

STAR WARS

DARKNESS RISING

1-01: MASTER & APPRENTICE

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A break in at a museum's Sith exhibit attracts the attention of the Jedi Order and an experienced Jedi knight is despatched to investigate. He is joined in this mission by a newly assigned Padawan, one that is closer to her new master than is normal for the Jedi...

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1.

The market street was narrow and crowded and Thal N'Krey eyed the dense crowd of beings with suspicious eyes. Ahead of him a diminutive robed being beckoned him onwards towards a stall located down an even narrower alleyway.

"This had better be worth what I paid you." Thal told his guide.

"Yes, yes. Worth it master. Worth ten times the price."

"Show me what you have." Thal said to the stall holder, another alien who possessed several pairs of arms and eyes. The stall holder smiled, blinking all of his eyes.

"A rare treasure." he said as one of his many arms reached under his stall and retrieved an intricately carved wooden box that was about the size of a human head, "The rarest and most valuable of all." he added as he held out the box.

"I'll be the judge of that if you don't mind." Thal replied as he took the box from the stall holder's hand.

He held the box up so that it caught as much of the limited light available in the alleyway and inspected the carvings.

"You like?" the stall holder asked, "For fifty thousand-"

"Be quiet you weak minded fool!" Thal hissed, "You have no idea of what could happen if this is not done correctly." and then, satisfied that it was safe to do so he lowered the box and gently lifted off the lid to peer inside to get his first look at the contents. As a soft glow illuminated his face a wide smile spread across Thal's face and with his head still tilted downwards he turned his eyes to look directly at the still smiling stall holder.

"You like?" the alien asked.

"Oh indeed I do." Thal replied, "Though I believe that we can negotiate a much better price than the one you are demanding." and slowly his hand moved under his long coat to what was kept beneath it.

The art gallery's most valuable pieces were protected by armoured transparisteel screens, motion sensors, neural stun fields and deflector screens. However, the gallery owners did not go to such extremes when dealing with some of the more mundane pieces they exhibited. There were still security features in place of course but these were far easier for Mara Tosk to disable as she slid her bodyglove clad form from a service duct and lowered herself down into the exhibition hall dedicated to artwork based around galactic conflicts pre-dating the Ruusan Reformation when the Republic and Jedi Order were both demilitarised. Each exhibit in the hall was labelled with a brief description of the piece that included its name as well as its creator but Mara did not need to study any of these, she knew exactly what it was that she was here for. Five items in all. The first and largest of these was a large painting mounted in a carved frame. The frame was irrelevant to Mara, just something that someone had added because they thought it added to the aesthetics of the piece. With a flick of her wrist Mara expanded the baton she carried in a belt pouch before using it to smash the frame to pieces. Collapsing the baton she then took out a knife and cut the painting itself from the plastic rim that held it flat, allowing her to roll up the painting and slide it into a tube fixed to the side of her backpack. Next on the list came a pair of necklaces, and once more she used her baton to smash the fragile glass cases in which they were displayed before she simply snatched the necklaces and stuffed them into her bag. The third item was a dagger that was hung on a mannequin and all Mara had to do here was unhook the belt from around the mannequin's waist before this too was put into her backpack. Only one item now remained and the way in which this was displayed made it the only item that offered any sort of challenge to her. The gallery had chosen to place the carved wooden box in a rotating repulsorlift field so that visitors could see all six faces without anyone needing to handle it. The problem was that the field included a power monitor and any alteration to the mass held within it would trigger an alarm. Fortunately Mara had come prepared for this and she lay down next to the base and took out a small laser cutter that allowed her to cut through the casing to expose the repulsorlift circuitry inside. Mara had studied the production schematics for this controller and she knew the function of every component by heart. One of these components was a variable power regulator that automatically adjusted its output to compensate for increased or decreased mass within the field. However, the device also had a fixed output mode that could be engaged by cutting through a single track on the circuit board and that was exactly what Mara did using her laser cutter. Then all she had to do to retrieve the box was reach into the field and pluck it out. Leaving the field running with nothing in it while still channelling in enough power to keep the box aloft meant that the system would start to overheat but by the time that became noticeable Mara would be long gone and after putting the box into her backpack she turned around and dashed into an adjoining room that was empty of exhibits but had its external facing wall dominated by a large window and she waved to the speeder hovering outside before retreating and shielding her face.

A door opened in the side of the speeder to reveal a masked man armed with a heavily modified blaster rifle that had most of its barrel cut back. Bracing the weapon against his shoulder the man discharged the weapon and there was a sudden flash as the energy was released not in a concentrated bolt but in a pulse that expanded as it went until slamming into the window and blasting a hole almost two metres across in it. Mara made her way to the hole, approaching it cautiously owing to the combination of residual heat and the occasional strong winds that were a consequence of standing next to a gaping hole in the side of a building that was more than a hundred storeys above the ground.

Removing her backpack Mara hurled it across the gap between the window and open door of the speeder and the man in the doorway caught it, falling backwards as he overbalanced in the process. Mara then backed away from the window before running towards it as fast as she could and leaping through the hole and stretching her arms out in front of her. There was a railing that ran along the bottom of the speeder and Mara grabbed hold of this with both hands before pulling herself aboard.

"I'm in!" she yelled as she slammed the door shut behind her and there was a roar as the pilot accelerated away from the gallery building before the local police could respond to the reports they would undoubtedly have received about the blaster fire. Mara then looked across the rear compartment of the speeder and saw that the man who she had thrown her bag to had managed to spill the contents on the floor, "Oh nice work Teron." she said as she pulled his mask away to reveal his youthful features, "You better not have broken anything."

"Well if it's so fragile why did you throw the bag at me in the first place?" Teron asked.

"Because I didn't think you'd be so clumsy that you'd drop it." Mara answered and as she headed for the speeder's cockpit she added, "Now pick that stuff up and put it away."

Teron frowned as he continued to pick up the items Mara had just stolen from the gallery until he reached the wooden box. Something about this object seemed strange to him and rather than just put it away he stared at it closely. Noticing the split where the box was designed to open Teron lifted the lid slowly and a glowing light shone out onto his face.

In the seven hundred and fifty years since the Ruusan Reformation the Jedi Order had dedicated itself to its new role as keepers of the peace rather than fully fledged soldiers and they no longer commanded massed ranks of non-force sensitive troops as they once had. The Order was based in the Jedi Temple on Coruscant and it was here that Jedi Knight Jayk Udra returned to following his most recent assignment. Jayk was an experienced Jedi knight who was just the latest in a long line of Udras to serve the Jedi Order and he had not expected to be summoned to the council chamber as soon as he arrived at the temple.

"Ah Jedi Udra." Karadon Ress, the Supreme Grand Master of the Jedi Order said as Jayk entered the council chamber, "Welcome." Grand Master Ress was an imposing man and it was easy to imagine him as a warrior during the dark days of the wars with the now extinct Sith.

