

# STAR WARS

## DARKNESS RISING

3-02: HONOUR & FRIENDSHIP

BY STEPHEN J DUTTON



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Sensing that Tylo is in danger Jayk chooses to ignore his orders and go to help his friend, but he does not intend to go alone...

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# 1.

Jayk Udra passed by the physical training area on his way to the main entrance of the Jedi temple. One of the exercise chambers was being used by a class of padawans practising defensive technique with their lightsabers. Each padawan faced three hovering remotes that would move about random patterns before attacking. The task for the padawans was simply to avoid being hit by the stinging energy bolts fired by the remotes. To make matters more complicated the remotes would sometimes switch between different padawans so that they would suddenly face attack from a different direction. Recognising one of the padawans, Jayk paused and looked at her. Called Brae, she had previously been assigned to him as his apprentice even though the council had informed him that she was his niece. This situation had come to an end just within the last week when Brae had been revealed not to be his niece but his daughter, the product of a relationship Jayk had had on a long duration mission almost two decades earlier. Angry at this deception, Jayk had confronted the council about it directly but they had simply returned Brae to general training and assigned new Jedi to the case they had been working on.

Brae noticed Jayk's presence in the hallway and looked towards him and waved. In doing so however, she took her attention away from the training remotes and one of them made a swift run at her. Brae let out a yelp as the low powered bolt struck her leg and scowled as she turned back towards the remotes.

*Anger.*

Brae suddenly lashed out with her lightsaber, using it to strike directly at one remote after another. Not programmed for evasion, the tiny spherical machines were easy targets and in a matter of seconds the smoking remains of all three were on the floor in front of her.

"No Brae!" the instructor called out, "Exercise halt." and all of the remotes ceased their attacks, forming regular lines in front of the padawans as the instructor walked towards Brae, "The point of the exercise is to be able to defend yourself against attack. Not to carry out attacks yourself and certainly not to do so through anger. You must resist the pull of the Dark Side."

"The exercise is pointless." Brae replied, "Why would I want to stand around getting shot at all day when I could just disable my attackers?"

Rather than stand and listen to the rest of the argument Jayk walked away from the training area, continuing to the temple's main entrance where he encountered a second familiar face.

"Hi Jayk." Jedi Knight Kat Maran said when she saw him from the bench she was sat on and she got to her feet, "I was starting to wonder whether or not you'd get here."

"Sorry Kat, I got distracted." Jayk replied as they embraced briefly, "We've still got time to make it to the restaurant though."

The two Jedi then began to walk through the streets of Coruscant, the capital of the Galactic Republic. Making their way to the outskirts of the governmental district, away from the temple and senate building, they came to a restaurant and went inside.

"Udra and Maran." Kat told the maître d' droid.

"Your booking is confirmed and your order was received." the droid responded, "Please follow me to your table. Your first course will be delivered in six minutes."

"Very efficient." Jayk commented as he reached to the chronometer on his wrist and set the timer, intending to compare the actual delivery time to the one stated given by the droid.

"So how was your day then Jayk?" Kat asked when they had been seated, "Busy I'm guessing."

"Actually no, not really. The council hasn't given me a new assignment yet so I've been going through the archives. This business with Thal N'Krey still has me interested and I'm wondering what other remains of the Sith Empire could still be out there."

"So you almost missed our date because you had your head stuck in a databook?" Kat asked with a smile.

"A date? Is that what this is?" Jayk replied, smiling back at Kat, "Don't tell the council. I'm in enough trouble over my attachment to Brae as it is."

"It must be weird to suddenly find out you're a father. Have you seen her since the council separated you?" Kat asked.

"Not really." Jayk replied.

"Jayk I don't need to be a Jedi to notice that what you said isn't a proper denial." Kat said.

"I came past a training area where she was part of the class on my way to meet you." Jayk said.

"And how did she seem?"

"Angry. I spent a year calming her down and trying to teach her to control her darker impulses and if what I saw was typical of her behaviour now then that has been undone in a week."

"Jayk the council may have me stuck teaching marksmanship on the temple firing range but that does mean I get to speak with the other temple instructors regularly. It wouldn't take much to find out exactly how well

she's doing."

"No." Jayk said, "The council separated us for a reason. I may not agree with that but I am bound by their decision and you deliberately trying to find out about her progress on my behalf would get us both into trouble."

A serving droid then rolled across the restaurant to the table where the two jedi were sat and Jayk looked at his chronometer as the starter course was placed on the table.

"To within twenty seconds. I'm impressed." he said.

"Thank you sir." the droid responded before it rolled away from the table.

"I'd be more impressed if the waiter had checked who was who." Kat said, "Your starter looks delicious but if I eat things like this I'll get too fat to meet the Order's physical fitness standards." and the two jedi exchanged their plates before starting to eat.

"So what about your day?" Jayk said, "How is life on the range?"

"Tedious. The most exciting thing that happened all day was when Tiska from the communication centre came down to talk about how Jedi Olan may be missing."

"Olan?" Jayk repeated when he heard the name.

"Yes, Derra Olan. She and her padawan missed a scheduled check in. I didn't know you knew her." Kat said.

"I don't. But I know the name." Jayk replied, "When the council told me that I was being taken off the Thal N'Krey investigation they told Tylo that Jedi Olan would be taking it over."

"She didn't contact you for advice though?" Kat said, "You ran the investigation for a year. I'd have thought that she'd want your insight on it."

"Perhaps. Though she would have been given access to all my notes. How many check ins has she missed?"

"It was just one when I heard about it." Kat answered, "There's no need to worry about her just yet."

"Actually it was Tylo I was more concerned about." Jayk said, "Kat, I've got a very bad feeling that something is wrong."

After the meal Jayk and Kat returned to the jedi temple and split up as they each retired to their respective quarters for the night but Jayk found sleep hard to come by. The news that the jedi who had replaced him in the Thal N'Krey investigation had failed to check in on her first mission after replacing him troubled Jayk.

After a mostly sleepless night Jayk again headed for the jedi temple archives. It was said that the only way for information about something to not appear in the archives was for it to not exist but as far as Jayk knew there was no information on how to ignore the troubling thoughts he was having.

Jayk decided that the only solution was to ask another jedi for advice, one even more experienced than him. However, this presented a problem of its own. Jayk had served with the Jedi Order for many years and the only jedi he could think of that had a greater knowledge of the workings of the Force than himself were masters, but if he approached a master with his concerns about the missing jedi and Tylo they would probably just remind him that only one transmission had been missed. Then another idea occurred to Jayk. Just because any living jedi with more experience and knowledge than Jayk was likely to turn him away if he took his concerns to them now did not mean that there was no-one in the temple that he could consult. Instead of asking a living jedi he could ask a dead one.

The Jedi Order's archives included a large number of holocrons. The majority of these advanced data storage devices were mere data libraries, although ones that held large amount of data, however there were some that were far more complex than this. Sometimes a jedi knight would not only record all of their knowledge into a holocron, they would also create a facsimile of themselves within it. These artificial intelligences would then act as a gatekeeper who could guide a user through the contents of the holocron as well as limiting their access to knowledge considered dangerous.

