

STAR WARS

DARKNESS RISING

4-09: VISION & FORESIGHT

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Teron Sharr intends to create a fleet and for that he needs warships. Setting out to steal a vessel renowned for its devastating main armament he is confident of success. However, one of his gang has a previously unknown connection to Brae Udra and the *Swift Exit* and its crew are soon on his tail.

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1.

Jedi padawan Brae Udra walked through the corridors of what she somehow knew was a warship. However, for some reason the other beings accompanying her were clearly civilians and included younglings of various ages. A single being in a uniform was leading the group and speaking to them but Brae found that she was unable to focus on what he was saying, instead she was studying every aspect of the ship's layout and construction. On a bulkhead she saw a safety notice on which there was a silhouette of the vessel and she tried to place the class. However, before she could determine whether or not she knew the type of ship she was aboard she caught a glimpse of her face reflected in a highly polished wall panel. It was not her own.

Brae gasped as she woke up abruptly only to find herself now sitting upright in a bed in the Jedi temple's infirmary.

"Padawan Udra, are you distressed?" a medical droid asked as it floated towards her on a repulsorlift field.

"No, no I'm fine. I just need to speak to my dad." Brae replied as she pulled back the sheet covering her and got out of bed.

"Padawan Udra you were instructed by the healers to remain in bed." the droid said.

"I know but this is important." Brae said, looking in the cabinet beside her bed for her clothes. However, the cabinet was empty and she sighed, "Never mind, I'll just go like this." she said and before the droid could try to stop her she rushed out of the infirmary.

Unusually for a Jedi, Brae served the Jedi Order as her father Jayk's padawan and she now hurried through the corridors of the temple in search of him. She could sense that her appearance, wearing just an infirmary gown was attracting a lot of attention as she went but she ignored this as she focused on finding Jayk. Her first thought was to try his quarters. He was not there and none of the other Jedi knights she found were able to tell her where he might be. All of them seemed to want to speak to her further but in each case she dismissed them as quickly and politely as she could before moving on.

Brae's next thought was the main hangar, she and her father travelled on a YT-700 class light freighter, the *Swift Exit*, that was docked in the main hangar and Brae knew that it was possible Jayk would be there. Even if he was not then the ship's owner, Tylo Kurrast who had been a smuggler until forced to transport Jayk and Brae in exchange for not being imprisoned for his crimes was also often to be found in the ship. Even if Jayk was elsewhere then Tylo might be able to tell Brae where to find him.

Sure enough Brae saw the *Swift Exit* in the hangar among the more conventional couriers and starfighters that agents of the Jedi Order normally used to travel the galaxy and she ran towards it, rushing up the open access ramp. Upon entering the hold she could hear sounds coming from the adjoining lounge and she smiled, knowing that Tylo was indeed aboard and using the expensive video equipment he had had installed aboard the *Swift Exit* at the Jedi Order's expense to watch a sport broadcast.

"Tylo is my dad here?" she said as she rushed into the lounge.

"Hey hold on kid, what are you doing up and about? I mean you look strong enough to pull the ears off a gundark but you're supposed to be in bed. Especially dressed like that." Tylo replied as he paused the broadcast on the video screen.

"What? Oh, the gown. I couldn't find my clothes and I think that this is important. Is my dad here?" Brae asked as she walked across the lounge towards the doorway leading towards the crew cabin that they all shared when the *Swift Exit* was deployed. In doing so she turned her back on Tylo and he smiled.

"Err kid." he said.

"What?" Brae said without turning around.

"That gown is open at the back." Tylo said and Brae gasped, spinning around to stand with her back to the wall as she reached behind her to try and pull the gown closed, "Hey look I've already seen you naked from the front. What difference does the back make? To me that is. I'm sure everyone else you walked past between the infirmary and here saw something new though."

"Because you shouldn't be seeing me naked at all." Brae said, "Now where's my dad?"

"How should I know. I think he and Kat were heading off somewhere so if that Force of yours is with him then he's naked too right now." Tylo said and Brae winced.

"Please stop talking like that." she said, holding her hands up in front of her.

"Well you're welcome to wait here for him to get back." Tylo said and he pointed to the still paused screen,

"You can watch the game with me. No beer for you though. I don't care if you are nineteen now, who knows how it would affect you after than bump on the head you got."

"Fine but I'm getting dressed first. Are any of my clothes here?" Brae replied and Tylo nodded.

"Your usual spare travelling set." he answered, "Your dad left your lightsaber and other gear here as well."

"Thanks Tylo." Brae said, turning to leave and as she stepped through the doorway Tylo called out after her. "Naked from behind kid. Naked from behind." he said. "Really doesn't matter any more does it?" Brae responded and without turning around she ripped the gown off and threw it back into the lounge."

Jayk returned to the *Swift Exit* in the company of Kat Maran, the female jedi knight that he spent much of his free time with on Coruscant and as they entered the ship they could hear voices coming from the lounge.

"It was more than just a dream Tylo, this was happening." Brae said as Jayk and Kat entered the lounge to see her and Tylo sat at the table, Brae now wearing one of Tylo's shirts.

"If you are talking about your recent escapade around the temple then yes, it certain happened." Jayk said and Brae sighed.

"So you heard about that?" she asked.

"It seems that the whole temple is talking about it." Kat replied, "Of course the story differs somewhat depending on who tells it."

"Yes," Jayk added, "the jedi knights I met near my quarters explained that you were too impatient to be told about your wardrobe malfunction while according to a number of padawans you were rushing around the temple naked and screaming hysterically"

"Oh that's just not true." Brae said, "I was only naked in front of one person and that was your fault for leaving the closet with my clothes in locked." and Tylo smiled.

"Fortunately I was on hand to rescue her from her predicament. I was a perfect gentleman." he said.

"Perfect and gentleman. Two words I don't associate with you at all Tylo." Kat commented and Tylo's face fell.

"Perhaps you should tell us what this is all about." Jayk said and he and Kat both sat down at the table as well.

"Sounds like a nightmare to me." Tylo commented.

"It was a vision." Brae said, glaring at Tylo but the former smuggler just shrugged.

"A vision of the future?" Jayk asked.

"No, something happening at that moment." Brae answered, "I think I was seeing through the eyes of Mara Tosk."

"How is that possible?" Kat asked.

"Mara is possessed by something." Tylo said.

"Teron Sharr controls her directly. Brae has shown in the past that she can sometimes read the link between them. Perhaps in her unconscious state she made contact again." Jayk explained.

"Her eyes don't look human any more." Brae added, "I saw a reflection of her in my vision and she was wearing dark glasses to cover them up."

"So what was she doing?" Kat said.

"Taking a tour I think." Brae responded.

"A tour of what?" Jayk added.

"A starship. A warship I think." Brae told him.

"And I pointed out that militaries don't tend to run public tours around warships." Tylo said.

"Not modern ones, no. But what about something older? There are plenty of warships kept as museums."

Kat pointed out.

"Brae do you know what sort of ship was in your vision?" Jayk said.

"Not exactly. But it had to be fairly big. There seemed to be plenty of room inside. Plus there was a sign up on a wall that included a drawing." Brae answered.

"That could be all we need." Jayk said, "Cal did you get all that?"

"Of course." the hologram of an older man in jedi robes said as he appeared in the lounge, projected from a crystal cube that sat on a shelf beside the table. Cal was a distant ancestor of Jayk and Brae who had also been a jedi knight. The crystal cube was the holocron that he had created to store all of his knowledge and experience. In addition he had created a virtual version of himself to act as the gatekeeper to this knowledge and this appeared as the hologram that now stood in front of the others, "I take it you want me to access the Republic's database of warships and show them to Brae?"

"If you could, yes." Jayk said.

