

STAR WARS

DARKNESS RISING

3-12: OFFERS & AGREEMENTS

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Now under arrest, Morton Crayne still seeks revenge against the man who seized control of his gang from him, but the only way he see of getting this is to hand Teron Sharr to the jedi...

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1.

Jayk and Brae Udra watched the prisoner on a monitor screen. In the room with the two jedi were an officer from the sector rangers, the Republic's interstellar law enforcement body, a prosecutor with a protocol droid programmed for legal work and a lawyer from the Republic's public defender's office.

"You've reviewed the deal I take it?" Jayk asked the defence lawyer and the man nodded.

"I have but I don't think Mister Crayne will accept it even if I do recommend it to him." he said.

"Why wouldn't you?" Brae said, the teenager frowning as she asked the question.

"Because I don't know if it's a good deal or not. Crayne will confirm his identity to me but that's it. He won't discuss any of the charges he's facing so I don't know what he plans to offer in his defence." the defender replied, "He wants to be able to contact his own lawyer."

"Fat chance." the sector ranger said suddenly, "Give that sleemo access to a transmitter and his associates will be going to ground all across the galaxy."

"Taking this case to court while he's refusing his assigned counsel is going to be difficult." the prosecutor added, "Even if the jury doesn't buy that he's being railroaded we're setting ourselves up for years of appeals."

"Then let's just tell him what evidence we've got." Jayk said, "It will have to be presented to the defence before trial anyway."

"Jedi Udra," the droid said, "need I remind you that there are a number of court rulings that affect the admissibility of evidence gained by jedi using their powers?"

"Oh I don't intend asking him any questions at all. At least not ones relevant to having him prosecuted."

Jayk said and then he picked up the datapad on which the pleas bargain to be offered to Morton Crayne was displayed and marched out of the room, heading straight into the interrogation room where Morton sat.

"Jayk Udra." Morton said, smiling at the jedi and then he glanced at the doorway as Brae followed Jayk into the room, "Oh and Brae Udra. Your niece as well as your padawan. Or is it your daughter? I hope you aren't here to try and use your powers on me. That sort of thing would not go down well in court."

"Morton Crayne," Jayk said as he sat down opposite Morton and pushed the datapad across the table to Morton's side, "you have been brought to Coruscant to stand trial for among other offences murder, assault, kidnapping, theft and the possession and transportation of forbidden Sith artefacts. The case for every one of these charges is backed up by physical evidence and witness testimony that make coercion unnecessary. However, you do have something that we want more than seeing you rot in prison for the rest of time."

"Oh really? What would that be?" Morton said.

"The location of Teron Sharr." Jayk responded and Morton smiled.

"Ah that little nerf herder. Having a rogue jedi-" he began before Brae interrupted him.

"He's no jedi knight. He's Force sensitive but that's it." she said.

"Touched a nerve there I see." Morton commented, "Jedi or not, having him running around using the Force for personal gain must be pretty embarrassing to the Jedi Order. You're supposed to be able to keep people like him in line after all."

"If you read the deal we're offering then by pleading guilty to the charges presented and giving us the location of Teron Sharr then your sentence will be capped at twenty standard years." Jayk said.

"And if I plead guilty but Teron's not where I tell you he is?" Morton asked.

"If you lie to us the deal is off." Jayk told him.

"Now why would I lie? I've enough reason to want Teron dealt with to give him up. I just don't want to lose the rest of my life because he decided to up and move his hideout to somewhere I don't know about. It's been a year since we parted ways after all."

"You mean since he took over most of your gang and forced to you run off to hutt space?" Brae responded and Morton glared at her.

"Teron's on Undara Besh. About sixty kilometres south east of a settlement called Udarran's Point in the Makran Barrens. It's well hidden though, so you won't be able to spot it from the air." Morton said unexpectedly and Jayk and Brae looked at one another in surprise as he pushed the datapad back across the table towards Jayk, "But you can keep your deal. The charges won't stick so there's no way I'm pleading guilty to any of them. I've been in this game too long to fall for a legal trick like that. Tell the prosecutor I'll see him in court and tell that public defender I want a real lawyer."

With a possible location for Teron Sharr's hideout given to them Jayk and Brae returned to the jedi temple to address the council.

"Undara Besh is a strange choice for a hideout." Grand Master Ress said as he read Jayk's report, "It's inside the Republic which means we are free to operate there."

"Actually it's a pretty good spot if you ask me." the man standing beside Jayk said. This was Tylo Kurrast, the captain of the YT-700 class freighter *Swift Exit* who had previously been employed by Morton Crayne to transport his people between systems. Now thanks to a plea deal of his own he acted as a pilot for Jayk and Brae while they investigated the missing artist Thal N'Krey who had mixed a number of Sith artefacts into his work before his mysterious disappearance, "The system is close enough to several major hyperspace routes to be able to take advantage of them but sparsely populated enough that there are plenty of places for someone to hide."

"Been there you have?" Master Yoda asked.

"Me? Once or twice. yes. In fact I dropped some of Morton's people off there once. I just figured they were using it as a transfer point. I didn't think I was right on his doorstep or I'd have mentioned it when I was arrested. I bet the deal for that would have been better than what I got."

"Morton could not confirm that Teron would have stayed on Undara Besh." Jayk said, "I suggest that we travel there immediately to see if his information is correct. If it is then we'll judge the strength of his forces and report in."

"I agree." Grand Master Ressa said, "Teron Sharr's skills demand that we act swiftly but if you feel that his forces are too strong then wait for reinforcements. No go and may the Force be with you."

When Krovak entered the room that had once been Morton Crayne's office he found Teron Sharr sat cross legged in the centre of the room with a burning torch hovering in the air above his head. Teron had explained the exercise to Krovak once, using the fear of the pain that the flames would inflict on a Force user if their telekinetic hold on the torch slipped and it fell onto them to draw strength from the Dark Side of the Force. Beyond Teron, standing where she could see the entrance to the room was a woman called Mara Tosk. Like Krovak, the expert thief Mara had been a member of Morton Crayne's gang before Teron had taken it over but unlike Krovak she had remained loyal and she had only come into Teron's service after she was abducted and an eel-like creature engineered by the Sith had been placed inside her body to control her mind. Now her ordinarily pale coloured eyes were entirely black and she acted more like an animal trained to be utterly loyal to Teron than a sentient being.

Most of the room's furniture had been removed by Teron who now used the space to practice the skills taught to him by his master who appeared to him only as a hologram via the hideout's communication system but there was still a cabinet filled with drink at the side of the room and Krovak made his way towards this, watched by the possessed Mara but ignored by Teron. The contents of the cabinet had been put there while Morton Crayne had still been in charge and most were of the highest quality, far more expensive than anything Krovak would think of buying for himself at a cantina. Krovak selected a bottle of Corellian Whisky and poured two glasses before he looked at Mara.

"I don't suppose I can tempt you can I?" he asked but she just hissed at him, "Thought not." Krovak added and he picked up the drinks and turned to face Teron, "Come on, let's toast our good fortune." he said.

