

STAR WARS

DARKNESS RISING

2-04: EXPLORE & EXPAND

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The alien tremone want nothing to do with the Galactic Republic and keep their borders closed. So when a group of political dissidents decides to establish a colony in their territory it falls to the Jedi Order to prevent the situation escalating into an all out war...

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1.

The freighter that had been retrofitted as a colony ship came out of hyperspace at the edge of the system and immediately started to scan it. As expected the fourth planet of the system had a Type I atmosphere and gravity within acceptable tolerances for humanoid life but that was not what the comscan operator was searching for.

"Skies are clear captain." he said, "No sign of any other vessels and no transmissions alerting anyone to our presence."

"Excellent." the captain responded and he turned to the woman sat at the helm station, "Take us into orbit." he told her before he activated the ship's intercom.

Elsewhere in the transport a large group of the colonists had gathered to watch their exit from hyperspace even though the planet that they had come here to settle was too far away for any of them to see unaided. All that they could see outside the large transparent dome they had gathered together in were stars in all directions. But that was enough for them.

"Attention all hands." the captain's voice announced, "As you are probably aware we have just left hyperspace. Our scans confirm everything we believed, this system is uninhabited and our future home lies dead ahead." and the assemble crowd began to applaud. At the same time the expedition leader climbed onto a platform and turned to address the crowd.

"This marks both a beginning and an end." he announced, "For us it is a new beginning. While for those who have driven us here it is the beginning of their end." and the crowd applauded even louder.

The sound of music attracted Tylo Kurrast into the interior of his ship, the *Swift Exit*, as it sat in the main hangar of the jedi temple. Stepping into the lounge area of the ship he found three individuals in jedi attire there. Jayk Udra was a jedi knight that Tylo had been given the task of transporting around the galaxy in exchange for avoiding a prison sentence for trafficking in contraband Sith artefacts while Brae was not only Jayk's padawan learner but also his niece and she was the source of the music as she read notes from a datapad that she then played on her eight stringed queterra. The final jedi present was there only as a hologram, Jedi Knight Cal Udra had died thousands of years ago but during his life he had created a holocron to store his knowledge and used a recreation of himself as its guardian. Given that he had once taught his own younger sister, the Jedi Council had decided that Jayk would benefit from his advice on how to deal with a close relative.

"Pretty good kid." Tylo said, smiling as he leant against the door frame, "I think this is the first time I ever heard you play."

"Thanks." Brae replied.

"Playing an instrument can help calm and focus the mind." Jayk said, "Something Brae could do with more of."

"So do either of you play an instrument as well?" Tylo asked, "Because I've always wanted to be part of a band."

"Actually I have some experience of the queterra as well." Jayk said, "Though it has been a while since I last played. In fact I think it was about nineteen years ago when I was trying to impress a woman."

"Seriously? How did that go?" Tylo asked and Jayk smiled.

"It worked. It worked very well." he said, "Of course my deployment ended and we had to part ways."

"Okay, so we've got two queterra players and I'm known for my ability with drums so that just leaves you Cal." Tylo said, "What can you bring to our musical tour?"

Cal smiled.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "the original me liked to sing. I recall both my wife and sister commenting about how powerful my voice was." and at the same time the holocron's circuits called up a memory of a younger Cal singing to himself at home then turning around to see his wife Gayal and sister Lara sat on a couch with pillows pressed over their ears while they glared at him and a dog howled nearby, "On the other hand my sister thought she could play both the queterra and the keybed." and he recalled Lara playing both instruments perfectly.

"Perhaps we should go and find Lara's holocron and get her to join us." Brae suggested and Cal hesitated.

"No." he replied, "That won't be possible. My sister never created a holocron."

"Sounds like we've got ourselves a band anyway." Tylo said before a bleeping sound from the cockpit alerted the *Swift Exit's* occupants to an incoming transmission.

"Sounds like duty calls." Jayk said and he got up and headed for the cockpit with Tylo hurrying after him.

"Keep practising." he said to Brae as he passed her, "That could be our ticket out of here."

In the cockpit the two men sat down and activated the ship's communication system.

"Master Ress." Jayk said when the face of the Grand Master of the Jedi Council appeared on the screen, "Is there word of Thal N'Krey?"

"No, not this time Jedi Udra." Master Ress answered and he glanced towards Tylo, "This time I have an assignment that could benefit from Captain Kurrast's presence as well."

"Captain'?" Tylo commented, "I don't hear that often. At least not in reference to me. I've got a very bad feeling about this."

"What's wrong?" Jayk asked.

"How much do you know about a species called the trenome?" Master Ress asked.