"My presence was requested masters." Jayk replied, bowing his head, "My mission to-"

"Not your recent mission have we called you here for." Jedi Master Yoda interrupted. Yoda was known to have an exceptionally high midi-chlorian count and there were many who said that the most recently appointed member of the council would one day lead it, "A new assignment we have for you."

"And a new padawan." the grand master added and he held out a datapad that Jayk took from him.

"Of course masters." he said as he glanced at the mission data. It seemed like a straight forward task and he scrolled to the section concerning the padawan learner he was being asked to train, "There must be some mistake." he said when he saw the name.

"No mistake Jedi Udra." Grand Master Ress replied, "That is your new padawan."

"But why?" Jayk asked, "I do not understand. Surely the Jedi Code forbids it."

"Padawan Brae Udra has the potential to be a powerful Jedi." the supreme grand master explained, "Her midi-chlorian count is almost twelve thousand but the strength of her power is not matched by the strength of her control. If she continues with her training as she has done so far then we will inevitably reach the point where we will be forced to expel her from the order and given her extraordinary power it is likely that she would be corrupted and we would be put in the dangerous situation of having to deal with her."

Jayk was taken aback by this. A midi-chlorian count of such a level was almost unheard of. A typical sentient being would have a count of about two and a half thousand while most Jedi had one about three to four times that much.

"The primary difficulty appears to be her confidence." another of the council continued, "She does not believe that she is capable of what is asked of her and that is why she fails. This causes her to become angry and act on that instead of focusing. This is holding her training back as well as causing animosity between her and the other padawans."

"How am I supposed to remedy this?" Jayk asked.

"We think that if she knew more about the Udra family's background then she would realise that her ability is part of a heritage passed down for thousands of years then she will be more likely to believe that she can carry out the tasks she is set."

"Is this to be a permanent assignment?" he said, wondering whether the unorthodox pairing would be reviewed as soon as the assignment was completed.

"Brae is your padawan learner Jedi Udra." Grand Master Ress told him, "You will continue to instruct her until she passes the trials or is no longer a part of the order."

Expelled in other words, Jayk thought to himself.

"You will not undertake this task alone Jedi Udra." another of the masters added, "Before you depart you are to report to the archives. They have been instructed to provide you with a holocron. The guardian of this has some experience that you may find useful."

"Thank you master." Jayk said, uncertain of exactly what this experience might be.

"Your padawan is due to complete a physical training session shortly Jedi Udra." Grand Master Ress said, "I suggest you proceed to the temple training area and meet her there. The Republic Judicial Department has arranged transport and a vessel will be waiting for you. You are dismissed."

"Yes master." Jayk replied and he bowed before leaving the council chamber.

"You have something to say Master Yoda?" Grand Master Ress asked and he looked at Yoda.

"A very bad feeling about this I have." Yoda responded, "Dangerous it is to put them together. Deeper into their own pasts they may be tempted to look. Make matters worse the holocron could. Prepared for this I do not think you are."

The Grand Master smiled.

"The council has made its decision Master Yoda." he said.

2.

The jedi temple featured an expansive training area where younglings could practice physical combat or any use of the Force that required a significant amount of room. The floor here was padded to reduce the risk of injury when the inevitable accidents occurred among students of the Force who were using powers they did not yet have full control over. By the time Jayk arrived at the training area the training session was over and he could see padawans making their way out of the changing areas adjacent to the training area and making their way back to their quarters. Seeing the jedi knight who had conducted the training session standing not too far away and talking to one of her students Jayk walked over to her.

"May I help you?" the instructor asked.

"I am looking for Padawan Brae Udra." Jayk replied.

Disappointment.

"Oh." the instructor said, unable to conceal her opinion of Brae at the mention of her name, "She is getting changed. I suggest you wait over there." and she pointed to a bench located next to the changing rooms.

"Thank you." Jayk replied and he made his way over to the bench before he sat down to wait for Brae.

One after another the padawans emerged from the changing rooms either singly or in small groups but none of them coming from the female room looked like the image Jayk had been given and he began to wonder whether he had missed her after all. Then a group of three padawans appeared together and Jayk stood up.

"Excuse me." he said and all three turned to him and stood up straight out of respect for his rank, "I am looking for Padawan Brae Udra." he said, "Is she still in the changing room?"

Amusement.

At least one of the padawans found this question funny for some reason but Jayk chose not to press the issue.

"Oh she's in there." a padawan replied and then she smiled, "Why don't you right on in?" and then all three young women smirked before they turned around and hurried away, whispering to one another.

Jayk watched them leave, uncertain of the reason for their less than professional behaviour. For him to enter the female changing room would be considered inappropriate ordinarily but the fact that the other padawans had suggested just that made him curious and he focused his mind on what lay on the other side of the wall. He could sense someone within the changing room and it was clear that they were strong with the Force.

"Brae Udra?" he called out, standing just within the doorway so that the barrier intended to protect the privacy of those using the changing facility blocked his view.

"Hello?" a female voice answered, "Is someone there?"

"Yes. Are you Brae Udra?"

"That's me. What do you want?"

"I would like you to hurry up and come out of the changing room." Jayk said.

"Oh." Brae said. Then there was a brief pause before she added, "Could you come in here instead?"

Jayk hesitated.

"That would be highly irregular." he said.

"I know. But could you just come in here anyway?" Brae said.

Jayk sensed no mischief or malice in Brae, only a sense of urgency and since he was eager to get started with their assignment he cautiously advanced into the changing room and peered around the barrier.

"Padawan Udra." he began but he stopped there as soon as he saw that the room beyond the barrier was empty apart from the lockers running down each side and rows of benches in front of each. There was a shower unit and refreshers beyond further barriers but Jayk had no intention of going anywhere near those. Jedi could use the Force to distract someone searching for them and trick them into simply not noticing their presence but they could not make themselves invisible.

"Hello?" Brae said again and Jayk's eyes widened for a moment as he realised where Brae was and why he could not see her.

She was inside one of the lockers.

"Padawan Udra," he said as he walked towards the locker that the voice had come from, "could you please explain to me why you are currently inside a locker?"

Brae sighed as Jayk sat down on the bench immediately in front of the locker.

"There was a slight misunderstanding." she said, "I accidentally sent another padawan's lightsaber flying across the room. It wasn't lit but when it hit someone it gave her a black eye."

"So this is revenge from the other padawan's friends?" Jayk said, disappointed that such behaviour would occur here in the temple.

"Kind of. They dragged me from the shower and stuffed me in here. They said that since I had so much power I ought to have no trouble in getting out."

"Well you have no need to worry about such things any more Padawan Udra." Jayk said.

"I'm being kicked out aren't I?" Brae asked before Jayk could continue.

"No you are not. The council has assigned you to me as my padawan learner and given us a mission. We leave immediately." he explained, "Or at least as soon as I let you out." and then he stood up and reached for the locker catch.

