

STAR WARS

DARKNESS RISING

3-1-1: HUNT & CATCH

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Rescuing Dahlis Hebro from his kidnapers reveals the location of Morton Crayne and Jayk and Brae are ordered to apprehend him. However, this takes them into territory where the rules of the Republic are meaningless and the Jedi will be on their own if caught...

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1.

"Hutt Space?" Tylo Kurrast, owner of the YT-700 class freighter *Swift Exit* said when Jayk Udra, the Jedi knight he transported aboard his ship as part of an agreement to keep Tylo out of prison told him where his former employer Morton Crayne was now hiding. The pair were sat in one of the refectories in the Jedi temple where Tylo had been exploiting the supply of free food he could get as part of his plea deal.

"The data was pulled from the navigation computer of the transport sent to take Dahlis back to Morton's new base of operations and the pilot confirmed it." Jayk said.

"You've got to admit it's a pretty good place to hide out. Assuming you can afford to keep paying off the hutt's of course, but Crayne's obviously got someone serious backing him. Hey, do you think he's working for the hutt's?" Tylo said.

"The council did consider that idea but it has been rejected. The hutt's have no interest in the Sith or their knowledge, even by the usual standards of the rarity of Force sensitivity few hutt's have such ability so it would have little value to them." Jayk said, "The council has concluded that he is using Hutt Space simply as a place to hide."

"A place where you have no legal authority." Tylo pointed out, "The hutt's don't like Republic agents poking their noses into their affairs and if Crayne's paying them off to let him stay in their territory they've got a financial incentive to keep him safe."

"Which is why we'll be doing this on the quiet." Jayk said and Tylo winced.

"I had a really bad feeling that you were going to say that." he said, "I assume that the reason you're saying 'we' is because I'm going along on this insane venture as well?"

"Actually Tylo it's your choice. Technically once we get beyond Republic territory you could abscond and we won't have the authority to force you to return." Jayk said.

"Now there's a thought." Tylo said, a smile appearing on his face.

"Although if you were ever caught in Republic space again then our deal would be invalid and you could expect to spend the next few decades of your life in prison." Jayk added and Tylo's face fell.

"There's always a catch with you Jedi isn't there?" he said.

"I was hoping that the fact that Morton Crayne placed a bounty on you would be enough to make you want revenge." Jayk said.

"Okay I'm in." Tylo replied, "When do we leave?"

"The council wants us to leave right away. The longer that Crayne's transport is overdue, the more likely it is that he'll get spooked and go to ground." Jayk said.

"Just let me finish this and I'll be right with you." Tylo said and he returned to stuffing food into his mouth as quickly as he could.

The *Swift Exit* was in the temple's main hangar and when Jayk and Tylo walked up the access ramp they heard the familiar humming sound of an active lightsaber coming from the lounge.

"Ah Brae, I see you've managed to fix the problem with your new lightsaber's beam emitter." Jayk said to the teenage girl in Jedi robes practising her lightsaber fighting technique while a target remote hovered in the air in front of her. Brae was not only Jayk's padawan she was also his daughter, the result of a relationship Jayk had entered into while on an extended deployment. Although such things were not unheard of in the Jedi Order it was highly unusual for close relatives to be paired with one another as master and apprentice. The Jedi council had only assigned Brae to Jayk so that the potentially very powerful young woman could witness the abilities her family had contributed to the Jedi Order for thousands of years and both had been told that she was Jayk's niece, the truth emerging by accident later on.

"Cal helped me." Brae replied as she shut off her lightsaber and the remote and looked towards the holographic image of an older man in Jedi robes.

A distant ancestor of Jayk and Brae, Cal Udra had been a Jedi knight long before the Jedi were forbidden to marry and raise families of their own and he had taught his own sister how to use the Force. Therefore, when Jayk was tasked with training a close family member as well the council had decided that the holocron Cal had created during his life to store all his experience would make an excellent source of knowledge. In addition to his knowledge Cal had also included his own personality in the device and now an artificially intelligent version of him acted as the gatekeeper to the knowledge stored inside the holocron.

"I've built a few lightsabers in my time. Or at least helped with them." Cal said.

"Hopefully this one will last longer than my first." Brae commented, holding up the hilt of her lightsaber.

"Not running into any more pirates should help." Cal added, referring to the group of pirates that had taken Jayk and Brae's weapons from them before attempting to burn them alive.

"Funny story about that." Tylo said, smiling, "Which I'll leave your dad to tell you Brae while I go and set the

nav computer to take us to Hutt Space."

"Hutt Space?" Brae exclaimed, "But Hutt Space isn't in the Republic, we don't have any authority there. It's full of criminals."

"Yes I know, it's a wretched hive of scum and villainy." Jayk responded, "But the analysis of the transport ship we captured along with the interrogation of its pilot says that Morton Crayne is hiding there so that's where we need to go."

"What will we do when we get there?" Brae asked.

"Ah. That's where things get a little complicated." Jayk said.

"Isn't it obvious? You're going to kidnap Morton Crayne." Cal said, "Frankly I'm surprised to hear that the Jedi Order still has the guts to do something like that. Of course in my day we'd have had a platoon of freedom warriors to act as back up but since the Republic and the Jedi Order got rid of most of their armed forces that option isn't available any more."

"The Jedi aren't soldiers." Jayk pointed out.

"They're spies and kidnapers?" Cal suggested.

"Where in Hutt Space are we going? Is it to Nal Hutta itself?" Brae asked but Jayk shook his head at the mention of the homeworld of the Hutts.

"No, it's a colony on the fringes of Hutt Space called Nem Korona." he answered, "Tylo's been there before and from what he says it had no indigenous species before the Hutts arrived and now it has only a few settlements split between the control of various Hutt clans."

"That could be beneficial." Cal commented, "If Morton Crayne is being sheltered by one clan then maybe a rival one will be willing to help." and Jayk smiled as he reached under his cloak and produced a small pouch.

"That's why I've been given these." he said as he tipped some of the assorted gemstones it contained into the palm of his hand.

"For a moment I thought you were going to tell me we'd be offering the Hutts kyber crystals." Brae said, referring to the energy amplifying crystals that the Jedi used in their lightsabers.

"No. Even the kyber crystals that are too small to be used in our lightsabers and holocrons are too dangerous to be allowed out of the Order's vaults. The Hutts could do a lot of damage with even the smallest crystal. More still if they were able to examine one and find a way to replicate its molecular structure.

Conventional gemstones will have to suffice for any bribes we have to make." Jayk said.

"Are we all set?" Tylo's voice then announced over the intercom and Jayk returned the gemstones to the pouch and walked over to the intercom.

"Yes, we're ready Tylo." he said.

"Good. Then take a seat and fasten your seatbelts. The captain is turning on the no smoking sign and we're about to take off." Tylo said.

One of the Nikto guards passed a weapon detector over Morton Crayne as he stood with his arms held out to his sides. No-one was allowed into the presence of Temga the Hutt, the most powerful Hutt on Nem Korona carrying a blaster and even his own guards were limited to melee weapons while guests were expected to surrender all weapons they carried at the front door. There was no guarantee that these would be returned on departure but Temga's guards did at least guarantee that anyone who started a fight inside the palace would not get to finish it.

"Clear." the Nikto announced.

