

STAR WARS

DARKNESS RISING

2-02: FRIENDS & FAMILY

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The Jedi Order recruits Force sensitive individuals in infancy to keep them from being influenced by the Dark Side. Some parents are not so keen to give up their offspring, however and as they mature these individuals can prove dangerous...

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1.

Breaking into the building was easy, it was in an isolated location and its security system was in poor repair. All the masked intruders had to do was smash a side window and they were inside with the freedom to roam around and take whatever they could carry. The only real problem that they faced was in finding something worth taking. Had the contents been more valuable then the building's operators would have taken more precautions to protect them. Instead the intruders satisfied themselves with causing whatever damage they could, tipping over and breaking furniture until that became too boring and one of them took out a lighter and set fire to a pile of boxes.

The contents of the boxes turned out to be highly flammable and the individual who had set the flame was suddenly thrown backwards as the entire stack was engulfed in flame.

"Kriiff! Let's get out of here!" one yelled and all of the intruders ran for the nearest exits, breaking windows and forcing open doors in their rush to escape before then entire building caught fire. However, in their haste to escape they were less cautious about the security system in place and an alarm sounded as soon as one of them opened a side door.

"You nerf herder! Now the cops will come." another shouted.

"Let's just get out of here." the one responsible for triggering the alarm responded and he ran towards the row of repulsor scooters that the group had used to get to the building, picking up the one that belonged to him and riding away without waiting for his friends.

The others in the group ran for their own scooters and climbed onto them just as the first sirens were heard in the distance and moments later there were flashing lights as a police speeder came into view.

"Scatter!" someone shouted, knowing that the police could not follow everyone at once and the group headed off in different directions.

Inside the police speeder the two police officers picked the nearest of the group and started to follow them.

"This unit trill herf xesh one-one-three-eight to control. In pursuit of single suspect on repulsor scooter fleeing north in sector two. Breaking and entering and arson. Multiple suspects have fled in other directions, requesting back up. Fire department is required at Seventeen Forty-Second." one of the officers said into his comlink.

"Confirmed trill herf xesh one-one-three-eight. Units are en route." the police operator responded.

Being bigger and much more powerful than the lightweight scooter, the police speeder could easily keep up with its quarry in a straight run but the rider of the scooter was doing his best to lose them in the tight turns and narrow alleyways of this part of the city. But rather than try to stay right behind the scooter, the driver of the police speeder increased the altitude of his vehicle so that he and his partner could track their target from above and this meant that they saw when he made a critical error.

"He's just gone down a dead end. We've got him." the passenger said.

"I see it, I'm taking us down." the driver replied as the speeder descended, parking across the entrance to the alleyway that the rider had gone down.

Exiting their vehicle the two police officers lit glow rods and drew their blasters, setting the weapons on 'stun' in the anticipation that they would be able to take their target alive even if he resisted and then they began to advance down the alleyway.

All of a sudden the rider came rushing towards them on his scooter and the officers raised their blasters.

"Halt or we fire!" one shouted but the rider showed no signs of slowing down and there were two flashes of blue as both officers fired at almost exactly the same time. Both stun blasts struck the rider and he was thrown from his scooter into a pile of garbage bags while his vehicle crashed into a nearby wall. The two police officers advanced cautiously towards where the rider had landed, expecting to find him unconscious thanks to being hit twice by stun blasts. But much to their surprise their target was in the process of getting back to his feet already.

"Stay still. Don't make us hit you again." one of the officers told him as both aimed their blasters at him.

However, the masked man's reaction was not what they had expected at all.

"Leave me alone!" he screamed behind his mask and when he thrust both hands out towards the police officers pale blue lightning erupted from his fingertips.

The policemen screamed in agony as they died, their blasters falling from their hands before they collapsed in heaps. Ignoring the wrecked scooter the masked man leapt over the bodies of the two police officers and paused only to pick up one of their blasters before he ran off, leaving the two corpses behind him with the body cameras built into the armoured vests they wore still recording what was happening.

"Jayk!" a woman's voice called out in one of the corridors of the jedi temple and jedi Knight Jayk Udra turned around to see a familiar person hurrying towards him.

"Kat." he said. Kat Maran was another jedi knight and the pair had been friends for many years, having been padawans at the same time.

"Is something up with your comlink?" Kat asked as she came to a halt in front of Jayk.

"No, I turned it off. I didn't realise you'd be looking for me." Jayk answered.

"Not me. The council. They want you, your padawan and that smuggler you've been hanging around with to report to them immediately."

Jayk sighed.

"They're the reason I turned it off." he said.

"Still smarting about getting into trouble over your niece?" Kat said.

"Apparently the council believes that I should have sacrificed Brae's life to arrest Teron Sharr." he said.

"Yeah, I heard. At least they didn't take any real action against you." Kat said.

"Unless they've changed their minds and are preparing to expel me." Jayk said, "It would be more tolerable if the council actually got out once in a while and saw what it's getting to be like in the galaxy now instead of just sitting around passing judgement on the rest of us. Oh well, I might as well get this over with and go and see what the old codgers want."

It was then that Kat's eyes widened and Jayk felt her reaction.

Surprise.

Horror.

"There's one of them is standing right behind me isn't there?" Jayk said and Kat smiled awkwardly without saying a word.

"Yes Jedi Udra, one of the old codgers is." the voice of Grand Master Karadon Ress said, "Run along Jedi Maran, I'm sure you have duties to attend to."

"Yes master." Kat replied before hurrying away.

"Turn around Jedi Udra. I have no wish to speak to the back of your head." Master Ress said and Jayk turned around to face the head of the Jedi Order.

"Master I-" he began.

"Never mind Jedi Udra." Master Ress said, "Go and find your padawan and Mister Kurrast and then bring them to the council chamber. We have an assignment for you."

"Yes master." Jayk replied.

It did not take long for Jayk to locate his niece and padawan learner, Brae Udra or the owner of the ship they had been assigned to, Tylo Kurrast and the three of them entered a turbolift that would take them up the central tower of the jedi temple to the council chamber near the top.

"So do you think they're about to fire you?" Tylo commented as the turbolift rose.

"Master Ress said that the council had an assignment for us." Jayk replied.

"You'd don't think that it's a ruse to get you up the council chamber before springing it on you by surprise then?" Tylo said.

"The council wouldn't lie." Brae responded.

"Brae is correct." Jayk added, "If the council was considering expelling me from the Jedi Order then they would either tell me directly that I was to leave or ask me to prepare a defence before they made a final decision."

At that point the turbolift stopped and the door slid open to reveal the hallway immediately outside the council chamber where two armoured temple guardians stood guard, their double bladed lightsabers held across their chests.

Jayk, Brae and Tylo walked across the hallway and up to the doors to council chamber without either of the guards reacting to their presence. The doors slid open automatically as Jayk neared them and on the other side he saw the jedi council assembled.

"Jedi Udra, come in." Grand Master Ress said sternly as the trio entered the room and moved to stand in the centre so that the council was arrayed around them. Jayk and Brae bowed to Grand Master Ress.

"Is it me or does he seem annoyed?" Tylo whispered to Brae as she straightened up, looking at Grand Master Ress and Brae nodded briefly.

"The council requested our presence master." Jayk said as he stood up straight again.

"Arisen an opportunity has to make amends for your failure at the Dalenova system." Master Yoda said from his seat, "Struck again Teron Sharr may have. Send you to apprehend him we shall."

