

STAR WARS

DARKNESS RISING

3-10: KNOWLEDGE &
EXPERIENCE

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Hoping to gain an edge in the search for artwork created by Thal N'Krey, Morton Crayne orders the abduction of Dahlis Hebro. However, his close association with the Jedi Order brings Jayk and Brae Udra hunting for him...

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1.

The original ceremonial robe was tattered and would disintegrate if Thal N'Krey even attempted to remove it from the case someone had had the sense to preserve it in all these thousands of years. However, the artist had spent many long hours inspecting both the remnants of the robe itself and images that claimed to be of it being worn by its original owner and in this time he had produced an exact replica of it.

Thal pulled this replica robe over his shoulders and lifted its hood far enough that it was still easy to make out his own features under it. He briefly ran his fingers along the symbols embroidered into the edges of the robe, pondering the meaning of the ancient words before he turned to look at his reflection in the nearby mirror that he had set up specifically to provide him with a full length view of himself.

"Now guide my hand." he said to himself as he picked up a paintbrush and began to work.

"Lot trill herf xesh one-one-three-eight." the auction droid announced as a labour droid carried a large, flat object covered in a plastic sheet to the front of the room beside the podium and as the cover was removed the auction droid continued, "Painting entitled 'The Sorcerer - A Self Portrait' by Thal N'Krey. Starting price one thousand credits. No reserve."

A hand went up in the audience and the droid pointed to the owner.

"One thousand credits." it said.

"Twelve hundred." a voice called out and the droid turned towards the source.

"One thousand two hundred credits bid. Do I hear one thousand five hundred?" the droid asked and the original bidder raised his hand again, "Do I hear two thousand?" the droid asked, looking at the second bidder but the man shook his head and the droid turned to look straight ahead, "Any advance on one thousand five hundred credits?" it asked and when there was no response it raised its hand in the air, "At one thousand five hundred credits going once. Going twice. Sold to Professor Dahlis Hebro."

Smiling, Dahlis got out of his seat and walked over to a payment droid, handing the machine his credit stick.

"Can this be delivered to my hotel room?" he asked.

"Of course sir. There is a one hundred credit surcharge for this service though." the droid said.

"That's fine. Put it through." Dahlis said and the droid deducted the payment from the credit stick before returning it to Dahlis.

"Enjoy your purchase sir." it said.

Alone in his hotel room Dahlis examined the painting he had just purchased more closely while he waited for his communication to Coruscant to be connected. He had come across the painting in an auction list by chance while visiting Caamas and rushed to buy it before informing anyone else of its existence and only now was he sending word back to the people he knew would be most interested in it.

Just as the description provided had told him, Dahlis saw instantly that the painting depicted the kiffar artist Thal N'Krey himself only rather than a mundane image of a man who by all accounts struggled to make a living from his talent he had chosen to paint an image of himself as a Sith Lord wearing one of their robes. It was this robe that Dahlis considered the most important feature of the painting. Thal was known to have used genuine Sith artefacts for his inspiration and the painting was clear enough to show the symbols on the outside of the robe. It was quite possible that these had been invented by Thal using his own artistic licence but there was also a chance that they were copied from genuine Sith writing, in which case it was possible that they represented some forbidden knowledge.

"Hello?" the young woman in jedi robes whose hologram appeared in the hotel room asked as Dahlis studied the painting closely and he turned to face her.

"Ah Brae," he said, "I have unexpected news. Is your father around?"

"No, he's gone out to lunch with Kat. I can call him back if you want though." Brae replied.

"No, I don't think that will be necessary. But when he gets back he needs to know that I have obtained another painting by Thal N'Krey on Caamas and it is possible that there is genuine Sith knowledge involved."

"Okay I'll let him know." Brae said, "Are you in danger?"

"Danger? No of course not. I bought the painting in an auction and I've had it delivered to me here in my hotel room. It's room three one six at the Republic Star Hotel in Caa City." Dahlis said before the intercom at his hotel room door chimed.

"Room service." a voice said and Dahlis smiled.

"It seems my dinner has arrived." he said, "If you could let your father know what I've found and come here to collect it as soon as possible I'd be very grateful."

"Sure, I'll tell him as soon as he gets back." Brae said and then her image vanished.

Dahlis made his way to the door and opened it to find a man standing outside in the uniform of a hotel waiter

and holding a covered tray.

"Come on in." Dahlis said, waving the man into the room.

"Yes sir." the man replied, walking past Dahlis. Then as soon as the slid shut behind him the man dressed as a waiter knocked the cover off the tray to reveal the blaster beneath it. Snatching up this weapon the man dropped the tray to the floor and pointed his weapon at the startled Dahlis.

"Hello professor." he said, "Mister Crayne would like to speak to you."

Keeping his blaster trained on Dahlis the gunman then produced a comlink and lifted it to his mouth.

"I've got the target." he said and then he glanced at the nearby painting leaning against a wall, "and the painting as well. You can come on up to collect them now." and then he returned the comlink to his pocket.

"There's no way I'm co-operating with someone who's threatened me with a blaster. The moment we are in a public area of the hotel I'll tell people what's happening." Dahlis said and the man shrugged before firing his blaster. There was a flash of blue light as the man shot Dahlis with the weapon set to 'stun' and he collapsed in a heap on the floor.

"I never thought it would be any other way." he said to himself before the door intercom chimed again and he went to open it. This time there were two men, one human and the other devaronian standing in the hallway dressed as paramedics and holding a repulsor chair between them, "Get in." the man dressed as a waiter said and the fake paramedics entered the hotel room as well. Then while the fake paramedics were picking up Dahlis and placing him in the repulsor chair the fake waiter walked over to the painting of Thal N'Krey and after swapping his blaster for a knife he sliced around the edge of the painting to remove it from the frame so that he could roll the painting up to move it more easily.

"Here." the devaronian said while his comrade was covering Dahlis with a blanket and he took a spare set of paramedic's overalls and tossed it to him.

A few minutes later the door to the hotel room opened and the three men emerged disguised as paramedics pushing the unconscious Dahlis in the repulsor chair. Calmly all three made their way to a turbolift and from there down to the street behind the hotel where an unmarked repulsor van waited for them.

The three men drove Dahlis to their safe house, a disused speeder repair shop that provided them with an enclosed parking area where they could unload Dahlis from the repulsor truck without being seen.

"Stash him in the strong room." the first of the three told the other two, "I'm going to let Mister Crayne know what we've got for him." and then he made his way to another room where a rudimentary subspace communication system had been set up. This was limited to audio only communication but it was powerful enough to make direct contact with Morton Crayne in his hideout in Hutt Space.

"This is Asander calling Mister Crayne, are you receiving me?" the man transmitted.

Far off in Hutt Space Morton Crayne was waiting impatiently for word of the mission to abduct Dahlis Crayne and as soon as the communication system in the room serving as his office activated he rushed to answer it.

"This is Crayne." he said, "Asander what is your status?"

"Mission accomplished Mister Crayne." Asander told him, "We ambushed the professor in his hotel room after the auction and grabbed both him and the painting. He never saw it coming."