"Excellent." one of the identically dressed female Twi'leks stood behind the guards said. Morton had seen these two women most of the times he had visited the palace but he still could not tell them apart and he assumed that they were twins, "Come this way Mister Crayne." the Twi'lek woman added as she and her twin stood either side of Morton and slid their arms under his.

"We'll escort you to the great Temga the Hutt's audience chamber." the second Twi'lek added and the pair began to walk, guiding Morton through the hallways of the palace even though he already knew the way. This was another security measure, Morton knew. While most males of humanoid species would consider having one of the Twi'lek females with their long form fitting dresses on each arm a pleasing experience it also limited their movement, their own arms effectively held in place by the Twi'leks and although pushing them off would be relatively easy, doing so would alert the guard that Morton knew was following them close behind.

As befitting the palace of a Hutt the hallways were wide and even the turbolift that carried Morton and his escorts up to the floor on which Temga held his audiences was spacious. The turbolift opened out onto one last hallway before getting to the audience chamber itself and this room was lined with two rows of battle droids that stood motionless as Morton was escorted to the doors to the audience chamber itself. These swung open slowly as Morton and the two Twi'lek women stood in front of them to reveal the audience chamber beyond. This room was filled with senior members of Temga's organisation as well as prospective business partners from across the galaxy and Morton warily eyed the two individuals he noticed speaking with one of Temga's officers that wore the uniforms of sector rangers. Neither of these two law enforcement

agents paid any attention to Morton or the twi'leks as he was led through the audience chamber directly to where Temga the Hutt himself rested on a floating repulsor couch though, both being more interested in the terms of the bribes they were being offered and the drinks provided by one of the numerous serving droids in the room.

Temga the Hutt was speaking with a second, smaller member of his species that stood on the floor rather than a repulsor couch as Morton was led towards him and both were being closely attended by several females of various humanoid species.

"Great Temga the Hutt we have brought Morton Crayne to see you as you requested." one of the twi'leks escorting Morton announced and the large hutt turned towards him before beginning to speak.

A protocol droid stood beside Temga to translate his speech but Morton understood hutttese and so the droid was not needed.

"Young Morton," Temga said, the hutt being several centuries old at least and thus much older than anyone else in the room including the other hutt, "where is my ship?"

"Look Temga, I know I said I could get it back to you in twelve hours but there's been a delay." Morton said as the twi'lek women stepped back from him.

"I am not interested in your excuses young Morton." Temga said sternly, "You came here offering to pay me for shelter and I have provided you with shelter. You have asked to be able to recruit followers from the population of my world and I have allowed you to recruit. You asked to be able to conduct your business and I have permitted you to do this for a percentage so ridiculously small that it barely covers the costs of having your operation audited each month."

"Yes, you've been very generous-" Morton began before Temga interrupted him.

"Now though I hear your operation is failing. You are losing key personnel and you needed to come to me to hire transport." the hutt said and then he reached for the panel that controlled the position of his couch,

"Follow me young Morton." he added.

Temga's couch began to drift slowly towards the large balcony. The hutt made no effort to move around any of the other beings in the audience chamber, instead relying on them to get out of the way before they could be run over. Temga brought the couch to a halt near the wall that ran around the edge of the balcony overlooking the city and he waved towards some of the other dozen or so rounded towers that looked like massive elongated eggs that resembled the structure of Temga's own palace. All of these were surrounded by clusters of smaller buildings that had been constructed in a variety of styles depending on the species of the builders but the towers themselves all followed the pattern of hutt architecture.

"Do you see those towers young Morton?" Temga asked and Morton nodded.

"Yes, I see them." he replied.

"Each of those towers contains a rival of mine." Temga said, telling Morton what he already knew, "Each one contains a hutt from a clan that is just waiting for me to fail so that they can step into my place as the ruler of this world. I could have them all killed of course, I have spies in every last one but they too have their spies in my own palace and every failure they hear of gives them the opportunity to undermine me before my superiors in my clan. I took you in young Morton because you told me that you had a guaranteed source of income that you would share with me. However, since I agreed this income of which you have spoken has done nothing but deteriorate and even my most loyal and sycophantic subordinates are starting to ask why I let you stay. Why should I let you stay exactly young Morton? Why shouldn't I just have you thrown from this balcony as a warning to anyone else who fails me or thinks of trying to deceive me?"

"I have never tried to deceive you." Morton said, "It's just that the last year has been rough. I've had the jedi sniffing around and-"

"Ah yes, the Jedi Order." Temga said, "At no point did you mention that your activities were serious enough to attract the attention of the jedi."

"Okay I admit that when I first came here I didn't quite realise how seriously the jedi would take my client's operation but I promise you that you won't be put at risk. The Republic is not going to let the jedi invade a sovereign planet like Nem Korona." Morton said.

"They better not young Morton," Temga said and he waved at to of his nearby guards. Instantly both of them rushed up behind Morton and grabbed him by the arms, dragging him to the very edge of the balcony and leaning him over the wall so that he found himself staring down at the ground more than a hundred metres below, "because if they do I promise you that you won't be around long enough to see how the battle turns out."

"Okay, okay!" Morton cried out and the guards pulled him back over the wall.

"You owe me my ship young Morton. You paid for the use of it for twenty-four hours and not a minute longer. If it isn't back by then then I shall consider it sold and you will owe me for a new ship, a price I shall add on to your next scheduled tribute payment, a payment I expect in full and on time. Am I clear?"

"Like a kyber crystal." Morton answered.

"Good. Now go, I have more profitable business that requires my attention." Temga said.

Morton bowed his head slightly before he turned to leave and once again the two twi'lek women positioned

themselves beside him to escort him out of the audience chamber.
"This deal is getting worse all the time." Morton muttered to himself.

2.

Knowing that their jedi style robes would stand out prominently on Nem Korona, Jayk and Brae changed into more ordinary clothing that resembled the durable and functional style that Tylo wore. This extended as far as swapping the lightsabers that usually hung on their belts for blaster pistols, although these were not as powerful as the heavy version Tylo carried. The jedi still kept their lightsabers however, these now tucked into harnesses they wore under their jackets so that their traditional weapons would remain out of sight until they themselves chose to draw them.

"Well at least you look fashionable for once." Tylo commented as the two jedi entered the *Swift Exit's* cockpit and sat down, Jayk taking the co-pilot's seat and Brae sitting behind him.

"How long until we come out of hyperspace?" Jayk asked.

"We're almost there. Just a couple of minutes now." Tylo told him.

"And what can we expect when we get there?" Brae added, "Will we be searched?"

"Searched? Not likely. Remember kid this system is populated by beings that all have something to hide. The last thing the hutts want to do is start scaring ships away by asking to take a look around. A landing permit might be a different matter though. Since none of the hutts will vouch for us we might have to hand over some of those gemstones you brought along to be able to land." Tylo answered and then there was a bleeping sound from the flight controls, "Okay we've arrived." he said as the tunnel of light outside the ship reverted back to the stars of realspace.

Ahead of the *Swift Exit* Mem Korona itself was visible, appearing through the canopy as a dark green world marked by small, scattered oceans across its entire surface. Orbiting close to its sun, the surface temperature was too high to permit water to freeze naturally and even its poles were covered in vegetation.

"I'm picking up energy readings from the surface. Looks like there's still just a single major settlement with few smaller ones scattered around the same continent." Tylo said as he checked the ship's sensors.