"So soon?" Brae commented, "I expected him to lie low for a while."

"Two police officers were murdered on Jallas Tor." Grand Master Ress said, "The coroner reported that they were exposed to a high energy electrical discharge that burned their flesh and likely paralysed their nervous system before it triggered heart failure and killed them. Significantly their armour was fitted with cameras that recorded the entire incident." and then he took out a datapad and used it to access the council chamber's holographic projection system.

In the air in front of Jayk a pair of rectangular images appeared as the final moments of the police officers'

lives was replayed. To begin with the footage showed what they would have seen as they ran down the alleyway before firing at the figure on the scooter.

"That's supposed to be Teron?" Tylo asked, "How can you tell?" but none of the Jedi present responded, instead all of them continued to watch the two sets of footage being played back as the figure got to his feet after supposedly being stunned and then all of a sudden the Force lightning was unleashed from his fingertips.

"Ah." Tylo said as Grand Master Ress halted the playback, seeing no need for everyone to have to watch the moment that the two police officers died, "So that's how you know."

"The officers were responding to a break in." Grand Master Ress said, "When they arrived the building was on fire and the suspects all fled on repulsor scooters. The officers managed to corner this one and were taken by surprise."

"That's hardly a surprise in itself." Jayk said, "Few in law enforcement will ever encounter a Force user."

"Jedi Udra you are to go to Jallas Tor." Grand Master Ress said, "There you will liaise with local law enforcement and apprehend Teron Sharr, if that is who this really is."

"I hope it is." Brae commented.

"Why?" Tylo asked, "Last time we met he made us look like fools. You and your uncle in particular."

"Because if it isn't Teron Sharr then that means that there is another rogue Force user running around loose," Jayk told him, "and who knows how much damage he can do."

Tylo's starship, a YT-700 class freighter called the *Swift Exit* was housed in the Jedi temple's main hangar and after being dismissed from the council chamber the trio headed straight for it. Once inside they headed for the ship's lounge area where they were greeted by the hologram of a man in Jedi robes. This was a recreation of the Jedi Knight Cal Udra that acted as guardian to a holocron that he had created. Cal had lived thousands of years earlier at a time when Jedi were permitted to marry and have families. As a young knight he had been assigned his own sister as a padawan. This experience had led the council to believe that he would be well placed to advise Jayk on training a close relative.

"Ah, so we're all still together then." he said.

"For now at least." Jayk replied.

"This Jedi Order of yours really doesn't think much of wanting to protect people does it?" Tylo added.

"The Jedi code forbids attachment." Jayk said, "The council interpreted my decision to put Brae ahead of my mission as an indication that I am too attached to her."

"How did you deal with working with your sister?" Brae asked, "Were you ever forced to put her in danger?"

"If you knew Lara then you'd know that she often rushed headlong into danger before I could stop her." Cal replied, "So where are we going this time?"

"Jallas Tor." Tylo replied, "So if you don't mind I'll go and plot a course. We'll be taking off in ten minutes so make sure everything is secure by then." and he left the lounge, heading for the *Swift Exit's* cockpit.

"Well I doubt that the council is sending us to Jallas Tor on vacation, even if it is almost four millennia since I last had one." Cal said, "So what's the mission?"

"Teron Sharr seems to have murdered two police officers following a break in there." Jayk explained, "We're being sent to apprehend him before he can do any further harm."

"Plus since he was breaking into somewhere it's a fair bet that there was something interesting to be stolen."

Brae added, "Maybe it can shed some light on what happened to Thal N'Krey."

"Quite. Now go and make sure that everything is secure. I'm going to join Tylo for take off. We'll practice your lightsaber technique during the flight. If we are dealing with Teron and his gang then you will benefit from all the practice you can get." Jayk told her.

2.

Jallas Tor had first been settled by miners brought in by large corporations to mine the rich veins of minerals. When these started to run dry the corporations moved on but most of the inhabitants stayed put, now adapted to life on the rather barren world. Now the planet was an unremarkable place that was visited by only a relative handful of starships each year.

When the crew of the *Swift Exit* disembarked from their ship at the starport closest to where the supposed encounter with Teron Sharr had taken place they were surprised to find that there was no-one waiting for them, not even a customs agent.

"Well isn't it nice to feel wanted?" Tylo commented sarcastically.

"I don't understand." Brae said, "Surely they were expecting us."

"I think perhaps we should attempt to locate someone in authority." Jayk suggested and Tylo nodded.

"Well while you do that I think I'll wait with the ship. I don't like the look of this place." he said as he looked around at the somewhat rundown docking bay they had been directed to land in by the control tower.

"That's probably a good idea. Brae and I can handle the initial introduction to the police. We'll contact you if we need your assistance." Jayk replied. Then as the two jedi walked away from the ship Tylo turned around and went back inside.

"What's wrong?" Cal asked, his hologram appearing as soon as Tylo returned to the lounge and sat down.

"I've got a bad feeling about this planet." Tylo said, "The locals are supposed to have known we were coming but they couldn't be bothered to send anyone to meet us. When a government either can't or won't run a murder inquiry properly then that spells trouble to me."

"This is troubling." Cal replied, "When my sister and I were first assigned to the Narthis Sector our mission took us to a world called Tepillos. The government there had lost control entirely and the Republic had to deploy a military force to provide even a semblance of order. Lara looked the planet up in jedi records and found that even they described it as a 'wretched hive of scum and villainy.' We later discovered that the cause of the planet's difficulties were down to the presence of a large number of Sith artefacts and ruins on the planet corrupting the inhabitants."

"Sounds like the sort of place that would attract people who are in the habit of stealing such things." Tylo said.

"It was. Plus the chaos on that world played a major part in our enemies' plans."

"Think we should warn Jayk and Brae?" Tylo asked.

"Oh I doubt that they're in any imminent danger. Jayk will check in once he's spoken with the police and we can speak to him then."

"Your ship's running with a jedi ID." the customs agent said from behind his desk without even bothering to take his eyes off the screen showing a sports match between two teams of droids passing a ball between them, "I never heard of a jedi smuggler so there didn't seem much point in running an inspection."

"Obviously you were busy with other things." Brae muttered.

"Can you put us in contact with the police or provide us with transport to get to the station ourselves?" Jayk asked.

"Waste of time calling. The cops are too run off their feet to come out to anything that isn't an emergency. But you can hire a speeder right across the street or get a cab from the main terminal." the customs agent said, still transfixed on his viewing.

"Thanks, we'll do that." Jayk replied and he and Brae turned to leave the tiny customs office.

"Oh by the way," the customs agent called out after them, "If you go for a cab then don't get a robo-hack rather than an organic driver. Some of the locals have been known to slice their programming to take them into some of the less desirable parts of town. It doesn't happen often but it's getting more common."

"I'm sure we'll be fine." Jayk said before he and Brae left the office.

It did not take long to locate a taxi that could take the jedi to the nearest police station and when they arrived they understood why meeting the *Swift Exit* at the starport may not have been a priority for the police. Inside the police station the reception area was crowded with beings of numerous species both in uniform and in plain clothes. There was a central desk behind which stood several uniformed police officers all attempting to deal with the huddle of beings on the other side in the most orderly manner possible as they all yelled across the desk at the same time. Meanwhile around the room an assortment of police officers, lawyers and civilians argued over the rights and wrongs of why they were here.