"What good fortune would that be?" Teron asked without looking at Krovak.

"Haven't you heard? Morton Crayne got arrested. It seems that a Jedi assault team tracked him to hutt space and raided his hideout. Word is they slaughtered his men and dragged him out of there screaming." Krovak said and he held out one of the drinks.

With a wave of his hand Teron triggered a localised gust of wind that was enough to put out the burning torch before he waved his hand back in the other direction and the torch itself was thrown into the corner of the room.

"The Jedi are weak." he said as he got to his feet and approached Krovak, "Too weak to take part in a slaughter of anyone, no matter how deserving of it they may be." then as he took the drink Krovak was offering him he added, "However, I can believe that Morton Crayne showed himself to be even weaker and allowed himself to be captured by them." this prompted a momentary smile from Krovak, remembering how he had had to rescue Teron when a group of Morton's men led by Mara had captured him with the intent of taking him back to face Morton. Teron then gulped down the drink and looked at Krovak again, "We must be prepared for the consequences."

"Consequences? Morton's going to spend the rest of his life behind bars and Mara's firmly under your control now. The only consequence I see is that we've no more competition for finding all that ancient stuff your boss keeps sending us for." Krovak replied and then he took a sip from his drink.

"Precisely and with Morton out of the picture we have two problems. One is that now that they are not being distracted by having to locate Morton Crayne as well the Jedi are now free to concentrate their efforts on tracking us down. Secondly there is Crayne himself. He knows where we are based and he may try to trade this information to the Jedi Order for his own advantage." Teron explained and then he looked towards where Mara stood watching both him and Krovak, "Or maybe even just for revenge for what he lost to me."

"You think it's time to move on?" Krovak asked.

"Not yet. I will consult with my master about other potential sites for us to set up our headquarters but until we are threatened the location of this moon holds too many advantages for us to simply give it up." Teron

answered.

"So we just sit and wait then?" Krovak said.

"Not quite. Send men to the settlements. I want to know the instant the Jedi or the Republic get here. In the meantime I will consult with my master." Teron said before he left the room, Mara following close behind him. Teron then made his way to a small chamber where a holographic communication system was set into the floor and with Mara standing behind him still he knelt down and bowed his head.

"Master." he said and moments later the image of a humanoid figure, his face hidden by the hood of the robes he wore materialised.

"Speak Teron." the figure said.

"Master, Morton Crayne has been taken by the Jedi. He knows our location and will probably surrender it to them in exchange for favourable treatment." Teron explained.

"Ah, so you fear an attack." the hooded figure replied.

"I consider one possible. I do not fear it." Teron answered.

"Then why come to me? You know I am not in a position to assist you fight them."

"Because the Jedi may come in overwhelming numbers and we may have to withdraw. I want your advice on where we should retreat to. I want somewhere safe where the Jedi will not find us. Somewhere I can grow my powers." Teron said.

"Ah, you seek one of the ancient places of power, a nexus of the Dark Side. Yes, there are a number of these scattered around the galaxy but the Jedi know where most are and they watch them closely."

"Most but not all?" Teron asked.

"There may be some that have escaped their notice, yes. Very well. If you are forced to leave your current location by the Jedi I will guide you to the nearest nexus and you can determine for yourself whether it is safe or not. I warn you though, being forced to withdraw is one thing but deliberately fleeing is another. You are not worthy of replacing me if your first instinct is to flee from danger. We are Sith. We are not cowards." the hooded figure said and then it faded away to nothing.

2.

Jayk, Brae and Tylo sat in the cockpit of the *Swift Exit* as the ship dropped out of hyperspace in the Undara system. The planet Undara itself was a massive gas giant orbited by a large system of moons and rings. "Undara Besh is on the far side." the fourth individual in the cockpit said. Cal Udra had been a jedi knight thousands of years earlier and had stored all his experience in a holocron, including a virtual recreation of himself as its guardian and now he acted as an advisor to Jayk and Brae, "I've looked it up in the archives and it looks like a dreary place."

"Is the atmosphere breathable?" Brae asked.

"Oh yes, the moon is big enough to maintain an atmosphere, though the gravity is a little light and the length of day is somewhat erratic thanks to it spending so much time in the shadow of the planet it orbits." Cal said.

"Morton mentioned settlements." Jayk said.

"Yes, it seems that the moon has been inhabited since before my time so obviously there's something down there to interest some beings." Cal replied.

"I've got the co-ordinates for these Makran Barrens locked in." Tylo said and he curled his lip, "Barren seems like the right word as well. Little surface water and even less vegetation. Not exactly the sort of place anyone would stay without a very good reason."

"Take us around the planet." Jayk told him, "Let's get a look at this moon for ourselves."

Tylo took the *Swift Exit* into orbit around the gas giant, placing it at an altitude and heading in a direction that would bring Undara Besh into view as quickly as possible. When the moon did appear over the gas giant's horizon it had a multicoloured appearance with the dark green of jungles near the poles while a wide band around the equatorial region was pale brown. There were only a few bodies of open water on the moon large enough to be visible from this distance but those that were added a dark blue colour to the surface.

"I'm not picking up any beacons other than a pair navigation satellites." Tylo said, "I think we just land where we want."

"Then do it." Jayk said, "Locate Udarran's Point and land as close as you can."

Tylo nodded as he steered the *Swift Exit* towards the moon, aiming for the settlement close to the equator and the ship soon entered the atmosphere without receiving any form of challenge from the surface or other vessels nearby.

The settlement known as Udarran's Point was built on the edge of a cliff that overlooked what looked to be a large dry lake bed. Most of the visible structures looked to have been built from the same modular construction units, giving them a uniform look as the *Swift Exit* flew overhead. Tylo made a full pass over the settlement, approaching from the opposite side to the so that when the ship reached the far side of the settlement the ground beneath dropped away suddenly.

"I wouldn't say there are many landing spots." Brae commented, not having seen a single other starship or airspeeder on the ground.

"And I wouldn't be so hasty kid." Tylo responded as he brought the *Swift Exit* around to face the settlement again, this time approaching it from the cliff side. This revealed that the settlement in fact extended over the side of the cliff with numerous platforms attached to the side of it, the structures built on these having the same modular appearance as those on the level ground at the top of the cliff. More importantly though, several of the platforms had large open areas on them that from the vehicles already present had obviously been set aside as landing platforms and in the absence of any instructions to the contrary from the ground Tylo flew the *Swift Exit* towards one of these, "This looks as good a place as any to land." he said, extending the ship's landing gear and setting it down on the platform and as he shut off the ship's engines he added, "Okay, let's go meet the locals."

"No." Jayk said, "Brae and I will go. You stay here in the ship."

"What for?" Tylo asked, frowning, "It's not like I'm going to try and join-"

"Some of Teron's gang might be here and some of them probably know you from when you all worked for Morton Crayne." Jayk pointed out, "I want to be able to take a look around without being recognised if at all possible so for now you need to stay out of sight." then he turned to Brae, "Come on Brae, we're going for a walk."