"That should make finding Morton Crayne easier." Brae commented.

"What about defences?" Jayk said.

"I'm not reading a shield or any orbital weapon platforms but I think there's a warship in orbit." Tylo said.

"A warship? Are they locking onto us?" Brae asked when she heard this.

"Relax kid it's probably just a pirate ship here to offload its loot." Tylo said.

"That isn't very reassuring." Brae said.

"Take us down but try and keep your distance from that warship. But don't look like you're keeping your distance." Jayk said.

"Fly casual." Tylo said, nodding as he flew the *Swift Exit* towards the planet ahead of them.

The warship orbiting Nem Korona ignored the *Swift Exit* as it sped towards the planet but as soon as the light freighter completed its entry into the atmosphere it was suddenly bombarded with attempts at communication from the surface.

"Hey up there we've got the best docking bays money can buy. Secure and with every tool you could need for making repairs all for one price."

"Attention YT-seven hundred if you're looking to unload a cargo then we've got a deal for you."

"Forget what anyone else is telling you, my docking bays are the biggest and the best."

"Yeah and I bet your prices are the biggest as well." Tylo said out loud as he switched off the communications panel.

"Don't we need that switched on to get landing instructions?" Brae asked but Tylo shook his head.

"As long as we don't crash into anyone we'll be fine. We can just set down and negotiate a price with the ground crew foreman. Trust me all those signals were just designed to trick us into landing somewhere that no-one would think of landing if they'd seen it first."

Tylo flew the *Swift Exit* over the planet's sole city, circling overhead so that he could inspect the various landing zones visually from above and while he did this Brae studied the city's structures.

"I take it that those are hutt buildings." she said, looking at the numerous egg-like towers.

"Each one home to a slug." Tylo replied using a derogatory term for members of the hutt species.

"We're probably going to need the help of one of those slugs." Jayk pointed out, "Try and find us a docking bay close to one of the towers."

"Okay I think we've got a good one here." Tylo replied as he looked down at a cluster of hexagonal docking bays that from the air resembled the inside of an insect hive. About half of these bays were already occupied by ships similar in size to the *Swift Exit* while the others remained empty.

"Why that one?" Brae asked.

"Because there's a hutt shuttle in one of the bays." Tylo said, pointing at one of the landed spacecraft, "If a hutt trusts the owner enough to leave their ship there then it must be good. Of course it'll come with a hefty

price tag as well."

"We'll manage. Take us in." Jayk replied.

As they walked down the *Swift Exit's* access ramp Jayk, Brae and Tylo were met by an overweight twi'lek flanked by a pair of klatoonian bodyguards.

"Welcome to my docking bay." the twi'lek said, "The landing fee is five peggats and the docking fee another two peggats per day with five days payable in advance."

A huttese currency, the peggat was worth around forty Republic credits so the twi'lek was asking for approximately six hundred credits up front.

"We have these." Jayk said, reaching into the pouch that contained the gemstones and removing a number of them. Then he let several drop back into the pouch so that the twi'lek could see them more easily before he held out what he still had in his hand.

"Let me see." the twi'lek said and Jayk tipped the gems into his hand instead.

Envy.

Greed.

The twi'lek smiled for a moment as he looked at the gems but the smile disappeared from his face as he looked up again.

"I will take these in exchange for eight peggats. How many more do you have?" he said.

"Those in your hand are worth more than a thousand credits." Brae said.

"I do not care about what you say they are worth. I will give you eight peggats for them." the twi'lek responded before Jayk calmly waved his hand in front of the alien's face.

"Those will buy us our stay here." he said, "For as long as we want."

The twi'lek looked directly at Jayk and for a moment it looked as if he was about to argue the point but then he smiled instead.

"Stay as long as you want." he said before he clicked his fingers and walked away, his two bodyguards following him.

"If the rest of our stay here goes like that we should be out of here by this time tomorrow." Brae said, smiling.

"Sadly I don't think the rest of our dealings will be anywhere near as easy Brae." Jayk replied, "The hutts themselves are known to be resistant to our powers." and Brae sighed.

"I had a bad feeling you were going to say something like that." she said.

Despite Nem Korona being a hutt colony world the vast bulk of the population was made up of other species. Many of these came from species that had been dominated by the hutts since the days of Xim the Despot such as nikto, klatoonians and weequays but there were also sizeable numbers of twi'leks and humans among them as well. This mix of species made it easy for Jayk, Brae and Tylo to blend in with the crowd as they headed towards the nearest of the egg shaped towers.

"Do you really think we can count on a hutt for help?" Brae asked as they looked up at a tower on the far side of the market they had reached. Although it was difficult to judge the scales of the towers in relation to one another from the ground, especially when not all of them were fully visible, this particular tower did look to be one of the larger examples of its type in the city.

"You can if you make it worth their while kid." Tylo said, "Wave enough money at them and they'll sell you their own mothers. Though I would ask to see a DNA test to make sure they aren't scamming you and selling you someone else's mother instead."

"First things first, we need to find out which hutt lives in that tower." Jayk said, "I doubt we'll get an audience if we just ask to speak to any random hutt." Jayk then walked up to the nearest market stall and waved the stall holder towards him, "Excuse me but who lives in that tower?" he asked, pointing to the rounded building.

"You mean you don't know?" the nikto merchant responded.

"We're new here." Brae told him.

"Well in that case take my advice and stay away from that tower. That's Gorga the Hutt's palace and he's not someone you want to cross paths with if you can help it."

"So why set up your stall so close to him?" Brae said.

"Because it's a good spot for a stall. Gorga is dangerous but his clan is among the most powerful in this sector and that brings a lot of customers this way. Aren't you here to deal with the Masallik clan?"

"Yes we are." Jayk replied, "But our information about who represented it here on Nem Korona was limited. You have been most helpful." and he took a small gemstone from his pouch and gave it to the stall holder who smiled when he saw it.

"Thank you. Anything you need while you're here just ask me." he said as Jayk, Brae and Tylo turned to leave.

As they made their way through the crowded marketplace the trio were approached several times by merchants hoping to lure them to their stalls and also by individuals offering more compact goods that they could carry on their person without needing a stall and it was while one such being, a klatoonian, was

standing in front of them holding up a selection of shiny chronometers that Brae felt someone bump into her from the side.

"Hey! Watch yourself." she called out as she looked around to see a hooded figure running away through the crowd.

"Pick pocket." Tylo said and Brae checked under her jacket.

"He's got my saber." she said.

"After him." Jayk ordered but as he turned the klatoonian chronometer seller tried to block his path.

"Very good quality." he said.

"They're junk. he's in on it." Tylo said and Jayk grabbed hold of the klatoonian's wrist.

"See if you can catch him. If he realises what he's got then we're done here." he said and Brae and Tylo both nodded as they set off through the crowd in pursuit of the figure, "In the meantime you and I need to have a little chat." Jayk said to the klatoonian, "Where is he going?"

"I don't know him." the klatoonian protested.

Deception.

Jayk smiled.

"I'm good at reading people, even members of your species and I know you're lying to me. So how about you start telling me the truth or we'll find out whether or not it's true that there's no law here." he said and he drew his blaster before pressing the muzzle up under the klatoonian's jaw. This was unusual public behaviour even for world run by criminals and all around Jayk and the klatoonian other stall holders and shoppers stopped to watch what was going to happen next. On a more civilised world someone would have summoned the authorities not here on Nem Korona, "Now who is he and where will he go?" Jayk added only this time he drew on the Force as well, pushing the question into the klatoonian's mind to try and compel him to answer truthfully.