"Of course I can." Cal responded and then his hologram disappeared to be replaced by one of an ancient warship, "Let's start at the beginning shall we? Warlord-class, used by the forces of Xim the Despot."

"No." Brae said.

"Hutt glorious sword-class, used against Xim's forces."

"No, the first one was much closer. Long and relatively thin without any significant protrusions."

"Ah, so what about a ship of the kumauri-class?" Cal asked and the hologram changed again.

"That looks close, very close." Brae said, studying the image.

"This class was developed into the cal-class. No relation by the way." Cal said, the image changing slightly as he brought up details of the modified class of warship.

"That's it!" Brae exclaimed, "That's th sort of ship that Mara was aboard."

"The cal-class is the best part of ten thousand years old." Tylo pointed out, "They are ceratinly museum pieces but what would be aboard one that Teron Sharr wants to steal?"

"I got the feeling that Mara was interested in the ship itself." Brae said.

"At three thousand metres long that's a frightening ship to have in the hands of someone like Teron Sharr."

Cal commented, his own hologram reappearing beside that of the ancient warship, "Particularly given its role as a planetary bombardment vessel. If he could get that ship into orbit around an inhabited planet then he could lay waste to an entire city before they could raise their planetary shield."

"Or he could wipe out entire colonies in the Outer Rim territories where a lot of planets don't even have shields." Tylo added.

"That assumes that he can find one with its mass driver still functional." Kat said.

"I don't think we can take the chance that he won't." Jayk said, "We need to alert the jedi council immediately."

"Can I least get some clothes on first?" Brae asked.

2.

Karadon Ress, grand master of the Jedi Order glanced around the council chamber after Jayk and Brae explained her vision and what they thought it meant to them.

"Disturbing this is." Jedi Master Yoda commented, "That a link your padawan has to this individual."

"Master, I am more worried about the damage a being like Teron Sharr could do with such a vessel than about my daughter's ability to intercept his telepathic link." Jayk replied and Brae smiled for a moment, knowing that Yoda had always objected to the two close relatives working together even when they had both believed her to be Jayk's niece instead of his daughter. Jayk's use of the word 'daughter' instead of padawan was obviously meant to stress the relationship they shared.

"And what do you propose Jedi Udra?" the grand master asked.

"The holocron of Cal Udra is currently sorting through the Bureau of Ships and Services registry for all entries on cal-class warships. Then we will search for any that are currently operating as living history museums and check them against Brae's vision. When we find the right ship we will go there to prevent its capture by Teron Sharr." Jayk said.

"'We' being yourself and your padawan?" Master Ress said.

"Correct grand master." Jayk answered.

"Injured your padawan is. Perhaps chosen another should be." Yoda said.

"I'm healthy master." Brae said.

"Brae is also our connection to Mara Tosk." Jayk pointed out, "However, if the council feels that she should not be used in an active role then I would accept a third Jedi being assigned to the mission as support. Jedi Maran perhaps. We are dealing with a warship after all and she is qualified to deal with any ordnance we may come across."

"Are there any objections?" Grand Master Ress asked, looking around at the other members of the Jedi Council and his gaze lingered on Yoda for a short time. However, none of the other Jedi Masters raised any objections and he turned back to Jayk and Brae, "The Judicial Department will be advised of the danger so that they may make preparations for if Teron Sharr is able to make off with a ship. Meanwhile, in the absence of any objections I approve your plan Jedi Udra. Go and may the Force be with you."

Jayk and Brae bowed before they left the council chamber, passing between the masked guardians outside the door on their way to the turbolift. However, as they got into the turbolift they heard Grand Master Ress calling out to them again.

"Hold that turbolift." he said and Jayk pressed the hold button to give the grand master the time he needed to reach it

"What level do you need master?" Jayk asked.

"Any. Actually I just wanted to have a private word with the pair of you." Master Ress replied and then the doors slid shut.

"Is something wrong grand master?" Jayk said.

"You mean other than you rubbing your relationship to your padawan in the council's face?" Master Ress responded, "Jayk you know that there are those on the council who want to separate you. They see your pairing as a violation of the Jedi code."

"Are you ordering me to pretend that I am not Brae's father grand master?"

"I'm trying to tell you to be careful. Antagonising the council will not end well for you. Either of you." Master Ress said just as the turbolift came to a halt and the doors opened.

"Thank you for your advice grand master. I shall consider it."

"You saw my master?" Mara Tosk asked the young man sat on the floor in front of him and he opened his eyes to look at her. In the privacy of their own vessel Mara had removed the glasses she used to conceal her own eyes and Teron could see the two jet black orbs looking back at him.

"Of course I saw. The ship is exactly what we need. Fuelled and fully operational." Teron Sharr responded and then he looked at the man standing against a nearby wall, "What do you think Krovak?" he asked.

"I think stealing a battleship is dangerous. The Republic's going to know it's gone and come looking for it."

Krovak answered, "Besides, where do you plan on getting a crew for it? You've got just over fifty beings working for you right now and that includes this - thing." he added, looking at Mara and snarling at her.

"I'm not planning on waging a protracted military campaign. At least not yet." Teron said, "Fifty of us can pilot the ship for a single jump into Wild Space and there we can recruit as many as we need to crew the ship.

Then we'll find a few frontier colonies without planetary shields and make our presence felt. We need a home base Krovak and this freighter isn't good enough. With that battleship we'll be able to command the compliance of some atomic level world where the Republic and the Jedi will never find us. Later on it will be

come the core of our fleet, a fleet that we'll use to attack the Republic directly."

"You'd wage war on the Republic? You'd go that far?" Krovak asked and Teron smiled.

"Have you ever doubted that I would my loyal friend?" he said before he got to his feet and approached Mara, "For now though I want the data you gathered." he told her and without saying anything in return she simply held out a datapad that he took from her, "Come on Krovak, let's go and see how we're going to take our prize."

All three then left the compartment Teron had been meditating in and made their way to an office that had been used by the previous leader of the gang that Teron had overthrown. This compartment included a holographic projector in the desk and Teron connected the datapad to this. Instantly a three dimensional image of the massive cal-class battleship was projected into the centre of the office. This was a false colour image, with different sections of the ship marked in different colours to indicate their function.

"So the green areas are open to the public, yellow limited access and red off limits, yes?" Teron asked, looking at Mara.

"Yes master." she answered, offering no further explanation.

"So how do we get aboard?" Krovak asked, "Are we all just supposed to turn up and ask for a tour?"

"In a word, yes." Teron replied.

"But we'll never get any weapons aboard. They're bound to scan for them before letting anyone on the ship." Krovak pointed out.

"I will be the only weapon that we require Krovak. Although we can probably get weapons aboard for you and Mara as well. Thanks to her we have a full deck plan for this ship, including the sections normally off limits to the public such as here." Teron said and he pointed to an area of the ship along the dorsal hull that was marked in red.

"What's that?" Krovak asked.

"The security section." Mara said.

"Specifically the main armoury." Teron added, "Enough weapons to arm a regiment of two thousand troops. Not just small arms either Krovak, grenades and heavy weapons as well. All perfectly stored and ready to use. I can get us in there and then we'll have everything we need to overpower the security detail. Then we can take the ship wherever we want."

"The council has approved our mission." Jayk told Tylo, Kat and Cal when he and Brae returned to the *Swift Exit*.

"What about me?" Kat asked, looking up from the datapad she was studying.

"You as well." Jayk said.

"Not that the council were happy about it though. So have you come up with any ideas?" Brae added.

"Lots. It turns out that there are still several hundred of those old cal-class ships around according to BoSS records." Tylo added, putting his own datapad down.

"Fortunately not all of them are being used as tourist attractions." Kat added, "So each time we find another ship of the class we're running it by the tourist offices of the planet that it's registered to."

