

STAR WARS

DARKNESS RISING

3-04: ACQUISITION &
POSSESSION

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Using a team of mercenaries, Morton Crayne is finally able to apprehend Teron Sharr. However, this forces Teron's own gang to seek help in getting him back from from a dangerous source...

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1.

If the planet had ever had a name then it was not recorded by the Republic. Instead it was just another world that had been ravaged by war and then forgotten by the rest of the galaxy. The weapons used here had destroyed the ecosystem and although after the centuries since the fighting had stopped the atmosphere remained just about breathable almost all of the native species of flora and fauna had become extinct. Now the only living things on the planet were a handful of the hardier mosses and grasses as well as a few of the more resilient species that were parts of food chains that depended only on these and on rare occasions such as this, visitors from other worlds who had not entirely forgotten that this one existed.

The shuttle swooped low enough over the ground that its occupants could identify landmarks on the surface that had been eroded by more than seven hundred years of exposure to the elements.

"We're looking for what was a fork in the river." Teron Sharr, the expeditions young leader said to his pilot Krovak.

"That might be it up ahead." Krovak said, "I doubt the water's flowed here for a long time but you can still see where it used to." and he pointed to a patch of green among the brown of the surrounding landscape. Teron then used a set of macrobinoculars to examine the ground. Sure enough it had the flat appearance of a dry riverbed and at about the point where the tiny patch of vegetation remained this split apart.

"That'll be it." Teron replied, "I bet that moss is growing right over the structure. All we need to do is set a charge in the riverbed and I bet we can blast right through."

"Okay I'm taking us down." Krovak said and as the shuttle began to descend towards the ground Teron went into the rear compartment where more of the members of his gang sat.

"Get ready." he told them, "This place has been abandoned but its creators may have left something behind to deter tomb robbers like us." and the gang began to check the assorted weapons they had brought with them.

As soon as the shuttle touched down Teron opened the hatch and he jumped through it before the ramp had even finished deploying and ran towards the dry riverbed about a hundred metres away.

"Well? Is this it?" Krovak asked as he and the rest of the gang followed as soon as the ramp was fully deployed,

"Yes, this is it. I can feel it. My master was correct, the Sith did leave one of their honoured dead here. Set the charge right here where I'm standing." Teron replied and he used his heel to make a mark in the riverbed indicating where he wanted the explosive to be set.

A sharpened pipe was then driven into the ground with a sledgehammer before being pulled back out to create the hole that the charge consisting of a simple stick of detonite was dropped into.

"Everyone clear!" Krovak shouted as he ducked behind a rock with the explosive trigger in his hand and after giving everyone else a few seconds to get clear he set off the charge. The blast sent mud and rocks flying in all directions. Then when he and Teron peered around the rock they saw that some members of the gang were already approaching the hole, hoping to be the first to see inside the long buried tomb.

"No!" Teron shout a he burst out from behind the rock and started to run towards the hole, "Keep back!"

His warning came too late though and all of a sudden a swarm of large beetle like creatures burst out of the hole and rushed towards Teron's men. Panicking the gang members fired their blasters into the swarm but the energy blasts could destroy only a few of the creatures at a time while there remained thousands of others to take their place.

The gang members screamed as the guard creatures swarmed over them, tearing the flesh from their bones and after devouring those men the creatures turned towards the next nearest source of food, that being Teron. However, Teron was not an easy target and he snarled as he lifted his hands and then he unleashed a storm of lightning from his fingertips. This ashed over the swarm and there was a crackling sound as the insects were cooked inside their shells before they burst open and turned the riverbed orange with what remained of their modified body tissue.

"Is that it?" Krovak asked as he emerged from cover holding his blaster at waist height.

"That was the first wave." Teron replied, "There will be more defences that are not as obvious so stay behind me."

Tossing a chemical light stick into the hole created by the explosive charge revealed a large chamber directly below and Teron simply jumped down into it and looked around, studying the statues of the ancient warriors that now surrounded him.

"Come on down. I want you to see this." he shouted and when a syntherope line was dropped through the hole Krovak slid down.

"So these guys were all Sith then?" he said as he looked at the statues of the robed figures as well.

"No these were the priests loyal to the Sith interred here." Teron said, "Their bodies are probably buried

beneath the statues themselves. I wouldn't be surprised if they'd been alive when they were placed here. On the other hand this is more significant." and he walked to a gap in the ring of statues that had been filled a suit of ancient plate armour posed to look as if it was holding the sword that was in front of it propped up on a plastic frame, "This armour was worn by a favoured warrior who died alongside his master. As a reward for his service he was placed here to continue guarding his lord."

"What's this even made of?" Krovak asked, prodding the armour with his finger.

"It's not what it is made of that is important it is what was done to it. The Sith used their powers to rework the material to not only make it as strong as possible but to turn the wearer into an unstoppable killing machine."

"So we're taking this with us?" Krovak said.

"Yes but be careful with it. Don't let it get attached to you." Teron told him.

The armour was dismantled carefully and along with the under suit found also draped over the frame all of the pieces were placed into a crate that was hoisted up out of the hole and taken back to the shuttle.

"You know," Krovak said, "one suit of archaic armour and a sword doesn't seem like much to justify coming all the way out here."

Teron smiled.

"I told you Krovak. That warrior was placed here to guard his master. It's him and his secrets that my own master and I care about. Now if you wouldn't mind I need you to use your blaster against that wall." he said and he pointed to the wall that was exposed now that the warrior's armour had been removed.

Krovak shrugged and brought his rifle up to his shoulder, taking aim at the wall.

"Perhaps that master of yours should try doing some of this poodoo for himself every now and again." he said before he fired his rifle and blasted a fist sized hole through the wall. Then he fired again and again, each time putting another hole in the wall until it could no longer support its own weight and it collapsed to reveal the treasure chamber beyond.

"Holy kriff!" Krovak exclaimed, "That lot must be worth tens of thousands of credits."

"More to the right people." Teron said, "But it's all junk. I want one tenth put in the shuttle to cover the cost of this expedition and then you and the men can divide whatever is left between you. I want to find a way into there." and he pointed to a doorway at the far end of the newly revealed room that had Sith writing painted all over it in what looked disturbingly like blood.

The treasure consisted of riches looted from the worlds that had been raided by the Sith lord who had finally been defeated here on this isolated world and after Krovak had taken some to be loaded aboard the shuttle the rest was arranged into piles on the surface so that each member of the gang would be able to see what he was getting. There was a great deal of talk about what each gang member intended to do with his share and it was during one of these conversations that one member of the gang noticed that there was someone missing.

"Where's Jur'at?" he said looking around.

