

STAR WARS

DARKNESS RISING

4-1-1: DIVERSION & DEATH

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4-11: DIVERSION & DEATH

When Teron Sharr discovers that there is a beacon aboard the *Swift Exit* he plans on using it to force the Jedi into an ambush in a remote system far from any help.

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1.

The remote training device hovered in front of Teron Sharr, moving from side to side to avoid the glowing red lightsaber he wielded. Every so often the remote would fire a jolt of energy at Teron and he would attempt to block it with his weapon. However, he lacked the years of training that a Jedi padawan received before being given a field assignment and every so often one of the blasts got past the blade and struck him.

"Stang!" he hissed as another shot struck the back of his hand.

"Use the pain my young apprentice." the holographic figure on the communication pad behind Teron said.

Teron only ever communicated with his master through the communication pad in this chamber and so this was also where he carried out most of his training, "Remember how it feels and draw strength from it."

The remote fired again before Teron could reply and once again was able to bypass his lightsaber, causing him to cry out in pain. Then he swung his lightsaber quickly enough that the remote was unable to dodge it in time and the device exploded in mid air.

"Excellent. Your instincts are improving." the hologram of the hooded figure said as the door to the room slid open and a woman entered. This woman appeared human except for the totally black orbs that were her eyes, a result of the creature created using Sith science that now inhabited and controlled her body.

"What is it Mara?" Teron asked. The possessed Mara was not prone to simply wandering around their ship, in fact between operations she did nothing not immediately required to maintain her appropriated body and this had given her an increasingly unkept appearance.

"The host remembers." Mara said.

Although the creature inside Mara was able to make use of her skills its access to her memories was patchy and every so often something new would surface. However, it was rare for the creature to deem anything new that it had discovered worthy of being reported to Teron.

"Remembers what?" he asked.

"The Jedi. Their ship. A beacon." Mara said.

"Mara placed a homing beacon on their ship?" Teron said, his eyes widening.

"Yes. The one called Morton ordered it. It is connected to their communications." Mara told him.

"So we can track them?"

"Perhaps. Its range is short." Mara said.

"Or perhaps we can make alternate use of it." Teron said, a smile spreading across his face and then he turned towards the hologram and knelt in front of it, "Master, with your permission." he said.

"Speak." the hologram replied.

"Master the Jedi have opposed us at every turn. If Morton Crayne had a way of tracking their vessel then perhaps we can use it to locate them as well. Then we can destroy them." Teron said and the hologram let out a brief laugh.

"And how would you do that exactly? Your powers are growing but the Udras are stronger." he said.

"Master Jayk and Brae Udra are strong in the Force but they have one glaring weakness."

"And what is this weakness you think you have found that I do not know of?"

"Their ship. They travel in a freighter owned by Tylo Kurrast. If I can find it in space then my forces can attack. Even a Jedi cannot survive in the depths of space without a ship." Teron said and under his hood, the man in the hologram smiled.

"Yes, yes it could work. Go now and return to me when Jayk and Brae Udra have gone to join the Force." he said before his image flickered and vanished.

Teron then turned to Mara.

"Tell me everything about this beacon." he said.

"Okay flight time from Teramar to Coruscant is about seven hours we should be back at the temple in time for the council to court martial you and Brae for screwing up before dinnertime." Tylo said, looking at Jayk from the pilot's seat of the YT-700 class freighter *Swift Exit*, "Unless you want us to go back for Dahlis."

"The professor wanted to visit friends on Alderaan. He's happy taking commercial transport." Jayk replied before he felt a tremor in the Force.

Anger.

"I think that Brae may have just discovered the joke." the Jedi added.

"Tylo!" Brae Udra, who was both Jayk's padawan and daughter, "Tylo I know you did this to me!" and moments later a young woman wearing a bright red bodyglove appeared in the doorway of the *Swift Exit*'s cockpit.

"Hey kid. What's wrong?" Tylo asked, smiling.

"What's wrong? The zip of this bodyglove is glued shut and I know it had to be you that did it." Brae said,

pointing to the back of her neck where the bodyglove fastened.

"Hey it wasn't me that glued it." Tylo said.

"Oh sure. So who was it then? Am I supposed to believe that it was my dad?" Brae said and then all of a sudden she frowned, "Hey, I didn't sense a lie from you. I know you're a good liar but not that good."

"Over to you I think." Tylo said to Jayk.

"Dad? You did this?" Brae said.

"I applied the glue, yes." Jayk admitted.

"But it was Cal's idea." Tylo added and Brae's jaw dropped.

"Cal?" she said. Cal Udra had been a jedi knight thousands of years earlier and was a distant ancestor of Jayk and Brae. Now he existed in the form of a virtual recreation the original had made to be the gatekeeper of the holocron he had made during his life to contain a record of all of his knowledge and experiences.

"Someone called?" Cal's voice said over the intercom. Although he was capable of appearing as a hologram he could do so only where his holocron was located. However, he was capable of interfacing with many of the *Swift Exit's* systems, including its internal and external communications.

"Cal did you tell my dad to glue my bodyglove shut?" Brae asked.

"Ah so you've figured it out at last." Cal said, "My sister would have found out much quicker you know."

"Cal I'm stuck in this." Brae said, "If I cut it open it'll be ruined."

"No you're not. Just apply a little solvent and it'll open up easily. You said you wanted to keep the bodyglove and this way it won't get damaged. Jayk has it." Cal said.

"Not any more he doesn't." Tylo said.

"Tylo threw the solvent in a pond." Jayk added and Brae glared at Tylo.

"What's the fuss kid? There's another zip if you need the refresher and we'll be back on Coruscant in seven hours. I'm sure there's plenty of solvent at the jedi temple." he said.

"Fine. But don't think that I'm changing before we report to the council. We'll see what they think of this." Brae said before turning around and exiting the cockpit.

"Okay well now that we've got that over with standby for the jump to hyperspace." Tylo said and he reached out and engaged the *Swift Exit's* hyperdrive.

"Hey Tylo is there something wrong with the subspace antenna?" Cal asked just after the stars of realspace had blurred into the bright tunnel of hyperspace.

"Not that I've noticed. Why?" Tylo replied and both he and Jayk looked at the flight controls, paying close attention to the communication panel.

"Because I noticed a spike on the receiver right as we were entering hyperspace." Cal said, "The system acknowledged the link as well for a moment."

"That's odd. No-one was trying to contact us." Tylo commented.

"No but a received signal could have other uses." Jayk said, frowning.

"You mean a connection trace?" Tylo asked and Jayk nodded.

"Well a fat lot of use that's going to do for them now." Tylo said, "We're in hyperspace and we won't be dropping out until we reach Coruscant. Anyone who attacked us would have to be insane to attack us in the system where the Judicial Department's anti-piracy forces have their headquarters. Not to mention the Sector Rangers, Senatorial Guard and Jedi Order."

"Perhaps." Jayk said, "But I have a bad feeling that whoever sent that signal has something else planned for us."

"Well?" Teron asked the woman sat at one of the consoles in the flight deck of his freighter and she leant back and smiled at him.

"I did just as you said." she replied, "I targeted the beacon's ID code and used that to get into their system. It was crude but I'm pretty sure it worked."