It was one of the latter type that Jayk wanted to access as he walked up to the archive's main desk.

"How may I help you?" the archivist behind the desk asked.

"I wish to consult the holocron of Jedi Cal Udra." Jayk replied.

"One moment." the archivist replied, checking his computer. Jayk knew that it was possible the council would have restricted his access to the holocron created by his ancestor that he and Brae had carried with them for the last year. As a young jedi Cal had acted as the instructor to his own sister and that experience had been considered useful by the council who allowed the holocron to be removed from the archive because of this. Fortunately it turned out that the council did not consider Jayk consulting with the AI guardian of Cal's holocron to be a problem as moments later the archivist looked back at him, "Please come with me, I will have the holocron brought to you." he said and he led Jayk to a private room where after a few minutes the holocron of Cal Udra was delivered to him.

"Hello Cal." Jayk said as soon as he was alone in the room and the holographic image of Cal Udra as he had appeared later on in his life materialised in front of him.

"Jayk." Cal said, "This is a pleasant surprise. I didn't expect to see you again. Or anyone for the next hundred years or so."

"Cal I'm concerned about Tylo." Jayk said.

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

"The Jedi assigned to replace me in the Thal N'Krey investigation has missed a check in."

"Just one?" Cal said and Jayk nodded.

"Yes, just one for now. But I sense something amiss. I would go to the council but they could interpret it as a means to become involved with the investigation again." he replied.

"Ah so you came to me for my advice. You know I defied the Jedi Order once." Cal told him and Jayk frowned.

"I was not planning on defying the Jedi Order." he said.

"Then why come to me? Go to the council and after they dismiss your report go back to whatever you were doing. If this other Jedi misses more check ins then I'm sure they will send someone else to investigate. Eventually."

"By which time Tylo could be dead." Jayk said.

"Which brings us right back to defying the council." Cal said, "What is your current assignment?"

"I have none."

"Then the council can hardly complain if you chose to take a couple of fighters on a test flight now can it?" Cal said.

"A couple?" Jayk commented.

"Of course. Going alone would be stupid. In this situation it's always best to have someone you trust with your life along to look after it. A relative for example." Cal said.

"You? Why would you need a starfighter?"

"Not me you nerf herder. Brae of course." Cal responded and Jayk hesitated.

"The council ordered me specifically to have no further contact with her."

"Look Jayk, by the time you get back here the council is going to be furious anyway. Why not make it really worth their while being angry?"

"Because I do not want to risk Brae's future by getting her expelled from the Jedi Order." Jayk told him.

"And how has your daughter been doing since the council separated you Jayk?"

"Poorly I believe. I think she is losing control to the Dark Side again."

"Then it's only a matter of time before she is expelled from the Jedi Order anyway. Possibly even exiled from the Republic entirely to some backwater world to live out her life alone or locked away to stop her doing harm to anyone." Cal pointed out.

"It will have to be her choice." Jayk said.

"Of course. Mind you when I did this I didn't ask my sister about it beforehand. Of course she'd just been arrested for murder so there wasn't really the opportunity." Cal replied.

"We'll have to do this now." Jayk said, "Quickly as well. I can probably sneak you out of the archive but it will only be a short time before your absence is noticed."

"These things are best done without too much planning. That just gives you the chance to change your mind." Cal said, his hologram smiling.

"Then let's do this." Jayk said and as he picked up the holocron and slipped it into his robe Cal's image vanished.

The idea that a Jedi would steal anything from the temple was considered so ludicrous that there were few security measures taken to prevent it. There were exceptions for those areas of the temple where items considered too dangerous to be accessed by anyone but too useful or interesting to destroy, but apart from that the temple's internal security relied on the Jedi themselves.

Walking to the exit from the room Jayk opened the door and peered into the hallway. As he had hoped it was empty and he darted along it until he reached the main archive chamber. Had this been almost any other place in the galaxy Jayk would have simply used the Force to distract anyone who might notice him as he made his way out of the archive. However, doing that in the Jedi archive would be like sending up a flare and advertising what he was doing so he had to go for a more old fashioned form of stealth.

Lifting up his hood to cover his features Jayk bowed his head as he walked towards the nearest exit from the archive, doing his best to remain calm so that none of the other Jedi present would sense any unusual agitation through the Force.

Making it to the exit without being challenged Jayk lowered his hood and picked up his pace as soon as he knew he was out of sight of any of the archivists, heading towards the temple hangar. Once there he approached one of the service droids that performed most of the maintenance work on the various craft used by the Jedi Order.

"I need to book out two starfighters for a training flight." Jayk told the droid.

"Departure time?" the droid responded.

"Immediate." Jayk said, "I will also need to check the departure log for the past week."

"Confirmed. Two Aurek-six Sprite-class interceptors are available." the droid said as it checked its database.

"And hyperdrive rings?" Jayk added, knowing that this type of fighter was unable to travel over interstellar

distances without them.

"Available on request." the droid answered.

"Good. Have the ships prepared for launch while I check the departure log and await the arrival of my wingman." Jayk said and he headed for a nearby computer terminal to call up the recent departure log. He knew the rough time of Tylo's departure and he quickly searched for the starship *Swift Exit* within that time frame, "The Tion?" he said to himself, "You did go a long way didn't you Tylo?" and then he made a note of the system Tylo had gone to before leaving the hangar again and making his way towards the temple's training areas.

Checking the time, Jayk saw that it would soon be time for the first lessons of the day to begin and he positioned himself between the training areas and the padawans' quarters, knowing that Brae would come by this way.

Sure enough padawans began to walk past Jayk in small clusters, discussing issues such as their expectations of the day ahead or the events of the past evening. Standing in an alcove with his hood raised again, none of the padawans paid any attention to Jayk as they filed past him as he waited for Brae to arrive. As Jayk had expected when Brae did appear she was alone, walking some distance behind any of the other padawans. He knew that she was not popular among the padawans in the temple and as her father he found that it pained him to see her isolated like this.

Brae did not pay any more attention to Jayk than any of the other padawans and Jayk did not dare call out to her just in case he was recognised. Instead as soon as Brae walked past the alcove Jayk reached out and dragged her into it as well, wrapping one arm around her body to hold her still while clamping his hand over her mouth to stop her from crying out.

"Brae it's me. Jayk." Jayk said as Brae tried to struggle free and all of a sudden she stopped her struggling, "Keep quiet" Jayk added and then he removed his hand from her mouth and let go of her.

"Father." she said softly, turning towards Jayk, "What are you doing here?"

"Getting out of here." Jayk replied, checking to see whether any of the other padawans had noticed Brae's sudden disappearance, "I think Tylo's in trouble and I'm going after him. I want you to come too, I've got a pair of starfighters being prepped in the hangar now."

"Does the council know?" Brae asked before adding, "Sorry, stupid question. You wouldn't be hiding in the shadows if they did. But what will happen when they find out we're both missing?"

"We may be expelled from the Jedi Order." Jayk said, "I can't order you to come with me but I want you there to watch my back if I do get into trouble."