"How should I know Kall? Probably gone for a piss." another of the gang said.

"I better go and check. If there are any more of those bugs about we need to know." Kall said and he walked away, heading for a low hill nearby that seemed the obvious place for Jur'at to have gone if he was going to disappear, "Jur'at? Jur'at it's Kall. Where the kriff have you got to?"

As Kall rounded the hill he found Jur'at crouched down with his back to him and obviously holding something in his hands.

"What have you got there Jur'at?" Kall asked, "Have you been helping yourself to the treasure? Teron's already said that we all get an equal share."

No, it's nothing." Jur'at responded as he got to his feet and tucked something into his pocket.

"So show me." Kall said and he reached for Jur'at's arm to pull whatever it was he had hidden back out of the pocket, "A comlink? Who are you taking to?" he said when he saw the device but instead of answering him, Jur'at produced a knife from his pocket and stabbed Kall before he could warn anyone else.

2.

"Okay that was the signal." Mara Tosk told the mercenaries under her command in the assault shuttle, "We go now."

"Yes ma'am." the pilot responded and the assault shuttle dived through the atmosphere towards the tomb where Teron's gang was at work.

The sound of the approaching powerful repulsorlifts made the gang look up into the sky and as soon as they saw the assault ship descending they started to scatter.

The pilot of the assault shuttle fired a blast from its weapons towards Teron's shuttle but missed and two plume of flame shot into the air just as Krovak was rushing down the ramp to find out what was happening.

"No." Mara told the pilot, "Deal with the traitors first then we'll take the shuttle."

"Yes ma'am. Taking us down." the pilot said and he continued to take the assault shuttle lower until its altitude allowed syntherope lines to be dropped from either side of the ship and the mercenaries it contained slid down to the ground.

Teron's gang did not sit passively and wait while this was happening though and the first of the mercenaries was hit a blaster bolt almost as soon as his boots hit the ground but in response bursts of fire from two other mercenaries cut him down. While the mercenaries were spreading out to hunt down the other members of the gang Mara also slid down to the ground and she landed just as Teron himself was climbing out of the hole.

"Well, well." Mara said with a smile, "Teron Sharr. You know Morton is going to reward me greatly when I take you back to him."

"Too bad I won't be going anywhere with you then." Teron replied and from inside his jacket he produced a lightsaber and ignited it. This took Mara by surprise somewhat, having expected him to go for the blaster on his belt but she still did what she had been planning on doing and fired her own weapon at him. Mara's blaster was only set to stun but Teron took no chances and still swung his lightsaber in an arc that redirected the energy bolt away from him. Had he been more experienced then he would have attempted to send the blast directly back at Mara but for now he considered just making sure that it did not hit him sufficient. Mara broke into a run, moving towards Teron but at an angle so that each additional shot she fired came from a slightly different direction and he was forced to turn to keep his blade in the path of her shots.

Krovak snarled as he recognised Mara from the days before Teron had usurped Morton Crayne as the leader of his gang and he rushed back into the shuttle to where a blaster rifle was propped up in the rear compartment. Taking hold of this he then ran back down the ramp and dropped to one knee, aiming the rifle at one of the newly arrived mercenaries and shooting him dead.

Although the members of Teron's gang were experienced fighters they were neither trained nor equipped to be proper soldiers, unlike the mercenaries that Mara had brought with her and Krovak could tell that this was a losing fight. Their only hope was to get aboard the shuttle and escape before being wiped out.

"Fall back! Fall back to the shuttle!" he shouted over the noise of fighting and he saw another member of the gang leap up from behind the rock he had been using for cover and run towards him, only to get just a few metres before being shot in the back.

While most of the rest of his gang remained pinned down Teron continued to fight, knocking aside one blaster bolt after another with his lightsaber.

"Give it up Teron." Mara called out as she slid to a stop behind a crate partially loaded with looted Sith treasure and used it as cover while she reloaded her blaster. Expecting to meet Teron in combat she had picked a higher powered sidearm for this fight but the extra hitting power came at the expense of ammunition capacity and this meant having to reload with alarming frequency, "Oh and hand over that saber as well. I'm sure Morton's client will pay handsomely for that."

"Tell her to find her own." Teron shouted back at her as he ran towards the crate and swung his lightsaber down at it. The bright red energy blade sliced through both the crate and the contents, only narrowly missing Mara as she rolled aside.

"You've learned some new tricks." Mara said.

"You'll find I'm full of surprises." Teron responded as he advanced on her and raised his lightsaber.

"So am I." Mara exclaimed as she reached out to scoop up a handful of dirt from the dry riverbed and hurled it at Teron's face.

Teron had no choice but to turn aside to avoid getting any of the dirt in his eyes and in that moment Mara leapt back to her feet and started to run, putting as much distance between her and Teron as she could before he recovered. As she ran she saw one of her mercenaries run up to Teron and point his rifle at the young man just as he was straightening up again.

"No! Get away from him!" she shouted to the mercenary but her warning came too late and Teron cut the

man in half with a single swing of his lightsaber before striding towards Mara once more. This time Teron drew his own blaster pistol from his belt and pointed it towards Mara, fired it repeatedly and forcing her to dive for cover behind a rock. Teron kept on firing as he moved towards her hiding place and as Mara heard each energy bolt impact on the rock and blow another chunk out of it she began to wonder whether Teron would manage to destroy the rock and shoot her before he got close enough to cut her in two as well. However, before she could find out she saw another of her mercenaries appear in front of her so that she was between him and Teron. The soldier raised his blaster rifle and fired over Mara's head at Teron and the red flash of energy told her that his weapon was on a lethal setting. She was just about to yell at him to stop so that she could take Teron alive when she realised what he was doing. With the mercenary shooting at Teron he was being forced to defend himself using his lightsaber to block the incoming shots and he could not do that while also attacking Mara. This allowed Mara to roll sideways out from behind the rock so that she lay on her stomach as she took aim at Teron. Just as she had expected he was having to keep his lightsaber high to block the incoming lethal fire from the mercenary and in doing so he had left the lower part of his body vulnerable to attack. Aiming for Teron's knee, Mara fired another stun blast from her weapon and the bright blue energy pulse struck him right where she had aimed. This was not enough to render Teron unconscious but the sudden shock to his nervous system caused his leg to give way beneath him and Teron collapsed. Needing both his hands to break his fall, Teron dropped both his weapons and this left him defenceless as Mara got to her feet. Gripping her blaster in both hands, Mara now pointed the weapons at Teron's head and just as he turned it to glare at her she fired another stun blast that hit him right between his eyes.

Krovak gasped when he saw Teron collapse and it took him a moment to recover from the shock before he fired his rifle at the mercenary that had just helped disable his leader. Then after shooting the mercenary he turned towards Mara only to find that she had already gone to ground.

