

STAR WARS

DARKNESS RISING

3-01: ENDINGS & RENEWALS

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With the truth about Brae's parentage exposed the jedi council reassigns both Jayk and Brae, replacing them with two new jedi who are ordered to make contact with an old acquaintance of Tylo's...

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1.

Anger.

Standing next to one another in the turbolift as it took them up towards the meeting chamber of the Jedi Council, Brae Udra could not help but sense the mood of her master, Jayk Udra. The Jedi Order tried to keep blood relations in service at the same time apart to avoid attachment. However, an exception had been made in the case of Jayk and Brae. Brae's midi-chlorian count was extremely high, even by the standards of the Jedi Order but she lacked control and it had been feared that she would fall to the Dark Side without proper guidance. The Udra family had served the Jedi Order for thousands of years and it was hoped that by placing her with Jayk she would realise her full potential. At first this arrangement had worked well until Brae was poisoned on the remote world of Veletar. A creation of Sith sorcery, the only cure for the poison relied on a donation of bone marrow from a close relative. Jayk had of course volunteered to provide the necessary bone marrow but the tests run by the hospital staff to confirm compatibility had proven that he was not, as the Jedi Council had told them both, Brae's uncle at all.

He was her father.

"So what's the worst that could happen?" the other man in the turbolift asked. This was Tylo Kurrast, a career criminal who, in exchange for helping the Jedi Order track down Sith artefacts hidden amongst works of art by the mysterious Thal N'Krey had avoided being sent to prison for his role in the thefts of some such works. Despite having no ability with the Force whatsoever, even he sensed Jayk's anger at being lied to by the Jedi Council.

"The turbolift could malfunction and we could plummet to our deaths." Brae commented and Tylo frowned.

"I meant with-" he began.

"I know." Brae interrupted, "I just thought that maybe I could lighten the mood in here a little."

"This is a serious situation Brae." Jayk said, "The council willingly misled both of us about the nature of our relationship. Now I want to know why they did not trust us."

The turbolift door slid open to reveal a pair of temple guardians standing between it and the door to the council chamber.

"You shall not pass Jedi Udra." one of the masked guardians said.

"So the council hides behind its guardians now?" Jayk said as he strode from the turbolift, "Do they fear me that much?"

"The council is discussing important matters. You shall not pass." the guardian replied.

"Then I shall wait. The council cannot hide from me forever." Jayk said sternly.

Just then the doors to the council chamber opened and Karadon Ress, the Grand Master of the Jedi Order emerged.

"Jedi Udra." he said, smiling, "We have been waiting for you to get here."

The grand master then turned around and went back inside the council chamber, while the pair of guardians outside now stepped aside to permit Jayk, Brae and Tylo to enter.

"I've got a very bad feeling about this." Brae said softly before she and Jayk walked past the guardians without saying a word to them but Tylo paused beside one and looked at him.

"You guys make sure we aren't disturbed. Okay?" he said before he followed the Jedi into the council chamber.

In this room the most respected and experienced Jedi sat around the outside of the room with Grand Master Ress directly opposite the door while Jayk, Brae and Tylo stood in the centre of them all.

"Anger I sense in you Jedi Udra." Master Yoda said.

"With good reason." Jayk replied, "This council did not trust me with important information. This council lied to me."

"To us both." Brae added.

"You are a master and an apprentice." another of the council said, "That is all that matters."

"I am Brae's father." Jayk said, "Why hide that from me?"

"Knew this would happen I did." Yoda said, addressing the rest of the council rather than the Udras, "Warned against placing them together."

"What is done is done." the grand master said and then he looked straight at Jayk, "Jedi Udra, whether you are Brae's uncle or her father is irrelevant."

Anger.

"Irrelevant?" Jayk exclaimed.

"As Master Kinno has said you are her master and it was your duty to teach her the ways of the Jedi Order. In that respect you have clearly failed. It was hoped that you would be able to demonstrate to Brae how to use the Force without drawing on the Dark Side but your anger suggests that you too are vulnerable when it

comes to matters relating to your padawan." Grand Master Ress said.

"If I may speak." a voice said from beneath Brae's robes and she reached under them to produce a holocron. As soon as she did this the holographic image of a man in jedi robes appeared beside her. Cal Udra had been a jedi knight almost four thousand years earlier, well before the Ruusan Reformations that brought an end to jedi marrying and raising families. Cal's first padawan had been his own younger sister and it had been thought that his holocron would be able to guide Jayk in teaching a close family member to be a jedi, "Thank you Brae." Cal said, his hologram nodded at Brae before looking around the council chamber, "Perhaps this council should just admit that it made a mistake by lying to one of its jedi. How can any master hope to train an apprentice when they do not truly know who they are?"

"Changed the Jedi Order has since your time. More disciplined it is." Master Yoda responded.

"The council has decided that a mistake was made." Grand Master Ress added, "But not by concealing Brae's parentage. The mistake was thinking that the correct course of action was to violate the jedi code in the first place by pairing Jayk and Brae. That pairing ends now."

"But I've already learned so much." Brae protested.

"Now more you will learn here in the temple." Master Yoda told her, "Until a new master for you can be found."

"One without an emotional attachment to you." another member of the council added.

"You can't." Brae protested.

"The council's decision is final." Grand Master Ress said, "Jedi Udra you will return to your quarters and await your next assignment. Padawan Udra you will report to the head of teaching so that you may be reassigned to your classes. The Cal Udra holocron is to be returned to the archives immediately."

Tylo clapped his hands together once, smiling before he spoke.

"Well I suppose I'll be leaving as well then." he said. Then he looked at the Udras and added, "It was nice knowing you but hopefully we'll never see one another again." and then he turned towards the exit from the council chamber.

"Where are you going Captain Kurrast?" Grand Master Ress called out.

"Hey look, Jayk got mad at not being told he had a kid. Now I've managed to avoid that particular trap so far but I get where he's coming from and I get why you're splitting them up. But if you're ending this Thal N'Krey case then you don't need me any more." Tylo replied.

"Continue the investigation will." Master Yoda said, "Only a new jedi you will work with."

Tylo's face fell.

"Return to your ship captain." Grand Master Ress said, "Jedi Olan will meet you there in one hour."

Morton Crane sat looking out of the window over the hutt city outside and poured himself a drink.

"A bit early for that isn't it?" his associate, the professional thief Mara Tosk said as she entered the room.

"It's never too early for Corellian whisky of this vintage Mara. Join me." Morton replied and he slid the bottle across the table towards her.

"No thanks. You're going to need the whole bottle I think." Mara said and Morton frowned.

"What is it now?" he asked.

"Mayon Shan." Mara told him.

"That moof milker we hired to run contraband? She's not been pinched has she?"

"No, she may be a moof milker but she's too good for the Republic to catch. Problem is she's decided she's too good to deliver the goods to us as well. She's gone and she's taken the shipment."