"Hang on a moment." Brae said suddenly and Jayk paused, "I don't suppose there's a set of robes out there is there? Maybe a towel at least?"

Now Jayk sighed.

"You mean-" he began.

"I told you, I was in the shower." Brae interrupted.

Jayk removed his cloak before releasing the catch on the locker. Then he stepped aside so that he was on the far side of the locker door as he pulled it open and he averted his gaze and held out the cloak.

"Thanks." Brae said as she took the cloak. Then Jayk heard the sound of the locker close again and Brae added, "Okay, I'm decent." she said and Jayk turned around to get his first look at his new apprentice.

As the image he had been provided with showed Brae shared the blonde hair and blue eyes that were characteristic of the Udra family but whereas the Udras tended to be taller than average for humans Brae was quite short, standing barely one and a half metres tall.

"Perhaps now we can fetch your belongings and make our way to the starport." Jayk suggested.

"I'm sorry I didn't catch your name master." she said as they started to head towards the padawans' barracks.

"Jayk." Jayk told her, "Jayk Udra."

Surprise.

Confusion.

"Udra?" Brae said, "But I thought that-"

"That the Jedi Order does not place members of the same family together?" Jayk interrupted, "Under normal circumstances no. There is the risk of attachments forming that could compromise the jedi involved.

However, the council has decided that in this case the fact that we are biologically related may benefit you. I am your uncle."

"How's it supposed to benefit me?" Brae asked.

"Brae we come from a long line of jedi knights. In every generation the most promising individuals are brought to the temple to be trained while the others continue the family line and ensure that there will be further generations to serve the Republic." Jayk explained.

"So there are other Udras out there?"

"As far as I know the Udra name itself no longer exists for our family. It is now used only by those of us selected for service."

"So do you know who my parents were? Or yours?" Brae said as they reached the barracks.

"No. There must be exceptional circumstances for a jedi's parentage to be revealed to them. The only information I have is that one of your parents was my sibling." Jayk told her, "Now go and get dressed and collect your belongings. Then we need to go and collect the third member of our team."

As was to be expected for what was one of the most extensive libraries in the galaxy, the jedi archives were a hushed place where both students and masters gathered to study. When Jayk and Brae entered the outer area of the archives they were approached almost immediately by one of the archivists, an elderly jedi who had dedicated most of his life to collecting and cataloguing the knowledge held here.

"How may I help you?" he asked.

"I am Jayk Udra." Jayk told him and the old man smiled.

"Ah yes, we were told to expect you. Please accompany me and I will fetch you the holocron that has been prepared for you."

Jayk and Brae followed the elderly jedi into a side room where they waited while he went to fetch the holocron that the council believed would be of benefit to Jayk in his training of Brae. Apart from a metre high pillar set into the middle of the floor in the room was completely empty.

Impatience.

Jayk glanced at Brae as he sensed her frustration at having to wait.

"You will find that a great deal of our lives is spent just waiting for the next chapter." he commented, "Do not allow your frustration at having to wait allow you to miss what you need to see to make the correct decision about what to do next."

"So basically just sit and wait?" Brae asked, "Or stand in our case?"

"Precisely." Jayk answered just as the door to the room opened again and the archivist returned holding a crystalline cube that he set down on top of the pillar.

"We have instructions to allow you to remove this from the archives so I will leave you now." he said, "Please return it to us when your assignment is completed." then he bowed slightly and left the room.

"Okay so now what?" Brae asked and Jayk smiled.

"What do you know of holocrons?" he asked.

"They're data storage devices used by jedi to create interactive records of their knowledge." she answered.

"Correct. But have you ever used one before?"

"No." Brae said, shaking her head. Then she smiled slightly, "I don't think my instructors wanted me to have access to the sort of knowledge they contain."

"Then now is your chance to see what they are capable of." Jayk said, "A jedi holocron is much more than just a repository of knowledge such as a book or mundane datafile. When a jedi creates a holocron they create a version of themselves within it. When you activate this example we will find ourselves in the presence of a jedi possibly long dead yet their personality has been preserved perfectly within this device."

"So what do I do?" Brae asked.

"Just place your hand on top of the holocron." Jayk said, "The guardian will do the rest?"

"The guardian?"

"You'll see." Jayk said and Brae stepped towards the holocron before reaching out and placing her hand on top of the small cube.

As soon as she touched the surface there was a shimmering and a holographic image of a human male dressed in jedi robes appeared in front of her and Jayk.

"Greetings." it said as the hologram gave the appearance of looking at each of Brae and Jayk in turn and Brae jumped back in surprise, "I am the guardian of this holocron."

Brae stared at the holographic man then looked at Jayk.

"So that's what the jedi who created this holocron looked like then?" she asked.

"My appearance is based upon that of my creator towards the end of his life." the guardian told her, "It can be altered to assume any other recorded appearance contained within this holocron should it be desired. What information do you seek?"

"I have been told that you can assist me in training my new padawan." Jayk replied and he glanced at Brae, as did the hologram of the guardian.

"And why do you need assistance with this?" the guardian asked.

"There are unusual circumstances." Jayk started to explain, "I am Jayk Udra and my padawan is my niece, Brae."

"Udra you say?" the guardian commented and a smile appeared on his incorporeal face, "And the Jedi Order has decided to have you train your niece? Ah, I see now why the council decided that I might be able to help you. My first padawan was my younger sister. Her name was Lara. My name is Cal Udra."

3.

"Mara. What a sight for sore eyes you are. I take it you have the merchandise?" Morten Crayne asked as she walked through the doorway into his windowless office. Though it had not taken a great deal of planning to carry out the break in at the art gallery, Morten always found himself feeling relieved when such jobs were complete. It was the only point at which he could relax in the knowledge that he was not going to have to explain to his client that the money they had paid up front had been wasted and was non-refundable.

"Of course I have it." Mara replied and she tossed the backpack onto the desk that Morten was sat behind. Eagerly he opened the pack and started removing the contents, placing the necklaces, dagger and painting on the table and examining them. As he did so he shook his head.

"All looks like cheap poodoo to me." he said.

"Well I guess someone must want it bad enough to pay what you charge for me to steal it." Mara replied.

"Thing is I bet they could have openly bought some of this junk for less." Morten said, "So what's so special about it?" then he frowned.

"What's wrong?" Mara asked as he picked up the backpack and reached inside again to rummage around.

"That box." he said, "It's missing."

"It can't be." Mara replied, "It was the last thing I took. I pulled it from the repulsor field and put in there myself." then she groaned and raised a hand to her face, "Teron." she said with a sigh, "That nerf herder dropped the bag. He was supposed to put everything back in."

"So where's the box?" Morten asked.

"Probably in the back of the transport that we ditched on Corris." Mara said and Morten scowled.

"P'Gal! Luk! Get in here." he yelled and the door of his office opened as two large thugs of different species entered.