There was no-one to meet Jayk and Brae as they disembarked from the *Swift Exit* and they immediately made their way towards the cliff itself where numerous tracks for open topped turbolift cars had been set into the rock.

"Part of this settlement is underground." Brae commented when she saw a door set into the cliff and Jayk nodded.

"Perhaps whatever drew the original settlers here is down there but for now that is not important." he said

and he pointed to one of the turbolift tracks where an empty car was already waiting, "We'll take that car up to the top and start asking questions." he added.

The turbolift took the two jedi all the way to the top of the cliff without stopping and it was here that they encountered the first of the locals. The settlement had a reasonably sized population but the streets were not crowded, enabling Jayk and Brae to walk around freely. However, they could see nothing that suggested the presence of a powerful gang of criminals led by a student of the Dark Side. As far as they could tell the settlement was a peaceful place, with few of the inhabitants carrying any sort of weapon openly.

"It doesn't look like these people are afraid of being attacked by Teron's gang." Brae said as she studied the locals carefully.

"No it doesn't." Jayk agreed and then when a droid marked with a gold coloured star and the word 'SHERIFF' on its torso casing came walking around a corner he added, "In fact I'd say that law and order are maintained quite well here."

Jayk then began to walk towards the droid, beckoning for Brae to follow him. The droid halted as the two jedi walked right up to it and it studied each of their faces in turn.

"How may I assist you citizens?" it asked.

"We want to speak to someone in charge." Jayk told the machine.

"Please define the term 'someone in charge'." the droid replied.

"Who gives you your orders?" Brae asked.

"I have standing orders to enforce the by laws of Udarran's Point." the droid answered and Brae looked at Jayk, "Dad, this is getting us nowhere. Let's try a real person instead." she said.

"Wait one moment." Jayk said and he looked at the droid and asked, "Where are you based?"

"The sheriff's workshop is located in Triggan Square in the administration building." the droid said.

"Good and how do we get there?" Jayk said.

"Take that street there. It will take you straight to the square." the droid said, pointing to a street that led further away from the cliff and Jayk looked at Brae, "There you are. We just needed to find the right question to ask."

Leaving the droid to continue its patrol Jayk and Brae made their way through the settlement to the administration building that was located in a large open square at the centre. This building was made from the same modular construction materials as most of the others in Udarran's Point and was identified only by a large faded sign mounted above the main entrance that read 'ADMINISTRATION' but other than that there was nothing to indicate where the sheriff's workshop was located and so the two jedi simply entered through the main door. Inside the building they found themselves in a large hallway that had a list of room assignments on several large boards mounted on the wall beside them while the reception desk opposite to this stood empty.

"The sheriff's workshop is listed as being on this floor in the blue sector." Jayk said and he and Brae both looked down at the floor to see lines of different colours heading off in different directions.

"I guess we just follow the blue line then." Brae said and then she frowned.

"What's wrong Brae?" Jayk asked.

"I was just wondering why the sign says sheriff's workshop. Why not sheriff's office?" Brae replied.

"The sign could just be incomplete." Jayk suggested, "But we can ask when we get there if you wish."

Brae nodded and then they set off, following the blue line marked on the floor. This guided them through the building until they reached a section where the walls themselves had a blue band running around them about a metre above the floor.

"The blue sector I presume." Jayk said and then he noticed a door that was marked with the same sort of star that had been painted on the droid and the word 'WORKSHOP' written above it in the aurebesh alphabet, "And that looks like the workshop we are looking for."

Jayk then walked up to the door and pressed the button for the intercom. However, rather than the intercom activating the door simply slid open.

"Come on in." a voice called out from inside the room beyond the door and both Jayk and Brae stepped through the open doorway.

It was immediately clear to both of them why this was referred to as the sheriff's workshop rather than an office. Parts of droids and the equipment needed to keep them running were scattered everywhere while a row of a dozen machines identical to the one the two jedi had encountered in the street stood in charging booths at the far end of the room. A young human male stood beside a workbench in the centre of the room, leaning over another droid that lay outstretched on it, probing its internal systems.

"So what do you want?" the technician asked without looking away from the droid.

"Your undivided attention if you don't mind." Jayk said and the technician sighed as he turned around.

"There? Is that better?" he said and then he frowned as he looked at Jayk and Brae, "Hold on, are you two jedi?" he asked.

"My name is Jayk Udra and this is my padawan Brae." Jayk answered, nodding.

"Well I'm Trae Nordan. What are you doing here?" the technician said, reaching out to shake hands with

each of the jedi in turn.

"Looking for the sheriff." Brae said.

"Well, err, that's me I suppose. I mean it's my job to keep the droids running." Trae said.

"The entire sheriff's department is made up of droids?" Jayk asked and Trae nodded at him.

"Yeah, Cybot Galactica mark six enforcement droids. Just over forty of them in total." he said.

"How do droids like this investigate crime?" Brae said.

"Wow you really don't know much about Undara Besh or Udarran's Point do you? Basically most of the crime here consists of petty theft and damage with the odd drunken brawl among labourers in the caverns thrown in. The droids can take care of all of that quite nicely. The farming companies have their own security units to look after their crops and on the odd occasion we get something more serious then the council will bring a detective in from Denniter City." Trae explained.

"Crops?" Brae commented.

"We gather spice here." Trae told her, "Every few months we get massive rainstorms and that soaks into the lake bed and from there into the caverns underneath us. This feeds a type of fungus that grows on the walls that is harvested for spice when it starts to dry out after the rain. Of course the farming companies do their best to make sure that no-one gets near their product who shouldn't."

"So who would we ask about gang activity here in Udarran's Point?" Jayk asked and Trae shrugged.

"There isn't really any. A few kids sometimes, but that's about it." he said.

Jayk reached under his cloak and took out his datapad, using it to bring up images of Morton Crayne, Mara Tosk and Teron Sharr before handing it to Trae.

"So you don't know anything about these individuals then?" he said.

"I remember this one and this one." Trae said, pointing to the images of Morton and Mara, "The other one's not familiar though. I think they had some place out in the desert. Every now and again some of their people come into town for supplies and sometimes they get into trouble. One of these two would often come to bail them out and be mad as hell about it. But it must be well over a year since I last saw either of them. We still get the people coming into town for supplies but it's someone else that comes to bail out any trouble makers." and he handed the datapad back to Jayk.

"So you've never investigated who these people were?" Brae said.

"Hey young lady, my job is just to keep the droids running. If the council cared about who these people were then it would be up to them to decide what to do about it. But they cause no more trouble than any other group so they get ignored."

"If they are normally ignored then perhaps they won't be watching for be followed." Brae suggested.

"You're suggesting that we wait for them to come to town and follow them back to their lair?" Jayk said.

"Yes master." Brae replied, smiling.

"A reasonable plan of action." Jayk said and he looked at Trae, "We will need your assistance in identifying suspects to tail." he told the mechanic.

Members of Teron's gang were preparing an assortment of weaponry, primarily a variety of blasters but there were also several melee weapons and grenades in the mix as well when the door to the room slid open and another gang member ran into the room.