Brae smiled.

"It's probably just a matter of time before they kick me out anyway." she said and Jayk smiled back at her.

"Excellent. Oh by the way, there'll be three of us going." he said and he took Cal's holocron from under his robe and showed it to her.

"Is that-" Brae began, her eyes widening.

"Cal? Yes. Here, take him and let's get out of here before anyone notices any of us missing from where we ought to be."

Hurrying back to the hangar, Jayk and Brae found that the two starfighters Jayk had requested had now been moved into launch position with astromech droids in place and they jumped into the cockpits.

"Where are we going?" Brae asked as soon as she had put on her communication headset.

"I'll send you jump data once we're out of the gravity well." Jayk replied, "Are you ready to launch?"

"Yes, all systems on line."

"Good. No turning back now." Jayk said as his fighter lifted up off the hangar deck and then raced out of the launch door. Brae copied this and the two arrow shaped fighters shot upwards, the sky rapidly turning from blue to black and becoming filled with stars.

"Hyperdrive rings dead ahead." Brae said when she saw the circular external hyperdrive units that would give their starfighters the ability to jump to hyperspace.

"I see them." Jayk replied, "C-one send these jump co-ordinates to Brae's fighter." and the astromech droid fitted to his starfighter chirped as it copied the data to Brae's droid.

"Drenos?" Brae said when she saw the jump data shown on her navigational display, "I've never heard of that system."

"I'm not surprised. It's in the Tion. It was a mining colony until the mineral resources were stripped bare and it became something of a waypoint for commercial shipping instead." Jayk said before he slowed his fighter down so that it could connect to one of the grid of hyperdrive ring ahead of him. Looking around he saw Brae do the same and he nodded at her through the cockpit canopy, "Execute jump." he said and the two Jedi engaged their hyperdrives at the same time, the two starfighters vanishing in brief flashes of light.

## 2.

The Drenos system was located along the Permelian Trade Route and this meant that the route was well charted and relatively quick to travel along. On the other hand it was still located close to the galactic rim and this meant that even fast ships such as the Jedi starfighters took several hours to reach it. It was usual for Jedi to meditate during the time spent in starfighters in hyperspace while the ship's systems were monitored by their astromech droids. However, having been separated from Jayk so soon after discovering the truth about their relationship had left her with questions she wanted answers to and so she decided to take advantage of the extremely close positioning of the two fighters to communicate with Jayk.

"Master." she said, preferring to use the title Jayk had held while she was his padawan.

"I'm not your master any more Brae. The council decided that." Jayk replied when Brae's signal interrupted his mediation. Ordinarily he would have expected Brae to have had a good reason to justify this, but given their current circumstances he decided that he could not expect her to hold with protocol.

"Father?" Brae said.

"I suppose that is accurate. Though you could just call me by my name if you want to talk." Jayk said.

"That seems weird." Brae replied.

"Say what you have to say anyway Brae." Jayk said.

"Tell me about my mother." Brae said.

The request surprised Jayk. Jedi were raised in the knowledge that they would never meet or know their parents and the Jedi Order forbade any attempt for a Jedi to search for any information on the matter. However, Brae already knew that Jayk was her father and when he had revealed that information to her he had given her some basic information about the circumstances surrounding her birth, but he had not actually told Brae who her mother was or where she lived.

"Father?" Brae said and Jayk realised how long he had hesitated.

"Brae you need to put thoughts of your mother out of your mind. I haven't seen or heard from her since before you were born and I doubt that I will ever see her again. Right now what we are doing can be explained as concern for a colleague but when this is over and we return to Coruscant the Jedi Council will decide our fate and if they find out that you have asked about your mother it will only increase the likely severity of the punishment they will hand down to us. Now prepare yourself. We are not far from Drenos now and we will be exiting hyperspace soon."

The Jedi starfighters emerged from hyperspace just beyond the gravity well of the planet Drenos in the system of the same name and the numerous orbital facilities that surrounded the planet were immediately visible.

"Tylo could have taken the *Swift Exit* to any of these stations. So where do we start?" Brae asked.

"Tylo came here on Republic business so he will not have attempted to hide the *Swift Exit*'s presence." Jayk replied, "The ship will have been seen on sensors so we will simply approach the local authorities and ask them for access to their sensor log."

"But what if they won't let us see them?" Brae said, "We're not here on official business."

"No, but they won't know that will they?" Jayk replied, "We'll drop our hyperspace rings here and head for the primary orbital over the planet's northern polar region."

"Dropping hyperspace ring." Brae said as both Jedi disengaged their starfighters from the hyperspace rings that had brought them here and headed towards one of the numerous space stations that hung in space above Drenos. The station located above the planet's north pole was clearly a government facility, numerous patrol vessels docked and weapon batteries clearly visible. The station's sensors were highly effective and they soon picked out the two starfighters heading towards the station.

"Attention approaching craft, you are approaching a closed zone. Identify yourselves immediately or you will be fired on." a voice announced.

"So much for our transponders." Brae commented.

"They're just being cautious." Jayk replied before he responded to the challenge from the space station, "This is Jedi Knight Jayk Udra here with my padawan on official business. Requesting clearance to dock." he transmitted, confident that although the Jedi Order would be aware of Jayk and Brae's absence by now it would not have known their destination nor posted a general bulletin to be on the watch for them.

"Permission to dock in bay seven Jedi Udra. Welcome to Drenos."

"See?" Jayk said to Brae on their private channel, "Easy."

"I don't know. I've got a bad feeling about this." Brae replied.

"Well the time for that was back on Coruscant at the temple. But for now remember to act like you're still my padawan and I'm your master."

"Yes master."

Jayk and Brae brought their fighters into the dock bay as instructed and as they climbed out of their cockpits they were met by a protocol droid with government markings on its chest.

"Good afternoon master jedi. Welcome to Drenos Orbital Command. I am K-three-KO and I have been sent to assist you." the droid said.

"Excellent." Jayk replied, "I am Jedi Knight Jayk Udra and this is my padawan Brae Assen." Jayk said, not wanting to prompt any awkward questions about their relationship that might trigger the locals check up on them with the Jedi Order. Brae did not visibly react to Jayk providing the droid with a false name for her but she sensed that he had not picked that name at random and that it held some significance that she resolved to ask about later on, "We require information about a vessel that arrived in this system within the last week." Jayk added.

"Of course. Please come with me master jedi." K-3KO said and the droid turned around and began to walk towards the exit from the docking bay.

Jayk and Brae followed the droid as it led them to the station's main command centre. The senior command staff were located on a raised platform that was ringed with control consoles and still offered them a clear view of everything going on in the rest of the room around them. The droid escorting the jedi avoided this central area and instead led them to the row of tracking consoles where several technicians monitored space traffic around Drenos.

"You may access the records from here master jedi." K-3KO said, calling up the traffic control log on a vacant console.

"Allow me master." Brae said and she sat down and ran a search through the log, setting it to just search the past few days to speed things up, "Here." she said, when the search was complete, "The *Swift Exit* arrived here two days ago and was given permission to dock at High Orbital Platform one-one-three-eight." then she frowned. "There's a marker next to the record." she added.