"Watch yourself." Jayk said to Brae, who nodded before Jayk began to push his way through the crowd towards the desk. Along the way Brae noticed someone bump into Jayk seemingly by accident before his hand reached for Jayk's belt where his lightsaber hung. She was about to warn her uncle about this attempt

at theft when he lowered his hand and grabbed hold of one of the would-be thief's fingers and twisted it.
Pain.

Brae winced as she heard a 'snap' and the thief let out a cry, pulling back his injured hand and clutching it before hurrying to try and escape through the crowd. Letting him go, Jayk continued towards the desk. However, when he and Brae got there the officer who would have been right in front of them instead turned around and started talking to someone else.

"How long do you think we'll have to wait?" Brae said.

"Not long at all." Jayk replied and he waved his hand towards the closest officer, "You need to talk to us next." he said, using the Force to implant the suggestion into the officer's mind.

"How can I help you?" the officer said, turning towards Jayk immediately.

"My name is Jedi Udra and this is-" he began.

"Second floor." the officer interrupted.

"Excuse me?" Jayk responded.

"Detectives are all based on the second floor. Just go straight up and along the corridor. You can't miss them." the officer said and he pointed to where a staircase was located beside a turbolift that was marked as being out of order.

"You know," Brae said as the two jedi now pushed their way through the crowd towards the stairs, "I'm starting to think that Tylo had the right idea staying with the ship."

"I think your right." Jayk agreed.

Climbing the stairs to the second floor the two jedi found themselves in a narrow corridor lined with notice boards and monitors showing information about wanted suspects and upcoming events. At the end of this was a larger open area filled with desks. Just as in the reception area downstairs this room was filled with beings of various species, though none of them wore police uniforms. However, a large number had detective's badges clipped to their clothing and blasters holstered on their waists or under their shoulders.

"Can I help you?" a twi'lek sat just inside the room asked when Jayk and Brae entered.

"My name is Jedi Udra, we were told to come here." Jayk replied.

"Oh right, the jedi case." the twi'lek commented and then she pointed across the room to one of the few detectives not already talking to someone, "Detective Sorron is handling that."

"Thank you." Jayk said before he and Brae walked over to the desk pointed out to them, "Detective Sorron?" Jayk asked.

"I'm busy." the detective responded without looking up at the jedi.

"My name is Jedi Jayk Udra." Jayk said and the detective suddenly looked up.

"Right, the jedi case." he said, getting to his feet, "Well we've had a bit of a breakthrough with that."

"What sort of breakthrough? Have you located Teron Sharr?" Brae asked but the detective shook his head.

"No, but a unit managed to catch up with one of his friends. I've got him in an interrogation room now. He's been processed but not questioned. This case involves dead cops so we're after a result here. But we didn't want to risk messing it up by jumping the gun and talking to him without you."

"Very good. Take us to him, we'll question him right away." Jayk replied.

"I thought you'd say that. Come with me." Detective Sorron said and he picked a datapad up off his desk before starting to walk away, "This is our guy." he added, handing the datapad to Jayk so that he could see the arrest report that included the image of the arrest individual, "Danny Lortis. A petty street thug who's spent more time in police stations than he has in school. Age seventeen standard years, no honest employment that we know of and he seems to live with various relatives depending on which police jurisdiction he's trying to stay out of. You'll see that he has something of a long arrest record but until now it's all been for minor stuff that judges have never bothered imposing a custodial sentence. Mind you this time he's looking at charges for breaking and entering, arson and possibly as an accessory to murder. Even at seventeen that could land him in prison for a couple of decades."

"Does he know that we're going to be questioning him?" Brae asked and again the detective shook his head.

"No. We stuck him in the interrogation room as soon as he was processed. Ah, here we are." and Detective Sorron pointed to a door just ahead of them. He had just reached out for the control to open the door when Jayk reached out and grabbed the detective, pulling him back from the doorway. Then with a wave of his hand Jayk used the Force to open the door, revealing Danny standing right inside and in the process of urinating against the door to form a pool of foul liquid on the floor that anyone entering the room without knowing about it would be likely to stand in. Now though the stream of urine came out into the corridor as the young man gasped at being caught in the act, suddenly attempting to stop and close his trousers. But in the process he simply managed to cover himself in urine as well.

"Oh very nice." Detective Sorron said, "Oh well I suppose now we can add indecent exposure to the charges given the presence of the young lady." and he glanced at Brae who smiled.

"To be fair in his case it's very minor offence detective. I doubt it'd stand up in court." she said and Jayk frowned for a moment at the crude innuendo.

"Danny Lortis sit down." he said, "We have questions."

"Who are you?" Danny responded as he walked over to one of the chairs in the room and sat down, fidgeting in his wet clothing as he attempted to get comfortable.

"I am Jedi Udra and this is my padawan." Jayk replied, "Now tell me what you know about Teron Sharr."

"Who? I've never heard of Teron Sharr." Danny answered.

"This is Teron Sharr." Jayk said, producing his own datapad and calling up a file image of Teron.

"He was part of your group that committed the burglary." Brae added and Danny shrugged.

"I don't know what you're talking about and I don't who that guy is." he said.

Deception.

"You are a poor liar Danny." Jayk said, "I can sense that you aren't telling the truth."

"Okay, so some of my friends broke into some old warehouse and trashed the place. But I've never seen that nerf herder before so whatever he's done you can't pin it on me."

Jayk and Brae looked at one another, neither of them detecting any attempt to deceive them this time around.

"Look Danny," Detective Sorrton said, "we know that-" but Jayk held up his hand for the detective to be quiet.

"One of your gang is different isn't he?" the Jedi said, pulling up another chair so that he could sit down before Brae also took a seat for herself.

"What do you mean?" Danny asked.

"You know what I mean." Jayk said, "Tell me about the one that is different. The one that can react quicker than anyone else. The one who seems to know about things before they happen."

"What are you talking about now?" Detective Sorrton said, looking back and forth between Jayk and Brae.

"He doesn't know Teron Sharr." Brae replied, "That means we're looking for someone else who is Force sensitive. Probably a local."

"Something that of course brings up the question of how someone in the Colonies region managed to avoid detection by the Jedi Order at birth." Jayk added. Then he stared at Danny, "Tell us who he is." he said.

Danny grinned and leant back in his chair.

"What's in it for me?" he asked.

"Not being considered an accessory to the murder of two police officers." Jayk replied and Danny's eyes widened."

Fear.

"Didn't you know that your friend killed two policemen while fleeing the scene of the break in?" Brae added.

"Hey! I had nothing to do with that. We split up and whatever Keros did after-" Danny began before he suddenly stopped and Jayk smiled.

"So he's called Keros is he?" Jayk said and Danny scowled as he realised that he had inadvertently given his friend away.

"I want a lawyer." he said, "I'm not answering any more of your questions."

"That's alright Danny, you've been most helpful already." Jayk said, "We'll be sure to pass on how helpful you've been to those that need to know." then he looked around at Detective Sorrton and added, "Detective we're going to need access to your planetary information database."

3.

"It won't stand up in court?" Jayk said to Brae as they returned to the *Swift Exit*, "You've been spending too much time around Tylo."

"What did I do?" Tylo asked when he heard this and peered into the hold from the lounge.

"You're a bad influence on me apparently." Brae replied and Tylo frowned.

"Well it's nice to hear I can teach a jedi something." he said before changing the subject, "So how did things go with the cops? Do they know where Teron is?"