"They're everywhere." another member of the gang, the first to have made it back to the shuttle said as he ran up to Krovak but before he could step onto the ramp he too was shot by one of the mercenaries that were now closing in around Krovak and the shuttle. In the distance he suddenly notice Jur'at looking out from behind a rise in the ground and when he saw him raise a blaster, for a moment he thought that the other gang member was about to shoot a nearby mercenary in the back. However, when Jur'at pulled the trigger his weapon was aimed at another gang member fleeing towards the shuttle instead and Krovak snarled as he realised that they had been betrayed.

Setting his rifle to automatic Krovak sprayed blaster fire over the widest area he could as he backed up the shuttle's access ramp, stopping only when the rifle's power cell was exhausted from the continual firing. Then he tossed the weapon aside, closed the ramp and ran to the cockpit. Ordinarily there was a procedure to follow before taking off in a space vehicle of any kind but with mercenaries closing in and blaster shots already bouncing off the hull of the ship Krovak chose to ignore this and simply turned on the shuttle's repulsorlifts.

The engines roared and there was a groaning sound from the shuttle's superstructure as it rose up off the ground without the proper warm up of its engines first but the engines remained operational and Krovak pulled back on the controls to lift the shuttle's nose before the shuttle accelerated rapidly up into the air. The sky rapidly darkened, turning to black and Krovak switched in the shuttle's ion drive as he flew away from the planet. Then as soon as the shuttle was outside the planet's gravity well he engaged its hyperdrive and the shuttle vanished in a flash of light.

Mara continued to watch the departing shuttle right up to the point where it was too high up for her to see any more and then she turned to survey the area around her. The bodies of most of Teron's gang littered the dry river bed while Teron himself lay unconscious not far away.

"Secure him." she said, "Make sure to use stun cuffs on him though and I want every man to have a trigger. if that little nerf herder tries using his sorcerer's ways on any of us I want him lit up like a Republic Day fireworks show."

"Yes ma'am." the nearest mercenary responded. Then he looked at the bodies of the gang members, "What about them?" he asked.

"Check to see if they're carrying anything of value and then burn the bodies." Mara ordered.

"Mara!" a voice then called out and Mara and the mercenaries turned to face in the direction it came from, raising their weapons, "Whoa, don't shoot." Jur'at exclaimed when he found himself facing down the barrels of so many blasters and he raised his hands above his head.

"Stand down." Mara said, returning her blaster to its holster, "He's with us."

"Too right." Jur'at said as he walked towards Mara but then halted when he reached the crates filled with treasure taken from the tomb, "For what Morton Crayne's paying me I'd be crazy not to be."

"If money is all you care about then money is what you will get." Mara replied as she walked over to him and snatched the medallion that he had just lifted from one of the crates out of his hand and tossed it back where it had come from, "But it'll be in cash. All of this is going to Mister Crayne's client and she'll decide what's to

be done with it. Now if you don't mind I need to go and give him the good news about what's happened here."

Mara then headed for where the assault shuttle had now touched down and made her way into the cockpit.

"Is the transmitter on line?" she asked the pilot and the man nodded.

"It's good to go." he replied.

"Good. In that case I need to report our status." Mara said as she sat down and picked up a headset from on top of the flight console. She then set the transmitter to connect her directly to a specific location and spoke into the headset, "Morton it's Mara. I have news for you."

Moments later the face of Morton Crayne appeared on a screen in front of Mara.

"Good I hope Mara." he said and Mara smiled.

"Couldn't be better." she said, "Our man was right about Teron coming here to find something and not only do we now have his dig site all to ourselves, I've also got the little nerf herder trussed up in stun cuffs. He's not going anywhere."

"What about the rest of his gang?" Morton asked.

"Dead. At least most of the ones he had with him here. I think that ignorant thug Krovak got away but if I know him he'll have just taken whatever loot was already aboard that shuttle and gone. We've seen the last of him, I guarantee it."

"Good. If the haul here is good then the combination of it and Teron should get me back in Rylee's good files." Morton said and Mara smiled again, "What?" he asked.

"Sorry to disappoint you Morton but I get the feeling it'll take more than a few trinkets and a thief for Rylee to be willing to sleep with you. She doesn't seem the type to like bad boys." Mara said and Morton frowned momentarily.

"I'm sending a transport to pick up Teron and whatever it was he went there to collect. Make sure you have everything bundled up and ready to collect by the time it gets there." Morton told Mara and then he shut off his communicator and the screen went blank.

3.

Teron was bound hand and foot when he regained consciousness and as soon as he glared up at one of the two mercenaries standing over him he screamed in pain as one of them triggered the stun cuffs used to bind him.

"That was just an example." one of them told him, holding up a controller for the stun cuffs, "Try messing with anyone's heads and we'll fry you."

"Your power is insignificant compared to that of the Force." Teron hissed and he suddenly reached out with his bound hands and used the Force to pull the control unit out of the guard's grip. However, the moment the controller flew from his grip Teron screamed in pain once more as the other mercenary triggered the cuffs again using a second device that had not been revealed to Teron.

"What's going on?" Mara asked as she strode towards them.

"Just administering a lesson ma'am." one of the mercenaries replied.

"Well cut it out. Morton doesn't want him damaged if it can be helped so don't go provoking him. Just stash him in the ship while I take a look at what he's led us to." Mara ordered and the mercenary nodded.

"Yes ma'am." he said.

While Teron was being dragged towards the assault shuttle Mara made her way over to the hole that led down into the Sith tomb and peered inside. The chemical light stick that had been thrown in still illuminated the chamber below and this enabled her to see the statues that stood around the chamber and she smiled. "Score." she said to herself softly and then she climbed down the ladder that Teron's gang had lowered into the hole so that they could climb up and down more easily.

She paused briefly at the bottom of the ladder to examine the statues again and it was obvious that getting these out of the tomb would require heavy lifting equipment that her mercenaries did not possess. This meant that she would not be able to have everything from inside the tomb ready by the time the transport arrived but she did not think that delaying departure while the statues were loaded aboard would cause any problems.

From this outer chamber Mara made her way into the nest, noting along the way that the floor just in front of the hole that had been blasted in the wall appeared to have had some object removed from it recently. Having seen nothing on the surface yet that could have fitted here she guessed that whatever it had been had already been loaded aboard the shuttle that managed to escape before she arrived and she made a mental note to ask Jur'at about it. Stepping through the hole in the wall Mara then found herself inside the treasure chamber. Teron's gang had been eager to strip this chamber bare and in their hurry to load ancient artefacts into the shipping containers Mara had seen on the surface they had made a considerable mess. "Fools." she muttered to herself as she pondered the damage they could have done in their haste to obtain the best loot for themselves.