"I've heard the name." Jayk replied, "But I don't know anything about them."

"That's because they don't get out much." Tylo said, "I've heard enough about them to know to avoid their territory. It's said they don't let anyone in and anyone they catch there is never heard from again."

"Tylo is correct." Master Ress said, "The trenome have a xenophobic culture located in the Outer Rim that rejects all outside contact. For many years they were responsible for the destruction of shipping and isolated settlements that cost hundreds of lives across several sectors until an agreement was finally reached. Now we have a border that separates their space from the Republic that has held for more than six hundred years."

"You're about to tell us that that border is threatened, aren't you master?" Jayk asked.

"Unfortunately, yes I am. Deep space tracking monitored a colony ship heading for their space."

"A colony ship?" Tylo exclaimed, "What sort of fool would take a ship filled with civilian settlers into Tremone space?"

"Extremists turning their back on the Republic." Master Ress said, "The colonists are all drawn from a political group that sought to dissolve the Republic entirely. A number of them were associated with a violent underground group that their local government was able to disperse with our help. After that they were able to gather just enough support for a public vote to hold on the issue of planetary secession but it was easily defeated as well. Now they have chosen to find another way of leaving the Republic and the group was able to raise enough funds to purchase a small number of vessels including the colony ship. It is our belief that they intend to establish a colony on a planet claimed, but not yet settled by the tremone."

"What happens if the trenome find them?" Jayk asked.

"They'll wipe them out." Tylo said.

"Worse than that they may see it as a breach of the treaty." Master Ress added, "If they do then their attacks on our ships and colonies would start up again. If our estimates of their military strength are correct then the casualties could run into the millions before the Republic can organise a response."

"Kind of makes you think that the Republic made a mistake in getting rid of its armed forces." Tylo commented.

"I'm guessing that you want us to go and convince the colonists to move." Jayk said.

"Correct." Master Ress replied, "We're hoping that Captain Kurrast's experience as a smuggler will enable you to avoid the trenome's border defences. We'll give you all the information we have on the colony ship's course and what survey data we have for that region of space. Hopefully that will be enough for you to find the colony before the trenome do and convince them to leave."

2.

"This information is old." Jayk said as Cal showed them the survey data that the Republic available of the systems where the colony ship was likely to have headed based on its last known course. The *Swift Exit* had left the Jedi temple as soon as the orders to leave had been received and the crew had had to drop out of hyperspace short of tremone space to upload this information from more local sources and now that the ship had returned to hyperspace for the final leg of their journey its occupants reviewed it.

"Understandable given that the only information gathered more recently than six hundred years ago was collected using radio telescopes that are limited to the speed of light for the information they can gather." Cal replied.

"Kind of leaves us in the dark." Tylo added.

"I thought you knew about the tremone." Brae said.

"Fragments kid. No-one really knows much about them because no-one comes back from where we're heading for. Are you three sure you wouldn't rather just hit the road with our band?" Tylo replied.

"Our mission is clear." Jayk said.

"Do you think we'll be able to convince them to leave master?" Brae asked, "Do you really think this could lead to war?"

"There hasn't been a full scale war since the foundation of the Republic." Cal said, "Or at least since its reformation more than seven hundred years ago. Thankfully the galaxy seems to have outgrown such things."

"I am confident that we will not be responsible for ending the Republic's track record of peace." Jayk added.

"Well if you do just remember one thing." Tylo said, "I'm not in the army. Assuming we had an army. Which we don't. So you won't be finding me on the front lines."

All of a sudden an alarm sounded and Tylo's eyes widened.

"Is that the proximity alarm?" Brae asked.

"Sure is." Tylo responded as he got to his feet, "But there shouldn't be anything big enough to pull us out of hyperspace this far out." and then he hurried into the cockpit, the two Jedi following him, "We've got a mass shadow alright." he said as he sat down and studied the ship's sensors, "We'll have to drop out of hyperspace. Hang on." and he reached out to shut off the hyperdrive before the emergency cut outs could be triggered. Outside the ship the blurred lights of hyperspace suddenly coalesced into the stars of realspace, revealing the *Swift Exit* to still be somewhere in interstellar space far from the nearest star system.

"There's nothing here." Brae commented.

"Yes there is." Jayk said, "Your senses can deceive you my young apprentice. Use the Force. What do you feel?"

Anger.

Hatred.

Fear.

Brae shuddered and gasped when she opened her mind to the Force and felt the Dark Side.

"There's someone out there. Someone who doesn't want us here." she said.

"I've got a rogue asteroid dead ahead." Tylo said, "If I had to guess I'd say that someone deliberately dragged it here to block the hyperspace lane through this sector."