"Which still leaves more than eighty ships to chose from." Tylo said.

"Cal can you narrow it down any further? We may not have time to check on all eighty and by the time we hear about Teron Sharr taking one it will be too late." Jayk said.

"I hate to say it Jayk but we might not be in time." Kat said, "Perhaps the Judicial Department should be preparing a task force to deal with the ship as well."

"At least given how slow a cal-class is through hyperspace we can be pretty much guaranteed that a Republic squadron would be able to catch it." Tylo commented.

"I may have a way of narrowing down the search more." Cal said and he used the lounge' video screen to show several images of cal-class battleships, all of them either docked at space stations or in close orbit of planets. Each image was also marked with clear lettering explaining that the ships were open to the public and encouraging tourists to visit the ships.

"Tourist brochures?" Brae said and Cal's hologram smiled.

"Exactly. You saw the inside of the ship in your vision and there are internal images of all these ships included in the brochures. Perhaps if you look through them you'll see something you recognise." he explained and Brae sighed.

"Eighty you say?" she said and Tylo nodded.

"Sorry kid." he said.

"Fine. Let me see them. The sooner I start with this, the sooner I can be done." Brae responded.

In the ten thousand years since the cal-class battleships were constructed, all of the surviving examples had been through repeated upgrades, repairs and refits. Most had also changed ownership numerous times as the navies that owned them from new replaced them with more modern vessels and sold them off to owners

who did not need state of the art vessels and all this combined to give each vessel a unique appearance. Some had changed more radically than others, removing the massive spinally mounted mass driver that had been the defining feature of the entire series of kumauri battleships whereas others had kept the powerful if obsolete weapon. The problem for Brae was that her vision had been of one of the battleship's corridors whereas the publicity material offered by the owners the cal-class battleships now serving as tourist attractions focused on chambers filled with impressive looking equipment intended to tempt visitors into paying money for a tour.

Brae quickly set aside about half of the possible vessels though, the colour schemes of the pictured areas being radically different to what she had witnessed in her vision. She knew that this was a crude method of sorting and that three thousand metres of warship meant a lot of paintwork that could differ from section to section but it at least gave her a means of sorting her search. After this she began searching for details in the background of the images, hoping that there would be some common component that she had seen in her vision that also appeared in one of them. However, even having set aside a large portion of the material given to her, the search was still slow going.

"How is the search going?" Jayk asked when he appeared in the door of the crew cabin the Swift Exit's occupants shared while Brae sat in her bunk looking at a datapad. In response Brae just stared at him, "That good?" he said and he held out a mug that had steam coming from it, "Do you want caf?" he said and Brae smiled.

"Thanks dad."

"Kat made it."

"Then thank her for me."

"Of course." Jayk said as he set the mug down where Brae could reach it.

"This is impossible." Brae said, lowering her datapad, "I thought maybe the sign on the wall would help me find the right ship but I think everyone who has one of them downloads their signs from the same place."

"Have you considered looking somewhere else for answers?" Jayk suggested and Brae frowned.

"I think I have enough brochures already." she replied.

"I meant the Force. You obviously have some connection to Mara. Perhaps you can make the link consciously and find out what Teron is up to." Jayk said.

"Is that a good idea? The council seemed to think that my link to Mara was dangerous. Won't this just put me at risk? Mara is possessed by something created by the Sith after all." Brae replied.

"Brae you have come a long way from the girl I found trapped in a locker by her fellow padawans." Jayk said and Brae winced at the memory of being pushed into a locker and abandoned, "Your control over your powers has grown along with your resistance to the influence of the Dark Side. I have every confidence that you will be able to resist anything that the Sith may have left to try and trap you."

"And if I can't?" Brae asked.

"Then I will be here to support you my young apprentice." Jayk answered.

3.

Krovak's eyes widened when he entered Teron's quarters and saw the young gang leader.

"What the kriff?" he said, looking at the robes Teron now wore instead of his usual casual and heavily patched clothing, "Are you trying to pass for a jedi or something?" Krovak himself was wearing the uniform of an officer from the Republic's Judicial Department and he had expected Teron to adopt a similar disguise.

"In a word, yes." Teron replied and he extended his hand towards where his lightsaber sat on a nearby table, using the Force to call to it. The weapon promptly flew through the air and into his grip before he hung it from his belt, "If we are unable to reach the security section before the alarm is raised then we may have to cut through some bulkheads and blast doors. Can you think of a better way than a lightsaber?"

"And since only a jedi should be carrying one you need to look like a jedi." Krovak said.

"Oh I could easily hide it. Lightsabers tend not to show up on most weapon scans. I just like the idea of people thinking that a jedi is killing them." Teron said.

"As long as security don't ask us for ID." Krovak commented and Teron waved his hand at Krovak.

"You don't need to see my identification." he said, smiling, "Now what do you want?"

"Everyone's ready. They're in the hold and waiting for orders from you. I've made sure that the ship's lockdown systems are active. If anyone tries to get aboard while we're away she'll perform a micro jump when they try. If they're scanning then they'll see the build of power and get clear but if they aren't then-

"Then they risk being dragged into hyperspace and hurled randomly across the system." Teron interrupted with a grin, "It shouldn't matter anyway Krovak. This ship is adequate as a transport but after today it will be nothing more than a support vessel to our new flagship."

"So are you going to come and tell that to the others now?" Krovak said and Teron waved at the doorway behind him.

"Lead the way." he said.

Although the old freighter that served as the headquarters for Teron's gang was well over a hundred metres long most of the internal volume had originally been given over to cargo space and even after being modified with extra living quarters it still had a cramped feeling inside. The other members of Teron's gang had gathered in the vessel's hangar where there were several shuttles docked. The gang members had already split themselves into groups with each group standing beside one of the shuttles, ready to board it when the time came for them to depart.

"Quiet!" Krovak bellowed at the chattering gang members when he and Teron entered the hangar and in an instant they stopped talking amongst themselves and looked towards the two men.

"You all know what our objective is." Teron told them, "We will travel to the target in small groups to avoid suspicion but once inside we shall rendezvous near the security section. The *Red Blade* is ours by right and we shall reclaim her, after which you shall be the officers of my new fleet. Now get to your ships. We leave immediately."

Watched by Teron and Krovak the gang members began to board their shuttles and Teron was about to head for his own when he sensed an odd presence in the Force, something familiar but not a daily occurrence and he turned towards where Mara stood watching silently in her own Judicial Department disguise. In return the woman just stared back at him through her black eyes.

"Aren't we going as well? What's wrong?" Krovak asked him just as the presence in the Force disappeared.

"Nothing. For a moment I thought I sensed something but it's gone now." Teron replied. Then he called out to Mara, "Come on Mara, we're going."

Brae's eyes opened suddenly.

"*Red Blade!*" she called out.

"Hey kid, are you okay?" Tylo asked, startled by her sudden outburst.

Brae was sat in the lounge of the *Swift Exit* and it took her a few moments to readjust to her surroundings after tapping into Mara's senses instead.

"Yes, I'm fine." Brae said and she turned to where Jayk and Kat stood looking at her, Cal's hologram close by, "The name of the ship is the *Red Blade*."

"I don't remember that ship being on the list." Tylo commented.

"Could there be one that we've missed?" Kat suggested.

"Or maybe Teron plans to rename his ship and that's what he's going to call it." Jayk added.

"Or maybe you lot just need to look a bit closer at the brochures I found. Look." Cal said and he brought up a copy of one of the tourist guides advertising the museum that a cal-class battleship had been turned into.

"The *Great Lance*? In what language does that sound like *Red Blade*?" Tylo said.

