

STAR WARS

DARKNESS RISING

1-07: LIFE & LIBERTY

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Stopping off at an independent space station on their way back to Coruscant, the crew of the *Swift Exit* discover that a large number of visitors to the station are never heard from again and they decide to investigate what is happening to them...

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1.

The YT-700 class freighter *Swift Exit* dropped out of hyperspace close to the imposing shape of what had once been known as Transfer Point THX-1138, a trading post along the Corellian Trade Route that led from the Core Worlds right to the Outer Rim. As the speeds and ranges of starships had increased over the millennia the need to drop out of hyperspace to refuel every few sectors had disappeared and the traffic that the station received had dropped off significantly. Effectively abandoned by the Republic, the station had been taken over by private operators and turned into a free port now known as *Lygon Station* after the being who had originally taken it over that offered the opportunity for beings from several nearby sectors to meet discretely and do business without worrying about overbearing government interference. Such freedom from government oversight proved a popular selling point and the *Swift Exit* was unable to dock immediately, instead it was forced to wait outside with dozens of other vessels all wanting to dock. There were many such places in the galaxy and it was impossible for the Republic to properly police them all, but when the opportunity arose agents from the judicial department would pay a visit to see if they could uncover evidence relating to illegal activity within the Republic.

On this occasion the vessel acting on behalf of the Republic was the *Swift Exit*. Ordinarily a light freighter was not the sort of ship that the judicial department would assign to such a mission but on this occasion the visit was one of opportunity rather than something preplanned far in advance. The *Swift Exit* carried a pair of Jedi, Jedi Knight Jayk Udra and Padawan Brae Udra who was his niece as well as his apprentice. The pair were returning from dealing with a conflict between two Republic worlds in the Outer Rim and had received word to stop off at the station and see whether there were any activities that obviously require investigation. "So how do we go about this?" Brae asked as she, her uncle and the *Swift Exit*'s owner, a smuggler named Tylo Kurrast sat in the cockpit and waited their turn to dock.

"We check the hangars and docking ports for any signs of illegal cargoes." Jayk replied.

"But master, wouldn't such things be hidden?" Brae said.

"Not in a place like this." Tylo commented, "Now if a judicial vessel dropped out of hyperspace and a platoon of sector rangers disembarked then you can pretty much guarantee that any ships about to carry something illegal into Republic territory would vanish before you say 'please arrest me officer' but providing you two can keep a low profile you may have a chance of catching people in the act of moving illegal cargoes."

"Precisely." Jayk said, "Therefore, my young apprentice you may feel free to exchange your robe for something more casual."

"What about you?" Brae said, looking at Tylo.

"Oh I thought I might just take a look around and see if there's anything for sale that catches my eye." he replied.

"Grenades?" Jayk said.

"I still say that they could come in useful." Tylo said.

"If we're going to go up against any more gangs of pirates or swarms of Sith spawn then-" Brae began before Jayk interrupted her.

"The Jedi Order frowns upon such things." he said. Then a smile appeared on his face, "So I suggest that if you are able to obtain such weaponry then you should find somewhere to keep them that will not be easy to find."

"Oh don't worry, I'm used to having to hide things away from prying eyes." Tylo said before there was a chiming sound from the console, "Ah," he added, "we just got our permission to dock."

The inside of *Lygon Station* was even more crowded than the space outside, with beings of many species intermingling as they conducted their business or looked for someone that was offering what they wanted. Standing outside the hangar where the *Swift Exit* was docked its occupants could see adverts for all manner of goods and services, most of which were restricted or downright illegal in many parts of the galaxy but given the sovereign status of the station were perfectly legal here. The station was not lawless however, uniformed security could be seen patrolling in groups and keeping watch for behaviour likely to disrupt the smooth running of the station. Of course there would be no such niceties as a trial for anyone who ran afoul of the station authorities, instead troublemakers could expect to be relieved of their valuables before being thrown off the station for minor offences or simply ejected into space for more serious infractions.

"So where do we start?" Brae asked as she looked at the various signs. The teenager had changed from her usual Jedi robes into a more casual outfit she had obtained while on their previous assignment to make blending into a crowd easier.

"You and I will inspect the loading docks." Jayk replied, "Be on the lookout for any vessels loading contraband cargoes and make a note of them. We'll try to determine where they are heading later on and

alert the authorities. Meanwhile Tylo can explore the rest of the station and see if there is anything here he needs." and he held out a credit stick, "Spend it wisely."
"Of course I will." Tylo replied as he took the stick, "Now if you don't mind I have work to do." and he began to walk away.
"Get going." Jayk told Brae, "With any luck we should meet up on the far side of the station and we can decide then whether there is anything here that deserves a closer look."
"Yes master." Brae replied before the pair turned away from one another and headed off in opposite directions.

At the same time as the Jedi were moving around the outer sections of the space station Tylo was heading more towards the centre. The innermost sections were related to the administration and operation of the station and as such were off limits. But located between the loading docks and core sections were the commercial sectors. These offered a wide variety of goods and services from traders who made the station their permanent home rather than just making brief stops and Tylo correctly guessed that this was where he would find the recreational activities he favoured.

There were several gambling houses located in a cluster, all of them also offering food and drink so that customers would be able to stay inside the establishment longer without needing to seek nourishment elsewhere. Tylo was not especially worried about finding somewhere that offered good food though, instead he was hoping that he would find somewhere that mixed gambling with other forms of entertainment and he smiled when he saw a sign promoting both life sabacc and live dancers. Going inside Tylo saw that the establishment was just what he had hoped for. The main gambling hall was filled with tables being run by a mix of droids and live staff. Mixed in with these tables were raised platforms on which scantily-clad dancers performed for the entertainment of the customers and as Tylo had expected the vast majority of these appeared to be female members of species considered physically attractive by humans and similar species. From what Tylo could tell anyone wanting to gamble simply had to make their way over to a table and take a seat before being dealt in as soon as there were enough participants and he rapidly chose the one that he wanted to join.

The table was operated by a droid rather than an organic being and it was positioned right beside one of the raised platforms. On this platform a young human woman, appearing to be only a few years older than Brae, danced around a pole while the nearby gamblers continuously glanced up at her before looking back down at their cards. There were two vacant seats at the table and as Tylo expected they both faced away from the young dancer and he sat down in one of these and plugged his credit stick into a socket in the table.

"Five thousand." he said.

"Confirmed. You have purchased five thousand credits worth of chips." the droid responded, "You will be dealt in at the next hand. May I order you a beverage?"

"Thanks. I'll take a beer." Tylo told the droid as he returned the credit stick to his pocket and then he settled down to watch what was going on while he waited to be dealt into the game. But rather than turning around to watch the dancer he watched his fellow gamblers and he quickly determined that he had chosen his table well. The fact that it was run by a droid meant that drinks could be ordered easily without the dealer needing to interrupt the game in play to relay the order, thus meaning that more alcohol would be consumed and since all of the other players were male they spent a significant portion of their time watching the girl behind Tylo instead of the shifting values of their cards.

When the next hand was dealt Tylo's cards were a mix of positive and negative value cards that gave him a very poor score not far removed from zero but he still made a moderate bet, hoping that the values would shift later in the game. Obviously no-one had a particularly strong hand since all of the other players also made bets without calling the game but a number of them did slide cards face down into the interference field that locked their values. Following this the droid activated the shifting field and Tylo was pleased to see his cards adjust in value to take his score down considerably to minus sixteen.

