

# STAR WARS

## DARKNESS RISING

4-03: LOVED & LOST

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Tylo falls victim to a professional starship thief and the *Swift Exit* is stolen. Tylo and the Udras find themselves having to track down the thief and her gang not only to recover their ship but also to rescue Cal who unknown to the thief was aboard at the time.

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# 1.

Jedi Knight Jayk Udra looked across the street to where his padawan Brae, who unusually for a Jedi also happened to be his daughter, was standing with a group of other people watching a band play music. Rather than call out to her and disturb the crowd he crossed the road and made his way to stand beside her.

"So what did Tylo want?" she asked as she sensed her father's presence.

"Tylo has made a new friend. Jayk replied and Brae winced.

"The sort of friend where he promises to keep in touch via subspace but handily forgets her comm address the moment she's put her clothes back on?" she said and Jayk smiled.

"Probably. However, I have promised that we will not return to the ship tonight." he said.

"So what do we do now then? The painting by Thal N'Krey is already loaded and we know he hasn't been here in over a year." Brae responded.

"In that case I think we've earned an evening off, don't you?" Jayk said and Brae smiled back at him.

"As you command master." she said, "But Tylo had better make sure his date doesn't disturb any of my things. I've got a very bad feeling about this."

"There she is, the *Swift Exit*." Tylo Kurrast said to the woman he had his arm around and he pointed to the YT-700 class light freighter in the docking bay.

"Interesting hull art." she said, looking at the image of a partially clad woman reclining while holding a blaster.

"Oh that. That was on when I bought the ship and every captain knows that it's bad luck to paint out hull art." Tylo said.

"Whatever, it's just a painting." the woman said, "Now how about you show me around inside and I'll show you something to put your painting to shame?"

Tylo led the woman into the *Swift Exit*, taking her straight to the lounge area. Once here he spread his arms and turned to face her.

"See? Everything you could want to keep you occupied while in hyperspace." he said as she looked around. Although the *Swift Exit* looked like an ordinary freighter from the outside it was obvious that a lot of money had been spent to improve the vessel's interior, equipping it with state of the art entertainment facilities.

"I'm impressed." the woman said.

"I thought you would be."

"How did you get all of this? Don't tell me that your business is that profitable." the woman asked and Tylo grinned.

"Let's just say that I've got some benefactors with deep pockets. Very deep pockets." he said.

"That's good to hear." the woman said as she stepped closer and wrapped her arms around Tylo who in response did the same thing. Then as he leant in to kiss her she whispered, "Maybe they'll help you get another ship." and all of a sudden Tylo felt a sharp pain in the back of his neck.

"What the hell?" he said, letting go of the woman as he staggered back and clamped his hand over where he had felt the pain, finding a tiny metal spike sticking out of his flesh there.

"Good night Tylo. Sweet dreams." the woman said and she blew Tylo a kiss as he collapsed to the floor of the lounge.

The sun was coming up over the city when Jayk and Brae returned to the docking bay.

"Do you think that the woman will still be there?" Brae asked.

"Possibly. Just in case I think we should stay in the lounge and wait for either Tylo or his guest to come to us rather than going into the sleeping quarters ourselves." Jayk replied before he reached out to open the pedestrian entrance to the docking bay.

"What the hell? Tylo took off without us." Brae exclaimed when they both saw that the *Swift Exit* was no longer in the docking bay where it was supposed to be.

"I think not. Look." Jayk replied and he pointed across the docking bay to where Tylo lay on the ground and both Jedi broke into a sprint as they rushed to see if he was badly hurt.

"He's still alive." Brae said as she sensed his presence in the Force.

"Tylo, Tylo can you hear me?" Jayk asked, shaking Tylo gently but this had no effect and so he reached into one of his belt pouches and took out a medpac, taking a stimulant injector from it, "Hopefully there's nothing in his bloodstream that will react badly to this." he said as he pressed the nozzle of the injector to Tylo's wrist and triggered the device.

Immediately Tylo's eyes opened wide and he gasped as he sat up.

"What the hell hit me?" he said, blinking and then when he saw Jayk and Brae he frowned, "Hey, aren't you guys supposed to be staying away from the ship tonight so I can-" and then he noticed that he was no longer

aboard the *Swift Exit*, "And where the hell am I? Where's the ship?"

"That's a very good question and one that we were hoping that you could answer for us." Brae replied.

"The woman. The woman I met. I took her back to the ship and then I felt something in the back of my neck." Tylo said, "Next thing I know I'm waking up on the floor and my ship is gone."

"Along with the painting by Thal N'Krey we came here for." Brae pointed out and then she looked at Jayk and added, "Do you think that's what she was after?"

"If she was then why not just take the painting? No, I think that this was just an unfortunate coincidence. The *Swift Exit* was her target. She wanted to steal the ship and that's exactly what she has done."

"Oh yeah? Well then we better go and get it back. That ship has a lot of very personal stuff aboard." Tylo said.

"The Jedi Order paid for most of it." Brae reminded him, "I'm sure they'll replace it all for you."

"I think that you're forgetting something Brae." Jayk said, "Where exactly is Cal?"

Cal Udra was an ancestor of Jayk and Brae's who had been a jedi knight more than three and a half thousand years earlier. During his life he had created a holocron, placing all of his knowledge and experience into the device and created a virtual version of himself to act as the guardian of that information. The Jedi Order had permitted Jayk and Brae to remove the device from their archives because Cal had taught his own sister the ways of the Force and his experience in teaching a close relative had been considered something that would be beneficial to them.

"Stang." Brae said, "He was still aboard."

"And since I see no sign of his holocron here now we can only conclude that he still is." Jayk said, looking around the docking bay, "I don't know about you but I would rather not lose him forever. Nor would I like to explain to the council how we lost a priceless jedi artefact."

The asteroid had been hollowed out to create a dry dock that was large enough to handle bulk freighters but the only ships present as the *Swift Exit* touched down were smaller vessels like the light freighter. Many of these had teams of technicians and droids working on them, some were carrying out maintenance or making modifications to disguise the ships while others were breaking ships down for their parts.

"Back again Tarlay?" a technician said as the woman who had stolen the ship from Tylo several hours earlier.

"Sure am Ronen. Another prize ready to be processed." the woman replied, smiling.

"Really? Because as I recall you were sent to acquire a space yacht, not an obsolete freighter." the man called Ronen reminded her.

"What do you mean obsolete?" Tarlay protested.

"I mean that everyone knows that the one thousand series will be released soon." Ronen said.

"Exactly, so no-one will think twice when another seven hundred comes on the used market." Tarlay said.

"It's not what you were sent for Tarlay. The boss pays for what he asks for, not whatever junk you chose to present to him." Ronen said.

"Junk? Junk? You wound me Ronen, you really do wound me. This ship is as good as new. Better even, you should see all the kit that's been added to it." Tarlay responded.

"Customised? So it's easily identifiable then?" Ronen commented as he looked at the *Swift Exit* and Tarlay sighed.

"Look, just do your checks while I go and tell the boss what I've got for him." she said, walking past the technician and heading for the nearest exit from the hangar.

Leaving the cavernous hangar, Tarlay made her way up a flight of stairs to an office. Pausing outside the door, she was about to activate the intercom beside it when all of a sudden it slid open to reveal a skeletal appearing givin sat behind a console.

"Come in Tarlay. Take a seat." the givin told her.

"Thank you Mister Surr." Tarlay replied as she entered the office and sat down.

"Now where is my space yacht Tarlay?" Surr asked, leaning forwards over his desk.

"Ah, well there was a slight problem with that you see." Tarlay said.

"I don't like problems. I like solutions." Surr said sternly.

"Which is why I brought you a-

"A YT-seven hundred freighter. Yes, I know. Now where is my space yacht Tarlay?"