"Teron, they're here!" the gang member exclaimed.

"Where?" Teron replied.

"Udarran's Point. Their ship landed there about an hour ago and I came right here to warn you. The others are still keeping an eye on them."

"We better make sure our defences are in place." Krovak said, looking at Teron.

"I'll leave that to you." Teron said.

"What will you be doing?" Krovak asked and Teron turned towards the nearby Mara.

"I think it's about time that we found out exactly what our new friend is capable of." he said and Mara grinned, bearing her teeth.

3.

"So what have you learned?" Tylo asked when Jayk and Brae returned to the *Swift Exit* while he was sat eating in the lounge while he watched a sport broadcast on the large video screen he had installed at the Jedi Order's expense.

"That this place could do with a Republic peace keeping force." Brae responded.

"Really? Everything seems calm to me." Tylo said.

"The locals have a habit of doing the bare minimum to upholding the law." Jayk said, "There is a police force but it is made up entirely of droids while there is no localised investigative force."

"Sounds like my kind of town." Tylo said, smiling, "No wonder Morton chose to put his hideout near here."

"He may also have been after the spice." Jayk commented."

"Spice? What spice?" Tylo said.

"That's what they do here, harvest a type of fungus from the caverns inside the cliff that's used to create spice." Jayk told him.

"Okay, so what about finding Teron and his gang?" Tylo said.

"We spoke with the mechanic that maintains the sheriff's department droids. He's going to let us know as soon as they spot any known gang members." Jayk said.

"Then we grab them and make them talk?" Tylo said, smiling.

"Not quite. Then we follow them until they lead us back to their hideout." Jayk replied and the smile vanished from Tylo's face.

"A shame, I was hoping-" he began before Cal's hologram appeared.

"We've got a video message coming in and I think you ought to see it." he said.

"Put it on the screen." Jayk said.

"You can watch your game when we've vanquished evil." Brae commented when she saw Tylo frowning at being interrupted.

The sports feed on the large screen changed to a lower resolution image that was obviously the visual feed from one of the sheriff's department droids patrolling Udarran's Point. The droid was focused on a cluster of beings walking along the other side of the street and each of them had been tagged with a still image that in all but one case had been taken from a mug shot when the individual concerned had been arrested for some offence. The exception to this was a woman whose image was a screen capture from another video recording, taken when she had come to bail out some of the other gang members after their arrest.

"What the hell is she doing here?" Tylo said when he recognised Mara Tosk among the group.

"I thought she was supposed to be loyal to Morton Crayne." Brae said.

"She was. Obviously that has changed recently." Jayk replied.

"Do you notice that they're all armed?" Tylo pointed out, "I've got a very bad feeling about this."

"So do I." Jayk replied, "I think that we had better prepare to defend ourselves. Cal, can you get in touch with Trae Nordan in the local administration building? Tell him we may be need of further assistance."

"I'm on it." Cal said and his image promptly vanished.

"So what now?" Tylo asked, "Do we wait for them to try and break in?"

"No. We can't be certain that that is what they will try. They could be carrying explosives to attack the ship directly. I think concealing ourselves on the landing platform would be a better idea. with any luck we'll be able to make this work for us." Jayk replied.

"How?" Brae asked.

"Simple. Once they start to retreat we let them, following them back to their base of operations." Jayk answered.

"Okay, just give me a minute to grab my rifle." Tylo said as he got up and rushed from the lounge, heading towards the cabin they all shared.

The *Swift Exit's* crew emerged from the ship with their weapons held at the ready, aware that Teron's gang could reach the landing platform at any moment. Last out of the ship, Brae turned to close the access ramp behind her when all of a sudden she felt a tremor in the Force.

Danger.

"Down!" she snapped and all three of them threw themselves to the platform just as a shot from a blaster flew over their heads and struck one of the *Swift Exit's* landing struts.

"Sniper!" Tylo hissed, "I see him over there by that generator." and still lying prone he aimed his rifle towards the gunman and fired several shots in rapid succession.

"They must have been watching the ship since we landed." Jayk said, "Tylo keep that sniper pinned down while Brae and I circle around behind him."

"Pinned down? I'm going to put a blast through his head if I can get a clear shot." Tylo said before firing

another shot in the direction of the generator.

Both Jayk and Brae activated their lightsabers as they got back to their feet and broke into a run, heading in the general direction of the generator but not following the direct path along which Tylo was firing his weapon. Tylo was not fully successful in preventing the gunman from returning fire and another pair of blaster bolts came from behind the generator, heading towards the two running jedi. Jayk used his lightsaber to deflect this and the first energy blast flew off over the dry lake bed while he was able to send the second back roughly the way it came so that it struck the near side of the generator.

Seeing that the jedi were attempting to flank his position, the gunman retreated behind the generator and fired around the other side instead but Jayk and Brae had already reached the safety of a stack of empty parts containers and although this latest burst of blaster fire ripped one of these apart the jedi remained unharmed.

"He's seen us." Brae said and Jayk nodded.

"We attack together but from different angles." he said and he looked up at the top of the stack, "How quickly can you climb this?" he asked and Brae smiled. She then shut off her lightsaber and scaled the stack of cases, coming to a halt just before she reached the top. Looking back down at Jayk she nodded.

"Ready when you are." she said.

"Go!" Jayk exclaimed and Brae quickly pulled herself up onto the top of the stack of crates at the same time as Jayk burst around the side and charged straight towards the gunman who at this point was once again pinned down by fire from Tylo. The former smuggler ceased fire as he saw Jayk charging towards the gunman and Brae leap from the top of the crates to land about half way between them and the generator. This allowed her to approach from a different angle than Jayk, ensuring that the gunman would not be able to bring both of them down with a single sustained volley of fire from his weapon and she reactivated her lightsaber as she ran just in case the gunman chose to fire at her.

The gunman chose to focus his fire on Jayk, firing several shots in rapid succession that the jedi deflected using his lightsaber. While Jayk was defending himself from the attack Brae was able to get closer and she leapt into the air, using the Force to boost her leap and enabling her to land on top of the generator the gunman was using for cover before jumping down again to land behind the gunman. He reacted by spinning around to face her but as he did so Brae struck, swinging her lightsaber at an angle so that she cut across his chest and he let out a brief scream as he collapsed and his blaster fell to the platform with a clatter.

"Brae search him." Jayk told her, "Tylo, you and I need to check the platform to see if there are any more."

"Got it." Tylo responded as he got up.

The open area of the platform used as a landing field was dotted with refuelling and maintenance equipment as well as abandoned parts and cargo crates like the ones Jayk and Brae had used for cover and each of these had to be checked to make sure that no-one was hiding behind any of them, waiting to ambush the crew of the *Swift Exit*. Meanwhile Brae went through the pockets of the dead gunman, looking for anything that would give a clue to his identity or where he came from. What she found painted a picture of a habitual criminal, with a knife in addition to spare power cells for the blaster rifle and also a packet that contained what Brae guessed was an illegal narcotic of some kind as well as a small pipe used for smoking it. Then when she checked a pocket she found on the inside of the dead gunman's jacket she found something more useful, a comlink and after checking that it was set to receive only she turned the device on.