"The tremone." Jayk said.

"They're using it as a base, aren't they master?" Brae said and Jayk nodded.

"Tylo I suggest you get us as far from that asteroid as you can and plot us a jump into hyperspace." he said as he got to his feet.

"Where are you going?" Tylo asked.

"To the turret. It might be a good idea if you powered it up. I sense that we're about to have company."

"Okay, transferring power to the turret now." Tylo said and then as Jayk left the cockpit Tylo looked at Brae, "I could do with Cal up here." he told her, "He'll be able to calculate the jump much quicker than I can."

"I'll go and get him." Brae replied and she too got out of her seat and rushed from the cockpit, returning shortly after with Cal's holocron in her hand, "Here." she said, handing the holocron to Tylo who placed it on top of the control console.

"Cal are you there?" he asked.

"Right here." Cal replied, his hologram appearing at the rear of the cockpit, "I'm interfacing with the nav computer now. I'll have jump co-ordinates in two minutes."

"Good. Because here they come." Tylo replied.

From hangars built on the asteroid a dozen starfighters were launched towards the *Swift Exit* and they accelerated rapidly.

"Republic craft you have trespassed in the sovereign territory of the Tremone Kingdom." a voice announced over the *Swift Exit's* communication system, "Now you must be destroyed."

"Friendly, aren't they?" Tylo commented, "Raising shields."

A sudden flash of light alerted the *Swift Exit's* crew to the fact that they were now in range of the asteroid base's long range turbolasers but the initial blast missed the small transport and Tylo cursed as he swung the ship around sharply. At the same time Jayk turned the *Swift Exit's* turret towards the oncoming fighters and opened fire with an extended burst. Being more concerned about keeping them away from the *Swift Exit* long enough for the ship to re-enter hyperspace than with destroying the fighters, Jayk used his attack to scatter their formation while Tylo flew the ship as fast as possible away from them and their base. However, in doing so the *Swift Exit's* ion drive exhaust was exposed to the tremone fighters. The intense heat being given off by the engine enabled one of the fighters to get a rapid missile lock and there was a plume of fire as the rocket engine of a missile ignited and sped towards the *Swift Exit*.

"Incoming." Jayk announced and he turned the *Swift Exit's* turret towards the missile and opened fire. The tiny missile made for a difficult target but it lacked any evasive programming and Jayk took advantage of its straight course towards the *Swift Exit* to shoot it down at a safe distance. However, the fighters kept on coming and although their level of technology was inferior to the *Swift Exit* they continued to gain on the freighter.

"How much longer until we can make the jump into hyperspace?" Brae asked, looking at the hologram of Cal stood behind her despite the holocron itself being in front of her.

"Travelling through hyperspace isn't like dusting crops." Cal commented and Brae frowned.

"What's that even supposed to mean?" she said.

"It means he's not done yet." Tylo said, "At least with those fighters now in the way that outpost can't fire its turbolasers at us again."

"Twenty seconds." Cal said, "I'll have us out of here in twenty seconds. Just make sure that we're far enough away from that asteroid that we can make the jump."

"We'll be fine." Tylo said, "We'll be out of the gravity well in ten."

"How close are the fighters?" Brae said and Tylo glanced at the sensor display.

"Ah." he said, "They'll be in range in five seconds."

"I've got a very bad feeling about this." Brae said and she reached for the intercom, "Uncle Jayk we need about fifteen seconds of cover." she told him hurriedly before wincing as she wondered whether or not it was appropriate to refer to him as 'uncle'.

"On it." Jayk responded, making no comment about her choice of words and he fired again. Thankfully the *Swift Exit's* laser cannon had a longer range than the more primitive cannons aboard the tremone fighters and he was able to break up their formation again, this time clipping one of the fighters and sending it hurrying back towards the outpost with flames trailing from one of its engines. The rest of the fighters continued to head for the *Swift Exit* however, now doing their best to avoid the laser fire from the turret by limiting the amount of time that they spent flying a straight course before changing it. The consequence of this was that the fighters were no longer closing on the *Swift Exit* quite as rapidly.

"Five more seconds." Tylo said, "Then they'll be able to hit us."

"Almost there." Cal replied, "I've got the primary vector sorted, I just need to check the velocity against mass shadows."

"Hurry." Brae said.

All of a sudden there was a flash of light outside the cockpit as a blaster shot struck the *Swift Exit's* shields.

"That was a close one." Tylo said, "At least our shields are holding."

"Ready!" Cal exclaimed, "Uploading the data now."

"I see it. Hang on." Tylo said and he reached out and slammed his hand down on the hyperdrive control, sending the *Swift Exit* hurtling back into hyperspace and Tylo exhaled, "Okay we're away." he said to Brae, "You may want to go and check out that mission briefing again while I see if we took any damage."

