

# STAR WARS

## DARKNESS RISING

4-08: GREED & LEARNING

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Artefacts are being stolen from an archaeological dig and the Udras are sent to find out who is responsible. However, the culprit is willing to kill as well as steal and the Udras become the prime target.

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# 1 .

Doctor Erasmus Tayne divided his attention between the information on his datapad and walking across the uneven ground towards the latest location that his team was to investigate. The subject of their study was a set of ruins that had lain buried for centuries and to speed matters along the preliminary excavation had been carried out overnight by labour droids programmed to gain access to what remained of the structures.

"According to the ground penetrating radar scan the structure is hollow so we don't need to dig out the interior as well." he told the team members walking with him.

"Looks like the droids have finished their work doctor." one of his students commented as the dig site came into view, the labour droids lined up and motionless.

"Ah, excellent. Then we can get right to work. To start with I want holo-recordings of the whole interior of the structure. Each of you has a map on your datapads generated from the scan but we need to keep a record of exactly how it appears before we can remove anything." Erasmus ordered as they approached the opening that led into the underground structure.

"Yes doctor." another of the students replied as they stopped to take out their glow rods.

Shining the powerful compact lights ahead of them the eight strong team entered the darkened structure and immediately activated their recording rods so that they could capture the appearance of the passageway they were walking along. This soon opened out into a chamber that was lined with small alcoves and in each of them stood a plinth. Some of these plinths had sculptures resting on them while others had either complete sculptures or the fragments of broken ones at their bases.

"Incredible." one of the students said, "The design of these artefacts is native Sith, not the later Republic-derived versions."

"That means that this place is older than we thought." another student added, "Doctor what do you think?" she added but Erasmus did not respond, "Doctor, what's wrong?"

"Has anyone touched anything?" Erasmus said at last.

"No doctor, why?" a student answered.

"Because the radar scan detected a metallic mass right here in this alcove but now there is nothing." Erasmus said, pointing to an empty plinth while looking at his datapad, "Yet now it is gone."

"Not again." a student commented, "Who would do such a thing."

"Who indeed? This cannot be ignored any further." Erasmus said, "I will have to inform the Jedi. She will know what to do." then before anyone else could say anything there was the sound of a scream from one of the passageways that led from the chamber.

The YT-700 class freighter *Swift Exit* looked out of place among the starfighters and fast courier ships that made up the bulk of the vessels in the main hangar of the Jedi temple on Coruscant but that did not bother its owner Tylo Kurrast as he entered the ship carrying a crate of supplies. Normally the parts inside the crate would have been expensive and hard to come by, but thanks to the deal that had him transporting a pair of Jedi around the galaxy and helping them with their primary assignment in exchange for not being sent to prison for his own role in the case they were investigating he was able to use the Jedi Order's system for obtaining parts without having to pay for them.

Entering the ship's lounge area he saw a discarded cloak and belt on the table and he recognised them both as belonging to Brae Udra, the Padawan and daughter of the Jedi knight Jayk Udra who he transported aboard his ship. Surprisingly Brae's lightsaber was still clipped to the belt as well, meaning that she had abandoned her weapon.

"Hey kid," he called out as he set down the crate on the floor before picking up the belt and cloak and heading towards the ship's sole crew cabin that they all shared, "I thought we were supposed to have an agreement about you not leaving stuff lying around the place." then as he opened the door to the cabin he added, "Plus I doubt your dad would approve of you-" then he gasped when he saw Brae in her bunk on top of a teenage boy about her age that Tylo could not quite place, both of their clothes scattered on the cabin floor, "Whoa, my mistake." he exclaimed, tossing the cloak and belt to the cabin floor as well and then closing the door before returning to the lounge.

Once there Tylo went to the fridge and took out a bottle of beer that he opened before sitting down and he started to sip at it.

"You could have warned me Cal." he said out loud and a hologram of an older man in Jedi robes appeared, projected from the crystal cube on a shelf close by. Cal Udra had been a Jedi knight thousands of years earlier and during his life he had created a holocron to store all of his knowledge and experiences. To help guide people in accessing the contents he had also included a virtual recreation of his own personality and this recreation now served as an advisor to Jayk on instructing a close family member and as a secondary

teacher to Brae.

"It really isn't any of my business." the hologram replied, "Besides even with the current insistence of the Jedi Order that all Jedi stick to the letter of the Jedi Code, the council does not demand that Jedi remain celibate. Brae wouldn't be here if they did."

"Yeah but I'm just saying that a warning would have saved a lot of embarrassment. Especially for Brae I'm guessing." Tylo said before the boy that he had seen in the cabin suddenly appeared with a nervous look on his face, adjusting the fastenings on his clothing.

"Captain Kurrast, I-" he began.

"Do I know you?" Tylo interrupted, staring at him.

"I work in stores sir." the boy replied, "My name is-"

"Don't care. Your name is between you and Brae. Now if you're done you can go. Hurry now, before that young lady's father decides to make an appearance." Tylo told him.

"Yes sir." the boy said before dashing from the lounge and Tylo winced.

"What's wrong?" Cal asked.

"Kid called me 'sir'. That means I'm getting old." Tylo answered before Brae appeared in the doorway, holding her cloak around her.

"Tylo I-" she began.

"No need to explain yourself kid." he interrupted, "I'm guessing you didn't expect to be disturbed here, right?" and Brae nodded.

"We couldn't exactly use my room in the padawan's quarters." she said and then she sat down beside Tylo, "Tylo, could you perhaps not tell my dad about this? Please?" she asked and Tylo took another sip of his beer.

"Look kid I can't speak as a father myself but I'm willing to guess that the one thing guaranteed to upset yours more than being told that his daughter, who is nineteen and thus over the age of consent for humans on Coruscant by the way, was having sex with a willing partner is being told that the dashing male smuggler who shares a ship with you both happened to catch her in the act and thus saw her completely naked." Tylo replied and Brae smiled as she leant her head on his shoulder.

"Thanks Tylo."

"Hey you once said we were friends and what are friends for if not covering up for one another to the authorities?" he said.

"You can count on my discretion as well Brae." Cal added, "But I suggest you think about what you're going to tell your father about why you are wearing only your cloak quickly because he is coming up the access ramp now."

"Dad?" Brae said as Jayk Udra appeared in the doorway that connected the lounge to the hold with a datapad in his hands.

"Yes?" he replied.

"Oh nothing. Tylo and I were just talking and I didn't sense you coming." Brae said.

"Talking? About what?" Jayk asked.

"Oh nothing special. Brae was just wanting to take a shower here to skip the queue in the padawan's quarters and she was waiting for the water to warm up." Tylo answered and Jayk nodded.

"Well I'm glad that I have you both here because we've been given orders." he told Brae and Tylo.

"What, has another cursed painting or something appeared?" Tylo said, taking another sip of his beer.

"No, quite the opposite it seems. Artefacts are disappearing and we've been ordered to investigate." Jayk responded.

"More burglaries?" Brae said.

"Of a sort, but this time Sith artefacts are being taken from their source at an archaeological dig in the Outer Rim. There is already a representative from the Jedi Order on site, they are to liaise with us." Jayk explained.