"Like I said, there was a problem. The owner managed to lose it playing sabacc an hour before I was ready to make my move and the new owner was a herglic who clearly wasn't interested in me." Tarlay explained,

"So, about this freighter-"

"I will take the freighter but I will not pay for it." Surr said.

"Hey, I need that money. We agreed that you would pay me five thousand." Tarlay protested.

"Yes, for a luxury space yacht." Surr reminded her.

"Well you should see the inside of this ship Mister Surr. It may look like junk from the outside but inside it had everything you could want. High quality video screen, full holonet access, the works." Tarlay said and Surr

looked through the large window that overlooked the hangar at where the Swift Exit was docked.

"Ronen." he said, activating the comlink built into his desk.

"Yes Mister Surr?" Ronen responded.

"Tell me about the YT-seven hundred that Tarlay has just brought us." Surr ordered.

"Yes Mister Surr. All the primary systems appear standard and to be in full working order. The ship needs no repairs at all." Ronen told him.

"What about the secondary systems? Have these been modified?" Surr asked.

"Extensively. It looks like the ship has unlimited access to the holonet and the lounge has been upgraded using the best available equipment. There's a video screen in here that is better than anything we have on the base, including your private one. Mister Surr, I don't think that this was an ordinary cargo runner. Inside it looks more like a VIP transport." Ronen told him.

"Interesting." Surr said, "Continue your inspection. I want to know every last detail of the modifications made. A ship like that could prove useful to me."

"So," Tarlay said, placing her hands on her hips and smiling at the givin, "is that ship still worthless?"

"Two thousand Tarlay. My only offer. Take it or leave it." Surr said and he reached into a drawer to take out two rolls of bank notes that he placed on top of the desk.

"Deal." Tarlay replied, reaching out and taking the money.

"Good. Now get out of my office and the next time I send you for a ship make sure that that is the one you bring back to me. Do not fail me again." Surr told her.

## 2.

Jayk, Brae and Tylo sat together in the planetary police station while a detective sipped coffee while he looked at the report they had submitted on his datapad.

"So let me get this straight Captain Kurrast, you took this woman back to your ship with the intention of spending the night with her. However, once aboard she assaulted and incapacitated you-" the detective said, lowering his datapad and looking at Tylo.

"Hey she drugged me." Tylo interrupted.

"That's what he's saying." Brae said, rolling her eyes.

"Yes but the way he says it it sounds like I got beaten up by a woman." Tylo protested.

"Think you're man enough to take me on?" Brae asked but before Tylo could reply Jayk raised his hands.

"If we could stick to the matter at hand." he said.

"Yes, please." the detective added, "Now Captain Kurrast, after you were incapacitated the woman removed you from your ship and when you came to it was gone. Is all that correct?"

"Came to? We had to give him a stimulant." Brae said.

"Yes, that's all true." Tylo said.

"And do any of the beings shown here look familiar?" the detective said and he adjusted his datapad so that it showed a number of facial images of human and near human women before passing it to Tylo. Taking the device Tylo studied these, tapping on each image to increase its size to full screen before going back and then looking at the next one.

"This looks like her, only she was older. About five years maybe." he said eventually and he returned the datapad to the detective with one of the images filling the screen.

"Seven actually." the detective said, "This mugshot was taken seven years ago when Tarlay Pree was arrested for breaking into a hangar with a view to stealing a starship. She spent two years in detention before being released. Since then she has been identified as a suspect in forty-one starship thefts, all using the method you described. She tricks her way aboard with the promise of a sexual encounter and then knocks out the owner before stealing their ship. Normally she goes for more expensive vessels though, yachts and the occasional gunship. This is the first time she's targeted a light freighter." then he looked at Jayk and Brae and added, "It's also the first time she's risked tangling with jedi."

"She didn't meet us. We only saw her from across a bar." Jayk replied.

"With her tongue in Tylo's mouth and her hand in-" Brae began.

"The cop doesn't need to know that kid." Tylo interrupted. Then he looked at the detective again, "Look, can you get my ship back or not?"

"I'll give you a reference number for your insurance company," the detective replied, "but so far we haven't managed to locate any of the vessels that she's stolen."

"Detective, there was important jedi property aboard the vessel when it was taken." Jayk said.

"I'm sorry about that. We're doing our best to track Pree down but we can't spare massive resources for her." the detective said.

"I take it that you won't object if we carry out our own investigation though?" Jayk asked and the detective leaned back in his chair.

"Well I suppose if the ship was being operated under the authority of the Jedi Order then it does give you jurisdiction." he said and then he smiled, "I'll speak to my captain and get her to give you access to our system." and then he got up and walked away.

"I think that went as well as could be expected." Brae commented and Tylo glared at her.

"Okay, so where to now?" Tylo asked as he and the Udras walked down the steps of the police station.

"The local authorities believe that the reason they are unable to locate any of the stolen ships is because they are being moved off planet." Jayk replied, holding up a datapad that he had been given by the police, "However, they have been unable to track their departure paths because they are being flown beyond starport sensor coverage before leaving the atmosphere. After that space based tracking can't link ships to their original take off sites."

"So they could be anywhere in the galaxy." Brae said.

"Yes but we do have one advantage for tracking the *Swift Exit* that was not available on any of the other stolen ships." Jayk said and Brae smiled.

"Cal." she said.

"Exactly. Cal." Jayk replied, "He wouldn't have been able to stop this Tarlay Pree from stealing the ship but I doubt he would have sat idly by while she did. We should study the tracking data from the orbital sensor network and look for any signs that he was sending us a message."

"Look, I never thought I'd be saying this but wouldn't it have helped if we told the cops this?" Tylo said. "So that they can do what?" Jayk responded, "I alerted the local police firstly out of courtesy and secondly so that we could gain access to any information that they might have that could help us. I never intended for anyone other than us to regain possession of the *Swift Exit* though. Now come on, we need to speak to someone at the starport who can get us access to the orbital tracking system."

The tracking centre at the starport was overseen by just a single individual while a number of droids carried out all of the actual monitoring of traffic around the planet.

"The tracking system doesn't routinely read transponder data. I'm not sure how seeing my logs will help you identify your vessel." the overseer said when Jayk explained what they wanted.

"We're hoping that there will be something else to identify our ship." Jayk replied.

*Fear.*

"Is something wrong?" Jayk asked when both he and Brae sensed the overseer's discomfort at being told this.

"It's not my job to look out for stolen ships." he replied, "If you're going to accuse me of missing something—"

"You wouldn't have known what to look for even if you were on alert. We're not even sure what the signal will be." Brae told him.

"So are you going to let us see these logs then? I want my ship back." Tylo said angrily.

"Oh very well. You're Republic agents anyway so you've got the right to the data." the overseer said.

"Thank you. Now is there somewhere private that we can use to study them?" Jayk asked and the overseer nodded.

"Yes, I'll show you." he said and he led the trio to a small office that looked as if it had not been used in a long time, "This was the shift supervisor's office before we switched to a droid controlled system. The terminal is somewhat antiquated but it still works." he said as he activated the computer terminal and its screen flickered as it came on. Then the overseer called up the orbital sensor log and stepped back, "There you go, it's all there. You can search by time or sector. Now if you don't mind I need to get back to my work." and then the man hurried out of the office, closing the door behind him.

"Hey kid, how about you use the Force to blow the dust off one of these chairs then?" Tylo said to Brae as he pulled a chair from the side of the room only to find that it was covered in years of dust.

"Or maybe you could just wipe it down." Brae replied before she used the corner of her cloak to wipe clean another chair before she sat down in front of the terminal.

"What time did you get back to the ship Tylo?" Jayk asked, standing beside Brae.

"About twenty hundred." Tylo answered, "I wasn't looking at the clock."