But it was at the drawing phase that he put his scheme into place, delaying taking his decision long enough for the other players to look up at the dancer or order new drinks before quietly announcing his intentions to the dealer droid, locking the value of two of his cards while exchanging the third for a new one. Starting the next round of the hand in a much better position than he had the first, Tylo increased the value of his bet only slightly so as not to attract attention before starting the sequence again.

Tylo's plan worked just as he had hoped it would and by making subtle bets and plays while his opponents were more focused on their drinks or the dancer, he was soon more than a thousand credits up from where he started. It was then that a number of his opponents ordered new drinks and the droid relayed their orders to the bar located at the far side of the casino. These were delivered by a living member of staff, another young woman wearing a revealing outfit that served only to distract Tylo's opponents further. Even Tylo himself allowed his eyes to linger on her for a while longer than he would have preferred to and it was then that the waitress suddenly tripped, tipping the entire tray of drinks over the dealer droid and interference field generator in the centre of the table. This produced a sudden 'crash!' along with the sound of breaking glass

and the contents were scattered. Though both the droid and interference field generator were maintained well enough to function reliably under normal circumstances their maintenance regimes had not included properly sealing them against fluids and both produced sudden showers of sparks as they shorted out. Immediately there were groans from around the table as the players realised that their game would now have to be abandoned.

"Nice work nerf herder!" one snapped as he tossed his cards down onto the table and swept up his remaining chips, including those he had moved into the pot before he stormed away from the table. He was swiftly followed by the other players apart from Tylo who was about to leave to find another game where he could take advantage of other players' distraction when all of a sudden he decided to stay and help the unfortunate waitress who was now struggling to clear up the mess.

"Careful with that." he said as she reached for a piece of broken glass, "It's sharp."

"Mayla!" a stern sounding voice suddenly called out.

"Stang." the waitress hissed when she saw her employer storming across the casino towards her, "I'm sorry Mister-" she began before the casino manager reached out to snatch the tray away from her.

"Just get out." he told her, "I've had enough of your poodoo and now this table is out of commission."

"Hey look," Tylo said, attempting to intervene on the waitress's behalf, "it was just an accident."

"Oh yeah?" the manager responded, "Well how about you keep your nose out of what you don't understand? I've got enough trouble with her friends just quitting on me without her disrupting my business as well." and at that point Mayla just dropped her tray again and ran for the exit, "Typical. Total vacc head." the manager muttered as he started to head back to the bar.

Tylo was just about to go and look for another sabacc game that met his requirements when all of a sudden he halted and looked in the direction the waitress had fled. Then he picked up his chips and stuffed them into his pocket before he headed after the waitress instead of towards another table. The crowd outside the casino made it hard to follow someone but the revealing nature of her outfit made Mayla stand out among the other beings crowded around her and Tylo started to push his way towards her.

"Hey Mayla!" he shouted after her and the waitress stopped and turned back towards him, revealing that she had tears in her eyes.

"Just leave me alone okay? I'm sorry I spilled your drink but-"

"I don't care about the drink." Tylo said, "But you seemed pretty upset back there. I was wondering what the problem was."

"You always follow crying women out of casinos?" Mayla commented and Tylo hesitated.

"No." he admitted, "In fact most times I see a woman running off crying it's because of something I did. But let's just say I've undergone a bit of a change in outlook recently owing to the somewhat disreputable company I've been keeping." then he looked around at the other recreational establishments available, "How about I buy you a drink and you can tell me what's wrong?"

"At one of these places? No thanks." Mayla replied.

"How about my ship then? I've got some decent liquor stashed away." Tylo suggested but Mayla just frowned at him, obviously unsure of accepting an invitation to a stranger's vessel, "And if you're not happy about staying here I'll even throw in a free ride to Coruscant." he added, "If you don't trust me then you'll trust my shipmates I promise."

"Coruscant?" Mayla said, "You're heading right to the Core Worlds?"

"All the way." Tylo replied.

"Anywhere beats here I suppose. But I need to go get my things."

"That's fine. I need to go cash in my chips anyway. My ship is in loading bay seven. I'll meet you there."

2.

"Hello?" Mayla's voice called out from the bottom of the access ramp and Tylo ran to the top.

"Hi there. Come on up." he said, waving her aboard when he saw her standing alone at the bottom of the ramp with a holdall over her shoulder, "What are you drinking?"

"Do you have any kind of tea?" Mayla asked.

"I think Brae has some somewhere." Tylo replied as he led Mayla into the lounge and headed for one of the cupboards where food was stored.

"Who's Brae?" Mayla said.

"Some kid I have to share my ship with." Tylo answered as he rummaged through the cupboard, "She was a bit of a bantha cow at first but we get along better now." then he smiled as he found a box of tea bags and held them up for Mayla to see. In response she smiled and nodded, "So what's troubling you anyway?" Tylo asked as he started to prepare a cup of tea for Mayla, "You don't seem too bothered about losing your job."

"Working there was just supposed to be temporary." Mayla said, "We started out hitch hiking starships to try and get to the Core, Alderran or Chandrila maybe. Coruscant seemed out of reach."

"Who's we?"

"Me and my friends. Kassyndra and Jesso. We grew up on a two credit mud ball mining colony and wanted out but couldn't afford the fare. We managed to get here before we ran out of cash and got jobs for that stinking casino to try and earn enough to get off the station. The problem was the manager was always coming up with reasons why he could dock our pay or take our tips."

"So are these two the ones who quit?" Tylo said as he placed a mug of tea in front of Mayla.

"They didn't quit." she said, frowning, "They just vanished."

"Vanished?"

"That's right. A couple of weeks ago they just didn't come back from a work shift. I tried going to station security but they weren't interested. They said that they both probably just left the station but they left all their possessions behind. Then when my boss found out they were gone he went berserk and said I needed to work extra shifts to cover for them."

"And you've heard nothing from them since?" Tylo said and Mayla shook her head.

"Nothing at all. It's obvious that something's happened to them but no-one will believe me."

"Well I may be able to help you out there." Tylo said and he walked across the lounge to where a small crystalline cube was positioned on a shelf and he looked right at it, "Are you listening?" he asked.

"Of course." Cal Udra said as his hologram materialised in the middle of the lounge.

"Stang!" Mayla exclaimed, surprised at the sudden appearance of the ghostlike figure, "What the kriff is that?"

"Mayla, please allow me to introduce Cal Udra." Tylo told her.

"Jedi Knight Cal Udra." Cal said, "Or at least the original me was."

"Cal is the guardian of the holocron that the real Cal Udra created about three thousand years ago." Tylo explained, "He's an advanced AI that apparently has the personality of his creator and he has the useful knack of being able to interface with wireless computer networks and search them much faster than you or I could."

"Precisely." Cal added, "Now I understand that you've two friends who have gone missing."

Mayla nodded.

"Kassyndra and Jesso." she said.

"Yes, I heard you. Do you have any recent images of them?" Cal asked.

"Sure. Right here on my datapad." Mayla answered and she reached down to open up her holdall, taking a datapad from it and bringing up an image on the screen of her and two other young women stood together and smiling. Then she held this out towards the hologram of Cal.