"Mara that shipment isn't mine. It's bad enough that I've been reduced to doing these stupid little jobs for the hutts so they'll let me stay here without underlings deciding to cut a better deal with something that the hutts entrusted to me. It's all Teron's fault." Morton said, snarling as he mentioned the name of the much younger man who had been able to usurp his position as gang leader and forced him to flee to hutt space with the few gang members that had remained loyal, "He managed to get away with stealing from me and now everyone thinks they can. Well this time I'm going to send a proper message Mara. I want Mayon Shan's head back here so I can demonstrate what happens to people who cross me. Whether not it is still attached to her shoulders is irrelevant."

"Bounty hunters?" Mara asked.

"Bounty hunters." Morton repeated, "Assassins. Mercenaries. Little old jawas for all I care. Who delivers Mayon Shan to me gets twenty thousand credits or ten if she's dead and a five percent cut of whatever they can recover from the shipment. In fact not just Mayon. I want prices on the heads of everyone who's crossed me. Mayon, Teron, Tylo. All of them."

"But five percent? That's half your cut from the hutts Morton." Mara pointed out.

"I know but it'll be worth it to get the shipment back as well." Morton replied and Mara nodded.

"Okay, I'll make the call." she said.

2.

The *Swift Exit* was an unremarkable looking YT-700 class freighter that Tylo had owned for many years. Since he had entered into the deal with the Jedi Order the vessel had been stored in the main hangar of the Jedi temple on Coruscant. Sat in the cockpit Tylo watched what was going on in the hangar pondering the chances of his being able to escape if he just launched now without permission and headed for the Outer Rim.

However, before he could finish trying to remember all of the details of the temple's impressive anti-aircraft defences he saw a pair of Jedi walking towards the *Swift Exit* carrying kit bags over their shoulders. One was a human woman with hair that was starting to turn grey while the second looked to be a much younger male whose bright blue skin and dark blue hair marked him out as coming from the near human Wroonian species. A single braid in this hair signified that he was a Padawan and Tylo guessed that this pair were the new Jedi assigned to his ship. Getting out of his chair he made his way to the ship's access ramp to greet them.

"Hi, I'm-" Tylo began as he stood at the bottom of the ramp and holding out his hand in greeting.

"Tylo Kurrast." the woman replied, "I am Jedi Knight Derra Olan and this is my Padawan Nodan Turrak. Is your ship ready for launch?"

"Err, sure. Let me show you around and we can-" Tylo said before Derra interrupted him again.

"I am familiar with the layout of a YT-seven hundred thank you Captain. Nodan and I will stow our equipment in our quarters and join you in the cockpit. Then I shall brief you on our assignment and provide you with hyperspace co-ordinates."

The two Jedi then walked past Tylo, heading up the ramp. On his way past Nodan glanced at Tylo and smiled but did not say a word.

"I've got a bad feeling about this." Tylo muttered when the Jedi had gone inside the ship and he returned to the cockpit, sealing the access ramp behind him.

Tylo had been telling the truth when he said that the *Swift Exit* was ready for take off and all he had to do was start up the ship's repulsorlift engines before lifting off and flying out through the hangar door. With no other instructions to the contrary Tylo took the *Swift Exit* straight up into space and flew directly away from Coruscant to get the ship clear of the gravity well and ready for the jump into hyperspace.

"Excellent." Derra said as she and Nodan appeared in the cockpit doorway behind Tylo and she handed him a datapad, "This holds the details of where you must take us." she added.

"The Tion?" Tylo said when he saw the destination written on the datapad display, "What's taking us that far out?"

"An old friend of yours I believe. Do you know a woman called Mayon Shan?" Derra asked.

"Sure, I remember her. She was hired by Morton Crayne, just like me. I guess she's still working for that nerf herder though." Tylo replied.

"Not any more she isn't." Nodan said, speaking for the first time since Tylo had met him.

"What my Padawan is trying to say is that Mayon Shan and Morton Crayne have parted ways and now your friend is located in the Tion. Our mission is to make contact with her and convince her to help us track Morton Crayne. If the information you have provided us with is correct then Morton Crayne will be able to lead us to Teron Sharr."

"I should point out to you that Mayon and I were never exactly friends." Tylo said.

"But you know her by sight, which is more than can be said for either of us." Derra pointed out, "It will be your job to identify her to us and then we shall handle things from then on."

"And if she rejects your offer?" Tylo asked, "Becoming an informant for the authorities isn't a very business decision for a smuggler."

"No but having the goodwill of the Jedi Order is a good decision when there is a price on her head." Nodan said, "When she left Crayne's gang she took an expensive cargo with her. Now Morton has placed a bounty on her and the return of the cargo. You too."

"Me?" Tylo exclaimed.

"Morton Crayne appears to be moving against all his enemies, including yourself." Derra added, "There is one more detail though Captain Kurrast." she continued and she held out her hand, "I shall require your blaster."

"Hey now wait a minute. I need this to defend myself, especially if there are going to be bounty hunters coming after me." Tylo protested.

"Correct me if I am wrong, but did you not cause a minor diplomatic incident on Alderaan because of your use of that blaster?" Derra said.

"That was self defence. Besides Jayk approved of everything." Tylo said.

"Perhaps. But I am not Jayk Udra. Now hand over your blaster Captain. You will not need it from now on."

Derra ordered and Tylo sighed as he took the weapon from his holster, ejected the power cell and then

handed it to her.

The planet of Drenos in the Tion Cluster had been colonised thousands of years earlier by the infamous warlord Xim the Despot who had desired its vast mineral wealth. He had used slave labour to extract the minerals but later generations had used a wide variety of indentured labour, professional miners and droids until the seams ran dry. Fortunately the planet's location along the Permelian Trade Route had made it useful as a refuelling point and the planet's economy shifted from mining to trading. However, located so close to hutt space and far from Coruscant it was inevitable that not all of the trading done here was legal and it was said that any product or service imaginable could be had here for the right price.

"There are so many." Nodan said as he looked at the vast network of orbital facilities that hung in space around the planet.

"So does your information about Mayon extend as far as telling us where she happens to be amongst all of this?" Tylo asked.

"Her ship is listed as having docked at High Orbital Platform one-one-three-eight." Derra replied.

"My lucky number." Tylo commented, "Of course you know that she could just hop on a shuttle and transfer to any of the other platforms or to the surface?"

"And leave her precious cargo behind? I doubt it." Derra said, "Take us to the platform Captain Kurrast."

"Sure, why not." Tylo said, steering the *Swift Exit* towards the space station.

High Orbital Platform 1138 had existed in one form or another for several millennia and in that time it had extensively modified. What had originally been a neat cylindrical structure had been added to as the need arose to add extra internal volume or to permit the installation of new new piece of technology that had been developed after the station was constructed. These modifications were in turn also expanded and now the station had a random appearance in terms of its outline and colouration as no effort was made to make new components match the appearance of those already in place.

Docking bays and external ports littered the exterior of the station and Tylo flew the *Swift Exit* towards the closest of these.