"What does that mean?" Jayk asked, looking at K-3KO.

"High Orbital Platform one-one-three-eight requires a berthing fee be paid daily. That mark indicates that the captain of the vessel is in default." the droid answered.

"I could understand Tylo trying to get away without paying the fee but it is unlikely that Jedi Olan would permit that." Jayk said, "Brae, I think this proves that they are in trouble."

"So now we go to this platform one-one-three-eight?" Brae replied and Jayk smiled.

"Yes. Now we go there and find Tylo." he replied.



### 3.

Whereas the Drenos Orbital Command station was as well maintained as could be expected for this far from the Core Worlds, High Orbital Platform 1138 was not. The station had clearly been extensively modified since it was first built and there was no uniformity to this modification, with different sections having radically different styles of architecture to one another.

"I don't like the look of this place." Brae said as she and Jayk flew towards the station in their starfighters.

"As much as I would like to remind you that appearances can be deceptive, I share your feeling Brae." Jayk replied before they were contacted by another traffic controller, this one from High Orbital Platform 1138 itself.

"Approaching starfighters follow beacon twelve." the voice said.

"This is Jedi Knight Jayk Udra." Jayk responded, "We are here on official-"

"Follow beacon twelve." the voice repeated, interrupting Jayk and ignoring what he was trying to say.

Immediately after this the channel went dead.

"How rude." Brae commented.

"It would appear that the authorities aboard platform one-one-three-eight are not going to be as co-operative as the crew of our last port of call. Follow the beacon and we'll proceed from there." Jayk said.

Beacon twelve led the jedi to a docking bay that appeared reserved for military style craft, with numerous starfighters and gunships present.

"A defence squadron?" Brae asked as she and Jayk stood between their fighters and looked around.

*Fear.*

"I think not." Jayk said when he sensed the discomfort coming from several of the other beings inside the hangar who were doing their best to avoid making eye contact with the jedi, "Brae I think that many of the vessels in this docking bay are used for purposes that may not be entirely legal."

"Pirates?" Brae suggested.

"Possibly. Though they could also be mercenaries." Jayk replied.

"Do you think they had anything to do with Tylo's disappearance?" Brae asked.

"It is too soon to tell." Jayk said.

"Are these yours?" a gruff voice said from behind the jedi and they turned to see a green skinned nikto in overalls standing looking at the starfighters. A patch on his chest suggested that he was one of the station staff, "There's a penalty for not registering ordnance ahead of arrival."

"We're here on official Republic business." Brae said.

"Doesn't matter. The law is the law." the nikto replied, "One hundred credits per ship plus your regular docking fee."

"Payable in cash no doubt." Jayk said.

"I can't help it if my payment processing datapad is broken." the nikto said.

*Deception.*

"I think we may have just met the most incompetent con man in the galaxy." Jayk said to Brae and the nikto snarled.

"What did you just say?" he demanded.

"I said that as a con man you are utterly unqualified to correctly identify your target beforehand." Jayk said, "For example, our starfighters are clearly marked up as belonging to the Jedi Order and my apprentice and I are wearing the tradition robes of jedi. Plus we have these." he added before both he and Brae drew back their robes and placed their hands on the hilts of their lightsabers.

*Panic.*

"I'm sure my supervisor will agree to waive the fees in your case." the nikto said and he turned around started to scurry away.

"Not so fast." Jayk called out after him and dashed forwards, placing a hand on the nikto's shoulder and spinning him around, "We need to locate a ship that docked here recently."

"A YT-seven hundred called the *Swift Exit*." Brae added.

"I'm no informer." the nikto responded.

"No but I bet that you do have access to the docking database for this station." Jayk said and then he waived his hand and used the Force to reinforce his next words, "Tell us where we can find the *Swift Exit*."

The nikto hesitated, his urge to do exactly as Jayk had commanded conflicting with his natural instinct to do nothing to help him. Jayk and Brae glanced at one another as they both wondered whether Jayk's attempt to use the Force to manipulate the nikto had succeeded or not when all of a sudden he took out his datapad and activated it.

"The *Swift Exit* is located in bay four." he said.

"Good." Jayk said with a smile on his face, "Now tell me how to get to docking bay four from here."

Docking bay four was constructed in a large void within the space station, with a number of landing platforms extending outwards from a central column. The *Swift Exit* sat on one of these platforms, easily identifiable from the image of the scantily clad female human holding a blaster painted on the side. There were no obvious signs of life from anywhere on the ship, its access ramp closed and no internal lighting was visible. Importantly though the ship was intact and there were no indications that it had been attacked.

"I don't think anyone's at home." Jayk said as he and Brae walked toward the ship. Then he took out his comlink and checked that it was set to the channel that he knew Tylo used for the *Swift Exit's* internal communications, "Tylo are you there?" he signalled but there was no response.

"Do we go inside?" Brae asked and Jayk nodded.

"I'll take the main ramp and check the forward section. You take the port side docking port and check the aft." he said.

"Yes master." Brae replied and she ran around the side of the *Swift Exit* and looked up at the docking port that was about three metres off the pad while the ship was stood on its landing gear. Using the Force to boost her, Brae leapt up and landed on the narrow ledge that surrounded the docking port hatch and grabbed hold of the hull, "Ready." she called out.

"Go!" Jayk snapped and at the same time both Jedi used their access codes to open the hatches into the *Swift Exit* and rushed inside, igniting their lightsabers in preparation to defend themselves if necessary. The interior of the ship was just as dark as the exterior, the only illumination being provided by the Jedi's lightsabers as they made their way through the ship cautiously. Entering into the forward cargo hold, Jayk saw nothing out of the ordinary and no signs of internal damage. From here he moved into the lounge and he found this to be as well ordered as it usual was. Jayk had turned a blind eye to Tylo using the Jedi Order as a means of improving the amenities of the *Swift Exit* and the large wall mounted video screen and upgraded food preparation units were still present and seemingly undamaged. This left just the cockpit in the forward section of the ship and Jayk made his way into it cautiously. The transparent canopy at the front of the ship had allowed him to see most of the interior of the cockpit from outside the ship, but there was still the chance that there was something towards the rear of the cockpit that had not been visible from the outside.

The cockpit door opened with a 'hiss' and Jayk leapt through, holding his lightsaber in front of him. Just as with the other areas of the ship there were no signs of violence or damage. Shutting off his lightsaber, Jayk sat down in the pilot's seat and began to bring the *Swift Exit's* systems on line.

While Jayk was searching the front of the *Swift Exit* Brae was circling around the rear, checking inside the workshop then making her way around past the gun turret to the crew cabin and bathroom. All of these were empty and undamaged. The only thing that appeared out of place in the crew cabin was an external lock that had been fitted to one of the lockers. Brae knew that this was where Tylo stored his weapons and she had never known him to be concerned that they were not safe inside it. One quick swing of her lightsaber was enough to slice the lock off the locker door and Brae opened it to see what was inside. Surprisingly she found not only Tylo's blaster rifle but also the heavy blaster pistol he usually carried still inside the locker. Brae had rarely seen Tylo without the sidearm and she was wondering what would make him lock it away when all of a sudden the lights came on throughout the ship.