"How sure?" the larger man standing beside Teron asked.

"Please forgive Krovak." Teron said, "He does not trust people as easily as I do."

"Well I'm as close to one hundred percent sure as I can be. The code was uploaded with the connection trace into the beacon. If she-" the woman said, nervously looking around at where Mara stood, "-if she was correct about how it's connected then the ship's jump data will be overwritten and instead of going where they want to, they'll end up here."

"How long before they get here?" Krovak said.

"Given the speed of a YT-seven hundred, about three hours." the woman answered.

"Tell the crew," Teron said, "I want everyone ready in two hours. When the jedi get here they'll find us waiting for them."

"She might look like she's meditating but I suspect that she just isn't talking to us." Cal told Jayk and Tylo when they walked into the *Swift Exit's* lounge and found Brae sat in the middle of the room with her legs

folded and her eyes closed.

"Doesn't bother me. I spent years aboard this ship alone." Tylo said as he went over to the fridge and opened it, "Anyone who wants a beer speak up now." he said and he looked at Brae.

"I would be disappointed if she could be distracted that easily." Jayk said as he sat down.

"Worth a shot." Tylo replied, shrugging as he took a bottle from the fridge and opened it. Then as he walked towards the nearest chair he looked at Cal's hologram, "So Cal, tell us about some of the practical jokes you played on your sister. I bet the Jedi were wilder in the good old days."

"I once tied Lara's pig tails to the bed while she was asleep." Cal responded and Tylo frowned.

"That's it? You tied a little girl's hair to the bed?" he said.

"She was twenty-two at the time I seem to remember." Cal said, "On the other hand she used to pretend that my dog Ghost was in fact hers when his previous owner obviously gave him to me."

"You had a dog? I didn't think Jedi had pets." Tylo said and then he glanced at Brae again and added,

"Present company excepted of course." and then he smiled when this prompted her to open one eye briefly to glare at him.

"A pet represents an emotional attachment." Jayk pointed out.

"Ah of course." he said before an alarm sounded, "What the hell?" he commented.

"We're about to drop out of hyperspace." Cal told him.

"We can't be. We're not even half way to Coruscant." Tylo said and both he and Jayk got up and rushed to the cockpit just in time to see the bright tunnel of hyperspace revert to the star field of realspace.

"This is not the Coruscant system." Jayk said.

"I know that." Tylo replied.

"In fact I'm not picking up any form of navigational beacon. I don't think that we're in an inhabited system at all."

"Then where the hell are we?" Tylo commented.

"You should know. You set the co-ordinates." Jayk pointed out.

"I set them for Coruscant." Tylo protested.

"Has Tylo screwed up again?" Brae asked when she appeared in the doorway behind the two men.

"Oh so now she speaks." Tylo replied, "And in answer to your question, no I have not screwed up. Now sit down while I try and figure out what's gone wrong."

"They're here." Krovak said when the freighter's sensors picked up the arrival of the Swift Exit and Teron smiled.

"Excellent. Send to all ships, commence the attack as planned." he replied.

2.

"I don't get it, the hyperdrive is registering as fully operational. We should still be in hyperspace instead of here." Tylo said as he studied the instruments in front of him.

"And where is 'here' exactly?" Brae asked and Tylo frowned.

"Right now I'm not so sure." he said.

"Which means jumping back into hyperspace is a bad idea. There could be any number of gravity wells nearby." Jayk added.

"Well it sure as hell wasn't some rogue gravity well that brought us out of hyperspace here." Tylo said, "The computer confirms that we're in free space."

"And we're not alone." Jayk said as he looked at the sensors, "I've got three contacts coming over the horizon of the moon at six three by minus seventeen. They're heading right for us."

"Are they broadcasting idents?" Tylo asked when he glanced at the sensor display for himself and saw the sensor contacts approaching from behind one of the moons of a nearby gas giant.

"No but they're jamming our communications." Jayk answered.

"It's a trap." Brae exclaimed and Tylo nodded.

"I think you're right kid. Everyone hold on." he said as he brought the *Swift Exit's* ion drives up to full power.

"Tylo power up the turret. Brae take over from me." Jayk said as he got to his feet.

"Wait, the turret?" Brae said.

"Yes. If those contacts are hostile then they aren't going to find us completely helpless." Jayk answered.

Brae quickly moved to the now vacant co-pilot's seat and looked at the sensor display. This clearly showed three small vessels approaching the *Swift Exit*. Their speed was not much faster than the light freighter though, suggesting that at least one of them was not a modern starfighter and that the pilots were maintaining a formation. However, there was still the issue of their numerical advantage and Brae could not help but notice that the ships were all in the *Swift Exit's* forward arc.

"Tylo, you realise that they're ahead of us." she said, "Right in front of us in fact."

"Of course. Stabilise the front deflector." he replied.

"You're going to attack them?"

"No I'm just flying right towards them. You're dad will attack them when they come within range." Tylo told her before they were interrupted by an alarm.

"What's that?" Brae asked.

"Someone just got a missile lock on us." Tylo said.

"I see it. Incoming!" Brae snapped when a fourth contact appeared on the sensors, this one much smaller than the others and accelerating away from them rapidly.

"Jayk are you in the turret yet?" Tylo said into the intercom.

"Just there now, bringing it online." Jayk responded.

"Well we've got a fast mover heading for us." Tylo warned him.

"Understood, targeting it now." Jayk said as he turned the turret towards the incoming missile.

The *Swift Exit* mounted only a single light laser cannon but the weapon's yield was enough to deal with most small targets and a missile lacked the armour or shielding to resist even a single hit. The problem was that the missile was also a small and agile target with an onboard guidance system that was continuously updating its flight path to intercept the *Swift Exit* as it travelled through space and the first volley that Jayk fired went wide.

Jayk then held his fire and took a deep breath, letting the Force flow through him so that he could sense not where the targeting system was telling him the missile's current velocity, heading and position but the same information about where it would be a short time in the future and he turned the turret away from the computer prediction before firing again. This time the first shot of the four blast burst hit the missile almost head on and the energy bolt triggered the concussion warhead well away from the *Swift Exit*.

"Missile destroyed." Jayk said.

"Great." Brae responded, "But Tylo's still flying us right at them."

"Between kid. Between." Tylo said.

"Buy why not turn and head away from them?" Brae asked.

"Because there's nothing behind us but empty space to keep running in." Tylo said, "But if I can get us past then then I can get us into the orbit of that gas giant. Then we've got all those moons and rings to hide in. we still have to get past those three ships though so shut up and let me fly the ship."

"How rude." Brae muttered.

"They're moving into attack position." Krovak said as he watched the engagement unfolding on the freighter's

sensors. The vessel that Teron and his gang used as their base of operations was currently doing exactly what Tylo had planned for the *Swift Exit*, using the rings of the gas giant as cover while monitoring the battle from a distance.

"It was to be expected. My master predicted that this would be their response." Teron replied, "For all their fault the Jedi are not cowards. Tell the second group to be ready. They will have only a brief window before the Jedi realise their mistake."

"Targets in visual range now." Brae said and then she frowned as she looked at the magnified images on the display in front of her, "What the hell?" she added.