The next time the *Swift Exit* came out of hyperspace the crew were more prepared.

"Thirty seconds." Tylo announced over the intercom and Jayk and Brae hurried to the cockpit, bringing Cal's holocron with them. They sat down just as the ship dropped back into realspace and they found themselves looking out into space at a brightly coloured gas giant.

"Where are we?" Brae asked, "Isn't there supposed to be a habitable planet here?"

"I thought it prudent to bring us back into realspace somewhere out of sight of the colonists." Cal said,

"Fortunately the radio telescope data revealed the existence of this gas giant."

"Okay, I'm taking us into orbit." Tylo said, "We'll run silent and see what we can pick up with passive sensors."

"Probably not a lot at this range." Cal said, "We may want to make another hyperspace jump to get to the colony."

"We'll see what we're dealing with first." Jayk replied, "If the colonist have already established defences then

we'll need to think of a way of getting around them.”

“Adjusting our orbital position now.” Tylo said, “We should be able to see the colony over the horizon in a couple of minutes.”

The world on which the dissidents from the Republic had settled came into view just as Tylo had predicted it would, rising over the horizon of the gas giant. Given the distance between the two planets it was visible to the *Swift Exit's* occupants as just a tiny dot in the distance that stood out against the stars only because of its brightness. However, the ships passive optical sensors gave them a much more magnified view, showing them the shapes of continents and also the ship in orbit around the world.

“Looks like a rin assid bulk hauler.” Tylo commented, “They must have refitted it to bring them here.”

“There's a shuttle as well.” Cal commented, “Must be running supplies to the surface.”

“I don't get it.” Brae said, “Why not just land the ship?”

“Because having it in space gives them the advantage of an orbital platform.” Jayk said, “From there it can direct operations over most of the continent, acting as an observation platform as well as a communications relay.”

“They may be pushing mass limits for atmospheric operation as well.” Tylo added, “Rin assids are cargo ships with limited passenger capacity. You'd have to make a lot of changes to turn it into a colony ship for a reasonable number of people. They could have had to rip out a lot of stuff that would let the ship operate in an atmosphere.”

Just then an alert sounded from the console.

“Cronau radiation burst.” Cal said, “Someone just dropped out of hyperspace.”

“The tremone?” Brae suggested.

“We're too far away to tell from passive sensors only.” Jayk said.

“Yeah, it'll take a good hour for the EM emissions to reach us.” Tylo added.

“In that case we have a choice, either wait or move in closer.” Jayk said.

“I'm not monitoring any subspace signals.” Cal said, “If it is a tremone patrol then they aren't in a hurry to tell anyone about this colony.”

“The colonists could be sending out scouts.” Jayk said and Tylo nodded.

“Makes sense.” he said, “They must know that the tremone won't be happy to find them here.”

“I picked up three signatures.” Cal said, “It's hard to tell from here but they all looked like they were from ships a similar size to us.”

“We'll wait.” Jayk said, “I want to know what sort of defences the colony has before we try getting any closer to it.”

“No argument here.” Tylo responded.

The crew waited patiently, monitoring the signals from the planet ahead until the electromagnetic emissions from the newly arrived ships travelling at the speed of light reached them. This revealed two of the ships to be obsolete scout ships from the Republic while the third was more unexpected.

“That's odd.” Jayk said, “One of those ships is a tremone vessel.”

“The tremone know that the colonists are here master?” Brae asked.

“Possibly.” Jayk answered, “Which would mean our mission has more urgency. But it seems odd that their ship would arrive escorted by the colonists scouts.”

“It could be an outlaw ship.” Cal suggested.

“That tremone ship looks pretty beat up.” Tylo commented, “Look, there's a hole in its hull.”

“That doesn't look like blast or impact damage.” Brae added, “The only time I've seen damage like that is from a lightsaber.”

“The colonists wouldn't have lightsabers.” Tylo pointed out.

“No, but they'd have cutting torches.” Cal said.

“Those scouts boarded that ship and captured it.” Jayk said.

“What for? Won't the tremone notice that it's gone?” Brae asked.

“Possibly. But if the colonists went to all the trouble of bringing it here then they must have already thought of that.” Jayk replied, “But the bigger question is what do they need the ship for?”

3.

The expedition leader was flanked by a pair of men armed with blaster rifles as he watched the two scouts come in to land with their prize. Waiting for the hatch on the tremone ship to open first, the three men then walked directly towards it at the same time as five colonists in space suits emerged from inside. None of the five men wore helmets and their faces were all visible. Four of the men carried a stretcher between them on which lay an unconscious tremone and the expedition leader smiled when he saw this.