"This is *Swift Exit* calling-" he began as he radioed the station for permission to dock but he did not get the chance to finish his sentence.

"Approaching freighter follow beacon four." the voice of a flight controller said and then the channel went quiet.

"Is that normal?" Nodan asked.

"Not all the stations here care who docks." Tylo told him, "That's a good sign though. I doubt that Mayon would have wanted to deal with customs if she's hauling a stolen cargo that probably consists of illegal goods in the first place."

The beacon led the *Swift Exit* towards an internal hangar that lacked a magnetic field to retain the atmosphere inside. Instead Tylo was required to fly the ship into an oversized air lock and wait while the external doors were closed and then the internal ones opened. It was during the wait between this that the ship was contacted again.

"Docking fee is one hundred credits. Air lock cycle will complete after payment." a voice said and at the same time the *Swift Exit* received a data stream that instructed the crew to pay by credit transfer.

"Here." Derra said, taking a credit stick from her robes and inserting it into the control console. The communication system then chimed and the internal air lock door slid open to reveal the hangar itself. This was occupied by several other small freighters, each one sat on a circular landing pad that connected to a central spire by a walkway that was wide enough for a large repulsor cart.

"I guess we just set down wherever we want." Tylo said as he lowered the *Swift Exit's* landing gear and then set the ship down on the closest unoccupied pad, "So now what?" he added, looking at Derra.

"Now we find Mayon Shan. From what you know about the woman, where is she likely to be?" she replied and Tylo shrugged.

"A cantina probably." he said, "A lot of independent business is done over a strong drink."

"Then we shall start by searching all of the cantinas aboard this station." Derra said and when she noticed the smile on Tylo's face she added, "However, we will not be partaking of any intoxicating beverages." and Tylo's face fell.

Another ship approached High Orbital Platform 1138 just as the *Swift Exit* was receiving its docking instructions. Unlike Tylo, the pilot of this vessel was doing his best to avoid being spotted on the station's sensors, flying an irregular course that took the ship around several other nearby stations and large transport ships until it was in a position to switch to silent running and drift the rest of the way toward the station.

"That's the station." one of the ship's four occupants said from the pilot's seat.

"And take a look at that ship." a second said.

"What about it?" the third asked, "It's just a YT-seven hundred."

"But it's a YT-seven hundred with a Republic transponder that identifies it as the *Swift Exit*." the second

replied.

"The *Swift Exit*? You mean Tylo Kurrast's ship?" the final occupant asked.

"According to the information from Crayne, yes." the second answered and the pilot smiled.

"Two for the price of one." he said.

"It's too much of a coincidence." the third of the ship's occupants said, "Tylo is supposed to be based way off in the Core now. Coruscant. What's he doing all the way back out here right at the same time as Mayon Shan arrives?"

"He must be here to buy the cargo from her." the pilot said, "Which means where we find one we'll find the other as well. If we do this right then today just became even more profitable. Now hang on because we're going dark."

The pilot then shut down all of the ship's non-essential systems and fired its engines one last time to propel it slowly towards the space station the *Swift Exit* had just entered. However, their ship did not head for any of the hangars or docking ports or attempt to make contact with what passed for the station's traffic control. Instead it drifted through space like a piece of debris. This would be a risky means of approaching many space stations that employed not only tractor beams but also laser turrets to deflect or destroy debris on a collision course, but this particular space station had no such weapons and instead relied on a powerful particle shield to protect itself against impacts.

This enabled the pilot to get the ship to within a few metres of the station's hull where it was hidden from its sensor receptors before he fired the engines again to bring it to a complete halt relative to the station.

"Okay this looks good. Now we wait for the next visitor." he said.

"I've got a ship at bearing one six four. They should shutting down the shield any moment." the second occupant announced after a brief wait.

Sure enough the particle shield was shut down to permit the approaching ship to dock at one of the external ports and it was at that moment that the pilot of the mysterious ship fired the magnetic grapples mounted on one side and used them to pull the ship right up against the hull of the space station.

"Okay we've got a hard seal." he said, "Let' make a hole and go collect the marks."

3.

"I'm looking for Mayon Shan." Tylo said when he walked up to the bar of yet another cantina. While he did this the two Jedi positioned themselves near the exits to watch for anyone fitting the rough description they had of Mayon Shan trying to leave suddenly when Tylo asked for her at the bar.

"What are you having?" the barman replied.

"Just the information." Tylo said.

"Just information is expensive. Drink is cheaper. Perhaps if you stay here a while then your friend will turn up and join you." the barman said.

"I'll try somewhere else." Tylo said and he made his way to the doorway where Derra was stood.

"Another failure?" she asked.

"Of course. Look, I know this sort of place and this would be a lot easier if I could at least order a drink and make it look like I'm going to be spending a decent amount of money if the staff can help me." Tylo replied.

"And supposing you had had a drink at each of the establishments we have been to so far Captain Kurrast. Would you still be able to string together a coherent sentence to ask about Miss Shan? For that matter would you even still be conscious?"

"I wouldn't have to drink it." Tylo said, "Just a sip or two as I walk away from the bar would at least let me leave just enough information with the barman that Mayon will think I'm a potential buyer. If we keep doing it your way then the only way we'll find her is if we happen to blunder into her by chance and I don't feel that lucky to-"

Tylo suddenly stopped speaking and Derra noticed his eyes widen when he saw a familiar face among the crowd.

Surprise.

"What's wrong?" she asked, turning to look in the same direction as Tylo.

"It's her." Tylo said before he pushed past Derra and started to force his way through the crowd as he set off in pursuit of the woman they were searching for.

"Nodan." Derra said into her comlink, "Tylo has identified the target. Join me at the front entrance immediately."

"I'm on my way mistress." Nodan responded.

While Derra was waiting for Nodan to join her Tylo continued to chase after Mayon but it was all he could do just to keep her in sight, let alone catch up with her.

"Mayon!" he called out, "Mayon Shan! Wait up!"

His cries had the opposite effect to what he had hoped, however and Tylo saw the woman start to move even faster before stepping into a turbolift and disappearing from sight.

"Stang." Tylo hissed as he missed the turbolift. Fortunately the display above the door indicated the direction in which the car was travelling and he hurried to the next car, darting inside and pressing the button for the floor five levels above. It took just a few seconds for the turbolift to reach this level and Tylo leapt out, keeping his hand in the doorway so that it could not close. With this turbolift car effectively jammed in place Tylo looked at the display above the door for the turbolift he had seen Mayon take and he saw that it had stopped two levels above this one. Jumping back inside the turbolift Tylo pressed the button for that level and set it back into motion.

When the turbolift door slid open again Tylo found himself looking along a corridor that, unlike the commercial level he had started on was almost completely empty and this made it easy for him to see Mayon just as she was walking around a corner.