"Now listen to me Asander, are either the professor or that painting damaged in any way?" Morton asked.

"I had to stun the guy and I cut the painting out of its frame to-"

"You cut the painting?" Morton interrupted, "Are you brain dead? My client wanted it intact."

"There was no way we could carry the entire thing in its frame Mister Crayne. I only cut around the edge, honest. The picture's still there." Asander protested.

"It better had be Asander because if it isn't then it won't be me that's answering for it. Do you understand?" Morton warned him sternly.

"Yes sir Mister Crayne." Asander replied.

"Good. Now hold tight and I'll arrange for a transport to pick you up as soon as I can. Crayne out." Morton said and he shut off the transmitter. Pausing for a moment, he leant back in his chair before he got up and quickly checked his appearance in a mirror he kept hung on the wall. Then he returned to his desk and leant over it to activate the communication system again. This time however, he enabled the full holographic communication function, this signal being intended for someone who possessed the highest quality of communication equipment. The communication address was already programmed into the system and it connected in just a few seconds.

"Yes?" a voice said as Morton walked around his desk towards the holographic communication pad, although no image appeared on it yet.

"It's Morton Crayne. I need to speak with her." Morton replied, "Tell her it's important."

"Wait." the voice said and the channel went silent until just over a minute later when the three dimensional image of an attractive young woman materialised on the holographic projection pad.

"Rylee," Morton said with a smile on his face. He always did his best to look his best and appear cheerful for this particular client, still hoping that he would be able to charm her enough to tempt her to his bed, "I have

news."

"You have the professor and the painting?" Rylee asked.

"I do. Or rather my men do. It was just like your source said, he was at the auction and my men were able to intercept him and the painting at his hotel. They have them both at the safe house now."

"How long until you have them in your possession Crayne?" Rylee said.

"I need to arrange a transport to bring them back here. That shouldn't take more than a couple of hours and then providing the ship is enough the round trip to Caamas is less than eight. I should have them both her for you in less than twelve." Morton told her.

"Good. Professor Dahlis has proven himself useful to the jedi in tracking down work by Thal N'Krey. If he could be turned he would be a powerful ally." Rylee said.

"What if he won't co-operate?" Morton said.

"He will, one way or another." Rylee answered, "Whether he does so to gain the rewards we can offer or just to avoid losing any further appendages he'll serve us in the end."

"So when can I expect you to arrive to collect him?" Morton said, "Since you shouldn't have to wait more than a few hours you could always just come here now."

"No, that won't be necessary." Rylee said, dashing Morton's hopes of getting her within his headquarters with nothing to do long enough for him to be able to try and seduce her, "Contact me again when you have Professor Hebro and the painting and I'll send someone with the money. Goodbye Crayne." and then the image of Rylee faded away to nothing.

"Stang." Morton hissed. Then he shrugged, "Her loss." he added.

2.

There was a landing pad located on the roof of the Republic Star hotel. Normally this was reserved for guests using only one of the premium suites but operating under the authority of the Galactic Republic meant that Tylo Kurrast, owner of the YT-700 class light freighter *Swift Exit* was able to secure clearance to land there, especially when he informed the staff that he was carrying a pair of Jedi. The presence of two of the Republic's Force wielding guardians impressed the hotel staff so much in fact that the hotel manager himself was waiting at the side of the landing pad as the somewhat battered looking starship with an image of a partially dressed woman holding a blaster painted on the side came in to land.

"Good evening." the hotel manager, a grey furred caamasi said as Tylo walked down the *Swift Exit's* access ramp in the company of Brae Udra and her father and master Jedi Knight Jayk Udra, "My name is Elegos Ma'Nan, the manager of the Republic Star hotel. if you require accommodation then our facilities are at your disposal." and he held out his business card to Jayk.

"Thank you," Jayk replied as he took the card, "but I hope that we will not be inconveniencing you for more than a few minutes. I am Jedi Knight Jayk Udra and this is my padawan Brae Udra. Our pilot is Tylo Kurrast and we are here to meet with one of your guests. Professor Dahlis Hebro from Coruscant . He is in room three one six."

"Oh dear." Elegos said.

"What's wrong?" Brae asked.

"I'm afraid that the professor is not here at the moment. He was taken ill a short while ago and summoned an ambulance to take him to hospital." the caamasi hotel manager explained.

"I've got a bad feeling about this." Jayk said before addressing Elegos again, "What about his possessions?" "The professor is booked in until the end of the week so we have left his room alone." Elegos said and Jayk nodded.

"That's something." he said, "We need to see his room immediately."

"Of course. Do come this way." Elegos said and he led the trio from the roof to a nearby turbolift that took them down to the third floor and from there he showed them the way to the room Dahlis had occupied.

"No one has been in here since the professor was taken away?" Jayk asked as Elegos was using his manager's access key to unlock the door.

"No. Housekeeping will clean the room as scheduled tomorrow morning but for now it has been left completely undisturbed." Elegos replied and then he opened the door.

"Someone was here." Brae said as soon as the door slid upwards and she saw the discarded tray and cover lay on the floor in plain sight.

"That's strange." Elegos said as he accompanied Jayk, Brae and Tylo into the room, "I do not know who could have brought that here."

"A waiter." Tylo commented as he walked over to the bed and picked up a waiter's tunic from where Asander had discarded his initial disguise, "One of yours I presume?"

"Yes but I have no idea how it came to be here." Elegos said, "Professor Dahlis was taken ill before the meal he requested could be delivered."

"Did any of your staff see this?" Jayk said as he walked across the room to where the frame that had held the painting of Thal N'Krey now stood empty and he ran his fingers along the inside of it, feeling what was left of the canvas beneath them.

"No. I was present when it was delivered from the auction house but it was covered." Elegos replied.

"So someone grabbed the professor and took the painting as well." Tylo said.

"Let me guess," Brae said, "they were disguised as paramedics."

"Whichever was disguised as the waiter probably had the job of subduing Dahlis and then summoning his co-conspirators to assist in removing him under the guise of taking him to hospital." Jayk said, nodding his head in agreement, "I take it that no-one saw the ambulance or response vehicle that these paramedics arrived in." he added, looking at Elegos.

"No, I'm sorry it never occurred to me or my staff that they could be impostors. Frankly when guests are taken ill we prefer to have them removed from the premises as quickly as possible."

"Don't want to upset paying customers with the sight of sick people do we?" Tylo commented.

"We don't have medical facilities here and we can't be responsible for anyone's treatment." Elegos

responded, "But why would anyone do this? Professor Hebro never requested any increased security for a valuable painting."

"That's because the painting was probably dirt cheap." Tylo said.

"Then why steal it?" Elegos asked, confused, "And why kidnap one of our guests?"

""Though not valuable in itself the works of the artist that created the painting are of interest to several

underworld parties." Jayk said.

"And to the Republic," Brae added, "Only we wouldn't steal it to get hold of it."

"Or kidnap anyone." Tylo commented and then he frowned, "Hey, why would they kidnap the professor anyway?"