"What's wrong kid?" Tylo asked.

"Tylo take a look at those ships. They look like they're literal piles of junk." Brae said and Tylo glanced at the screen she was pointing at and smiled.

"Uglies." he said.

"What?"

"Uglies kid. Improvised combat craft constructed by sticking together whatever spare parts the builder has to hand. That's good."

"Why?"

"Don't they teach you anything in the Jedi temple?" Tylo responded, "Uglies are improvised. Half the systems aren't compatible with the other half so even when they're working they aren't working properly if you take my meaning. They're prone to breaking down and their weapons might not be that great. That may be why they only fired the one missile. That could be the only one they have between them."

Brae smiled.

"So they're not really a threat then?" she said.

"Of course they are. Any ship with a blaster is a threat. They just aren't as big a threat as one of those new headhunters would be for example. Let's hope your dad can do something about them."

As if prompted by Tylo's remark, Jayk opened fire with the turret at that moment and his attack hit one of the oncoming starfighters. This blew a bulky ion drive mounting away from the side of the craft's cockpit and it immediately went into a wild spin that took it tumbling away from the other two before suddenly exploding.

"Dad got one!" Brae exclaimed.

"Yes he did but don't get cocky kid. That still leaves two more coming right at us. Now let's see how they react when we go right between them." Tylo replied.

Tylo angled the *Swift Exit* to pass between and slightly below the two oncoming fighters. He judged the angle so that, as long as the fighter pilots were not very experienced, it would not be obvious what he was doing. The *Swift Exit*'s turret was mounted on the dorsal hull and this limited its field of fire largely to above the ship. Therefore, by passing under the two crude starfighters Tylo kept both of them in Jayk's sights.

Jayk took full advantage of this and he fired on another of the ships. This turned out to be protected by a deflector shield and the pilot chose to break off his attack rather than risk his shield overloading. The next shots came from the third ugly in the form of two streams of energy blasts that came at slightly different rates, suggesting that the cannons had been salvaged from different sources. These struck the *Swift Exit*'s shield outside the cockpit and both Brae and Tylo flinched as the bright red pulses exploded barely a metre away from them.

"Stang Jayk, hurry up and get that sleemo." Tylo exclaimed.

"I've got him." Jayk responded and he fired the turret again. This time his aim put the burst of cannon fire dead centre of the ugly and it exploded, sending glowing shrapnel in all directions. However, by this time the pilot of the second ugly had turned his craft around and was now closing from the rear, beneath the *Swift Exit*'s hull.

This volley of fire hit the light freighter's ventral hull and the ship rocked as its weaker aft shielding gave way. This prompted a number of alarms in the cockpit and several status displays turned red.

"We're hit!" Brae exclaimed.

"Kid watch the rear deflector!" Tylo snapped as he kept the ship heading for the moon that the uglies had been using for cover before they staged their ambush.

"I can't see him. Tylo try turning." Jayk said as he turned the turret towards the rear of the ship but found that he still did not have a clear line of sight to the final fighter.

"There's no time for that. Just keep shooting until I say otherwise." Tylo replied.

"I'm transferring power to the rear deflector." Brae said.

"No, keep them equal. That guy could still have more friends ahead of us." Tylo told her.

"Okay." she said.

The pilot of the final ugly was proving able to keep out of Jayk's line of fire but the firepower of his ship was limited and the *Swift Exit*'s shield held up to a sustained barrage of fire from it.

"Okay I've found what we need." Tylo said and Brae frowned.

"What do we need?" she asked.

"Somewhere to hide." Tylo answered.

"Hide? But there's just one left." Brae pointed out, "Why not shoot him down?"

"One that we can see kid. But those ships were all uglies. I doubt any of them could travel through hyperspace without breaking up from the stress of entry. That means-

"I get it." Brae interrupted, "That means they have to have a mother ship out there somewhere."

"Exactly. Or at least one dropped them off and will be coming back for them soon. Now look at the surface of that moon." Tylo told her and Brae looked at the moon they were heading towards.

There was nothing remarkable about the moon's appearance. It looked to be a mundane combination of rock and ice that was incapable of supporting humanoid life but it was obviously subject to considerable stress, presumably from the gravitational pull of the gas giant that it orbited and these competing forces had caused it to become covered in numerous deep ravines that criss crossed the surface.

"Hold on kid. This is going to be tight." Tylo said and then he returned to the intercom, "Jayk stand by to lose power." he said.

"Lose power? Is the core damaged?" Jayk responded.

"No but I need us to look like we're dead." Tylo said and then when the ship rocked under another hit to the rear deflector he suddenly veered off towards the moon, firing the ion drive one last time at full power before he shut it down and then deactivated the ship's shields and turret before moving on to the other systems.

"Hey Tylo we need those." Brae said.

"Actually no. If we use any of them then we'll be seen. No just sit down and trust in my aim. Oh and hope that those ravines are as deep as they look."

"Your aim? What? Hey wait a minute are we just going in ballistic?" Brae said and Tylo shrugged

"Kind of." he replied.

"Oh I've got a very bad feeling about this." Brae said as she hurriedly strapped herself into her seat.

The pilot of the ugly followed the *Swift Exit*, staying behind the freighter as it sped towards the moon's surface but he ceased fire when it abruptly lost power and went dark.

"Hey Jayk is he still with us?" Tylo asked over the intercom.

"Right behind us. Waiting to see if we're bluffing." Jayk replied, "I finally get a clear shot and I can't take it."

"Well I reckon we're about five seconds from the moon so he ought to give up in about three." Tylo said.

"Understood. Wait, he just broke off." Jayk said and Tylo sighed.

"Pirates just don't have the commitment to make good pilots." he said, "Okay two seconds to the surface."

"So shouldn't you be turning the engines back on?" Brae asked.

"No way kid. That creep in the ugly may have broken off but he'll be able to see the flare from our ion drive half way across the system. This needs to be done just right."

The *Swift Exit* reached the surface of the moon exactly when Tylo had predicted and thanks to his expert piloting, instead of smashing into it the view outside the cockpit suddenly went black as the ship flew into one of the ravines.

"Tylo." Brae said, her eyes widening as the wall of the ravine sped past.

"Trust me kid. I know what I'm doing." he replied, reaching out to the flight controls. He did not reach for the ion drive however, instead Tylo went to activate the *Swift Exit's* repulsorlift engines. These were normally used within an atmosphere to avoid the disturbance that would be created by an ion drive capable of hundreds of gees of acceleration. However, repulsorlift engines would function anywhere that there was a gravity field strong enough for them to interact with and even the relatively low gravity of the moon was enough for this.

As soon as the repulsorlift field engaged Tylo pulled back on the flight controls to level the *Swift Exit* out before it reached the bottom of the ravine and crashed for real. This prompted a sigh of relief from Brae as she saw the sensors indicate that the ship was no longer falling and Tylo then slowed down, studying the sensors himself.

"Now we need somewhere to set down." he said, "There, that looks good." and he carefully flew the *Swift Exit* towards a rocky overhang at the side of the ravine large enough to conceal the ship and he brought it in to land underneath this.

"There we go kid. Now it's time to shut down everything we don't need to keep us alive and see just how bad that hit was." he said.

3.