"Brae, report." Jayk said over the intercom and Brae walked over to the nearest intercom panel.

"There's nothing back here." she said, "Although I found Tylo's weapons locked away. His rifle and pistol. Why would he do that? He likes to be armed all the time. He even take a blaster into the bathroom."

"That is strange. However, it does not tell us what happened to him. In fact I found nothing up here to that effect either. Whatever happened to Tylo it seems that he and Jedi Olan left the ship willingly. We should check the mission logs to see what they were doing here. Bring Cal to the cockpit. He can interface with the computer and hopefully open Jedi Olan's files.

In another ship docked elsewhere on the station, three men in the traditional armour of Mandalorian warriors sat eating when a fourth entered the small living compartment of the ship that contained bunks and a compact dining area.

"Kane we've got a problem." he said and the leader of the group looked up from his meal.

"What is it Krevan?" he asked.

"I just checked with the beggars we've got keeping tabs on Shan's and Kurrast's ships just in case Shan went back to either of them like you said and it looks like Kurrast has got visitors." Krevan said.

"Visitors? Not Shan then?" Kane said.

"No. Jedi. Two more of them. A young girl and an older guy. Both human." Krevan explained.

"Another master and padawan." another of the Mandalorians said, "Could the Jedi Order have already noticed that we killed the other two?"

"No Bronon." Kane said, "There hasn't been enough time for them to have been listed as missing. At most they'll have missed one check in."

"But that means-" the fourth mandalorian began.

"I know what it means Trenner." Kane interrupted, "It means that they had already been called here before we took out the other two jedi. I think I need to have a little word with our guest."

Getting to his feet Kane made his way into another compartment that was even smaller than the one he had just come from. In here Tylo Kurrast, owner and captain of the *Swift Exit* hung from the ceiling by his wrists, his mouth covered by a gag that Kane unfastened and removed.

"Kurrast we need to talk." he said as Tylo gasped, drawing air that he had been limited to breathing in through his nose while gagged.

"Really? Well I suppose I am just hanging around here doing nothing." he said, "Seriously though, you might want to let me down. I need to use the head."

"I think not. I just want answers."

"Oh well, it's your floor that one of your lot is going to have to clean up and I should warn you that I had some really dodgy take out food yesterday, or at least I think it was yesterday. What day is this?"

"Enough!" Kane snapped, "Your friends have arrived and I want to know what they know. how much do they know about Shan?"

"Mayon still giving you the slip then?" Tylo said, "Well I can't help you out there. Mayon Shan and I didn't part on very good terms."

"It's your friends I want to know about." Kane said.

"Beats me. I'm not the sort of person who has many friends."

"Enough!" Kane shouted, "One of my men has been watching your ship just in case Miss Shan attempts to contact you and he saw the jedi arrive."

"Jedi?" Tylo said and he smiled, "A little blonde kid and a tall guy older than me?"

"Krevan said there was a man and a young girl. So you do know them." Kane said, "Very good. Tell me why you summoned them."

"I didn't. The Jedi Order doesn't work for me. Funny thing is if it is those two are who I think they are then they aren't supposed to be working together. I'd be careful of them though. Compared to them Derra and Nodan were amateurs. Jayk and Brae know how to do some real damage. The kid especially. She's real feisty if you back her into a corner. Take my advice and just let me go now." Tylo said.

Kane grunted and then left the room.

"I take it it's a 'no' on going to the bathroom then." Tylo called out after him.

Back in the ship's living area Kane looked at the other mandalorians.

"Kurrast is playing the fool." he said, "But he does know these jedi. Cut him down and get him ready to move. Krevan take me to these jedi, I want to see them for myself."

## 4.

"You understand what we need?" Jayk asked and the holographic image of Cal nodded.

"I patch into the *Swift Exit's* computer and find out exactly why Tylo and your replacements came here. Then we use that information to try and piece together what happened to our friend. It shouldn't take long." he said and then his image vanished.

"Father while we wait I have a question for you." Brae said and Jayk looked at her.

"What is it Brae?" he asked.

"When we landed at the polar orbiting station you introduced me as Brae Assen." Brae said.

"Yes. It is widely known that the Jedi are not supposed to have children. Sharing the same surname could have aroused too much interest in who we are. I didn't want them checking with the Jedi Order and revealing our presence here before we can locate Tylo." Jayk explained.

"Yes, I understand that. What I want to know is why you picked Assen. The name seemed to come naturally to you and I could sense no hint of deception. Almost as if it really was my name."

"Brae it's just a name." Jayk said.

"Is it my mother's name?" Brae said, "If I wasn't sensitive to the Force would I be Brae Assen?"

"Brae you must try and put all thoughts of your mother out of your mind." Jayk said, "The more you focus on her the more your thoughts will become clouded and the pull of the Dark Side will become stronger the more you try to obtain that which is unobtainable."

"Finished." Cal's voice said sudden and he reappeared in front of Jayk and Brae in the lounge.

"You've accessed Jedi Olan's files?" Jayk asked.

"No. I accessed Tylo's log instead. I already know all his passwords and just as I thought he made a note of why they came here. It seems that Tylo and Jedi Olan are trying to locate Morton Crayne by going through someone who has recently left his employment. Mayon Shan worked for Morton Crayne in the same capacity as Tylo, though according to him her skills were inferior to his own."

"So Morton Shan is here then?" Brae said and Cal nodded.

"Got it in one." Cal said, "She docked here and her ship was identified. The Jedi Order sent Derra Olan and her padawan Nodan Turrok to take her back to Coruscant for questioning."

"Did they find her?" Jayk said.

"Tylo made a note about locating Mayon but he says she was not happy to see him and gave him the slip before Derra or Nodan could catch up with him. However, he goes on to say that another woman, apparently a vagrant of some kind turned up to offer him a meeting with Mayon in a place called the Bothan Spire."

"I'm guessing that's a place aboard the station." Jayk said.

"I wouldn't know. Tylo didn't say." Cal said, "However, he did say that he didn't believe the woman who delivered the message was telling the truth. He thought her story lacked credibility. On the other hand Derra Olan was only too willing to take her story at face value. Tylo says she even paid her for delivering it."

"That sounds like Tylo." Brae said, "Can't stand to see money being given out freely to anyone but him."

"I think our next step is obvious." Jayk said, "We need to locate this Bothan Spire and go there ourselves."

Brae can you see if you can get us directions? I want to check Tylo's weapons. Unless something has happened to put them out of order we'll take them along as well."

"Good idea." Cal said, "My sister and I often kept a pulse wave blaster or two to hand just in case. A grenade launcher as well in fact. That was mine by the way, not Lara's. It would make too much of a bulge when she was moonlighting as a stripper."

"I think the blasters will be enough." Jayk said, "We don't need grenades."

"Pity." Brae added, "Sounds like fun."