"No, too busy looking at the woman's—" Brae began.

"Brae set the search from twenty hundred. Look for all small contacts." Jayk said, purposely interrupting Brae before she could finish her remark.

"Search." Brae replied and then her eyes widened, "Wow." she added.

"What's wrong kid?" Tylo asked as he continued to try and wipe his chair clean using only his hand.

"In the past nineteen hours more than two thousand ships under fifty metres long have arrived at or left the planet." Brae replied.

"This is a trade centre for the sector. It is understandable that it sees a lot of traffic. Perhaps it would be easier if we searched in smaller time blocks. Narrow that down to between twenty and twenty-four hundred local time last night." Jayk told her.

"And just departures." Tylo added as he finally sat down.

"Okay, that just leaves us with three hundred possibilities." Brae said as she edited the search parameters.

"Did the system flag any unusual emissions from any of them?" Jayk asked but Brae shook her head.

"No, all I've got here is a time and a reference. I think we're going to have to go through each individual log one at a time." she said.

"In that case I need a drink. Whisky ideally but I'll settle for coffee." Tylo said as he got up again and walked over to the door leading back to the tracking control room. However, when he tried to open it nothing happened, "What the hell? We're locked in." he said and then he banged on the door, "Hey! Let us out you little sleemo." he shouted as Jayk and Brae dashed across the room to join him.

"Stand back." Jayk said, drawing his lightsaber and there was a 'snap-hiss' as he activated the weapon.

Then with a single swing of the lightsaber he sliced through the door where the locking mechanism was located before following this up with a wave of his hand that channelled the Force to lift the door open, "Go!" he exclaimed and both Brae and Tylo leapt through the open door ahead of Jayk before he released his hold on it and it dropped shut again.

Looking around the tracking control room they could see that the overseer had gone while the droids continued to carry out their task, ignoring the Jedi completely.

"You!" Tylo snapped at the nearest droid as he strode up to the machine and grabbed hold of it, "Where's you

overseer?"

"The overseer is not present." the droid responded.

"I know that. Where the kriff is he?" Tylo demanded.

"The overseer is not present." the droid repeated.

"Tylo it doesn't know." Brae said.

"That little nerf herder must be in on this." Tylo said.

"Obviously." Jayk said, "But these droids won't tell us where he's gone. Now he can't have that much of a head start on us so I suggest that we try and find him."

"Okay, so where do we start?" Tylo said.

"Our target will attempt to hide, flee or alert his co-conspirators to our involvement." Jayk said.

"If he wants to flee then he'll probably head for the parking lot." Brae said.

"And if he wants to warn anyone he'll need a comm unit." Tylo added, "Of course if he's hiding then he could be almost anywhere. He probably knows every hiding place here."

"He would need to avoid anyone that could tell us that they'd seen him." Jayk said.

"That would limit him to this control tower." Brae said, "Anywhere outside and he'd be seen. But I don't sense anyone nearby."

"Then we should head for the parking lot. I saw a communication node between here and there. If he does want to warn anyone about us then that is where he would likely go before making his escape. No come on, he already has a head start on us."

### 3.

Sending a message over interstellar distances was not generally possible from a public call point, but a relay had been rigged up to permit the overseer to contact Surr with information on starships worth stealing and it was this that he called. As expected the relay acted as if his call had reached an answering system, a real time message being impossible with this set up.

"It's me." the overseer said when prompted to speak, "I don't know what your operative was thinking when she took that seven hundred last night but now I've got jedi breathing down my neck. I need you to get me out of-"

"Stay where you are!" Jayk's voice called out and the overseer turned to see the two jedi and Tylo running towards him.

Acting quickly the overseer ended his call and turned and ran, heading for the nearby parking lot where he had his speeder parked. To the best of his knowledge the jedi were on foot now that they had lost their ship and so getting to his speeder gave him the best chance of escape.

Seeing the man start to run, Tylo ground to a halt and drew his blaster. The overseer was too far away for a stun shot so Tylo left his weapon on a lethal setting and fired, aiming low in the hope that he could shoot out the fleeing man's legs from under him. The shot missed the man by more than a metre, blowing a chunk of dirt from the ground.

"No, cease fire. We need him alive." Jayk ordered as he and Brae continued to chase after the overseer. However, the man still had a good head start over the jedi and he reached the parking lot ahead of them, using his pass key to get through an access gate then he slammed shut behind him. The gate was not much of an obstacle to Jayk though and with another swing of his lightsaber he cut through it effortlessly before kicking what remained open and rushing into the parking lot. Even this brief delay was enough for the overseer to have concealed himself among the rows of parked speeders though and the man was nowhere to be seen.

"Where did he go?" Brae asked as she and Tylo followed Jayk through the gateway.

"He must be using the vehicles for cover. Let's split up, we can cover more ground that way." Jayk said. Then he looked at Tylo and added, "Remember I want him alive. No disintegrations."

"Oh like I could disintegrate him with this anyway." Tylo replied, frowning as he held up his blaster before the three of them split up, each heading in a different direction as they searched between the parked vehicles for the overseer.

Meanwhile the overseer stayed low as he crawled between the parked speeders until he reached his own. The problem now for him was that he knew that he could not open the transparent bubble canopy without it making a noise. Added to which it would be visible to anyone looking towards it when it hinged upwards. Therefore, with his pursuers still some distance away he decided to wait and see if an opportune moment arrived during which he could get into his speeder. This moment came just over a minute later as a bulk freighter flew low overhead, its powerful repulsorlift engines making enough noise to hide the hiss of the opening canopy and he noticed that at that moment none of the people chasing after him were looking in his direction.

Before the canopy was even fully opened the overseer squeezed through the widening gap and sat in the driver's seat, reaching up to pull the canopy shut again as soon as he could. He hesitated before starting the engine though, knowing that the moment he did so he would give away his position. All of a sudden Brae turned towards the overseer's speeder and she looked directly at him.

"He's here!" she shouted and the overseer started the engine of his speeder and slammed his foot down on the throttle, aiming his vehicle straight for Brae.

Rising up off the ground by about half a metre, the landspeeder shot forwards. The overseer expected Brae to try and dive out of the way but instead she held her ground, standing with her lightsaber held ready.

Already committed in his course, the overseer had no intention of slowing down or stopping now though and he continued to speed towards the teenager, prepared to run her down if that was what it would take for him to escape.

"Brae move!" Tylo shouted as he and Jayk ran towards her but Brae did not move until right at the last moment when she suddenly rolled aside and held out her lightsaber horizontally beside her. The glowing blue blade sliced into the front of the landspeeder and it cut a deep split all the way along the vehicle as it continued past her. This split penetrated the internal compartment where the overseer was sat and the man screamed in agony as the lightsaber blade also passed through his legs just below his knees and severed them both. It was then that he lost control of the speeder and it spun out of control, smashing into other nearby vehicles and coming to a halt just as Jayk and Tylo arrived.

"Brae are you alright?" Jayk asked, concerned for his daughter's well being.

"Yes master." she replied, standing back up again and shutting off her lightsaber. Then she looked at the crashed speeder. Through the transparent bubble canopy it was easy to see that the crash protection system had activated on impact and the overseer could still be heard screaming from inside, "I think he's alive to answer questions as well." she added with a smile.

Jayk used his lightsaber to cut the canopy from the speeder and then he and Tylo dragged the overseer out of his vehicle, dumping him on the ground beside the wreck.

"My legs!" he yelled, his hands reaching down to the charred stumps just below his knees, "You cut off my kriffing legs!"

"It was self defence." Brae commented.

"Don't worry, I'm sure they'll give you a prosthetic set in prison. Which is the only place you'll be heading to now." Tylo added.

"First though perhaps you'd like to do yourself a favour and tell us where our ship is." Jayk said.