"Point it towards the holocron itself." Cal said, "My hologram can't actually sense anything."

"Sorry. This is my first time talking to a dead man." Mayla replied as she turned the datapad around.

"Okay I've got it. Now hang on while I try to access the station records." Cal said. Then his image appeared to frown, "That's disappointing. The station doesn't appear to log who comes and goes and the security monitors in the docking bays don't have open feeds to tap into."

"So someone would have to find the computer they're stored on and patch in manually then?" Tylo asked.

"That's right." Cal replied.

Just then there was the sound of voices as Jayk and Brae returned to the ship. Both jedi walked up the access ramp and came to a halt when they saw Mayla sat in the lounge.

"Tylo, you never said we were having guests." Jayk said, "Shall Brae and I take another lap around the station to give you some privacy."

"No." Tylo answered, "Jayk and Brae Udra, meet Mayla. I don't know her last name but I think she needs our help."

"Needs our help?" Brae commented, "Tylo since when did you concern yourself about helping people?" "Since you two started rubbing off on me." Tylo said and he looked at Mayla, "Mayla, Jayk and Brae are members of the Jedi Order."

"The young lady has some missing friends she'd like to locate." Cal said.

"And then she needs a ride to the Core." Tylo added, "I thought we could help her out with both."

"Master, are we going to help?" Brae asked.

"The Force guides our path my young apprentice," Jayk said as he sat down opposite Mayla, "and on this occasion it appears to have brought us here at the right time to help this young lady and her friends." then he smiled and glanced at Tylo, "It even seems to have had an effect on our pilot."

"Tylo being charitable." Brae said, "I've got a very bad feeling about this."

Jayk listened carefully as Mayla told him her the story of how she and her two friends had attempted to escape a life of drudgery in the Outer Rim by making their way to the Core where as they saw it everything would be better. But lacking the funds to buy passage they had been forced to make short trips hitch hiking from place to place until they arrived on *Lygon Station* approximately three months earlier and had taken up employment at the casino.

"I would like to start at the casino." Jayk said, "Brae, you will accompany me."

"I'm not so sure that's a good idea." Tylo said.

"Because of my age?" Brae asked, "I may be seventeen but it's not like I'll be drinking or gambling."

"Oh that doesn't matter here." Mayla pointed out, "There are no age restrictions on anything. Businesses can serve who they want with whatever they want as long as the station management gets their cut at the end of the day."

"Yeah, this whole place is pretty much just a hive of scum and villainy." Tylo commented.

"Ah, so that's why you seem so at home." Brae replied and Tylo scowled momentarily.

"I'm sure Brae can handle herself. She's already made a circuit of the station on her own and I'll be with her."

Jayk said, "So if you'd just like to tell us where this casino is we'll head right there. In the mean time Tylo, I suggest that Mayla takes you back to her apartment and you check the area for any signs of foul play."

Brae changed back into her robes before she and Jayk headed for the casino. Both Jedi kept their cloaks closed to conceal the lightsabers they carried, not wanting to advertise their identities any more than necessary aboard a station filled with criminals.

The inside of the casino had changed little since Tylo had been there, the only real difference being the two technicians trying to repair the damaged droid and sabacc table as quickly as possible while the manager repeatedly reminded them of the money he was supposedly losing while it was out of action.

"You are the manager here?" Jayk asked as he walked up behind the man.

"Hey, I run a straight house here." the manager replied. Then as he turned around he added, "If you're about to come out with some poodoo about being cheated-" but he stopped when he caught sight of Brae and smiled.

Lust.

"You know I have a couple of vacancies for waitresses as well as dancers." he said with a smile.

"She is not interested in any employment you can offer." Jayk replied, "But we would like to ask you a few questions about some of your former employees."

"Pity." the manager said as he continued to stare at Brae and Jayk reached out and grabbed hold of him before physically turning him in his own direction.

"Your former employees." he said sternly.

Anger.

"I don't care about former employees." the manager said, scowling and he reached up to remove Jayk's hand from his shoulder, "Now get your kriffing hand off me before-"

"Before you take us to your office to discuss this matter privately." Jayk said, waving his other hand in front of the manager's face.

"Come into my office." the manager said, staring forwards, "We'll talk about this privately."

"Of course." Jayk replied, smiling as he removed his hand from the man's shoulder.

The two Jedi followed the manager from the casino floor past the bar and along a short passageway to an office simply labelled 'Manager' on the door. Inside the room was cluttered and there was a strong smell of both alcohol and intoxicating herbal mixtures. There was a desk in the middle of the room and on it was a small plaque that read 'Kell Orborn – Manager'.

"So what do you want to know?" Kell asked as he sat down.

"You had two young women working for you until recently." Jayk replied, sitting down while Brae walked around the office, inspecting the various images hung on the walls. Most of them depicted Kell with an assortment of young women wearing extremely revealing outfits but there were a few that Brae guessed

were keepsakes of times he wanted to remember such as him standing outside the casino as the sign was being lifted into position, "Named Kassyndra and Jesso. Both human." Jayk went on and Kell snorted. "Oh those two." he said, "They quit. Just didn't show up. Their friend was little better either. I had to fire her this morning."

"The two women who failed to show up for work have disappeared. Their friend asked us to investigate." Jayk said, "Is it a common problem, your staff suddenly failing to show up for work?"

"That's just the nature of this place. People move on. But I take care of my staff." Kell answered.

"Oh really?" Brae commented from behind him, "And is it your caring nature that causes you to monitor your female employees while they are getting changed?" and she pointed to the computer monitor on Kell's desk. The picture was broken up into numerous smaller ones, each of which showed the feed from a security camera somewhere on the premises and it was obvious that several of them were located in areas where the casino's female employees changed their clothing.

Rage.

"Who the kriff do you think you are?" Kell bellowed as he leapt to his feet and Jayk stood up as well, drawing back his cloak to reveal his lightsaber and Brae did the same.

Fear.

"Oh kriff." Kell said backing away from the two jedi, "Look, wherever those two girls went it had nothing to do with me."

"Maybe, maybe not." Jayk said, advancing with his hand resting on his lightsaber, "But you aren't exactly being co-operative."

"I had nothing to do with it I promise." Kell pleaded, "Every now and again someone just doesn't show up for work and I replace them. There are always more where they came from."

Jayk glared at Kell. The casino manager obviously had no respect for his employees but there was no indication that he was attempting to deceive the jedi.

"Are all the ones that just vanish female?" Brae asked.

"Not all of them, no. I lose barmen and cleaning staff as well as the waitresses and dancers." Kell told her, "But you're wasting your time. They're just moving on. That's the way this place operates. People can come and go as they please with no questions asked. That's why most come here in the first place."

"Did either woman have any problems being harassed while they worked here?" Jayk said.

"Other than by you." Brae muttered.

"Customers hit on the girls all the time. If they can't take it then they need to find a different job." Kell replied, "If someone causes real trouble they get thrown out but I'm not about to get rid of paying customers just because someone's ass got grabbed. I'd go out of business."

"And I think that it is time to let you go back to running your business." Jayk said and he looked at Brae, "Come on, we're leaving." he told her. But before he took a single step towards the door he looked back at Kell, "There is the matter of Mayla's outstanding wages, however." he said, "Along with those of the two missing women. You may give them to us."