On the far side of the treasure chamber lay an open doorway and as Mara walked closer to this she saw that it opened onto a much smaller chamber that led to another doorway, this one closed. Rather than make her way straight to the closed door she paused at the open one to examine it around the edges. a professional thief, Mara was used to encountering doorways rigged with any number of different security systems ranging from alarms to deadly booby traps and just as she expected she found signs that the open doorway had been rigged with some form of trap that Teron must have disabled before opening it. There were no obvious signs of what would have happened if any of the traps she discovered built into the open doorway were triggered but, given that this was a Sith tomb, Mara thought it reasonable to assume that they would all be lethal.

Having decided that she had learned everything she could from the open doorway Mara moved onto the closed one and crouched down to inspect it, focusing on where the two halves joined together and where the doors met the frame around the edge.

When Krovak brought the shuttle into land in the docking bay there were several other small transports and a pair of obsolete starfighters present as well but only one other member of the gang working on them.

"Hey Krovak." the other gang member called out when he saw Krovak disembark from the shuttle alone, "What happened?"

"What happened?" Krovak snapped back at him, "What happened? I'll tell you what happened. That kriffing traitor Jur'at sold us out to Crayne. He sent that rancor bitch Mara and a bunch of hired guns to kill us."

The other gang member's jaw dropped when he heard this.

"Teron's dead?" he said in disbelief.

"No." Krovak replied, shaking his head, "Or at least he wasn't when I last saw him. They hit him with a stun blast and he went down. Morton Crayne must want him alive so now we need to go rescue him."

"Rescue him? Do you think we can?"

"Us? No. we wouldn't stand a chance against those mercenaries. They know how to fight as a unit far better than we can and we don't have Teron to even the odds now." Krovak admitted.

"So how do we get him back?"

"We get help." Krovak said.

"Mercenaries?"

"No. I've got a much better idea than that. I'll be in the communication room." Krovak said and he strode past the other gang member, heading straight for an exit from the docking bay. From there Krovak made his way to a small compartment nearer to the centre of the gang's underground headquarters. This compartment was almost totally empty except for a small control console and a holo communication pad. Krovak went straight to the control console and activated the communication device, causing the pad to light up before he then went to stand directly in front of it.

"Well?" he said out loud after waiting several seconds, "Are you going to talk to me or not?" and all of a sudden an image of a humanoid figure, his face concealed beneath the hood of his robes appeared on the communication pad.

"What are you doing here?" the man asked, "Where is Teron?"

"I'm here to tell you that we need your help." Krovak answered, "One of our gang decided to betray us and now Teron's been taken by Mara Tosk, Crayne's pet thief."

"Taken? Taken where? Tell me now or get out of my sight." the hooded man said.

"Yeah, I thought that would get your attention fast enough. If I know Mara she'll stick around long enough to make sure that there's nothing left in that tomb worth stealing. Then she'll take Teron back to her boss."

"A shame." the holographic image said, "Teron showed great promise, he would have made a powerful Sith."

"Didn't you hear what I just said? I said that Mara isn't going anywhere just yet. She'll finish plundering that tomb before she takes Teron back to Crayne. We can still save him."

"If you thought you could save him then you would already have done so. Your enemies are stronger than you or you would not be here now."

"Right. But I figured that the great Sith lord himself might just want his protege back enough that he'd get up off his ass and come here and save him rather than just delivering lectures via holocom." Krovak said.

"I cannot reveal myself." the man in the hologram replied, "If Teron is to escape then he must do so himself. Anything else would show him to be weak and a Sith cannot be weak. In the meantime you must help me locate a new apprentice. I want you to scour the galaxy for-"

"Hey hold on a minute but I don't actually work for you." Krovak interrupted, "I work for Teron."

"Teron is gone. You have told me so yourself Krovak. Now you have the opportunity to work for me instead. Serve me well and I promise you that the rewards will be great."

"Rewards will be great? Don't try that poodoo on me." Krovak shouted, jabbing his finger towards the hologram and his hand passed partially into the image, "The second anything happened to me you'd turn your back on me just like you're doing with Teron. Now I'm telling you that either you do something to actually help for once or I'm calling time on this deal now and no-one from this gang will ever contact you again."

"You are loyal to your master Krovak. I like that." the hologram said, "But I meant it when I said I cannot reveal myself. To do so would risk the Jedi Order learning of my existence and keeping that a secret is worth any sacrifice. Even the life of Teron Sharr."

"So he gets to die for a lousy suit of armour." Krovak said.

"What did you say?" the hologram asked.

"I said Teron's dying just so we can get a suit of ancient armour."

"You recovered armour from the tomb?"

"Yeah, it even came with a sword." Krovak said.

"Bring this armour. I must see it for myself." the hologram said, "If the Dark Side is with us then this may be exactly what we need to recover your master and my apprentice."

"How can a suit of armour do that?" Krovak asked, "I'm talking about going up against an entire platoon of professional soldiers."

"Bring me the armour Krovak. I am not used to repeating myself and you are already making a habit of forcing me to do so."

"Fine. I'll go and get your precious armour." Krovak said and he turned to leave the communication room, leaving the holopad active.

When he returned Krovak was dragging the crate that contained the ancient Sith warrior's armour and he opened this up so he could lift out the ornate helmet.

"The chest." the hologram said, "Show me the chest plate."

Krovak shrugged and then took the chest plate from inside the crate and held this up, showing off the dark crystalline carving set into the front of it.

"The crystals are intact." the hologram said, "Good."

"Sure. Good. What's a suit of armour without a bit of bling? But I don't see how this helps." Krovak said.

"Is the under suit intact?"

"I think so.

"Good. Now take off your clothes and put it on."

"I'm supposed to wear this crap? It's heavy as hell." Krovak pointed out.

"It will not slow you down Krovak. It will make you more powerful than you can possibly imagine." the hologram told him.

"Okay then. Here goes." Krovak said and he began to strip off his clothes before he pulled on the armour's under suit. This stretched around his body to provide a perfect fit and then he looked at the hologram of the Sith lord again, "Now what?" he asked.

"The chest plate. Hold it up in place and then strike hard against the crystals on the front."

Krovak picked up the chest plate again and held it up right in front of his own chest one handed. Then he formed a fist with the other and slammed it down dead centre of the crystalline pattern. The moment he did this splinters of the crystal burst from the inside of the chest plate and pierced Krovak's skin. This enabled the minute amounts of electricity from his own nervous system to power up the kyber crystals used in the design and trigger the device built into the chest plate.