Jayk saw the klatoonian wince as he tried to resist for a few moments but in the end he was not strong willed enough to defy the jedi.

"The river!" he snapped, "There's a green shack by the bridge leading to the tower. She'll be heading there."

Jayk smiled, interested to find out that the pick pocket was a female in addition to where she was heading.

"Thank you. Though unfortunately I can't take the chance that you'll warn your partner if I let you go." he said and then he pulled the trigger of his blaster.

"No!" the klatoonian just had chance to cry out before there was a flash of blue as Jayk fired his blaster on its stun setting and let go of the klatoonian who immediately collapsed to the ground. Jayk then calmly holstered his blaster again and began to walk away while behind him the crowd suddenly closed in on the unconscious klatoonian and began to rifle through his pockets, stealing anything he had of value.

3.

Brae and Tylo kept after the thief but the crowded marketplace made following her difficult. Tylo considered drawing his blaster and taking a shot at the hooded figure but there were too many other beings in the way for him to be able to do this safely. All of a sudden the pickpocket reached a roadway and dived under a passing transport vehicle, the ground clearance of its repulsorlift field preventing her from being crushed. However, this did put a large physical barrier between Brae and Tylo and their target that she took full advantage of by ripping her cloak from around her and tossing into the road. This meant that by the time the transport had gone past she was no longer concealed under her cloak and she began to walk calmly along the opposite side of the road.

"Oh great." Tylo said when he saw the cloak blowing about in the road as vehicles passed it by, "Now how do we find him?" he added, not realising that their target was a woman.

"Quiet, let me concentrate." Brae said and she closed her eyes and reached out through the Force.

"What are you doing kid?" Tylo asked, frowning with confusion.

"My saber has a kyber crystal in it." Brae reminded him as she slowly turned on the spot, "It'll resonate in the Force so I should be able to find it that way." and all of a sudden she opened her eyes again and pointed across the road to where she and Tylo both saw a human woman walking away from them, "Her!" Brae snapped. The woman heard this shout even over the sound of the traffic and she looked around to see Brae pointing straight at her, prompting her to break into a run once more.

Jayk found a row of crude buildings along the riverbank in the shadow of Gorga's palace and among these was a shack made from sheets of metal that were painted a dull green colour that had a primitive mechanical lock on its door. Like the other areas of the city, this small part was inhabited by beings from several different species but here Jayk sensed more of them taking an interest in him than in the marketplace. However, whenever he looked at anyone they would quickly look away and Jayk could sense their fear of him so as he stood outside the shack the klatoonian had described to him he paused to look around, clearing away any observers before he walked around the shack, squeezing through the narrow gap between it and the neighbouring structure that looked even less stable than this one. Once behind the shack and out of sight of everyone nearby Jayk reached into his jacket and took out his lightsaber. There was a 'snap-hiss' as he activated the weapon and then quickly used it to cut a hole in the back of the shack that was large enough for him to crawl through before propping up the section of wall he had cut free to hide what he had done and turned on his glow rod so that he could take a look around the interior of the shack.

The building had only a single room that contained a pair of beds, a table and several mismatched chairs. In addition to this there were numerous boxes, some of which were sealed while others were open to expose the contents. Most of these looked to be cheap trinkets such as the chronometers that the klatoonian had been selling in the marketplace but others contained a variety of more valuable items that Jayk guessed were probably stolen but had yet to be sold. Picking a chair that was located as far from the door as possible, Jayk then sat down and turned off his glow rod to wait for the pickpocket to arrive.

It did not take long for Jayk to hear the sound of someone putting a key in the lock of the shack's door and he drew his blaster from its holster, pointing it towards the door. Moments later the door flew open and the pickpocket burst into the shack, closing the door behind her. The dim light in the shack meant that she failed to notice Jayk sat in the far corner and she walked across the interior of the shack to one of the beds with Brae's lightsaber in her hand, familiar enough with the interior of the crude building that she did not need a light source to avoid the furniture.

"Hello there." Jayk said, lighting his glow rod again to illuminate the interior of the shack and the woman gasped as she spun around to face him, her jaw dropping and her eyes widening when she saw the blaster pointing straight towards her.

Surprise.

Fear.

All of a sudden the door to the shack flew open again and Brae and Tylo burst into it.

"Don't move!" Tylo snapped, also pointing his blaster at the woman while Brae stood behind him with her blaster in her hand.

"Who are you?" the woman asked, looking back and forth between Jayk in the chair and Brae and Tylo by the door, "And how did you find me?"

"Allow me to demonstrate." Jayk said and he holstered his blaster and got to his feet. Then he reached under his jacket to take out his lightsaber and he held it out in front of him before activating it.

The woman flinched as the glowing blue blade suddenly extended and then she looked down at the similar weapon she was holding in her own hand, realising what it was that she had stolen.

"Kriff, you're jedi." she said.
"My father and I are jedi." Brae commented, "Tylo is a criminal like you."
"Oh please. I'm way smarter than her." Tylo protested.
"I still managed to catch you." Brae pointed out and Tylo frowned as Brae held out her hand towards the woman, "I'd like my lightsaber back by the way." she said and then she used the Force to snatch her weapon from the woman's grip, summoning it back to her own hand and the woman gasped.
"Let's start with your name." Jayk said, staring at the woman.
"Aleese." she replied and Jayk nodded.
"Very well Aleese, as I'm sure you can guess the Jedi Order has no interest in a minor thief on a planet outside the Republic but unless you want us to start going through every item in this place in search of anything we think needs returning to its genuine owner, along with an explanation of where we retrieved it from of course, you need to tell us everything you know about Gorga the Hutt." he said.
Aleese hesitated, looking nervously at each of the three strangers in her home.
"We don't have all day." Tylo said and then he turned to Jayk and added, "Let's just start letting people have their stuff back."
"Wait no." Aleese said, holding up a hand, "I'll talk."
"Good. Now what do you know about Gorga the Hutt?" Jayk said.
"Gorga's the number three hutt on the planet behind Moggo and Temga. Temga's clan has been running this planet for more than a century and the others are keen to try and dislodge him if they can." Aleese told him.
"So if someone came here looking to hide from the republic they'd have to go to this Temga then?" Brae commented and Aleese nodded.
"Yes." she replied, "Temga doesn't want to attract the attention of, well of you so he makes sure that his people approach all new residents. Partly to shake them down but also to find out what sort of risk they pose to him."
"Sounds like Temga's the one we should be approaching." Brae said.
"No. If Crayne's being protected by Temga then he's the last one who'll give him up." Tylo responded, "On the other hand a rival may want to make him look weak and foolish by letting someone he promised to keep safe be kidnapped from his own planet."
"Agreed." Jayk added as he got back to his feet, "Gorga sounds like our best hope."
"And if he won't help?" Brae asked.
"Then we'll try another of the hutts and if that doesn't work we'll keep trying hutts and their henchmen until we find someone who will help us." Jayk answered.