"This job needs two Jedi knights? I've got a bad feeling about this one." Tylo said.

"I said a representative of the Jedi Order, not a Jedi knight." Jayk pointed out, "The being concerned is one of those whose abilities with the Force were not strong enough for them to progress to the rank of Jedi knight and so another role was found for them. Once we arrive I shall be in charge of the operation. Now since you have clearly been drinking I'll fly the ship and Brae you can take your shower." he continued.

"That's Tylo's only one." Brae commented.

"Hey kid if you dad wants to fly this time let him. If I can get drunk enough en-route then maybe I'll have an excuse to stay in the ship while you two go out and deal with all the ancient Sith curses." Tylo told her.

"Let's get going." Jayk said and without waiting for either Brae or Tylo to react he headed for the *Swift Exit's* cockpit, sitting down in the pilot's seat that Tylo usually occupied and started preparing the ship for lift off.

Then when Tylo entered the cockpit and sat down beside him with his drink still in his hand he glanced at the former smuggler briefly.

"Thank you for supporting Brae." he said and Tylo frowned.

"Huh?" he replied.

"You managed to lie well. I actually didn't sense it. However, there was plenty of other evidence to tell me what happened." Jayk said.

"I don't know what you mean." Tylo replied.

*Deceit.*

*Fear.*

"Now that one I did sense." Jayk told him, "But you have no need to worry. When I was walking through the hangar I ran into a young man who was in something of a hurry. Or rather he ran into me." he continued, "He knew who I was and could sense that he was particularly afraid of me for some reason obviously more serious than simply not looking where he was going."

"You think he was up to something?" Tylo said, now being careful not to say anything untrue that Jayk might pick up on.

"You disturbed them didn't you?" Jayk said and Tylo sighed.

"Walked right in on them. Look, I promised I wouldn't say anything. Okay? Brae's not a child any more." he said.

"I know. The Jedi Code says that I should not be attached to her but I am and that's why it's good to know that she can count on you as well. If she chooses to see more of this man then that is her choice. Although hopefully in future he will be attentive enough to notice when he has put his tunic on inside out." Jayk said and he and Tylo both smiled, "Now strap in, we're ready to launch."

## 2.

The planet on which the dig was located had been settled for just over a century and was still only lightly populated and possessed only the most basic of traffic control systems in the form of a single surface beacon outside the only major settlement on the planet.

"Our destination is somewhat remote." Jayk told Tylo, "We'll have to call ahead for directions."

"Allow me. You just fly." Tylo replied as he activated the ship's communications, "This is the Jedi vessel *Swift Exit* calling dig team. Do you read me?"

"Yes, I read you *Swift Exit*. This is Lowra Sen. Follow my signal, we are expecting you." a woman's voice responded.

"I've got a fix. Six five by two oh seven." Tylo said and Jayk nodded.

"Lowra Sen is the representative of the Jedi Order we are to meet. Go and tell Brae that we are there." he said.

"Sure and if it's okay with you I'm going to grab my rifle. We're a long way from help and if something creepy is going on then I want all the firepower I can get." Tylo replied.

"As you wish." Jayk replied.

The twi'lek woman Lowra Sen waved as the *Swift Exit* came in to land on the patch of flat ground located beside the expedition camp and she waited as the ship touched down for the access ramp to lower, "Jedi Udra, thank the Force you're here." she called out as the ship's occupants came down the ramp and she walked towards them.

"Lowra Sen I presume." Jayk replied and she nodded.

"Jedi Exploration Corps." she said.

"So how did you wind up doing this?" Tylo asked, noting that the clothing she wore looked just like the functional robe worn by the other Jedi he had encountered, only lacking a lightsaber on her belt.

"My ability to control the Force was limited at best and I had a choice between this or recruitment." Lowra answered.

"By recruitment you mean going around and taking people's offspring from them." Tylo commented.

"Tylo you know what can happen if a Force sensitive being grows up without the proper training to control their abilities." Brae said and Tylo shrugged.

"Doesn't mean I like it any better." he said.

"Lowra, I need to know exactly what has happened here." Jayk said.

"You mean the thefts and deaths?" Lowra replied and Tylo's eyes widened.

"Deaths?" he commented.

"Your report didn't mention anything about deaths." Jayk added.

"No, when I submitted that there didn't seem to be any connection. But now two more have died and it's looking like there is something more going on here." Lowra replied, "Come with me, I'll introduce you to Doctor Tayne. He's the leader of the dig team."

"Lead the way." Jayk said.

Lowra escorted the new arrivals through the camp site that consisted of numerous lightweight prefabricated structures rather than tents to give the occupants better protection from the weather. Each of these had a name plate on the door to identify the occupants and Lowra walked up to the one labelled 'DR ERAMUS TAYNE' and knocked.

"Come in." a voice called out from inside and Lowra opened the door.

"Jedi Jayk Udra and his padawan have arrived Doctor Tayne." Lowra said.

"Ah yes, Jedi Udra do come in and join us." Erasmus said and as Jayk, Brae and Tylo entered the doctor's quarters they saw him standing by a table at which another man was sat, "Please allow me to introduce Coran Petter. Our guide and local liaison."

"Jedi Udra, welcome to our world." Coran said as he stood up and reached out to shake Jayk's hand, "And who are your companions."

"This is my padawan Brae Udra and-" Jayk began.

"Udra again? An interesting coincidence." Coran interrupted.

"Actually Brae is my also my daughter." Jayk told him.

"But I thought the Jedi did not have families." Coran said.

"It's complicated." Jayk replied.

"Jayk was with a woman while he was on assignment. Brae is the result of that relationship." Tylo said and when both Jayk and Brae looked at him he shrugged, "What? I just made the complicated tale simple. That's all."

"And this is our pilot Captain Tylo Kurrast." Jayk said, still staring at Tylo.

"Excellent. I only wish that we could be meeting under better circumstances." Erasmus said.

"Perhaps now that we are all introduced you could tell us exactly what the circumstances are doctor." Jayk suggested as he sat down.

"We were just told that artefacts had disappeared from your dig." Brae added.

"Yes, that's how it started." Erasmus replied, nodding, "When I heard about this planet and the potential for being able to excavate genuine Sith ruins that were by all reports still largely intact I was very excited. I needed to refer the matter to the Jedi Order of course but they agreed to send young Miss Sen along to make sure that anything we dug up that was dangerous could be made secure and Coran offered to be our guide."

"So what's your connection to this area? It's pretty remote." Tylo commented, looking at Coran.

"Most of the planet qualifies as remote." Coran pointed out, "That means that land here is cheap. When my grandfather arrived here he staked a claim over all of this area, intending to survey the land for any useful minerals or lifeforms. It was my uncle that later found the first of the ruins."

"Yes," Erasmus added excitedly, "virtually intact Sith settlements. Untouched by the Jedi military campaign that destroyed the Sith Empire."

"We're pretty far from the old Sith Empire doc." Tylo pointed out.