"That's what my sister thought as well." Cal said.

"Be on your way Brae." Jayk said and Brae nodded before heading out of the lounge. Jayk gave her time to get off the ship and then looked at Cal, "Cal I need your advice." he said.

"Ah, I thought it odd that you were sending Brae out to get directions you could have asked for on your way. Or at least she could. Us men never ask for directions after all." Cal replied.

"Brae is asking about her mother. What do I tell her?" Jayk asked.

"Ah. That's a complicated one." Cal answered, "Have you considered just telling her everything? Well not quite everything. I think that a precise description about her conception is something no child ever wants to find out. Especially if it involved any strange acts. It didn't did it?"

"Cal the Jedi Order has good reasons for keeping the parentage of Jedi secret and forbidding us from having families." Jayk said,

"Bantha poodoo!" Cal snapped, "The Jedi Order has excuses for that, not reasons. If you ask me the Jedi Order is just a shadow of what it once was. In my day we didn't worry about Jedi starting families. We thought

it gave us more of a connection to the Republic we served if we had a stake in it future beyond our physical lives. Brae's discovery that you are her father has given her a past that she never had before but it's incomplete. Until she knows the rest then there'll be the risk that she'll go looking for that missing information. At least if you tell her then you can control how she gets it. Think about that Jayk."

The alien figure spoke quickly and although Brae had enough knowledge of his language to get in she still struggled to understand every word. The frantic hand gestures from the alien did little to improve the situation either.

"Thanks." she said when the alien had finished speaking and he nodded his head before walking away from her. Looking around Brae selected someone else to approach for directions, hoping that this time she would pick someone who spoke something much closer to basic. Unfortunately in this part of the station most of the inhabitants were not humanoid and that limited her choices. She did notice a pair of near humans walking along the wide corridor she was stood in but they were accompanied by a gotal and Brae knew that his species' ability to detect energy emissions made them able to spot Force users easily. Jayk had not given her any specific instructions about keeping their identities as Jedi secret but she saw no reason to advertise it either..

"Do you require assistance young human?" a voice asked from behind Brae and she turned to see another alien, this one hunched over with most of its body covered by a tattered robe.

"Yes, I'm looking for directions to a place called the Bothan Spire." Brae said.

"Ah yes, the Bothan Spire. I might be able to remember the way." the alien replied and Brae noticed that it suddenly held out one of its hands from beneath its robe with the palm open.

"Yes of course." Brae said, taking some coins from her own pocket and placing them in the alien's hand.

"Most kind of you." the alien said before it placed an arm around her shoulder and began to give her directions it said would lead to the Bothan Spire.

Both Brae and the alien were unaware of the hooded man watching from a distance while the alien was giving Brae directions and when the two split up the man headed towards the alien. Having seen Brae hand over money Kane knew exactly how to proceed and as he stepped in front of the creature he held out several coins.

"What did you tell my friend?" he asked.

"Ah, she's no friend of yours." the alien replied and Kane closed his fist over the coins before the alien could snatch them away, "But then again no friend of mine either." and Kane opened his hand.

"What did you tell her?" he asked again.

"Nothing secret. Just the way to the Bothan Spire." the alien said as it took the coins.

"The Bothan Spire." Kane repeated.

"Yes she-" the alien began but Kane was not interested had he turned around and hurried away, heading back to his ship.

When he entered the cramped living area of the ship Kane found his men checking their weapons and equipment while Tylo sat in a corner, a set of binders securing his wrists to a handrail.

"The Jedi know about the ambush at the Bothan Spire." he said and the other Mandalorians looked at him.

"Do they know about us?" Bronon asked.

"How could they?" Trenner responded, "we killed both Jedi and Kurrast has been here with us since then."

"They could have been relaying data to their ship." Krevan suggested, "Maybe that's how they managed to get here so quickly."

"Stang you found us out." Kurrast said from the side of the room, "That's right guys the Jedi Order knows everything. That's why it sent two of its most capable warriors to deal with you. How many hours has it taken them to track you across the galaxy? Trust me these two will hunt you down to the ends of the universe. Alternatively you could just let me go and I'll tell them it was all just a big mistake."

Kane strode towards Tylo and punched him in the face hard enough to draw blood from his nose.

"They don't know a damned thing." he said, looking at his men, "On the other hand we know that they're heading for the Bothan Spire so we'll try and get there before them and deal with them just like we dealt with the other two." then he looked at Tylo, "We'll bring him along as well." he added.

"What for?" Krevan asked.

"Bait." Kane answered.

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

## 5.

"So this is the Bothan Spire." Jayk said as he and Brae entered what turned out to be a deserted tower constructed from the superstructure of an ancient bothan starship. The various levels of the spire were positioned around the sides of the structure with a massive open shaft running down the centre. This gap was crossed in numerous places by various bridges and staircases between levels. When constructed the spire had included a turbolift system but this had long ceased to be operational and now the only way from one level to another was to climb using stairs or ladders.

"Doesn't look like much does it?" Brae replied and she sniffed the air, "And what an amazing new smell you've discovered."

Jayk smelt the air as well and what he smelt was not new, he had smelt it before.

"That's the smell of death." he said, "This way."

Jayk led Brae towards the centre of the spire from where they could see all the way up. However, it was not the view of the spire's height from the bottom level that attracted the attention of the jedi. Instead it was the corpse on the floor in front of them.

"Is that Jedi Olan?" Brae said as she and Jayk rushed to investigate. However, it rapidly became obvious that it was not Derra Olan.

"A wroonian." Jayk said when he saw the blue skin and hair of the body, "A padawan as well. This must be Nodan Turrok. It appears that he was stabbed." he added as he rolled the body over and saw both the braid in Nodan's hair and the wound beneath his ribs, "I don't think he was killed here though." Jayk continued, looking up the spire, "I think he was killed somewhere up there and fell down here.

"It can't have been from too far up given the extent of the damage." Brae pointed out. Had Nodan fallen from the very top of the spire several hundred metres above then the damage from the impact with the floor would probably have made the stab wound much more difficult to find.

"No, that makes our next job easier though." Jayk said as he looked up again.

"Which is what?" Brae asked.

"We need to find where he was killed. So we climb." Jayk told her.

"Wait." Brae said sudden and she dashed towards the edge of the open area at the bottom of the spire, "I think it's his lightsaber." and she picked up Nodan's lightsaber from where it had ended up after falling down the spire as well. Then she flicked the activation switch and there was a 'snap-hiss' as the blade extended. "Keep it with you," Jayk told her, "and take this too." and he reached under his robes to where he had Tylo's heavy blaster pistol tucked into his belt and tossed it to Brae who caught it one handed, "I have the rifle. Our lightsabers may be effective at close quarters but the nature of this place makes being able to shoot across that gap useful."

"Yes master." Brae said as she ticked both the blaster and lightsaber into her own belt and then the two jedi headed for the closest staircase.

The stairwell that the jedi chose was surrounded by a transparisteel barrier that enabled them to see out onto each level as they reached it and they paused to inspect each level along the way. It was on the third level they reached that Jayk looked out and saw the end of a length of syntherope hanging down the central shaft that he had not seen from the bottom.