"His knowledge has been useful to us." Jayk said, "Perhaps his abductors hope that he can be just as useful to them." then he looked at Elegos, "We need access to your security camera footage." he told the manager.

Before Elegos showed Jayk, Brae and Tylo to his own office so that they could view the security footage they returned to the *Swift Exit* to collect the final member of their crew. Cal Udra was an ancestor of Jayk and Brae who had been a jedi knight more than three and a half thousand years earlier. He had been responsible for training his own sister to be a jedi and so when Brae had been assigned to Jayk the council had decided that Cal's experience would be of use. The original Cal had of course died long ago but during his life he had stored all of his knowledge in a holocron and created a virtual version of himself to act as its gatekeeper and the council had permitted Jayk and Brae to remove this from the jedi archives so that he could advise them on working together as close relatives.

As well as being able to offer advice based on a lifetime of experience, Cal's holocron was also able to interface directly with other technology and given the processing power of its core this meant that Cal could search for and retrieve data incredibly quickly. Thus when presented with the recordings of the security cameras in the hallway outside Dahlis' room Cal was able to locate the point at which his abductors appeared almost instantly.

"They weren't worried about the camera." Cal said as he brought up the image of Asander standing outside the door to Dahlis' room disguised as a waiter while the other two stood waiting with the repulsor chair further down the hallway where they would not be visible when Dahlis opened his door.

"He never even questioned whether the waiter was real." Brae said as the footage continued to show Dahlis opening his door and inviting the disguised Asander into his room.

"I'll speed this bit up." Cal said, and he sped up the footage until the two men disguised as paramedics started to make their way along the corridor, "Obviously the other two were waiting for this moment." Cal commented as the jedi then watched the fake paramedics press the intercom and then the door was opened again by Asander to allow his comrades to enter the room.

door was opened for a third time and this time all three of Dahlis' abductors emerged dressed as paramedics pushing the unconscious professor along in the repulsor chair.

"How far can you track them?" Jayk asked.

"There's a camera in the turbolift that tracked them down to the main lobby but then they head into the service area of the hotel and disappear from coverage." Cal said.

"Didn't any of your staff challenge them?" Brae asked, looking around at Elegos.

"No, they didn't give us any reason to suspect that they weren't what they appeared to be." the hotel manager responded.

"We'll need to pass this footage to the local police." Jayk said, "I don't recognise any of those three from what we know about either Teron Sharr's or Morton Crayne's gangs."

"It has to be Teron." Tylo said, "If it was Crayne then he would have sent Mara Tosk on a job like this."

"Dahlis knows Mara." Brae pointed out.

"Wouldn't matter as long as she wasn't the one pretending to be a waiter." Tylo replied, "I'll bet that he stunned Dahlis before the other two went into his room."

"Regardless of who is behind this kidnapping we need to locate Dahlis quickly. They will undoubtedly want to get him off world as quickly as possible." Jayk said.

"What if they already have?" Brae asked.

"Then we need to identify the ship used and track it to its destination." Jayk replied before he got out of his chair and turned to Elegos, "We'll be taking copies of the footage and we may have further questions for you and your staff. In the meantime it would help us greatly if we could retain the use of your landing pad."

"Of course. The Republic Star Hotel is at your disposal." Elegos said nervously, concerned about the implications for the hotel when the news inevitably got out that one of its guests was kidnapped under the noses of the staff and considering the temporary loss of the landing pad and whatever other hotel facilities the jedi needed to use as a small price to pay for being able to demonstrate publicly how co-operative he had been.

3.

Dahlis woke to find himself in a room that was a far cry from the comfortable hotel room he had been in when he was rendered unconscious. This room was a lot smaller, just about big enough to contain the camp bed he lay on when he awoke, and its walls were in dire need of repainting. He guessed that there was a window towards the top of one wall but a sheet of bare metal had been fixed over this to block it entirely. Whether this had been done to convert the room into a cell or the room had been chosen as a cell because of this Dahlis could not tell but he did know that there was no way he was going to be able to get out that way without any tools. The only exit from the room was a door on the far side from the bed but when Dahlis got up to try and open it he found that he could only get about half way to it before the chain that was locked around a pipe running up the wall beside the bed and to his ankle at the other.

"Hey!" he called out, hoping that perhaps someone would hear his shout and summon help, "Let me out of here!"

A few moments later the door slid open, its motor grinding from poor maintenance and the devaronian kidnapper entered the room, no longer wearing his paramedic disguise.

"Sit down and keep quiet old man." he said sternly, "There's no-one around to hear you anyway."

"Then what does it matter if I make noise?" Dahlis asked and the devaronian snarled at him.

"It annoys me." he said.

"So I'm supposed to just wait here and starve am I?" Dahlis said but the devaronian just turned around and exited the room, closing the door behind him. Alone again, Dahlis waited for a few seconds before he turned back towards the bed but it was at just that moment that he heard the grinding noise of the door's motor again and the devaronian reappeared. This time he held a bottle of water in one hand and several ration bars in the other.

"There." he said as he tossed them onto the bed one after another, "That should be more than enough to last you until our ship arrives to pick us up." and then he closed the door again.

Hungry, Dahlis returned to the bed and tore open one of the ration bars. He winced at the taste of the basic ration but in the absence of anything else to eat he finished chewing and then took another bite as he thought about what his devaronian captor had said. The man who had tricked his way into Dahlis' hotel room had only mentioned Morton Crayne wanting a meeting with him but on the other hand the devaronian had specifically said that a ship was on its way to take him to meet the criminal. Having spoken to Brae and requested that she and Jayk come to Caamas to collect the painting by Thal N'Krey, Dahlis knew that the jedi would arrive soon, assuming that they were not on Caamas already. He knew that the jedi would quickly discover that he had been abducted from his hotel room and immediately begin to search for him. However, although Dahlis had faith in the jedi's investigative abilities he also knew that the odds of them finding him would be much better if he was still on Caamas and he took another look around his cell for anything that might help him delay his departure.

The door was the most obvious solution. Dahlis had heard the sound of the motor that operated the door and it was obvious even to someone that knew as little about engineering as he did that it was not in good working order. The best option for delaying his departure therefore, seemed to be to find a way of accelerating the motor's failure and jamming the door shut. This meant that he would have to find a way of reaching the door though, something that was not possible while he was chained to the pipe but here Dahlis had another idea. The locks at both ends of the chain were simple mechanical ones and Dahlis knew that it was possible to pick such things with a length of wire. This was something else that he did not have to hand right now but in this instance it was something that he thought he might be able to get hold of and he stood up again, facing the bed and flipping the mattress over to reveal the underside.

Just as he had hoped the underside of the mattress showed significant signs of age and the covering was worn away in several places, exposing the wire and spring frame inside. Hooking his fingers into one of the holes Dahlis pulled the sides apart and the fabric tore, enlarging the hole and exposing even more of the wire that the mattress contained. Then he found a broken wire among the internal frame that he was able to pull on, twisting and bending it back and forth until he put enough stress on the wire further along to break off a piece about the length of his hand.