"Quite. What we are looking at here is a splinter colony, probably established in the aftermath of the Great Hyperspace War. One or two Sith lords and their followers evaded pursuit and came here to hide. They established a colony but their numbers were few and they fell victim to the typical ravages of their feudal system. Fortunately the weapons they had at hand to use on one another were far less destructive than the orbital bombardments used against the original Sith Empire." Erasmus explained.

"That all sounds normal to me." Brae said, "Haven't there been hundreds of digs like this around the galaxy?"

"Yes, which is why the Jedi Order permitted this one." Lowra answered.

"And it began like any ordinary dig as well." Erasmus added, "The first structures we were shown were empty but then we began to use ground penetrating radar and we found more of them. I estimate that this settlement was home to almost five thousand beings at its height. We used droids for the initial excavation. They would work over night to gain access to the buried structures and recover loose artefacts then during the day we would explore them and catalogue the contents. That's where things started to go wrong. At first it was put down to errors in the scanning, it can be difficult to tell the difference between a sculpture and a natural rock formation from an awkward angle so when the number of artefacts found by the droids was lower than the scans suggested could possibly be present the discrepancy was ignored. But then artefacts that appeared on visual and holographic recordings started to vanish before they could be formally catalogued." Erasmus then paused and looked down for a moment, "The first death occurred shortly after that. One of my staff was killed in a cave in. A support gave way in the structure that she was surveying and the roof fell in."

"She didn't even have the chance to call out for help." Coran added.

"I'm afraid to say that we didn't notice she was missing until she failed to turn up for dinner." Erasmus said, "The second death was a student who triggered a booby trap inside a newly excavated building. He was hit a poisoned dart."

"Didn't the cops start asking questions then?" Tylo asked.

"The police are only chartered to act within a specific radius of the main settlement." Coran said, "Further out and you have to hire a bounty hunter."

"And I suppose that you are further out than the police are allowed to act." Brae said and Coran smiled as he unexpectedly pulled a blaster from a holster that was hidden under the table and placed the weapon down in front of him.

"I never come out here without that." he said.

"People have been talking about a curse." Lowra said to Jayk and Erasmus snorted.

"Curses! Stuff and nonsense!" he exclaimed.

"I've been asked by a few people whether or not the Sith can haunt place like this." Lowra added.

"My uncle never mentioned anything about ghosts." Coran said.

"There are stories of jedi living on as Force ghosts after death." Lowra pointed out.

"An ability that has been lost for a long time," Jayk reminded her, "and the Sith never had that ability as far as we know. On the other hand we have no idea what they may have left buried here."

"Two more have died since and equipment has been either been sabotaged or taken." Lowra said.

"How did they die?" Tylo asked.

"Murdered. With a sword or some similar edged weapon." Coran said and Tylo winced.

"I had to ask." he muttered, "Well I suppose that definitely rules out accidents."

"But a curse? The evil ghost of a Sith lord come to drive us away. That's impossible." Erasmus said.

"Perhaps we should ask Cal for his input." Brae suggested and Jayk nodded.

"He has had experience with this sort of thing." he said.  
"Who's Cal? We weren't expecting another jedi." Erasmus said.  
"I think perhaps you should come with us to our ship." Jayk told him.



### 3.

"Amazing. I've heard of the gatekeepers put in place in some Jedi holocrons of course. I just never thought I'd get to see one myself. The Jedi Order normally doesn't let them outside the temple on Coruscant." Erasmus said when he saw Cal's hologram appear and realised what he was looking at, "I would love to be able to ask you about the experiences of your creator."

"First things first, Cal we need your advice on the ability of the Sith to manifest after death." Jayk said.

"Ah yes, the quest for immortality." Cal said, his image smiling, "Many Sith lords have looked for ways to avoid death, it's the one thing they all fear because for them it means oblivion. The Jedi become one with the Force but the Dark Side consumes the souls of the Sith rather than allowing them to continue on."

"But could the spirit of a Sith haunt a location?" Brae asked.

"Absolutely, yes. I encountered one myself once." Cal answered.

"Fantastic." Erasmus said, still overwhelmed by what he was looking at.

"Not for me or my sister it wasn't. We had to deal with the spirit of a Sith lord who had cheated death by uploading himself into the main computer of a space station. Thankfully we were able to destroy the machine he used to project his power into the real world and left him trapped where he couldn't do any more harm." Cal said.

"Well this Sith may have killed four people." Tylo said.

"Ah. That certainly complicates matters. Though I would suggest that it is instead some sort of ancient defence system. The Sith were notoriously paranoid and for good reason. As many of them were killed by other Sith than by Jedi." Cal replied and Jayk nodded and looked at Erasmus.

"We'll need to see the records of everything you have discovered." he said.

"But I reviewed everything that was found myself. Nothing has been found that has a significant presence in the Force." Lowra told him.

"Perhaps not, but we have to start somewhere." Jayk said.

"Then I'll show you the logs immediately." Erasmus said.

"Thank you doctor." Jayk replied.

"Oh Jayk before you leave there is something else I need to ask you. It concerns Brae's training so perhaps she should stay as well. Tylo too, he might be able to help as well." Cal said.

"What about my training?" Brae asked.

"Don't worry it's nothing to worry about. There's something that I think needs to be added, that's all." Cal said.

"We should let them get on." Lowra said, looking at the others gathered in the *Swift Exit's* lounge.

"If you say so." Coran said and he and Erasmus got up to leave with her.

As the three of them walked down the *Swift Exit's* access ramp Coran looked at Lowra.

"So did you believe any of that?" he asked.

"What, about an ancient defence system? It's possible I suppose." she replied.

"No, about why that AI wanted us gone. I'm telling you that there's something they aren't sharing with us. You're a Jedi, what's it likely to be?" Coran said.

"I'm part of the Explorer Corps, not a Jedi knight." Lowra reminded him, "Jedi knights don't generally share their concerns with us any more than they would with you."

"So do you think that it's because of a question about that girl's training that required them to be alone?" Erasmus asked.

"No. Not for a moment." Lowra answered.

Back inside the *Swift Exit* Cal waited until he was certain that they were alone before addressing the ship's crew.

"There's more at play here than just some three thousand year old defence system." he said.

"I knew it." Tylo said, sighing.

"I thought so." Jayk said, "If a Sith defence system had been activated then I would have expected far more destruction."

"You're right. They weren't subtle. Whatever this is it's clever." Cal said.

"What because it picks people off one at a time when they aren't expecting it instead of going on a rampage?" Tylo said.

"Exactly." Cal replied.

"Why would someone want to slaughter archaeologists?" Brae said, "Is one of the team a Sith worshipper?"

"Follow the money kid." Tylo said, "I bet someone is just helping themselves."

"Could it be one of Teron Sharr's or Morton Crayne's gang?" Brae suggested.

"It's possible but there are many other groups that would steal from an archaeological dig if they could." Jayk

pointed out.

"My money's on Coran." Tylo said, "I don't like the slimy little nerf herder. I wouldn't be surprised if his family had been selling stuff from here for years. Now that these university types have turned up they're threatening his income."

"Let's not jump to any conclusions just yet." Jayk said, "To start with I think that we should take a look at these ruins for ourselves."