There were no guards outside the door of Gorga's tower but the armoured blast door was monitored by several very obvious holo cameras and several small sealed hatches set into the walls that it was necessary to walk between to reach the blast door which offered firing points for guards inside the tower.

"So do we just knock or what?" Brae asked but before either Jayk or Tylo could respond one of the small hatches in the wall just above the levels of their heads opened and a mechanical eye stalk emerged.

"Who approaches the palace of the great Gorga the Hutt?" a droid's voice demanded.

"My name is Jayk Udra and this is my partner Tylo Kurrast and servant Brae." Jayk said, pointing to Tylo and Brae in turn, "We are licensed bounty hunters and wish to request an audience with the mighty Gorga the Hutt to discuss a business matter."

The eye stalk promptly retracted back into the wall and the hatch closed behind it, leaving the trio standing outside the blast door with no idea of what was going to happen next.

"I don't think they're going to let us in." Tylo said.

"Perhaps we should have offered a bribe up front." Brae suggested before there was a rumbling sound and the blast door slowly rolled upwards to reveal a pair of wookies armed with large vibroaxes standing either side of an incredibly slim human male significantly shorter than both Jayk and Tylo.

"Please come with me." the human said, "You may keep your weapons but anyone who draws one in the presence of the great Gorga the Hutt without his permission will die slowly."

"I don't doubt it." Tylo commented, looking at the two wookies as they snarled back at him and bared their teeth.

Jayk, Brae and Tylo all followed the human servant into the tower while the wookies positioned themselves behind them. They remained in these positions as the the two jedi and Tylo up to the audience chamber of Gorga the Hutt. In Gorga's case this was a large circular room that had the centre open to the level below so that the gathered guests could watch Gorga's prisoners fighting for their lives against a mix of gladiator droids, wild beasts or even one another depending on the whims of the slug-like hutt who sat on the far side of the arena and laughed as a slave within it tried in vain to avoid a gladiator droid armed with a whip that crackled with energy as it circled the unfortunate individual.

"Jayk Udra and Tylo Kurrast my lord Gorga." the human announced, bowing in front of Gorga, "They are

bounty hunters."

"Are you collecting or delivering?" Gorga asked, his words translated from huttese by the archaic protocol droid that stood beside his throne.

"We seek information on a target." Jayk announced and he held out his datapad with a file image of Morton Crayne shown on the display. The image was a mug shot that had been taken many years ago when he had been arrested for a minor offence but it was still a good likeness for his current appearance, "His name is Morton Crayne and we have tracked him to this world. We think that Temga the Hutt might be hiding him." "We've heard that Temga is your enemy." Tylo added.

"Yes, Temga is my enemy." Gorga responded after a brief, deep laugh, "His clan also rules this planet so why should I want to anger him?"

"Because if he cannot protect those he has given sanctuary to then Temga and his clan will look weak." Jayk said and Temga began to laugh again.

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

"We also offer payment." Jayk said and he reached for the pouch on his belt. This movement prompted several of the nearby guards to raise their weapons, not wanting to be caught off guard if Jayk instead tried to draw the blaster that was prominently displayed on his hip. Jayk paused for a moment before he continued to move his hand slowly to the pouch where the bag of gems was kept, making it obvious that he was not going for the weapon. Of course none of the guards knew of the lightsaber hidden under Jayk's jacket that he could have plucked from its holster and ignited before any of them could have got off a shot. Opening the bag, Jayk then proceeded to pour the contents into his hand, making sure that Gorga could see them, "Readily convertible into any currency across the galaxy." Jayk added.

Gorga waved to the human that had escorted Jayk, Brae and Tylo to the audience chamber and the man walked up to Jayk and picked a single bright blue gemstone from his hand before examining it using an electronic magnifier he took from his pocket that also told him the weight and molecular structure of the gem. "Sapphire." he said, "One point two Coruscant Standard Carat." and then he returned the stone to Jayk's hand.

"I offer five stones like that one in exchange for the location of Morton Crayne." Jayk said.

"Morton Crayne is worth ten." Temga replied and Jayk smiled.

"The bounty on him is not much more than that. Perhaps we should try elsewhere." he said and he began to tip the gemstones from his hand back into the bag.

"Dad, what are you doing?" Brae whispered.

"Bounty hunters don't go throwing their money around kid. In fact they keep their wallets closed tighter than a hutt's vault." Tylo whispered back to her.

It was only when Jayk turned his back on Gorga that the crime lord spoke again and his droid translated for him.

"Perhaps five will be enough." he said, "Though I will want to chose which five myself."

"I think we have a deal great Gorga." Jayk said, smiling as he turned to face the hutt again.

4.

"Mister Crayne there's someone here to see you." one of the inhabitants of Nem Korona that Morton had been able to tempt into his service said and Morton looked up from the datapad on which he was studying various antiques he had been commissioned to obtain for his client.

"Do they have a name?" he asked.

"Yes sir, she's says she's called Aleese."

"And what does this Aleese want?"

"She says she has information that is important to you personally."

"Oh and let me guess, she wants paying for this." Morton said, "Oh well, show her in. I could do with some entertainment." and he tossed his datapad on the desk in front of him as he waited for Aleese to be shown in,

"Ah, you must be Aleese." he said when his subordinate showed Aleese into the office and he poured out a drink for himself, "What brings you here today?" he asked.

"You're in danger." Aleese told him and Morton shrugged.

"That's nothing new." he said before downing his drink in one.

"I'm serious. There are people here hunting for you."

"Then they can deal with Temga the Hutt. he's guaranteed my sanctuary as long as I keep up my payments."

"I don't think these jedi and this Tylo guy are going to care." Aleese said just as Morton was picking up the bottle again and he suddenly froze.

"Tylo? Tylo Kurrast?" he said.

"I didn't catch his second name. All I know is that he's called Tylo and he's with a pair of jedi. An older guy and some young girl who claims to be his daughter but I don't see how that can be right." Aleese said.

"How do you know this?"

"I stole the lightsaber from the girl but they caught up with me. Then they asked me about the hutts and that Tylo mentioned your name. I figured that if I came and warned you then you'd make it worth my while."

Aleese said and Morton smiled.

"And what exactly do you expect in exchange for this information that you've already given me for nothing?" he said.

"I want in." Aleese said, "I'm sick of looking over my shoulder all the time and I want the protection that comes with being part of a bigger organisation even if I'm at the bottom. I've shown you I'll look out for you and since I managed to find you, you know I'm resourceful. Plus stealing from a jedi must count for something."

"Nothing counts if you get caught doing it." Morton said, "But then again I am always looking to recruit good help so take a seat and drink a toast with me."

"Sure, why not?" Aleese said and she sat down opposite Morton while he poured them both a drink.

"To a long and profitable working relationship." Morton said, raising his glass as he studied Aleese's appearance more closely and taking note of her attractive features that made him think that while he continued to work on seducing his client he might be able to distract himself with Aleese instead.

The location of the building where Morton Crayne and his gang were operating out of was not a secret among the hutt clans, each of which took great pains to make sure that each other knew which buildings were under their protection. For one hutt to strike directly at the holdings of another would invite a response that could easily escalate into a full blown war between the clans on and close to Nem Korona. However, there was nothing in the unofficial rules that the rival clans operated under to say that they could not provide information about a rival to a third party who might then chose to attack them and so one of Gorga's men accompanied Jayk, Brae and Tylo to Morton's location and identified the building to them.