"I don't know." the overseer replied, "Now get me to a doctor."

"Are you seriously claiming ignorance? Because frankly that story reminds me of you. It doesn't have leg to stand on." Tylo said and Brae winced.

"Seriously Tylo?" she said.

"I couldn't resist it." he replied, shrugging, "But he knows what's going on."

"I don't know where the ships go, honest." the overseer said, "I just call a number and tell them about any ship that looks interesting. But I didn't tell them about your ship, I promise. They were supposed to be taking some fancy yacht, not an old freighter."

"Oh that does it, I'm shooting him now." Tylo said but as he pointed his blaster at the man on the ground Jayk pushed the weapon aside.

"I don't sense any deception from him Tylo. He really doesn't know." Jayk said.

"So what do we do now master?" Brae asked and Jayk looked down at the overseer.

"First we contact the local authorities. They can send an ambulance for him and find out who he called from that call station. After that we go back to our original plan and see if we can find the *Swift Exit* in the orbital tracking logs."

"We have Tarlay for you sir." one of Surr's henchmen said as the woman was led into his office by a pair of them.

"Ah Tarlay. Do sit down." Surr said and he pointed to the chair on the opposite side of his desk. Instinctively Tarlay also looked at the chair and she noticed that not only had it been fixed down to the floor but restraints had been added.

"What's going on?" she asked but Surr just looked at his men.

"Restrain her." he ordered and the two henchmen grabbed hold of Tarlay and dragged her across the office to the chair.

"Hey! Let me go!" she exclaimed as she was pushed into the chair and as she struggled against them the henchmen fastened straps around her wrists, ankles and neck to prevent her from moving, "What's the meaning of this? I haven't done anything." she protested.

"Leave us." Surr said and the henchmen nodded before leaving the office.

"Mister Surr, whatever you've been told, I'm loyal to-" Tarlay began.

"Shut up!" Surr snapped, "Listen to this and tell me again about your loyalty." and then he activated the communication system built into his desk to play back the most recent message he had received.

"It's me. I don't know what your operative was thinking when she took that seven hundred last night but now I've got jedi breathing down my neck. I need you to get me out of-" the overseer's voice said before Jayk's voice was heard calling out in the background.

"Stay where you are!" he shouted and then the message ended.

"The jedi Tarlay. Because of you I now have the jedi breathing down my neck. It seems unlikely that our informant will escape them so that means the planet is lost to us even if the jedi get no further in their investigation." Surr said sternly.

"I didn't know. I swear I didn't know." Tarlay said, pulling at her restraints.

"Oh Tarlay I'm sure you didn't. However, the fact remains that your incompetence could cost me dearly and someone needs to be made to pay for that. That someone is of course you." Surr said and then he activated another control on his desk. Immediately there several snapping sounds from around the office as all of the vents suddenly closed, sealing the office off from the station's ventilation system.

"No! Don't, I beg you!" Tarlay cried out, knowing what was coming next but Surr just sat and watched her struggle helplessly before the large viewport located behind him slid open and there was the rush of escaping air as the atmosphere inside the office was blown out into space, leaving it in a vacuum.

The harsh environmental conditions of Yag'Dhul, the homeworld of the givin had caused them to evolve with the ability to survive even in the vacuum of space for a prolonged period without the need for a vacuum suit

and Surr now sat calmly as the last of the air in the office escaped, watching as Tarlay fought desperately to try and free herself from the chair. When faced with decompression some beings foolishly tried to hold their breath but the pressure differential that this created inside their respiratory system only made the effects worse. Tarlay had at least been smart enough to exhale as the office was plunged into a vacuum but now she was instinctively gasping for breath, unable to draw in air that was not present. She continued to try to scream as well but the lack of air in her lungs silenced these cries entirely, all Surr could hear were the muffled sounds of her struggling as the vibrations from them travelled through the floor of the office to where he sat watching.

As Surr expected Tarlay lost consciousness after just over two minutes of struggling, the limited oxygen supply in her blood now exhausted and she slumped forwards in the chair with only the straps holding her in place. Surr did not seal and re-pressurise his office just yet though. Although she was now unconscious, he knew that Tarlay could still survive if she received oxygen in the next few minutes. Therefore, Surr continued to just stare at Tarlay until enough time had elapsed to guarantee that she was beyond help. Only then did he activate the same control that had opened his office to space again to reverse the process.

"Step in here a moment." he said into the intercom when the office was once again fully pressurised and the door opened for his two henchmen to enter again.

"Yes Mister Surr?" one of them asked.

"Get rid of that." Surr told them.

The two men were just carrying Tarlay's corpse out of the office when Ronen arrived and he looked at the body.

"Something wrong?" Surr asked.

"No Mister Surr, nothing." Ronen replied.

"Good. Then give me your report." Surr told him.

"I've been over the freighter as you requested and there are no tracking devices built into it. The control system does have a wireless interface but the receiver is internal, you'd have to actually be aboard the ship to gain control over it. I doubt signals could even penetrate the hull so you couldn't even use it to remote pilot the ship while performing an EVA." Ronen told him.

"Curious. Why permit remote control of the ship from inside?" Surr commented.

"Perhaps in case of damage to the cockpit." Ronen suggested.

"Did you find the control device itself?" Surr said but Ronen shook his head.

"No. Or at least nothing that looked like one." he said.

"Very well. The ship will have to be dismantled for parts. We cannot risk selling it as a complete unit if the Jedi are hunting for it." Surr said.

"What about the upgrades?" Ronen asked, "Some of them would-"

"You may keep anything for the station that you wish but only if you can confirm that it poses no risk to us. The rest must be got rid of within a week." Surr replied and Ronen nodded.

"Of course Mister Surr. I should be able to get to that within the next couple of days." he said.

"See that you do Ronen. Otherwise I may have to call you back in here for a little chat." Surr said and he looked at the now empty chair on the other side of his desk.

## 4.

Even with the playback of the sensor traces sped up it was still a painfully long process to go through every possible one of them to look for some signal from Cal that would identify the *Swift Exit*. This was made worse by the fact that the traces varied so little from one another that it became difficult to tell them apart and even Jayk and Brae found their Jedi patience being tested as they sat and watched one after another in the office in the starport control tower.

"Congratulations." Tylo said, yawning, "I think you've found the most boring task in the universe."

"This is your ship we're looking for." Brae said.

"Yes, with your ancestor aboard." Tylo pointed out and Brae turned to stare at him.

"Wait!" Jayk snapped before Brae could argue with Tylo, leaning forwards and stopping the playback, "Run this trace again."

"What are we looking for?" Brae asked as the trace was rerun, showing a sensor contact departing the atmosphere of the planet.

"Watch the magnetic field readings as the ship switches to its ion drive." Jayk told her and both she and Tylo concentrated on the magnetic field data that accompanied the radar trace.

"Hey yeah, I saw that." Tylo said, smiling.

"Then can one of you tell me please?" Brae said.

"A YT-seven hundred like the *Swift Exit* has two primary ion drive clusters, each one subdivided into smaller thrust elements pumping out charged particles as reaction mass." Tylo began, "Well if you look at the particles coming out of the back of that ship you'll see that they have different polarities coming from different thrust units."

"But doesn't that make the ship less efficient?" Brae said, frowning.

"Exactly. The positive and negative particles are drawn together instead of pushing apart and providing extra thrust. You only introduce inversely charged particles to your thrust flow to test the engines at high power without sending it shooting off into space." Tylo said.

"Which means someone accessed the engine diagnostics while in flight." Jayk said.

"Cal. Cal can access that system." Brae said, smiling, "We've found him."

"Not yet we haven't kid. What we have there is an exit vector. But the *Swift Exit* could be in any system along that route." Tylo reminded her before there was a knocking sound from the doorway to the office that was now wedged open after Jayk destroyed the door's mechanism. Standing in the doorway was a woman in a police uniform clutching a datapad in her hand.