"You better take me with you." Cal said and Jayk nodded.

"Brae." he said and Brae smiled, reaching out her hand and using the Force to call the fist sized crystal cube to her grasp.

"I said 'bring', not hurl through the air." Cal commented as his hologram disappeared.

"Well one of these things could sure make a mess of someone. The digging tools could easily cut someone in half." Tylo said as he stared at the row of labour droids standing a short distance from the ruins. Each of the bulky machines stood on four legs and was equipped with a variety of digging implements

"I believe that all the droids used here have restrictions on harming sentient beings." Lowra said, the twi'lek having escorted the crew of the *Swift Exit* from the camp site.

"So no-one around here has the skill to override that?" Tylo asked.

"The servicing is done by other droids." Lowra answered.

"These are what I'm more interested in seeing anyway." Jayk said as he walked closer to the nearest of the structures, a squat trapezoid with an entrance wide enough for three human sized beings to enter side by side. This size made it large enough for one of the excavation droids to enter if necessary.

"Doesn't look like much to me. I was expecting something bigger." Brae said, walking alongside Jayk.

"Doctor Erasmus says that the Sith who came here adopted a largely subterranean existence." Lowra told her, "The bulk of the structure is underground."

Sure enough there was a set of stairs immediately inside the entrance to the structure was a flight of stairs leading down to the antechamber that then led to a much larger gallery.

"There were bodies in here when the droids broke in." Lowra said, following Jayk, Brae and Tylo down the stairs, "The droids were programmed to alert us to something like that and they were removed quickly and placed in a refrigerated environment. All but one that is."

"What happened to the other one?" Brae said.

"Oh don't ask that kid." Tylo said, wincing.

"It disappeared." Lowra replied and Tylo nodded slowly.

"I knew it." he said.

"At what point did it disappear?" Jayk asked.

"When the bodies were being moved. The droids simply didn't take one to storage but witnesses saw every body picked up." Lowra said.

"That's weird. Even if there was something infecting one of the bodies that could reanimate them I'd expect the droid to register the loss of its cargo." Brae said.

"So someone intercepted it." Tylo said, "Tricked the droid into thinking that it had carried out its task and then sent it back here. Labour droids are only fifth degree after all, no real brain power."

"Perhaps we should carry on." Jayk suggested and he crossed the antechamber and passed through the large open doorway leading to the gallery beyond.

As expected this chamber was much larger than the previous one and featured an upper level that consisted of rows of tall steps on each side that were obviously meant for an audience to sit in while they watched whoever was on the lower level. Meanwhile there was another balcony at the far end that had an ornate metal seat on it.

"I see that there are no artefacts still in here." Jayk commented, looking around the chamber at various places that looked as if there had been some decorative purpose to them but that had nothing there other than bare wall.

"No, this structure has been fully catalogued." Lowra told him.

"What's that for?" Tylo asked when he entered the gallery and saw that one of the passageways that led from it had a length of bright yellow tape strung across it.

"Oh the research team use those to mark out passageways that are suspect. If you see one of those then the structure is considered unsound." Lowra said.

"How is that decided?" Brae asked, "I'm guessing that you don't just wait for the roof to fall in on someone."

"No. The radar scans are studied for signs of weakness. The plans was to send droids in to survey those areas." Lowra replied.

"Was?" Tylo commented.

"The droids were damaged in one of the earliest acts of sabotage." Lowra said, "Their central processors were fried and the handful of spare circuits stolen."

"So whatever was down these passages at the start of the dig still is?" Tylo said, shining his glow rod down the taped off passageway.

"Yes, that's right." Lowra said and then all of a sudden Tylo ducked under the tape and started to walk cautiously down the passageway.

"Tylo you can't do that!" Brae exclaimed, "The roof could cave in."

"Trust me kid. I know what I'm doing." Tylo replied as he continued to sweep his glow rod around. The passage walls were largely plain and undecorated and he saw no signs of anything that he thought the archaeological team would want to remove.

"Tylo come back." Lowra called out after him and then her comlink sounded, "Doctor Tayne must want me." she said as she lifted the device to her mouth but before she could speak there was the sound of static from the device and she frowned, "That's weird." she said.

"What is?" Brae asked.

"Well we're not that deep underground and our communications normally work perfectly. I'll need to go back to the surface and see if I can send a clear signal." Lowra said and she turned to leave the gallery, leaving Jayk and Brae looking down the taped off passageway Tylo had gone down.

"Should we go after him?" Brae asked.

"No, not unless-" Jayk began before all of a sudden he heard Tylo's voice call out.

"Hey you need to come and see this." he shouted and Jayk looked at Brae.

"Unless he asks us." he said and then he ducked under the tape and also headed down the passageway.

Brae hesitated, watching her father advancing past the yellow warning tape and then she sighed.

"Oh I've got a very bad feeling about this." she said before she too crouched down to get under the tape and headed down the passageway.

The Jedi could see the light from Tylo's glow rod coming from around a corner and when they followed it they found the former smuggler standing in a small chamber that, unlike the passageway outside was filled with artefacts that ranged from sculptures and carved stone tablets to what were obviously ancient weapons and pieces of armour.

"I'm sure that Doctor Tayne will be interested to find out about this place but I don't think it was worth risking being buried alive for." Jayk said to Tylo.

"Oh I don't think we're in any danger." Tylo replied as he walked into the room and reached between two larger objects for something, "Not unless you think that ye olde Sith kept modern droid circuitry in their temples." he added as he held up a circuit board.

"What's that doing here?" Brae said when she saw it.

"I think that Tylo has found where whoever is responsible for the thefts and sabotage has been hiding some of their ill gotten gains." Jayk said and Tylo nodded.

"If all I had to do to hide anything I didn't want to get caught with was string up a bit of tape then I'd do it in a heartbeat. Of course I'd also need to make sure that the droids considered expendable enough to be sent down the marked off areas were taken out of the picture as well.

"Couldn't you have let us know what you were doing?" Brae asked.

"If I did that then you'd have both come down here with me and if I was wrong then I didn't want risk getting you two crushed along with me." Tylo said.

"Wow, I didn't know you had it in you to be so gallant." Brae said.

"Gallant? Hell, I just wanted to make sure you two were on hand to dig me out." Tylo said.

*Danger.*

Brae gasped when she sensed the disturbance in the Force and Jayk spun around to face the doorway she was still standing in.

"Brae get down!" he yelled right before there was an explosion and the passageway outside caved in.

## 4.

"Doctor Tayne!" Lowra's voice said from Erasmus' comlink.

"Yes, what is it?" he responded.

"Doctor you need to come quickly. I was showing Jedi Udra and his team the main hall building and they insisted on searching one of the unstable passages. They must have tripped some sort of booby trap because there was an explosion and now the passageway has collapsed. It's completely blocked." Lowra told him and Erasmus leapt to his feet.

"I'm on my way. Don't do anything to disturb the collapsed section until I get there with help." he said and then he shut off the comlink without waiting for a response from the Jedi representative.