"We're on our way down now." Brae heard a voice saying and then she heard another more familiar one respond.

"Good. Just remember to stay out of Mara's way." Krovak said, "Teron will make sure she does what he needs her to do."

Hearing this Brae looked up, turning towards the cliff face itself and she saw a turbolift car descending towards the platform with a group of armed people inside it. Brae could not identify any specific individuals from this distance but she guessed immediately that this was the group from Teron's gang sent to attack the *Swift Exit*. Worryingly Brae could also sense a strong concentration of Dark Side energy inside the car.

"Dad! Tylo!" she called out and she pointed upwards towards the turbolift car coming down towards them, "Above us!"

Almost as soon as Brae called out her warning there was the flash of blaster fire from the turbolift car as one of the occupants fired over the edge and several energy blasts struck the platform not far from where Tylo was standing in rapid succession.

"Hey! Why pick on me?" Tylo cried out as he ran for cover. Then, crouching behind a refuelling unit he returned fire on the turbolift car. However, having already used his rifle in its automatic mode to suppress the gunman watching the *Swift Exit* the weapon's power cell was almost depleted when he opened fire and he soon found himself having to reload.

While Tylo was firing on the turbolift car both Jayk and Brae ran towards where it would arrive at the platform, standing with their lightsabers held up in front of them. Tylo ceased fire just as the turbolift car was nearing the platform and several of the occupants now took the opportunity to fire over the side at the jedi.

Fortunately most of them had weapons capable of semi-automatic fire only and this limited the number of

shots that Jayk and Brae had to defend themselves against. Jayk was able to angle his lightsaber just right so that one of the shots aimed at him went back at the turbolift car, angled to take into account its movement and the gang member who had fired the shot screamed as he was hit and then again as he tumbled over the side of the car, bouncing down the turbolift track past the platform to his death at the bottom of the cliff. Another of the gang leapt over the side of the turbolift car as it was slowing down and landed on the platform. Holding a blaster pistol in each hand he yelled at Jayk as he fired them both together and ran across the platform, heading for a small shed that Jayk had found to be empty.

"Kriff you jedi!"

Ordinarily Jayk would have stood his ground against a man with a blaster pistol, but by firing two weapons simultaneously this gunman made it far more difficult for Jayk to deflect his attacks with his lightsaber and so he also broke into a run, heading for a rusting ion engine not far from the hut the gunman was making for. When he reached the defunct machinery Jayk took a moment to catch his breath while he heard the sound of blaster bolts striking the other side, unable to penetrate it. Then he peered around the engine to check on how Brae and Tylo were doing. It seemed that the gang members had split into three small groups with three of them heading for Brae and two for Tylo. Meanwhile if the man with two blaster pistols was counted a total of four were coming after Jayk and he noticed that one of them was armed with a scatter shot blaster, a weapon that fired several independent blasts of energy at the same time on slightly different trajectory. This made the weapon almost impossible to block with a lightsaber and Jayk knew that this man was the one he needed to deal with above the others.

Then he noticed something strange. Behind the three groups of gang members Mara was still stood by the turbolift car and he could sense the Dark Side of the Force around her in a manner normally only found in individuals sensitive to it.

The other gang members remained more of an issue though and Jayk turned his attention back to them. Noticing that their path towards him would bring them past a cluster of drums marked 'HIGHLY FLAMMABLE' Jayk extended a hand towards the drums and used the Force to drag as many into the path of the charging men as he could and in the process they toppled over, spilling their contents onto the platform. Jayk then stepped out from behind the ion engine and the gunman behind the hut fired at him again, this time with just one blaster. This was all Jayk needed, however and when he used his lightsaber to deflect the blast he directed towards the spilled liquid. This was already in the process of evaporating and as the deflected energy blast passed through the fumes it ignited the entire pool, creating a sudden ball of flame that consumed the three men rushing towards him and leaving him facing just the man behind the hut.

"Whoa. Hardcore." Tylo said when he felt the sudden rush of heat from the flames before he rolled out of the line of fire of the man who had fired down at him from the turbolift, now charging across the platform at him with a second gang member as well, "Stang, I really need to get hold of some grenades." Tylo muttered as he crouched behind a repulsor cart. Then he leant over the lightweight vehicle and returned fire with his rifle still set to automatic and both of the men charging towards him fell, one of them dead while the other screamed in pain and clutched at the blast wound to his leg. He could still fire the pistol he was armed with though and he waved it towards Tylo and pulled the trigger repeatedly, spraying out energy blasts at random. Tylo took cover again, letting the blaster fire pass by him for a few seconds before he suddenly leant around the side of the cart and fired another burst. With the injured gang member immobilised, Tylo knew exactly where he would be and this minimised the time he need to spend aiming before the volley struck the gang member repeatedly and he convulsed as each shot hit him before slumping sideways.

Across the platform Brae was already close to cover and she dived behind the generator that the dead man at her feet had used for cover earlier, hoping it would protect her better than it had him. The three gang members heading towards Brae did not come charging right up to her, however. Instead all three found cover behind equipment left behind by previous visitors to the platform and began to fire at the generator, keeping Brae pinned in place while Mara began to advance from the turbolift in Brae's direction as well.

Brae sensed Mara's approach from her unusual presence in the Force, surrounded by the Dark Side and when the men firing towards her suddenly ceased fire Brae peered around the side of the generator just in time to see Mara break into a run. Brae stepped out from behind the generator and brought up her lightsaber, expecting Mara to deploy some sort of weapon at any moment so it came as a complete surprise when the woman charged all the way up to the padawan and dived at her, passing beneath Brae's lightsaber and grabbed her around the waist as the pair of the fell to the platform and landed in a heap. It was right as she was tackled that Brae noticed not only Mara's pallid appearance but also that her eyes were now nothing but solid black orbs in their sockets and this strange appearance distracted Brae for a few moments. On the other hand Mara needed no time to recover before she lashed out and knocked Brae's lightsaber from her hand, sending it skidding away from them both. Then she used her other hand to grab Brae around her neck and began to choke her. In turn Brae used her free hand to grab Mara's wrist, gripping it tightly as she tried to break her grip but in doing so something expected happened.

In focusing all of her attention on Mara, Brae inadvertently caused their minds to connect through the Force. Normally such a thing would give a jedi a snapshot of what the other person was feeling or thinking about at

the time but in this case the reaction was far different. The blackness of Mara's eyes dispersed, leaving them their normal colour and Mara gasped as she looked down at Brae, her feelings easy to sense through the Force.

Fear.

"Help me. Please." Mara said.

4.

Sat alone in Morton Crayne's former office Teron felt his connection to Mara break at the moment Brae grabbed hold of her wrist.

"No!" he snapped, "You can't have her. She's mine." and he snarled as he focused his mind on the Sith engineered parasite inside Mara's body, channelling as much of his power to it as he could. Then he smiled as he sensed Mara returning to his control.