"Not on Jallas Tor." Brae told him while Jayk walked up to the holocron sat on a shelf at the side of the room. "Huh?" Tylo commented.

"Cal I need your help." Jayk said and Cal's hologram appeared in front of him.

"So Teron's not here then?" he said.

"It doesn't appear so. We seem to be dealing with a Force sensitive local by the name of Keros. We've been given full access to the planetary data network so I need you to search it to find him." Jayk said.

"Just a first name isn't much to go on when we're dealing with a planet with a population of about half a billion beings." Cal pointed out.

"He'll probably be aged between fourteen and twenty standard years old," Jayk said, "and he'll likely have a criminal record so that could be the best place to start. Plus there is footage from the deceased police officers' body cameras that could help build up a physical profile."

"What about immigration and birth records?" Brae suggested, "A Force sensitive child should have been detected by an midi-chlorian test when they were born. Maybe Keros wasn't born here."

"That's a good point." Jayk replied.

"Okay, I'll get right on it." Cal responded, "In the mean time you may want to talk to Tylo about the conversation we had while you were gone. Now that we don't think we're dealing with Teron it may not be such an issue but it's still something to bear in mind." and then the hologram disappeared.

"So what's this about a conversation?" Brae asked, turning towards Tylo, "What would you have to talk about with Cal?"

"As it happens he and I get along just fine." Tylo responded, "He may be a copy of a jedi knight's personality but he's nothing like you two."

"The real Cal lived a long time ago, well before the Ruusan Reformations. The entire Jedi Order is different now." Jayk said.

"Yes and don't I think it's a bad idea." Tylo commented, "Anyway, while you two were off talking to the local cops Cal was telling me about a planet he went to that was a lot like this one in terms of the government not looking like it has very good control over the planet. That was all down to the place being littered with Sith artefacts that drove people crazy. He also said that the fact that there were so many Sith artefacts left lying around meant that people who wanted to steal them made the planet one of their first ports of call."

"Was Jallas Tor ever a Sith controlled world?" Brae asked, looking at Jayk.

"The Sith controlled most of this part of the galaxy a long time ago but as far as I know the Jedi Order did a thorough job of cleaning up when the wars ended." he replied.

"Well someone who can shoot lightning from their fingers obviously thinks this place is worth either visiting or calling home." Tylo commented before Cal's hologram reappeared.

"I think I've found our suspect." he said and then another image appeared in mid air beside him, this one a flat picture of a human teenager stood in front of a height chart with an arrest reference added to the bottom of the picture, "Keros Pano. Age eighteen standard years with a history of arrests, mainly for his involvement in relatively minor violent disturbances. These all seem to have been with other people in a similar situation to him and he's only been formally charged and tried twice, both times in the last year. He was fined and sentenced to community service on both occasions but he doesn't seem to have attended the sessions. The police have an active warrant for his arrest."

"That makes things easier." Jayk said, "We can enter private property to remove him without needing to seek permission."

Tylo snorted.

"So you use some minor convictions to bypass due process." he said, "Is this supposed to be teaching me to go straight?"

"It should remind you that the Jedi Order will come after you if you try to run." Jayk said. Then he looked at Cal, "Do you have an address?"

"I have the address of his mother. It was listed on his arrest reports."

"If the police are already hunting him then why would he go to an address that they know?" Brae asked.

"Because the local cops obviously don't have the resources to stake out the home of someone they think is

just a petty thug on the off chance he'll walk right past them. They'll have gone round to serve a warrant and then left when he wasn't there."

"Even if he isn't there then his mother may know where he's hiding but be unwilling to tell the police." Jayk added.

"What if she won't tell us either?" Brae asked and Jayk smiled.

"Then we'll just need to be more persuasive." he replied.

The neighbourhood where Keros had lived with his mother was a tightly packed cluster of habitation units that looked to have been assembled from kits on the lowest possible budget. Stackable, the units had been piled on top of one another to create a three dimensional community that was interconnected by a series of walkways and staircases, several of which were sealed off with brightly coloured tape that warned of unsafe structures.

"So what am I supposed to do while you're questioning his mother?" Tylo asked from the driver's seat of their hired landspeeder.

"You'll be parked at the back of the Panos' hab unit." Jayk replied, "Brae and I will be going in through the front so if Keros is there he's likely to try and escape through the back. If he does that I want you to watch where he goes while Brae and I move to intercept. But whatever you do, don't try and take him yourself."

"Oh don't worry about that." Tylo responded, "I saw the footage of what happened to those two cops. I don't intend to end up the same way."

"Good. Now drop us off here and drive around the back." Jayk told him and Tylo brought the speeder to a halt. Then when the two Jedi had got out he drove off, disappearing between two rows of the habitation units. Jayk then led the way towards the unit that the Pano family was listed as living in.

"I think we're being watched." Brae said, looking around nervously.

"I know, I sense it too. But remember that we are strangers here. I think that makes some of the residents nervous. Strangers may often mean police come to arrest someone. Hopefully our robes make us more anonymous. Make sure your lightsaber is out of sight though." Jayk said and Brae double checked that her weapon was covered by her cloak.

The habitation unit where Keros was listed as having lived was located on the lowest level of a nearby stack, enabling the Jedi to walk right up to the front door without needing to go up any stairs. But the ease of approach also meant that it would be easy for Keros to escape if he was at home and before announcing their presence Jayk took out his comlink.

"Tylo we're ready. Are you in position?" he signalled.

"Yeah, I'm out back just up the street. I can see everything clearly from here. You can go in whenever you're ready."

"Understood." Jayk replied before putting his comlink away and reaching out for the intercom beside the door. However, when he pressed it nothing happened.

"Doesn't look like it's working. I guess we have to knock instead." Brae said and Jayk nodded before knocking on the door.

"Someone's coming." he said softly as he sensed the approach of someone on the other side of the door.

"What do you want?" a woman's voice called out from behind the still closed door.

"We're here to ask you some questions about your son." Jayk said.

"He's not here. I don't know where he is." the woman said, "I've already told you people that."

"You people?" Brae commented then she raised her voice and added, "Who do you think we are?" she asked.

"Aren't you the police?" the woman responded.

"We're Jedi." Jayk told her.

Fear.

"That was interesting." Brae said, "Did you sense how afraid she became when you said that?" and Jayk nodded.

"Open the door Missus Pano." he said sternly and moments later the door slid open without him having to use the Force on either the door or Keros' mother, "Thank you." Jayk added as he and Brae entered the apartment and looked around. If the area in which Keros' mother lived was not enough to prove it, it was clear from the furnishing of her habitation unit that she had little money. Most of the furniture was damaged in some way and Jayk was cautious not to inflict any further damage as he sat down.

"I suppose I should have expected this." Keros' mother said as she sat down as well.

"You knew that your son was Force sensitive?" Brae said.

"Of course I did. I've always known since the day he was born." the woman responded, "The doctor ran a test."

"A midi-chlorian test?" Jayk said.

"I think that's what he called it. Well it said that Keros was Force sensitive."

"I don't understand." Brae said, "If the test came back positive then why didn't the Jedi Order come and take

him?"

"Because they never found out. The doctor told me that he had to run a second test just to be certain that it wasn't a false positive so I bribed him to fake the results. His report said that Keros is no more Force sensitive than I am."