"Report." Teron said when the fighter pilot contacted the freighter.

"I did it." the pilot responded, "I destroyed the jedi ship."

"The ship no longer appears on our scopes." the gang member currently acting as comscan operator added from behind Teron on the flight deck.

"Are you sure?" Krovak asked.

"Positive. I saw them go in. They lost all power and I followed them as far as I could before they crashed into the moon." the pilot said.

"So that's it?" Krovak said, looking at Teron but he did not respond, "Hey, are you okay?"

"Wait here." Teron replied and he got to his feet.

"What about the fighters?" Krovak said and Teron looked through the viewport at the front of the flight deck.

"Keep them out there. Have them search the lunar surface for wreckage. I need to consult with my master."

he said and then he exited the flight deck, making his way to the communication suite where he knelt before the projection pad, "Master." he said and he waited for the hologram of the hooded figure to materialise in front of him.

"Speak my young apprentice. Have you come to tell me that you completed your task and destroyed the jedi vessel?" he said.

"That is what my pilot has reported my master." Teron replied and beneath his hood the figure in the hologram smiled.

"Ah, but you do not believe him." he said.

"I sensed no deception but I do not think that the jedi are dead. I do not believe that they could be destroyed with such a basic attack. They are too-"

"Devious?" the hologram said.

"Yes master."

"Indeed they are. Trust in your suspicion Teron. Do not just accept the word of a minion. Bring me proof of the deaths of the jedi." the hologram ordered and then it faded away before Teron could reply. Getting back to his feet he then returned to the flight deck where Krovak looked at him as soon as he entered.

"So what did our lord and master have to say for himself?" he asked.

"Tell the pilots to keep searching the moon. I want proof not leads." Teron replied.

"The good news is that our life support systems are still fully operational and that we don't need to worry about running out of air for several weeks yet." Cal said.

"That implies that there's bad news as well. I've got a bad feeling about this." Brae commented.

"I'm afraid so." Cal replied, "I've tried checking the status of every system and I can't get a response from the hyperdrive. The primary or the reserve."

"So even if we knew where we are and could plot a jump to Coruscant we can't get into hyperspace." Jayk said.

"I'm afraid so, yes." Cal replied.

"What about communications?" Tylo asked.

"Still jammed. I'm monitoring for a clear frequency but so far nothing." Cal said.

"Okay that proves that there's a mother ship out there in the system somewhere. No way a little fighter, especially an ugly could be carrying kit powerful enough for that." Tylo said.

"Do we know where we are yet?" Brae said.

"No, the *Swift Exit*'s stellar database isn't comprehensive enough for us to use the star field to identify where we are." Jayk said.

"And with the jamming in operation we can't send a signal to request a remote triangulation." Cal added.

"So we have to fix the ship and wait for the jamming to stop before we can leave then." Brae commented.

"That just about sums it up, yes." Jayk replied.

"Plus we have to do that with someone up there who could figure out that they didn't finish the job of trying to kill us yet." Tylo added.

Joined by four more starfighters, two of them more of the improvised 'ugly' vessels while the others were more modern Subpro C-73 trackers, the fighter that had survived the engagement with the *Swift Exit* flew across the surface of the moon looking for the wreckage of the freighter. The pilot of this latter fighter was still convinced that he had destroyed the jedi craft and was becoming increasingly frustrated at being unable to locate where it had crashed.

"It must have been buried on impact. That ice isn't so solid." he broadcast to the other pilots.

"We'd still see some sign of an impact." another of the pilots responded.

"So where the hell did they go?" a third commented.

"That's what you're out there trying to find out." Krovak told them from the flight deck of the freighter where he and Teron were monitoring the search from, "Looks like they're getting impatient." he added to Teron.

"What about the beacon?" one of the other gang members.

"What about it?" Krovak added, looking at Teron.

"No. The beacon is tied into the Jedi's subspace beacon. We'd have to drop the jamming. The Jedi may be monitoring for any disruption and it would give them the chance to either establish their location or call for help. I don't want them doing either. Order the pilots to keep searching and warn them that if they return while their ships still have air left for them to breathe then I'll see to it that they still choke." Teron replied sternly.

Brae flinched when Jayk and Tylo lifted a floor panel to reveal part of the machinery for the *Swift Exit's* hyperdrive only to find sparks flying from damaged circuitry.

"Still get surprised by some stuff huh kid?" Tylo commented. Then he looked at Jayk and added, "Pass me that extinguisher would you?"

"Here." Jayk said as he handed over the fire extinguisher mounted on a nearby wall. Tylo pointed this down into the exposed machinery and looked at Brae again.

"Just for your information this will make a loud noise." he told her, smiling and she smirked back at him while making an insulting gesture.

"Brae a Jedi should have better manners than that. Jayk cautioned her.

"Of course master." she replied.

"Why do I get the feeling that you were just insulting me as well?" Jayk commented before there was a sudden loud blast of gas from the fire extinguisher as Tylo discharged it into the hyperdrive machinery.

"Okay that should take care of the flames." he said when he had finished, "We'll give it a few minutes for the ventilation system to clear the CO-two out of there and then I'll go down and take a look."

"I don't mean to interrupt," Cal's voice announced over the intercom, "but someone up there is probing the ravine with their radar."

"Let's go." Jayk said and he, Brae and Tylo all rushed to the *Swift Exit's* cockpit where Tylo ran right through Cal's hologram to reach the pilot's seat.

"You could have just said 'excuse me'." Cal commented.

"No time. Have they found us?" Tylo replied as he and the others all sat down.

"I don't think so. What I picked up was a reflection from the floor of the ravine, not a direct pulse from the radar emitter." Cal said and then his hologram frowned.

"Is something wrong?" Jayk asked when he noticed this.

"No but I think I may have an idea about how to determine our location." Cal said.

"Really? How?" Brae said.

"Well as you know we don't have the onboard data to determine where we are so we're going to have to use an external source." Cal said.

"Yeah we know this. Only with all that jamming we can't scan for beacons or send a distress signal." Tylo pointed out.

"No but as I've just proven we can still pick up electromagnetic broadcasts." Cal said.

"But surely if we tried sending a signal by radio it would take years to reach another system. Even then there might be no-one listening for it." Brae said.

"Quite. Which is why we need to listen for radio signals making it here." Cal said, "Every modern planet emits masses of radio signals, the Republic was using them to detect new cultures even back in my day. Now I'm guessing that we're in a system somewhere between Teramar and Coruscant. We can't have travelled that far off course or it would have been obvious when we made the jump. So that means that we should be well inside Republic space and able to pick up transmissions from nearby colonies."

"That will be years out of date." Brae pointed out.

"That doesn't matter." Jayk said, "All we need is a signal that identifies the exact date on which it was broadcast. Or rather two or more." Jayk told her and Tylo smiled.

"I like it. The age of the signal tells us how far we are from fixed points and then we just find a system where those distances all intersect." he said.

"The theory is simple. The execution of it still has one glaring flaw, however." Cal said.

"You mean that in order to pick up those signals we are likely going to have to leave the cover offered by this ravine?" Jayk asked.

"I'm afraid so, yes." Cal said.

"In that case we should press on with the repairs. Knowing where we are is of little use if the hyperdrive isn't working." Jayk said.