"Yes boss?" the one called P'Gal asked.

"Go bring me Teron." Morten replied, "I want him in my office right now and I want him able to answer questions so don't go smashing his teeth out. If you need to use force then just break a limb or two."

"Yes boss." P'Gal said and he and Luk left the room.

The two thugs made their way through the gang's dingy headquarters towards the section where the members were quartered and they stood in the doorway of a lounge where a number of them were gathered playing cards.

"Where's Teron at?" P'Gal demanded, "The boss wants him."

"I saw him head for the comms suite." one of the gang members present said and he pointed towards another doorway.

The two thugs followed the direction, striding purposely towards the headquarter's communication room and as they approached the open doorway they heard the sound of voices inside.

"Teron!" P'Gal called out, recognising the gang member's voice, "Get out here now. The boss wants you."

Teron remained inside the communication room and when the two thugs stood in the doorway they found him standing just in front of the holographic projection pad and looking back at them.

"Tell him I'm busy." Teron said and P'Gal and Luk exchanged glances and laughed at the idea of the young man was standing up to them. Either of them was strong enough to snap his neck like a twig and here he was acting as if the pair of them did not scare him in the slightest.

"He said we could break an arm or leg if we wanted." P'Gal said and as he stepped forwards he reached out towards the young man. However, Teron reacted quickly and he grabbed hold of the alien thug's arm and twisted it sharply so that there was a sudden snapping sound and P'Gal screamed as he saw his forearm now bent at a right angle about half way along the bone. Then he delivered a blow to P'Gal's throat that sent him staggering backwards as he choked before collapsing in a heap.

Startled by this unexpected turn of events Luk reached for his blaster. But in the time it took him to draw the weapon Teron was already upon him with a knife in his hand and he knocked the blaster away before slicing across Luk's throat with the knife.

"You were right." Teron said as he looked down at the two dead aliens, "My anger. My hatred. It was easy." then he turned back to face the holographic pad and knelt down, "I want to learn more."

"And I will teach you all you need to know." the image of a hooded man said as it appeared on the pad, "Now rise my new apprentice. If you are to serve me fully then you must also learn to lead others and your new followers await you out there."

"And what if they refuse?" Teron asked.

"If they are not with you then they are your enemies." the hologram said, "And the Sith destroy their enemies utterly."

Since the Ruusan Reformation had stripped the Jedi Order of the majority of their combat starships Jedi had made use of vessels operated by the Republic's judicial forces and it was one of their brightly painted consular-class cruisers that transported Jayk and Brae to Corris. When their ship docked at an orbiting station they were met by a smartly dressed woman who produced an identity card that identified her as a member of local law enforcement.

"My name is Investigator Keera Syl." she said, "Thank you for responding so rapidly."

Deception.

Frustration.

"You have an issue with our presence investigator?" Jayk asked when he sensed her real feelings on the matter and she frowned.

"This a break in." she said, "A pretty minor one at that but for some reason our system automatically flagged up that the Jedi Order needed informing and we got told to wait while you got here. I've got six officers standing guard over a crime scene that my forensics people aren't allowed to touch because of some order handed down from Coruscant."

"In that case investigator, I suggest we proceed to the crime scene immediately." Jayk replied, "If the case is as minor as you say we should be able to sign it off and be out of your hair today."

"Follow me." Keera said and she turned around and walked away.

"Is this the sort of reception Jedi face everywhere master?" Brae whispered to Jayk as they followed the investigator.

"Not normally and I doubt that the investigator has any particular dislike for us either. She is just angry at being unable to carry out the job she feels she needs no help in doing." Jayk replied.

Keera took the Jedi to a government shuttle and from there they were transported down into the atmosphere of Corris where it landed on the rooftop landing pad of the art gallery. This was the first planet other than Coruscant that Brae could remember being on and the view from the roof of the art gallery reminded her of those from many of the buildings on the Republic's capital world. In every direction massive towers reached up into the air, some tall enough to disappear into the clouds above.

Two uniformed police officers stood guard next to a vent access that had been cut open close by and Keera pointed towards them.

"That's how our perpetrator got inside." she said, "It was alarmed but whoever it was managed to trick the building security system into going into a standby mode. The alarms on the exhibits weren't touched though."

"Is that how you were alerted?" Brae asked but Keera shook her head.

"The break in was on the hundred and tenth floor." Keera said as she escorted the Jedi to a nearby turbolift access, "It's a fairly minor part of the gallery that doesn't house anything of note so the stolen items weren't alarmed. We were called when the perpetrators used a blaster fired from a speeder to shatter a window to make their escape and it attracted the attention of workers in the neighbouring building."

"It housed something worth stealing." Brae commented.

"It was a mistake. Mark my words." Keera said, "Most likely some vacc head didn't even know what it was they were taking."

The turbolift doors slid open and at the end of the corridor another pair of uniformed police officers could be seen standing guard over a doorway that had brightly coloured tape strung across it.

"I take that is where the robbery occurred?" Jayk said and Keera nodded.

"Everything was in the one room." she said as they walked towards the guards and she lifted the tape barrier and looked at the two Jedi, "In you go. Aside from a gallery security guard and the first response officers no-one's been in there yet. Oh and I'd be grateful if you tried not to disturb anything that could be evidence."

Jayk and Brae ducked under the tape and stood inside the room where the thefts had occurred.

Surprise.

"Something wrong Brae?" Jayk asked when he sensed his padawan's reaction to what she saw. All around them were depictions of the Sith in one form or another. There were paintings, framed texts, sculptures and examples of personal belongings covering every wall as well as contained within several free standing cases "Master, how is this allowed to exist?" she asked, "In the temple we were taught that the Jedi Order gathered up everything created by the Sith so that could be destroyed hundreds of years ago."

"And you are correct my young apprentice." Jayk replied as he walked forwards and stood in front of where a painting had been removed from the wall and its frame smashed so that it would be easier to carry,

"However, you have failed to grasp one important feature about all of these exhibits."

"Which is what master? Brae said.

"None of them are genuine Sith artefacts Brae." Jayk told her, "Though the Jedi Order continues to seize Sith artefacts and either destroys them or locks them away where they can cause no harm there is certain knowledge that cannot be contained and that sometimes inspires other beings to create reproductions of Sith artefacts. Sometimes this is done to try and trick gullible collectors who think they are purchasing a genuine piece of Sith history on the black market for an exorbitant fee but most such copies are sold openly as such. There are collectors and historians who will pay for a good copy of an artefact as well as the more

unscrupulous ones who will try to obtain the real thing.”

“Told you it was junk.” Keera said from the other side of the tape, “The items taken weren't even the most valuable.”

“What was taken?” Brae asked and Keera took out a datapad and looked at it,

“Two necklaces, one ornamental dagger, a wooden carving and an oil painting. In total they were worth about twenty to thirty thousand credits according to the insurance data submitted.”