Erasmus quickly gathered together a team and they equipped themselves with both digging and medical equipment before rushing to the dig site itself. The possibility of a collapse burying someone inside the ruins had been obvious and although as much care had been taken to ensure that it did not happen the team had trained for just in case the worst did happen. Despite being the first time that this training had had to be put into effect the team responded quickly and there was little confusion about what needed to be done or who was supposed to be doing it.

"Doctor Tayne, it's that structure right there." Lowra called out the moment she saw the rescue party approaching and she pointed to the entrance to the underground structure that the crew of the *Swift Exit* had gone into. Her directions were not necessary however, a cloud of dust and smoke billowing from the entrance indicating exactly which of the structures had suffered the cave in.

"Make sure that the entrance is stable. We'll send one of the excavation droids in before we risk any living beings." Erasmus ordered and several of his team ran to the entrance, pulling breath masks over their faces to protect them from the dust in the air before they began to inspect the entrance itself. Meanwhile Erasmus turned to Lowra, "Tell me exactly what happened."

"The Jedi's pilot, Tylo Kurrast, he went down one of the passageways marked as unstable. I warned them what the tape meant before he did it but he ignored me. I left when I got a signal and that was when the collapse happened. Tylo must have disturbed something and brought the roof down on all of them."

"What was this signal that caused you to leave?" Erasmus asked.

"I don't know." Lowra admitted, "It was very strange. I received it underground and there was a lot of static." Erasmus frowned when he heard this, knowing from his own experience that comlink signals were quite capable of penetrating into the ruins.

"That's unusual." he said and Lowra nodded in agreement.

"Yes. Then when I got to the surface the signal just stopped." she said.

"Strange." Erasmus replied before there was a shout from the entrance to the structure.

"Doctor Tayne, we've confirmed that the entrance is sound at least. We're sending in the droid now." one of the team members called out.

"I'm on my way." Erasmus responded and he and Lowra hurried to the entrance where a portable computer terminal was being set up. This was used to bring up a live feed from the visual sensors of the excavation droid that had been moved to the entrance and once it was confirmed that the link was functioning properly the bulky machine was directed down into the structure.

The droid had to rely on the bank of powerful glow rods built into its body to be able to penetrate the dust that filled the air inside the structure but this was sufficient for the machine to be able to find its way around as it made its way through the antechamber and proceeded deeper into the structure.

"The collapse appears to have been in one of the passageway leading off from the main chamber." the computer operator said when the feed showed the dust coming from the passageway that Tylo had gone down. The bright yellow tape hung across the entrance to this was barely visible now, the dust too thick for it to be seen clearly from across the chamber.

"Send the droid in closer Reham." Erasmus told the operator, "But be careful. If the roof has become unstable I don't want to trigger another collapse."

"Yes doctor." Reham replied as he gave the orders to the droid through the computer.

Inside the structure the droid strode across the room, its head looking down regularly to check the floor for obstacles, or possibly a body that had been hidden by the dust. The droid was able to penetrate just a few metres into the passageway before it found its way blocked by fallen debris.

"The passageway is completely blocked." Reham said.

"Yes, so I see. Of course the question remains how far does that go on for?" Erasmus responded.

"Perhaps we should try signalling the Jedi by comlink." another of the rescue team suggested.

"Have you tried that?" Erasmus asked, looking at Lowra.

"No, it never occurred to me." she admitted, "I just called you right away."

Eramus frowned as he hurriedly took his comlink from his pocket.

"This is Eramus Tayne calling the crew of the Swift Exit. Can any of you hear me? Please respond." he signalled but there was no response. Eramus was about to try signalling again when all of a sudden there was the sound of a repulsorlift engine and Eramus looked around to see Coran approaching in a landspeeder.

"Doctor Tayne," Coran called out as he brought the vehicle to a halt and climbed out of it, "what's going on? I heard at the camp that there had been a cave in or something."

"Yes, a section of one of the structures has collapsed." Eramus answered.

"Jedi Udra and his crew were inside at the time." Lowra added and Coran rushed up to the computer terminal.

"Are they okay?" he asked, "How long will it take to dig them out? If it's a question of manpower then-"

"Coran I appreciate your offer." Eramus interrupted, "But right now we can't contact Jedi Udra, his padawan or Captain Kurrast. I fear that they may be dead."

"Jayk!"

Jayk's eyes opened suddenly as he heard his name being called and he tried to remember exactly what had happened. Looking around him he could still see the Sith artefacts stacked around the room, illuminated by the glow rod dropped by Tylo while his and Brae's lightsabers had shut down when dropped. The main difference was that the air was now filled with dust and both Brae and Tylo were lying face down on the floor close by where Jayk himself lay.

"Cal what happened?" he said as he got to his feet and picked up his lightsabre.

"The roof fell in nerf herder." Cal's voice said from beneath Brae's cloak.

Jayk went to check on Brae, crouching down beside her. Worryingly as he got close he saw a pool of dark liquid that could only be blood coming from under her head and he hurriedly took out a medpac, tearing open the emergency kit.

"Brae's hurt." he said.

"I thought so. I tried to wake her but there's only so much I can do." Cal replied and then there was a groan from across the room as Tylo began to move.

"Did we just get hit by an asteroid or something?" he asked, rubbing his head as he sat up, "I'm fine by the way, thanks for asking."

"Tylo you have a very hard head. On the other hand Brae does not." Cal told him.

"Kid?" Tylo said, rushing to Jayk's side.

"She was closest to the collapse. Some of the debris must have hit her." Jayk said while he continued to dress Brae's wound.

"Think she'll be okay?" Tylo said nervously.

"She's still breathing and her presence in the Force remains strong for now but we need to get her to a proper medical facility." Jayk said.

"Those archaeologists probably have an infirmary." Tylo commented before he went to pick up his glow rod and then looked around, "Of course there appears to be a shortage of ways to get her out of here and to it." he added.

"Hopefully Lowra will have raised the alarm. She left the chamber to answer a comlink signal." Jayk told him.

"That was convenient. Are you sure that she didn't have anything to do with the collapse?" Tylo asked.

"I don't see how." Jayk answered, "Or why. She is a member of the Jedi Order after all."

"Except that she can't use the Force and doesn't have a lightsaber. She's barely more of a Jedi than I am."

Tylo replied.

"Lowra did say that it was odd for the comlink not to work down here." Cal pointed out.

"What, so we could just call for help?" Tylo said.

"Unless whatever was causing Lowra's comlink to not work is still present then yes, I should think we could." Cal said and Tylo reached for his comlink.

"Hello? Can anyone read me?" he said into the device but there was nothing but static in return, "So much for that idea." he added before looking around and shining his glow rod at the collection of Sith artefacts in the room, "Do you think there's anything in here that could be used to get us out or maybe help Brae?" he said.

"Even if there is we shouldn't use it." Jayk warned him, "The risks of calling on the Dark Side far outweigh the potential benefits."

"You mean like survival?"

"Using a Sith artefact could unleash terrible destruction on many worlds Tylo." Jayk said, finishing his treatment of Brae and getting back to his feet, "No, we will be the architects of our own escape."