"Are you kriffing kidding me? I'm-" Kell began.

"We will take their money and be gone." Jayk said, gesturing with his hand again as he used the Force to push the idea of handing over the women's wages to him.

"Take the money and get out." Kell hissed as he reached into his pocket and produced a large wad of Republic Credits. Counting out a number of them he pressed the money into Jayk's hand, "Now it's time to leave." he added.

"Of course it is." Jayk responded as he tucked the money into his robes and he and Brae exited the office. Stood in the passageway outside Brae waited for the office door to drop shut before looking at Jayk.

"Wasn't making him hand over the money an abuse of our power master?" she asked.

"Not in this case. The money never belonged to him and we will not be profiting from it. Now I will wait outside for you."

"What?" Brae replied, confused, "Aren't we both leaving?"

"In time, yes. But first I thought you may wish to speak with some of the other employees here." Jayk said and he looked towards another door that was labelled 'Female Staff Changing'.

Brae smiled back at him and headed for the door, opening it and walking straight into the changing room beyond.

"Who are you?" one of the women inside asked when she saw the young jedi.

"Technical support." Brae replied as she walked over to the far corner of the room where she knew a surveillance camera to be concealed. Then there were gasps as she drew and activated her lightsaber before using it to cut through the fake wall panel that hid the camera before simply reaching up and ripping it out of place, "Tell your boss that his camera is definitely broken." she said, tossing the device into the middle of the room before walking out and heading to the casino exit. Behind her she heard the sound of shouting as the outraged staff rushed to confront the man who had been spying on them getting undressed.

3.

Tylo had seen rougher neighbourhoods than the one Mayla and her friends had lived in on the station, in fact he had lived in several but he had always known how to look after himself. This section of the station appeared to receive only the bare minimum of maintenance, only about half of the lighting panels were functioning and there was an odd rattling sound coming from the ventilation system.

"What are the neighbours like?" Tylo asked when he noticed a man exit an apartment, glance at him with a stern expression and then head in the opposite direction.

"Everyone keeps to themselves pretty much." Mayla replied. Then she pointed to a nearby door, "This is mine." she said and she reached out and opened the door.

"You leave it unlocked?" Tylo commented as he noticed that she used no key or security code.

"I didn't think I was coming back," Mayla answered, "and anything I cared about I'd already taken."

"I get it." Tylo said, following her into the apartment. Upon entering it, Tylo decided that 'apartment' suggested that where Mayla and her friends had lived was far more impressive than it actually was. Her home consisted of a single large room with three simple beds lined up along one wall and a small kitchen unit on the other side. The only other doorway than the one he had just come through led to a tiny bathroom that reminded Tylo of the one aboard the *Swift Exit*, "So how much did you pay for a place like this?" he asked.

"Two hundred a month." Mayla told him. Then she snarled, "But the landlord was always offering us alternate ways to pay if you take my meaning."

"Yeah, I get it. Did he have anything to say about your missing friends?" Tylo said as he started to walk around the room, inspecting the wall for any signs that they had been covertly modified.

"He claimed not to know anything and made it clear that he still expected to be paid the same amount. Do you think he was involved?"

"It's possible. But he doesn't have a financial motive to harm his customers." Tylo pointed out, "Without your two friends to help out with the rent he's less likely to be paid." then he came to a halt, "Okay, I've seen enough here. Now you said that you were here when you friends disappeared."

"That's right. As far as I knew they'd just gone to work. But when they didn't come back I called to check on them and the manager was furious, yelling at me about how they'd not turned up and left him in the lurch. Then he said that he'd be taking what he had to pay someone else to come in on short notice from my wages even though I know he won't have paid them a single extra credit."

"Well given how close you all lived and the fact that they left their belongings behind it seems highly unlikely that they did just leave so that means something must have happened to them on the way from here to the casino. Do you all take the same route each time?"

"Every time." Mayla replied, nodding, "It's a route that let's us stick to the better parts of the station."

"Really? You consider this a 'better part'?"

"Well it's better than some."

"Okay then. Show me." Tylo said.

"Sure, follow me." Mayla replied and she led him out of the room into the corridor outside. Once there they suddenly found themselves confronted by a middle aged twi'lek with breath that made Tylo recoil.

"Girl!" he snapped, "You owe me a month's rent."

"Oh stang." Mayla hissed.

"Hey look," Tylo said to the twi'lek, stepping between Mayla and him.

"Out of my way!" the twi'lek yelled and he moved to push Tylo aside. But as soon as he put his hand on Tylo's shoulder the smuggler grabbed hold of his arm and twisted it violently before using it to push the twi'lek up against the nearest wall.

Looking down the corridor Tylo spotted a security camera pointing towards him.

"Does that work?" he asked.

"I don't know." Mayla replied.

"Then I guess I better not use my blaster just in case." Tylo said before he delivered a sudden blow to the twi'lek's spine, causing the slum lord to produce a sudden howl of pain, "Okay, let's get out of here." he added as he let go of the twi'lek and let him fall to the floor. Then he grabbed hold of Mayla and hurried down the corridor, pulling her after him.

"That way!" she exclaimed, pointing as they passed a junction, "That's the route we took." and Tylo turned back to head down the other corridor.

A pair of security agents looked around at the wrecked casino. Only a handful of the male organic staff were still present and there were no women or customers at all.

"I want them all caught and made to pay for this." Kell said, gesturing at the damaged furniture and droids, "And I want compensating for my lost business as well." he added.

"How did this start exactly?" one of the agents asked.

"I told you." Kell replied, "All of a sudden every female member of staff went berserk. They tried to break into my office and then stormed out of here doing all of this on their way out. They drove out all my customers." The agents exchanged glances, having heard about the hidden cameras from comrades who had already caught up with some of the offended women.

"And what might have triggered that off?" one said.

"Those kriffing jedi, that's what. They came in here throwing accusations around about me being responsible for people disappearing and when they couldn't pin that on me they stole my money and encouraged my staff to riot."

At the mention of 'jedi' the agents looked at one another again.

"What do you mean 'jedi'?" one asked.

"There were two of them. A young human woman and an older man. I could show you security footage of them if my system hadn't just been smashed. They were asking questions about two of my staff that quit not long ago. Their room-mate accused me of being responsible and sent the jedi after me."

"Are you certain they were jedi?"

"Of course I'm certain. I saw their lightsabers. No-one else carries that sort of weapon."

"Wait here. We need to call this in." an agent said and both of them headed to the casino's main entrance.

"Jedi? I've got a bad feeling about this." the other agent commented while the first took out his comlink and activated it.

"Gorso to control, we've got a situation at Orborn's casino." he signalled.

"The girls come back for another round?" the voice of a controller responded.

"No, it's all quiet here."

"So what's wrong?"

"Orborn reckons that all of this kicked off because there are jedi on the station."

"Jedi? Are you serious. What are they doing here?"

"Asking about missing girls apparently. In particular two that vanished recently."

"Stang." the controller hissed, "Hang on Gorsio, I'm putting you through to the captain." and then the channel went dead for just under a minute before a deeper voice spoke.

"Gorso, what's going on out there? I'm hearing stories about jedi."

"Looks like they're true captain. Orborn says that there were two of them here in his casino and they caused all the trouble."