"He's in there. Him and his men. That is all I was ordered to show you." the nikto guide said, pointing to a squat structure that looked to have been built purely for functionality before he calmly wandered off leaving the others on their own to study their target. The structure's slab sided walls tapered slightly towards the flat roof on which an antenna array was clearly visible.

"Looks like Morton's got his own private subspace communication array." Tylo said.

"Think it's holonet capable?" Brae asked.

"I wouldn't be surprised." Jayk replied, "I doubt he'd want the delay of ordinary subspace communications in dealing with whoever he is gathering these artefacts for. It would be nice to be able to capture the array intact. That way we could use it to determine who that is without worrying about Morton's co-operation.."

"I don't like the idea of that Jayk." Tylo said, "As it is we're going to have to try and get Crayne back to the *Swift Exit* before Temga can send anyone to help him out. A subspace communication core would only be more weight to carry."

"Then we focus on Crayne but we need more intelligence about this place." Jayk said, "We know he is in there but we don't know anything about the layout or how many men he has in there with him. We need to split up and observe the building from different directions. I suggest that I maintain a watch from here while you two-

"Why are you sending us off together?" Brae interrupted, "I can carry out surveillance just as well as either of you can."

Tylo winced, knowing that Jayk was concerned for his daughter's safety in this city and that she would consider herself able to take care of herself. Having witnessed Brae in action, including having been overpowered and arrested by the short statured teenager when they first met this was something that Tylo was inclined to agree with.

"You two can chose other locations." Jayk said, "Try to make sure that we cover all sides between us and take note of any entrances no matter how insignificant they may look. Also watch the roof. Morton's men must have some way of maintaining that subspace array so there is probably an entrance up there that we cannot see. Any questions?" he added and neither Brae nor Tylo said anything, "Good. Then let's go and may the Force be with us."

Morton sat at his desk as he watched the feed from the concealed camera that showed where Jayk, Brae and Tylo were discussing their plans after Gorga's guide had left them. The system lacked an audio pick up that could determine what they were saying from such a distance across a busy street and Morton did not have access to lip reading software that could have given the same information. However, when the trio of Republic agents split up Morton guessed that they were still at the stage of planning their attack and wanted further information before launching it and from Morton's point of view this gave him an opportunity. After transferring the footage to his datapad Morton got up from his chair he left his office and made his way to a room where a group of half a dozen of his men were relaxing, four of them sat around a table playing sabacc while the other two maintained their weapons.

"Time to earn your pay." he told them and he tossed the datapad onto the table with the footage running on a loop, "Three targets. The older guy and the girl are jedi while the third is my old friend Tylo Kurrast. All of them are outside right now and you're going to go out there and deal with them. Tylo I want bringing back alive but the jedi you can kill or just drive off. You'll have to co-ordinate your attacks to make sure they aren't alerted beforehand."

"There aren't enough of us to take down two jedi at the same time, even without grabbing this Tylo guy as well." one of his men responded.

"Are you brain dead?" Morton said, "You don't need to take them down. All you need to do is make sure they can't come after us in here. Hit them from a distance. If you get lucky maybe you'll kill one or even both of them but if as is more likely they manage to survive then they'll probably do so by using their powers and that will identify them to everyone nearby. How do you think the people here on Nem Korona will react to finding jedi in their midst?"

"They'll tear them apart." the other man said, smiling as he realised what Morton's plan really was.

"Exactly and while the jedi are trying to deal with an angry mob they won't be able to come to poor Tylo's aid. Now get your gear together and get outside and deal with them."

5.

Remembering what Jayk said about the likelihood of there being a way into Morton's stronghold on the roof Brae searched several nearby buildings for an access point to their roofs until she found a ladder mounted on the wall of one that she began to climb. About three quarters of the way up the ladder she came across a rung that was rusted almost all the way through and she was careful to skip over this as she made her way to the top of the ladder and climbed onto the deserted roof of the building. Up here she made her way towards the edge of the roof and took a set of compact macrobinoculars from inside her jacket before training it on Morton's stronghold.

Brae's viewing angle was enough that she could see most of the roof of Morton's stronghold, except that part that was obscured by the subspace antenna array. However, this was not much of a problem for Brae since the hatchway from the roof into the building was visible from her position. This was a basic square hatch set into the level surface of the roof that lacked any form of control mechanism that Brae could see, suggesting to her that either it was controlled from the inside only or that it had to be opened by manually moving the hatch.

All of a sudden Brae heard the sound of twisting metal from behind her and she spun back around towards the ladder she had used to gain access to this roof where someone had obviously just tried to put their weight on the damaged rung. Brae was just in time to see a hand appear as someone reached up to pull themselves from the ladder and she darted across the roof to a nearby vent that was large enough to enable her to hide behind. Returning her macrobinoculars to their case she was about to draw her lightsaber when it occurred to her how using the weapon would risk alerting the local population to the presence of jedi on Nem Korona and she drew her blaster instead as she peered around the vent she was hiding being to watch as the person on the ladder climbed onto the roof.

The individual was a human male who clutched a blaster in one hand as he looked around the roof. Then he waved over the side of the roof and a second man appeared, this one with a long barrelled rifle slung across his back that he unslung as soon as he was clear of the ladder. Although Brae suspected that these two men worked for Morton Crayne she could not be certain that they had not simply come from inside the building she was stood on to investigate her presence here and so she held her fire as she waited to see if their actions would betray their purpose.

There were several obstacles on the roof that would offer Brae a hiding place and the man armed with a blaster pistol began to creep towards the closest of these while the man armed with a rifle held his position and covered him. Watching this, Brae felt in her pockets for something that she could throw and found the spare power cell she was carrying for her blaster. Taking this out she tossed it across the roof so that it struck another vent that neither of the two men was facing. The impact produced a hollow 'clang' that attracted the attention of the two men, prompting them both to spin around towards it.

"She's over there!" the rifle armed thug exclaimed as he fired and the other man also shot his pistol towards the other vent. Both shots struck the vent, punching through the lightweight sheet metal that it was made of. This was enough for Brae, not only had both men fired without warning but the sniper had also indicated that he knew that it was Brae on the roof by specifically referring to her as 'she' and she leant fully around the vent and fired her blaster at the man armed with the rifle.

Brae's shot was on target and she hit the sniper in the shoulder. This spun him around and he overbalanced, dropping his rifle as he fell over the edge of the roof. The combination of shot and scream made the other man turn around again and he saw Brae behind the vent.

Danger.

Sensing the shot before it was fired, Brae dived back out of sight moments before the first of his two rapidly fired shots blew holes in the vent above her. Knowing that if the gunman continued to fire at the vent then eventually one of his shots was bound to hit her Brae jumped back up and burst out of her hiding place, firing back at the man as she moved. However, her aim while moving was not as good as it was while stationary and the gunman was able to dodge out of her line of fire before taking cover behind a piece of machinery that came up through the roof from the inside of the building below.

Brae took advantage of the gunman being unable to see her to run towards his position, her instinct being to attack at close range even though she was not using her lightsaber in this instance. She did not fire as she ran and this encouraged the gunman to reappear, leaning around the machinery and pointing his weapon towards Brae as she closed with him. Before he could fire Brae reached out her hand and using the Force she plucked his blaster from his grip and sent it flying over the side of the roof.