"You have it." he said to the man leading the other four from the alien ship.

"Yes Commander Odan." he replied, "We surprised the enemy vessel and easily overwhelmed it. This was the only occupant."

"A shame." Odan said, "Still it ought to be enough. Take it to Doctor Hellik immediately. Then see about getting the damage to that ship repaired. We'll need it to look intact when we are ready for deployment."

The crew of the *Swift Exit* could not make the jump from their position in orbit around the gas giant to the colony world right away. The presence of the colony ship in orbit meant that if they left their current position or arrived in orbit around the colony while it had a line of sight to them they would be vulnerable to detection by its sensors. Therefore, they had to wait until both the transport and the colony itself were over the planetary horizon. At this point the freighter jumped back into hyperspace for just the few seconds it took to cover the tens of millions of kilometres between the gas giant and the colony world, coming back out of hyperspace in a high orbit over the world.

"Taking us in." Tylo said, angling the *Swift Exit* towards the planet and beginning the process of entering the atmosphere before the colony ship came back around the planet and saw them. The ship shook as Tylo pushed its speed as high as he could before running the risk of burning up on entry into the atmosphere until the time came to cut power to the sub light ion drive and switch over to repulsorlifts instead, "Here goes." he added and the ship back to fall freely, its repulsorlifts running but not providing any thrust.

"Tylo shouldn't you do something about the engines?" Brae asked as the ground below appeared to race towards the falling ship.

"We need to get as low as possible before I push power into the repulsorlifts." Tylo replied, "If the colonists pick up the energy pulse bouncing off the ionosphere then they'll know we're here. Once we're low enough to avoid detection, then I'll kick in the repulsorlifts."

"Have faith in Tylo's abilities Brae." Jayk said calmly, "I'm sure he has done this before."

"Actually this doesn't work on civilised worlds." Tylo said, "They have satellite systems that will pick you up no matter where you try coming down. But I saw someone try it in the Outer Rim once."

"Once? What happened?" Brae asked.

"Err, splat." Tylo replied and Brae's eyes widened.

"Splat?" she exclaimed and she hurriedly began to fasten her safety harness just as the *Swift Exit* dropped through a layer of cloud and below then the occupants of the ship saw a large lake, "Now?" Brae asked and Tylo smiled.

"Now." he said and he diverted as much power to the repulsorlifts as they would take.

The *Swift Exit* angled upwards sharply, barely missing the surface of the lake as it levelled out and producing a massive wave behind it from the blast of its engines hitting the surface of the water.

"Where are we?" Jayk asked, looking at the navigation system.

"About two thousand kilometres from the colony site." Cal told him.

"So about three and a half hours flight." Tylo said, "Assuming we fly all the way there."

"We better not." Jayk said, "Set us down about five kilometres away. Then Brae and I will go the rest of the way on foot."

"That's cutting it pretty fine." Tylo commented, "If that transport in orbit is scanning the area then they'll pick us up."

"Why would they be?" Jayk said, "They don't expect anyone to already be down here."

"What about Tylo?" Brae said.

"He needs to stay with the ship." Jayk replied, "If we need extracting in a hurry he can come and pick us up. We need to infiltrate the colony and see if we can figure out how to get them to leave."

Flying at just above treetop height, Tylo piloted the *Swift Exit* across the continent towards the colony. As Jayk had suspected there was no indication that the orbiting transport was conducting any scans of the surface and the ship remained undetected until it reached an area of swampland just a few kilometres away from the colony site and it was here that Tylo set down.

As soon as the ship's access ramp lowered Jayk and Brae rushed down it. Brae ground to a halt as soon as

she leapt off the ramp onto the soggy ground and clamped a hand over her nose and mouth. "Stang Tylo! What an amazing new smell you've discovered." she said from under her hand, despite his being out of earshot in the *Swift Exit's* cockpit.

"Swamp gas." Jayk said, "A by product of decaying vegetation and probably flammable in high enough concentrations."

"It smells like the refresher after that time Tylo let that vegetarian woman he hooked up with cook him a meal." Brae commented. Then she frowned, "What about the ship? Will the gas ignite when it take off?" "Not unless Tylo uses the ion drives." Jayk replied, "Now let's get going. I want to be out of this swamp as quickly as possible."

"Me too." Brae agreed and the two jedi headed in the direction of the colony.