"Yes officer?" Jayk asked.

"I'm sorry to disturb you Jedi Udra but my captain asked me to bring you this." the policewoman said as she entered the office and she held out the datapad.

"What is this?" Jayk said as he took it.

"It's the report from our communications forensics division." the policewoman told him and Tylo snorted.

"Sounds like a fancy way of saying professional eavesdroppers." he said.

"We traced the address that the call from the public comm station you told us about was placed to. It was abandoned when we got there but when we searched the place we found a remote subspace transmitter set up to relay information from the land line." the policewoman explained.

"So you know where the signal was sent to?" Brae asked.

"No, that information is not here." Jayk said before the policewoman could, "However, from this report the subspace transmitter has a range of less than seven parsecs."

"We need a star chart." Tylo said and he and the two Jedi got up and hurried back into the space traffic control room outside where a new overseer was now keeping watch on the droids.

"We need to see a map of every system within seven parsecs." Jayk told the man.

"Certainly." the new overseer replied and he called up a star map of the local area.

"That's the vector that the *Swift Exit* left on." Tylo said, running his finger across the screen.

"Yes and there's only one system along it." Jayk added, "That's it. The thieves are there."

"Great." Brae said, "Now all we need is a ship to get us there because in case you two have forgotten ours has been stolen."

"We don't have a military and none of our police ships are hyperspace capable." the senior law enforcement officer told Jayk, Brae and Tylo as they walked towards the hangar.

"Captain Marshal, you said you could help us. If you can't then we can summon help from the Republic's Judicial Department." Jayk replied.

"Oh I said we'd help you Jedi Udra and we can." Marshal said before he presented his security pass to the

hangar bay door scanner and it slid open to reveal the ships inside. Most of these were sublight patrol vessels, well armed and equipped with powerful ion drives to be able to respond quickly to threats in close proximity to the planet but incapable of reaching even the other planets in the same system in less than a day. However, as well as being used to store the planet's small force of police vessels, the hangar also held vessels that they had seized and one of these was now the centre of frantic activity.

"A consular-class cruiser." Tylo said as he looked at the familiar looking vessel. Consular-class ships had been in service with the Republic for centuries and they were common both in governmental and civilian service. So common that modifications for them were widespread and these included the fitting of weapons. "This was a pirate vessel that raided our shipping about thirty years ago." Marshal said as they walked towards the cruiser, "The original plan was to scrap her after the crew were convicted but then it turned out that there was some legal dispute about the ownership of the vessel and so we've been storing it here until the courts can decide what to do with it."

"For thirty years?" Brae exclaimed.

"That's bureaucracy for you kid." Tylo said, "Why do you think I became a smuggler?"

"Because you're a criminal who thinks the rules don't apply to him?" Brae commented. Then she looked at Marshal and added, "If this ship is the subject of a court battle then should we be using it?"

"Thankfully our local courts work quicker than the Republic's do. We got an order giving us the use of the ship pretty easily." Marshal answered, "Now come on, I'll introduce you to your team."

"Our team? We have a team now?" Tylo said.

"Without knowing exactly what we are up against I thought it prudent to request support." Jayk told him just as they got close enough to the cruiser to see that in addition to a ground crew making the ship ready for take off there was a team of police officers loading equipment aboard it.

"Sergeant Dayan is the team leader." Marshal said and on hearing her name spoken one of the police officers turned around.

"Prisa Dayan, tactical team leader." she said, holding out her hand and Jayk took it.

"How many are in your team?" he asked her.

"A dozen. Two marksmen and a ten strong assault team." Dayan said.

"I've also assigned half a dozen of our patrol ship crew to make up the numbers for flying the ship itself." Marshal added.

"They're already aboard." Dayan told Jayk.

"Then I suggest we join them. The sooner we get out of here the less chance there is that the *Swift Exit* will be broken up." Jayk replied and Tylo frowned.

"Don't say things like that. You'll jinx it." he responded.

At a hundred and fifteen metres long, there was adequate space for all of the police tactical team's equipment but the passenger space aboard had been reduced by the pirate crew and so the living quarters were somewhat cramped.

To alleviate this pressure, Jayk, Brae and Tylo made their way straight to the cruiser's bridge where the police crew were preparing for take off.

"What is our status?" Jayk asked.

"All systems functional Jedi Udra. Sergeant Dayan reports her team is aboard. We can depart whenever you want." one of the police crew responded and Jayk nodded as he sat down in the vacant captain's chair.

"Tylo take the helm. Brae navigation. Take us out of here." he said.

Brae and Tylo moved to replace the police crew at their indicated stations and Tylo promptly powered up the ship's repulsorlifts.

"Everyone fasten your seatbelts. This ship is a bit bigger than I'm used to." Tylo announced before the ship lurched as it rose up of the hangar deck. Tylo then carefully turned the ship around to face the massive external hangar doors before accelerating through them. Then as soon as the ship was outside he pulled back on the controls and it shot skywards into space.

"Jump co-ordinates set. We can enter hyperspace as soon as we're clear of the gravity well." Brae announced.

"What's our ETA?" Jayk asked.

"The jump should last about ten minutes." Brae answered and Jayk nodded.

"Excellent. Just enough time for us to prepare to enter battle." he said.

"Battle? Do you really think that these ship thieves will put up a fight?" Tylo said.

"We can't discount the possibility. We were told that they sometimes steal gunships. They could have one or more of them protecting their base of operations."

"Oh great." Tylo said, shaking his head slowly, "First I'm responsible for flying a type of warship I've never flown before and now I'm flying it into battle. I've got a bad feeling about this."

When the consular-class ship dropped out of hyperspace Brae checked their location while the police officer

at the comscan position immediately began to scan the surrounding system.

"Looks like we've come out of hyperspace right on target." Brae said, "At the edge of the system."

"I told you I could do it." Tylo added.

"I'm not picking up any signs of a base." the comscan operator said.

"What if they were using a ship as a base? Like Teron." Tylo asked but Jayk shook his head.

"I don't think so. That would require too much precision in the timing of thefts to be able to rendezvous with a carrier." he said, "Give me comms."

"Comms active." the comscan operator said.

"Good." Jayk said as he activated the communication system built into his chair, "Cal this is Jayk. Respond if you can." he signalled, the message being beamed across the system at the speed of light, "Now we wait for a response." he said.

"Mister Surr we may have a problem." the voice of one of Surr's men said over the intercom.

"What sort of problem?" Surr asked.

"We picked up a burst of cronau radiation about five minutes ago and now we've detected a radio broadcast." the man said.

"A message? Intended for us?" Surr said.

"I don't think so sir. Listen." the man said and then he played back the signal Jayk had sent.

"Cal this is Jayk. Respond if you can."

"What about the ship that sent this? What sort of vessel is it?" Surr said.

"One moment, we're just getting the passive scans now." the other man replied. Then he paused before adding, "It looks like a consular-class ship." he said.

"Consular-class? Interesting." Surr said. Had he been capable of smiling then he would have done so, "A consular-class ship is valuable. Prepare a strike team and tell Ronen to expect a new addition to our stock."

"Yes Mister Surr. I'll get right on it." the other man replied and then the intercom went dead.

## 5.

"Jayk, at last. I was starting to wonder whether or not you picked up my signal." Cal's voice said over the radio and the bridge crew of the consular-class ship suddenly sat up.

"Can you trace the origin of that transmission?" Jayk asked but before the comscan operator could respond Cal's message continued.

"Look, as far as I can tell I'm in some sort of asteroid base. So far no-one's noticed me hear but I think the occupants of this place might be getting ready to cut the *Swift Exit* up." he said.

"Oh hell no. No-one's hacking up my ship." Tylo exclaimed.