"That is a very dangerous thing to do Missus Pano." Jayk said, "Had Keros been identified then he would have been taught how to control his power."

"Why did you do it?" Brae added and Keros' mother scowled at her.

Anger.

"Look at you." she said, "How old are you?"

"Seventeen." Brae answered and she glanced at Jayk, wondering what she had done wrong.

"Seventeen. What do you know about life? You've no children have you?" the woman said but she did not give Brae the opportunity to respond before she continued, "Keros father had already been sent to prison by that point and Keros was all I had left. When the doctor told me that you jedi would be coming to steal him away from me as well I did what I had to do to protect him. No mother worthy of the word would do anything less than that. It's not like Keros was very powerful anyway. Only just registering on the scale the doctor said, but it was enough that I'd never see him again. So I paid off the doctor and kept my son. At least I know he grew up loved rather than among strangers who wanted to turn him into a weapon."

"Your son has killed two police officers." Jayk said, "He has become a great danger. Now it is up to us to deal with the consequences of your actions." then he leant forwards, "Where is your son Missus Pano?"

"I don't know." she replied, sneering at Jayk, "Even if I did I wouldn't tell you." and Jayk smiled.

"The sooner we find your son the easier it will be to help him." he said, subtly waving his hand as he used the Force to push the idea into the woman's mind.

Keros' mother snarled at Jayk, but the thought was inside her now and she lacked the strength of mind to resist it.

"He stays with friends down by the river sometimes." she said, "I don't know their names though. All I know is that there are dozens of them squatting in a building there. Every time he's in trouble he goes there because the police can't. Any time they try they get rocks and fire bombs thrown at them."

4.

Tylo sat in the landspeeder watching the rear of the habitation unit Jayk and Brae were inside but there was no indication that anyone was attempting to climb out of the windows so he turned his attention to passers by instead just in case Keros attempted to return home without attracting too much attention by walking right up to the front door. He saw numerous people walk past but none of them matched the images of Keros that Tylo had.

However, after a short while he noticed a figure that matched the basic physical profile of Keros walking along the other side of the street wearing a hooded top that concealed his features while he had his head bowed. After spending years as a smuggler doing his best to avoid the attention of the authorities Tylo recognised that pose immediately as one used to try and look anonymous in an area where a being was known. Tylo quickly reached for a set of macrobinoculars and he used them to get the closest possible look at the figure, focusing on his head. This was of little benefit however, as the figure did not turn towards Tylo to give him a good enough look at his face to confirm whether or not it was Keros.

All of a sudden the figure came to a halt and it was then that he turned his head and Tylo saw that it was indeed Keros. Then before Tylo could alert the jedi inside the habitation unit Keros pivoted and started to run in the other direction.

"Thank you Missus Pano." Jayk said, smiling at her, "You've been most helpful." then all of a sudden both he and Brae felt a tremor in the Force.

"He's here." Brae said and both she and Jayk leapt to their feet and ran for the door.

It was then that Jayk's comlink sounded.

"Jayk can you hear me? Keros is out the back now." Tylo's voice sudden exclaimed from the device, "He's making run for it. I think you've been made."

"We're on our way now." Jayk responded as he drew his lightsaber. Brae copied him in this but they kept their weapons inactive as they ran around the stack of habitation units to see Keros fleeing away from them. Looking back over his shoulder he saw the two jedi with their weapons in their hands and he paused, drawing his blaster and firing it at them.

"Lookout!" Jayk yelled and he jumped in front of Brae, igniting his lightsaber and using it to deflect the blaster bolts away from them both.

Meanwhile at the other end of the street Tylo got out of the landspeeder with his blaster rifle in his hand and he pointed it at Keros before firing a single shot at him. But Keros sensed the danger just in time to allow him to dive out of the way and he ceased fire and continued to run. Tylo tossed his rifle back into the speeder and got back in before starting the engine. Then he drove to where Jayk and Brae were chasing after Keros and came to a sudden stop.

"Get in!" he snapped and both jedi leapt into the vehicle before Tylo set off again after Keros.

Keros knew that the jedi were chasing him and that they were just as likely to be able to sense him through the Force as he could sense them. Therefore, he knew that only his superior knowledge of the area would save him and he looked for an escape route that the jedi would not be able to follow him down.

Ahead of him Keros saw a corner and he knew that around it there as an area of disused buildings that was fenced off because the remaining structures there had been deemed unsafe and even squatters avoided them. However, as a child Keros and his friends had sneaked in to explore them on numerous occasions.

Racing around the corner Keros saw the fence surrounding the condemned buildings with the signs pasted on the outside warning of the danger to anyone entering the area but Keros ignored these warnings just as he had done when he had been a child and found the same loose panel that he and his friends had used to get through the fence, pulled it back and slipped through the gap before the landspeeder came racing around the corner after him.

"Where the hell did he go?" Tylo exclaimed when he failed to see where Keros had gone.

"That way." Jayk said, pointing towards the area sealed off behind the fence.

"You're kidding me. That's got condemned written all over it. Literally." Tylo said.

"Perhaps." Jayk said as Tylo brought the speeder to a halt, "But that is where he has gone and we must go after him."

Getting out of the speeder Jayk leapt up into the air and landed on the other side of the fence before Brae did the same, leaving Tylo standing alone beside the speeder.

"I guess I'll wait here then." he said.

On the other side of the fence Jayk and Brae looked around at the cluster of buildings that now stood empty and decaying.

"Why come here?" Brae asked.

"Keros must be familiar with this place." Jayk replied, "He must think that he can escape us here."

"Do you think he can?"

"Perhaps. We must proceed with caution, I don't need to call upon the Force to sense the danger in this place. We'll have to watch our step." Jayk said and he started to walk towards the condemned building.

"I'll be careful." Brae replied.

"You'll be dead if you're not." Jayk commented.

Keros had enough a lead on the Jedi that they could not sense his exact position but his fear of being caught gave them a general direction in which to head and they entered the building through the nearest hole in the wall. From here they could see that the building was little more than a hollow shell. The interior still contained some of the floors that separated the different levels but most of them had either been removed or collapsed of their own accord to leave the supporting beams with just random patches of flooring in place.

"He went up." Jayk said.

"Isn't that strange for someone trying to escape? It doesn't leave him with many places to go." Brae pointed out.

"Perhaps he intends to make a stand instead." Jayk replied, "Nevertheless, we must go after him." and he promptly jumped up onto one of the beams overhead, balancing carefully on it, "This one appears sound." he called down to Brae and as she jumped up after him he started to walk along the beam in the direction he sensed Keros had gone.

"I see him!" Brae shouted from behind Jayk and she somersaulted from the beam she was hurrying along to another that allowed her to get closer to Keros.

"Brae be careful." Jayk called out after her as he jumped from one beam to another as well.

Sensing the two Jedi approach Keros turned and fired his blaster. This time Jayk was too far away to intercept the attack but Brae reacted fast enough to use her own lightsaber to block each shot in turn until Keros changed his tactic. Instead of firing at Brae and watching every brightly coloured energy bolt be deflected by the blade of her lightsaber he aimed for the beam she was standing on and fired again. This time the path of the shot was too far away for Brae to parry and it struck the beam cleanly, melting right through it. Now even the weight of the beam itself was too much to allow it to remain level and Brae's weight on top of it made it even more unstable. It took less than a second for the beam to give way, one end tipping downwards as the other sprang up and in the process smashed through another running above it. This began a chain reaction as what little remained of the various floors came crashing down, dragging with them not only the walls and roof of the structure but also the two Jedi inside it.