"The *Great Lance* was a battleship in one of the Republic's reserve fleets during the Civil War while I was a

jedi knight." Cal said, "It was reactivated to shore up the Republic forces when most of their modern ships defected. On its first mission it was boarded by the Sith and captured. They renamed it the *Red Blade* and put it into service with their own fleet. It survived the war only to be recaptured by the Republic again and its name changed back to *Great Lance* before being put back into reserve, occasionally being brought back into service when it was needed but it never saw active service again. Then when the Republic's military was downsized to almost nothing after the Ruusan Reformations the ship was sold off along with all the others of its class that the Republic still owned. Being almost three thousand years old it was pretty cheap and the planet Pheros bought it to use as a patrol ship." Cal explained.

"A cal-class battleship is one hell of a patrol ship." Tylo commented.

"Yes and after about a century they decided that it was too expensive to keep running and mothballed her. Then about a hundred years ago they decided that they might have need of her after all at some point and recommissioned and renovated her. What Pheros didn't do though was go the expense of putting her back into service. Instead they turned her into a museum, using the revenue from the tours to keep her operational just in case she's needed." Cal said.

"Just how complete is the ship?" Kat asked.

"The brochure doesn't give specific details but it does say that all of the systems are operational and that there are areas of the ship that are either restricted access or off limits entirely." Cal said.

"That means she's fully armed and operational." Tylo said, "Her stores are loaded with blaster gas for the turbolasers and ready to go. Probably got all the munitions aboard for attack craft and troops as well."

"With a ship like that ammunition is not a concern anyway. She's equipped with tractor beams to scoop up asteroids that can be fired from the mass driver." Jayk pointed out.

"Should we warn the government of Pheros?" Brae asked and Jayk was about to say 'yes' when he reconsidered the move.

"No. If we do then they'll lock down the ship and not let Teron or his gang aboard. If that happens they'll pull back and we'll lose them again. We'll alert the Judicial Department so they can have a counter-piracy squadron on stand by and head there ourselves. If we can catch Teron aboard the ship then he'll have nowhere to escape to."

So we're letting a mad Force user aboard a battleship that he's planning to steal and not telling the locals about it because they'd be able to stop him easily if we did?" Tylo commented and he sighed and shook his head, "I've got a very bad feeling about this."

The shuttles flown by Teron's gang arrived in the Pheros system over the course of several hours, each of them coming in from a different vector so that no pattern would be detected by the planetary traffic control. Once in the system they further varied their behaviour, some heading straight for the spot in orbit where the *Great Lance* maintained a constant position while others headed for some of the other orbiting stations or even to the planet itself. This gave the appearance that although some of the gang had come here to visit the *Great Lance* specifically, others were just casual visitors with time to fill.

Last of the ships to arrive was Teron's own shuttle, a new model that was painted with the red markings of the Judicial Department and Krovak flew this straight towards the *Great Lance*.

"*Great Lance* this is Judicial flight trill hersh xesh one-one-three-eight respond." Krovak said into the communication headset he wore.

"Judicial shuttle this is *Great Lance* docking control, we don't have you on our pattern." the flight controller aboard the warship replied.

"No, this is an emergency inspection enacted under the Reformation Act." Krovak said.

"The Reformation Act? Are you joking? That doesn't apply to a ship of this class." the controller said.

"Well I've got an order here to inspect your ship so are you going to let us dock or do I need to report you for non-compliance?" Krovak transmitted, smiling at Teron.

For a while there was no reply while the controller was obviously speaking with his superior who would also be wondering why the Republic would send agents to inspect an ancient warship that came nowhere close to the limits on range and destructive power set down by the Reformation Act.

"Judicial shuttle this is the *Great Lance*," a voice that was different from that of the control said eventually, "you are cleared for docking but you better have that order ready for inspection. *Great Lance* out."

"For a tourist attraction you would think that they would be more welcoming." Krovak commented as he continued to fly towards the warship, steering the shuttle for the hangar that stood open with just a magnetic field to keep the atmosphere inside. As he flew the shuttle into the hangar he saw the rows of other small transports docked there, including all of the other shuttles that were being used by Teron's gang.

"Looks like everyone's here." he said.

"Excellent. In that case we can begin." Teron replied and Krovak glanced at Mara.

"What about that?" he asked, "Shouldn't its eyes be covered like last time?"

"Why?" Teron said, "Her uniform is the important thing. Let people stare if they want, it won't do them any

good. Now that we're aboard the ship is already as good as ours."

Flanked by Krovak and Mara, Teron strode down the shuttle's access ramp and at the same time one of the *Great Lance's* officers approached in the company of two security officers. Although the battleship was a military vessel none of the three beings heading towards Teron appeared to be military personnel, instead they were civilians appointed to take care of the ship until it was recalled to service. Fitting with this neither of the two guards were armed with blasters, instead each carried a simple stun baton hooked to their belt. "I'm the captain of this ship," the officer said, glaring at the three newcomers, "now would you mind explaining what's going on? I don't believe for a second that you're here to carry out an inspection and I've seen enough jedi to know that he's not one. He's far too young for a knight and he doesn't have a padawan's braid."

"What do you know? Someone who actually seems to know what they're talking about." Teron whispered to Krovak and then he stepped forwards, staring the officer directly in his face, "I am a jedi knight here to inspect this ship and you will instruct your crew accordingly." he said, waving his hand subtly as he used the Force to push the idea into the man's mind.

At first Krovak thought that the officer might just be able to resist the compulsion from Teron's use of the Force and he began to move his hand towards his blaster. However, all of sudden the officer's expression changed and he took out his comlink.

"Captain to the bridge, our guests have checked out. I want all crew to give them their full co-operation." he signalled and then as he put the device away he used his other hand to wipe a drop of blood from under his nose.

"Excellent captain." Teron said, smiling, "Now if you don't mind I'd like to start by inspecting the armoury."

"Of course, right this way master jedi." the captain replied and he pointed towards a doorway that was different to the one that a tour group was at that moment being led through.

Teron followed the captain, passing between the two security guards and in turn Krovak and Mara followed him. As Mara passed between the guards she looked directly at one of the men who had been staring at her obviously inhuman eyes and she bared her teeth at him as she grinned. Meanwhile Krovak studied as much of the hangar as he could and among the tour group currently heading out of the hangar through one of the other exits he saw three members of Teron's gang and he smiled to himself.

Under the influence of Teron, the *Great Lance's* captain escorted the young gang leader and his subordinates directly to the main security section, opening doors that were marked with signs designating the area beyond as off limits to tour groups. There were a handful of security officers in here and like the two that accompanied the ship's captain they carried stun batons rather than blasters. However, there was a rack of carbines along one wall, the weapons secured with individually locked covers.

"This is where the military weapons are kept." the captain said, pointing to a large blast door at the far end of the security section, "I don't have access to it but we have a full inventory in the ship's records." and Teron nodded.

"Good, then I'll need access to that. Oh and I'd like some privacy." he said.

"Privacy?" the captain asked, confused.

"Yes captain, privacy. I don't want you or your men leering over our shoulders while we are trying to our job.

"Give us the room captain." Krovak added.

"Of course. Everyone out, report to the secondary security office on aurek deck." the captain ordered and then he turned back to Teron, "You can reach me by the intercom if there is anything else you need." he said before he joined the security officers in leaving the room and as soon as they were alone Krovak rushed to the door and locked it, sealing Teron, Mara and himself inside.

"We're clear." he said.

"Good. Then let's get what we came for." Teron said as he drew his lightsaber from his belt and there was a 'snap-hiss' as he activated its bright red blade.

"Good job the captain never saw that." Krovak commented, "No one would believe that belonged to a jedi.

Now how about we get some of these guns out?" and he walked towards the rack of carbines.