Teron was sat meditating when the door opened and Krovak entered the room.

"The expression on your face suggests that our pilots have yet to locate the *Swift Exit*." Teron said, looking up at his subordinate.

"That moon is one big hiding place. Frankly I'd suggest we use it ourselves if the Republic ever gets too close for comfort. You could hide an entire fleet in those ravines." Krovak said.

"I sense that you did not just come here to complain my friend. Now tell me what your solution is." Teron told him.

"Normally I'd say just bomb the poodoo out of the entire moon but we don't have that sort of ordnance available to us right now and beside you want proof of death. So I'm suggesting that we drop the jamming and use the beacon." Krovak said.

"You know my thoughts on the matter. The Jedi must not be allowed to escape or call for help." Teron said.

"Yeah, you made that damned clear. But what I'm suggesting is just a few seconds of clear transmission time. The fact that the Jedi are hiding tells me that the Jedi ship is damaged, badly. I doubt that they're in any condition to make a run for it right now and even if they get a signal out how long will it be before they can get reinforcements? Two hours? Maybe three? That's more than enough time to make sure that they are dead before a Judicial Department frigate can arrive. Run it by your oh so helpful master. Maybe he'll have a better idea and can get off his holographic ass and actually turn up and help us for once."

Teron considered this. He had no intention of speaking with his master about this. He had promised him the deaths of the Jedi and for the time being he was no further to achieving that aim than he had been when he last reported in. Even if they were unable to escape the system, all the Jedi would have to do was evade his forces long enough for the Jedi Order to notice their absence and declare them missing. Then the same jamming that kept them from sending for help would alert any search vessel entering the system to something being wrong and the Republic would send forces to investigate.

"Very well, you have my permission to proceed. But find out how long the jamming needs to be disabled for before doing it. I want to know exactly how long the Jedi will have to send a distress call."

"Two minutes at most." Krovak replied and Teron smiled.

"You already knew before walking through that door." he said.

"Of course. I wasn't sure just how easy it would be to convince you to give the order. I thought having more information could come in useful." Krovak admitted.

"Do it. Discover exactly where the Jedi are hiding and kill them." Teron said and then he closed his eyes and went back to his meditation.

Returning to the freighter's flight deck Krovak sat down while the flight crew looked at him.

"So what did he say?" the female gang member responsible for accessing the beacon aboard the *Swift Exit* asked.

"The word is given. Teron wants the Jedi found." Krovak responded.

"I'm ready to access the beacon as soon as the jamming is stopped." the female gang member said.

"Stand by. Cutting off jamming signal in five. Four. Three. Two. One. Jamming off." another announced and the moment that he confirmed that the freighter was no longer emitting its broad spectrum jamming signal the female gang member began to transmit the signal needed to access the beacon aboard the *Swift Exit*.

4.

As soon as the cloud of carbon dioxide from the fire extinguisher had been purged from the ship's air Tylo descended into the hyperdrive to inspect the damage. Because of her small size Brae accompanied him, shining a glow rod over his shoulder so that he could see into the machinery and still keep both hands free while Jayk went to inspect some of the ship's other systems to make sure that they had not been damaged. Nothing other than the hyperdrive had failed outright following the battle but Jayk knew that not all damage was inflicted instantly and systems that had lasted long enough to get the ship into the ravine could fail if they tried to leave it.

"Looks like the circuit protection on the motivator tripped." he said.

"How long will that take to fix?" Brae asked.

"Kid if that's gone then we're stuck. The best we could hope for would be that we could get the back up running. Fixing a hyperdrive motivator requires special tools we don't have and we don't a spare either. Fortunately the circuit has built in protection components. As soon as they get hot they open the circuit before the critical components can be affected. Once they cool down again they should be fine." Tylo explained before his face fell, "Ah, now that is more of a problem."

"What is?" Brae asked.

"The casing of the hyper-matter reaction chamber is obviously fractured. That needs to come out and-"

"Jayk! Tylo!" Cal called out over the intercom, "We've got trouble."

"I'm on my way to the cockpit now." Jayk responded.

"Come on kid." Tylo told Brae as he pulled himself out of the hyperdrive, "We better go and see what's gone wrong now."

Rushing to the cockpit, Brae and Tylo got there just after Jayk and they all sat down to study the instruments.

"Cal what's happening?" Jayk asked.

"We just sent a subspace transmission." Cal answered.

"How is that possible?" Brae said, frowning.

"What about the jamming?" Tylo added.

"The jamming was cut off for a few moments," Cal said, "and our transmitter activated in response to an outside transmission. Fortunately I was plugged into the system and I was able to override the transmitter quickly. Though not before the first part of the signal had been sent."

"What was the transmission we were sending?" Jayk said.

"I've got a very bad feeling about this." Brae commented.

"Actually it was nothing more than a transponder ident code." Cal said in response to Jayk's question.

"It was a beacon to tell someone where we are." Tylo said, wincing.

"So whoever's up there hunting us knows where we are?" Brae said.

"Probably not exactly. But that transmission will have given them something to start from." Cal said.

"Then we need to move." Jayk said, "Tylo how soon can we take off?"

"Five minutes tops if all you want is the repulsorlifts." Tylo responded and Jayk nodded.

"That will be enough. I just want us to find somewhere else to hide down here, I don't want us heading back into space until we can jump to hyperspace." he said.

"I get it. Anyone coming down here will have to slow down and run off their own repulsorlifts. You get in the turret and I'll get us off the ground." Tylo said as he began to reactivate the *Swift Exit's* systems.

"But why did our communication system send a transmission at all?" Brae said, looking back and forth between Jayk and Tylo as Jayk was getting up to return to the turret.

"Isn't it obvious Brae?" Jayk responded, "Someone has been able to get a homing beacon aboard the *Swift Exit*."

"Not my ship. No way." Tylo protested.

"I'm afraid Jayk's right. There's no other explanation." Cal said, "I'll start running a system diagnostic but it's likely that you'll have to conduct a physical search for the device."

Anger.

Both Jayk and Brae sensed Tylo's fury at someone having interfered with his ship but neither said anything, Jayk leaving the cockpit and Brae moving forwards to take his place in the co-pilot's seat.

"Lifting off now." Tylo said, pulling back on the flight controls gently and the *Swift Exit* rose up off the ground a short distance before he turned the ship around and brought it out from under the overhang, "Okay now let's go find ourselves somewhere else to hide." he said.

"Contact." the female gang member announced.

"Location?" Krovak asked.

"Err, I can't be specific. The signal was cut off before we could get a precise lock." the woman said.
"How? I thought the beacon was tied directly into their subspace transmitter." Krovak responded, frowning.
"It is. Someone musty have been monitoring the system at exactly that moment. Maybe they were waiting for the jamming to clear so that they could send a signal of their own."
"I'm not interested in why. What I want to know is do you have anything?" Krovak said sternly.
"Yes, I've narrowed down the search area to about a hundred square kilometres but it's pretty rough ground. Ravines caused by-" the woman told him.
"Terrain does not concern me." Krovak interrupted, "Teron won't care either. Give the information to the pilots and get them down there. Now!"

Tylo brought the *Swift Exit* out from beneath the overhang.