Krovak dropped to knees, screaming in agony as the power of the Dark Side flowed directly into his body and the image of Sith lord standing before him began to laugh.

"Yes!" he exclaimed as Krovak continued to scream while his skin whitened and blood vessels darkened,

"Unlimited power!" he added as Krovak dropped to his knees.

Hearing the screams from a room down the hallway outside the communication room, two other members of the gang suddenly burst into the room through its unlocked door.

"Krovak, what's happening to you?" one asked, crouching down beside Krovak and reaching out to put a hand on his shoulder but the moment his hand touched Krovak, Krovak spun around and leapt back to his feet. This knocked the other gang member backwards while Krovak then reached out and grabbed the second by his throat, lifting him off the floor with one hand and staring at him with eyes that had turned yellow.

"The rage flows through you." the hologram said before Krovak dropped the choking gang member back to the floor.

"Get out." he said.

"Krovak, what the hell is-" the gang member who had been knocked aside began.

"I said get out!" Krovak yelled, "There's nothing wrong with me."

"Right." the gang member replied as he helped his comrade back to his own feet and they both hurried out of the room.

Krovak then turned back towards the holopad.

"What's happening to me?" he asked.

"Your body is being changed. Improved." the Sith lord answered, "Minute amounts of kyber are already flowing through your veins and these will resonate with the Force."

"You mean I'm becoming one of you?" Krovak said and the hologram appeared to laugh.

"No, you are no Sith. You are a tool, a weapon. Teron and I will tell you where to go and who to kill and you will do it. Clad in this armour and wielding the sword that comes with it you will be unstoppable."

"And when I take the armour off?" Krovak said.

"Then you will be as insignificant as before."

Krovak then looked at the crate filled with pieces of the Sith armour and began to pick out the individual pieces.

"There's nothing to hold them onto me." he said. The armour had been strung together when on display in the tomb and now that it had been taken apart there were no fastenings of any sort.

"They will fit just as the chest plate does. Now put them on." the holographic Sith told him and one piece at a time Krovak began to place the armour plates against his body. Each time a plate came into contact with the under suit it sent barbs into Krovak's body and he flinched in pain. However, after each agonising jolt a sense of growing strength came over him and he reached for the next piece of armour. This continued until only the helmet remained to be put in place and Krovak instead picked up the sword that had been found with the armour and held it up to examine it. Now that he was wearing the Sith armour, he could feel the sword vibrate with power as he held it up in front of him. Krovak was certain that the weapon had felt heavier when he had packed it into the crate inside the tomb but now that he was wearing the armour it felt almost weightless to him.

"This isn't ordinary metal." he said.

"No. It has been reworked in the same way as the armour. Be aggressive in your strikes and the blade will guide itself." the Sith lord replied, "It is strong as well, easily able to cut through armour and even strong enough to resist the blade of a lightsaber."

"I could kill a jedi." Krovak said softly and the hologram smiled beneath the hood of his cloak.

"Such confidence. Time will tell whether you are correct but for now you know what you have to do." he said.

"Yes I know." Krovak replied, "Return to the tomb where this armour came from and kill everyone who gets in my way." and the Sith lord laughed.

4.

"Miss Tosk." one of the mercenaries said and Mara scowled as she turned around, keeping the tools she was using to try and penetrate the closed door inside the lock.

"Really?" she said, "I'm trying to disarm a trap that can probably turn me into ash and you come creeping up behind me like that? What's so important?"

"The transport has just dropped out of hyperspace. It will land in fifteen minutes." the mercenary said and Mara turned back to the lock.

"Okay make sure that everything up there is ready to be loaded. Keep Teron aboard our ship though, its faster than the transport and I want to deliver the little sleemo to Morton as quickly as possible. Now off you go and make sure I'm not disturbed again. I'm rather fond of living, it's a habit I don't want to break." she told him.

"Yes ma'am." the mercenary replied before he turned to leave, leaving Mara to continue picking the lock.

About a minute later she heard a 'click' and she froze.

"Mara what have you done?" she said to herself, "Have you just opened the lock or killed yourself?"

Cautiously she turned the pick tools back the other way and withdrew them from the lock entirely. The moment she did this there was a creaking sound and the doors began to swing open away from her. This revealed a passageway that led into the darkness.

"All too easy." she said as she stood up and she was about to step through the doors when she suddenly halted and smiled, "Way too easy." she said and then she retreated back to the treasure chamber where a few pieces of carved metal lay on the floor waiting to be picked up and took one of them, a small statue of a humanoid to the newly opened doorway, tossing it through.

As soon as the statue landed on the floor there was a 'whoosh' of escaping gas and a cloud of darts flew across the passageway right in front of her and she smiled again in self congratulation at having avoided the trap.

"Poisoned no doubt." she said and then she stepped through the doorway into the passageway, activating her glow rod to illuminate the way.

Alert to the possibility that the ancient Sith who had built this place would have been smart enough not to put their faith in just one trap Mara reached down to retrieve the statue from where it had landed and then tossed it further down the corridor, watching as another cloud of darts fired across the passageway as the weight of the statue triggered the ancient firing mechanism.

Mara continued to follow this pattern, setting off each set of darts ahead of her and then moving forwards until she reached a point where the passageway began to slope upwards. Since there had been no structures visible above ground this could only mean that the passageway extended beneath one of the nearby hills and Mara guessed that the primary chamber would be inside one of these. Curious as to why Teron had not forced an entry deeper into the tomb than he had Mara tilted her glow rod upwards and examined the ceiling. There she saw carvings in the stone that, although meaningless to her meant that they could hold some value that Teron had not wanted to destroy.

"More for Morton's client." she said before she continued along the passageway, still using the statue to clear the way in front of her of the darts that fired from the walls.

There was no door at the far end of the passageway, instead it suddenly opened out into a circular chamber at the far end of which were a set of bones clad in ancient rags which lay out on a raised platform with a lightsaber resting on top of them. This was obviously the body of the Sith lord for whom this tomb had been constructed by his loyal followers. As it happened the body was the least interesting thing in the chamber though and Mara shone her glow rod at the items he had been buried with other than his weapon.

The walls either side of the chamber were lined with shelves and on these were row after row of archaic books, but pride of place in the very centre of the room had been given to another physical book that appeared to have a cover made of skin, a humanoid face having been used for the front cover.

Mara moved towards this book, shining her glow rod directly at it. It was obvious that the book was considered valuable but there appeared to be nothing preventing her from simply lifting it from the stand it had been placed on. Leaning in closer she could see how the entire face appeared to have been preserved as a single piece for use on the cover and Mara wondered whether the donor had still been alive as his face was peeled off.