“Are there surveillance files?” Jayk asked.

“The internal recorders were deactivated remotely somehow.” Keera answered.

“What about external ones?” Brae commented and Keera frowned.

“I don't now what you mean.” she said, “The gallery has no external recorders.”

“I believe that my apprentice is referring to recorders present in neighbouring buildings.” Jayk said, “You did say that a speeder was seen outside the gallery. Perhaps it was also caught by the recorders in that building.” and he looked at Brae, “Correct?”

“Correct master.” she said, smiling.

4.

Gathered in the security room of the building from where the emergency call had been made the two jedi and Keera watched as a droid cycled through one feed after another in search of footage of the speeder used by the thieves.

"Target frames identified. Generating model." the machine spoke and a hologram that showed one side of the speeder appeared in the air above the security console.

"Is that the only angle?" Jayk asked.

"Negative." the droid replied, "Full three dimensional model available from reflected data and secondary recorder captures." and then by using the reflection of the speeder cast in the windows of the gallery and picked up by this building's security recorders as well as other recorders that had picked up the speeder on its approach and departure the model became a full three dimensional representation of the vehicle that rotated to provide the jedi with a view at every facing.

"I'll need a copy of this." Keera said, "Send it to my station house directly."

"Confirmed." the droid replied.

"I want a copy sending to my ship as well." Jayk added. Then he looked at Keera, "Can you run a search of traffic recorders to see if the speeder shows up?" and the investigator snarled.

"I'm so glad we've got you jedi here to tell me how to do my job." she replied in a sarcastic tone. Then Jayk looked at Brae.

"We should be returning to our ship." he told her, "I want to consult with someone who may know more than we do about Sith artefacts, even fake ones."

"Who?" Brae asked.

"Someone who was around when the Sith still existed." Jayk said.

"The Sith?" Keera said when she heard this, "I thought you jedi wiped them out hundreds of years ago."

"About seven hundred and fifty, yes." Jayk said, nodding, "But fortunately I know someone older than that."

When Morten heard the disturbance outside his office he went to investigate, hoping that it would finally be the two thugs he had sent to retrieve Teron returning with him. But as he stepped through the door he saw one of his gang standing over the body of another with a blaster in his hand.

"What's going on?" he demanded.

"It's a mutiny." the man with the blaster replied, "Boss that little nerf herder Teron is trying to take over."

"That's impossible." Mara said as she stepped out of the office behind Morten but then there was a blaster shot that struck the gang member along the corridor in his back and he collapsed to reveal Teron and two other armed gang members standing behind him.

"Hi there boss." Teron hissed, "I hear you wanted to see me." and then he raised his blaster and fired.

Mara grabbed hold of the startled Morten and dragged him back through the office doorway and slammed her hand on the control that dropped an armoured blast door to block the entrance.

"What the hell is going on?" Morten exclaimed, "That little nerf herder Teron would never have the guts to do something like this and he never could have convinced anyone else to follow him."

"Well he's done it somehow." Mara replied and then as there was a pounding on the blast door that indicated someone was attempting to break through she added, "Now do you have another way out of here?"

"What?" Morten said, still unable to believe what was happening.

"Some secret way out of here just in case we ever got raided." Mara said, "I know you must have something."

"Of course I do."

"Well now seems like a good time use it."

"I can't just let him take over!" Morten snapped.

"We can deal with Teron later." Mara said, "But first we need to make sure that we survive the next ten minutes."

Morten dashed to his desk and reached underneath it to retrieve the blaster he kept hidden there and he slipped the weapon into his pocket before sliding his hand back under his desk. Moments later there was a hissing sound and a section of the office wall opposite to the blast door slid back into the wall to reveal a hidden passageway.

"That leads all the way out." Morten said, "Let's go." and after Mara grabbed hold of her back pack that still contained the remaining stolen artwork the pair of them hurried down the narrow passageway to make their escape before Teron and his men could find a way of forcing the blast door open.

Cal's holocron was sat in the table of the lounge module aboard the cruiser that had brought Jayk and Brae to Corris and as he sat down Jayk reached out and touched it.

"Ah, you're back." Cal said as he materialised and the hologram gave the appearance of looking around, "Or should I say we've arrived? Where are we?"

"Corris." Brae answered, "In the Mid Rim."

"Never heard of it." Cal responded, "So how can I help you? I know that less than a day has passed since we left the Jedi temple and I'm hoping that Brae's training hasn't stalled already."

"No." Jayk said and he held up a datapad showing images of the items stolen from the art gallery, "These have been stolen and we're hoping that you might be able to provide us with some information about them."

"Sith artefacts?" Cal asked.

"Copies." Brae replied, "Pieces of art that were on display in a gallery that was robbed."

"The Jedi Order investigates any activity that can be linked to the Sith, no matter how tenuous the connection even after all the centuries since they became extinct."

"I'm not an art critic." Cal said.

"No, but you know more about the Sith than we do. I was hoping that you could tell us about the significance of what these pieces depict."

Cal's hologram sighed.

"My wife knew more about this than I ever did." he said, "She spent some time studying Sith culture. I had little more than a passing interest when the situation demanded it."

"But can you tell us whether any of them are good matches of genuine Sith artefacts?" Brae asked and then she frowned, "Wait," she added, "did you just say 'wife'? How were you married?"

"I got down on my knees and asked her right after we'd defeated our mortal enemies." Cal replied and he smiled, "Then my little sister Lara almost vomited."

"But marriage is forbidden to Jedi." Brae pointed out.

"The code was considered more of a guideline in my day." Cal explained, "There were some Jedi who lived by it completely and I considered some of them among my friends. But marriage was quite common in the order. In fact both my parents were Jedi who only met because of that so if marriage had been forbidden then I wouldn't have even been born. Neither would either of you if you're descended from me."

"Perhaps we could get back to the matter at hand?" Jayk said, "So you can't tell us anything about what artefacts like these may have meant to the Sith or if they are even close matches to the real thing?"

"No. I came across a number of Sith artefacts during my life but studying or using them was forbidden. I had to kill a good man who ignored that rule and became corrupted by what he found." Cal answered, "Perhaps the gallery could help."

"The only information we got from them was the name of the artist." Jayk said, "They were interested in them only as pieces of art, not any Sith connection."

"They weren't even especially valuable." Brae added, "Far more valuable pieces were left behind."

"Then what you have here is a mystery." Cal said, "Do you have any other leads?"

"A speeder." Brae told him, "Witnesses reported blaster fire that came from a speeder to the police."

"We have a holographic recording of it." Jayk said before the ship's intercom sounded, "Yes?" Jayk said as he activated it.

"Jedi Udra," the voice of the ship's captain said, "we have an audio signal coming from the surface for you. It's a woman called Investigator Syl."

"Put her through captain." Jayk replied.

"Jedi Udra." Keera's voice said.