"Stand by on our shields kid." he told Brae, "First sign of someone coming at us then get them up. Don't wait for me to tell you."

"Got it." Brae replied, nodding and knowing that the reason Tylo had not already raised their shields was to keep their energy signature to a minimum.

Keeping the *Swift Exit* at a low altitude, Tylo wound his way between the rocky walls of the network of ravines and canyons that covered the surface of the moon. His first priority was to get the ship as far from their original compromised hiding place as possible before finding them a new one where they could make repairs and try to locate the tracking device someone had slipped aboard.

While Brae and Tylo sat in the cockpit Jayk had taken his position in the ship's turret again and was searching the sky for other ships. He knew that one of that one of the fighters had survived the previous engagement and that it was likely this would have been reinforced from the mother ship that also had to be somewhere close by.

"Incoming." Brae said suddenly when she saw a pair of signals on the sensor display as two Subpro Tracker fighters dived down into the ravine from above them, "Shields up."

"I see them." Jayk responded as he elevated the laser cannon and fired, unconcerned about the bright flashes of energy giving away their position now that the enemy had already found them.

Limited in their ability to manoeuvre while descending through the ravine the fighter pilots were unable to take the necessary evasive manoeuvres to avoid Jayk's attack and one of them was hit by the volley. The immediate damage to the Tracker was limited but the energy surge caused the craft's controls to become ionised and with lightning arcing across its hull the fighter spiralled off into the wall of the ravine and exploded.

The second fighter returned fire with the *Swift Exit* dead centre of its pilot's sights but the blasts from its twin lase cannons failed to penetrate the freighter's shields. Jayk fired again but this time his target was able to slip past the stream of laser blasts and reach the bottom of the ravine before suddenly levelling out.

"He's right behind us." Jayk said into his intercom headset.

"I see him." Tylo responded, "Let's see how good a pilot he is." and then he performed a sharp turn when the *Swift Exit* reached a junction in the ravine that took the ship along an almost perpendicular path.

For a few moments the pursuing Tracker fighter was out of sight but it soon came back into view as it followed the *Swift Exit* around the corner and fired another volley at the freighter that missed by only a narrow margin.

Returning fire, Jayk frowned when the fighter pilot was able to dodge his attack once more but then an idea occurred to him when he saw the laser blasts hit the side of the ravine and caused rubble to fall from it.

"Tylo are we at full speed?" he asked.

"No. Half." Tylo answered.

"Can you get us up to full speed? I've got an idea but we need to move fast." Jayk told him.

"Okay, accelerating now." Tylo replied.

"Why does dad want us to go faster? Isn't that dangerous?" Brae said.

"Sure is kid." Tylo said before Jayk fired the turret again.

This time Jayk had turned the turret to face sideways and his shots all hit wall of the ravine. Maintaining his fire Jayk cut a deep groove in the wall and caused the rock and ice blasted free to come tumbling down towards the bottom and right into the path of the Tracker. The fighter pilot tried to pull up but he was too late to avoid the debris and a large chunk of rock struck the nose of his craft and ripped it in half. The pilot attempted to eject before what remained of his craft ploughed into the floor of the ravine but as he was propelled away from the stricken fighter he was hit by yet more debris and died before his fighter exploded in a ball of flame on impact with the ground.

"Targets down." Jayk said, "Any sign of more?"

"None yet." Brae replied.

"Give them time. Even if those two didn't specifically report our position then their friends will have seen that little fireworks display." Tylo added.

"Have you found us a new hiding place yet?" Jayk asked.

"Err, not yet." Tylo said and then he glanced upwards and smiled when he saw something through the cockpit canopy that caught his attention, "Or maybe I have." he added.

"Uh-oh." Brae commented, "Dad, I've got a really bad feeling about this."

"Bringing the ion drive on line." Tylo said and Brae's eyes widened.

"Hey wait, I thought we couldn't use that down here." she said.

"We can if we're going straight up." Tylo said, "We need a new hiding place and I've found us one." and he pointed upwards. Looking up herself Brae saw what he was pointing at and sighed.

"I was right. I've got a very bad feeling about this." she said as she stared at the gas giant the moon orbited.

"Just be ready to shut everything down when I say." Tylo told her and then he suddenly pulled back on the flight controls and fired the *Swift Exit's* ion drive on full power, "Now! Kill everything but life support," he snapped and he and Brae hurriedly began to shut down all of the ship's systems.

The energy released by the ion drive was more than enough to hurl the freighter not only out of the ravine but far enough away from the moon that its weak gravity field would not pull the ship back down towards it, leaving it speeding towards the gas giant. The blast also dislodged large chunks of rock and ice from the walls of the ravine that were also hurled up into space and these provided a shield for the *Swift Exit* as it coasted towards the gas giant using nothing but its own momentum.

"What if that mother ship is nearby?" Brae asked softly even though there was no way for her voice to carry beyond the confines of the ship.

"Then they'll have picked up an explosion on the surface and seen the debris thrown free." Tylo replied, "No one's lighting us up with any active sensors so it's a fair bet that they don't know we're here."

"But won't they figure it out?"

"Unless they're total nerf herders then yes, but by that time we'll be safely inside the atmosphere of the gas giant and all that static and energy discharges are enough to hide ten thousand ships like us." Tylo said just as Jayk appeared in the doorway behind them.

"Even though you didn't bother telling me what your plan is, I assume that you have one." he said.

"We're drifting to the gas giant." Brae replied and Jayk nodded.

"A reasonable idea. Although that doesn't solve any of our problems regarding repairing the ship or establishing our location." he said.

"Actually I may have the answer to one of those." Cal said as his hologram appeared in the cockpit, "We can still receive signals while running silent and I think I've picked up an old radio transmission from Alderaan. It was a news broadcast that included the time and date."

"How old was it?" Tylo asked.

"The same as Brae actually. About nineteen years." Cal said.

"So we're nineteen light years from Alderaan. That narrows things down a bit." Brae said.

"There are eight systems that we could be in." Cal said, nodding, "Now if I can just pick up another signal then maybe I can tell you which one this is."

5.

"What the hell was that?" Krovak said, leaping out of his seat when he saw the bright flash from the moon's surface.

"An explosion of some kind." one of the other gang members present replied and Krovak snarled, his hand reaching towards his blaster for a moment as he considered shooting the man to make a point about insubordination but he decided against it for now.

"What's happening?" Teron's voice said from the rear of the light deck unexpectedly and Krovak looked around to see the young gang leader standing in the open doorway.

"We detected an explosion from the surface of the moon right after losing contact with the second fighter that was engaging the jedi." Krovak told him, "It could have been Tylo's ship or-

"Or it could have been the fighter. Or perhaps neither." Teron interrupted and he looked at the sensor operator that Krovak had almost executed, "Well? What was it?" he asked.

"I don't know without-" the man began but he suddenly stopped speaking when Teron held out his hand towards him and he reached for his throat as he began to choke.

"If you don't know how to work that equipment then what good are you to me?" Teron said.

"I can do it." the man gasped, "I swear." and all of a sudden Teron lowered his hand and the man found that he could breathe freely once more.