"Okay this is good." he said to himself, looking at the wire as he sat down and folded his chained leg towards him, "Now let's see if these are as easy to pick as the movies suggest they are."

"Tylo what in the name of the Force are you doing?" Brae asked when she emerged from her room in the hotel suite that they had been assigned to find the former smuggler lining up the contents of a bag of nuts on the table in the recessed centre of the room.

"Counting nuts." he replied as Brae stepped down into the recession and sat on the couch that ran around

the outside.

"Are you including yourself in that?" she said and Tylo looked up for a moment to stare at her.

"That's what Cal said." he said before going back to lining up the nuts, "I want to know how many are in a packet." he added and now it was Brae's turn to frown.

"Why?" she said.

"So I can figure out the average cost of one nut in a packet that costs fourteen credits." Tylo said.

"Fourteen credits?" Brae exclaimed and Tylo smiled.

"Yes, fourteen credits from the mini bar over there." he said and he pointed to the refrigerated cabinet at the side of the room.

"How much have you spent?" Brae said, reaching out for the datapad guide that provided information on everything in the suite, including a full list of prices for the hotel's services.

"Hey the manager said everything was on the house. Why don't you go grab yourself a drink before your dad gets back. A proper drink, I'll cover for you." Tylo suggested.

Brae looked at the cabinet again, pondering Tylo's suggestion but before she could decide whether or not to get herself an illicit alcoholic beverage the door to the suite slid open and Jayk entered the room.

"Tylo what are you doing?" he said when he saw Tylo lining up the nuts from the packet.

"Counting nuts." Tylo said.

"Don't forget to count yourself." Jayk said and Tylo frowned.

"What is it with you Udras and that joke?" he said but Jayk ignored him as he joined Brae and Tylo in the centre of the room.

"Did you get anywhere with the police?" Brae asked and Jayk handed her his datapad.

"Yes and it looks like good news." he told her, "Our three suspects are all from off world and they arrived here on a regular flight from Deysum so their details were taken at immigration." he said as Brae looked at the datapad and saw the images of the two humans and one devaronian who had kidnapped Dahlis. However, these were of much higher quality than those taken from the hotel security cameras and all three were looking directly at the camera, "We also have names. Asander Tole, Martus Dayne and the devaronian is Gev Ment."

"Deysum. That's in the Mid Rim." Tylo said, "Just a few parsecs outside Hutt Space."

"Have you been there?" Brae said, looking at Tylo.

"Once or twice, yes. A lot of cargoes involving the hutts go through there. It wouldn't take much for someone coming from Hutt Space to hop from one ship to another there to disguise where they were coming from." he said.

"An interesting thought." Jayk said, nodding his head slowly, "But regardless of where they came from this information is good news. If the men who have kidnapped Dahlis came on a regular flight then it is likely that they do not have a starship of their own that they can use to get off world."

"So they'll still be here." Tylo said.

"And they'll have to have obtained everything they needed from someone here." Brae added, "Their weapons, their vehicles, somewhere to hide."

"Exactly. All items we might be able to trace." Jayk said and he turned to look at Tylo, "How much do you know about the black market here on Caamas?" he asked.

"Next to nothing but point me in the direction of the wrong side of town and I'm sure I'll be able to find us someone who can answer questions about off worlders buying from the black market. If whoever ordered this had the chance to plan it properly then they'd have used local talent instead of flying someone in. The hotel staff should have been suspicious when none of the paramedics were natives but I'm willing to bet that the local underworld won't have been so sloppy and they'll be wanting to make sure that these outsiders aren't about bring any unwanted attention down on them."

"You mean attention like a pair of jedi knights?" Brae said and a smile spread across her face.

4.

There was a plaque mounted above the outside of the door to the cantina that gave the name of the owner and declared that he was licensed to serve intoxicating chemicals for consumption on the premises only. However, this had obviously been in place for a long time and Jayk could not help but wonder whether it was still valid or even if the owner listed still had anything to do with the establishment.

"Sure you know what to do in there?" Tylo asked.

"I'll go to the bar and present the staff with the pictures of our suspects while Brae checks all of the customers." Jayk answered.

"Making sure they all see our lightsabers." Brae added, "Are you sure that will be enough?"

"Well worst case you might have to chop off a few limbs to make your point but they'll understand that you're jedi and looking for off worlders. It won't take long for word to get back to whoever these beings are working for. You just need to make certain that they believe you'll be in the area until you've caught them. The more of a nuisance you can be the better this will work."

"Okay and what will you be doing while we're inside?" Brae said.

"Keeping watch. There's always the chance that there'll be someone in there whose outfit thinks they're strong enough to handle a couple of jedi. If I spot an ambush being set up I'll let you know in time for you to get out the back door, even if you have to make one yourself." Tylo explained.

"It's not an ideal plan but right now it's the best we've got." Jayk said and he looked at Brae, "Come on Brae, let's get this over and done with."

There was a weapon detector fitted prominently just inside the entrance to the cantina and Jayk smiled as he and Brae walked through without their lightsabers triggering it. Modern weapon detectors worked by projecting a magnetic field that interacted with the energy carrying coils inside blasters and other similar weapons so any weapon that lacked such coils such as lightsabers or slug throwers would not be detected. This did not mean that no-one else inside the cantina would be armed in any way but it did limit the variety and capability of weaponry that they would be armed with.

"Start over there and work your way around. Don't worry about covering everyone, just make sure that people overhear what you're asking." Jayk said softly to Brae, pointing across the cantina to where he wanted her to start questioning the customers.

Just as they had hoped the two jedi were the only non-caamasi in the cantina and as they split up and walked between the tables with their robes open enough that the lightsabers hanging from their belts were on open display they could sense all of the customers watching them carefully.

Fear.

Hatred.

The reaction of the customers was immediate and Brae had to stop herself from smiling, this being exactly what the jedi had hoped for.

Jayk soon reached the bar and he stood in front of the caamasi that he took to be the most senior member of staff present, a male with fur that was just starting to grey with age. With the barman right in front of him Jayk rested one hand on the hilt of his lightsaber and held up his datapad towards the barman with the other.

"We're here on jedi business." he said, "We're looking for these three beings. Perhaps they have been in here recently."

"I've never seen them." the barman replied, glaring at Jayk and the jedi knight smiled back at him.

"You didn't even look at the datapad." he said.

Anger.

The barman glanced down.

"Like I said, I've never seen them. Any of them." he said.

"Oh well. Perhaps some of your other customers have." Jayk replied and he looked around to where Brae had just reached the point he had suggested she begin her questioning of the customers at.

"Excuse me but the Jedi Order is hunting these three beings. Have any of you seen them?" she asked a table full of caamasi, holding out her own datapad in front of them. None of the caamasi at the table responded to her question, instead all of them turned their chairs so that they faced away from her and continued with their drinks. Brae was not put off, however and with a wave of her hand she used the Force to suddenly turn all of the chairs back towards her, "Now that I have your full attention you can tell me if you've seen any of these beings." she told the startled caamasi at the table.

"Hey! She can't do that to my customers." the barman exclaimed to Jayk, pointing at Brae in frustration, "I don't care who you are. Get her out of here."