"Investigator." Jayk replied, "I take it that you have run a search for the speeder the criminals made their escape in?"

"I have." Keera said, "And the tags match a vehicle that was stolen four days ago from a parking lot."

"Do you have any idea where it went?" Jayk asked.

"As a matter of fact yes I do. It's in an impound yard about sixty kilometres from the gallery. It was towed after the perpetrators abandoned it at a private starport."

"So they're already off planet?" Brae said.

"It looks that way yes." Keera responded, "Maybe if my people had been allowed to start an investigation right away instead of waiting on you two turning up from Coruscant then we could have caught them before they made it to their ship."

"Ask about the ship." Cal said.

"Who was that?" Keera asked, the holocron's speech being picked up by the intercom just as well as that of either of the two living Jedi.

"An advisor we brought with us." Jayk replied, "What can you tell us about the ship investigator?"

"It's a YT seven hundred series ship that was waiting for the speeder when it arrived at the starport. As soon as the three occupants of the speeder went aboard it took off and headed straight out of our atmosphere. Tracking lost it when it jumped into hyperspace."

"I'll need an exit vector plotting." Jayk said, "Plus the transponder code if you've got it."

"We're going after the freighter aren't we?" Brae asked and Jayk smiled.

“Yes we are. Somebody wanted those items stolen and shipped off world and I intend to find out what it is that makes them worth it.”

5.

As soon as he received the relevant data about the transport ship that had met the speeder Jayk ran it through the Bureau of Ships and Services database. This told him that at the time of its first registration just over ten years ago it had been named the *Firetrail* but that it had subsequently been renamed the *Swift Exit* three years later and that just over two years after that its official registration had been allowed to lapse. The last recorded owner of the vessel was a human male named Tylo Kurrast, a free trader who hailed from the core world of Hosnian Prime. Looking up Tylo Kurrast, Jayk found that his licence to operate a starship had also expired several years earlier and that there were several outstanding warrants against his name for various infractions related to safety regulations, his lack of proper registration for himself or his ship and transporting goods without paying the appropriate duties. Interestingly there were also several private bounties posted with the Bounty Hunters' Guild. None of these were for more than a thousand credits however, so it seemed that Tylo was not someone that was worth a bounty hunter spending a great deal of time hunting down.

As well as the transport's transponder data, Keera had also supplied Jayk with the exit vector taken when the *Swift Exit* jumped to hyperspace. The speeds that modern starships were capable of meant that in the time since the robbery at the art gallery a YT-700 could have crossed the entire galaxy and so Jayk had to allow for this as he checked the exit vector against current star charts. It was of course possible that Tylo could have dropped out of hyperspace far outside of any settled system and then taken a different heading to throw off any pursuit but that would expand the list of systems that the *Swift Exit* could have reached to more than a hundred million, a impractical number to try and search even for a Jedi. Instead Jayk focused on systems within two degrees in any direction of the exact heading taken. At first none of the possible destination stood out any more than the others but then he noticed that not all of them were star systems and he felt a tremor in the Force telling him to look closer at this.

Thousands of years earlier starships travelling across the galaxy had made use of jump co-ordinates stored in a network of navigational beacons that spanned the Republic. Some of these were nothing more than basic structures in interstellar space that did nothing more than provide passing ships with the data they needed to travel safely through hyperspace whereas others had become settlements in their own right, boasting large populations and the services to match them. When more efficient shipboard navigation computers had become common the network of navigation beacons had been shut down with most of the beacons being left to drift in interstellar space. However, some of the beacons that had developed into space borne colonies continued to operate and in some cases even thrive. However, for many of them the shutting down of the beacon network had been their death knell. Ships were no longer forced to stop to get up to date jump information and travellers in a hurry to get somewhere tended to pass them right by. This had seen the economies of many of them to collapse as well and encouraged the majority of their populations to leave. But what remained were a number of large remotely located space stations that were far from the prying eyes of the Republic and its bureaucracy. Just the sort of place were those eager to avoid such entanglements would go to meet and do business.

"I have you now." Jayk said to himself with a smile as he stared at the image of Tylo Kurrast.

Getting up from his seat Jayk left his quarters where he had been studying the data and made his way back towards the lounge pod where he had left Brae practising lightsaber techniques under the supervision of the Cal Udra holocron and as soon as he opened the door to the lounge he heard the familiar hum of a lightsaber.

Anger.

"Oh kriff!" Brae exclaimed as she swung her lightsaber and once again missed the remote she had been aiming for and it sent a jolt of energy into her leg.

Danger.

Brae swung her lightsaber again in a wide arc and once again she missed the remote. Only this time as her blade kept on moving it headed right for Jayk and thanks to the warning from the Force he reacted just in time to be able to draw his own lightsaber and parry her accidental strike.

"Master!" Brae exclaimed, "I'm so sorry."

"A phrase I am sure you are used to saying." Jayk replied, "Though I notice your lightsaber is active even now."

"Sorry." Brae said again and she took a step back as she shut off her lightsaber. Then the remote suddenly unleashed another jolt of energy that struck her from behind and she yelped.

Anger.

"Seriously? Right in my ass?" she hissed as she scowled.

Jayk stepped into the lounge and looked around to see that the table and several of the seats had been

destroyed by Brae's lightsaber while he had been gone.

"I have at least a passing familiarity with all seven recognised forms of lightsaber combat." he said, "I am not familiar with any that require the total destruction of furniture."

"To be fair she did seem upset each time it happened." Cal commented from the corner of the room and looking at the hologram Jayk noticed a horizontal scorch mark on the wall behind it. Had Cal been a living person instead of a hologram then he would have been cut in two by that particular strike.

Shutting down his lightsaber and returning it to his belt, Jayk closed the door behind him and stood right in front of Brae.

"Turn around." he told her and as she turned to face away from him he wrapped his arms around her, placing his hands over hers, "Now turn on your blade." he said and there was a 'snap-hiss' as Brae's lightsaber ignited again, "Good. Now close your eyes and concentrate."

"Close her eyes?" Cal said, "You've seen what she's done with them open and now you don't want her to watch where her blade is?"

"I want her to feel where it is." Jayk said as he straightened out Brae's arms so that her lightsaber was pointed directly ahead of her.

"So now what?" Brae asked.

"Now just relax, let the Force be your eyes and watch what I do." Jayk said as he watched the spinning remote.

The fist sized device suddenly swooped down and fired again. However, this time Jayk pushed Brae's blade into position to block the shot. The remote repositioned itself rapidly and fired again only for Jayk to deflect that blast as well. Twice more the remote moved and fired and twice more Jayk used Brae's lightsaber to prevent her from being hit. Then the remote pulled back and Jayk let go of his grip on Brae just before it fired again, the first of three shots in quick succession. Neither of the first two energy jolts struck Brae though, even with her eyes closed she parried them with her lightsaber and it was only then that she realised Jayk was not guiding her hands and she stopped and opened her eyes only for the third shot to hit her in the hand and she dropped her lightsaber, the blade deactivating as soon as she released her grip.