"Jedi Udra I have located the source of the signal." the comscan operator announced, "An asteroid four and a half light minutes from here."

"I've got it." Brae added, "It's big."

"Big enough to hide a ship like the *Swift Exit* inside?" Jayk asked.

"Big enough to hold a thousand ships the size of the *Swift Exit* inside." Brae answered.

"Jedi Udra I'm picking up energy emissions from the asteroid consistent with a low level magnetic field." the comscan operator said.

"The sort of field used to seal a hangar from space?" Jayk asked.

"Yes sir. It looks like that. Sir, I also have a visual now." the comscan operator answered.

"Put it on the main screen." Jayk ordered and the large display screen mounted above the cockpit's forward viewports changed to show the asteroid being used by Surr and his gang as a hideout. From this angle the hangar running right through the asteroid was clearly visible, along with several of the surface structures that jutted out in various places, "That gives me an idea." Jayk said, smiling.

"This is our target." Jayk said to the beings crowded into the cruiser's forward pod. The original civilian transport version of consular-class ships used this as a passenger lounge and the pirates who had modified the ship had retained this function. Therefore, the seating and display screens that the room offered made it ideal for the briefing. Now all of the police tactical team members and two of the bridge crew were present along with Brae and Tylo to listen to Jayk explain his plan for taking the asteroid, "It is a hollowed out asteroid base that holds an unknown number of hostiles. Our assault on this facility will be two-pronged. Firstly our cruiser will execute a micro-jump through hyperspace to get us into close proximity from where it can provide fire support if needed. Otherwise it shall act only to prevent any of the base occupants from escaping. If possible shoot to disable any fleeing vessels, but you have permission to use lethal force if necessary. The second part of our assault will be the boarding action itself and for this we will use this pod. As soon as we drop out of hyperspace I want the ship aligned towards the hangar entrance. The pod will then be ejected and flown straight through the magnetic field into the hangar. Our scans have shown that the field is not strong enough to prevent a boarding action. Once inside the boarding party will split into three groups. Tylo will lead the first group that will also include both of our marksmen. They will secure the hangar while Brae and myself each take a team to explore the rest of the base and capture it."

Brae's eyes widened when she heard this.

"I'll be commanding a team?" she said and Jayk nodded.

"Yes Brae. I trust you to take command. However, just in case you need assistance I want Sergeant Dayan in your team as well to back you up."

"Don't worry kid, I'm sure you'll do just fine." Tylo added.

"Are there any questions?" Jayk asked, looking around the crowded room but no-one responded and he nodded, "Good. In that case may the Force be with us all."

Two of the vessels inside the asteroid base's hangar had been selected for use as assault ships. One of these was a purpose built gunship stolen from a band of mercenaries while the other was a freighter that had been upgraded with superior shields and weapons. Now more than two dozen members of Surr's gang had been issued with weapons and were being organised into squads for the attack when all of a sudden a klaxon sounded.

"Alert! Alert! The base is under attack. Repeat, the base is under attack!" a voice announced over the intercom as the consular-class cruiser completed its micro jump through hyperspace to position itself close to the asteroid.

Moments later the forward pod section of the cruiser detached, dropping below the ship before its engines ignited and it shot towards the asteroid.

"Incoming!" one of Surr's men yelled when he saw the flare of the pod's engines. These engines did not burn for long though, instead they operated for just long enough to get it clear of the cruiser and steer it towards

the opening of the base's hangar. By this time the pod had already built up significant speed and the engines cut out, leaving it to drift. Meanwhile the cruiser itself stayed back, watching for any sign of weapons being targeted at the pod by the base. However, the base was unarmed and the pod burst through the hangar's magnetic field unimpeded.

Suddenly exposed to the base's artificial gravity, the pod dropped to the floor of the hangar with a massive 'crash' before sliding across it, scattering the armed men before it smashed into the gunship and finally came to a halt. Inside the pod the occupants felt it shake violently during this but its own artificial gravity field protected them from being thrown around and injured.

"Everyone out!" Jayk yelled as he undid his safety harness, leapt to his feet and rushed to the hatch at the rear of the pod. Rather than open it normally he triggered the emergency release system and three seconds later there was an explosion that blew the hatch clear.

Jayk jumped down from the pod and there was a 'snap-hiss' as he ignited his lightsaber in time to position it in front of him to deflect the blaster fire that now flew towards him. Brae was the next one out of the pod and she too activated her lightsaber, parrying multiple blaster attacks. With the two jedi blocking the fire aimed at the pod the way was left clear for Tylo and the police tactical team to disembark safely and they deployed behind the jedi, returning fire at the gang members in the hangar.

"Over there, look." Tylo called out and he pointed across the hangar at where the *Swift Exit* lay, "Cresh Team with me." and then he waved for the four police officers that made up his team to follow him.

While Tylo and his team rushed across the hangar Jayk pointed out two doors leading out of it to Brae.

"Brae, those two doors. You take the one on the left and I'll take my team through the one on the right." he said.

"Got it." Brae replied and she broke into a run, still swatting blaster bolts aside to protect the police officers following her. As she ran more members of the gang began to converge on the hangar to try and drive back the invaders and a large alien appeared in the doorway Brae was heading for with a repeating blaster in his hands. The alien laughed at Brae as he pointed his weapon towards her but the moment he pulled the trigger she not only blocked the stream of energy blasts that shot from it, she sent many of them straight back at him and he convulsed as he was hit by his own shots before he dropped the heavy weapon and collapsed in a heap on the floor.

"Come on! The way is clear." Brae called out, jumping over the alien's body to exit the hangar.

While Brae's team was leaving the hangar Jayk was just approaching the other exit and just as he neared the doorway he saw someone on the other side. Whoever this was they did not attempt to fire at the jedi, having witnessed how ineffective that was in the hangar. Instead the figure slammed a hand down on the door controls and a heavy blast door designed to protect the rest of the base from explosions in the hangar slammed down in front of Jayk.

"Cover me." Jayk ordered the police officers accompanying him and while they formed a perimeter around him and began to lay down covering fire he plunged his lightsaber blade into the door. Although it was tough to cut through, the metal of the blast door could not totally resist the lightsaber blade and Jayk was slowly able to drag around the edge of the door to cut through.

Eager to regain control of his vessel, Tylo raced across the hangar, firing his blaster at any of the base's crew he saw in his path whether they appeared to be armed or not. He had no intention of dying just because he failed to spot a hidden weapon. As he got closer to the *Swift Exit* he saw that the ship's access ramp was open and he rushed straight inside, grinding to a halt when he reached the top of the ramp, "You two stay put and cover the hangar," he told the two police marksmen, "and you two others come with me. I want to make sure that there's no-one aboard my ship that shouldn't be here. Leaving the two marksmen at the ramp, Tylo and the other two police officers left the hold and headed into the lounge area of the *Swift Exit* where they were met by the hologram of a man in jedi robes.

"Well it's about time Tylo." Cal said, his arms folded.

"Cal, is there anyone else aboard?" Tylo asked.

"No. Everyone was called out a few minutes ago. I think your arrival here has a few people panicked." Cal said.

"Good. Just wait until I catch up with that bitch who stole my ship. I'll give her something to panic about." Tylo said.

"About that, from what I heard people saying I think that you're a bit too late for her."

"She left?" Tylo asked.

"In a way, yes. I heard that she was killed. Apparently the leader of this gang was unhappy about her getting jedi involved in their operation and killed her for it. They're saying he spaced her." Cal answered.

Base crewmen ran to defend the asteroid from the assault force and a group of them deployed on the other side of the blast door Jayk was cutting through. Some pointed their weapons towards the blast door while others dragged heavy crates and equipment across the corridor to create an improvised barrier. The blast

door collapsed under its own weight when Jayk was most of the way through cutting a hole in it and it fell to the floor with a loud 'crash'.