All of a sudden the eyes on the cover opened wide to reveal a pair of empty black sockets and the mouth began to speak, reciting a strange language that Mara could not understand. This shocked the normally collected Mara and she fell backwards, dropping her glow rod. The face on the front of the book continued to speak as she retrieved the glow rod before she return to the book stand. Clipping her glow rod to her collar she then took hold of the book in both hands and winced as she felt the skin on the cover moving against her

OWN.

Mara suddenly leapt forwards, towards the remains of the Sith lord and knocking over the book stand in the process. She reasoned that any trap laid would be based on the idea that anyone who took the book would either remain standing in front of the stand to read it or attempt to immediately exit the chamber through the door behind them and it turned out that she was correct. A single, massive metal sphere suddenly came crashing down out of the ceiling and landed right where Mara would have been had she just stood in front of the stand and picked up the book. Thanks to its shape, the sphere did not remain in the centre of the room though, instead it rolled towards the exit to the passageway that from this end led downwards and Mara rushed across the chamber to watch as it rolled down away from her. Waiting until the sphere had vanished from view before she stuffed the still talking book into her bag and followed the path taken by the sphere. This led all the way back down the passage, that Mara now saw was the perfect size to permit the sphere to roll down it thus ensuring that anyone caught in its path could not escape by pressing themselves against the walls to either side. Then it passed through the small chamber between the two sets of doors and through the treasure chamber where it had flattened some of the items left on the floor in its path before finally bursting through what remained of the wall into the main entry chamber. Here the sphere had rolled right the way across the chamber and smashed into three of the statues and destroyed them. Mara knew that the destruction of the statues would probably not impress Morton or his client, but she also guessed that the book she could still just about hear talking from inside her bag would be worth more than everything else recovered from this site.

The sphere had also smashed through the ladder leading back up to the surface and so Mara temporarily found herself unable to get out.

"Hey up there!" she shouted, "Does someone want to give a girl a hand up?"

Clad in the full Sith armour, including its helmet, Krovak stood at the rear of the shuttle as one of the other gang members piloted it and a second acted as navigator.

"Coming up on the target area now." the navigator said.

"Take us around to the west." Krovak ordered, "Set me down about two thousand metres away."

"Two thousand metres? That's a pretty long walk." the navigator commented.

"They're bound to spot us coming." the pilot added.

"They will see where we land, yes. But they won't see what's coming." Krovak replied.

5.

A pair of mercenaries lifted Mara from the hole and one stared at her bag when he heard the sound of the talking book.

"What the hell is that?" he asked.

"I don't know and I don't want to know." Mara replied, "But I bet it's worth money to Morton's client so I grabbed it. Now what about the lifting gear?"

"It's being unloaded now. The transport crew reckon they'll have everything loaded in about an hour." the same mercenary replied. Before Mara could reply there was a roaring sound from above and they all looked up to see the same shuttle that Krovak had escaped in fly past them before coming to a halt and descending out of sight beyond several hills.

"Looks like that ignorant thug Krovak came back for a second helping." Mara said.

"Want us to take him out?" the second mercenary asked and Mara nodded.

"Looks like he's landed a couple of kilometres out. Find somewhere you can pick him and whatever other scum he's brought with him off from a distance." she told them.

"Yes ma'am." the first mercenary replied and leaving Mara to oversee the loading of the transport they walked away from the hole, heading towards where the shuttle appeared to have landed.

They walked just over five hundred metres before they came to a narrow pass between two hills that anyone approaching from the shuttle was likely to have to take and positioned themselves at the top of one of the hills from where they could shoot down into the pass.

"We'll wait until we know how many of them there are and then pick off whoever looks like the leader first." one of the mercenaries said and the other nodded as they both lay down and looked down the sights of their rifles.

They had to wait only a few minutes before someone appeared but the armoured figure was not what they had expected at all. To start with the armour looked ancient, like something crafted by a civilisation that had barely mastered sailing across oceans, let alone powered flight or space travel. In addition to his armour the figure's weaponry appeared just as primitive, being armed only with a sword that it held in one hand despite its large size. Whoever it was inside the armour was also alone, walking straight down the pass towards the tomb.

"Is this guy insane?" one of the mercenaries said.

"It must be a trick." the second replied.

"So what do we do?"

"Take him down."

The two mercenaries fired in rapid succession and both shots struck Krovak as he continued to walk along the pass. Staggering under the impact of the first, Krovak collapsed when the second shot hit him and landed face down on the ground.

"All too easy." one of the mercenaries said as he got to his feet and slung his rifle over his shoulder, "I'm going to go and check that guy out. You stay here and call out if it turns out he does have any friends."

The mercenary then walked down the hill towards where Krovak lay and crouched down beside him.

However, as he reached down to roll the armoured body over Krovak suddenly reached up with an armoured hand and grasped him by the throat. Getting to his feet while still holding the mercenary by his neck, Krovak lifted the man up off the ground and turned towards where the second still lay with his rifle. The mercenary Krovak held clawed at Krovak's hand and kicked out as he attempted to free himself. This proved ineffective and the mercenary instead attempted to unslung his rifle. Krovak saw this and immediately knocked the weapon from the mercenary's grip.

The mercenary at the top of the hill pointed his rifle towards Krovak but his line of fire was blocked by the other mercenary being held between them. Krovak then crouched down just long enough to pick up his sword before he began to walk up the hill towards the second mercenary, continuing to use the mercenary in his grip as a human shield. The second mercenary got to his feet as Krovak approached and tried to circle around him so that his still kicking comrade was no longer blocking his line of fire towards Krovak. However, Krovak simply turned to follow him while making sure to keep the mercenary in his grasp visibly alive. Realising that he was never going to get a clear shot, the mercenary abandoned the idea of shooting Krovak and turned back towards the Sith tomb and broke into a run. As soon as he saw this Krovak thrust the Sith sword through the chest of the mercenary he held, impaling him through the heart and killing him instantly. Then as he released his grip the body slid off the blade and Krovak broke into a run as well, chasing after the fleeing mercenary.

Focusing on his hatred for the mercenary, the power of the Dark Side flowed into Krovak and despite the weight of the armour he wore he easily picked up speed and began to outpace the mercenary. The

mercenary heard the thumping sound of Krovak's feet from behind him as the gap between them narrowed and he came to a halt, raising his blaster rifle as he spun around but by this time Krovak was already within arms' reach and he had brought his sword up to neck height and holding the weapon in both hands he swung it at the mercenary and decapitated the man effortlessly.

Mara watched as the first of the still intact statues was winched from the hole and then lowered onto a waiting repulsor cart.

"Okay get it aboard the transport." she said, "I don't want to risk breaking any more so we'll not chance overloading the cart."