Brae watched as Mara's eyes darkened just as quickly as they had become normal, returning to their solid black appearance as Teron was able to re-exert his control over her using the Sith parasite. Teron did not want to risk losing control of Mara again though and so he had her release her grip on Brae and get back to her feet. Then she turned and started to run back towards the turbolift car. Brae also got to her feet and she ran after Mara, catching up to her after just a few metres and she wrapped her arms around the possessed woman. Mara responded by elbowing Brae and the teenage jedi released her grip and fell back to the platform.

Meanwhile the other remaining gang members saw that Mara was retreating and they began to fall back, firing last defiant volleys from their weapons before they too started to run.

"Brae are you okay?" Jayk called out as he rushed over to where his daughter was picking herself up off the platform again and she nodded.

"I'm fine." she replied.

"Kid are you okay? You went down hard from the looks of it." Tylo added as he too came running towards her.

"I'm fine." she repeated.

"Well we better get moving if we want to be able to follow them." Tylo said and he looked at the turbolift car that was now ascending towards the top of the cliff once again.

"Actually no we don't." Brae said with a smile.

"Brae, what have you done?" Jayk asked.

"When I tackled Mara I stuffed the comlink I took from that dead guy over there into her pocket. I set it to transmit a homing signal that we can follow." Brae answered.

"Hey, nice work kid." Tylo said.

"But there's something else." Brae said, "About Mara. There's something wrong with her and I don't think that she just defected to Teron's gang of her own free will."

"What is the state of our defences?" Teron asked when he emerged from his meditation chamber.

"Weapons have been checked and I think there's not a single power cell or grenade left in the armoury."

Krovak replied, "I take it Mara failed then."

"She did. She almost had the padawan when that little rancor cow was able to disrupt my hold over her somehow." Teron told him.

"She broke your control?" Krovak said in surprise. Although he had experience with only a handful of Sith artefacts the way the eel-like parasite that had been inserted into Mara had been described to him, he had not thought a victim could ever be freed.

"Only for a few moments but it was long enough for Mara to resurface. I took back control and ordered her to retreat before the jedi could do anything that would permanently cost us Mara's servitude. She's on her way back here with the other survivors of the attack and I expect the jedi to find us as well. We need to be ready for them."

Krovak nodded

"It's just a matter of figuring out where you're going to put everyone." he said.

"Outside. We need to engage the jedi at a distance and bring as much firepower as possible to bear on them. We'll split the gang into two groups. I'll command one and you the other. You'll have to suit up." Teron said and Krovak smiled.

"I was hoping you were going to say that." he said.

"Before you do I need to know about our plan for withdrawal. Have you checked the ship?" Teron asked.

"I've started up the computer and its running its preflight checks now. At what point will you give the evacuation call signal?" Krovak responded.

"If we're forced to fall back to the hangar. I'll make sure there are good defensive positions set up to enable us to launch before the jedi can get to us while you go and get suited up." Teron said and Krovak turned around and walked away. He made his way through the corridors of the base to his own quarters and once inside he began to remove his clothing as he approached what looked like a set of ancient plate armour

propped up in an alcove alongside a sword hanging on the wall beside it. Walking right up to the armour, Krovak reached out and took the chest plate from the frame supporting it and pressed it against his bare chest before he slammed a fist against the centre of the crystalline design worked into the front. The moment he did this the crystals that penetrated all the way through the armour burst out of the inside and pierced Krovak's skin. Krovak then roared in pain as the power of the Dark Side flowed through the crystals and into his body. Then, breathing heavily and snarling because of the pain he reached for the next piece of the Sith armour.

"This would have been easier if you'd made a note of the frequency the comlink was set to when you planted it on Mara." Cal said as all three of the *Swift Exit's* living crew sat in the cockpit while he and Jayk searched through the multitude of communication channels in search of the comlink beacon signal.

"I was pushed for time." Brae replied defensively, "I couldn't just use the frequency it was set to or Teron's gang members would have picked it up on their own comlinks so I just pushed down on the frequency adjust without watching and activated the beacon mode."

"The benefits of modern communications." Tylo commented, "Thousands of possible channels and still nothing to hear."

"Wait, I think I may have something." Cal said suddenly, "Jayk try channel one-one-three-eight."

"Got it." Jayk replied and all of a sudden as he adjusted the *Swift Exit's* short range communication frequency and then a regular bleeping sound was heard over the cockpit speakers.

"That's coming from the south east, just like Morton told you." Tylo said as he compared the signal pattern with the *Swift Exit's* passive sensors to confirm the direction it was coming from, "From the strength I'm reading I'd say they had about a ten kilometre head start on us."

"They must have had a vehicle close by." Brae said and Jayk nodded.

"If their hideout is as far away as Morton said then they'll need one. Sixty kilometres is far too far to walk there."

"Hiring a speeder will just increase their head start." Tylo pointed out and Jayk nodded again.

"Take us after them Tylo." he said, "Keep our altitude high so we can stay out of sight though."

"Just what I was thinking." Tylo said as he took hold of the flight controls and started to bring the *Swift Exit's* repulsorlift engines on line.

Lifting up off the platform attached to the cliff face, Tylo flew the *Swift Exit* away as he gained altitude and then circle back to fly over Udarran's Point in the direction taken by the survivors of Teron's gang. Tylo kept an eye on the ship's sensors, watching for the familiar energy pattern of a repulsorlift field, while he continued to gain altitude to avoid being observed from the ground. Travelling much faster than a landspeeder could, it did not take long for the *Swift Exit* to catch up with Mara and the other survivors of the attack at the platform, at which point Tylo began to circle around the vehicle.

"I don't think they've seen us." he said.

"Good. Keep following them. They're leading us right to their hideout." Jayk replied.

"They're back." Krovak said to Teron as the pair stood in the entrance to the hideout's hangar when he saw the landspeeder approaching them. Behind them there were four small transport ships in the hangar and also several repulsorlift vehicles, the largest of which could carry a dozen beings the same size as a human being. Outside the ship the entire gang had been split into small groups located in a variety of fortified position

"Yes and they're not alone." Teron said, looking up into the sky and he raised a set of macrobinoculars to his eyes. The macrobinoculars were powerful enough to be able to observe starships in orbit so picking up the *Swift Exit* as it appeared between the clouds was a simple endeavour and Teron smiled when he saw the shape of the ship he had once been aboard, "Bring them down."

Responding to the order from Teron, a gang member climbed out of a slit trench set up not far from the hangar entrance with a bulky tubular weapon that he lifted up onto his shoulder and aimed skywards. The concussion missile launcher was fitted with a heat seeking guidance system that took only a few seconds to lock onto the *Swift Exit's* engines, the passive sensor ensuring that the crew could not detect the lock. Then there was a flash and a sudden 'whoosh' as the concussion missile burst out of the launcher and sped towards the *Swift Exit*.

5.

"Incoming!" Cal snapped as the launch of the missile showed up on the *Swift Exit's* sensors.