"Ignore them." Teron told him, "Those are nothing compared to what's behind this door." and he walked up to the blast door that blocked their way into the military armoury and he plunged his lightsaber into it.

4.

Even with a lightsaber, it still took some time for Teron to be able to penetrate the armoury's blast door but the armoured metal could not resist the weapon indefinitely. While they waited Krovak looked for somewhere to sit down, while Mara remained standing and watching Teron as he continued to attack the blast door. Teron specifically targeted the point on the door where the four different segments all connected, knowing that this was where the physical locking components would be located. Sure enough the moment he had burned his way through enough of the door to reach these there was a sudden flash of light and the segments of the door began to retreat back into the walls and floor.

"Behold! All the weapons needed for an army." Teron called out, spreading his arms wide apart as the opening blast door revealed the weaponry inside the armoury. The area nearest the door was dominated by racks of small arms that included everything from blaster pistols up to disassembled repeating blasters, all of them ready to be issued along with the cases of power cells stored below the racks. Beyond this came the explosives and heavier weapons such as missile launchers and mortars along with all of the ammunition needed for them.

"There must be thousands of them." Krovak said.

"Like I said, enough for an army. Our master's army." Teron replied.

"Not yours?" Krovak commented and a smile appeared on Teron's face.

"One day. When I am the master and I find an apprentice of my own." he said before finally shutting down his lightsaber, "Help yourself Krovak. Take what you want." then he looked at Mara who had stood silently since Teron began cutting through the blast door, "As for you, send the word. These weapons are useless without troops to wield them."

Mara calmly crossed the room to a console that included an intercom and she set this broadcast across the ship.

"Attention please," she said into the intercom, making her voice sound as friendly and human as possible, "would guest Nune Lemne please return to his ship to receive an urgent message. Thank you." and then she shut off the intercom, having sent the coded signal that would tell all of Teron's gang members aboard to head to the security section to be armed.

"That's strange." Brae said as the *Swift Exit* entered the *Great Lance's* primary hangar and she looked past Jayk and Tylo through the cockpit canopy at the other ships present.

"What is kid?" Tylo asked.

"Well look at that ship over there," she said, pointing through the canopy, "that ship is in Judicial Department colours."

"I've got a very bad feeling about this Jayk." Kat said from beside Brae.

"Me too. We should hurry." Jayk replied and before Tylo had even brought the ship to a full stop the three jedi in the cockpit with him all leapt up from their seats and rushed from the cockpit.

By the time the *Swift Exit* stopped the jedi were already in the cargo hold and Brae opened the access ramp for them to disembark. The sight of three jedi charging from the ship with their lightsabers in their hands made the hangar crew stop and stare and one of the more senior crewmen marched towards them.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded.

"My name is Jedi Jayk Udra and I have reason to believe that you have an intruder." Jayk responded.

"Well tell it to the other jedi. The one giving orders while he carries out some laser brained so-called inspection." the man said.

"What jedi?" Jayk asked, already guessing at the answer.

"I didn't catch his name but his ship is right over there." the crewman replied, pointing at the shuttle Teron had arrived on, "He was with two others. A man and woman with freaky black eyes."

"That's Teron with Krovak and Mara. They're already aboard alright." Jayk said and then he looked directly at the crewman, "I need to be put in touch with your captain." he said.

"Let me get this straight, you're saying the man who arrived on my ship claiming to be a jedi is an imposter?" the *Great Lance's* captain said from his position on the warship's bridge when Jayk explained the situation over the intercom, "I welcomed him aboard this ship myself and confirmed his identity."

"No captain, you were deceived. Teron Sharr is no jedi but he can use the Force and he probably used it to convince you to co-operate. Now where did he go?" Jayk replied.

"Where? He was here to inspect the ship's military capability. He went to the armoury of course. My men left him there." the captain said before the seriousness of what he was saying finally overcame the mental block put in place by Teron, "Stang, no." he said, his eyes widening.

All of a sudden the doors to the bridge opened and there was blaster fire from the adjacent compartment and a crewman close to the door was cut down instantly. A pair of security guards reached for their batons but before they could do anything they too were shot as Krovak stormed into the bridge still wearing his Judicial Department uniform with several members of Teron's gang and began firing at anything that moved.

"We're under attack!" the captain just had time to call out before another burst of blaster fire struck him in his back and he fell over his console.

Unaware that the intercom link to the hangar was still active Krovak and his men kept firing even when some of the crew tried to surrender, he was there to take control of the bridge not to take prisoners and the crew meant nothing to him.

"That's the last of them. The bridge is ours. Someone let Teron know." Krovak said as the last of the bridge crew died and only then did one of the gang members shut off the intercom.

"They've got control of the bridge." Kat said when the intercom panel in front of the *Swift Exit's* crew went dead.

"And if Teron doesn't have engineering now then he soon will have." Tylo added.

"At least now we know where Teron is." Brae pointed out.

"That still leaves Mara and how ever many of their goons they managed to get aboard." Tylo added before a siren started to sound.

"Attention, a serious fault has occurred in the life support system." a voice that the *Swift Exit's* crew recognised as being Tylo's called out, "For their own safety all crew and guests should immediately make their way to the hangar and leave the ship."

"What should we do?" the crewman who had shown the jedi to the intercom asked.

"Do exactly as he said. Make sure that everyone gets off this ship quickly, it isn't safe for them here any more." Jayk told him.

"And what about you?" the crewman said and Jayk drew his lightsaber.

"We're going to see to it that Teron Shar does not get away with this ship." he said.

"So bridge or engineering?" Tylo said.

"Both." Jayk told him, "Brae and I will head for engineering to deal with Teron. I want you and Kat to retake the bridge."

"That still leaves Mara." Brae commented.

"Yes, I'm hoping that Teron has kept her close and that she'll be with him in engineering. If not then we'll have to hunt her down afterwards. Hopefully without Teron to control her that will be easy." Jayk said.

"From what I hear Teron is dangerous. Take care Jayk and may the Force be with you." Kat said and Jayk smiled.

"Watch out for Krovak. He is an experienced killer. You may need the Force with you as much as I do." he responded and then they separated, Jayk and Brae heading for engineering while Kat started to head towards the bridge.

"Hey hold on a moment." Tylo said to her.

"What's wrong?" Kat asked.

"My rifle. I need to get my rifle. I want every advantage that I can get." Tylo replied and he rushed back to the *Swift Exit*, running up the access ramp and then reappearing shortly after with a blaster rifle in his hands and a bandolier of extra ammunition across his chest before he and Kat headed for the bridge.

The *Great Lance's* ancient reactor, hyperdrive and sublight ion drives required a massive amount of room to be housed and the battleship's engineering section was divided up into several smaller compartments separated from one another by reinforced bulkheads, although each of these compartments was still massive themselves. This made clearing them difficult as there were plenty of places that crew members could hide among the machinery. This combined with the risky nature of firing blasters in anywhere near the reactor was why Teron led the group assigned to seize control of it rather than Krovak. His ability to sense people through the Force meant that he could find crewmen who were familiar with all the possible hiding places and he could use his lightsaber with impunity without worrying about a stray shot triggering an explosion. Teron did not limit himself to using his lightsaber though and when the need came he thrust out his hand to unleash blasts of Force lightning or lift helpless crew members from the deck and hurl them from walkways or into walls and heavy machinery as he and his gang members swept through the engineering section one compartment at a time.

Some of the battleship's engineers were able to make it to exits from the engineering section, it was after all designed to permit crew members to escape rapidly if the ship suffered damage in battle and Teron ordered his gang members not to pursue them. His aim was to secure the engineering section only so that he would have control of the ships engines. He anticipated that many of the fleeing engineers would seek to abandon ship entirely while any that hid could be hunted down later. Some might even be persuaded to join Teron's

crew, otherwise they would be killed as was anyone who tried standing their ground or fighting back with whatever improvised weapons came to hand.