"Then you have five minutes to tell me what that explosion was. Don't fail me again." Teron said as he took his seat at the centre of the flight deck and all around him the members of his gang hurried to process the data the ship's sensors had recorded, knowing that if Teron did kill the current comscan operator then any one of them could be next in line.

"Sir, energy release of that magnitude and duration can only have come from the ion drives of one of the ships." the comscan operator announced just before his time was up.

"It must have been the jedi ship. There's no way our pilots would risk using their ion drives down there."

Krovak said, "They must have used it like a weapon. The back blast would-"

"Yes, I know what firing an ion drive close to the surface of a planet or moon does Krovak. Now tell me what happened after the blast." Teron said.

"Well everything close to the blast was destroyed. If our fighter was still active then it was probably blasted apart."

"But could the jedi ship have survived?" Teron said.

"Yes, if it stayed ahead of the blast, but thrust of that scale would have propelled it all the way into space and we'd be able to see it." the comscan operator said and Krovak snarled.

"Not if they were ready for silent running." Krovak pointed out.

"Quickly. What happened to the debris that was thrown out by the blast?" Teron snapped.

"Nothing, some fell back to the surface but a lot of it had enough energy to escape the lunar gravity. It's being pulled towards the gas giant probably." the comscan operator said.

"That's it. The jedi are there. Hiding among the rocks heading for the gas giant." Teron said.

"If they get in there then we'll have real trouble finding them." Krovak added and Teron nodded.

"Launch everything we've got. I don't want the jedi making it to that moon." he ordered.

"I think we've got trouble." Tylo said, rushing into the lounge where Jayk and Brae were resting while he took the first shift watching the *Swift Exit's* passive sensors.

"We're coming." Jayk replied as he and Brae both got up and rushed into the cockpit with Tylo, "What have we got?"

"First we've got these thermal blooms from near that moon we just left." Tylo said, pointing to the sensor display.

"Fighters breaking off from searching the surface for us?" Brae suggested.

"That's my guess kid." Tylo replied, "But we've also got this." and he pointed elsewhere on the display where more thermal signatures had been detected."

"More ships?" Brae asked and Tylo nodded.

"Has to be but its the individual readings that are the problem." he said."

"What's wrong with them?" Brae said.

"The shapes." Jayk said, "They are all hollow."

"That means that every single one of them is heading right this way kid." Tylo added.

"You mean they've detected us?" Brae said.

"No, I don't think so. If they had then they'd be lighting us up with targeting radars right now but all we're picking up is the usual sweeps." Tylo said.

"They must have figured out what we did to escape." Jayk said, "They know that we're somewhere in among the debris but they don't know where. How long until we reach the gas giant?"

"About six hours at this speed." Tylo told him, "But those ships will be here in a matter of minutes. Less than ten I'd say. If they come at us piecemeal then the first could be here in half that."

"Bring the engines back on line." Jayk said, "I assume that we can still beat them to the gas giant if we head there at full power?"

"Full power? Yes, but that leaves nothing for weapons or shields. It will just be a straight run for the atmosphere." Tylo said.

"That's all we need. Just get us into the atmosphere." Jayk replied.

"Okay then, here goes." Tylo said as he quickly powered up the *Swift Exit's* ion drives again and squeezed the controls to fire them as tightly as he could.

Even with the *Swift Exit's* artificial gravity field active the force of the acceleration was still felt by the occupants inside the cockpit, all three of them being pushed back into their seats. However, looking at the sensor display showed that the move was working, the freighter was closing on the gas giant faster than its pursuers were gaining on it. One of the approaching starfighter, another of the improvised 'ugly' designs tried launching a concussion missile at the *Swift Exit*, but the freighter was accelerating so quickly that the pilot failed to get a proper lock and the weapon sped straight ahead instead of arcing to follow its intended target. "We're going to make it." Brae exclaimed and Tylo grinned.

"I told you it would work." he said, "Now hang on we need to slow down and adjust our heading slightly before we hit the atmosphere or we'll come apart as if we'd hit the surface of that moon we just left."

Tylo briefly cut the power to the *Swift Exit's* ion drives and the ship carried on coasting towards the gas giant before he threw the engines into reverse and turned sharply so that it would enter the gas giant at a shallower angle. This loss of speed allowed the pursuing ships to gain on the *Swift Exit* somewhat but they were still too far behind to stand a chance of even getting close enough to engage the freighter with their weapons.

"Spectral analysis of the atmosphere indicates a pocket of hydrogen gas along with trace molecules of oxygen at the point where we'll enter the atmosphere." Jayk said from the co-pilot's seat.

"Good." Tylo replied, "It'll give us some cover. Best get the shields up now though, this could get rocky."

"Rocky? Wait are you about to deliberately fly into a cloud of volatile gas?" Brae said but Tylo did not respond and she hurried to fasten her safety harness.

The *Swift Exit* was still moving very quickly when it hit the upper layer of the gas giant's atmosphere and the friction of the surrounding gases against the hull heated both up rapidly to the point where the atmospheric hydrogen reached its combustion point and the atmosphere all around the freighter suddenly erupted into flames, producing a massive fireball that shook the ship and its occupants violently. It was then that Tylo shut off the ship's ion drive and let it glide deeper into the atmosphere.

"Are we dead yet?" Brae asked.

"If we are then this must be hell." Tylo replied and Brae frowned.

"Why?" she said.

"Because we are still here with him." Jayk commented and Tylo smiled.

"I'll let the ship sink about fifty kilometres deeper into the atmosphere before I bring the repulsorlifts on line.

The electrical disturbances outside should keep us hidden from their sensors while we complete repairs and figure out how they managed to get a bug aboard my ship." he said.

"May I butt in here?" Cal asked as his holocron that was still connected to the *Swift Exit* at the back of the cockpit projected his hologram forwards again.

"More bad news?" Brae said.

"Perhaps from a certain point of view." Cal replied.

"Just tell us okay?" Tylo said.

"Very well, since you ask so nicely. I think I know who's trying to kill us." Cal said.

"Who?" Brae asked.

"Teron Sharr. Our sensors picked up the mother ship those fighters are operating from and its profile looked familiar to me so I checked it. It's the freighter that his gang had hidden underground when you tried to arrest him." Cal answered.

"He's probably angry that we stopped him getting his hands on that battleship." Tylo said.

"Yes and now he's out for revenge." Brae added.

"Lord Teron the ship no longer appears on our scopes." the comscan operators said, looking towards Teron and Krovak.

"Stang." Krovak hissed, "They made it into the atmosphere."

"Why can't we track them?" Teron demanded.

"There was an explosion when they entered the atmosphere that masked their descent." the comscan

operator replied, "Now the storm activity is concealing them."

"We might be able to track them with the beacon." the female gang member suggested, "The storm activity inside the gas giant will prevent them from making any long range transmissions but we should be able to pick up a connection at this range."

"What if they get around the other side of the planet?" Krovak asked and the young woman hesitated, "I knew it. It won't work will it?"

"It will if we spread our ships around the planet and have all of them send the recognition code." the woman replied.

"Split our forces?" Krovak said.

"Do it." Teron ordered, "We can't kill the jedi if we can't find them." then he looked directly at the woman and added, "But for your sake I hope this works."