"Mayon! It's me Tylo! We need to talk!" he shouted as he broke into a run and he sprinted along the corridor, dodging the few other beings present until he reached the junction where he had seen Mayon go around the corner. Rounding this corner rapidly Tylo almost ran right into Mayon as she stood just beyond it and looking right at him, "Mayon, thank goodness I caught up with you." he said, placing his hands on her shoulders.

It was at that point that Mayon suddenly smiled and before Tylo could react she brought her knee up between his legs and he cried out in pain as he dropped to his knees. While he was still on his knees Mayon formed a fist and punched him in the face hard enough to knock Tylo backwards and she left him sprawled across the floor as she turned away and ran off.

Tylo had no idea how long he lay on the floor before he suddenly saw Derra and Nodan looking down at him and he groaned at them.

"He's alive." Nodan said.

"Quite. Lift him up." Derra added and the two Jedi pulled Tylo to his feet, "Captain Kurrast, I take that you caught up with Miss Shan and that she was less than happy to see you." she added and Tylo snarled.

"You could say that." he said, gasping for breath still and he raised a hand to wipe blood from beneath his nose, "Does either of you have a medpac?" he asked.

"Your wound is not that serious Captain Kurrast." Derra said, "Now tell me what happened.

"I suppose telling you that I was jumped by six guys twice my size isn't going to fly?" Tylo said.

"No, we know that despite portraying yourself as a tough individual you got beaten up by a woman much smaller than you." Nodan replied.

"Of course." Tylo said, "Well it happened just like you said. I tried to make contact but she chose to hit me."

"Captain Kurrast, I feel that we are owed an explanation from you." Derra said, "What exactly was the nature of your relationship with Mayon Shan that she would react in such a manner?"

"We dated for a while but things got awkward." Tylo said.

"Awkward, how? Because you both worked for Morton Crayne?" Derra said but Tylo shook his head.

"No, nothing like that. Morton didn't care who his subordinates slept with as long as they did their jobs properly."

"Then what happened?" Derra said sternly.

"I kind of slept with her sisters." Tylo said, "Both of them. At the same time. She caught us. But in my own defence-

"Captain Kurrast I do not care." Derra said before he could finish, "Suffice to say that had you not been so impatient and gone after her yourself then perhaps I could have made contact and we could be making our way back to Coruscant by now. I might almost believe that you want her to escape."

"Well if I did before then I sure don't now." Tylo replied, pointing at his nose, "Now get me to a doc so I can see if that little rancor cow has done any serious damage to my face."

After burning their way through the hull of the space station the crew of the other vessel took care to conceal their handiwork before beginning their own search for both Tylo and Mayon. Well armed and armoured, they took the precaution to avoid advertising this by wearing long robes that came down to the floor and enabled them to hide their body armour and blasters beneath them. The four men split into two pairs to conduct their search, each pair approaching the search from a different point of view. The first pair made their way towards the hangar they had witnessed the *Swift Exit* heading towards to check to see if Tylo was still aboard his ship. After they had confirmed that it was empty they then began to investigate the other docking bays to try and find Mayon's ship.

While they were doing this the other two men made their way towards the commercial areas of the station. They knew that Mayon had come here to try and sell her stolen cargo so they went to the places where such deals took place, the cantinas and gambling dens where what passed for the station's authorities did not look. However, rather than asking about Mayon herself they asked about her cargo, claiming to be buyers looking for the specific goods she had stolen. This way they hoped that if they could not find Mayon then she would find them.

However, it was not Mayon that they found first, it was Tylo.

Tylo as being supported by a robed wroonian as he stepped from a turbolift and he limped as they headed towards a nearby medical facility. The two bounty hunters made their way straight for the pair, their hands sliding beneath their own robes to take hold of their weapons so that they could be brought into action quickly if the need arose.

"He's not armed." the first hunter said, frowning.

"Unarmed? Who walks around a place like this unarmed?" the other responded.

"No-one. His blaster must have been taken by whoever did that to his face."

"Think there's another crew here after him? What about that wroonian?"

"No." the first hunter said, shaking his head, "If he was claiming Kurrast as a bounty then why isn't he restrained? And why take him to a doctor?"

"Wait, look at the wroonian's hair." the second hunter said suddenly, "When he looks this way again."

The first bounty hunter focused on Nodan and when the padawan turned his head slightly the hunter saw the braid that marked him out as a jedi padawan.

"Jedi." the bounty hunter hissed.

"And a padawan at that." the second said, "They don't travel without their masters so-"

"So that means that there are two of them here and either they've arrested Tylo or he's working with them." the first replied, "I'll go and tell the others. You keep an eye on Tylo. Now that we've found him I don't want to let him give us the slip."

"Ow!" Tylo exclaimed as the medical droid's probe pressed against his nose.

"Hold still." the droid said, "I am about to apply the anaesthetic."

"Ow!" Tylo exclaimed again as an injector was suddenly pressed to his nose and an anaesthetic fired directly through his skin.

"Procedure complete." the droid said, "Please remove your trousers."

"Oh no." Tylo said as he rolled off the treatment couch and stood up, "After that I'm going to walk the other thing off."

"You seem in considerable discomfort." the droid said.

"Discomfort I can live with. Probes and needles down there are a different matter all together." Tylo replied,

"Now help me back to the ship. I have what I need there."

Nodan frowned as he supported Tylo.

"What is that?" he asked.

"Beer." Tylo answered, "Plus ice from the freezer."

"That will be seventy five credits." the droid said as Tylo and Nodan headed towards the door and Tylo looked at Nodan.

"I got this injury in the line of duty, just you remember that." he said and Nodan sighed before taking out his credit stick and inserting it into a nearby payment terminal.

"Many thanks. The owners hope to do business with you again." the droid said when the transaction was confirmed and Tylo and Nodan made their way out of the clinic.

"Great huh?" Tylo said when they were outside, "That droid effectively told us that it hopes one of gets hurt again."

All of a sudden Nodan collided with someone in the crowded concourse and he looked at the man who had just banged into him.

"Sorry." he said while the other man just continued to walk on by.

"Never mind that ignorant nerf herder kid." Tylo said, "Call up your mom and let her know we need to talk."

"My mom? Jedi Olan is not my mother. We aren't even the same species." Nodan said.

"Just a joke kid. Call her up." Tylo said.

"My mistress is looking for Miss Shan. Wouldn't it be better to wait for her back at the ship?" Nodan asked.

"No, because we aren't going back to the ship yet."

"But you said-"

"I know what I said kid and I know what I'm saying now. Look, there's a diner right over there where I'm sure can get a non-intoxicating beverage each. Tell Derra we'll meet her in there." Tylo said, interrupting Nodan.

Nodan then took out his comlink and lifted it to his mouth.

"Mistress Olan, can you read me?" he signalled.

"Just about Nodan. Your signal is breaking up." Derra responded.

"It's probably the structure."

"Probably, yes. What do you want Nodan?"

"Captain Kurrast wishes to meet with you as soon as possible." Nodan told her.

"What for?"

"He will not say. However, he has changed his mind about returning to the ship and instead wants to meet you in the diner opposite the clinic I took him to for treatment." Nodan said.