What Teron had failed to anticipate however, was the presence aboard the ship of the Jedi and as some of the engineers lucky enough to escape from his gang fled towards the hangar they ran right into Jayk and Brae.

Fear.

Panic.

It was obvious to the Jedi that the engineers were running from something but when they saw Jayk and Brae their instinct was not to rush to them for help. Teron's disguise meant that they thought the two genuine Jedi were also aboard to kill them.

"No please!" one cried out when he saw the Jedi ahead of him and had nowhere else to try and flee to and he dropped to his knees.

"We aren't here to hurt you." Brae said and Jayk offered the engineer a hand back to his feet.

"But a Jedi is leading the attack. He has a lightsaber and he shot lightning from his hand." the engineer replied.

"Teron." Jayk said, looking at Brae.

"Jedi don't shoot lightning from their hands." Brae told the engineer.

"But his lightsaber-" the engineer began before he was interrupted by a 'snap-hiss' as Jayk ignited the blade of his weapon and this caused the engineer to step back.

"Did it look like this?" Jayk asked.

"No." the engineer answered, shaking his head, "His was red."

"The Jedi don't use red lightsabers." Brae said.

"Was he alone?" Jayk added and the engineer shook his head again.

"No, there were at least a dozen others with him. They had blasters but he led the way." he said.

"Understandable. The last thing you want when trying to steal a starship is to damage its engines." Jayk commented.

"Was there a human woman with black eyes with him? I mean properly black, no white or iris at all." Brae then asked.

"I didn't notice. I just ran." the engineer said and Jayk nodded.

"And I suggest you carry on doing just that. Head to the hangar or an escape pod. If you find anyone else still aboard tell them to do the same thing." he told the man.

"But what about you?" the engineer asked.

"We have a ship to save." Brae responded as she ignited her lightsaber as well.

The two Jedi watched the engineer run along the corridor towards the hangar for a few moments before they too broke into a run, heading for the engineering section as quickly as possible now that Teron's presence there had been confirmed.

While Jayk and Brae had to run most of the way between the hangar and the engineering section the path to the bridge was largely by turbolift, it being located almost directly above the hangar and so Tylo and Kat found themselves approaching it well before the others reached engineering.

Danger.

"Tylo get back!" Kat warned just as Tylo was about to step around a corner and she reached out to pull him back just as there was the sound of blaster fire and several powerful energy blasts shot past him, blowing large holes in the plating of the wall beyond him.

"Stang!" he hissed, "They must have taken a repeating blaster from the armoury. So can you get us down that corridor without us getting hit?"

"You mean deflect every shot with my lightsaber?" Kat responded, lifting the glowing lightsaber she held.

"Yep. At least the first one. If you could use it to hit that gun then we wouldn't need to worry about it firing any more." Tylo said.

"Unlikely." Kat told him, "I'm not the swordsman Jayk is."

"Pity. Is there another way around?"

"I'll have to check." Kat replied, taking her comlink from her belt, "Cal this is Kat. Tylo and I are outside the bridge between it and turbolift shaft fourteen. We're under fire from a heavy weapon. Is there another approach?" she transmitted.

"Not according to my files. Not a corridor at any rate, although you could always try the ventilation system." Cal responded and Kat winced.

"That's such a cliché." she said.

"Hey, if it works it works without us getting blasted into a million pieces then I'd knock on the door and tell them I'd come to fix the air conditioning." Tylo said, shrugging.

"Fine, let's find a vent and I'll cut it open." Kat told him.

5.

"A lightsaber? Kriff, that means jedi. How the hell did they get here so quickly." Krovak said when one of his team told him that they had seen someone with an active lightsaber outside, "Teron needs to know." he added as he took out his comlink and activated it, hoping that Teron would be able to answer.

"This had better be important." Teron said when he responded after a short delay.

"The jedi are here. One was seen outside the bridge by my sentries." Krovak told him.

"The jedi do not operate alone. If your men saw one then there will be another." Teron said.

"Oh great. Where?"

"I don't know where they are now but I know where they will be. They'll be coming for me." Teron said, "I think it's time Mara played her part. She should be able to provide an adequate distraction. How far off getting the ship under control are you?"

"We've got full access to the flight controls and we have full power available. All we need is for you to bring the engines on line." Krovak said.

"Good." Teron replied, "Make sure Mara has the power she needs."

"Understood. I'll get to it right away." Krovak said, shutting off his comlink and turning to one of his men, "Jaran, power up the weapons." he ordered.

Mara stood watching as the gang members sent to support her checked the consoles in the room she had seized control of. Unlike the bridge and engineering sections there had been no-one in here when she had arrived. There was no need to keep it permanently manned while the battleship was acting as a tourist attraction rather than a warship and no tour groups had happened to be present when they arrived. However, there were plenty of large signs all around the room that explained with words and large pictures what the purpose of the room was and the gang members were using these to determine exactly how the systems in here worked.

Mara.

The Sith created creature inside Mara became alert to the mention of its host's name and Mara smiled as Teron continued to communicate using the Force.

The jedi are here. We need to keep them away from the bridge and engineering long enough to take full control of the ship. As soon as we get into hyperspace we can hunt them down. You know what needs to be done.

"Yes master. It will be done." Mara said out loud, her words carried through the Force to Teron.

Jayk and Brae could see the entrance to the *Great Lance's* engineering section when Brae gasped and came to a sudden halt.

"What's wrong?" Jayk asked, stopping and looking at her.

"I think I just sensed Teron talking to Mara. She's not in engineering." Brae replied.

"Then where is she?" Jayk said.

"I think she's in the control room for the mass driver and I think she's just been ordered to use it." Brae answered.

Jayk took his comlink from his belt and quickly lifted the device to his mouth.

"Cal it's Jayk." he transmitted.

"Jayk I was just about to let you know, someone just powered up the *Great Lance's* weapons. All of them." Cal responded.

"Yes, Brae thinks Mara has control of the mass driver. You need to tell the government of Pheros to activate their planetary shield. They might have time to raise it before Mara can complete the firing process." Jayk said.

"Okay I'm on it." Cal said and as Jayk put his comlink away again he looked at Brae.

"We can't let Teron escape but we need to stop Mara firing that mass driver." he said and Brae nodded.

"I understand. Who do you want me to deal with?" Brae asked.

"Mara. I will deal with Teron." Jayk told her,

"You don't think I'm strong enough to deal with Teron?" Brae said.

"I think that Teron is the stronger opponent and although your skills are much improved since we met you are not a jedi knight yet. Now go and-"

"May the Force be with me?" Brae said.

"No. Take care of yourself. My adherence to the jedi code is questionable when it comes to you." Jayk replied and they smiled at one another.

"I love you dad." she said.

"I know." Jayk replied.

The length of Tylo's rifle made crawling through the Great Lance's ventilation system difficult and he had to be careful that the weapon did not suddenly strike the sides of the duct and give away the presence of himself and Kat to anyone immediately outside. On the other hand Kat was able to advance more easily and so she took the lead. This proved to be a sound decision in any case when the pair found that the ship had been constructed to limit the ability of an intruder to move easily through the system by placing metal bars across the duct at key points. These did nothing to obstruct the flow of air but meant that a human sized being could not get past them. Obviously any maintenance team that entered the ventilation system would need to know where a fault was so that they could get to it but the simple security measure would have proved fatal to Tylo and Kat's plan had Kat not been armed with a lightsaber. Using this weapon she was able to cut through the bars with two quick strokes, holding them in the middle to stop them making noise as they fell, before the pair crawled onwards.