"Everyone strap in. I'm going to cut in the auxiliary power. That might give us the boost we need to dodge this thing." Tylo said.

"What about countermeasures?" Brae asked.

"This isn't a starfighter kid. The only countermeasure we've got is how fast I can turn us out of that missile's tracking arc." Tylo replied as he performed a sharp turn through ninety degrees. However, the missile was able to match the turn and it continued to close with the freighter, still homing in on its exhaust.

"Turn faster." Brae said.

"I'm doing it as fast as I can but the engine's can't handle it." Tylo said.

"Too late." Jayk added and just then the entire ship was severely rocked as the missile slammed into it and exploded on impact.

The cockpit was immediately filled with alarms as numerous systems began to shut down.

"We're losing engine power. We're going down." Tylo said.

"Can we get back to Udarran's Point?" Brae said.

"Kid we'll be lucky not to explode on impact." Tylo said, "Now hang on because this is going to be rough."

"Well shouldn't we just eject?" Brae said, knowing that the cockpit of a YT-700 like the *Swift Exit* doubled as an escape pod.

"We're going down too fast. We probably wouldn't be able to pull back up in time if we ejected." Tylo replied as he struggled to keep control of the plummeting freighter.

With the *Swift Exit's* repulsorlift engines failing it was almost impossible to control the ship's descent.

However, Tylo was still able to angle the ship's nose so that it landed on its ventral hull then bouncing across the desert. This repeated itself several times, each impact shaking the vessel and its occupants roughly until the ship finally came to a stop.

"Is everyone okay?" Jayk said, looking around the cockpit.

"All in one piece over here." Tylo said, "I can't say the same thing about the *Swift Exit* though."

"Well at least we didn't explode." Brae said, "That's a good thing, right?"

"They say any landing you can walk away from is a good one." Jayk said, "But I doubt that Teron and his gang are done with us yet. They'll want to make sure that we're dead."

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

A plume of dust marked where the *Swift Exit* had come down and Teron looked through his macrobinoculars, hoping to see the crashed freighter but it had landed out of sight.

"I'll get the men ready to move out. We'll need to make sure that they're dead." Krovak said and Teron lowered his binoculars.

"No." he said simply.

"What do you mean 'no'?" Krovak asked.

"It doesn't take us all to find that out. Send one man only. He can take a speeder bike to survey the wreckage and then come back and tell us what happened to the Jedi." Teron answered.

"And if they're alive? What can one man do?" Krovak said.

"He doesn't have to do anything. The Jedi will come to us." Teron responded.

"Automated fire suppression handled the worst of the blaze," Tylo said as he emerged from the wreck of the *Swift Exit* while Jayk and Brae were sorting through supply containers to see what resources remained to them, "and thanks to some amazing piloting the superstructure survived the impact. Or impacts if you count all that bouncing."

"Don't get cocky." Jayk replied, "We are still in a vulnerable position."

"Maybe so but at least once we've got ourselves out of this vulnerable position we'll be able to have the ship recovered and repaired. I take it that the Jedi Order will be covering the cost as usual?"

"Don't worry, you'll get paid." Jayk said.

"Good. Because I'm thinking that as part of the repair work we should upgrade a few systems here and there."

"A bigger video screen for the lounge?" Brae commented.

"Actually I was thinking full holographic." Tylo said with a smile, "There are some movies that look much better in three dimensions."

Just then the high pitched sound of an approaching repulsorlift engine was heard and looking around the crew saw a small vehicle speeding towards them from the direction of the gang's headquarters.

"Looks like a scout to find out if we're still alive. Take cover. If we can capture that vehicle then maybe we can use this to our advantage." Jayk said and he, Brae and Tylo scattered, seeking cover among the rocky terrain the *Swift Exit* had come down in.

The speeder bike continued to speed towards the wrecked freighter before its rider slowed down so that he could inspect it for signs of life. The ground was broken and uneven around the crash site but this did not conceal the crew's tracks entirely and Tylo knew that the rider would spot these as soon as he came to a stop. His blaster gave him the chance to deal with the rider at a distance but Tylo remembered what Jayk had said about taking the speeder bike intact so he flipped the weapon's setting to 'stun' as he drew it and waited for the scout to arrive.

Tylo did not have to wait long, the scout bringing the speeder bike to a halt close to the rock where Tylo was hiding. Just as Tylo had expected the scout saw the footprints around the ship almost immediately. Given that his orders were simply to determine whether anyone had survived the crash this should have been enough for the scout to set off back to the hideout but he instead reacted by reaching for his own blaster and this gave Tylo all the opportunity he needed to leap up and take aim over the rock before firing three shots in rapid succession. One of the bright blue pulses of energy hit the speeder bike, validating Tylo's decision to use the lower powered setting on his weapon, while the other two both struck the scout and he toppled from the lightweight vehicle.

"Clear." Tylo called out and Jayk and Brae both emerged from their own hiding places.

"Good thinking with the stun setting." Jayk said.

"Yeah well you wanted the bike intact and this thing would have blown a hole right through it." Tylo commented, holding up his heavy blaster pistol.

"So now what do we do?" Brae asked and Jayk smiled.

"Now we find out whether the engine on this speeder bike will tolerate carrying three passengers." he said and Tylo snorted.

"Three? Brae's so tiny she only counts as half." he joked.

6.

The speeder bike's engine screeched as Tylo rode it towards the gang's hideout with Jayk riding pillion and Brae squeezed in between the two men. All three wore goggles salvaged from the *Swift Exit* and scarves around their heads to protect them from the debris being thrown up from the ground as the bike's replusorlift field worked overtime to try and compensate for being so heavily loaded.

"I've got a very bad feeling about this." Brae said over the sound of the engine.

"Not far now kid." Tylo responded, "If I took my bearings right from where that missile came the hideout should be just around this set of rocks."

Tylo steered the speeder bike around the large rock formation ahead of them and immediately the *Swift Exit's* crew got their first look at the hideout of Teron's gang. Just as Morton Crayne had warned them this was constructed underground, a large bulge giving away its presence at this close range and visible from this angle was the large rectangular entrance to the hangar. However, this was largely blocked by a blast door that was open only far enough to allow people through rather than large vehicles and so it was not possible to tell what craft might be inside.

"Head for that opening." Jayk said and Tylo nodded.

"He's back." one of Teron's gang called out from his position when he first saw the speeder bike rounding the rocks but nearby Krovak frowned.

"Something's wrong." he said, noticing the unusual pitch of the engine and he took out his comlink to communicate with Teron who was in his own position, "Teron, that bike-" he began.

"I know." Teron interrupted, "It's them. they're fools if they didn't think that I'd sense a pair of Jedi. Open fire."

Blaster fire erupted from several different positions as Teron's gang fired on the approaching speeder bike but fortunately for the *Swift Exit's* crew their aim was not good enough to hit the fast moving vehicle.

However, it did alert them to the positions occupied by the gang outside their hideout.

"Brae get ready to jump." Jayk said and Brae nodded.