"It's called Kollo's." Tylo said, leaning his head towards Nodan's comlink.

"Did you hear that mistress?" Nodan asked.

"Yes Nodan. Kollo's. I shall be there as soon as possible but I hope that this is not just Captain Kurrast attempting to distract us while his former girlfriend escapes."

4.

Tylo took the opportunity to order food at the diner while Nodan just ordered a glass of water while they waited for Derra to arrive.

"So will you explain why you wanted to meet here Captain Kurrast?" Derra said when she arrived and sat down at the table with the other two.

"Yeah, you've been made." Tylo replied as he carried on eating, "Or at least the kid has and it's only a matter of time before you get connected to him."

"I don't understand." Nodan said, "No-one has shown any interest in me since we arrived on the station."

"Look around kid." Tylo said, lowering his eating utensils, "No-one shows any interest in anyone here. It's not the sort of place to be nosey. But I'll tell you now that everyone is watching everyone else and you've been made. Probably that pig tail of yours in your hair."

"I still do not understand how you can tell that anyone has taken a special interest in me." Nodan replied.

"The tracker." Tylo said.

"What tracker?" Derra asked, looking at Nodan who had a confused look on his face.

"The tracker that was slipped into his pocket when another guy in robes made a bad act of accidentally bumping into him outside the clinic." Tylo said and he looked at Nodan as the padawan rummaged around in his pocket and took out a small electronic device slightly smaller than a comlink. Nodan eyes widened when he saw this.

"Mistress I apologise, I had no idea-" he began.

"There is no need to apologise my young apprentice." Derra replied and then she looked at Tylo, "So that is why you did not want to meet back at the ship." she added and Tylo nodded, swallowing another mouthful of food before replying.

"There's no way of knowing whether they know about the *Swift Exit* yet." he said, "If they do then we've not lost anything but if they don't then we've avoided revealing a major asset to them."

"So who was that man?" Nodan said and Tylo shrugged.

"You tell me kid. I only work here." he answered.

The other bounty hunter from the pair that had found Tylo made his way towards the largest cluster of docking bays and soon found his other two comrades.

"Bronon, Krevan." he called out as he walked across a large hangar that held more than twenty transport ships as well as a handful of starfighters towards the other two robed figures.

"Kane, what are you doing here?" the man known as Bronon responded.

"Trenner and I found Tylo Kurrast." Kane answered.

"So we have him at least." Krevan said.

"No." Kane said, "He was not alone. He was with a jedi padawan."

"There are jedi here on Drenos?" Bronon said, "What are they looking for?"

"Perhaps the same as us. One of them already had Tylo after all." Kane said, "I left Trenner tailing them to see where they went and how many more there are."

"There must be at least one." Krevan commented, "Padawans do not travel alone. A master and an apprentice, that's how it works."

"Yes and I think we can use that to our advantage." Kane said, "If we kill the apprentice then surely the master will reveal himself."

"Crayne isn't paying us to kill jedi." Krevan pointed out and Kane smiled at him.

"Since when did our people need an excuse to repay the jedi for what they've done to our people?" he asked.

The trio of bounty hunters returned to the place where Kane and Trenner had seen Tylo with Nodan and he soon made contact with them, approaching them from behind.

"Where are Tylo and the jedi?" Kane asked.

"I put a tracker on the padawan." Trenner replied, "But they found it."

"Then we've lost the element of surprise." Bronon said.

"Do you know where they are?" Kane asked and Trenner nodded.

"Right over in that canteen behind me. They went in and were joined by a human woman that looks an awful lot like a jedi as well." he said.

"The master." Bronon commented.

"That's what I thought so I made sure to grab an image of them." Trenner said and he produced a datapad from beneath his robe that he handed to Kane who in turn showed the other hunters.

"We should try to separate them." Kane said, "Take them out one at a time."

"What about Kurrast and Shan?" Krevan asked.

"Those jedi won't let us escape with either of them." Kane pointed out, "We deal with the jedi and then those two will be easy prey."

"But how do we split them up?" Bronon asked and Kane looked around. Like many large space stations with large populations a certain number of these would slip through societies cracks. Too impoverished to afford a transport elsewhere they resorted to begging or petty crime to get by and several beggars were visible from where Kane stood.

"By offering them exactly what they want." he said.

With the tracking device disposed of in a garbage chute Tylo and the two jedi returned to the *Swift Exit* to discuss their next move.

"The way I see it," Tylo said as he sat down with a beer in one hand a bag of ice in the other before placing the bag in his lap and letting out a sigh, "is that Mayon isn't going to come to us by choice so we need to position ourselves somewhere that we know she has to go sooner or later."

"But on a station this size where would that be?" Nodan asked.

"Easy. Whatever hangar she's docked in." Tylo said, "We just need to stake our her ship. In fact if we could get inside that would be even better."

"The morality of breaking and entering into a privately registered starship aside, your plan has merit." Derra said, "We have the transponder details of Miss Shan's vessel so it should not be a problem to locate it."

"Hello?" a high pitched voice called out suddenly from the hangar outside the ship and the occupants of the *Swift Exit* made their way into the forward cargo hold to see who was there.

Stood part way up the ramp was a young woman wearing clothing that was dirty and badly damaged.

"Sorry kid." Tylo said, used to such individuals presenting themselves at space ports looking for a way of the planet or station, "I'm not hiring." and eh turned to go back inside.

"I have a message from Mayon Shan." the young woman said and Tylo came to a sudden stop and turned around again.

"What is this message?" Derra asked.

"Which of you is Tylo Kurrast?" the woman responded and Tylo raised his hand.

"That would be me. Captain Kurrast at your service." he said.

"Mayon Shan wants to meet with you." the woman said and Tylo exchanged glances with the jedi beside him.

"Sure. Let's go. Where is she?" he said.

"Not now." the woman replied, "She said for you to meet her on level ten of the Bothan Spire at midnight station time."

"The Bothan Spire?" Nodan commented.

"Yeah, didn't you see it when we were on approach?" Tylo said, "Someone took a section of an old bothan exploration ship that looks like one of their tall buildings and welded it onto the side of the station. I've no idea why but it's a real rat run inside. Lots of places to hide."

"So good for covert meetings. You can stay hidden until you know exactly who's coming towards you." Derra said and Tylo nodded.

"Providing you don't mind the risk of decompression. I've heard it's a bit leaky." he said and then he frowned,

"Why does she want to meet me there? Why not just come here herself?" he asked.

"Err, she didn't say." the young woman said and she started to back away from him.

Fear.

"Tylo you're scaring her." Derra said and then she looked at the young woman, reaching into her robes, "Here, take this for your trouble." she said as she tossed a fifty credit coin towards her. The woman failed to catch the thrown coin and instead quickly crouched down to scoop it up off the deck before hurrying away.

"What, you're just giving her money and letting her go?" he said, "What if it's a trap? Has it occurred to you that maybe it wasn't even Mayon that sent that message?"