Fear.

Jayk sensed Brae's panic as she fell as well as the build up of power within her, but was too busy trying to control his own descent to warn her about calling on the Dark Side inadvertently and even as he was using the Force to pull a loose section of flooring towards him to use as a shield he felt a sudden blast of Force energy as Brae screamed and tried to push all of the falling debris away from her as rapidly as possible. Meanwhile Keros managed to stay ahead of the destruction just long enough to reach a hole in an outer wall that had one been filled with glass and leap through, landing on the ground before escaping through another loose fence panel and leaving the two Jedi buried under the piles of rubble behind him.

5.

Standing beside the landspeeder and cradling his rifle Tylo jumped when he heard the building on the other side of the fence start to collapse.”

“Kriff!” he snapped as he turned around to see the building falling in on itself.

Rather than waste time trying to communicate with either of the Jedi using his comlink Tylo raised his rifle and fired at the nearest fence panel, blasting it free of the posts supporting it so that he could run through the gap. Ahead of him he saw the remains of the building and a thick cloud of dust coming out of all of the holes in what remained of the walls.

“Jayk! Brae!” he called out, running towards the building before grinding to a halt at the edge of the cloud.

Then he heard a coughing sound and Brae came staggering out of the cloud of dust, covered from head to toe in a thick layer of it, “Brae are you okay?” Tylo asked, rushing up to her and she nodded, still coughing as she tried to clear her lungs of the dust, “What about Jayk? Is he still in there?”

“Yes.” Brae gasped, “I can feel his presence so he's still alive.”

“Okay, where?” Tylo asked.

“Right behind you.” Jayk announced as he walked out of the cloud with the hood of his cloak raised up over his head. When he lowered the hood he revealed that unlike Brae only his cloak was covered in dust.

“Why aren't you covered in dust like her?” Tylo asked.

“Because I controlled my fall and was able to place a large enough piece of debris above me to act as a shield and create an air pocket beneath it where there was no dust.” Jayk explained, “Then when I was satisfied that the building was done collapsing I wrapped my cloak around me and made my way out. Brae on the other hand was overcome by her fear and tried to prevent any debris from hitting her.”

“Sounds like a good idea to me.” Tylo commented

“That's why I did it.” Brae croaked and then she coughed again.

“You acted out of fear Brae. That is a path to the Dark Side. The telekinetic blast you unleashed may have succeeded in keeping all of the heavier debris away from you but as you can see the dust was another matter. Had you been rendered unconscious by the fall then you could quite easily have suffocated. On the other hand I would have had enough air to last some time.”

“I don't suppose that there's any chance Keros was under that lot when it came down is there?” Tylo asked but Jayk shook his head.

“I sensed him fleeing after the building had collapsed.” he said, “You're lucky he didn't try coming past you.”

“Okay, so now what?” Tylo said.

“The river.” Brae said.

“What?” Tylo responded.

“According to Keros' mother her son is known to hide out with a notorious group of squatters located close to a river.” Jayk said, “We'll need to head back to the *Swift Exit*. I want to ask Detective Sorron what he can tell us about the place before we move in.” then he looked at Brae, “And we need to talk.” he added.

“Yes, I know the place.” Detective Sorron said when Jayk and Tylo contacted him from the cockpit of the *Swift Exit*, “Over the years it's become a haven for petty and mid level criminals of all sorts. Thieves, minor drug pushers and all sorts of anarchists. There are only a handful of approaches and the squatters keep them all under observation. Any attempt to approach gets our people attacked. If this Keros is hiding out there then there's not much we can do. My superiors won't sanction a raid even for a murder investigation because of the risk of further casualties.”

“Told you.” Tylo commented, “The government is losing control. Once you start letting no-go zones form then you give criminals the advantage of a safe place to retreat to when the going gets tough.”

“Do you have the area under surveillance?” Jayk asked.

“No, we can't spare the resources for a full surveillance operation. But I could have an airspeeder do a low level pass and provide you with the footage.”

“That would be useful.” Jayk replied, nodding.

“Okay, I'll call you back when I have it.” Sorron said and the screen went blank.

“What did Detective Sorron have to say?” Brae asked as she then appeared in the cockpit doorway with a towel wrapped around her and her hair still wet from the shower she had taken to clean the dust off her and she sat down behind Jayk and Tylo.

“He will provide us with what information he can but there will be no practical assistance coming from the local police.” Jayk told her.

“Too bad the planet doesn't have a standing army.” Tylo added.

“I could try sending for help from the Judicial Department.” Jayk said, “A couple of Sector Ranger teams

could be of great use to us. The problem of course is whether there are any close enough to be able to make a difference."

"So it's down to just us then." Brae said and Jayk nodded.

"Which means you cannot be distracted." he said and Brae frowned.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean that whatever is troubling you needs to be settled." Jayk said and Brae looked away, "Tell me Brae. I first sensed it when Keros' mother challenged you. What's wrong?"

Brae sighed.

"She bribed a doctor so she could keep her son." Brae said, "Do you think my mother tried that? Or yours? Or were we just considered things to be given away when the Jedi Order came calling? I'm seventeen and I already know that I'll never marry or have children. Why me and not someone else?"

Jayk smiled.

"That is a common question asked by padawans." he told her, "Like you I have no idea who my parents are. I only know that I have, or had, a sibling who was your parent. Whoever they were they knew that raising a Force sensitive child is fraught with danger. Remember that the Udras have been Jedi since well before the Ruusan Reformatations."

"Perhaps Cal could help." Tylo suggested, "He must have witnessed the change in the Order."

"Possibly." Jayk replied, "But there may not have been any reason for him to be consulted during that time. His personal experience comes from a time when the Jedi did marry and procreate as they saw fit."

"Whereas we have to be alone for our entire lives." Brae said, "I mean right now I've got you two but what happens when this assignment ends? I've no other friends. I'll be on my own again."

"Seriously?" Tylo said in amazement, "I mean I'm surprised that you've not got any other friends, not that you consider us friends. Even given how we met."

"Brae was not popular with her class." Jayk said, "Her power combined with her lack of control over it caused a number of unfortunate incidents."

"Yeah and the other padawans were always happy to get their own back on me for them. I don't want to go back to being stuck naked inside a locker again." and then she noticed a slight smile on Tylo's face, "Stop imaging me naked you pervert!" she snapped and then she punched him on his arm.

"Ouch!" he yelled, grabbing his arm.

"Perhaps I ought to remind you that as well as being my apprentice, Brae is also my niece." Jayk said.

"It's not fault." Tylo said, rubbing the spot where Brae had hit him, "If she's going to talk about being naked then I'm going to think about it."

"Tylo may have a point Brae." Jayk said, looking at her, "Perhaps you should consider what it appropriate to talk about in front of him. Now go and get dressed. I'm going to see what support we can gather from the Republic before Detective Sorron gets back to us."

Brae had just finished getting dressed when the footage from the surveillance flight over the squatters' camp came in and the Swift Exit's crew gathered in the lounge so that it could be displayed on the large video screen Tylo normally used for watching broadcasts of sports matches or movies.

"Wow," Brae commented, "we're actually using that thing for what Tylo told the Jedi Order he needed them to buy it for."

"Shut up kid or I'll go back to picturing you naked." Tylo responded.