All of a sudden Kat came to a halt, surprising Tylo.

"A little warning next time okay?" he whispered, "I don't want to be explaining to Jayk how come I crawled into his girlfriend's-"

"Firstly I'm not strictly speaking his girlfriend and secondly please don't go any further with that comment Tylo." Kat interrupted.

"Fine. So why stop now? Is there another barrier?" Tylo asked.

"No. I hear voices which would be easier to hear if you just shut up." Kat said.

"Okay sorry." Tylo said before being quiet so that Kat could listen to what was being said from outside the vent not far away.

"Status?" Krovak asked, the senior gang member now sitting in the captain's chair of the *Great Lance*, a position he expected to fill permanently when the ship was renamed and became the flagship of Teron's proposed fleet.

"Power has been enabled for the ship's weapons and the jamming is active. We can fire on the planet as soon as targeting is complete and the Jedi can't warn them." one of the other gang members responded.

"What about engines?" Krovak said.

"Still off line." another gang member answered.

"Come on Teron, hurry up." Krovak muttered to himself before he looked around at the gang members crewing the tripod mounted heavy repeating blaster set up in the doorway, "Still no signs of the Jedi again?" he added.

"None. Maybe they gave up." the gunner replied.

"The Jedi are relentless. They don't give up that easily." Krovak told him.

"Then maybe they're looking for another way in." another of the gang suggested.

"That door is the only way in and that corridor the only way to get to it." Krovak said before something occurred to him, "Unless-" he added and he looked around at the walls, searching for access points to the ventilation system, "They're in the kriffing vents!" he snapped.

Danger.

Kat sensed the imminent attack and ignited her lightsaber, using it to slice through the ventilation duct moments before the gang opened fire. Mounted externally on the wall of the bridge, the severed duct collapsed under the weight of Kat and Tylo and the pair of them dropped out into the room. Prepared for this, Kat rolled gracefully across the floor while Tylo instead came tumbling out of the duct and landed in a heap. The gang members in the bridge levelled their weapons and fired again, aiming at Kat when she leapt back to her feet while Tylo was still on the floor and out of sight behind some of the consoles.

Dodging and weaving, Kat used her lightsaber to deflect the energy blasts that she could not avoid, grateful for the fact that the gang members had enough sense not to try using their heavy repeating blaster inside the bridge where it could cause catastrophic damage. There was still some collateral damage however, as stray or randomly deflected shots struck consoles and there were showers of sparks as they exploded.

While the gang members were focused on Kat, Tylo stayed low and crawled to the end of the console he had landed behind. Glancing around this he saw the two gang members who were the gun crew for the heavy repeating blaster and he fired a rapid burst from his rifle that struck both men as well as the blaster.

"Kurrast, I know that's you! You'll get what's coming to you!" Krovak snapped when the heavy weapon burst into flames and its crew fell dead.

The sudden distraction provided by Tylo also enabled Kat to leap over a console and strike down another member of the gang before he could react and immediately following this she thrust out her hand to unleash a wave of telekinetic energy that was not enough to injure any of the gang members in its path but it did

knock them from their feet before she spun around to face Krovak himself.

"Fall back." Krovak yelled as he fired his rifle towards Kat. Knowing the risk of her deflecting at least some his shots right back at him Krovak aimed his weapon at her feet instead of her body as was usual. This made it more difficult for her to block his attack and instead forced her to dive out of the way while he and his surviving team members fell back towards the exit. Tylo emerged to fire his rifle again, this time aiming for Krovak but the other man noticed him at the last moment and grabbed hold of one of his own men, dragging him into Tylo's line of fire. Seeing one of their own comrades so casually sacrificed unsettled the other gang members present and all but one came to a halt as they tried to decide what they would do next. Meanwhile Krovak and the final gang member continued to retreat, fleeing through the open doorway while Tylo and Kat cut down those who now tried to hold their position and fired at random now that they were not taking orders from Krovak.

"Good luck undoing anything jedi." Krovak called out before he blasted the control panel beside the doorway and then dived through the narrowing gap as the blast door put in place to protect the bridge began to close, locking Tylo and Kat inside.

"Now what do you suppose he meant by that?" Tylo asked, looking at Kat.

"I heard them saying that the ship's weapons were powered up." she responded, "Plus they're jamming communications so they can fire on the planet without us being able to warn them."

"One of these panels must let us turn that off." Tylo said.

"Yes." Kat replied, "That one." and she pointed to a burning console that had been struck by a blaster bolt she had deflected away from herself.

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

6.

Charging into the engineering section, Jayk cut down the two gang members Teron had placed on guard before they had chance to call out a warning. However, the screaming of one still alerted Teron to the jedi's arrival just before sensing him in the Force.

"Keep searching for anyone we missed." Teron told the gang members he was leading, "I'll deal with the jedi."

Leaving his subordinates to carry on their search for any of the ship's engineers that might still be in hiding, Teron broke into a run towards Jayk. The jedi knight was not in the same engineering compartment as Teron and when he burst through the hatchway separating the two that they occupied he found Jayk already in the centre of the room on its lowest level and running towards a set of stairs that would bring him up to the same level as Teron.

The two men each ground to a halt and raised their lightsabers as they stared at one another.

"Here to face me alone old man? No padawan this time? Is she the one Krovak will be killing?" Teron said but Jayk ignored all of this."

"Teron Sharr you are under arrest. Surrender your weapon." Jayk told him, starting to walk towards him again.

"I think not." Teron replied and he suddenly held out his hand to unleash a storm Force lightning at Jayk. Jayk reacted quickly to this, holding his lightsaber in the path of the storm and blocking it. A move that enraged Teron and promptly he leapt over the safety rail of the walkway he was stood on and dropped down to the lowest level, landing several metres ahead of Jayk before charging straight at him.

Jayk stepped out of Teron's path and swung his lightsaber at the young man as he passed. Teron reacted quick enough to parry this attack but he was still thrown off by the suddenness and simplicity of the jedi's move. Teron took a step back before he launched into another assault, striking at Jayk with his lightsaber in a series of rapid attacks intended to put the jedi on the defensive. However, Jayk's considerable skill and experience were both far superior to Teron's and he was happy to block each attack as it came and he waited for Teron to tire himself out and make a critical mistake.

Jayk did not have to wait long for this, Teron's mistake coming when he thrust his lightsaber at Jayk in an attempt to impale him through his chest while still relatively far away. This forced Teron to lean forwards, shifting his bodyweight high up his body so that when Jayk again side stepped the attack the jedi was able to trip him over and Teron fell face first to the floor.

Narrowly avoiding cutting himself in half with his own lightsaber, Teron roared in anger as he landed and his weapon slipped from his grasp. Looking around he saw where his lightsaber had landed and he used the Force to call it back to his grasp. However, just as he took hold of it again Jayk stood on his hand and pinned it to the floor.

"It's over Teron. I have the high ground." Jayk said calmly, staring down into Teron's rage filled face.

Brae had to check her datapad to make sure that she was on the correct path to the compartment from which the battleship's mass driver was controlled from. As she neared her destination she slowed from her sprint to a more cautious pace, expecting Mara to have set defences to protect the position. However, the manpower required to operate the mass driver took all of the gang members under Mara's command and so Brae was able to get all the way to the control room without opposition.

The doorway to the control room stood open and Brae could hear the gang members reporting the status of the *Great Lance's* primary weapon. Mass drivers were complicated weapons and most had been constructed long before modern automation allowed for smaller guns crews, added to which the inexperience of the gang members as gun crew were making readying the weapon for use.

Thanks to the presence of the creature possessing her, Mara sensed Brae and turned around with her blaster in her hand.

"Hello there." Brae said with a smile.