Panicking the gunman broke and ran, heading back towards the ladder from the roof as fast as he could. This made him an easy target but Brae held her fire, hoping to capture him alive and she came to a halt so that she could adjust the setting on her blaster to 'stun'. This gave the man the chance to get close to the

ladder and he was just about to grab hold of the top rung when Brae fired again and the blast of bright blue energy hit him in the back, causing him to collapse on the spot just out of reach of the ladder. Keeping her blaster trained on the unconscious gunman just in case he recovered the stun much faster than was expected, Brae took out her comlink and raised it to her mouth. "Dad, Tylo, I've just been attacked by two men with blasters. One had a pistol and the other a rifle. They seemed to know where I was so there could someone coming after you as well." she signalled to the two men.

Still stood on the same street corner Brae had left him on, Jayk looked around and tried to pick out who in the crowd might have been sent by Morton Crayne to attack him. The problem was that on a hutt controlled world like Nem Korona most of the population were involved in some form of illicit activity that they did not want those around them to know about and this meant that Jayk could not just call upon the Force to try and sense the deception in the minds of his would-be assassins. Fortunately the Jedi Order gave its members instructions in more mundane methods of determining if they were under surveillance and thinking back to these lessons Jayk began to walk down the street, picking a direction at random. Jayk walked to a junction and then turned the corner before continuing to walk about half way down the street at which point he came to a halt and turned around suddenly. This prompted a brief insult from an alien that almost walked into him but Jayk ignored this as he studied the other beings now walking towards him, paying special attention to anyone who was armed with anything bigger than a sidearm. After a short time he then set off again, heading back the way he had come and turning the corner again so that Morton's headquarters came back into view. It was then that Jayk stopped once more and turned around again, drawing his blaster and holding it down at his side as he watched the individuals coming around the corner. A number of them noticed the weapon and glared at him angrily, some moving their hands towards weapons of their own until they were sure that he was not about to target them. This continued for just under a minute before a pair of men that Jayk recognised as having walked past him earlier came rushing around the corner with their weapons, a pistol and a rifle drawn.

"Kriff!" one exclaimed as he saw Jayk standing right in front of them, "He's here."

The man armed with a rifle started to bring up his weapon but before he could point it towards Jayk the jedi reached out and grabbed it by the barrel, pulling it past him so that it could not be fired at him. At the same time he swung his pistol at the man's face so that the butt of the grip stuck his nose and there was a spurt of blood as his head jerked backwards sharply.

At the same time the second man was lifting his blaster pistol and Jayk turned towards him, keeping his grip on the other thug's rifle so that he was dragged between Jayk and his comrade right as the second man opened fire. The shot hit the rifle armed man in the back and he gasped as he collapsed in a heap, the rifle clattering to the ground as well as Jayk released his grip on the weapon. Having just shot his own partner in the back the second man stared down at the body in shock and during this brief pause Jayk pointed his own blaster at the man and shot him from point blank range.

With his blaster still in his hand Jayk looked around again, studying the faces of the crowd that had backed away from the brief fight to see how they would react.

"It's a private matter." he said before bending down to pick up the dropped blasters, slinging the weapon over his shoulder and tucking the pistol into a pocket as he walked away and left the crowd to pick over the bodies.

Tylo also decided that it was better not to be caught stationary and he started to walk in the direction he had seen Brae go in earlier.

"Hey kid can you see me?" he transmitted using his comlink.

"Yes, I see you." Brae responded from her rooftop vantage point.

"Good. Then guide me towards you and let me know if you can spot anyone following me." Tylo said and Brae took out her macrobinoculars again before she began to study the beings around Tylo, watching to see how they reacted as he moved.

"Cross the street right there." Brae told Tylo and she saw him suddenly dash across the road, resulting in the sounding of numerous speeder warning klaxons. Brae doubted that there were traffic laws to prevent someone from simply mowing down pedestrians on Nem Korona but she also doubted that anyone operating a vehicle would want it damaged by hitting a person at any speed," Good, now head down the alleyway to your left until you find the ladder up to the roof I'm on. Watch it through, one of the rungs is a bit rusty."

"Thanks kid I'm on my way up." Tylo responded, running towards the alleyway. However, before he got to the entrance there was a flash of blue from across the street as a stun blast was fired towards him. Fortunately the blast did not make it as far as Tylo, instead striking the side of a landspeeder that was completely undamaged by the non-lethal energy pulse. additionally, in opening fire one of the two men assigned to capture Tylo gave away his position clearly.

"Tylo, eight o'clock. Human male in green coveralls." Brae exclaimed and Tylo turned, bringing up his own

rifle to his shoulder and he found himself facing a man who was in turn pointing a blaster rifle back at him. The difference was that Tylo's weapon was set not only to deliver a lethal blast but also to fire sustained bursts and Tylo squeezed the trigger and held it down to fire a stream of energy blasts at the gunman. The suddenness and fury of Tylo's response caught the gunman by surprise and he had no opportunity to take cover before he was cut down while around him other passers by scattered and vehicles came to sudden stops to avoid being hit by any of the blaster fire. Tylo then continued towards the alleyway while Brae watched from the rooftop and she spotted the second gunman sent after him rush up to his fallen comrade and pick up his dropped rifle. However, before Brae could send a warning to Tylo there was a single shot from further down the street that hit the gunman as he was taking aim and he too fell dead. Turning towards the source of this, Brae saw that Jayk had appeared with the rifle he had taken now in his hands. "Dad, I'm up on the roof." Brae signalled and she waved towards Jayk so that he could identify her position and he too rushed across the street towards her.

When Jayk and Tylo arrived on the roof Brae pointed out the hatch on top of Morton's headquarters.

"Looks like we have a way in without needing the front door." she said.

"We still need a way over there." Tylo pointed out, "We can't exactly go setting up a ladder on the street and if either of you two use your powers to get us onto that roof then everyone's going to know that there are Jedi here."

"Cal." Jayk said and both Brae and Tylo looked at him, "Cal is hooked up to the *Swift Exit's* control systems isn't he?" he added.

"Sure." Tylo replied, "But he can only make basic manoeuvres."

"That's all he'll need." Jayk said, "He can lift off, follow our comlinks as a beacon and then we can guide him down to pick up. After that he just carries us across there and then circles until we call him back."

"That sounds simple enough." Brae said but Tylo frowned.

"I don't know." he said, "I've got a bad feeling about this."

6.

"Mister Crayne we've lost all contact with the men sent to bring back Tylo and drive off the jedi." one of Morton's men exclaimed as he burst into Morton's private quarters just as he was tugging at Aleese's shirt while they sat on his bed and kissed.

"Stang!" Morton hissed as he pulled away from the young woman, "Can't anyone do anything themselves? Okay, so what do we know?"

"There's been firing outside but we don't know who's been hit."

"Obviously not Tylo or the jedi or we'd have heard back from the team I sent out there by now." Morton said and he got to his feet and crossed the room to where a cabinet was stood against the wall, "Get everyone that's left and make sure they're ready inside the main door. Oh and guard the underground entrance as well. If the jedi caught any of the team then they may have told them about how they were able to sneak out of here." he added as he opened the cabinet to reveal a selection of weapons of assorted types, "Do you know how to use one of these?" he asked, looking at Aleese and she nodded.

"It's been a while." she said.