"See?" Jayk said as he reached out his hand and used the Force to call the remote to him while Brae scowled at him, "You can do it when you don't try to think too much about it."

"If I'd tried that with my little sister she'd have elbowed me in the ribs." Cal commented.

"What's that supposed to prove?" Brae said.

"It's supposed to prove that your problem is not one of strength but control. Your instincts are good but you are trying too hard to bend the Force to your will instead of allowing it to guide your actions."

Brae bent down to pick up her lightsaber and hooked it back on her belt.

"So I'm guessing that you came here for more than just to tell me I'm doing everything wrong." she said.

"I believe that I may have found the transport ship that took our targets off Corris." Jayk replied.

"Really? Where?" Brae asked.

"A space station located about eighty parsecs from here. I am going to speak with the captain to get him to take us there."

Brae frowned.

"There's something else isn't there?" she said, "I can sense it." and Jayk smiled.

"Very good my young padawan." he said, "Unfortunately I doubt that this vessel will be able to get us all the way to our destination and we will have to finish our journey in a somewhat unconventional manner."

6.

Approaching the shadow port in a vessel painted in the bright red of the Republic's Judicial Department was likely to trigger a mass evacuation by anyone with anything to hide and so Jayk wanted a more subtle method of getting there. Fortunately for the Jedi the salon pod in which the passenger lounge was located aboard the consular-class cruiser also doubled as an escape pod that could be detached and operate independently from its parent ship. Lacking a hyperdrive meant that Jayk would have to take the risk of detaching the pod from the larger vessel while still in hyperspace so that it would return to realspace close enough to the shadow port that it would be able to reach it using the basic sublight thrusters it did possess. Even pushing the vessel to its lowest possible speed in hyperspace without stalling the hyperdrive and forcing the entire vessel back into realspace the window of opportunity to carry out the ejection process was just a tiny fraction of a second and so Jayk decided that he would be the one to trigger the ejection process from inside the pod rather than leaving it to the ship's bridge crew.

Knowing that the return to realspace would be a rough ride Jayk strapped himself into the seat from which he would be able to pilot the pod and then watched as Brae did the same in the co-pilot's seat next to him.

"What's wrong master?" she asked when she noticed him watching her.

"I am about to attempt to eject us from our vessel while in hyperspace and return us to realspace less than a million kilometres from our target." he replied, "After which it is likely I will be taking a seventeen year old girl who does not have full control over her abilities into battle for the first time."

"I won't let you down." Brae said, "I promise."

"Coming up on target now." the captain's voice said over the intercom and Jayk looked at the display in front of him at the same time as he took hold of the control lever. At the top of the display there was a timer counting down to the moment when Jayk would need to release the pod. However, he chose not to rely on this and instead he took a deep breath and closed his eyes as he reached out through the Force, letting it guide his hand while the captain continued to mark off ten second intervals. Then just as the countdown was about to hit zero Jayk pulled back on the lever to eject the pod from the cruiser.

The moment the lever was pulled the pod dropped away from the cruiser and it shook violently as it was torn from hyperspace to be dumped back into realspace. Brightly coloured lights filled the interior of the pod and Brae instinctively reached out towards Jayk.

Fear.

Rather than try to calm his padawan Jayk reached out in turn and took her by the hand, holding it tightly until the pod lurched suddenly and the lights and vibration ceased as it completed its uncontrolled exit from hyperspace. Brae exhaled loudly, having held her breath during the exit and Jayk released his grip on her as he checked the pod's instruments.

"Station dead ahead." he said, "Six hundred thousand kilometres."

"Good." Brae replied, still breathing heavily, "Let's not do that again. Ever."

Jayk took hold of the pod's control column and engaged its sublight engines. It took several minutes to get close to the station during which time it was scanned several times by someone. Some vessels would be able to cross the distance between the pod and station in seconds but the pod's drives were far less powerful and so the compact and ungainly vessel made its way far more slowly.

"We'll dock there." Jayk said, pointed to one of the numerous hangars visible on the main display.

"Do you think that's where Tylo's ship is master?" Brae asked.

"I don't know." Jayk answered, "But it's close to us and I don't want to raise anyone's suspicions by taking too much interest in what's inside each hangar."

Jayk deployed the pod's landing gear as he steered it into the hangar and then hovered over an empty landing zone before bringing it down for a gentle landing. It was then that he saw a group of armoured figures walking towards the pod.

"Guards?" Brae commented, "Do you think we can beat them all?"

"Perhaps." Jayk replied, "Fortunately we will not need to find out. You won't be going into battle just yet my young apprentice. Now let me do all the talking and you'll see how a Jedi has other means at their disposal than armed force."

As the hatch at the back of the pod slid open a set of steps extended down to the deck of the hangar that allowed the Jedi to exit from it easily as the squad of armoured guards marched closer.

"Landing fee is two hundred credits." the leader of the guards barked from behind a faceplate that concealed everything above his upper lip, "Berthing fees are fifty credits per standard day with the first day payable up front. Cash only."

Brae tensed. She knew that neither her nor Jayk were carrying any cash, instead having been issued with an electronic credit stick. If a suitable dispenser was available then it could be used to convert that into local

currency but this station was not the sort of place that was equipped with them.

Anger.

"Did you hear me?" the guard said when Jayk failed to reply, "Now pay up or we take your ship and give you a beating for our trouble."

"We don't want any trouble." Jayk replied, waving his hand in front of the leader of the guards.

"They don't want any trouble." the man said to his men.

"There is no need to delay us any further."

"There's no need to delay you any further."

"We can be on our way. Move along."

"You can be on your way. Move along, move along."

Jayk smiled and nodded before he and Brae walked around the guards and started to cross the hangar.

Behind them the leader of the guards glared at them.

"Some people think they can just walk onto this station and do what they want." he commented and his men nodded in agreement.

Meanwhile the two jedi looked around the hangar, hoping that one of the dozen or so vessels docked here would turn out to be a YT-700 freighter. But none of the vessels were of this class.

"Obviously we need to look elsewhere." Jayk told Brae, "But stay close to me. This place is a wretched hive of scum and villainy."

"I'll be careful master." Brae replied.

"You'll be dead if you don't heed my advice." Jayk said, "Oh and it's probably best if you don't call me master. That could make people suspicious."

"Then what should I call you?"

"I suggest either using my name or even uncle if you prefer."

Leaving the hangar the two jedi found themselves looking at a multitude of cantinas, bars and establishments offering various entertainments that Jayk was concerned he ought not take Brae inside.

"So where do we start uncle?" she asked.

"I suggest the closest cantina." Jayk answered and he looked at the nearest of the cantinas to the hangar they had docked in.

"So we will search them all one at a time?" Brae said but Jayk shook his head.