"Okay this is a problem. I want you to get as much information on these two jedi as you can while I put a team together. If we're going to keep a lid on this then we need to get rid of them as soon as possible."

"Kill jedi?" Gorsio replied, "But won't they just send more?"

"That's a problem we'll deal with if it comes down to it. For now we need to get rid of the ones we've already got poking their noses where it doesn't belong. Now go find out what you can, I'm going to go and tell the boss."

Mulgon Vorst was the latest in a long line of station administrators of *Lygon Station* and under his management its profits had increased considerably thanks to his ability to identify gaps in the market that legitimate trading posts within Republic territory could not fulfil. Part of the station's success remained dependent on it being seen as somewhere safe to do business, however and for that he needed an effective security force and that was organised by the man now standing in front of him, a man called Tyrro who operated under the title of 'captain'.

"What's wrong?" Mulgon asked.

"We've got jedi on the station." Tyrro told him.

"So? The Republic sends its agents here regularly but we're outside of their jurisdiction. The worst they can do is wait for our customers to enter their territory and that's hardly our problem."

"It is when they're asking questions about people disappearing off the station." Tyrro said, "How long do you think this operation will continue if people find out we're selling off the strays to slavers? Most of them are Republic citizens after all. We could end up up to our necks in jedi and sector rangers. Even if they didn't seize the station the disruption would put us out of business."

"I take it you have a plan to prevent this?" Mulgon said, leaning back in his chair.

"Of course. I'm putting together a tactical team. I figure all we need to do is take out these jedi before they can find proof of what we've been up to. Then we wait until the dust settles and carry on where we left off. But I suggest you have the snatch teams make sure they've cleaned up after themselves. If the jedi are reporting back to Coruscant the moment they find anything then we could end digging an even deeper hole for ourselves."

"Excellent." Mulgon said as a smile spread across his face, "I'll make sure everyone else knows what to do."

4.

Mayla led Tylo along one dilapidated hallway after another as she showed him the route she and her friends had taken to the casino, all of which shared the same appearance as that of the one outside their home. Or at least they did until Tylo saw a wall that was fitted with brand new bulkhead plates and he came to a halt. "What's this?" he asked, pointing at the clean plates that looked distinctively out of place in this section of the station.

"I don't know." Mayla replied, "I first noticed it a few days ago. But I don't know why the wall was replaced." "A few days? About the time your friends vanished by any chance?" Tylo said as he looked up and down the hallway.

"I don't know. Maybe." Mayla said before Tylo spotted a woman begin walking down the hallway towards them.

"Hey!" he called out, "Do you know what happened here?"

"Why should I?" the woman responded, "Station maintenance blocked off the corridor for a couple of hours though and I couldn't get past them. I had to wait all that time just to get home."

"Why not just go around?" Tylo said and the woman snorted.

"Because the way around would take me down there." she said, pointing in the direction of a side passage.

"What's wrong with down there?" Tylo said, looking at Mayla.

"If you think this area is bad, it's nothing compared to down there." she told him, "I don't think even station security goes there unless they're in a group."

"Interesting." Tylo said as he took a compact multi-tool from his pocket and started to remove the screws holding one of the new bulkhead plates in place, "Thanks for your help ma'am." he said before glancing at Mayla and adding, "So what if your friends couldn't get past here on their way to work? Would they wait or go back home?"

"No chance. Orborne would be furious and dock their pay. They'd find another way." Mayla answered.

"Which would mean going that way." Tylo said, pointing to the side passage and Mayla's eyes widened.

However, before she could say anything Tylo felt the bulkhead shift and he carefully pulled it away from the wall to reveal the bundles of cables, pipes and ducts behind it, not one of which looked to have been touched in years judging by the layers of dust and large patches of corrosion evident on them all.

"Now this is interesting." he said.

"What is?" Mayla asked.

"Well I'd say that the work crew that had to block off this entire corridor while they replaced these bulkhead plates, a ten minute job if you ask me, didn't touch anything that's back here."

"So why do it?"

"Well it would force people who come down here regularly to find an alternate route to their destination. One where they could easily be ambushed but where no-one would think to look for them. But that would have to mean-" Tylo said before he trailed off and looked around.

"Mean what? What are you looking for?" Mayla asked.

"Security cameras." Tylo replied, "There's no way that someone could block off a corridor for hours without being spotted and work would have to be authorised by station administration. Mayla, I've got a bad feeling that the reason station security weren't interested in finding your missing friends is that they're in on it. Either as active participants or they've been paid off to look the other way." then he set the bulkhead down on the floor and leant it up against the wall, "Come on let's get out of here." he said.

"But aren't you going to fix that first?" Mayla asked.

"Not likely. I want to be as far from here as possible before anyone from security can show up. Let's get back to the ship. If we're going to find your friends then we'll need Jayk and Brae's help."

Jayk and Brae had already returned to the Swift Exit by the time Tylo and Mayla got there.

"We've got trouble. Big trouble." Tylo said as he entered the lounge, not giving either of the jedi the opportunity to greet him.

"Why? What's wrong?" Brae asked.

"I think that the station authorities are behind the disappearance of Mayla's friends." Tylo replied, "Which means there could be others as well."

"Master, I've got a bad feeling about this." Brae said.

"So do I." Jayk responded, "Especially since it is likely that the station authorities know that we are investigating their disappearances and I doubt they will take such a threat lightly."

"What do you mean by that?" Mayla said.

"You and your friends are Republic citizens, right?" Tylo said, looking at Mayla and she nodded.

"Yes, all three of us."

"Then that means if the station authorities harm you the Republic can step in." Tylo explained, "Which means Jedi knights and judicial tactical teams swarming all over the station. They could even seize the whole thing."

"Which means they'll be coming after us." Brae said.

"And you." Jayk added, "They need to eliminate every potential witness."

"So what do we do?" Mayla said, looking at each of the others present in turn.

"Here's an idea. How about we leave?" Tylo suggested, "Then send in the Jedi to deal with the place."

"No." Jayk said, shaking his head, "If we leave then we give those responsible the opportunity to cover up their crimes or escape. We have no choice but to act on this ourselves."

"Oh, I had a bad feeling you were going to say that." Tylo said.

"Aren't we even going to let the Jedi Order know what's happening here?" Brae said.

"Of course we will. We will send them a report detailing everything we already know." Jayk told her.

"Actually I don't think you will." Cal said as his hologram suddenly appeared and made Mayla jump.

"Does he have to do that?" she asked, clutching a hand over her chest.

"I think he thinks it's funny." Tylo replied. Then he looked at Cal, "Okay so what's stopping us from sending for help?" he asked.

"I'm still connected to the station network," Cal began, "and every outside channel went dead about a minute ago. I'd say that someone was pretty keen to stop anyone contacting the outside galaxy."

"Then it probably won't take them long to track us here." Jayk said as he got to his feet, "Perhaps it would be best if we weren't here when they arrived."

All of a sudden Brae's eyes widened and she gasped as she sensed a disturbance in the Force.

Danger.

"Master," she said as she steadied herself against the table, "they're here."

Jayk drew his lightsaber and looked at Tylo.

"Perhaps it's time you unpacked your rifle." he said, "And I don't suppose you were able to obtain any grenades were you?"

"Sorry no." Tylo replied, shaking his head, "I kind of got sidetracked before I could even ask."