"Brae this man obviously doesn't want us disrupting his business." Jayk said, "Perhaps we should try asking people somewhere else instead."

"That's right." the barman said sternly as Jayk and Brae headed for the doorway, "Get out of my cantina. Your sort aren't welcome here."

The two jedi did not go very far though and as soon as they stepped through the entrance to the cantina they stopped and stood so that they blocked it. They did this just as another pair of caamasi were about to enter the cantina and Jayk held up his hand for them to stop.

"Have you seen these beings?" Brae asked as she held up her datapad, "This is jedi business."

The two caamasi did not answer, instead they just carried on walking down the street instead of going inside the cantina. While Brae watched them leave Jayk turned to look back towards the bar again and he smiled as the barman glared at him angrily, knowing that the jedi were now deliberately disrupting his trade.

All of a sudden the barman hurried through a doorway behind the bar and disappeared from view for a short time and Jayk looked at Brae.

"This could be it." he said, "He's either trying to get hold of the information that will make us go away or he's arranging for us to be attacked."

"I'll be careful." Brae responded before she stepped in front of another passing caamasi and held up her datapad, "I'm here on behalf of the Jedi Order." she said, not having time to ask about the kidnappers before the caamasi hurried past her and avoided going inside the cantina, "How rude." she commented jokingly.

The two jedi continued to stop everyone that came past them and as a result of this not one caamasi entered the cantina, put off by the presence of Republic agents right outside the door. While they did this Tylo continued to watch from his vantage point nearby and when he saw a speeder pull up out of sight of the jedi and a single caamasi get out before the vehicle sped off he activated his comlink.

"Jayk you've got incoming." he transmitted.

"How many?" Jayk responded.

"Just the one. Slowing down now that he's reaching the corner and about to come into your field of view."

Tylo told him and Jayk turned to see the caamasi now calmly walking along the street towards him and Brae. "Got him." Jayk said before he returned his comlink to his belt, "Excuse me citizen." he then called out and the caamasi came to a halt in front of him.

"You're jedi aren't you? What are you doing here?" the caamasi asked in stark contrast to the abrupt or non-existent responses all of the other passers by had given up to this point.

"Yes we are jedi. We're looking for three off worlders." Jayk said and he held out his datapad after calling up the images he wanted to show the caamasi, "Perhaps you have seen them."

The caamasi barely glanced at the images on the datapad before looking at Jayk again.

"I've not seen them myself but they seem like three strangers I have been told about." he said and Jayk smiled in a friendly manner, noting the choice of words used by the caamasi. They seemed chosen specially to avoid having to lie and risk his deception being sensed by either of the jedi. This pleased Jayk though, it suggested that the caamasi had been sent specifically to talk with the jedi by someone who knew exactly who the three men who and where had kidnapped Dahlis were.

"What were you told?" Brae asked as she joined Jayk in standing in front of the caamasi.

"I was told that they are in the north quarter of the city. I spoke with someone that rented an old workshop to three aliens." the caamasi said and Jayk nodded his head.

"Thank you. You have been most helpful." he said.

"You're welcome." the caamasi replied before he continued to walk down the street as if nothing was wrong.

"Do you believe him?" Brae asked when the caamasi was far enough away not to overhear her.

"He knew what he was going to say before he encountered us. That's why he didn't even look at the images I showed him." Jayk replied and Brae frowned.

"How do you know?" she said and Jayk showed her the datapad so that she could see that he had switched the images of the two human kidnappers for ones of himself and Tylo.

"There are just under four hundred premises listed as workshops in the city directory." Cal said when Jayk, Brae and Tylo returned to the hotel suite, "Eighty-one of them are in the northern quarters and seventy-four have active listings in communication directories."

"That just leaves us with seven to check out." Tylo said.

"Which we can do easily just by walking up to them and seeing whether there's anyone inside." Brae added,

"Cal do you have addresses for all the empty workshops?"

"Of course." Cal replied.

"So how do you want to do this?" Tylo said, looking at Jayk, "Do we split up or stick together?"

"Time may not be on our side so we'll have to split up." Jayk answered, "Each of us will take two addresses and check them out. If we find anything then we call for the others. If not move on to the next address and then to the seventh. If Dahlis is being held there then that's where we'll rendezvous anyway."

Dahlis had seen any number of movies and video broadcasts in which someone had been able to open a primitive mechanical lock using just a length of wire like the one he had taken from inside the mattress in just

a matter of seconds. However, he had been struggling to do that for a considerable amount of time without success.

"Come on damn you!" he hissed as he shook the wire back and forth. All of a sudden he heard a 'click' and the lock popped open in his hand. Dahlis almost let out a cheer when this happened, only to remember just in time that to do such a thing might bring his captors into his cell to see what the noise was about.

With his ankle now free Dahlis got up off the bed and hurried across the room to the door on the opposite side. He had no idea of what was on the other side of this so he did not attempt to open it. Instead he examined the wall around it, looking for any sort of access panel that he might be able to open to be able to get at the mechanism that operated the door but he found nothing that did not require the use of some sort of tool he did not have.

The only other feature of the room was the window and although it was boarded up Dahlis still decided to see if there was some way he could use it to escape. Here he had more luck when he found that of the four metal pins used to secure the plate covering the window to the frame, one of the two at the bottom of the window had missed the frame and Dahlis was able to bend the corner upwards and by standing on the tips of his toes he was just about able to look out through it.

Through this he saw that the room he was imprisoned in was largely below ground level, with the bottom of the window being level with the ground. He could see that outside it was now night, with street lights visible across the road but the light from inside his cell made it difficult for him to make out anything else in the darkness, creating reflections in the window that obscured Dahlis' view. Turning out the light would have helped with this but as far as Dahlis could tell the light switch was in fact somewhere outside his cell and so there was nothing that he could do about it.

5.

Travelling by speeder bike enabled Tylo to quickly reach the workshops he had been assigned to check. The first of these was obviously lifeless and so he moved onto the next. This building was more interesting, with every window having been covered by plates on the inside that made it impossible to tell whether there was anyone inside or not. Leaving his speeder bike out of sight of the building, just in case there was someone inside that had set up some sort of surveillance system that he had not noticed Tylo crept towards the workshop, keeping to the shadows as much as he could.

Tylo was just a few metres away from the large vehicle door at the front of the workshop when he noticed a light source around the side of the supposedly empty building and he ground to a halt, dropping into a crouching position and drawing his blaster as he waited to see if he had been noticed. When nothing happened to suggest that he had been seen Tylo moved towards the light source for a closer look and it soon became apparent that the light was coming from a window that was not properly boarded up like the rest. Given that the boarded up windows and doors indicated that whoever was inside the workshop had something to hide Tylo had a strong suspicion that this was where Dahlis was being held and this was confirmed as he got close enough to see the professor staring out of the illuminated window.

"Professor," he said as he reached the window crouched beside it, his sudden arrival making Dahlis jump in surprise, "are you okay?"