Jayk then made his way into the passageway outside the room and he activated his lightsaber for illumination. This revealed the extent to which the passageway was blocked, immediately outside there was

just a thin layer of debris on the floor but this got rapidly deeper until the entire passageway was blocked in the direction they had come from. Jayk held up his hand towards the rubble and moved it slowly from side to side.

"Can you sense anything in the Force?" Tylo asked.

"I'm not sensing the Force, I'm looking for a breeze and I'm sorry to say that I can't find one." Jayk replied.

"So we're stuck in here with no air." Tylo said and Jayk nodded.

"It does look that way, yes." he said. Then he looked down at Brae, "At least Brae's consumption of oxygen will remain low while she is unconscious. I could put myself into a trance to reduce my intake of oxygen as well but that would leave only you to dig us out of here." he told Tylo.

"The best I can do is offer moral support." Cal added.

"In that case I'd rather die quicker." Tylo said. Then he frowned and added, "What the kriff am I saying?"

"Come here a moment Tylo." Jayk said suddenly and sniffing the air.

"Why? What's wrong?" Tylo said as he made his way across the room to stand beside Jayk in the passageway.

"Do you smell something?" Jayk asked and Tylo sniffed as well.

"Now that you mention it I do. That sort of acrid smell. I know that from somewhere." Tylo responded.

"Detonite." Jayk said and Tylo's eyes widened.

"Stang, you're right. But that means we're stuck down here because someone triggered off a bomb." he exclaimed.

"Exactly. However, right now the cause of the collapse is of secondary importance to getting us and Brae out of here." Jayk said.

"Okay, so how about using the Force?" Tylo suggested and he pushed out his hand, miming the motion typically made by Jedi when using their telekinetic abilities.

"That is likely to be time consuming. A telekinetic push powerful enough to clear the passage could just cause further collapse by letting more material fall from above. On the other hand using smaller amounts of power is not likely to be any more effective than simply digging our way out by hand."

"And we'll never be able to dig our way through all that." Tylo said.

"No. Which leaves us with two choices. The first is to create our own way out." Jayk replied and Tylo frowned.

"Huh?" he said and Jayk looked up.

"How far underground do you think we are?" he said.

"How far? It must be at least ten metres. Twenty maybe. It's not like the floor of this place is dead level. There's no way that you'll be able to cut through with your lightsaber."

"Yes, that was my thought as well. Therefore, we will simply have to try and find another way around the blockage in that direction." Jayk said and he pointed down the passageway in the other direction.

"Wandering about randomly underground with a potentially limited air supply? I've got a very bad feeling about this." Tylo said. Then he looked at the still unconscious Brae, "What about her? Are you going to wake her up?"

"No. A stimulant could do more harm than good in the long term but I am unwilling to simply abandon her. I'll carry her."

"We. We'll carry her. We can take turns." Tylo replied and Jayk smiled.

"Thank you Tylo." he said.

## 5.

Standing behind Doctor Tayne and Lowra, Coran watched as the remaining excavation droids were sent into the underground structure, feeds from their sensors showing on the computer screen.

"Are you sure sending those things in is a good idea doctor?" he asked, "They might just cause more of the roof to fall in."

"We'll be monitoring their sensors for any signs of instability. Besides, I'm not risking any of my team until the droids have had the chance to get things started and relatively stable." Erasmus answered.

"That's weird," the operator, frowning as he stared at the computer screen, "we're getting some interference in the feed from these two droids."

"My comlink was disrupted when I was down there." Lowra commented.

"The droids will be fine. We still have a clear signal from the first so we'll know if more of the roof is about to collapse." Erasmus replied without looking away from the computer.

"Well I've got a very bad feeling about this. I'm heading back to the settlement. I'll be back with a proper rescue team as soon as I can." Coran said and he spun around and strode back towards his speeder.

"Don't be so ridiculous Coran. The settlement is too far. If Jedi Udra and his team are still alive then they can't wait that long." Erasmus exclaimed before looking at Lowra, "See if you can talk some sense into him."

"Coran wait." Lowra called out, rushing after Coran and catching up to him just as he reached his vehicle and was getting back into it.

"What are you doing Coran?" she asked softly.

"This has gone on far too long." he responded, "I'm coming back with help. Do things the old man's way if you want but the only way we're getting out of this is by taking real action. I suggest you make sure that things are ready for me when I get back." and then he started the engine of his landspeeder and accelerated away.

Tylo led the way along the remaining section of the underground passage. The passage went on for some distance although it did turn a corner and there was the occasional short spur to a short length of passageway that terminated in a dead end. All of these were lined by human sized doorways along both sides at regular intervals but each of these led only to a small chamber that had nothing more than a few fragments of ancient objects in them.

"What do you suppose all these were?" Tylo commented, glancing back at Jayk as he continued to carry the injured Brae.

"They have the look of living quarters to me." Jayk replied, "Possibly for slaves or low ranked labourers given their size and lack of amenities, "If I'm right then that could work in our favour."

"How so?" Tylo asked.

"We entered from what looked like a meeting chamber for high ranking members of the community. I doubt that any Sith lord would want his workers wandering back and forth into that if they didn't have a specific reason for being there." Jayk explained and Tylo smiled.

"Ah, so there'll be another exit that the workers could use to get in and out of the complex." he said.

"More likely to other places of work. I doubt the Sith considered letting their subordinates out. However, there may have been another entrance for provisions to be brought down if only to feed them." Jayk said.

"Hey look at that." Tylo said suddenly and he came to a halt, the beam from his glow rod shining directly ahead to where a length of yellow tape was strung across the passageway, "If we're already in the unstable area then that must mean the structure on the other side is safe."

"And since Doctor Tayne's team did not enter the dangerous areas it must mean that someone got to there via another route. One that we can use to escape." Jayk responded and the two men hurried towards the tape.

As soon as the excavation droids confirmed that the rest of the structure was not about to collapse Erasmus and his team donned breath masks to protect them from the dust that was just beginning to sink to the floor, rushed inside and began to unpack their equipment in the large chamber that the collapsed passageway led from. While they were doing this Erasmus shined his glow rod at the rubble as he tried to determine how easy it was going to be to clear.

"This will take hours to clear safely." he said, looking over his shoulder at Lowra.

"Maybe Coran will get back in time after all." she replied.

"We can't afford to wait and find out." Erasmus said before he turned back to the assembled rescue team and called out to them, "Begin at the top, I want a crawlspace so we can establish how far back this goes and get someone to the other side."

"Thanks doc but there's no need really." Tylo's voice then shouted from the darkness of another passageway and as the rescue team turned to look in that direction they saw Jayk and Tylo appear, Jayk still carrying Brae.

"Jedi Udra, you're alive." Lowra said in surprise.

"Yes, we feared the worst." Erasmus added.

"It was a close call doc." Tylo said.

"We need to get Brae to a medical facility immediately." Jayk said as a pair of Erasmus' team rushed up to him with medical kits.

"It's okay, we've got a bacta tank we can get her into." one of them told him as they unpacked a stretcher.

"Jayk." Cal's voice said from inside Brae's pocket and as soon as Jayk set Brae down on the stretcher he took the holocron from her.