"Brae, someone tried to climb down the shaft." he said, "You carry on. I'm going to see if they left any signs of their presence on this level."

Brae nodded and as she continued to climb the stairs Jayk exited the stairwell and headed towards the central shaft and the syntherope hanging down it. He had not gone far when he noticed a gouge in the structure of the level around him and he immediately recognised it as having been made by a lightsaber blade. Drawing his own lightsaber Jayk moved closer to inspect this mark and as he did so he saw several scorch marks that had obviously been made by blaster fire, the pattern of the marks indicating that they may have been fired across the central shaft.

Then a shiver went down Jayk's spine as he sensed a disturbance in the Force, a coldness that suggested something bad had happened here recently. Rather than retreat away from this Jayk headed towards the source, ready to activate his lightsaber at a moment's notice. he did not have to go far to find the source of the disturbance though as he came across the body of Derra Olan, lying on her back with a blaster wound to the centre of her chest. The central shaft was not visible from this location and so that meant either whoever had fired the shots that created the scorch marks Jayk had seen earlier had been able to get all the way here before Derra could get away or there had been more than one shooter.

"Brae can you hear me?" Jayk said into his comlink.

"Yes father." she replied.

"Where are you?"

"About another four levels up from where I left you. I can see one of the bridges across the shaft. It looks like it's collapsed and I'm thinking that maybe Nodan was on it when it gave way. I'm going to go and check out why." Brae told him.

"Be careful Brae. I've just found Jedi Olan and she's dead as well. Someone shot her and it looks like there could have been more than one attacker."

"More than one. Okay, I'll be careful." Brae replied.

"You'll be dead." Jayk added, "Keep your mind open to the Force and your eyes open to what's going on around you."

Brae continued to make her way up the stairs slowly, checking at each floor to see where the collapsed bridge had come from. Reaching the tenth level she saw that where there ought to have been a bridge just outside the stairwell there was now just a gaping hole in the safety rail at the side of the landing and she stepped out to investigate further. Kneeling down at the edge of the landing and holding onto the safety rail to make sure she did not fall to her death ten floor below, Brae studied the ends of the struts that had carried the weight of the bridge before it gave way. These looked twisted and burned and Brae guessed that some sort of explosive charge had been used to sever it rapidly.

All of a sudden Brae heard a noise and she spun around, leaping back to her feet as she did so. The noise was a banging sound as if something soft was striking a metal panel. Holding her lightsaber at the ready Brae crept towards its source. This took her along the landing to a junction where another landing led out towards the hull of the spire and Brae peered around the corner to see what was on the other side.

The landing led between the walls of two rooms for several metres before emerging into the open again and continuing to another landing mounted against the inside of the station's hull and it was here that she saw what she took to be the source of the sound, Tylo.

The smuggler was sat on the landing with his arms raised up above his head and tied to the safety rail with binders while a strip of tape across his mouth prevented him from calling out for help.

"Tylo!" Brae exclaimed and she broke into a run towards him.

Hearing Brae's voice Tylo stopped tugging at the binders and looked towards her, shaking his head furiously. "Don't worry. It's okay." Brae said as she crouched down beside him and swiftly ripped the tape from over his mouth.

"Ow!" he exclaimed and then he frowned and added, "No you laser brain it's not okay. It's a trap."

*Danger.*

Brae felt the tremor in the Force just as Tylo shouted his warning and she rolled aside as a blaster bolt passed through the air right where she would have been had she not.

"Stang!" Tylo yelled as he flinched from the heat of the blast and then he noticed the smoke coming from Brae's cloak, "Kriff kid, you're hit." he added.

"It's just my cloak. it just got a bit singed, that's all." Brae replied as she quickly removed it while searching for the source of the shot. Given that there was no follow up shot she guessed that she was now out of the line of fire.

"Hey is that my blaster kid? How about you cut me free and let me give you a hand?" Tylo said when he saw his blaster tucked into her belt.

There was a 'snap-hiss' as Brae activated her lightsaber and with one quick swing she cut through the binders restraining Tylo and he reached out to take his blaster from her belt.

"Thanks kid." he said just as Brae's comlink chimed and she activated the device.

"Brae, what's going on up there? I heard shooting." Jayk's voice said.

"I've found Tylo. He was tied up and when I came to free him someone shot at me." Brae replied.

"Are you both okay?" Jayk asked and Brae looked at Tylo.

"Well it's Tylo but I'm guessing yes." she said and Tylo frowned before snatching the comlink from her hand.

"Jayk it's me." he said, "Look you're dealing with mandalorians here. Four of them. They killed Derra and Nodan."

"Yes, I found their bodies. Do you know where they are?" Jayk responded.

"I've got a good idea about the one who just took a shot at Brae." Tylo said, "I reckon we can take him. Watch out though, one of them has a rocket pack he's fond of using to zip between levels with."

"I'll bear that in mind. I'm on my way up to join you now." Jayk said before he put his comlink away and ran back to the stairwell.

Meanwhile Tylo beckoned for Brae to follow him and they ran back along the landing towards the enclosed section that would offer them more cover. Another blaster bolt flew towards them as they ran and Brae used her lightsaber to block it before it could hit her.

"Okay so now what?" she asked when they reached the relative safety of the enclosed part of the landing.

"Now I set up at the corner there and you give me a target to shoot at." Tylo said and Brae frowned.

"I give you a target to shoot at? That sounds a lot like 'Brae runs out into the open and gets shot at even after just rescuing her friend'. Are you sure about this?" Brae said and Tylo smiled.

"Hey, it's me." he said.

"That does not fill me with hope." Brae said, "But in the absence of a better plan I'll go with it." and she drew Nadon's lightsaber from her belt as well, igniting the second blade. Brae then ran out onto the centre landing and began to circle around the main shaft. Out in the open and wielding two lightsabers was sufficient to draw fire from the hidden sniper again and another blaster bolt headed right for her before she swatted it aside. However, in firing at Brae the mandalorian sniper had given away his position just inside the doorway of a room on the other side of the shaft and Tylo took aim and fired his blaster at this. When he had previously fought these mandalorians he had had only a hold out blaster with six shots but this time he had fifty from his far more powerful heavy blaster pistol and he was willing to take several rapid shots to try and increase the odds of hitting his target. Though he was too far away to hear any scream or see through the doorway he did see the next blaster bolt emerge at an angle that took it almost straight up the central shaft and he guessed that it had been fired as a reflex action as the sniper died.

Kane snarled when Bronon was killed by the man who was supposed to be their prisoner. His plan had been based around his men having a two to one advantage in numbers over the jedi but now thanks to Tylo having been released and given a weapon and Bronon being killed the numbers were even.

"Krevan, Trenner, do either of you have eyes on that other jedi yet?" he signalled to the other two mandalorians with his comlink.

"He's coming up the stairs now." Krevan replied, "I'm going to intercept him on eight."