"I will be if you can get me out of here." Dahlis responded, looking around at the door to his cell just in case he was overheard, "There are at least two of them holding me. A human and a devaronian. They're working for Morton Crayne."

"Yeah we saw them on the hotel security recordings along with another guy. Hold on while I let Jayk know you're here." Tylo said as he took his comlink from his belt, "Jayk come in." he signalled.

"I'm here Tylo." Jayk responded almost immediately.

"Jayk I'm at the second address on my list. Dahlis is here. I've got eyes on him now and he's unharmed. Oh and he's also confirmed that these nerf herders are working for Crayne." Tylo explained.

"Okay I'm on my way. I'll let Brae know as well. You just focus on keeping Dahlis safe. Jayk out."

"Okay Jayk and Brae are on their way." Tylo said, "Now let's see if we can get this window open."

"It doesn't matter, we'll never be able to get this plate off." Dahlis replied but Tylo drew the heavy blaster pistol he kept holstered at his waist.

"Actually prof I was going to give you this so you'd be able to protect yourself." he said.

"Oh, okay." Dahlis said and he ran his hand along the bottom of the window, trying to find the catches that held it shut.

"Just a little further." Tylo said, able to see the catches from his side of the window.

"I can't reach any further." Dahlis said as he strained to reach the catch. Then he smiled, "Wait, I've got an idea." he added before he hurried back to the bed and lifted the mattress to expose the frame on which it sat underneath. This was constructed from several strips of metal that were crudely bolted together and Dahlis quickly found a short piece that kept the angle between two of the main pieces constant that was loose enough for him to remove the bolts from each end with his bare hands, leaving him with the length of metal in his hands and he returned to the window with this.

"Maybe now I'll be able to reach." he said and he pushed the metal strip behind the plate covering the window, attempting to use it to unhook the catch. However, the angle he was forced to do this from made this difficult and the end of the strip wavered about considerably before it suddenly struck the window itself and there was the sound of breaking glass.

"Oh I've got a bad feeling about this." Tylo said, his eyes widening, "Quick, just take this." he added before using the butt of the blaster to break more of the glass so that he could pass the weapon through to Dahlis.

"What the hell is going on?" a voice called out from outside the cell and Dahlis heard the grinding sound of the motor as the door slid upwards to reveal Martus, "Stang! he's got a blaster!" the man exclaimed as Dahlis spun around and pointed Tylo's blaster towards him. However, when Dahlis pulled the trigger nothing happened and Martus was able to dive out of the way, "There's someone outside."

"Prof the safety. At the back." Tylo said through the window and Dahlis quickly released the safety catch of the weapon and fired a single shot through the open doorway before someone on the other side acted to close it.

"Martus stay and make sure he doesn't get out." Asander shouted as he picked up a cut down blaster carbine, "Gev let's get out there and see who his friend is."

"Tylo you're about to have company." Dahlis called out from inside the cell and Tylo unslung his rifle.

"Be back soon prof." he said before he darted away from the building, heading for a cluster of waste containers that he took cover behind just as Asander and Gev came charging around the corner of the

workshop.

Tylo wasted no time with a warning and just opened fire, sending a rapid burst of energy blasts towards the two thugs, driving both of them back around the corner. Gev then held his blaster around the corner and fired blindly, his shots flying towards the waste containers Tylo was using for cover and punching several holes in them. This produced a high pitched squealing from scavenging creatures inside the containers and a number of creatures promptly leapt out of the container, one of which landed on top of Tylo and he acted to bat it away as Gev continued to fire.

With Tylo ceasing fire Asander ran from behind the corner of the workshop, heading for an alleyway that would give him a second firing angle towards the waste containers Tylo was hiding behind and as soon as he reached this he opened fire with his blaster as well. Under fire from two directions at once Tylo lay flat on the ground, knowing that the waste container he was using for cover would not hold out indefinitely. Had the container been mounted on wheels then Tylo could have attempted to fire underneath it but this was a more modern version that included a repulsorlift generator and this gave Tylo an idea. Looking up he saw the control panel for the repulsorlift and he got back to his feet, risking a blaster bolt being able to punch all the way through the container long enough to activate the generator. The moment he did this the container rose up a few centimetres of the ground and Tylo gave it a good strong shove.

Rendered weightless by the repulsorlift field beneath it the waste container began to glide towards the workshop and while Asander and Gev were still shooting at it Tylo darted behind the next container in the row and also activated the repulsorlift generator of this one before pushing it towards the alleyway where Asander was firing from. As this waste container began to move Tylo ran alongside it, hearing the sound of blaster fire from Asander striking it repeatedly.

Meanwhile the first container Tylo had pushed crashed into the side of the workshop not far from where Gev was hiding and the devaronian had to dive back out of the way to avoid the container as it spun around after bouncing back off the wall. Hearing this Tylo quickly fired a burst of fire around his known hiding place towards Gev and one of his shots clipped the devaronian while he was exposed and he fell to the ground.

With the second container heading for him Asander broke into a run, heading back towards the workshop and continuing to fire on the move. He was able to keep Tylo pinned behind the waste container even as it too smashed into a wall and came to a halt.

Before he could get back to the workshop though there was the sound of repulsorlifts more powerful than those on the waste containers and Asander turned to see both Jayk and Brae bearing down on him on the backs of speeder bikes. He recognised the pair as Jedi and pointed his weapon at them, firing repeatedly in the hope that he could hit them before they could dismount and activate their lightsabers.

Jayk and Brae both swerved at the moment Asander fired and his shot passed harmlessly between them. Then the two Jedi both brought their speeder bikes to a stop and dismounted, leaping into the air and landing side by side as they both activated their lightsabers in unison. Asander tried firing again, holding his blaster out behind him as he rushed towards the open door of the workshop where Martus watched from. However, although his shots were fired randomly Jayk was able to direct those that came towards him with much greater control and just before Asander made it to the doorway of the workshop one of his own blaster bolts hit him right between his shoulder blades.

"Thanks for the assist." Tylo called out as he emerged from behind the waste container, "Dahlis is in that room down there by the way. I couldn't get him out but I did get my blaster to him so he should be okay."

"Then let's go and get him." Brae said and the trio turned towards the workshop just as the large door used to permit vehicles to enter exploded outwards.

Having witnessed the arrival of a pair of Jedi Martus decided that it was time to abandon his mission and so grabbing hold of the rolled up painting he hurried to the gang's repulsor van that they had used to get Dahlis here from the hotel and started up the engine. He wasted no time with trying to open the door blocking the vehicle's exit from the workshop, instead he just pressed his foot down on the accelerator as hard as he could and crashed the repulsor van through the lightweight door, smashing right through it.

Neither the Jedi nor Tylo were prepared for this and all three dived out of the way as Martus drove the vehicle towards them. He failed to hit any of them but this did not bother him, what mattered was that he got past them and was free to head for the pick up point with the painting. He knew that Morton Crayne would be furious that he had failed to bring back Dahlis with him, but having the painting in his possession guaranteed that the pilot of the ship sent to collect would not just abandon Martus here on Caamas.

"Brae with me. We'll follow him on our speeder bikes." Jayk called out.