"Yes, that possibility has occurred to me Captain Kurrast. But someone has to spring that trap and if they do then they will be facing two jedi." Derra said and Tylo sighed.

"Okay, but can I at least have my blaster back?" he said.

"I have not changed my mind Captain Kurrast. Nodan and I will protect you but I do not want you starting a firefight unnecessarily." Derra replied and Tylo frowned.

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

The young woman who had delivered the message to Tylo had been told to meet the bounty hunters near one of the station's larger docking bays where numerous transports loaded and unloaded both passengers and cargo. The exact meeting place was a repair shop that had gone out of business and was now used by the locals as somewhere to try and scavenge parts from or store their junk in.

"Hello?" she called out, "I did as you asked. Are you going to pay me now?"

One after another the four robed bounty hunters emerged from the shadows, surrounding the woman.

"Did they believe you? Did Kurrast or the other confirm that they would be there?" Kane asked.

"I think so." the woman said, "They didn't say it out loud though. Now what about the rest of my money?"

"Here." Kane said and he handed a small packet to the woman. Taking it from him she looked inside and frowned.

"This isn't my money. You promised me a hundred credits." she said.

"That ticket is worth twice that. it will take you as far as the Mid Rim." Kane said, "The flight leaves in ten minutes though so you'd better hurry."

"And what if I don't want to leave?" the woman said.

"Of course you want to leave." Kane replied, "There is nothing for you here but a life of poverty. You already have the first hundred credits I gave you, plus whatever Tylo's associate did. So take the ticket and go. alternatively you could stay here but then you'd be a security risk to our operation and then we'd have to make sure you can't talk." and he slid part of a blaster from under his robe.

The young woman's eyes widened for a moment and then she suddenly turned around and started to run towards one of the transports in the docking bay outside.

"We could have just killed her." Bronon said after the woman had disappeared from view and Kane shrugged.

"We're not being paid to kill her." he said, "Now let's get ready. We've got a job to do." and he released the clasp on his robe, letting it fall to the floor to reveal the mandalorian battle armour beneath it. Then as he was putting on his helmet the other three mandalorians did the same.

5.

"Captain Kurrast." Nodan called out as he knocked on the bathroom door, "Mistress Olan says it is time for us to go. Will you be long?"

"Almost done kid." Tylo called out from inside the bathroom as he crouched down beside a wall panel located at floor level and pressed it in at one corner. There was a soft 'click' as he did this and the panel came free in his hand to reveal the hidden compartment behind it. Tylo liked to think of himself as a cautious individual who planned ahead for every situation and one of those possible situations that he had planned for was suddenly finding himself in need of a weapon. After confiscating Tylo's heavy blaster pistol Derra had placed it in the locker where he kept his other weapons and ammunition and then sealed it so that Tylo could not open it. Fortunately though the Jedi had not conducted a thorough search of the ship to discover where Tylo had concealed other weapons. One such hiding place was here in the *Swift Exit's* bathroom and behind the panel that Tylo had just opened was a compact holdout blaster. The weapon was short ranged, had limited stopping power and the power cell would last for only half a dozen firings before being depleted but it was still better than nothing. Tylo stuffed the weapon in a pocket on the inside of his jacket and closed the panel again to hide the evidence of what he had done, just in case either of the Jedi needed to make use of the bathroom before they left for the supposed rendezvous with Mayon. Then he cycled the refresher unit to provide cover for why he had been in the bathroom and squirt sanitizer on his hands so that it would appear he had just cleaned them.

"You might want to give it a few minutes kid." Tylo said as he emerged from the bathroom into the bunk room where he and his passengers slept. Nodan was now stood in the doorway at the other end of this compartment and he groaned when Tylo said this.

"Mistress Olan is waiting in the cargo hold." he said.

"Then let's not keep her waiting." Tylo said and he followed the Padawan into the cargo hold where Derra stood at the top of the access ramp.

"Nice of you to join us Captain Kurrast." Derra said.

"Well when you've got to go, you've got to go." Tylo replied, grinning.

"Indeed and we have to go." Derra said.

"Look, before we do this could a dangerous situation and I'd really rather not have to just sit covering in a corner while you do all of the fighting. So how about you give me back my blaster?" Tylo said.

"My position on that has not changed captain. Demonstrate that you can be trusted and I will consider it." Derra said.

"And how exactly can I prove I can be trusted with a blaster if you won't let me have one? You know I have the legal right to defend myself don't you?"

"Yes you do. However, as a felon you are prohibited by Republic law from owning a blaster." Derra said.

"That never bothered Jayk. He appreciated having the extra gun around now and again." Tylo said.

"I am not Jedi Udra, Captain Kurrast. Now let us be going, we are already behind schedule." Derra replied and she began to stride down the access ramp.

"Oh don't worry." Tylo muttered as he followed her, "You're nothing like Jayk Udra."

"I heard that Captain Kurrast." Derra called out from ahead of him.

When originally added to High Orbital Platform 1138 the Bothan Spire had had a fully functional turbolift system of its own. Rather than go to the trouble of fully integrating with this with the system on the rest of the station the engineers who carried out the work had constructed a terminal where some would get off a turbolift from one part of the station and then walk just a few metres to a turbolift cluster for the other.

However, as the Bothan Spire fell into disuse isolated systems such as its turbolifts were no longer maintained and eventually they broke down, leaving the emergency stairs and ladders as the only means of travelling from one level to another.

The two Jedi led the way up one of these sets of stairs while Tylo followed several steps behind them, alert for any signs of a trap. The walls of the stairwell were made of transparisteel plates and Tylo could not help but feel exposed, knowing that as they climbed the trio would be in plain sight to anyone on any of the walkways or landings that made up the bulk of the interior of the spire.

Hidden among these were the four Mandalorians, each man occupying a separate position between the eighth and twelfth level. All of these positions gave them a clear view of the walkway that extended out from the exit of the stairwell on the tenth floor.

Derra walked out of the stairwell first and immediately she felt a tremor in the Force.

Danger.

Plucking her lightsaber from beneath her robe, there was a 'snap-hiss' as the weapon ignited at the same

time as she dived forward and a moment later there was the sound of an explosion.

"Mistress Olan!" Nodan cried out at the sound of the blast wave slamming into the toughened transparisteel of the stairwell.

Through the transparent barrier Tylo and Nodan saw the walkway that Derra had stepped onto now swinging downwards away from them, no longer supported by the beams that had been cut through by the mandalorians.

"It's a trap!" Tylo exclaimed, "I told you so." and he pulled his tiny holdout blaster from inside his jacket.

"Where did you get that weapon from?" Nodan said when he saw the weapon.

"A good smuggler never reveals his secrets kid, now come on." Tylo responded and he started to run further up the stairs.

"Wait, where are you going?" Nodan called out after him.

"To look for the next bridge up. We can't do anything from here but if we can get across to the other side of that walkway then maybe we can still save that teacher of yours." Tylo replied without stopping or looking back at the padawan.