Moving through the swamp was slow going but after they left it the jedi were able to make good time across country towards the colony and they reached it just as the local sun was setting, something that worked to their advantage as the colonists activated a ring of area glow lamps around their fledgling settlement to assist their sentries in watching for local nocturnal wildlife trying to enter it. However, while the lamps illuminated the settlement and the area immediately around it they also ruined the night vision of the posted sentries and made it impossible for them to see much into the darkness beyond the illuminated area.

On the other hand, from their vantage point in the rocky terrain overlooking the colony the two jedi had an excellent view of how it was laid out as they studied its prefabricated structures through macrobinoculars.

"Looks like they've already got a fusion generator set up." Brae commented when she saw a power plant in the centre of the colony and Jayk nodded.

"Strange though." he said.

"What is master?" Brae asked.

"Well that generator is far more powerful than I'd expect for a colony of this size." Jayk told her.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because the best information we have is that there are about five thousand people involved in this colonisation effort. But that generator can output enough power to supply homes for ten times that number. It won't have been cheap either. Even used it would have cost more than twice what a more suitably sized generator would have brand new."

"Maybe they need the power for something other than heating and lighting." Brae suggested.

"I've got a bad feeling about this." Jayk said, "Everything I can think of that needs that much power is military in purpose. A shield generator or a surface to space turbolaser battery."

"I don't see either of those around." Brae said.

"No and I would have expected such a thing to be among the first facilities to be transported down from their ship if they had one."

"Perhaps if we got closer we could see where the power is going." Brae suggested.

"My thoughts exactly my padawan." Jayk said as he put his macrobinoculars away, "We need to get closer."

The two jedi moved cautiously towards the illuminated perimeter, crawling across the ground for the final few metres before they stopped just beyond the area lit by the lamps and watched as a pair of sentries walked past with rifles slung over their shoulders. Neither of the sentries wore any sort of uniform or armour, instead looking more like civilians who had been issued with weapons than a professional security force. As the two guards got further away Jayk raised a hand and waved it, the gesture reinforcing his reaching out through the Force to pick up a small rock and sending it flying through the air just behind them. The rock struck a nearby building and produced a loud 'clang' as it bounced off the metal exterior, causing the sentries to spin around and unsling their rifles as they hunted for the cause of the noise.

"Master, what did you do that for?" Brae whispered, "Now they're looking back this way."

"Not for long." Jayk replied and with another wave of his hand he sent a second rock flying behind the sentries again so that it too produced a 'clang' as it struck a building. This caused the sentries turn their backs on the jedi again, convinced that whatever was making the noise was moving in that direction and they began to creep forwards in search of it.

"Now." Jayk hissed and he rose to his feet and dashed across the area lit by the lamps. Behind him Brae did the same and the two jedi were inside the perimeter before anyone could notice them. Then they began to creep through the partially built colony towards the fusion generator they had seen.

Though much of the colony was shut down for the night, there was still some activity as labour droids that required no rest worked to put together yet more of the prefabricated structures being used to construct it. Fortunately for the jedi these droids had only basic programming that did not allow them to recognise them as intruders. Even if they could the majority of the machines lacked even the ability to communicate with anything other than other droids or supervising computer systems, severely hampering their ability to raise the alarm. Every now and again the jedi did encounter a colonist, however and they either paused to allow them to pass before carrying on towards the generator or used the Force to distract them long enough to slip past.

The generator building itself was easy enough to locate, not only being positioned at the very centre of the

colony but also being much larger than the surrounding buildings and easy to pick out from a distance even in the dark. However, given the importance of the building the colonists had set guards to protect it.

"Looks like they're being cautious." Brae whispered as she and Jayk peered around the corner of a nearby building at one of the guards. Unlike those patrolling the colony's perimeter this one was already holding his rifle and his posture suggested that he had some military or similar training rather than having just been given a weapon and told to stand beside the generator all night.

"Fortunately we don't need to get any closer than this." Jayk replied, "Look at the ground over there." and he looked towards a thick cable that ran along a shallow trench from the generator across the colony. There were several such cables visible from where the Jedi stood and they had crossed protective coverings over several of the shallow trenches on their way here but this particular example was much thicker than any of the others.

"Most of the power is being sent that way." Brae said, "But why? I don't see anything over there that looks like it needs more than anywhere else."

"Then perhaps we should investigate further." Jayk said and he waited for the sentry to turn away before he broke into a sprint and ran towards the thick cable.

Brae followed Jayk and the two followed the path of the cable as it wound its way through the colony until they heard the sound of running water.

"A river." Jayk commented.

"Perhaps the cable is for a water treatment system." Brae said.

"That is a lot of power." Jayk replied, "It would be easier to use smaller localised pumps to draw water across the colony. Now come on, we can't be far from the end now. I can see the glow from the perimeter from here."