"Yes ma'am." the driver of the cart said before he drove away, heading for the nearby transport ship.

Mara then turned to the winch operator.

"Don't wait for him. Keep going. It'll be quicker to load those things from up here than down there." she told him and the man nodded before lowering the winch back into the hole.

"Miss Tosk." a mercenary said as he walked towards Mara from the assault shuttle.

"What is it?" she asked in response, "Teron's not giving you any trouble is he?"

"Just telling us that we're all going to die for all of this. Nothing new." the mercenary replied and Mara smiled,

"No I wanted to ask about those two men you sent out."

"Aren't they back yet?" Mara asked, surprised at the delay in their return.

"No." the mercenary answered, shaking his head, "I can't get them on their comlinks either. I've got a bad feeling about this. Maybe there was more to that shuttle than a mob of gangers."

"Tell the rest of your men to stand to." Mara told him, "I'm going to double check on Teron and see if I can get him to talk."

As the mercenary began to call out orders to the others Mara ran towards the assault shuttle and hurried inside to where she found Teron strapped into a seat with his hands in his lap, still bound with the stun cuffs.

"You're afraid." Teron said, glaring at Mara as soon as she appeared.

"Cut the poodoo kid." she said, tossing her bag that still contained the muttering book onto another seat before she drew her blaster and double checked the power cell, "Now tell me what it is that's heading our way. How many of your minions are coming and how well armed are they?"

Teron smiled at her.

"Just Krovak. I can sense his rage from here, it's made him strong." Teron said, "He's going to kill everyone but you."

"Oh really? And what makes me so special?" Mara asked.

"We both want you to really suffer." Teron answered and all of a sudden there was a loud scream from outside the ship.

Running back outside Mara saw several people running towards the recently arrived transport and looking in that direction herself she saw that the operator of the repulsor cart was now lying face down on the ground.

"Wait!" Mara called out as the first person reached the body, one of the other crew members from the transport and he crouched down to roll the body over, "It's a trap!"

The crewman looked around when he heard the warning but he failed to get out of the way as Krovak suddenly stepped out from behind one of the transport's landing struts and swung the sword he held in both hands at the man before he could react.

Mara gasped when she saw Krovak in the Sith armour, knowing immediately that there was more to him than just a man in a suit of ancient armour.

"Shoot him!" she yelled and the mercenaries between her and Krovak all ground to an immediate halt an opened fire.

Krovak broke into a run as they began to fire on him, moving much faster than a man weighted down by a full suit of plate armour ought to be able to. This sudden burst of speed enabled Krovak to evade most of the blaster fire aimed towards him, while the handful of hits he took did not seem to slow him down at all. The closest mercenary chanced moving closer, hoping that by getting to point blank range his blaster would have enough power to penetrate Krovak's Sith armour but as he got closer Krovak lifted his sword up over his head and then roared as he hurled it with both hands at the mercenary. Despite its weight, the sword flew through the air and its blade impaled the mercenary right the way through his chest and burying itself in him right the way up to the grip. The dead mercenary then fell backwards and the tip of the sword embedded itself in the ground and the body of the mercenary remained bent over backwards, supported by this.

"Get away from him!" Mara shouted, "Use grenades."

The remaining mercenaries all plucked fragmentation grenades from their webbing and hurled them towards Krovak as he ran to the body of the impaled mercenary and pulled his sword free of both the body and the ground. Seeing the first of these grenades land nearby Krovak tossed the body of the mercenary onto the grenade and then threw himself to the ground in the opposite direction before it exploded.

As he had expected the body absorbed most of the explosive force of the grenade but in the process it was completely destroyed. Krovak knew that despite the unnatural resilience of his armour it did not make him

completely invulnerable and the clouds of shrapnel created by a grenade had more chance of finding a weak point where two different pieces met than even the best aimed blaster shot did so he leapt back to his feet and started to run again, watching the path taken by the grenades as they were hurled towards him and adjusting his path to keep as far from the centres of the blasts as he could while still heading towards the mercenaries throwing them towards him.

"He's coming right for us." one of the mercenaries called out after he had thrown another grenade that Krovak managed to avoid and he reached for where he had placed his rifle, knowing that within moments the armoured figure would be too close to risk using a grenade against. The other mercenaries copied this, picking up their rifles and firing again. This time though they backed away as they fired, hoping to keep Krovak as far from them as they could.

Krovak meanwhile let out another roar as he charged right into the midst of the mercenaries. He did not even bother to use his sword against the first of them, just barging right into the man and head butting him with his ornate helmet hard enough that he heard the man's skull crack as he fell to the ground. Krovak leapt over the body of the mercenary and used his jump to carry him towards the next man, bringing his sword down on his head and killing him as well.

Only four of the mercenaries remained now and Krovak hurled himself at the closest, smashing the pommel of his sword into the man's face with enough force to crush his nose entirely. Killed by the force of the blow, the mercenary collapsed and Krovak swung his sword at the next man who was not quite fast enough to get out of reach before the blade cut through his spine and he screamed as he collapsed. Bleeding severely from the wound the critically injured mercenary dragged himself across the ground, still trying to get further from Krovak. In return Krovak simply thrust the point of his sword straight down through the mercenary's chest and into the ground below, twisting the weapon to open out the wound even though the blade had already cut the mercenary's heart in two and killed him.

Hoping to take advantage of the delay that he knew would result from Krovak having to pull his sword free one of the two surviving mercenaries leapt forwards and pressed the muzzle of his blaster to the side of Krovak's helmet. However, before he could pull the trigger Krovak let go of his sword and spun around, taking hold of the blaster rifle by its barrel and tearing it free of the mercenary's grasp with one hand. Then he reached out with his other hand and grabbed the mercenary by the throat, lifting him up off the ground and tightening his grip until he heard a 'crunch' as the man's neck broke.

The final remaining mercenary now abandoned all pretence of fighting Krovak and he broke into a run, heading for the assault shuttle as fast as he could. Krovak did not even bother chasing after this man though. Instead he turned the blaster rifle he still held around and brought it up to his shoulder before firing a short burst that hit the fleeing man between his shoulders. Then he turned on the spot to face the winch operator cowering by the hole that led to the Sith tomb below ground and fired again, killing him as well.

This left only Mara standing at the base of the access ramp to the assault shuttle and Krovak faced her as he tossed aside the rifle and plucked his sword from the ground before striding towards her. With all of the mercenaries and the crew of the transport dead and knowing that she had no chance of stopping Krovak on her own Mara turned and ran back up the ramp into the assault shuttle. As soon as she was inside she slammed her hand down on the control to seal the access ramp behind her and headed for the cockpit. However, in her haste to try and escape she did not notice Teron use what little movement he had to point his hands towards her and use the Force to pluck the keys to his stun cuffs from her belt.