"Good. Trenner circle round the outside of ten and take down Kurrast. Kill him if you have to, he's still worth money dead. I'm going after the girl."



## 6.

Jayk looked up the stairwell as he climbed it towards Brae and Tylo and he caught a glimpse of an armoured figure above him before he heard something metallic bouncing down the stairs. Extending his hand he used the Force to push the grenade back upwards as he ducked so that he was out of the blast radius when it detonated. The explosion shattered the transparisteel wall around the stairwell at that level and shock wave was still enough to disorientate Jayk briefly but he drew on the Force again to steady himself. However, the stairs above him had been destroyed and he could only retreat down to the floor below and search for another means to get to the higher ones.

Meanwhile Krevan continued to descend the stairs, simply leaping across the gap created by the grenade and then following Jayk out of the stairwell. He knew that the Jedi would need to find another way up to the ninth level and he knew where the closest such route was, a maintenance ladder located not far from the central shaft and he headed for it as quickly as he could.

On the other hand Jayk did not know of this ladder and he began to run from one landing to another, searching for any indication of a means to get up to the next level. He remembered seeing an entrance to another stairwell on the bottom floor that would be located on the far side of the central shaft on the floors above and he decided to see if there was a bridge that would take him across to it. As he emerged onto the central landing Jayk saw that there was a bridge nearby and he rushed towards it, only for a rapidly fired blaster bolt to fly past his head and he dived for cover as Krevan came charging towards him.

The mandalorian was approaching via a side landing and Jayk pressed himself up against the wall where this met the central landing he was on, right next to the junction where the two connected. He had his lightsaber in his hand but he did not activate it to avoid giving away his exact position. This ploy worked and as Krevan came rushing out on to the central landing Jayk lashed out and knocked his blaster from his hands and sent it clattering away from him. It did not fall over the side of the landing, however and Krevan dived after it, not wanting to face Jayk without a weapon.

Jayk knew what the mandalorian was doing but would not strike out at a defenceless man, so he held his ground as he activated his lightsaber.

"Leave it," he said, "Forget about this and just go."

"No chance Jedi." Krevan hissed as he reached out and grabbed hold of his blaster rifle. Then he rolled over onto his back and fired three shots in rapid succession at Jayk.

Jayk deflected the first two away, sending one into the wall beside him and the other across to the other side of the central shaft. Then as the third shot came towards him he angled the blade of his lightsaber so that it was sent straight back at Krevan and the mandalorian was struck in his chest by his own shot. This punched straight through his armour and he slumped backwards across the floor. Knowing that the mandalorian was dead, Jayk wasted no time in checking on him and instead continued to run towards the bridge across the central shaft and it was as he was running across this that he heard the sound of blaster fire from above and he turned around and looked up.

After leaving Tylo tied up the mandalorians had disappeared from view without discussing where they intended to conceal themselves within earshot of him and now Tylo had no idea where any of them might be hiding. Having seen the way they used the central shaft to attack Derra and Nodan previously he guessed that they would try something similar again and so he began to circle around it, heading in the opposite direction to Brae. He knew that being on the landing that ran around the shaft left him exposed but it was also the quickest way to check all of the potential hiding places for more snipers and so he took the risk. However, it was just as he was approaching a bridge that stretched across the central shaft and an upwards angle to connect it to a landing two floors above that Trenner found him first.

The shot came across the central shaft and hit the safety rail that ran around the landing causing Tylo to throw himself to the floor. Looking around he could see Trenner standing out in the open on the landing near the other end of the bridge and he fired again and again, the shot passing close above Tylo's head.

It was odd for a mandalorian to miss a static target so many times Tylo thought to himself but then he remembered the bounty on his head. This would undoubtedly be greater if Tylo was delivered to Morton Crayne alive and so the bounty hunters had an incentive to keep him alive. However, the stun setting on a blaster was ineffective at longer ranges and so the mandalorian would have to get closer to use it. His current firing was just intended to keep Tylo pinned down and unfortunately for him it was working.

Jayk could see Trenner walking across the bridge through its mesh plating and he saw the flash of each shot he fired. From this distance Jayk could not use his lightsaber to help Tylo but on this occasion his traditional weapon was not the only one he had. Shutting off the lightsaber Jayk returned it to his belt and then unslung

Tylo's rifle from his shoulder. Pointing the weapon upwards he flicked the selector switch to fully automatic and aimed it carefully before he squeezed the trigger and held it down.

The sustained burst of blaster bolts blew holes right through the bridge plating all around Trenner and the mandalorian convulsed as several of them struck him as well. His armour was not designed to block attacks from directly below and the mandalorian was killed instantly, collapsing against the safety rail at the side of the bridge and dropping his rifle over it.

As Brae turned towards the sound of firing she suddenly saw Kane leap from a landing several floor above and come plummeting down towards her. Then he activated his rocket pack and his descent slowed until he hovered in front of her with a pistol in each hand and fired them together. Bringing up both the lightsabers she held Brae blocked these, attempting to redirect them right back at Kane but by shifting his weight he was able to dodge out of the line of fire before Brae inadvertently cut through the safety rail around the landing and created a gap in it wide enough for Kane to race forwards through and touch down on the landing. Then he turned to face Brae and jumped back as she lunged at him with her lightsaber and all she managed to do was strike his rocket pack. The failure of this attack put Brae off balance and Kane took full advantage of this by stepping to the inside of the landing and delivering a kick to Brae's knee that knocked her legs out from under her.

Unable to grab hold of anything to steady herself while she still held a lightsaber in each hand Brae could not stop herself from falling through the gap in the safety rail and she only just let go of both lightsabers in time to grab hold of the landing itself before she fell to her death. However, this left her dangling over the edge of the landing and holding on by just her fingers as Kane loomed over her.

"Goodbye jedi." he hissed as he raised a foot and brought it down towards one of Brae's hands.

Brae reacted fast enough to pull her hand out of the way but this now left her hanging on by just one hand and Kane laughed as he looked at it and raised his foot again.

*Fear.*

"Brae no!" Jayk shouted as he took aim at Kane with the rifle and at the same time sensed the power of the Dark Side gathering around his daughter but he was too late and as he watched Brae snarled at Kane and pointed at him with her free hand.

"No!" she screamed, closing her fist and pulling her hand back to focus her telekinetic grip on the mandalorian as she pulled him over the edge of the landing with the Force.

Kane tried to activate his rocket pack but the blow Brae had struck meant that it was no longer working and he screamed as he fell down the shaft, landing in a broken heap not far from where Nodan had landed.

"Could someone please help me up?" Brae then called out.

"Thanks again for coming to save me." Tylo said when they returned to the *Swift Exit*.

"Thank Cal." Jayk replied, "It was his idea."

"Yes it was." Cal added as his image appeared.

"So what will the jedi council say when we get back?" Brae asked.

"Does the Jedi Order have the firing squad?" Tylo asked.

"No thankfully." Jayk replied, "But we can't go back, not yet anyway."

"Why? What do we need to do first?" Brae said and Jayk looked at Tylo.

"I believe you were sent here to do a job. We can at least help you finish it first." he said.