"Then your rifle will have to do." Jayk said, "Brae, you and I will hold them at the access ramp while we wait for Tylo."

"Yes master." Brae responded.

The members of the tactical team put together by Tyrro entered the docking bay from multiple entrances at the same time. Witnesses had confirmed that the Jedi had come here and entered a Corellian YT-700 freighter. There was only one such vessel in the docking bay and they moved in from all sides to surround it. The access ramp leading up into the ship was open but the interior was in darkness, preventing the team from seeing inside properly.

Forming a ring around the *Swift Exit* the security agents aimed their weapons towards the ship and waited to see whether they had been detected. However, when there was no response from inside the ship to their presence the unit leader waved two of his men forwards. The pair darted towards the access ramp, coming to a sudden halt at the bottom and aiming their weapons into the darkened ship. But rather than charge up the ramp one of them plucked a grenade from his webbing and pulled out the pin. Tossing the grenade into the ship both men averted their eyes as they waited for it to explode. But before it did they heard the sound of something bouncing back down the ramp and they glanced in the direction of the sound only to see the grenade rolling back towards them thanks to a telekinetic push from Jayk.

"Back!" the agent who had thrown the grenade yelled but he was too late and the grenade exploded near the base of the ramp.

A concussion grenade designed to produce little fragmentation, the weapon still produced a blast wave that hurled both agents back from the ramp and echoed around the docking bay. This caused the entire tactical team to duck back instinctively and during these few moments of distraction Jayk and Brae came charging down the ramp with their lightsabers active. The Jedi wasted no time in engaging the security agents, starting with those closest to them before they could react to their sudden appearance. The pair stayed together to watch one another's backs as the agents attempted to hem them in, reasoning that they could not use their lightsabers to deflect blaster bolts fired at them from behind.

But Jayk and Brae were only acting as a distraction to draw the security agents out into the open and when they had achieved this Tylo emerged through the *Swift Exit's* upper hatch with his rifle and opened fire. Set to fully automatic, he used the weapon to spray blaster bolts into the densest concentrations of the agents.

Taken completely by surprise the agents were forced onto the back foot and they started to fall back.

"Split up!" Jayk exclaimed and Brae nodded as she and him moved apart, now switching to working individually as they pursued the retreating agents before they could either regroup or escape and gather reinforcements. Not wanting to strike a fleeing opponent in the back, both Jedi darted around the agents so

that they always attacked from the front. On the other hand Tylo had no such scruples and he happily shot them down from behind as he switched his weapon to semi-automatic before opening fire on them.

“Master! Over there!” Brae shouted when she found herself with no opponents left and looked around for more. As far as she could tell there was only one of the agents left and he was running rapidly towards a service hatch at the side of the docking bay. He was too far away for either of the Jedi to reach him before he reached the hatch and Tylo had no line of fire.

“Let him go.” Jayk said.

“Are you insane?” Tylo responded, “He’ll just come back with his mates.”

“In which case we need to be gone by the time he returns.” Jayk said.

“But I thought you said we weren’t going to run away.” Brae pointed out.

“Plus if they know about us you can bet that they’ll have the station defences ready to shoot us down before we can make it to hyperspace.” Tylo added.

“We aren’t leaving the station, just here.” Jayk said and he looked down at the bodies scattered around the floor, “Tylo get down here, we have work to do.” he added.

“Work? What are we doing?” Tylo asked.

“Disguising ourselves as station security while we hunt for Mayla’s missing friends.” Jayk told him.

5.

With Jayk and Tylo both disguised as security agents and Brae once again dressed casually, Mayla led the group to the junction leading to the area of the station that she and her friends had actively avoided.

"What makes you avoid this place?" Jayk asked.

"We just heard that it wasn't a good section of the station." Mayla replied.

"But no specifics?" Jayk said and she shook her head.

"No. But everyone agrees that it's not somewhere you want to go if you can avoid it." she told him.

"Apparently even station security avoid it." Tylo added and he glanced at Mayla, "Right?"

"Right." she agreed.

"Interesting." Jayk said.

"What is master?" Brae asked.

"If what lies down that corridor is so dangerous that even well armed security agents won't go there why not seal it off? There's a blast door that could be closed to contain the problem." Jayk pointed out, "Mayla, how often do you hear of people coming out of that section to attack someone?"

"Never." Mayla told him, "Whoever lives in there stays in there."

"Oh now that's weird." Tylo said, "No guards and no barricade? Any serious criminals would be in and out to find helpless victims."

"Unless there are no dangerous residents of that section." Jayk said.

"Then why would people avoid it?" Brae asked.

"Because the station authorities do not want anyone going in there except when they want them to." Jayk said, "But they cannot afford to actively prevent it or it would be obvious when they allowed it."

"But why would they do that?" Mayla said.

"Because whatever reason they have for making people disappear the station authorities need to be able to carry out their abductions and keep their captives somewhere that they will not be observed." Jayk said.

"So Kassyndra and Jesso could still be in there?"

"That we are about to find out." Jayk said and he started to walk down the corridor towards the supposedly dangerous section.

"What do you mean they're gone?" Mulgon asked when Tyrro brought him news of the failed attack on the *Swift Exit*.

"The jedi weren't alone." he replied, "There was another guy as well and they took my men by surprise. Only one of them escaped to warn us. I sent in a larger team but the ship was sealed up and silent."

"Then force entry." Mulgon ordered.

"There's no point." Tyrro said, "If they were inside they'd have come out to attack. They're somewhere else on the station."

"Well it can't be too hard to spot a pair of jedi."

"It could be. There's another thing I haven't told you yet." Tyrro said and Mulgon sighed.

"What?" he asked.

"Two of the guards had been stripped. I'm guessing that one of our jedi and their friend are wearing their uniforms."

"And they'll be coming after us." Mulgon said, "I've got a very bad feeling about this."

As they progressed further into the section of the space station that was generally avoided by its inhabitants the two jedi noticed a growing darkness in the Force around them, confirming that whatever happened here was enough to leave a lasting mark.

"Master I feel cold." Brae commented.

"Yes, I feel it too." Jayk replied, "The Dark Side is strong here. You must be careful when calling on the Force that you do not let it influence you."

"Am I the only one that's noticed the lights around here?" Tylo asked.

"What about them?" Mayla responded from between him and the two jedi where she could be better protected by them.

"There are just as many working ones as back where you live." Tylo told her, "Not bad for an area where station maintenance should be avoiding."

Mayla was about to agree with this statement when all of a sudden a shiny object caught her eye.

"Look!" she exclaimed as she darted forwards to pick up the object that rested in a narrow gap between two exposed vertical ducts. Picking it up she held the object out for the others to see and it became apparent that it was a civilian model communicator with a heavily decorated case, "This was Jenno's." she added.

"Are you sure?" Tylo asked, "There are a lot of communicators like that."

"Not like this." Mayla answered as she shook her head, "Jesso decorated this herself. I'd know it anywhere."

"Then this is probably where she and Kassynra were abducted." Jayk said as he looked around, "Everyone spread out and see if there are any further clues."

Leaving Mayla where she was the others moved further out to see if there were any more clues to the two women's disappearance. It was Jayk who found the next clue in the form of a small patch of dried blood on a bulkhead.