As the walkway fell, swinging across the gap it had spanned for centuries, Derra reached out with her free hand to grab hold of the safety rail in the hope that it would support her weight. Fortunately the rail had not been damaged by the blast anywhere other than the point at which it had snapped and Derra avoided falling towards the bottom of the spire. The walkway came to a sudden stop when it slammed into the structure on the other side of the gap and Derra found herself dangling in mid air and holding on by just one hand.

Shutting off her lightsaber and hanging it back on her belt, Derra used her second hand to also take hold of the ruined walkway before she could lose her grip. Looking up she then assessed her chances of being able to climb all the way up to where the walkway was still fixed to the landing on the tenth level. Unfortunately the safety rail's supports were spaced too far apart for her to be able to reach one while standing on the one below it and the angle was far too steep for her to be able to throw a line up accurately, even with the help of the Force.

"I've got a bad feeling about this." she said to herself before she looked back over her shoulder and up at the stairwell where she could just about see Tylo and Nodan still climbing towards the next level and she smiled.

"Good on you Captain Kurrast." she said.

6.

"I've got a clean shot." Bronon said to the other mandalorians over their comlink network. Looking through the sights of his rifle he could see that he was perfectly lined up to place a blaster bolt between Derra's shoulder blades while she was unable to defend herself.

"Remember the plan Bronon. If we wanted her dead we could have used a bigger bomb. This way she's bait to keep Kurrast and the padawan here." Kane reminded him.

"There moving up the stairs." Trenner said, "Looks like they're heading for the walkway on twelve." "I'm on it." Krevan replied, lining his rifle up on the exit from the stairwell just as Tylo burst out onto the walkway.

The mandalorian fired quickly but his aim was off slightly and the blaster bolt burned a hole through the transparisteel wall of the stairwell instead. Tylo could not help but recoil from the heat of the passing blaster bolt and he threw himself to the walkway as he tried to determine where the shot had come from.

"Stang." he hissed as he realised how close he had become to halving the reward for bringing in Tylo.

Nodan then came running out of the stairwell behind Tylo and Krevan fired again. However, the padawan had been alerted to the mandalorian's presence when he shot at Tylo and he already had his lightsaber held up in front of him to deflect the blaster bolt, sending it into the walkway not far from where Tylo lay.

"Hey!" Tylo yelled, "You were even closer than that guy shooting at me deliberately. He's right over there by the way. I saw the flash when he fired."

Nodan nodded and ran forwards, leaping over Tylo and deflecting another blaster bolt fired by Krevan. This time he deflected the blaster bolt back towards the mandalorian but it narrowly missed him, merely forcing him to cease fire and there was the sound of footfalls. Nodan kept on running towards Krevan's position even as he withdrew while Tylo got back to his feet. However, it was then that Kane chose to reveal himself by taking a running jump off a landing several floors below before igniting the rocket pack he wore.

"Look out kid!" Tylo yelled, pointing his hold out blaster at the flying mandalorian but unable to track the fast moving target well enough to aim precisely and unwilling to waste any of his limited ammunition on random wild fire.

Kane landed right beside Nodan and before the young wroonian could swing his lightsaber around to strike the mandalorian he swung the butt of his blaster rifle at him and knocked him backwards. Kane then turned his rifle around, intending to shoot Nodan before he could recover his senses but the padawan was too fast and Kane had to leap back when he saw a sudden flash of green as Nodan swung his lightsaber upwards and the blade cut through Kane's rifle effortlessly. Kane triggered his rocket pack again before Nodan could make a follow up strike that would cut him in half, flying over the padawan and landing right behind him.

Then as he spun around to face Nodan, Kane lashed out with his fist and delivered a blow that knocked the wroonian into the same wall that Krevan was using for cover. Dazed by the double blows to his head, Nodan dropped his lightsaber and the weapon bounced off the walkway before rolling over the side and plummeting downwards.

Even disarmed a Jedi was not helpless, the Jedi Order making sure that all of its members in the field were proficient in unarmed combat and Nodan dropped into a fighting stance. However, this did not impress Kane and he laughed as he drew a knife.

"Think you can take on a real warrior boy? Well lets see what they teach you in that temple." he said and he lunged at Nodan. Focusing on the blade in Kane's hand, Nodan reached out to grab him by the wrist with both hands so that he could not stab him. However, that was exactly what Kane had been counting on.

"His other hand! Watch his other hand!" Tylo shouted as he ran towards the ongoing melee but even as he shouted his warning Kane extended a second blade from the armour on his other forearm that he thrust upwards under Nodan's ribs. The padawan's eyes widened as he felt the blade enter his body before he released his grip on Kane's wrist and slumped forwards lifelessly against Kane.

A blaster bolt suddenly shot past Kane's head as Tylo closed to within range of his hold out blaster and fired it at him. Not wanting to give Tylo a second opportunity to fire now that he did not have to worry about hitting Nodan, Kane threw the lifeless body of the padawan from the landing and triggered his rocket pack again, shooting upwards through the spire.

Derra gasped as she saw Nodan's corpse tumble past her. She had just been able to drag herself up to stand on the safety rail support that she had just been hanging from and the shock of seeing her padawan dead almost made her lose her grip.

"No!" she cried out and she looked up in time to see Kane flying away from Tylo. The sight of the flying mandalorian took Derra by surprise. In the distant past the Jedi and mandalorians had fought almost constantly as a result of the latter's warlike ways but Mandalore had been a peaceful member of the Republic for more than five hundred years now. Of course it was known that when peace finally came to

Mandalore some of its warrior tribes had left the planet to continue living by their old ways, but it was rare to see them now.

Danger.

Another tremor in the Force made Derra draw her lightsaber again, just in time to deflect a blaster bolt fired by Bronon now that Nodan was dead. He fired a second shot immediately after he saw the first deflected and then a third when Derra parried that shot as well. Knowing that she could not stay where she was indefinitely, Derra looked for another way out. Previously she had focused on how to get back up to the tenth level above but when she looked towards where Bronon was firing from she saw the latticework of metal that supported the various levels of the spire and she came to the conclusion that she could still go sideways or downwards. The difficulty was that she could not keep hold of the safety rail while also defending herself with her lightsaber as well as throwing a line across to the other side of the spire. However, she quickly realised that she did not need to be standing still to throw the line and she calmly shut off her lightsaber and let go of the safety rail that had been supporting her.

This move took Bronon by surprise and his next shot went far over Derra's head as she suddenly dropped. The Jedi did not panic as she fell, instead she drew on the Force to guide her as she pulled a length of synthrope from the dispenser on her belt and the miniature grappling hook opened with a 'snap'. She threw this across the spire as hard as she could and let the line unravel. The moment she saw the hook wrapping itself around part of the structure of the spire she locked the dispenser so that no more line would be unravelled and grabbed hold of the line that already had.