"Yes master." Brae responded.

"What about me?" Tylo asked.

"Get Dahlis back to the *Swift Exit*, take off and come after us." Jayk told him, "The driver of that van wants to escape so he's probably heading for wherever their pick up ship will be arriving."

"It'll be easier to stop him with all three of us." Tylo pointed out.

"Dad doesn't want to head him off." Brae said, "He wants to take the ship. Don't you?" and she looked at Jayk.

"Exactly. Even if Morton Crayne himself is not aboard the pilot must know where he is located or he'd never be able to take Dahlis back there." he replied, "Now let's go. We can't let our quarry build up too much of a lead."

The two jedi then ran back to their speeder bikes and accelerated away, following the direction that Martus had gone in the repulsor van. Meanwhile Tylo made his way into the workshop.

"Professor Hebro!" he shouted, "Dahlis!"

"In here!" Dahlis shouted back and Tylo followed the sound of his voice to the door of the cell and opened it, wincing when he heard the motor grinding.

"I'm here to rescue you." Tylo said, smiling as he stood in the open doorway, "We need to get back to the *Swift Exit* as quickly as we can."

"The painting." Dahlis said, "There was a painting."

"Yeah we found the frame back in your hotel room. We can have the cops check this place later if we have to but my money is on the guy that drove off still having it with him."

"Okay let's go then. Oh but I think I should give this back to you first." Dahlis said as he handed Tylo's heavy blaster pistol back to him.

"Thanks. Now I hope you don't mind riding pillion because there's only one speeder bike between us." Tylo replied.

6.

Fear.

"He's right up ahead." Brae said as she and Jayk closed on the repulsor van.

"Are you certain Brae?" Jayk responded.

"Yes, I can sense the driver's apprehension." Brae said and Jayk smiled, trusting Brae's senses even though the repulsor van was not yet in sight.

"Be careful not to be too obvious." he said, "If he sees us then he could panic. Remember we want the ship, not just some hired thug."

"Yes master." Brae replied.

Exactly as Brae had said the repulsor van was just ahead of the two Jedi on their speeder bikes and they saw it as soon as they rounded the next corner. Even though they were viewing the vehicle from behind they recognised the make and colour of the vehicle and the fact that it was running at night without any lights indicated that its driver was eager not to be noticed.

"Brae kill your light." Jayk said as he shut off the forward headlight of his speeder bike and Brae did the same. This made the dark coloured repulsor van harder to see but Jayk knew that it would make things even worse for the escaping thug whose senses would not be as attuned as those of Jedi.

"Asander are you there?" a voice said from Martus' comlink and he pulled the device from his pocket while keeping the other hand on the steering controls.

"Asander's dead and so is Gev. It's just me now." Martus responded.

"Do you at least still have the prisoner and the painting?" the voice asked.

"I've got the painting but not the old guy. A pair of kriffing Jedi turned up to rescue him. It was all I could do to grab the painting and get out of there before I ended up shot like Asander and Gev." Martus explained.

"Crayne's going to be furious."

"Let him be furious. But if I hadn't run then he wouldn't have his precious picture either. Now where's the pick up?"

"We're following the signal from a comm tower twenty kilometres east of Caa City. ID is on frequency one-one-three-eight. Do you have it?"

"Hold on." Martus said, putting his comlink down for a few moments while he adjusted the repulsor van's navigation system to read the transponders from public communication towers, "Yeah I've got it." he said after scooping up the comlink again, "I reckon I can be there in about thirty minutes."

"Copy that, we should be getting there about then as well. Don't dawdle. We'll give you fifteen minutes and then we're out of there. Painting or no painting."

Returning to the Republic Star Hotel, Tylo and Dahlis headed straight up to the *Swift Exit* on the rooftop landing pad.

"Ah Dahlis." Cal said, his hologram appearing in the lounge as the pair came rushing into the room, "I'm glad to see you're unharmed. But where are Jayk and Brae?"

"Tailing the last of nerf herders who kidnapped the professor." Tylo responded, "Jayk thinks we can use him to get to Morton Crayne so everyone strap in because I'm going to have to cut a few corners to get us in the air fast enough to be of use." and then he disappeared, heading for the cockpit.

"I think Tylo would want you to help yourself to a drink." Cal then said to Dahlis.

"Good. Because after what I've just been through I could use one. A strong one." Dahlis responded.

The repulsor van turned suddenly without signalling and Jayk and Brae turned to follow.

"Do you think he's seen us?" Brae asked, knowing from her training that sudden manoeuvres could be used by individuals who suspected they were being followed to confirm whether they were or not.

"No. I sense no change in the driver's emotions." Jayk replied, "Perhaps he has just received directions to his rendezvous point with his evacuation ship."

The Jedi turned after the repulsor van, maintaining the distance between them and their target. It rapidly became obvious that the fleeing driver was heading out of the city into the hills that surrounded it. There were lights visible on some of these hills, coming from the various beacon towers constructed at the tops of them to take advantage of the superior line of sight they offered.

"Jayk. Brae. We've got eyes on you now." Cal's voice said over the speeder bikes' comlinks.

"What about the target? Repulsor van about one hundred metres ahead of us." Jayk replied.

"Yes, we see him on infra red too." Cal said, "Plus there's a ship about the same size as us on our sensors that's heading in at low altitude. Low enough that it looks like they're trying to avoid being noticed by ground

base tracking."

"That's our target. Tell Tylo to make sure he doesn't scare them off." Jayk replied before the repulsor van ahead of him and Brae abruptly turned off the road and headed across country, "This is it Brae. We take him now." Jayk added and both he and Brae accelerated, rapidly closing the gap between them and the repulsor van.

It was when he heard the sound of the speeder bikes' engines behind him that Martus finally noticed the two jedi behind him and he switched from driving in a straight line to weaving from side to side while still heading towards the communication mast at the top of the hill ahead of him. His erratic driving prevented Jayk or Brae from trying to overtake the repulsor van just in case it collided with their much lighter speeder bikes as they tried to do so. This meant that the only way they could approach the van was from directly behind before using the Force to enable them to leap from their speeder bikes in unison and land on the roof of the van with a loud 'thud'.

Behind the van the two riderless speeder bikes lost power and with no-one to keep them under control they span wildly before crashing into the ground and this combined with the sound of the jedi landing on the roof alerted Martus to the fact that the jedi had just transferred from their own vehicles to his. Martus continued to swerve, hoping to throw the jedi from the roof before they could get inside but both Jayk and Brae were able to drop to their knees and use the roof mounted storage rack as a handhold to avoid being thrown off. Jayk drew his lightsaber and there was a 'snap-hiss' as he activated it at the same time as he lay flat at the edge the roof so that he could reach down over the side of the van. Then with one swift stroke of his weapon he cut through the upper mountings of the large side mounted sliding door and it fell free.

"Brae now!" Jayk snapped and Brae quickly pulled herself to the side of the roof and rolled over it, passing through the side doorway to land in the repulsor van's cargo compartment behind Martus.

"Kriff!" Martus exclaimed as he reached for his blaster, taking both hands off the controls in the process and the van swerved again.