"Never mind, it'll come back to you." Morton said and he tossed her a blaster pistol and a pair of power cells, after which he reached into the cabinet again and took out a much different weapon for himself. Slug throwing firearms were considered archaic by most of the galaxy but Morton knew that they could still have their uses and so he made sure that he had a few of them on hand just in case. The weapon he selected was among the more advanced types of firearms before they began to be replaced by magnetic accelerator weapons and the primitive forerunners of modern blasters. It was a compact automatic weapon that was fed from a magazine inserted into the hand grip and could be fired single handed like a pistol or like a short rifle by extending the stock and bracing it against the shoulder. Tylo knew that the jedi could deflect blaster bolts with their lightsabers but he had heard stories from long ago that there was little they could do against a concentrated hail of bullets and he decided that there was no time like the present to put that theory to the test.

"We're clear, pull up." Jayk said into his comlink as he landed on the roof of Morton's headquarters after Brae and Tylo.

"Okay I'll circle and wait for your signal." Cal responded from inside the *Swift Exit's* cockpit and the ship rose back into the air as Jayk, Brae and Tylo ran towards the hatch Brae had seen from the neighbouring roof. Unseen from the streets, the jedi were able to wield their lightsabers openly and without even trying the hatch to see if it was locked Jayk cut through it with two quick strokes of his blade before jumping down to the bottom of the ladder exposed beneath it.

"Clear." he said and Brae jumped down behind him.

On the other hand Tylo climbed down the ladder as quickly as he could though this was still considerably slower than the time it took the two jedi to jump.

"Show offs." he said as he unslung his rifle, "So now where?"

"I sense the largest concentrations of people below us." Brae said and Jayk nodded.

"Though whether Morton is with them is another matter." he said before looking at Tylo.

"Crayne's no coward." Tylo said, "He could be with his men on the front line or he could be waiting to see what we do before he tries to ambush us."

"Then we attack the closest group and see if that will draw him out." Jayk said.

The group then began to search for a way down to the structure's lower level, moving slowly to avoid revealing their presence before they were ready. They soon found a set of stairs that spiralled down to the floor below and crept down these as well with Jayk leading the way.

When he was most of the way down the stairs Jayk came to a stop and held up his hand for the others to do the same.

"What's wrong?" Tylo whispered.

"They're right ahead. Less than ten metres from the bottom of the stairs." Jayk answered softly.

"You know if I had a few grenades then we could clear them all out in one go." Tylo commented.

"Yes and likely blow Morton Crayne to pieces in the process." Jayk pointed out, "Brae, you and I will engage them directly while Tylo covers the rear."

"Yes master." Brae said, nodding.

"Fine by me." Tylo added and all of a sudden Jayk and Brae charged the rest of the way down the stairs and along the hallway towards the small group of armed men covering the door that led to the hidden underground exit.

"Jedi!" one of the men called out as soon as he realised that they were there and he spun around and

opened fire with his blaster but Jayk simply swatted each energy blast out of the air before any of them could hit him before unleashing a telekinetic blast that pushed the man back into two of his comrades.

Waiting with Aleese and another of his men Morton heard the sounds of blaster fire before his comlink activated.

"They're in the building! They're in the-" someone shouted before the transmission was suddenly cut off. "That came from the underground exit. One of our team must have talked." Morton said and he started to move towards the source of the shooting, bringing his weapon up to his shoulder. Meanwhile Aleese was shoved by the other man.

"Come on," he said, "this is what you signed up for." and then both of them followed Morton, Aleese starting to have second thoughts about the wisdom of trading her previously unpredictable life as a petty thief for the supposed security of membership of a gang.

Familiar with the layout of his headquarters, Morton was able to move quickly towards the entrance to the tunnel and as he got close he heard the all too familiar humming sound of lightsabers in addition to the sound of blasters being fired. Turning the final corner before the sounds of fighting Morton suddenly leapt back again when Tylo spotted him and instinctively fired his rifle.

"Crayne!" Tylo called out as he switched his weapon to its stun setting before the man accompanying Morton leant around the corner to fire back at him. Fortunately the energy blast went wide and struck the wall opposite Tylo, giving him the chance to fire again and his shot hit the man, rendering him unconscious instantly.

Meanwhile behind Tylo Jayk plunged his lightsaber into the last of the men that had been guarding the underground tunnel and both he and Brae turned to face the direction Morton was approaching from.

"Morton Crayne you are under arrest." Jayk shouted out as he and Brae advanced along the hallway. Danger.

"Down!" Brae snapped as she sensed the tremor in the Force ahead of Jayk and both jedi threw themselves to the floor just as Morton leant around the corner and there was the roaring of projectile fire as he sent a stream of bullets towards them.

"Holy kriff!" Tylo exclaimed and he ducked back into the staircase, "Who uses slug throwers nowadays?"

"Aleese come on!" Morton ordered as he advanced around the corner and fired his weapon again just as Jayk and Brae were getting back to their feet to continue their advance and once again they were forced to take cover behind vertical supports running down the hallway.

Tylo risked another shot as Morton was forced to cease fire in order to reload but he missed the gang leader, merely forcing him to take cover further down the hallway. However, his attack did give Jayk the chance to rush forwards, charging straight at Morton just as he took aim again. Waving his hand Jayk tried to knock Morton's weapon from his hand using the Force but he was only partially successful. Morton was able to keep hold of the weapon but it was knocked aside and he inadvertently fired a sustained burst of bullets into the wall opposite him in the hallway. Jayk could not maintain his hold on the slug thrower and Morton turned it back towards him, pointing it straight at his face just as Jayk closed to within striking distance with his lightsaber and he pulled the trigger.

The weapon went 'click' as the firing pin fell on an empty chamber and Morton's eyes widened as Jayk smiled at him.

"Perhaps you should reconsider using a weapon with such a limited ammunition capacity." Jayk said and then he punched Morton in the face hard enough to knock him to the floor.

"Dad look out." Brae warned him and Jayk looked around to see Aleese standing at the end of the hallway with a blaster in her hand that was pointed at the floor.

"Hello there." he said to her, "We have what we came for so ask yourself, is Morton Crayne worth risking your life for?"

Aleese shook her head, dropped the blaster and then ran back around the corner, disappearing from view.

"Come on," Jayk said to Brae and Tylo as he shut off his lightsaber, "we should be getting back to Coruscant with our prisoner before any more of his men can arrive."

He and Tylo then picked up Morton between them before dragging him back up to the roof where Brae took out her comlink.

"Cal we're ready for a pick up." she transmitted.

"Understood. I'm on my way back down." Cal responded and the *Swift Exit* began to descend from the sky above.

As soon as the ship touched down on the roof Brae ran up the access ramp, followed by Jayk and Tylo as they continued to drag Morton between them and Brae closed the ramp behind them.

"We're in. Get us out of here." Brae said into the intercom.

"Hold on to something." Cal responded and the *Swift Exit* lurched as it suddenly rose back into the air just as the first of Morton's remaining men emerged from the rooftop hatch and fired into the air in a futile attempt to stop the ship from escaping.

"So what do we do with him now?" Tylo asked, looking down at Morton Crayne as he sat on the floor of the *Swift Exit's* hold with blood still pouring from his nose.

"Secure him." Jayk replied, "The jedi council will have a lot of questions to ask him when we get back to Coruscant."