"No Brae, we will not search any of them." he told her and she frowned.

"I don't understand."

"Then just watch." Jayk said and he headed into the nearest cantina.

Inside the cantina was crowded and the jedi had to push their way through the crowd towards the bar.

"What can I get you?" the barman asked.

"Not 'what', 'who'." Jayk said and he reached under his robes and produced a datapad. Activating this he turned it on and called up an image of Tylo Kurrast that he showed to the barman, "We are looking for this man." he said, "We understand he can help us."

"Help you with what?" the barman responded.

"That is our business." Jayk said, "Do you know him?"

"No. Now are you going to buy something?"

Deception.

Jayk smiled.

"No if you can't help us then we'll try elsewhere." and he turned around and beckoned for Brae to follow him back out of the cantina.

"So where next?" she asked.

"Wherever that man leads us." Jayk replied and Brae frowned again, "Brae he was lying. You will learn to recognise this in time. He knows Tylo Kurrast and I expect him to try and warn him that we are looking for him. In person hopefully." and now Brae smiled.

"So we follow him when he leaves?" she said and Jayk smiled back.

"Exactly. He will take us straight to Mister Kurrast."

Tylo Kurrast was inspecting the exterior of the *Swift Exit's* ion drives when he noticed a familiar face come rushing into the hangar and head for his ship.

"What's the hurry Fennos?" he called out.

"Tylo there are people looking for you." the barman replied when he got closer.

"People? What sort of people?" Tylo asked.

"There was an older guy and some kid hanging around behind him. The guy suggested that they wanted to do business with you but I got the feeling that their business involved delivering people to other people for money."

"Bounty hunters? Here?" Tylo said. It took a brave bounty hunter to come to a shadow port where almost everyone was wanted for something somewhere.

"I think so. Though the kid didn't look much like any bounty hunter I've seen before."

"Tylo Kurrast!" Jayk suddenly shouted out across the hangar bay, "In the name of the Galactic Republic you are under arrest." and then he drew his lightsaber and ignited it, followed almost straight away by Brae.

"Oh kriff!" Tylo exclaimed, "Jedi! You led Jedi right to me you laser brain!" and he shoved Fennos out of the way as he ran for his ship's access ramp.

But Tylo's was not the only attention that Jayk's announcement attracted and all around the hangar beings of various species dived for cover and drew weapons. Meanwhile a squad of guards all turned towards the Jedi. "Brae go!" Jayk snapped, "I'll hold them back!"

As the first of the guards opened fire Jayk used his lightsaber to deflect the blaster shots before using the Force to deliver a sudden powerful push to the entire squad that sent them all flying backwards and allowing him to turn to face some of the others in the hangar who were pointing blasters at him. At the same time Brae broke into a run heading towards the *Swift Exit* as fast as she could. Along the way several blaster bolts whizzed past her close enough that she could feel the heat of them but not so close as to cause injury even as she swung her lightsaber to try and deflect them only to miss every one.

"Stang!" she hissed.

Frustration.

"Brae concentrate!" Jayk called out as he used the Force to scatter a stack of crates being used for cover by a pair of gunmen who fled as soon as they found themselves exposed.

Brae watched helplessly as she saw Tylo disappear into his ship but she kept going nonetheless even as the ramp began to hiss closed. Launching herself forwards, Brae dived through the rapidly closing gap between ramp and hull but she landed heavily and her lightsaber fell from her grasp and rolled out of sight. Picking herself up Brae looked around for her weapon but failed to locate it before she heard the sound of the ship's engines powering up.

Hurrying towards the cockpit Brae saw Tylo sat in the pilot's seat working as fast as he could to get the ship ready for take off.

"Stop what you're doing and surrender to me." she told him, "You are under arrest."

Looking over his shoulder Tylo smiled and got to his feet.

"Don't make me hurt you little girl." he said as he drew a blaster pistol from a holster on his hip.

"I'm a Jedi." she said, "Now do as I say."

"You're a stowaway." Tylo replied as he advanced towards Brae, his blaster trained on her all the time, "Now get off my ship."

Knowing that without her lightsaber she had no chance of deflecting any shot from Tylo's blaster Brae decided on an alternate tactic and she let the Force flow through her and tried to focus her mind on the blaster. Then she released the energy in an attempt to rip the blaster out of Tylo's hand but she had overdone it and the resulting telekinetic pull not only disarmed Tylo but also brought him flying through the air towards her along with his blaster. The blaster flew past Brae but there was not enough space in the corridor for her to avoid Tylo and instead he slammed into her, knocking her to the floor before landing on top of her. Tylo recovered from the shock of this first and he grabbed hold of Brae's wrists and pinned them to the floor either side of her head while he squatted over her and used his legs to pin hers in place under him while she struggled to try and break free.

"Well, well, isn't this interesting?" he said as she struggled, "Now what am I to do with you?"

"Lean closer." Brae said softly.

"What was that?" Tylo asked, lowering his head.

"I said lean closer." Brae replied before she suddenly head butted him, producing a 'crunch' sound as her forehead struck his nose and broke it.

Dazed, one of Tylo's legs lifted slightly and allowed Brae to get one of hers free. Then she brought her knee up swiftly between Tylo's legs and he yelped in pain as he collapsed on top of Brae. Pushing him off, Brae slid out from under him and grabbed one of his arms before getting to her feet and twisting the limb behind Tylo's back to produce another cry of pain.

"Well, well, isn't this interesting?" she said with a smile, "Now what am I to do with you?"

"Lean closer." Tylo hissed before Brae kicked him between his legs again.

Surprise.

Pain.

Jayk had felt the sudden sensations from within the *Swift Exit* as he backed towards it under fire from several directions at once. He had no idea of how well Brae was doing inside the ship but he could sense her presence in the Force just as strong as it had always been so he guessed that she was at least holding her own.

Then there was a 'hiss' from the direction of the ship and Jayk risked a quick look around just in time as Tylo was about to emerge to attack him from behind. But rather than Tylo he saw Brae standing at the top of the ramp with her lightsaber in her hand.

"Master quickly!" Brae yelled as she ran to the bottom of the ramp and held up her lightsaber in a fighting stance. Jayk turned towards the *Swift Exit* and ran for the ramp, ducking and weaving to avoid the blaster fire aimed towards him. As soon as he reached the bottom of the ramp both he and Brae retreated inside the *Swift Exit* and sealed it behind them.

"Where's Tylo?" Jayk asked.

"Right this way." Brae answered with a smile and she led Jayk to the ship's lounge area where he found Tylo bound to a chair and gagged with tape. His nose was bent out of shape and covered in blood and he glared at the two Jedi.

Anger.

"He wasn't being very co-operative." Brae said, "So what do we do with him now?"

"We do nothing my padawan." Jayk told her, "We'll use this ship to take us back to Coruscant and the Jedi Order. I'm sure that they will be able to get more out of him than we can here."