"I almost killed someone for that." Cal said, "When my daughter brought her boyfriend home once I knew exactly what he had on his mind."

"And that is just one reason why the Jedi no longer marry." Jayk said, "Now let's see this footage."

The large display screen activated to show aerial footage of a cluster of buildings beside a wide river. There was a basic dock facility right on the shore but no indication that it had been used for anything for a long time. The buildings themselves stood in the centre of a ring of partially and fully demolished buildings and it was obvious that debris from these had been used to create a barrier that blocked most avenues of approach.

"I see four paths leading to the buildings." Cal said, "All of them passing by towers that make for perfect platforms from which to throw an incendiary or two."

"Explains why the cops leave them alone." Tylo commented, "You'd need a major force to take that place."

"And we need to do it with just a handful of sector rangers." Brae added.

"The sector rangers will position themselves on the outside of this barrier to detain anyone that tries to escape. Only the three of us will go inside." Jayk said.

"The three of us?" Tylo said, "To clear out an area that the city's entire police force is afraid to go to?"

"We will not be clearing it out." Jayk replied, "All we need to do is locate Keros Pano and extract him." then he walked right up to the display and pointed at the largest of the buildings, "Cal can fly the Swift Exit over this building. Then we'll disembark and locate Keros for extraction."

"Do you really think that the squatters will just let us take him?" Brae asked and Jayk shook his head.

“Of course not and I doubt that Keros will be willing to co-operate either.” he said, “That is why all three of us need to go. You and I will be needed to restrain Keros while Tylo will act as an escort. I doubt that the other squatters will have much in the way of weaponry so his rifle ought to be adequate to hold them back.”

“And if it's not?” Tylo said.

“Then hopefully resistance will decrease after we take Keros into custody.” Jayk answered and Tylo groaned.

“I've got a very bad feeling about this.” he said.

6.

Under cover of nightfall the *Swift Exit* flew low along the river.

"I've got a very bad feeling about this." Tylo said as he and the two jedi stood in the ship's cargo hold, waiting for the access ramp to be opened. Unlike the jedi who intended to simply leap from the open ramp Tylo wore a safety harness that would allow him to slide down from the *Swift Exit* on a line.

"You've already said that." Brae pointed out.

"Yeah well since we're now aboard a ship, my ship, that's being flown at rooftop height by a guy that's been dead for almost four thousand years I thought it was worth saying again." Tylo said before Cal's voice sounded over the intercom.

"Coming up on the target now." he said.

"Okay this is it. Weapons ready." Jayk said before the *Swift Exit* came to a halt and the access ramp opened under Cal's instruction. Immediately Jayk ran down the ramp and jumped from the end, controlling his descent with the Force before landing on the rooftop below with Brae just seconds behind him.

Panic.

Anger.

From below them the two jedi could hear the shouts of squatters alerting others to the *Swift Exit's* presence and they could sense the reaction in the Force. Tylo then landed on the roof, unhooking himself from the syntherope line as quickly as he could and unslinging his rifle as the *Swift Exit* gained altitude again and started to circle.

"It's a good bet the locals know we're here." he said when he too heard the sound coming from below them,

"Now do you know where our guy is?"

"I can't sense him from here." Jayk replied.

"You mean he might not even be here?" Tylo said.

"He's here." Brae said, "I can feel him and he knows that we've come for him." then she pointed to the building beside the one they were on top of, "There!" she snapped.

"Let's go." Jayk said and he ran towards the edge of the roof before leaping across the gap between the two buildings onto the other roof. Brae copied him, landing close beside him but when Tylo made a run towards the edge of the roof he ground to a halt right before making the leap.

"No way." he said, looking down at the height he would fall from if he failed to clear the gap. Then he looked over at the jedi, "I'll take the fire escape." he called out to them.

"Hurry. We'll meet you inside." Jayk shouted back at him and then he ignited his lightsaber and used it to cut a hole in the roof that he and Brae used to enter the building.

Inside the building the jedi could both sense the presence of another individual who was strong with the Force amid the panic coming from elsewhere and Jayk beckoned for Brae to follow him. Having made their own entrance into the building none of the occupants knew where they were and as Jayk peered out of the doorway of the room they were in he saw several squatters disappear up a flight of stairs that led only to the roof.

"Come on." he whispered as he darted out into the corridor and headed in the opposite direction to the squatters he had seen. With Tylo still outside Jayk knew that he and Brae needed to move downwards to meet up with him.

Meanwhile Tylo was hurrying down the fire escape clamped to the side of the other building when all of a sudden he heard a shout from above him and he looked back up the stairs. There he saw several squatters armed with an assortment of hand to hand combat weapons climbing out onto the fire escape after him. Pointing his rifle upwards Tylo fired a short burst to try and dissuade them from coming down after him. None of the blasts hit any of the squatters or even the fire escape itself, but the burst was enough to scare them back inside the building while Tylo continued down towards the ground.

He fired again after leaping down from the fire escape as another group of squatters came rushing around the corner of building and once again they scattered, retreating around the corner or throwing themselves to the ground while Tylo made a break for the other building. But as he ran he saw something bright suddenly be hurled from a window and he realise instantly that it was an improvised incendiary device made from a container of volatile liquid. Fortunately the container struck the ground several metres away from him and Tylo felt the heat of the flames as it smashed and the contents caught fire. There was another glow from the window the device had been thrown from and Tylo fired his rifle towards it. Unlike the suppressing fire he had used previously this burst as meant to strike its target and Tylo heard a scream as at least one of the blaster bolts hit someone inside the building. They also dropped the incendiary when hit and there was a brighter flash from inside the window as the room caught fire.

The main doorway stood open and as Tylo ran towards it he was met by a sudden rain of thrown debris that forced him to take cover just outside and he took out his comlink.

"I'm at the front door." he signalled, "But I'm not being made too welcome."

"Hold on, we're almost there." Jayk responded to Tylo's signal as he and Brae reached the bottom of the stairs. From here they could hear the sound of the squatters just inside the main doorway yelling abuse as they threw whatever debris they could lay their hands on at Tylo.

"Follow me." Jayk said and Brae nodded before he charged from the stairwell into the hallway outside where he was immediately confronted by one of the squatters armed with a metal bar. Jayk swung his lightsaber at the squatter, slicing through the metal bar just above her hands and she stared at the glowing end of her weapon in disbelief. Then Jayk unleashed a brief telekinetic blast that knocked her away from him without inflicting serious injury. However, the next squatter to challenge Jayk was not so fortunate. Lunging at the jedi with a knife in the hope of catching him off guard, the squatter gasped when he saw the lightsaber blade move towards him right before it impaled him through his chest.

Brae's appearance behind Jayk was then enough to convince the remaining squatters in the room that attempted to fight jedi with just knives, clubs and thrown rocks was not a good idea and they ran. Some chanced escaping from the building through the main doorway, rushing past Tylo while the rest of them retreated deeper into the building.

"Tylo hurry." Jayk called out and Tylo stepped into the building.

"You've not found Keros yet then?" he asked.

"We sense him up on the third or fourth floor." Brae replied.

"But we need to be cautious." Jayk added, "Someone up there appears to have started a fire that could easily spread."

"I'll be careful." Tylo commented.

The trio then started to head back up the stairs but before they got far there were shouts from overhead as the group of squatters that had gone up to the roof were now coming back down and they had seen the glow of the jedi's lightsabers.