Derra continued to fall and the line soon went taut. This then caused Derra to swing across the gap in the centre of the spire and towards the structure at the other side in an arc. Below her she could still see the base of the spire getting closer and she hoped that she had not already fallen so far that she would smash into the floor at the bottom before she made it across the centre of the spire.

Fortune was with Derra though and she was still more than ten metres above the bottom of the spire when she slammed into the metalwork opposite. Bracing herself against this, Derra then used the rope to pull herself up to the next level and climbed onto the landing there.

A stream of blaster bolts struck the metalwork around Derra as Krevan opened fire with his rifle on automatic from the other side of the spire. Rather than attempt to parry all of these with her lightsaber Derra broke into a run, bolts of bright red energy striking the metalwork behind her. As Krevan fired Bronon slung his own rifle over his shoulder and rushed for a nearby ladder that he began to climb down as fast as he could. Beneath him he heard the sound of running and while still holding onto the ladder he unslung his rifle and fired it downwards. The shot struck the floor plates right in front of Derra and she ground a halt and looked up at Bronon. The Mandalorian jumped off the ladder to the next landing beneath him and vanished from view, prompting Derra to continue running until she reached a reinforced support girder that was resilient enough to block the shots from Krevan's rifle and she took out her comlink.

"Captain Kurrast, can you hear me?" she signalled.

"Right here." Tylo responded.

"And where is 'here' exactly captain?"

"Heading back down to level ten now. Just hold on down there a bit longer and I'll see what I can do about helping you up. Look, Nodan's-"

"Nodan is dead. yes, I know." Derra said, "The issue now is for us to avoid the same fate."

"Yeah, well I've got five shots left. any idea how many we're facing here?" Tylo asked.

"Unless there are more of them that we have not seen yet then there are four, at least one of which has a rocket pack and thus is not limited by the stairs and ladders for moving between different levels."

"Okay so we're outnumbered two to one. I've seen Jayk and Brae beat odds worse than this." Tylo said.

All of a sudden the blaster fire towards Derra's hiding place stopped and she heard a 'clang' from close by, causing her to look around.

"I'll get back to you." she said before putting her comlink away.

Keeping her lightsaber inactive so as not to let the light it cast give her exact position away, Derra crept towards the outer edge of the spire where she could not be fired on from the other side of the central gap while she hunted for the source of the sound.

Another 'clang' caused her to turn again but there was still nothing to indicate the source of the sound.

Holding her lightsaber with her thumb ready to activate it at a moment's notice Derra followed the direction of the sound, still keeping away from the centre of the spire. She heard a third 'clang', this one closer than the others and she turned around to see a metal pipe connector rolling across the floor. Two more such cylindrical connectors were also visible and Derra realised too late that she had been drawn in by someone throwing them against a metal plate. Spinning around, Derra had only just activated her lightsaber when she saw Bronon knelt down and aiming his blaster rifle straight at her.

Tylo heard a single shot and then the spire went eerily quiet. There was no more weapons fire, no footsteps echoing off floor plates and no sounds of active rocket packs. Lifting his comlink to his mouth Tylo spoke into

it softly.

"Derra are you there?" he whispered but there was no response.

Tylo crouched down and looked around, searching for the nearest means of getting back to the base of the tower and escaping. Tylo knew of the ancient enmity between the Jedi and the Mandalorian warrior clans and it occurred to him that possibly this attack was targeted specifically at them. If this was the case then it was possible that if Derra was dead as well now, the Mandalorians would depart and leave him alone.

The problem with that theory was that it had too many conditions for it work out in Tylo's favour. Firstly the Mandalorians had to be targeting the Jedi specifically and not care about anyone who was not a Jedi but was obviously working for them. In addition to this they had to be willing to leave a living witness to what they had done. The Jedi Order was widely known for being obsessive in tracking down anyone who killed one of its number and Tylo had seen the distinctive armour that the Mandalorians wore, enabling him to identify them. The only stairwells that Tylo could see were the one that he and Nodan had used to descend from the twelfth level and the original set that he and the Jedi had climbed that despite being physically closer to him was currently inaccessible as far as he could see. Therefore, he turned back the way he had come and started to run towards the other stairwell.

The sudden sound of a rocket pack in flight made Tylo look up and he saw Kane descending towards him. Tylo raised his hold out blaster but held his fire while the flying Mandalorian remained out of his effective range.

"Not thinking of leaving us were you Kurrast?" Kane said as he landed in front of Tylo and blocked his path to the stairwell.

"Oh well you know, I accidentally got caught up in whatever grudge you still hold against the Jedi and now it's over I thought I ought get out of your way." Tylo replied.

"You misunderstand us Kurrast." Kane said as he walked towards Tylo, "The Jedi were just a bonus. It's you we're here for."

Seeing how close Kane was now Tylo quickly raised his blaster and fired all five remaining shots in rapid succession. All five found their target, hitting Kane in his chest, but the armour suit he wore was able to withstand even this and he did no more than flinch as he felt the heat of the blaster fire warming the armour as it dissipated it.

"Kriff." Tylo said suddenly, dropping the useless blaster and turning to run in the opposite direction. Kane did not pursue him, instead just watching as Tylo fled in the hope that he would be able to find an alternative way down the spire.

A bright yellow painted ladder seemed to offer Tylo some hope of escape but as he ran towards it Trenner suddenly stepped out from behind a structural support beam right in front of him and pointed his blaster rifle at Tylo's chest. Before the Mandalorian could fire however, Tylo dived at him and reached for the weapon. The impact knocked Trenner to the ground and the two men wrestled with one another for the rifle. Tylo twisted it in his grip, forcing the muzzle straight up between them before sliding one hand down towards the trigger while keeping the other wrapped firmly around the barrel. Pushing hard, Tylo was able to press the muzzle of the rifle against Trenner's chest plate and it was then that Tylo squeezed his fingers around the hand that Trenner was using to hold the weapon's pistol grip. There was a sudden flash of light as the rifle was discharged but much to Tylo's surprise it was blue rather than red, indicating that Trenner had set his rifle to stun.

"What the hell?" Tylo exclaimed as the low powered energy bolt failed to penetrate the chest plate that would have been cracked wide open by a full power shot from point blank range. In his surprise he relaxed his grip and Trenner was able to pull his rifle free before turning it towards Tylo and there was another flash of blue.

Tylo awoke to find himself hanging by his wrists from the ceiling of what he took to be a compartment aboard a starship. In addition to the restraints that were being used to suspend him about half a metre above the floor someone had fitted a gag to him while he was unconscious and he could not call out. He did not have long to wait before a nearby door slid open and Kane entered the compartment, no longer wearing his helmet.

"Ah you're awake." he said, "Even though blasters are supposed to be totally non-lethal when set to stun I'm never happy until I can see that somebody stunned has actually woken up again. After all if you had died then Mister Crayne wouldn't be paying me and my associates nearly as much as he will when we deliver you to him alive. All we need to do first is locate your former colleague Miss Shan and then we can all be on our way. I'm sure Crayne will be only too happy to see you both."