There was a medium sized structure located beside the river running alongside the colony that included pipes to draw water from it. Given its location was well lit by the glow lamps but this was not where the thick cable terminated. Instead a narrower cable branched off and ran into the treatment plant while the main cable continued past it to another structure, this one much smaller.

"Isn't this strange?" Brae said as the Jedi neared the structure that was little more than a metal hut in the middle of an area otherwise devoid of buildings, "What could be in a hut that size that needs this much power?"

"I have a bad feeling about this." Jayk said and then he dropped into a crouching position and placed one hand flat on the ground, "It's warm." he said, looking up at Brae, "There's something under the ground producing heat."

"Like an underground structure?" Brae said and Jayk nodded.

"We must be cautious." he said as he got back to his feet, "If this facility is as important enough that the colonists felt the need to hide it underground then it is probably guarded."

"Master what if the colonists didn't put it down there?" Brae asked.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean what if it's something they found down there when they landed?" Brae said.

"Then it is even more important that we find out what they are doing down there." Jayk replied as he drew his lightsaber. Approaching the door to the hut, an entry point that was almost as wide as the structure itself, Jayk saw that it was sealed with a complicated looking lock, "An unusually secure security feature for such a mundane appearing structure." he said softly before he ignited his lightsaber and swung it at the lock, slicing right through it. Jayk then took a deep breath and focused on the door itself, reaching out his hand and using the Force to lift the wide door far enough that Brae was able to duck beneath it.

"Wow." she said.

"What's back there?" Jayk asked while he held the door open slightly.

"A ramp." Brae replied, "It heads down."

"Can you take the door?"

"Yes master." Brae said and Jayk felt the pressure of holding the door through the Force fall. Shutting off his lightsaber, he released his own hold on the door and he rolled underneath. Stopping himself just in time to avoid rolling down the ramp Brae had warned him about.

"Interesting." he said as he got to his feet and behind him Brae lowered the door closed again. In front of the two Jedi the floor of the structure sloped downwards at an angle gentle enough that a person would have no difficulty in walking up or down it. The transition from level floor to ramp was also smooth enough that a wheeled cargo trolley could be pushed over it easily, "This is recent." Jayk added.

"It looks like ordinary ferrocrete." Brae commented and Jayk nodded in agreement.

"And the light coming from below us seems to back up our guess that whatever is taking all that power is down there somewhere. Follow me." he said and he began to walk slowly down the ramp.

"Master." Brae said suddenly.

"What's wrong?" Jayk asked, looking back over his shoulder.

"This place seems important to the colonists. Hidden underground and secured with an advanced lock. Don't

you think that they'd put guard on it like they did with the perimeter and the generator?" Brae pointed out. "A good point." Jayk responded, "But do you sense anyone?"

Brae opened her mind to the Force, searching for the telltale signs of intelligent life from the disturbance it created. She was just about to tell Jayk that she could not sense anything when something jumped out at her.

Pain.

Fear.

Anger.

"Brae are you alright?" Jayk said as she gasped and staggered, reaching out to grab hold of Jayk and steady herself.

"There is someone down here." she said, "Someone in incredible pain."

"Can you tell where they are?" Jayk said and Brae nodded.

"I think so." she said.

"Then lead the way my young apprentice." Jayk told her, "And use caution. Perhaps the reason we can't sense any guards is not because they aren't here but because they are droids or some other automated defence."

"Yes master." Brae commented, suddenly nervous at the thought of rounding a corner and running right into a security droid.

Doing as she was told, Brae took the lead in walking down the ramp until the floor levelled out at the bottom in a corridor where the only features were the lights fitted to the walls. This extended for a few metres before a blast door blocked it entirely.

"There's no locking panel." Brae said as she looked for a way to open the door.

"Up there." Jayk said and he pointed to a small antenna set into the ceiling, "This door is set to open when it receives a signal from a wireless controller. Probably just a comlink programmed with a security code."

"Too bad we don't have one." Brae said.

"Maybe not. But perhaps we can get around the need for one." Jayk said and he ignited his lightsaber again before slashing at the ceiling to cut away the section surrounding the antenna. This promptly fell free of the ceiling but dropped just a few centimetres before the wires coming from the control unit fixed to it halted its fall. Shutting off his lightsaber, Jayk reached up and took hold of the dangling ceiling section to stop it from swinging from side to side inspected the control unit.

"Yes, I thought so." he said, smiling.

"What is it master?" Brae asked.

"It's a conventional access control unit." he told her, turning the controller so that she could see, "When it receives a signal from a communication device it recognises it switches the output that these wires are connected to here. Ordinarily that would be connected to a door or gate motor but it could be connected to just about anything. Some terrorist groups are known to use them to trigger bombs remotely. Fortunately for us the system is very simple and now that we have access to the controller we can easily open the door."