"Stay back jedi!" Mara hissed as the pair faced one another with weapons drawn.

"I don't think so." Brae added as more of the gang members stopped what they were doing and reached for their own weapons.

"Keep working." Mara ordered.

"The weapon is already loaded." one of the gang members replied and a smile appeared on Mara's face.

"Too late jedi." she said softly and with her free hand she struck the console she was standing beside.

"Firing sequence initiated." a computerised voice announced, "Target will be in firing range in twelve minutes. Automatic countdown commencing now."

"No!" Brae exclaimed but Mara just laughed before turning her blaster on the console and firing.

The explosion of the console was the cue for the other gang members to begin firing at Brae and she swiftly moved to block their attacks with her lightsaber, sending the first shot aimed at her right back at the man who had fired it. Mara appeared to just watch this but Brae sensed the telepathic connection between her and Teron again and an idea occurred to her.

Reaching out through the Force, Brae attempted to contact Mara telepathically herself and in doing so temporarily blocked the connection between her and Teron. In addition with Brae's use of the Force coming from the Light Side rather than the Dark the sudden influx of power into Mara stunned the creature that possessed her and the effect was instant and dramatic. The blackness of Mara's eyes dissipated and they returned to their ordinary colour and at the same time Mara let out a piercing shriek as she got back control of her own body and she promptly collapsed to the floor and curled up in a ball.

The sight of Mara collapsing unsettled the other gang members and Brae was quick to use this to her advantage, charging at the closest of them before he could react and cutting him down. This took Brae away from the doorway though and the other gang members saw an opportunity to escape that they took, rushing around Brae and out into the corridor. Unconcerned with the mundane gang members Brae allowed them to escape and instead crept to where she could hear the sound of sobbing coming from Mara.

"Mara? Mara Tosk?" she said, shutting off her lightsaber as she bent down to check on the woman, but as she reached out a hand Mara suddenly looked up and Brae gasped as she saw her eyes once again turning black.

"Mara's gone." the thing inside Mara hissed and before Brae could pull back she lashed out and struck Brae in her throat. The blow was not strong enough to inflict any serious damage but it did cause her to fall backwards, dropping her lightsaber as she reached for her throat and gasped for air.

"I think not jedi." Teron said, smiling as he looked back up at Jayk, "I know where your padawan is now. I know what you sent her to do and I know that she has failed. Mara carried out her orders."

Jayk knew that Teron was goading him but the mention of Mara along with Brae made him think that what he was saying might have some element of truth in it and this momentary distraction was all that Teron needed. Reaching out with his free hand Teron released a strong telekinetic blast that hurled Jayk back through the air and allowed him to get back to his feet, his lightsaber back in his hand. He did not linger to continue fighting Jayk though, instead turning around and running as fast as he could before the jedi could pick himself up.

Leaving the engineering section by the nearest available exit Teron paused just long enough to use the tip of his lightsaber to melt the metal at the edge of the door to its frame, welding it shut so that Jayk would need to find another way around to pursue him. Then as he ran he took out his comlink and set it to broadcast to all of his gang aboard the *Great Lance*.

"This is Teron, everyone back to the hangar and grab whatever ship you can. We're leaving." he ordered.

"Jayk can you hear me?" Kat said into her comlink, "Jayk are you there? Brae?"

"This is Jayk, I can hear you." Jayk responded.

"Thank the Force. Jayk we've got trouble. The ship's weapons are powered and we can't shut them down from the bridge." Kat told him.

"Yes I know. Brae went to take control of the mass driver before it could be turned on the planet but I haven't heard from her." Jayk said.

"I'm fine." Brae said over the comlink channel, her voice hoarse after being struck, "But the mass driver is primed to fire and the controls are destroyed. I don't how we can stop it."

"What about taking out the computer?" Tylo suggested, "It worked to shut off the autopilot of that freighter."

"This is a battleship. The computer is too heavily protected for us to do anything about it in the time we have left." Jayk pointed out, "However, there may be another way. Kat, what's the status of the ship's other weapons?"

"All active I think." Kat replied.

"Good." Jayk said, "Then that's our answer."

"Other weapons? But if we shoot down an asteroid fired from the mass driver won't that just create lots of smaller falling bits of rock?" Tylo said.

"We aren't going to use the turbolasers." Jayk replied, "Kat what's the heaviest orbital facility near us?"

"There's a dockyard about ten thousand kilometres away. It's almost ten times the mass of this ship." Kat told him.

"Then that's our target. Everyone meet me at tractor beam emplacement number three. We're going to make sure that mass driver doesn't have a target to fire at." Jayk said.

Being the closest to the tractor beam emplacement Jayk was the first there and he sat himself down in the gun commander's seat before beginning to run through the arming procedure. Brae was next to arrive and

Jayk told her to sit at the power control station to assist him in getting the tractor beam ready for use.

“Okay we’re here.” Tylo announced as he and Kat entered the crowded room.

“Good, man the targetting and firing controls.” Jayk told them and they sat down.

“I’ve got the station in my sights.” Kat announced.

“What exactly is you plan here Jayk?” Tylo asked.

“We use the tractor beam to lock onto the dockyard.” Jayk said and Tylo frowned.

“But it’s too big.” he said, “Instead of drawing it closer to us all that will is that the ship will-” and then he paused and a smile spread across his face, “the ship will turn and take the planet out of the mass driver’s firing arc.”

“Precisely. Now it looks to me like this tractor beam is ready to use.” Jayk replied.

“Target locked.” Kat added.

“And I’m ready to fire when I have full power. Anything less and we might not be able to turn fast enough.” Tylo said.

“Full power available now but we might not manage it anyway.” Brae said as she double checked a timer she had set running on her datapad, “The mass driver fires in less than a minute.”

“Well here goes.” Tylo said and he reached out to engage the tractor beam.

The high powered beam of artificial gravity was invisible as it crossed the gap between the *Great Lance* and the nearby dockyard before latching onto it and joining the two massive objects together. Normally a tractor beam was used to either hold an enemy craft in place to make it an easier target or alternately to draw it closer for boarding. Normally this type of weapon was used on a smaller target so that the firing vessel would dominate the combined mass created but on this occasion the tractor beam was being used as a replacement for the battleship’s ion drive and it was the dockyard that became the anchoring point. Some external features were torn away from the dockyard but in general the well built structure remained intact and the *Great Lance* began to steadily turn towards it, the surface of Pheros disappearing in the targeting displays.

“Twenty seconds until firing.” Brae said.

“Planetary surface is still in the firing arc.” Kat added.

“Hurry up Tylo.” Brae said.

“This ain’t like flying a ship kid.” he responded, “The tractor beam is at full power and we’re turning as fast as possible.”

“Ten seconds.” Brae continued, “Nine. Eight. Seven. Six. Five. Four. Three. Two. One.”

Even from several decks away the crew of the *Swift Exit* heard the sound of the mass driver firing and the sensor console in front of Jayk showed the asteroid that had been loaded into the weapon purely to demonstrate to tourists how wars used to be fought flying into space ahead of the vessel.

“Stang, she’s going to hit.” Kat said as she watched the asteroid head towards the planet.

“I don’t think so Kat. Look again at the numbers.” Tylo replied, smiling and as they watched they saw the asteroid begin to glow as it skimmed the upper reaches of Pheros’ atmosphere and its surface began to heat up. This lasted only for a few brief moments however, before the asteroid suddenly veered off into space and headed away from the planet.

“I knew it.” Tylo said, “The angle wasn’t right and it bounced off back into space. We might need to warn the locals about a new hazard to navigation though.”

“It isn’t the hazard to navigation that worries me.” Jayk commented, “Not only did Teron Sharr escape again but somehow I have to explain to the locals about the mess made of their tourist attraction.”