"Open fire!" one of the gang members in the corridor called out and the corridor was suddenly filled with blaster bolts streaking towards the destroyed blast door.

"Fire in the hole!" a voice called out from inside the hangar and a stun grenade came flying through the hole in the blast door before exploding with a bright flash of light and a booming sound that echoed along the corridor.

Disorientated by the blast, the gunmen in the corridor were unprepared when Jayk leapt through the hole in the blast door and reached out his hand towards them. Then, using the Force to grasp the objects used to create the barrier blocking his path he pulled them towards him, turning the hastily built barrier into an assortment of individual objects scattered across the floor of the corridor. It was then that some of the gang members began to recover from the effects of the grenade and one of them opened fire at Jayk. However, once again he used his lightsaber to deflect the attack and sent the bolt right back at the man who had just tried to shoot him.

"Advance." he called out to the police officers still in the hangar and with Jayk to protect them from incoming fire they followed him into the corridor.

Under the sustained attack by the police tactical team some of the gang members defending the corridor decided that they would be better off somewhere else in the asteroid and they began to fall back. In doing this their lack of proper combat training was cruelly exposed however, as each man retreated as an individual rather than staging an orderly withdrawal with some of them providing cover while others fell back as one. Instead each member of the gang who broke simply turned and ran without any thought to those being left behind. This left Jayk and his team of police officers able to concentrate on those that remained and these were cut down easily.

Jayk was just leading his team in pursuit of the gang members who had successfully fled when his comlink activated.

"Jedi Udra this is Sergeant Hool." the officer that he had left in command of the cruiser said.

"This is Jedi Udra, go ahead sergeant." Jayk responded.

"Jedi Udra two more vessels have just dropped out of hyperspace. Both read as armed freighters." Hool said.

"More members of the gang operating this place?" Jayk asked.

"No sir. We've been hailed by one of them and it's police Captain Marshal. They received our status report before we began our assault and have sent reinforcements. Sixty more officers." Hool told him.

"Good. Tylo do you read me?" Jayk said.

"Loud and clear Jayk. Don't worry, the hangar is clear and my team will make sure it stays that way for them." Tylo said.

"Thanks Tylo. Jayk out." Jayk replied before putting his comlink away again and continuing to advance down the corridor.

After exiting the hangar Brae and her team faced little resistance as they made their way through the corridors of the base until they reached a large blast door that blocked their way.

*Danger.*

"Get down!" Brae yelled when she sensed the disturbance in the Force and she and the police officers with her dived to the floor just in time as an automated blaster set into the wall beside the blast door opened fire and a sustained burst of energy blasts flew above them.

"I can take it." one of the officers said and he raised himself up into a kneeling position to take aim at the blaster.

"No!" Brae tried to warn him but she was too late to prevent a second automated blaster from opening fire and hit him repeatedly. The body armour he wore was insufficient to protect the officer and he fell backwards, dead before he hit the floor.

"I don't suppose you can use your lightsaber to shield us from those two guns can you?" Dayan asked but Brae shook her head.

"No, the fire is coming from two different angles at once." she replied.

"Then we'll need those reinforcements. Hopefully Captain Marshal brought along some portable blast shields." Dayan said and Brae smiled at her.

"Why wait?" she said, "I may not be able to protect all of you but I can protect myself just fine." and then she waved her hand, sending a wave of telekinetic power at a stack of boxes nearby, none of them bigger than a quarter of a metre across. This blast from the Force sent the boxes flying towards one of the guns, attracting the attention of its motion tracking system and it sent its next volley of fire at the boxes. Meanwhile Brae leapt up into the line of fire of the other gun and offered herself to it as a target. Obliging the gun opened fire at Brae right as she positioned her lightsaber between herself and the gun, angling the blade so that the energy blasts were deflected back at the gun. Her aim was slightly off for the first few shots and they struck

the wall around the gun several times before she finally found her mark and one of the energy bolts fired by the weapon was sent straight back at it, causing it to burst into flames as it ceased fire. This came just in time as the boxes she had hurled at the other gun as a distraction either hit the wall around it or fell to the floor and the gun turned on her instead. Brae rolled out of the way of the first volley fired at her by the gun before springing back to her feet and once again using her lightsaber to deflect the energy blasts until she was able to send one directly back at the automated weapon and destroy it.

“Clear.” she called out as she looked around the room and the police officers cautiously got back to their feet.

“So what about that?” Dayan asked, pointing at the blast door and Brae also looked at it and sighed.

“That will take a little longer.” she answered.

## 6.

The gang members falling back before Jayk and his team retreated to the base's engineering section where its workshops and reactors were located. In here there were more than enough hiding places for the gang members to conceal themselves and suddenly emerge from to ambush the police officers. However, against a jedi this was not quite as easy and Jayk could sense where they were hiding before they appeared.

"Keep the left side covered. I've got the right." he said and the police tactical team took cover and aimed their weapons to the left hand side of the main workshop while Jayk headed to the right, charging along the length of the room and striking at every one of the gang members in his path. Those on the other side of the room attempted to shoot across at him but in doing so they exposed themselves to fire from the police officers and they were all gunned down until one of them fired at Jayk from behind a large power converter without needing to expose himself.

This gunman struck just as Jayk was engaging another member of the gang opposite him and the jedi knew that he had no time to use his lightsaber to deflect the attack. However, as he slashed the blade of his lightsaber across his opponent's chest the man let go of his blaster and Jayk used the Force to pluck it out of the air at the same time as he rolled out of the path of the incoming blaster shot. As he rolled he held out the arm holding the blaster and turned his head to aim it before squeezing the trigger and shooting the startled man dead.

"That's the last of them." Jayk announced, "In here at least."

"Master." Brae's voice then said from Jayk's comlink and he lifted the device to his mouth.

"Go ahead Brae." he said.

"I think I've located the main command centre. Whatever it is it's important enough to protect with automated guns and a blast door. I think I'll need help getting it open."

"Very well. I'm on my way." Jayk responded before shutting off his comlink. Then he turned to the leader of the police officers with him and added, "Secure this area. See if you can gain control of the power distribution system. It might come in useful."

The two armed freighters set down in the hangar and moments later the police officers they contained began to disembark, rushing down the access ramps. Captain Marshal had been unable to gather any more of the specialised tactical teams that had been assigned to support Jayk, Brae and Tylo and instead the two ships were filled with regular patrol officers. However, they had still been able to draw extra equipment before coming here and each of them carried either a blaster rifle or a blast shield that they could wield with one arm while holding a pistol in the other.

"I brought as many extra officers as I could." Marshal told Tylo as the former smuggler walked towards him, flanked by the two marksmen.

"Thanks. I've been keeping up with the chatter from the other two teams and it looks like the engineering section is that way and the command centre is down there." Tylo said, pointing at the doorways Jayk and Brae had gone through.

"Thanks. We'll spread out and see what else we can find in this place." Marshal replied.

"Brae I'm here." Jayk said as he rushed into the room where the large blast door was located.

"This is it." Brae replied, looking at the blast door, "There are no controls on this side so I'm guessing that its covering a conventional door on the other side."

Jayk nodded in agreement.

"Yes, it will take some time to cut through it and the opening mechanism is likely embedded somewhere in the rock above us." he said.

"So how do we get through?" Brae asked.

"We don't." Jayk answered, "We go around." and then he took out his comlink again, "This is Jayk. Cal can you hear me?"

"Just about Cal. The structure of this place doesn't lend itself to efficient comlink communication." Cal responded.

"Thank the Force he's okay." Brae commented.

"Cal you've been here a while and I'm guessing that you've taken the opportunity to sneak around their computer network. What can you tell me about the layout of the main command centre?" Jayk said.