"What do you mean jump?" Tylo asked.

"I mean get us close to where that blaster fire is coming from." Jayk told him and he pointed to one of the positions occupied by members of Teron's gang.

Tylo turned the speeder bike towards the blaster fire and drove them straight at it.

"Now!" Jayk snapped when they were about ten metres away and he and Brae both suddenly leapt from the back of the speeder bike, landing right in front of the trench. The sudden drop in weight meant that the speeder bike was no longer overloaded and Tylo felt it lurch forwards as it accelerated, forcing him to turn sharply to avoid ploughing into the mound under which the gang's hideout was located.

Behind him Jayk and Brae jumped down into the trench, activating their lightsabers and slashing at the gang members around them. The startled thugs were so surprised by the sudden assault that only one of the five managed to get off a shot in the confines of the trench and Jayk effortlessly reflected the blast back at him. Seeing the Jedi jump from the speeder bike, Krovak immediately climbed out of his own trench and began to sprint towards them, gripping his Sith sword in both his hands. The approach of Krovak made both Jedi turn around.

"What is that? I can sense the Dark Side around it." Brae asked.

"Something that the galaxy has not seen in centuries, a Sith warrior. We'll take him together." Jayk replied and the two Jedi climbed back out of the trench and ran to meet Krovak head on.

While they were doing this Tylo drew his blaster and with just one hand on the controls of the speeder bike he began to loop around the trenches dug by Teron's men, firing at them to keep them from firing at Jayk and Brae while they were out in the open.

This did not dissuade Teron himself though and he leapt out of his own trench and ignited his lightsaber as he ran into the path of the speeder bike. Knowing just how much damage a lightsaber could do, Tylo decided not to risk facing Teron alone and he swerved around the young man just as he swung his lightsaber at the front of the bike. Teron screamed in rage at his failure to kill Tylo. Slowing down as he neared another of the trenches Tylo was able to shoot one of the occupants just as he emerged to try and shoot him first and then Tylo brought the speeder bike to a complete stop and jumped down into the trench where he found two more members of Teron's gang waiting for him. Tylo heat butted the closest as he turned to face him before putting a shot into the man's chest from point blank range and then turned to face the second. This was the man who had fired the missile that brought down the *Swift Exit* and when he saw Tylo he dropped the bulky weapon to the ground and reached for the pistol tucked into his belt. He was too slow, however and Tylo put a shot into him as well before he could draw the weapon. Then he looked at the discarded missile launcher and smiled.

"Now that's what I'm talking about." he said.

Krovak let out a yell and raised his sword as he charged at Jayk and Brae, bringing his weapon down in an attempt to cleave Jayk in two with his first strike. Fortunately Jayk's skill as a swordsman exceeded that of Krovak and he parried the blow with his lightsaber. What was less familiar to Jayk though was having his lightsaber blade fail to simply cut through the metal of Krovak's weapon and the two men stood trying to overpower one another, their blades locked together. Seeing an opportunity to strike Brae darted forwards to try and stab Krovak in the side with her lightsaber. However, exactly as Krovak's sword blade was able to resist a lightsaber, so was his armour and when the tip of Brae's weapon touched it it slid off sideways instead of piercing a hole right through it. This took Brae by surprise and she stumbled. At the same time Krovak took a step backwards, disengaging from Jayk and enabling him to take one hand off his sword that he then used to strike at Brae. The blow caught her just above her ear and she fell sideways, dropped her lightsaber and clutching at where blood now flowed from the side of her head. Jayk then lunged forwards in an attack of his own and Krovak had to turn to face him once more, blocking Jayk's blade with his own. While Jayk and Krovak duelled Tylo picked up the missile launcher and lifted it onto his shoulder. Resting himself on the side of the trench he took aim at another of the nearby fortifications and fired the missile towards it. He could not lock the missile onto his chosen target but it was stationary and at short range so the missile just need to travel in a straight line until it impacted on the ground at the edge of the trench and exploded. The blast filled the trench with flames and shrapnel, killing all of the occupants and Tylo smiled when he saw the explosion then ducked back down to reload.

Teron had been running towards the trench Tylo occupied when he saw the missile shoot from it and he came to a halt, flinching when the weapon exploded. Then he turned towards Krovak and saw him desperately attempting to trade blows with Jayk, neither of them having any success so far. However, Jayk was clearly the better swordsman and even without landing any blows on Krovak he was driving the inexperienced Sith warrior further back with each attack. This presented Teron with a dilemma. If he went to help Krovak then Tylo would likely continue to use the missile launcher to destroy the other trenches and wipe out the rest of his gang. On the other hand if he went to deal with Tylo then Krovak was likely to be overpowered and killed.

Teron could see only one practical way out that would preserve as much of his gang as possible.

"Fall back!" he yelled.

Tylo was about to fire a second missile when all of a sudden he saw the gang members in the trench he was targeting climb out and start to run back towards the hangar door. Looking around he saw more of Teron's gang abandoning their positions and rushing back towards their hideout. Even Krovak suddenly broke off from his duel with Jayk and started to run. Rather than pursue him Jayk instead turned his attention to Brae, rushing to her side to check on her.

"Brae how bad are you hurt?" he asked.

"You know head wounds," she replied with a smile, "they're generally not as bad as they look."

"Nevertheless we need to get you to a doctor." Jayk said and Brae nodded.

"Lets get Teron first." she said.

Jayk then helped Brae to her feet and they made their way to where Tylo was dragging the ammunition for his newly acquired missile launcher out of the trench.

"Hey look, I've got a new toy." he said, grinning, "Think it'll get us in there?" and he and the two jedi all looked at the door to the hangar that was now sliding fully shut.

"Let's find out." Jayk replied.

When Teron and Krovak entered the cockpit of their escape vessel all of the systems were already active and they sat down in the pilot and co-pilot seats. In front of them the viewports were blocked on the outside and nothing was visible as Krovak took hold of the flight controls.

"Are we ready?" Teron asked.

"All systems are in the green." Krovak replied, "Of course Crayne never actually tried this."

"We don't have time to wait while the jedi break in. Get us out of here now." Teron said and Krovak engaged the ship's engines.

Tylo knelt down and pointed the missile launcher at the blast door sealing the hangar but before he could fire it he and the two jedi felt the ground begin to shake.

"What the hell is that?" he asked.

"I've got a very bad feeling about this." Brae commented as the shaking continued.

"Get back!" Jayk yelled and all three of them began to run away from the hangar door. As they did the ground around the mound under which the hideout was located started to split open and the bulk freighter that had been buried by Morton Crayne to create it began to rise up into the air for the first time in years, lumps of compacted dirt dropping off and falling to the ground.

Satisfied that they were now far enough away to be safe from the falling debris Jayk came to a stop and turned around. Brae and Tylo did the same and all three of them looked up into the sky as the freighter

began to move off, gaining altitude slowly at first before its engines suddenly flared and it vanished into the clouds above.

"So now what?" Tylo asked.

"Now we go home." Jayk answered, "Teron Sharr has escaped."