Brae extended her hand towards Martus just as he was aiming his blaster towards her and she channelled the Force to rip the weapon from his hand and draw it to hers.

"Give up yet?" she asked as she ignited her lightsaber. However, as she held the weapon out in front of her the blade suddenly flickered and died, "Oh stang. I thought I'd got that fixed." she said.

Martus braked suddenly and Brae was thrown forwards, hitting the cushioned backs of the seats at the front of the vehicle while on the roof Jayk had to hang onto the storage rack tightly to avoid being propelled forwards ahead of the van. Jayk then took advantage of the repulsor van being stationary to jump down from the roof and burst in through the side doorway. Inside the van he found both Brae and Martus wrestling for control of the blaster Brae was unwilling to relinquish her grip on. Martus managed to get his hand around the grip and all of a sudden there was a flash of light as his finger tightened around the trigger. Fortunately the blaster was pointed upwards at the time and the shot went into the ceiling of the van but it did demonstrate that he had regained effective control of the weapon. Jayk then lunged forwards, thrusting his lightsaber out in front of him and the blade passed right through the driver's seat to impale Martus through the chest.

Martus let out a gasp as he died, releasing his grasp on the blaster and Brae snatched it away from him.

"Quickly, we need to get this vehicle going again. The crew of that transport might be watching." Jayk said as he shut off his lightsaber and then dragged the body of Martus from the driver's seat. He and Brae then climbed into the front of the van with Jayk taking over the driving and he set the repulsor van going again, following the same heading Martus had taken.

"Jayk do you read me?" Tylo's voice said from Jayk's comlink but it was Brae who took out hers to respond.

"Dad's busy driving right now Tylo." she said.

"Well tell him that the transport just touched down by the comm tower at the top of a hill about half a kilometre ahead of you. You might want to get a move on." Tylo said and Brae glanced at Jayk.

"Tell Tylo to do whatever it takes to keep that ship on the ground." Jayk said and Brae nodded.

"Tylo dad says stop that ship from taking off. Do whatever it takes." she transmitted before putting her comlink away.

Jayk then pressed his foot down on the accelerator, increasing the repulsor van's speed as much as he could while still retaining control over the uneven terrain. Coming over the top of one hill brought the waiting transport into view. Operating without running lights the vessel appeared as just an outline against the night sky but as Jayk drove towards it a crack of light appeared when the crew opened the loading ramp. A single figure emerged from inside the ship and waved towards the van, not suspecting that it was now under the control of the jedi.

"Brae get ready." Jayk said and Brae nodded before climbing back into the rear of the van and standing just inside the large opening in the side. With her lightsaber having malfunctioned the young jedi instead held Martus' blaster in her hands.

"I'm ready." she said.

"Okay hold on to something." Jayk warned her and Brae just about had time to grab hold of the side of the

open doorway before Jayk sudden braked and brought the repulsor van to a complete stop. Before the van had even stopped moving Brae leapt out and rolled as she hit the ground. Then as she came to a stop she fired her blaster towards the figure standing at the bottom of the ramp. With limited experience in using a blaster her shot narrowly missed the man and her shot instead struck the side of the transport. "It's a trap!" the man at the bottom of the ramp yelled out as he drew his own side arm and returned fire. With no lightsaber to deflect the energy blasts with Brae instead threw herself to the ground as the man backed up the ramp. The sound of the transports engines grew louder as they shifted from merely idling to starting to lift off and it was then that there was a sudden volley of laser blasts from overhead as the *Swift Exit* flew over and began to circle round. The laser blasts passed over the transport, narrowly missing its hull but preventing the pilot from lifting off while he searched the skies for the source of the attack.

In the cockpit of the *Swift Exit* Tylo smiled and activated the intercom. "See?" he said, "I told you you could do it." "And it was easy." Dahlis said, "This thing practically fires itself." "Yeah but don't get cocky about it." Tylo added.

"Run Brae!" Jayk shouted as he leapt from the back of the repulsor van and both jedi charged towards the transport. Seeing this the man on the ramp turned and ran inside, reaching out for the controls to close it. Jayk knew what he was planning instantly and to prevent the man from locking the jedi out of the transport he extended his hand and used the Force to take hold of the man, pulling him back down the ramp. The man tumbled as he was pulled backwards and landed at the bottom of the ramp just as Jayk and Brae reached it. The man tried to raise his blaster but Jayk kicked it from his hand before delivering a punch to his face. "Brae find the cockpit." Jayk said, "I'll deal with him." and as Brae ran inside the ship Jayk pulled a thick plastic tie from his belt and began to fasten the dazed man's wrists to one of the ramp's supports. Brae heard shouts from elsewhere in the transport as she ran up the ramp into its hold and another of the crew suddenly appeared in a doorway ahead of her. Without stopping to think Brae fired twice and unlike in the darkness outside both her shots found their mark, hitting the crewman in his chest and he collapsed on the spot. Running through the doorway herself, Brae jumped over the crewman's body and looked around. A narrow corridor ran most of the length of the transport and towards the front of the ship she could see that the hatch into the cockpit was open, the pilot looking back at her. Seeing Brae standing in the corridor the pilot quickly slammed his hand down on the control to the cockpit hatch, dropping it shut before the engines became louder again.

"Transport's taking off." Tylo's voice said over both Jayk and Brae's comlinks, "We can't shoot at it with you aboard."

"That's okay. We can handle things from here." Jayk responded as he ran up the ramp, leaving the crewman tied to the support clinging to it as he looked down at the ground as the transport gained altitude. Meanwhile Brae fired her blaster at the cockpit door, hoping to blast a hole through it big enough that she would be able to target the pilot. However, the hatch proved to be made of a reinforced material that the blaster could not penetrate. Jayk then appeared in the corridor behind her and at the same time all of the other doors in the ship slid open.

"What's happening?" Brae said as she looked at them.

"The ramp is still open." Jayk told her, "As we gain altitude the air will be sucked out and we'll suffocate. Unless we can get into the cockpit first of course." and then he ran to the hatch and there was a 'snap-hiss' as he reactivated his lightsaber.

Although the hatch was sufficiently resilient to stop fire from a blaster pistol it was unable to resist a lightsaber and Jayk's blade passed straight through before he began to cut a hole large enough to step through.

The pilot was not deterred from his plan of trying to suffocate the two jedi aboard his ship, regardless of his comrade still tied to the ramp and he continued to try and gain altitude. However, to avoid suffocating himself he reached for an emergency oxygen mask and strapped it around his head while Jayk continued to cut through the hatch.

"Is it me or is it getting harder to breathe in here?" Brae asked as Jayk came close to finishing cutting the hole in the hatch.

"I'm almost there." Jayk replied and with one last push on his lightsaber he finished cutting through the hatch, kicking the centre free before he burst into the cockpit.

"I give up!" the pilot yelled, taking his hands off the controls and raising them over his head as Jayk stood over him and angled his lightsaber towards him.

"In that case," Jayk said, "you can start by getting us back down on the ground and then we will discuss the location of Morton Crayne."