Sitting in the pilot's seat Mara could see Krovak continuing to walk towards the assault shuttle and she hurriedly began the preparations to take off. Suddenly though she heard the sound of the access ramp opening again.

"What the kriff?" she said, leaping out of the seat and rushing back into the shuttle's rear compartment where she found Teron standing at the top of the ramp and smiling at her.

"I told you." he said, "Krovak has killed everyone but you."

Mara reached for the blaster at her hip but Teron was faster, pointing his hands towards her and unleashing a storm of Force based lightning. Mara screamed as she was struck by this, the Dark Side energy flowing over her body. Teron ceased the lightning as soon as Mara collapsed, gasping for breath but still very much alive and at that moment he heard the sound of heavy footfalls as Krovak walked up the ramp behind him.

"Ah Krovak," he said, turning to face the new Sith warrior, "I see that you have made the most of our discovery."

"Yes my lord." Krovak replied and then he looked at where Mara lay on the floor of the assault shuttle, "What do you want to do with her?" he asked.

Teron reached out to where he had dropped the stun cuffs when he had removed them and used the Force to summon them to his grip.

"Cuff her." he said, "She's coming with us. Then once we have her secure we'll come back for everything she kindly lifted out of the tomb for us."

6.

With Mara now in the stun cuffs Teron and Krovak led her to where their shuttle waited and the other gang members jeered as she was taken aboard.

"In there." Teron said, pointing to an empty crate and Krovak picked the helpless Mara up and then tossed her like a rag doll into the crate before the lid was slammed down over her and she was plunged into darkness. The darkness was suddenly broken as Teron used the tip of his lightsaber blade to pierce the crate lid in several places. Initially Mara thought that this was because he did not want her to suffocate before she could be taken back to his base of operations but she soon found out that it had a second purpose.

The holes in the crate made it much easier for Mara to hear what the gang members outside it were saying to one another during the flight and all of it was about her. Each gang member in turn spoke about how he would abuse her if Teron permitted it. Ordinarily Mara would have thought that most of this was empty bragging between petty criminals but as she listened to each graphic description she could not help but remember Teron's words to her.

"We both want you to really suffer."

When the crate was finally opened Mara looked up and saw the faces of Teron, Krovak and several other members of the gang staring down at her. Looking back up at them Mara wondered whether any of the sneering men had been among those who had been loudly describing to one another how they intended to abuse her. Krovak no longer wore his Sith armour but in her helpless state he looked no less intimidating to her. Teron then lifted a control unit for the stun cuffs binding Mara's limbs and activated it causing Mara to let out a muffled scream as she shook uncontrollably.

"Bring her." Teron said when he finally released the button and two of his gang reached into the crate to lift her out.

Dragging Mara from the shuttle they took her to a tiny storage room that had already been prepared for Mara. Four chains had been attached to the walls, two hanging from the top where they met the ceiling and the others connected where it met the floor. Each length of chain ended in a cuff similar to the stun cuffs Mara was currently bound with and as they released these from her limbs the gang members locked her into this new set. This left Mara standing in the middle of the tiny room with her arms raised up over her head and spread apart while her legs were also spread out.

"Whatever you're going to do just get on with it." Mara hissed, staring at Teron as the gang members other than he and Krovak left the room.

"Oh Mara," he replied, smiling at her, "if you had any idea what I've got in store for you then you'd be pleading for me to take as long as possible in getting started. But I'm not really in the mood to hear you beg at all so I'm going to do something about that. Krovak."

"Certainly." Krovak said and he stepped towards Mara, producing a gag from his pocket that consisted of a metal ring that he forced into her mouth to wedge it wide open before strapping it in place.

"We'll be back soon Mara." Teron told her and Krovak smiled.

"Yeah, so don't go away." Krovak added and then both men turned around and left the room, leaving Mara all alone.

As soon as the door shut behind them Mara began to pull at the chains holding her in place, hoping that whichever member of the gang had been responsible for fixing them in place had been sloppy and failed to secure them properly. However, all four chains held firmly in place and when the door to the storeroom slid open again Mara remained chained to the spot.

Teron now carried with him a transparent jar filled with a cloudy fluid and he held this up in front of Mara's face. Inside the fluid Mara could just about make out something coiled up against the walls of the jar.

"This is a pet I obtained a few months back," he said, "and I'd like to give it to you. I hope you like it." and then he placed the jar down on the floor near one of Mara's chained feet before unscrewing the lid and standing up again, "Now we'll leave you to get acquainted." he added before looking at Krovak, "What do you think?" he asked, "Shall we leave the lights on or turn them off?"

Krovak shrugged.

"Off would save on power but then she'd never see what was in store for her." he said.

"On it is then. Come on, let's leave her be." Krovak replied and then he and Krovak left the room once more. Mara looked down at the jar and as she did so she saw the head of something that looked like an eel break the surface of the fluid and begin to slither over the side of the jar. The glistening slime coated head of the creature was featureless but it seemed to be able to sense the presence of Mara somehow as it moved towards one of her feet. Desperately Mara tried again to pull herself free, tugging at each of the chains in turn but they continued to hold fast as she felt the eel slither on top of her foot and then start to coil around

her leg, climbing steadily up it. Reaching the top of her leg, the eel continued to wrap itself around Mara's body as it made its way ever further up towards her head and Mara tried to scream as she started to realise the purpose behind the gag that held her mouth wide open.

Mara felt the slime from the creature's body against her skin as when it reached her neck and she began to shake her head, hoping to keep it away from her mouth but this failed and her eyes widened in terror as she felt the creature start to make its way inside her body. She wretched as it began to make her way down her throat and suddenly she struggled to breathe with it blocking her airway entirely. But before she could pass out from a lack of oxygen the creature wriggled wildly, its tail thrashing from side to side as it dangled from Mara's mouth before it suddenly shot inside her completely and Mara began to scream again.

When the door to the storeroom opened again Teron and Krovak found Mara hanging limply from her chains. "Well it looks like it's finished." Krovak said, kicking over the jar and spilling the fluid from inside it over the floor.

"Check her." Teron said and Krovak lifted Mara's head, revealing her now pallid appearance and the dark lines on her skin that marked out the locations of blood vessels close to the surface.

All of a sudden Mara's eyes opened wide, revealing her eyes to be jet black as if they consisted of just a pair of giant pupils in the sockets and Krovak quickly removed the gag from her mouth,

"Who are you?" Mara said slowly, her voice droning as she looked at Teron and he smiled back at her.

"I am your master." he told her.