it went off with a 'fizz' and the end of the corridor began to fill with smoke. Brae then charged along the corridor and into the expanding cloud of smoke. Even without the ability to sense the presence of the gang member in the Force, Brae would have known where he was from the coughing sound he was making as he struggled to breathe. Even while choking on the smoke the gang member still saw the glow of Brae's lightsaber through the cloud as she charged towards him and he turned his blaster towards her and fired. However, Brae was quick enough to place her blade in the path of the energy blast and she sent it straight back at the gang member, killing him with his own shot.

Guessing that Brae had killed the other gang member and knowing that he was now facing two jedi alone, Krovak decided that it was time to withdraw and he ducked back around the corner, taking out his comlink as he retreated.

"The others are down." he transmitted, "It's just us now."

"That was to be expected." Teron replied, "Did they at least carry out their task?"

"Yes, the last barge was cut loose along with the jedi's ship." Krovak replied.

"Good. Then head for me. I am in position and it is time that we left the jedi behind." Teron told him.

"I'm on my way. Don't leave without me." Krovak responded as he broke into a run.

Behind him Krovak could hear the sound of the two jedi and Tylo chasing after him. Under other circumstances he might have attempted to lose them but he knew that with Brae able to sense the link between Teron and Mara they would still be able to find where he was heading for. Krovak did not make the pursuit easy for the jedi though and after rushing down a flight of stairs he turned and fired his carbine back up at them. His first shorter burst was aimed at the control panel and this promptly exploded with a shower of sparks, preventing the door from being opened. Then he fired another, more prolonged burst at the stairs themselves and the lightweight alloy steps shattered under the barrage. Only then did Krovak turn and continue to run.

When the door to the stairwell failed to open Jayk simply plunged his lightsaber into the door and cut a hole big enough to step through in it. Fortunately he peered through this before he actually went through and saw that Krovak had destroyed the stairs.

"Take care." he told Brae and Tylo, "The stairs here have been destroyed."

"Do we try and find another way down?" Brae asked.

"There's no time." Jayk answered, "We'll have to jump." and then he leapt through the hole in the doorway, using the Force to control his descent.

Brae copied Jayk but Tylo came to a halt looking down through the hole.

"Hey, what about me?" he called out and Jayk and Brae looked at one another, "Oh hell no." Tylo said but before he could object further both of the jedi reached out towards him and used the Force to take hold of him and pull him through the doorway, lowering him towards them as rapidly as they could while avoiding injuring him when they finally released him and let him drop to the floor.

"Come on Tylo, we have no more time to waste." Jayk told the smuggler as he glared back at Jayk.

"One day, one day I'll get my own back for being tossed around like a rag doll." Tylo muttered as they set off again.

Even with Krovak out of sight Brae was able to sense the presence of Teron and Mara and she guided the others right to them.

"They're close, I can feel it." she called out.

"Yes, I sense them as well now. Teron is getting stronger with the Dark Side." Jayk replied.

"I don't have a clue." Tylo commented right before the three of them rounded a corner and found Teron standing ahead of them flanked by Krovak and Mara. The corridor between them was straight and had no junctions that would give anyone somewhere to hide. However, there were two open doorways between Teron and the Jedi and between these was another of the connecting bridges between barges.

"Teron Sharr you are under arrest." Jayk called out as he, Brae and Tylo all ground to a halt.

"I don't think so Jedi." Teron replied and he ignited his lightsaber, its crimson blade extending in front of him. "He's too cocky." Tylo said, "He's got something up his sleeve."

"Then we have to do this quickly." Brae said and she suddenly began to charge forwards.

The moment she started to move Teron swung his lightsaber downwards, cutting through the floor of the connecting bridge.

"No Brae! Get back!" Jayk shouted as he realised what Teron was doing.

"Kid get down!" Tylo yelled and as Brae threw herself to the floor he fired his blaster rifle over her and towards Teron. However, the young man brought up his lightsaber and deflected the bolts back across the bridge to the control panel for the door on the other side, triggering its closing mechanism.

"No!" Brae yelled when she saw this and she leapt back to her feet and charged to the door, looking through the viewport set into it. Through this she saw Teron grinning at her as he hacked at the floor of the bridge, cutting through the coupling beneath it, "He's separating the barges." Brae called out moments before the coupling was finally severed and the barge the Jedi and Tylo were in was cut loose from the rest of the train ahead of it.

The barge lurched violently as its repulsorlift field failed and like the rear barge before it, it ploughed into the ground and Tylo was thrown across the corridor while the two Jedi were able to react quickly enough to grab hold of something to keep themselves upright. When the barge finally came to a halt Jayk rushed forwards and both he and Brae looked through the viewport at the rest of the train and they saw Teron still standing in the open doorway looking back at them with his lightsaber still in his hand.

"The *Swift Exit*." Brae said.

"Wrecked, remember kid." Tylo said as he sat up, rubbing his head.

"Then Teron will get away." Brae said, "Again."

"I haven't seen Morton about either." Tylo added.

"I suspect that he was in that group of landspeeders we detected." Jayk said, "And since they are no longer here it is likely that he has already fled as well."

"Then this entire thing was for nothing." Brae said.

"Perhaps. Perhaps not." Jayk said, "Whatever Teron has done to Mara Tosk you were able to sense the link between them. That may be something we can use the next time we meet."

"So you're planning on there being a next time then?" Tylo said and Jayk just smiled at him.