Pain.

"Ouch!" Brae heard Tylo exclaimed as she walked towards the open inspection panel for the hyperdrive and she looked down into the machinery to see him shaking one of his hands rapidly.

"Problem Tylo?" she asked.

"No, just got a shock from a capacitor that's all. I needed to discharge it before I could plug the motivator back in and my fingers were the first thing that came to hand." he answered and Brae frowned.

"Was that a joke?"

"What? Oh right. Fingers. Hand. No, no joke." Tylo said as he climbed out of the hyperdrive machinery, "But we now have a working hyperdrive again. Or at least we do for one or two jumps. I don't think that the system will hold longer than that so we better get to a civilised system first time or we're stuck. Now let's go and see how your dad is doing with the communication system."

Returning to the cockpit the pair found Jayk lay on the floor so that he could get under the main control console.

"Ah there you both are." he said without needing to look out from under the console.

"Well the hyperdrive is working again for the time being. Have you found anything yet?" Tylo asked.

"As a matter of fact yes. There's a module tied directly into the line running from the subspace antenna array to the control circuitry." Jayk replied.

"How come we've never noticed it?" Brae asked.

"Why would we? The system never showed any signs of having been tampered with." Tylo said.

"Well it's fine now." Jayk said as he slid out from under the console and as he got back to his feet he held out the tiny module and the trailing wires that had been used to interface it with the communication system.

"Okay so let's smash it." Brae said and she reached out to take the device before Jayk pulled it away from her.

"Not so fast my eager young apprentice. This might still come in useful." he told her,

"Yeah well at least we can reactivate the subspace communications now." Tylo said as he sat down in the pilot's seat, "Or at least we will when we get a bit closer to the edge of the atmosphere."

Jayk and Brae both took their seats as Tylo took control of the *Swift Exit* from the autopilot again and increased its altitude. However, as the ship drew closer to the edge of the atmosphere he suddenly saw another ship appear on the sensors."

"Stang!" he hissed as he flew the *Swift Exit* deeper into the atmosphere again, "There's one of them right out there."

"How did they know where to find us?" Brae asked.

"I don't think they did." Cal said as he appeared at the rear of the cockpit again, "There appear to be ships spread out all around the planet hunting for us. I picked up their transmissions when we got near the edge of the atmosphere. They're trying to make contact with that beacon."

"Well they can't now can they? Dad removed it from the communication system." Brae pointed out.

"True." Jayk said, "But as I said it may yet come in useful and right now it seems I was right."

"Surely you're not going to put it back." Brae said.

"Of course he isn't kid. He's going to use it as a decoy, right?" Tylo said and Jayk nodded when he looked at him.

"Exactly. We detach the secondary subspace antenna from the cockpit escape module and connect it to this. Then we provide it with a power source, a battery from a plasma welder should do and we eject it from the ship using a rocket pack for thrust to take it into the upper atmosphere. Teron's ships will detect it and assume that it's us." he explained.

"At which point we fly off in a different direction." Tylo added, "Of course we still don't know where we need to be flying."

"Actually I've managed to figure that out." Cal said, "I picked up another old radio signal when I detected those ships surrounding the planet. We're actually less than ten parsecs from Coruscant. I've already

uploaded the necessary co-ordinates into the navigation computer.”

“Why didn't you tell us?” Tylo responded as he checked the jump data.

“Telling you about the other ships seemed more important. We need to get far enough away from the planet to escape its gravity well before we can make the jump.” Cal replied.

“And as soon as we leave the atmosphere Teron and his ships will see us.” Brae added.

“Then we need to make a proper run for it.” Tylo said, “Full power to the engines just like we did to get in here.”

6.

“Still nothing?” Teron said to the female gang member, “You assured me that you could detect the *Swift Exit*.” “They could have gone deeper into the atmosphere.” she replied, “But as soon as they come back up we'll have them.”

“They'd better do it quickly then.” Krovak said, “Some of our fighters can't stay out there much longer. They may have been cheap but they aren't exactly suited to anything other than rushing at a target and shooting at it.”

“Figure out a rota.” Teron told him, “I don't want to pull all our ships in at once only for-”

“Lord Teron we've found them!” the female gang member suddenly exclaimed.

“Where?” Teron demanded.

“Near the northern pole, ascending through the atmosphere.” the woman replied.

“Order all ships to intercept.” Teron ordered, “Stop that ship no matter what it takes.”

“There.” Jayk said when he saw the energy flare on the sensor display, “They're going after the decoy.”

“Hold on, here we go.” Tylo responded as he then accelerated the *Swift Exit*, pulling back on the controls to lift up the ship's nose and gain altitude. For the time being he kept the ship on repulsorlift power to avoid producing a massive energy flare that Teron's ships would detect.

“Coming up on the edge of the atmosphere.” Jayk said, “We're going to have to switch to the ion drive soon.”

“Just one more minute.” Tylo replied before an alarm sounded.

“Missile lock!” Jayk snapped, “Looks like one of those uglies just spotted us. He's pulling around towards us. Not firing yet.”

“Oh hell. Well here goes.” Tylo said and he engaged the *Swift Exit*'s ion drive.

“One of fighters is reporting a sensor contact. It's not coming from the location of the beacon though.” the comscan operator announced and Teron snarled.

“It's a decoy!” he hissed, “Turn the ships around. Don't let them escape.”

“Enemy ship is already accelerating away from the gas giant, making for open space.” the comscan operator added and Teron glared angrily at the female gang member.

“Multiple contacts closing from behind.” Jayk said, “No sign of any missile launches yet but they'll be in laser range in five seconds.”

“How long until we're out of the gravity well?” Brae asked.

“Eight seconds.” Cal answered.

“So they'll have three seconds to fire at us.” Brae said.

“If I cut power to the engines then we can raise the shields but it'll increase their firing time to about ten seconds.” Tylo said.

“Do it.” Jayk replied and Tylo reduced the power to the *Swift Exit*'s ion drive, freeing up the power necessary to operate the ship's deflector shield. Activating this, Jayk focused it on the ship's rear facing from where the attacks would inevitably come.

Sure enough seconds later the *Swift Exit* rocked under a volley of laser fire from the lead starfighter.

Fortunately the order for all of Teron's fighters to rush to intercept the fleeing *Swift Exit* had resulted in every pilot acting alone and the fighters were too spread out to be able to concentrate their fire. Therefore, although the lead fighter scored several hits the shield held and the *Swift Exit* remained undamaged.

“How much longer?” Brae asked when a second fighter came within weapon range and it too opened fire.

Fortunately its pilot still did not co-ordinate with the first and although the shield began to weaken it still held.

“Three seconds kid.” Tylo replied, looking at the control console and reaching out for the hyperdrive, “Two. One. Now!” and he slammed his hand down on the console.

The flash of light that heralded the departure of the *Swift Exit* was clearly visible from the flight deck of

Teron's freighter and the comscan operator gulped, knowing that he had to confirm to Teron that the Jedi had escaped. Taking a deep breath he was about to turn around when all of a sudden he heard the sound of someone choking and as he turned he saw Teron with his hand outstretched towards the female gang member.

"She had one job. Find me the *Swift Exit*." Teron said as her body fell from her chair.