"Over here." he called out, "They were brought this way."

"Are you sure?" Tylo asked.

"There's blood." Jayk told him.

"Blood?" Mayla exclaimed, "You mean they're hurt?"

"Not seriously I don't think." Jayk tried to reassure her, "There is just a small amount of blood here. If anything it suggests that your friends were not simply killed out of hand. But we should hurry."

As the group continued on their way Jayk kept a careful eye out for any further signs that Kassynra and Jesso had been brought this way but found nothing. However, as they rounded a corner there was a sudden sound of laughter. Not the hearty sound of amusement though, instead this was a cackling sound that was soon followed by a screeching. Then there came a banging sound from several directions at once and an unseen voice cried out.

"Take them!"

"I've got a very bad feeling about this." Tylo said as he turned to face back the way they had come with his rifle at his shoulder.

"Master, what do we do?" Brae asked as she drew her lightsaber and prepared to ignite it.

"Let go of your senses padawan." Jayk replied, "Trust in the Force."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Mayla said as she looked around, panicking by the noises.

"Beats me." Tylo answered, "I only understand about one word in three of their explanations."

"It means that we are alone here." Jayk said, "This is not a trap."

"Huh?" Tylo commented.

"There's no-one out there." Brae explained, shaking her head, "Those are recordings."

"But why make them?" Mayla said.

"To scare people off, that's why." Tylo said as he relaxed, "It's simple intimidation. Give this place a reputation for being dangerous and if anyone does happen to wander in the recordings will make them think that they're about to be attacked and get them to run back to where they came from. No doubt bragging about how they escaped certain death. We probably triggered a motion sensor or something."

"And that means we're still on the right track." Jayk added as he too drew his lightsaber, "Now be cautious. If this is somewhere we are not supposed to be then where we want to be is probably very close by."

From this point onwards the group moved in pairs. Jayk and Brae went first, reaching out through the Force to search for any signs of life or danger while Tylo remained with Mayla to protect her until the jedi halted and beckoned for them to follow. This continued until the jedi were passing a hatchway and all of a sudden both of them ground to a halt as they sensed a disturbance from beyond it.

Fear.

Pain.

Suffering.

"Master is this-" Brae began.

"Our destination?" Jayk interrupted, "I think so. But I sense more than just a pair of women who need our help. I sense that there are far more captives on the other side of this hatchway."

"Hey." Tylo called out, trying not to make too much noise, "What's going on up there?"

"We may have found where Mayla's friends are being held." Jayk responded, "I suggest you and I investigate."

Tylo and Mayla hurried forwards as Jayk examined the mechanism of the hatchway, studying it for any signs of alarms or traps. But finding nothing he just reached out and pressed the button to open the hatch. In response to this the hatch slid upwards instantly to reveal a hangar on the other side. This was large enough to hold several mid sized transports though at present there was only one in there. Significantly the hangar and all of the equipment it held looked to be in a good state of repair, something that was at odds with everything else in this part of the station. Looking towards the freighter, Jayk quickly determined that the source of the disturbance he and Brae had sensed was coming from inside.

"Tylo and I will head for the freighter." he said, "Brae, remain here with Mayla and protect her. We'll call you if we need you."

"Yes master." Brae replied before Jayk and Tylo headed through the open hatchway.

Rather than move quickly from one hiding place to the next the two men moved calmly across the hangar, trusting in their stolen uniforms to disguise their true identities. As well as the equipment necessary for fuelling and servicing starships, there were numerous stacks of cargo containers scattered around the

hangar and movement from beside one as a man stepped into view caught the attention of both Jayk and Tylo. The man was not wearing a uniform but he did have a blaster holstered on his hip and was wearing an armoured vest identical to those Jayk and Tylo wore as part of their disguise.

"Hey!" he called out, "What are you doing here?"

"Just making the rounds." Tylo replied as he and Jayk came to a halt.

"Like hell you are. This area's off limits, you know that. What's your operating number?" the man demanded as he drew his blaster and aimed it towards Tylo. In response Tylo raised his rifle but he was too slow to be able to use it before the man fired. Fortunately Jayk reacted more quickly, drawing and igniting his lightsaber before using it to send the blaster bolt aimed at Tylo straight back at the firer. The bolt struck him in the chest and punched right through his armoured vest, sending him sprawling backwards against the cargo container he had emerged from behind.

"Boring conversation anyway." Jayk said and he looked at Tylo, "Come on, let's move." he added and both of them broke into a run towards the freighter.

"Master!" Brae shouted, "Shall I-"

"Stay where you are Brae." Jayk responded before she could finish, just as two more armed guards appeared running down the freighter's access ramp and started shooting.

Both Jayk and Tylo dived aside to avoid the initial volley.

"Cover me." Jayk said and Tylo nodded.

"Go." he replied as he fired a burst from his rifle that forced the men on the ramp to take cover as well and allowed Jayk to charge towards them. Holding his lightsaber in front of him, Jayk swatted aside the blaster shots aimed towards him. One of the armed men made a break for a better firing position but in doing so he exposed himself to fire and Tylo quickly shot him down. This left only one more guard and Jayk took care of him with only a single swing from his lightsaber, slashing the blade across his torso. However, before the Jedi could run up the ramp into the freighter he heard a sudden cry.

"Look out!" Brae shouted across the hangar as she saw another hatchway open and a group of heavily armed guards emerge through it. Obviously those already in the hangar had been able to alert their superiors to the presence of the intruders here. One of the guards raised a rifle and took aim at Jayk and Tylo. Beneath the barrel of his rifle, Brae recognised the stubby tubular shape of a grenade launcher and sure enough there was a sudden 'bloop!' sound as the guard fired it. Acting on instinct Brae unleashed a sudden powerful telekinetic blast towards the newly arrived guards. The blast was unfocused and it struck the guards like a tidal wave and sent all of them flying backwards along the bulkhead. In addition to the guards the grenade was caught up in this and it too was pushed backwards instead of being able to continue along its intended trajectory, meaning that when it detonated it was far closer to the guards than it was to Jayk or Tylo.

The grenade was a fragmentation type, designed to produce a dense cloud of tiny fragments in a limited radius before its effectiveness rapidly dropped to nothing and most of the guards were caught in this lethal radius when the grenade exploded and they screamed as the fragments tore through them. Their armoured vests offered some protection but it did nothing against the fragments that struck their heads, necks and limbs. Only a handful of the guards escaped the blast unharmed but those that did acted quickly to try and regain the initiative. As well as the grenade launcher the squad had brought with them a repeating blaster, a bulky weapon that needed to be mounted on a tripod to use effectively and two of the survivors hurried to get the weapon set up while the others spread out to avoid any further Force based attacks from Brae.

Tylo took aim at the guards preparing the repeating blaster and was about to fire at them when several rapid bursts of blaster fire forced him to duck behind a portable energiser that was hooked up to the freighter. Jayk started to move towards him but the smuggler waved him back.

"I'm fine." he said, "Go check the ship." and Jayk nodded before running up the ramp.

Seeing Jayk disappear into the ship while Tylo remained under fire, Brae was not willing to simply stand back and watch, especially now that the guards were undoubtedly aware of her presence and she ignited her lightsaber before charging into the hangar.

"Hey wait!" Mayla called out, "Aren't you supposed to be protecting me?"