"What is it Cal?" he asked.

"I'm picking up an interesting signal." Cal said as his hologram materialised in front of Jayk.

"What kind of signal?" Jayk said.

"The very crude jamming type. Normally I can detect devices meant for wireless connection up to about ten or twenty metres away but down here my wireless link is being blocked by static." Cal explained.

"The same signal that disrupted your comlink perhaps." Jayk said, looking at Lowra.

"We had some problems with the feed from the droids as well." Erasmus added, "Two of them anyway. The third was fine for some reason."

"That's interesting." Tylo said as he walked towards the three excavation droids that had defaulted to standing in a line to await further orders, "Which one gave the clear transmission?"

"The red one." Erasmus answered and before anyone could stop him Tylo drew his heavy blaster pistol from its holster and shot the red droid from point blank range.

*Fear.*

Jayk could not help but notice the reaction from several members of the rescue team who had been taken by surprise by the suddenness and violence.

"What are you doing?" Erasmus demanded as the machine exploded but Tylo ignored him.

"Okay Cal, how's that jamming looking now?" he said.

"Gone." Cal responded and Tylo grinned.

"Someone modified the droid's own internal comlink to create the jamming." he said, "It was multiplexed with the regular communications which is why its own signals weren't affected. Whenever it was transmitting the jamming had to be cut off. On the other hand every other transmitter would conflict with the jamming at some point because they weren't synchronised to avoid it."

"But haven't you just destroyed the evidence of how it was done?" Erasmus pointed out.

"I've made a similar mod a few times myself." Tylo replied, "It doesn't need any extra hardware, just a quick upload of code. There was nothing to be found that could point to who was responsible."

"In that case we should go. Brae needs medical attention." Jayk added.

To compensate for the archaeological team being so far from the planet's settlement, the camp site's infirmary was very well equipped and this included not only modern medical equipment such as a bacta tank but also a pair of medical droids capable of carrying out treatment.

"The patient has a severe laceration to the cranium." one of the machines said as Brae was being slid into the transparent fluid filled tube.

"So she cut her head. Yes, we know that." Tylo said.

"Will she recover?" Jayk asked.

Now that treatment can begin the chances of survival exceed ninety-nine percent. The chances of full recovery exceed ninety-seven percent." the droid replied and Jayk breathed a sigh of relief at having got his daughter to the infirmary.

"That was good work in deducing what had been done to the droid by the way." he added to Tylo.

"I figure it fits with what we were told about the vanishing body as well." Tylo responded.

"You mean that someone intercepted the droid before it could reach its destination, reprogrammed it and then sent it back for another as if nothing had happened?" Jayk said and Tylo nodded. However, before he could reply there was a loud scream from outside.

"I've got a very bad feeling about this." Tylo said and Jayk nodded.

"Me too. Let's go." he replied, both men drawing their weapons and rushing out of the infirmary.

As soon as they emerged from the prefabricated structure the two men found that they were not the only ones to have come outside to investigate the scream as students and staff from Doctor Tayne's team came to see what was happening.

"Does anyone know where that scream came from?" Jayk asked and a woman pointed.

"I'm sure it was from that way." she called out and Jayk nodded at her.



"Thanks. Everyone get back inside while we investigate." he said before he and Tylo rushed off in the direction she had indicated. This took them between two more of the camp site's prefabricated buildings and as they ran between them they heard another voice call out.

"Jedi Udra! Wait!" Erasmus shouted.

"Perhaps you should stay back doctor. We don't know what's going on yet." Jayk suggested as he caught up to them.

"No, I have a responsibility to all my people here." he replied. Then his eyes widened, "Oh no." he added before running forwards and it was then that Jayk and Tylo noticed the body he had seen, "Who could have done such a thing?" Erasmus said when he saw the condition of the body.

"Gutted." Tylo commented when he too saw the gaping hole in the dead man's abdomen and he knew that the scream they had heard had probably been his, a last cry as his body was split open and its internal organs came spilling out moments before the massive blood loss killed him.

All of a sudden there was another sharp scream that was followed by a shout as one of Erasmus' students came rushing between the buildings.

"Doctor Tayne! It's the Sith!" she shouted, "He's here."

"The Sith are long dead. One cannot possibly be here." Erasmus said, frowning.

## 6.

Lowra saw the masked figure as soon as she opened the door of her quarters and looked outside. It wore a discoloured and tattered hooded cloak that looked as if it had been buried for thousands of years over a suit of armour that was embellished with short spikes and blades that further tore at the cloak as it moved. Of more significance though was the ancient jagged edged sword that the figure wielded in both hands despite it being small enough that it could have been held by most humanoids with just one hand. Most of the research team had followed Jayk's order to stay inside but a few had ventured out, assuming that the Jedi had the situation in hand. Now the armoured warrior had just cut two of them down in rapid succession and as Lowra watched it then charged towards the closest living quarters, a building that Lowra knew was shared by about a dozen students.

Never intended to be permanent structures, the prefabricated buildings were made of lightweight materials and even though the occupants of the building had locked the door this did not stop the armoured figure from smashing its way inside and Lowra heard the panicked screams of the occupants as they saw the killer enter the building. Lowra ran across the open ground between her quarters and the building that the warrior had broken into and rushed inside. Right away she saw the body of one of the occupants, the bat they had tried to defend themselves with cut in half before they had been impaled. Then a crashing sound alerted her to which way the Sith warrior had gone and she followed the sound. This led her to a common dining area where it appeared some of the students had gone to try and arm themselves with kitchen knives. However, these had been no more effective than the bat and now three students lay dead while another clutched at their leg as blood poured out from a wound while the armoured warrior prepared to strike again.

"Stop!" Lowra shouted, "Why are you doing this?"

The masked warrior then broke off from his assault on the cowering student and turned towards Lowra.

"You know why," he said from behind his mask, "Everything here is mine by right. It does not belong to them." and he pointed at the injured student just as they died from the blood loss from the wound to their leg.

"The Jedi-" Lowra began.

"The Jedi are dealt with," the warrior interrupted, "There is just you and I now."

"Actually I'd like to dispute that claim," Jayk said as he and Tylo unexpectedly stepped into view behind Lowra and there was a 'snap-hiss' as Jayk activated his lightsaber.

"You betrayed me!" the armoured warrior yelled at Lowra.

"No I-" she began before she was interrupted again.

"Tylo would you mind getting Lowra Sen out of here? Be sure to keep an eye on her." Jayk said and Tylo nodded.

"You think you can handle this guy on your own?" he asked.

"Oh I think so. Plus revenge may not be a Jedi concept but I do have a score to settle." Jayk said.

Tylo then stepped forwards and grabbed hold of Lowra by her arm, dragging her out of the dining area.

"Okay missy, come with me." he said, pointing his blaster at her while Jayk stepped towards the armoured warrior.

"Now we'll find out just how well you handle that weapon against a real opponent." he said.

"It's not my sword I'm counting on Jedi." the warrior hissed from behind his mask and he suddenly lunged at Jayk with his sword held out in front of him.

The attack was clumsy, not the polished move of a well trained warrior and Jayk easily sidestepped it.