"I can tell you that they've got an excellent firewall. I could have breached it but not without giving myself away and now that you're aboard they've put the whole thing on lock down." Cal said.

"Stang. There goes that idea." Brae said.

"However," Cal continued, "not all of the crew who came aboard the *Swift Exit* were so careful with the

wireless ports on their datapads and since the original me kindly included a wireless data connection in my construction I was able to take a look at them instead.”

“That’s excellent. What did you learn?” Jayk asked.

“Well apart from the fact that some of the beings on this base have some rather disturbing personal tastes I know that the command centre sits behind a blast door that can be deployed if the base comes under attack.” Cal told him.

“Yes, we’re outside that now. Is there another way around?” Jayk said.

“Sort of.” Cal responded.

“Explain ‘sort of.’” Brae added, leaning closer to the comlink.

“Well the vents have been kept deliberately narrow so the only way in and out is through that blast door. Unless you’re willing to step outside that is.”

“Outside? You mean do an EVA?” Brae said.

“Of course, what else would I mean? You put on a vacc suit and head around the asteroid until you reach a viewport. That leads into an office right by the main command centre.”

“A viewport? But if we smash that then we’ll decompress the entire command centre. I’d rather give the command staff the chance to surrender before I suffocate them all.” Jayk said.

“Get this, the viewport opens. I think the boss around here is a givin and he uses his office to execute people he doesn’t like.

“Then that’s how Brae, Tylo and I will gain entry.” Jayk said, “We’re on our way back to the hangar now.”

“Have I ever mentioned how much I dislike the idea of combat in a vacuum?” Tylo said as he and the two jedi carefully walked across the surface of the asteroid. In the ultra-low surface gravity they had to be careful not to do anything that could result in their being thrown off into space.

“Several times while we were suiting up and since we exited the base.” Jayk replied.

“Yeah well it deserves to be said again. All it takes is one tear that fails to seal or a puncture in an oxygen cylinder and you’ve got about three minutes before you’re dead.” Tylo said.

“As opposed to all those much safer fights where you can be shot or stabbed to death instantly.” Brae pointed out.

“Quiet. I can see the viewport.” Jayk said suddenly when he spotted the light coming from Surr’s office through the viewport.

Carefully the trio made their way towards this and Jayk crouched down to peer through the viewport into the office on the other side. As he had hoped the room appeared empty but he could see the control panel on the desk that operated the viewport.

“I suppose one of those must open this thing.” Brae said as she looked inside as well.

“There is one easy way to find out.” Jayk replied and he reached out his hand, focusing on the buttons set into the control panel. Using the Force he pressed each of these one at a time until all of a sudden the viewport began to slide open and there was a sudden rush of escaping air from inside the office.

“Quickly, get inside. Be careful of the alignment.” Jayk said, knowing that as soon as they climbed down through the opening that from their current point of view was on the ground the base’s artificial gravity field would place it on a wall.

Jayk went first, followed by Tylo and then Brae. At this point Jayk began pressing buttons on the control panel again until he found the right one and the viewport slid shut again, allowing air to flow back into the office.

Or at least that was what Jayk intended.

The main control centre was a scene of panic. Although there was no comprehensive surveillance system in place in the base enough information had been sent back to the command centre that its staff knew they were under attack by jedi and that the initial small assault force had now been joined by a larger second wave that was seizing control of large parts of the base. Now it seemed that only the command centre remained and its security had been severely reduced when the automatic guns outside were destroyed by a single jedi. Looking around him, Surr knew that he lacked the forces he needed to take back control of his base but there was still one option open to him as he saw it.

Among the eventualities he had planned for was a mass mutiny among his gang and so he had set in place a countermeasure against that. Despite his base being located on an asteroid in deep space he had purposely limited the amount of vacuum suits aboard it and all of these were stored in locations that he could secure remotely. Surr’s plan to defeat a mutiny was simply to empty all of the base’s atmosphere into space and wipe out the mutineers. He would of course also wipe out any of the gang that were still loyal to him but he could easily replace them if he had to.

The information about the attacking force was that they were planetary police officers rather than dedicated space assault troops and as such they lacked vacuum protection. Therefore, decompressing the base would

work just as well against them as it would against a mutiny. Again he was faced with losing the few remaining gang members with him in the command centre but that was a price he was willing to pay. With remote access to the base's computer network shut down because of the assault Surr had to use a console to execute the decompression command and while his staff continued to argue about what to do next he subtly made his way over to an unmanned console and began to input the commands. The completed command sequence opened every hatch in the base, including the heavy blast door that protected the command centre and also shut down the magnetic fields sealing the hangar entrances and this caused a massive rush of air out into space. All across the base the police officers grabbed onto what ever they could to stop themselves being blown out into space but they could do nothing about the escaping air and as they gasped for breath they could not even use their comlinks to warn the jedi. However, inside the *Swift Exit* Cal also saw what was going on as the air was sucked out of the inside of the ship as well.

The door between Surr's office and the command centre opened unexpectedly and there was an instant rush of air past Tylo and the jedi.

"Jayk, the base is being decompressed. You have to stop it now or all those police officers are going to die." Cal's voice said suddenly over the comlink.

"Come on. We don't have much time." Jayk then told Brae and Tylo and the three of them rushed through the internal doorway into the command centre where they found the command staff clutching at their throats as they struggled to breathe while Surr simply stood back and watched.

Jayk ignited his lightsaber and the sudden blue glow made Surr look upwards and he stared in disbelief at the three figures wearing vacuum suits looking back at him.

Jayk and Brae both jumping over the safety rail of the landing they had emerged on and landed right in front of Surr.

"Brae, I'll take the givin. You undo whatever he did." Jayk ordered as Surr dived over the console he was stood at, intending to put as much distance between himself and the jedi as he could. One of the command centre staff was right next to where Surr landed and the givin reached down to take the man's weapon. Now holding a blaster in each hand he began to fire at Jayk with them both simultaneously. Firing two weapons together was inaccurate but it forced Jayk to concentrate on defending himself while Surr continued to back away in the direction of the still opening blast door. However, while Surr was focused on Jayk he had forgotten about Tylo and the former smuggler took aim from the landing with his blaster and fired, hitting the givin in the side of his head and sending him falling sideways to the floor.

"Brae can you get the air back in here yet?" Jayk said, spinning around.

"I think I've got it." Brae responded as she pressed a rapid sequence of buttons on the console and all of a sudden all of the base's exterior doors closed and the magnetic fields in the hangar reactivated, permitting the air inside the base to return to normal levels.

"We've made a number of arrests and recovered more than twenty vessels that we think are stolen." Captain Marshal told Jayk, Brae and Tylo as they sat in the *Swift Exit's* lounge.

"What about your casualties captain?" Jayk asked.

"We've got four dead and six wounded." Marshal replied, "Of course if not for your actions then all of us would be floating out there now."

"Very good. You may carry on captain." Jayk said nodding and Marshal turned around and left the lounge.

"Are you busy?" Cal then asked, his hologram materialising in front of the others.

"I was just settling down to a break actually." Tylo responded.

"Have you found something in the base network Cal?" Brae added.

"Yes, something very interesting. Take a look at this." Cal said and he pointed to the large video screen mounted on the wall of the lounge. On this he displayed a number of images of a starship inside a docking bay, "I'm guessing that this was a ship that the gang either stole or were planning to steal." he said.

"Now that is interesting." Tylo said, smiling as he looked at the prominent nose art painted on the vessel that depicted a naked woman who lay on her stomach smiling, "Look Brae, it's your father's favourite hooker."

"Thal N'Krey's ex-girlfriend and favourite model." Brae said, "That must be his ship, the one we're trying to find."

"Yes and perhaps some of the gang's survivors can tell us where to find her." Jayk added.