Seeing the young Jedi padawan enter the hangar, one of the guards turned his attention towards her instead of Tylo and opened fire. Lacking the same degree of skill with her lightsaber as her uncle, Brae instead opted to evade the blaster fire and she leapt and somersaulted her way towards the repeating blaster. She reached it before the two guards could start to use it and as one reached for his sidearm in desperation she impaled him on the blade of her lightsaber before decapitating the second.

Looking down at the repeating blaster Brae thought that it looked complete and ready to use so she shut down her lightsaber and grabbed hold of the grip as she swung it towards the remaining guards. However, when she squeezed the trigger there was only a sharp chirping sound as the weapon failed to fire.

"The power pack!" Tylo yelled as he tried to return fire on the guards still firing one volley after another towards him and keeping him pinned down.

Looking towards the separate power pack that was required to operate the weapon Brae saw that it had not been engaged, instead it was operating in a standby mode that allowed the repeating blaster's targeting

system to operate but would not provide enough power for even a single shot. The problem was that Brae did not know enough about the weapon or its power source to be able to complete the process of bringing it on line. Abandoning her position Brae charged towards the two remaining guards and once again used her agility to avoid the blaster fire one directed towards her rather than attempting to use her lightsaber to parry and deflect them.

Seeing the young jedi make her move Tylo opened fire with his rifle set to automatic. He could not risk taking his time to take careful aim so the burst was only approximately directed at the two guards. But the sudden attack did force both of them to retreat into cover and during this time Brae was able to get within striking distance. Leaping into the air she propelled herself towards the closest of the guards and slashed at him as she passed close by. This produced a scream of pain before the man died and the last guard tried to turn to face her but before he could bring his weapon to bear Brae swung her lightsaber at him and the blade sliced through both him and his blaster simultaneously.

"Nice work kid." Tylo said as he emerged from cover.

"Thanks." Brae replied, looking towards him, "It was nothing really."

"But don't get cocky, hey? Now let's go help your uncle."

6.

Fear.

Pain.

Inside the freighter Jayk could sense the suffering of those held captive within it. The access ramp led to a cargo hold that was much too small for a vessel of this size and Jayk guessed that it had been converted to allow part of the hold to be retained for conventional cargoes while the rest would be used for holding captives. That meant that the captives ought to be located somewhere towards the far end of the hold and so that was where Jayk headed for. He advanced slowly with his lightsaber held ready. The hold was relatively full of cargo and this meant that there were plenty of hiding places for a potential assailant to be waiting. No one jumped out to attack him, however and as he neared the end of the hold he saw a hatchway set into the far wall. This was much smaller than the access ramp but was wider than a standard hatchway that was designed for just a single humanoid sized to pass through at once. This hatchway would instead allow a pair of guards to drag a captive through between them. Jayk was just about to use his lightsaber to force the door open when he heard the sound of rapid footfalls from behind him and he spun around, holding his lightsaber up in front of him.

"Master!" Brae called out.

"Over here." Jayk replied, "There's a hatchway. I think the captives are on the other side."

Jayk then waited as Brae and Tylo rushed to join him and they positioned themselves either side of the hatch before Jayk brought his lightsaber down on the locking mechanism at the base of the hatch. This produced a shower of sparks and the hatch immediately slid upwards to expose the rows of cages in the compartment on the other side. These had obviously been designed to maximise the number that could be crammed into the ship and so each one was too small for a typical adult human to lie down. But before Jayk could take stock of how many of the cages were occupied he sensed a sudden disturbance in the Force.

Danger.

Leaping back away from the hatch, Jayk was just in time to avoid the blaster bolt that was fired towards him. "Jedi knight!" he called out, "In the name of the Galactic Republic you are ordered to surrender." Jayk called out.

"Didn't anyone tell you Jedi? This isn't Republic territory." a female voice replied.

"Maybe not. But you're holding Republic citizens captive and I'm here to release them. You can either stand down or face the consequences." Jayk said before another blaster shot came flying through the open hatchway and the Jedi sighed, "Oh well. I did try and warn her." he said before diving through the hatchway. He saw the woman hiding behind a nearby row of cages moments before she fired again. Some of the cages were occupied so Jayk could not risk sending the shot back towards her and instead he used his lightsaber to deflect the bolt up into the ceiling. Then he reached out his hand and focused his mind on the blaster itself before he used the Force to simply rip it from the woman's grip and it flew through the air to land at his feet. Then he used the Force project a telekinetic push rather than a pull and he pushed the woman back into an empty cage behind her before slamming the door shut.

Panic.

Jayk smiled as he sensed her reaction to being suddenly shut in one of the cages she normally guarded and then he took the opportunity to look around the compartment. Around half of the cages were occupied by members of various humanoid species. Jayk could still sense that they were afraid but their state of mind was now starting to clam down as they realised that despite his uniform Jayk was not another guard and that they were about to be freed.

"Brae! Tylo! Get in here." Jayk called out, "We need to release these people now."

"Kassynra! Jesso!" Mayla called out when she saw them coming down the access ramp of the freighter along with the other released captives.

"Mayla!" Jesso responded and the two embraced. Then Mayla turned to Jayk.

"Gods, I don't know how to thank you." she said.

"There is no need." Jayk replied.

"He always says that." Tylo muttered.

"But you need to remain here with Brae to make sure that these people are okay." Jayk continued.

"Where are you going master?" Brae asked and Jayk looked towards the hatchway that the guards sent to reinforce the hangar had arrived through.

"Tylo and I are going to see whether our disguises can get us to the heart of this conspiracy." he said and Tylo winced.

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

The hatchway led to a turbolift and Jayk and Tylo got in. There was only one control inside, suggesting that it was dedicated to bringing passengers to the hangar from just one other level. Jayk pressed the button and the door dropped shut immediately before the turbolift began to move.

"I take it we just act casual again?" Tylo asked as the turbolift continued to move.

"Correct." Jayk replied, "It is my hope that this turbolift will lead us to the heart of station operations and directly connect the administration with that slave ship.

At that moment the turbolift came to a halt and the door slid open to reveal *Lygon Station's* main control centre.

"What's going on down in that hangar?" Mulgon demanded as he paced up and down beside a row of control stations.

"Unknown." one of the command staff responded, "We've lost all contact with the guards you ordered sent."

"Captain Tyrro, send another squad." Mulgon said, turning towards his chief of security. But then he noticed the open turbolift and the two uniformed men now heading towards him, "Well?" he asked, "What happened down there?"

"Get down!" Tyrro yelled, pushing Mulgon aside and drawing his blaster when he saw that the two men were not part of his security force. But Jayk and Tylo were ready for this and as Jayk ignited his lightsaber Tylo opened fire on the guards stationed just inside the command centre's main entrance. Tyrro returned fire but Jayk simply deflected the shot and when Tyrro fired again the next one was sent straight back at him. Jayk then rushed forwards to where Mulgon cowered on the floor.

Fear.

Jayk smiled as the terrified Mulgon looked up at him.

"This slavery ring is ended administrator." Jayk said sternly, pointing the tip of his lightsaber blade down at Mulgon, "You are under arrest. Order your men to stand down."

"Wh-What are you going to do with me?" Mulgon stammered and Jayk smiled.

"Administrator, you're about to find out what it feels like to be caged." he answered.