Danger.

"Get back!" Jayk snapped as he leapt away from the edge of the staircase just as there was a sharp 'crack' from overhead as a slug thrower was fired and the bullet struck the stair where he had been stood. The trio continued to climb the stair but more slowly now, keeping their backs against the wall to keep them out of the line of fire as more shots were fired at them. Then there came a sudden halt in the gunfire and the sound of something metal bouncing down the stairs.

"He's reloading." Jayk said and Tylo leapt forwards.

"Got him!" he hissed as he fired up the centre of the stairwell while the two jedi began to run up the stairs again. The partially exposed gunman was struck twice and he dropped his pistol before rolling over the safety rail and plummeting down the centre of the stairwell, bouncing off the rails and forcing Tylo to duck back again to avoid being struck.

"This one." Jayk said as he reached the exit to the third floor and sensed the presence of a third Force user close by. Opening the door he stepped out of the stairwell into long hallway that extended for the entire length of the building, "He must be in one of these rooms." Jayk whispered, looking at the rows of doorways that ran down either side of the hallway and Brae nodded in agreement as she stepped into the hallway as well.

"I think I ought to stay here." Tylo said, looking up the stairwell, "I don't think it's going to take long for those guys to pluck up the courage to try rushing this floor."

"Do it. Brae and I will deal with Keros." Jayk replied and he began to advance towards the first doorway,

"Brae take the other side." he added and she began to move down the other side of the hallway.

Most of the doors in the hallway were closed and the jedi could check each room visually from the hallway without having to take any action to open them. But there were some along the side chosen by Jayk that were closed and thanks to the lack of power in the building they could not be opened normally. However, with a simple wave of his hand Jayk was able to lift them open using the Force, a process that although relatively easy for the experienced jedi also slowed him down as he made sure to gently lower the doors closed again rather than letting them fall and risk alerting Keros to what he was doing. This led to Brae being able to search rooms more quickly and she pulled ahead of her master. The first three times Jayk opened doors this way he found only an empty room on the other side of the door but when he did it for a fourth time he felt a sudden tremor in the Force.

Anger.

"Leave me alone!" Keros yelled and there was a volley of blaster fire from inside the room that Jayk blocked with his lightsaber before letting the door drop shut. He was about to summon Brae to help him when all of a sudden he sensed another build up of power in the Force as Keros unleashed a crude yet powerful wave of telekinetic energy that blasted the door and its frame out of the wall entirely.

Jayk dived out of the way of this before leaping back in front of the jagged hole left in the wall with his lightsaber held up in front of him.

"Keros Pano you are-" he began but before he could finish his sentence Keros suddenly unleashed a storm of Force lightning. Jayk was able to block this attack with his lightsaber but Keros did not give up.

"I'll kill you!" he screamed as the lightning storm continued and Jayk staggered backwards under the relentless attack.

"What's going on back there?" Tylo called out as he fired a single shot up the stairwell when he thought he saw movement up there.

"Stay back!" Jayk called out. But he did nothing that might draw attention towards Brae as she crept along the hallway as close to the wall as she could, getting ever closer to the hole that had lightning pouring out of it.

"Stop this Keros." Jayk said, "Your anger and fear has corrupted you. Come with us and we can still save you from the Dark Side."

"I'll never join you!" Keros shouted back at the Jedi as he stepped through the hole he had made in the wall. It was as he stepped out into the hallway he saw the glow of Brae's lightsaber just off to his side and suddenly his assault on Jayk ceased and he turned towards Brae instead, ready to strike. But Brae was too fast for him and even as he raised his arms towards her she swung her lightsaber in an arc that severed both his hands at the wrists and he screamed in agony as he stared at the charred stumps at the end of each of his arms.

"I'll kill you!" he yelled as he unleashed another wave of telekinetic power that hurled Brae back down the hallway. But the attack was crude and Brae shut off her lightsaber as she flew and was able to land on her feet before she reactivated the weapon. Meanwhile Keros turned back towards Jayk, preparing to unleash another blast of raw telekinetic energy through the Force at him. But Jayk expected this and as Keros turned the Jedi knight was already charging towards him with his lightsaber pointed in front of him.

Keros gasped as the weapon pierced his chest, passing all the way through to stick out of his back before Jayk shut it off and Keros collapsed in an heap at Jayk's feet.

"It's over." Jayk said, looking down at the corpse, "He could not be saved."

"Fine." Tylo called out, "Now what about us? I don't think it's going to be so easy getting up to the roof from here and there's a lot of smoke coming from the floor below us."

"Cal." Brae said and Jayk nodded.

"Hopefully his level of control over the *Swift Exit* is good enough to be able to pick us up." he said.

"Hey wait a minute." Tylo called out, "Are we talking about having the dead guy try and hover right next to a burning building?"

"Cal can you read me?" Jayk said into his comlink.

"Right here." Cal's voice responded.

"Cal we need you to come down and pick us up." Jayk told him.

"I'm guessing you're all inside that burning building. I can be there in two minutes."

"Not the roof." Jayk said, "We need you to hover outside the third floor so we can jump across."

"That could be tricky." Cal said, "The ship's proximity sensors can let me know when I'm about to crash into the building but I can't see to line her up on a particular window."

"Then just get the altitude and distance right. We'll direct you from here. Watch for my lightsaber to tell you which side of the building to approach." Jayk said.

"Okay, I'm on my way. But this plan is as stupid as something Lara would have come up with." Cal said.

"Tylo we're leaving." Jayk then called out and he waved his hand at one of the closed doors to lift it open, "Quick, in there both of you."

Brae and Tylo rushed through the doorway being held open before Jayk darted through after them. Then he let the door drop shut just as some of the squatters came charging into the hallway now that Tylo was no longer able to hold them back. With the squatters hammering on the door in an effort to break it down Jayk walked across the room.

"Brae, Tylo, cover that door." he said, "I'm going to make us an exit." and then he started to swing his lightsaber at the room's outer wall. This created an opening large enough that he could see the *Swift Exit* descending towards the building and Jayk took out his comlink, "Cal do you see my lightsaber?" he signalled. "Clearly. I'm coming in now." Cal responded as he flew the *Swift Exit* lower, positioning it a few metres from the side of the building and slowly descending further.

"That's it." Jayk signalled when the ship was at the correct altitude, "Now come forwards about five metres." and the *Swift Exit* glided forwards to hover right outside the hole, "You're there, stay right where you are. Open the top hatch and we're on our way over." then as he put his comlink away Jayk looked around.

"Brae you first." he said, "Then I'll throw and you catch."

"Throw and catch?" Tylo said, "Catch what?"

"You." Brae replied as she started to run and leapt across the gap between building and ship to land on its upper hull.

“Hey, wait a minute.” Tylo said but Jayk reached out his arm and using the Force he hurled Tylo through the hole in the wall towards the *Swift Exit*.
Tylo screamed as he flew until Brae plucked him out of the air and brought him down onto the hull in front of her.
“Are you okay?” she asked as he knelt there but he just looked up and snarled at her before Jayk landed behind him.
“Quickly.” Jayk said as he helped Tylo to his feet and the three ran across the *Swift Exit*'s hull to the top hatch where they jumped down into the ship.
“Is everyone safe?” Cal asked over the intercom when Tylo sealed the hatch behind them.
“Safe and sound.” Jayk replied, “Now set a course for the jedi temple. We're done here.”