However, as he struck back while the armoured warrior was moving past him Jayk found that his lightsaber blade could not penetrate the ancient armour that his opponent wore. Instead the blade cut loose a section of the cloak but failed to do anything more than scorch the armour underneath.

"Surprised Jedi Udra? You'll find I'm full of surprises." the warrior said as he launched into another attack that Jayk blocked with his lightsaber, but like the armour that the warrior wore the blade of his sword proved to be resistant to the blade of his weapon.

"Sith armour and a Sith blade." Jayk commented.

"Just the thing to fight a Jedi." the armoured warrior said and he took another swing at Jayk only to have it parried once more.

"Perhaps, but equipment cannot make up for the lack of training." Jayk replied and he stabbed at the warrior again. This time though his attack was aimed slightly aside and just as Jayk had expected the warrior sidestepped to avoid the lightsaber. However, this was exactly what Jayk had wanted and he twisted his blade so that he could then drag it along his opponent's arm, starting just above the wrist and running right up to the pauldrons on his shoulder.

As before the lightsaber was unable to penetrate the armour plates covering the body of Jayk's opponent but

the system of straps that held the armour together was partially exposed, a consequence of it having been custom made to fit someone of a different size to the being that now wore it and there were momentary flashes as the energy of the lightsaber blade burned through these. The armour plates covering the warrior's arm were suddenly no longer held properly in place and they slid downwards.

"Stang!" the warrior exclaimed as he leapt backwards, letting go of his sword with one hand so that he could shake his arm to dislodge the loose armour plates and these clattered to the floor of the dining area.

*Panic.*

*Fear.*

"Ancient weapons and blind luck are no match for the power of the Force. I suggest you surrender." Jayk said.

"Not while there's a breath in my body jedi." the warrior hissed and then he struck again.

With one arm now unprotected the warrior changed his fighting stance to keep his protected side towards Jayk and this included now holding his sword one handed as he slashed at the jedi.

Jayk easily leapt out of the path of this attack and aimed his blade for the warrior's still armoured arm as he passed by, hoping to cut loose the protection on this side as well. On this occasion his strike failed to connect with its target, however and the glowing blade did nothing more than scorch the surface of the ancient armour.

The warrior began to get more frantic in his attacks then, swinging his sword back and forth while Jayk backed away to avoid the attacks rather than parrying them with his own weapon.

"Scared jedi?" he said from behind his mask when another of his attacks failed to connect but Jayk did not respond.

The warrior struck again just as Jayk was nearing the wall behind him and with no more room left to retreat in the jedi rolled aside to avoid the attack. With his sword already coming down, it was too late for the warrior to change the direction of his attack and the blade instead struck the wall hard enough to embed itself in it. The warrior attempted to pull the sword out of the wall directly towards him and to his horror he found that the blade was now stuck, its irregular shape caught no matter how hard he pulled. Seeing this, Jayk knew that eventually the warrior would free his weapon and that he had only a limited amount of time in which to finish the fight. Taking full advantage of the warrior's distraction Jayk aimed his next blow at his opponent's armoured arm, bringing his lightsaber down on the man's wrist where there was a gap between the armour on the back of his hand and the lower half of his arm. The lightsaber cut through the warrior's wrist effortlessly, completely severing his hand and the man staggered back from the wall, screaming in pain as he instinctively clamped his other hand over the stump of his wrist. Jayk then struck again with another swing that cut through the warrior's unarmoured and now exposed arm that severed it just above the elbow. Jayk stepped back, shutting off his lightsaber as the armoured warrior dropped to his knees and looked down at his severed limbs as they lay on the floor in front of him.

"Aren't you going to finish it jedi?" the warrior asked, looking up at Jayk.

"It is finished." Jayk replied before reaching down and dragging the maimed warrior back to his feet.

"Jedi Udra, you have him." Erasmus said when Jayk stepped out of the living quarters building with his prisoner, "Now perhaps you can tell me exactly what is going on. Why is Lowra under arrest?"

"I haven't done anything wrong." Lowra protested and Jayk smiled.

*Deception.*

"Lowra you forget, lies like that are obvious to a proper jedi like myself." he said before he looked at Erasmus and went on, "Lowra has been working with our fake Sith warrior here to steal from your dig Doctor Tayne." he said, "I expect that her access to jedi records would have made it easier for him to identify valuable artefacts that he could sell on the black market."

"But who is he?" Erasmus asked.

"You mean you haven't figured it out yet?" Tylo said as he reached out and pulled the mask from the warrior to reveal Coran's face, "These two were in on it together. That's why she conveniently left the underground complex before the bomb that was meant to bury us alive went off."

"It is also why she as a member of the exploration corps was willing to rush into a building to face a Sith warrior while totally unarmed." Jayk added, "Brae or I might attempt such a thing but our ability to use the Force would make up for the lack of a weapon. On the other hand she knew that Coran would not attack her. She wasn't there to try and stop him, she was there to warn him that we had survived."

"Now both of them get to share a detention cell." Tylo said, smiling.

"There will have to be a full investigation of course doctor." Jayk told Erasmus, "Even if the local authorities aren't interested then the Jedi Order will demand answers and that means that your project is likely to be shut down, possibly permanently."

"Somehow I don't think my staff will want to stay anyway." Erasmus responded, obviously disappointed, "They signed up for a research project for course credits, not to be murdered by these lunatics." he added and he

glared at Coran.

"We'd have got away with it too if it wasn't for these damned jedi." Coran hissed.

"Visiting you in here is getting to be a habit kid. See if you could break it would you?" Tylo said while he and Jayk stood beside Brae's bed in the infirmary of the jedi temple.

"Thankfully the healers say you will make a full recovery. You just need to rest for a few days." Jayk added.

"Fine, but can someone tell me what happened?" Brae asked.

"It was Corran Petter." Jayk answered.

"Just like I said it was." Tylo added.

"He and Lowra Sen were taking artefacts from the dig to sell for themselves. The signal that Lowra received right before she left us underground was to save her from the cave in Coran had arranged." Jayk continued, "The disruption to her comlink was caused by using a reprogrammed droid.

"Which I figured out as well." Tylo said.

"You're going to be really smug about this for ages, aren't you Tylo?" Brae said.

"Of course I am. Normally I have to fly you two from one end of the galaxy to another while you wave your hands and fight with laser swords." Tylo replied, "This time it was different though. Basically I solved the case while you lay unconscious and your father just had to disarm the main culprit." and he smiled.

"Do you have to keep saying it like that?" Jayk said, frowning before Tylo nudged him and nodded towards the entrance to the infirmary where the young man he had caught Brae with was standing, "Ah." Jayk said, "It looks like you have another visitor. Perhaps it is time Tylo and I left you to rest."

"Thanks." Brae said, smiling as Jayk and Tylo turned to leave.

The two men got about half way towards the doorway before Tylo suddenly halted and turned to look at Brae again.

"And remember kid, it's bed rest. Emphasis on rest. Okay?" he said and Brae scowled at him for a moment before with a wave of her hand she sent a pillow flying across the infirmary and directly into his face.