Jayk then swapped his lightsaber for a pocket multi-tool and disconnected the wires coming from the output of the controller, "Get ready." he said and Brae nodded, igniting her lightsaber and standing right in front of the blast door. Jayk then touched the two wires he held together and held them in contact with one another. Just as he hoped this triggered the motors of the blast door and it split apart as the different sections rolled back into the walls.

What the two jedi saw on the other side of the blast door made both of them freeze.

4.

A chirping sound from his datapad made Odan look towards the device sat on a shelf at the side of his quarters.

"What's wrong?" his wife asked as Odan got out bed to investigate.

"It's the laboratory." he said, frowning, "Someone's just opened the door."

"What's Doctor Hellik doing working this late?"

"It wasn't the doctor." Odan said.

"But only you and he can open that door."

"The entry doesn't have a code with it. Someone must have found a way of forcing the door." Odan said and he picked up the comlink that had been sat beside his datapad, "Security, this is Odan. Meet me at the laboratory immediately. We have an intruder."

The laboratory behind the blast door was filled with medical equipment and computers. One entire side of the laboratory was dominated by vertical tubes running from the floor to the ceiling that were filled with clear liquid that had small red masses at their centres. But more worrying that these was the single horizontal tube placed in the centre of the room.

The canine like alien secured inside this tube was obviously a tremone that had numerous tubes inserted into various bodily orifices as well as into a large number of artificial connection points fitted to all of the tremone's limbs. Some of these were obviously feeding chemicals into the alien but the tube connected to its limbs were drawing out a dark red fluid instead.

Pain.

Fear.

Anger.

"He's awake isn't he master?" Brae said as both she and Jayk felt the suffering of the alien through the Force.

"Yes he is." Jayk replied.

"Then we need to release him." Brae said and she stepped towards the alien's prison only for Jayk to reach out and place a hand on her shoulder.

"Be cautious young one." he told her, "Look." and he pointed to a label fixed to the outside that bore the galactic standard symbol to warn of a biological hazard.

"Why do I get the feeling that this is not a medical unit trying to cure him?" Brae commented as she looked around and saw more of the labels.

"Because it isn't." Jayk said as he walked over to a row of computer terminals and looked at the monitors, "If I'm reading this right then this system is set up to extract bone marrow, feeding it into those cloning tubes over there." and he pointed towards the vertical tubes filled with liquid.

"Cloning?" Brae said, "But why clone him?"

"He isn't being cloned, only his bone marrow," Jayk replied, "and it's being DNA sequenced at the same time. Several key sections have been highlighted by the system."

"But why?" Brae said.

"Why else?" a voice called out from the doorway, "Revenge." and as the two jedi turned to see who was there the guards standing either side of Odan opened fire with their blasters.

Not wanting to damage any of the equipment inside the laboratory the guards had their blasters set to 'stun' and although he was hit by the first hot fired at him, Jayk was able to remain conscious by drawing on the Force. However, the continued barrage was too much for him to withstand and before he could activate his lightsaber the multiple hits sent him falling to the floor.

On the other hand Brae was able to dive behind a medical workstation mounted on a wheeled base and she remained concealed there as the blaster shots passed by her on either side as well as striking the workstation. Without Jayk to back her up, Brae was not confident that she could defeat the guards and she looked for a way out. Unfortunately the only exit was through the blast door and that route was blocked by Odan and two guards while the others spread out in both directions. Seeing the way in which the guards were deploying themselves Brae knew that she had less than a minute until they were able to surround an overwhelm her.

Brae screamed in panic and in doing so she inadvertently drew on the Dark Side of the Force, producing a wave of telekinetic energy that spread out in all directions. The fluid filled tubes were of reinforced construction and the wave did no damage to any of them or their contents but a lot of the other equipment present did not escape unscathed. Instead the smaller items flew through the air and the guards were forced to take cover. Even the workstation Brae was using as cover was affected and it was propelled across the

laboratory towards the entrance, forcing Odan and the two guards with him to dive out of the way before they could be struck by the heavy equipment.

Brae saw her chance and ran for the exit before the guards could recover and open fire again. She felt guilty about leaving Jayk behind but she knew that if she could not carry him and if she tried to wake him then she risked being shot as well.

"Stop her!" Odan yelled when Brae leapt over him and ran from the laboratory but it was already too late and she ran along the corridor until she reached the ramp leading back up to the surface. At the top of this Brae found that the door of the structure used to hide the entrance to the laboratory had been left open. As she ran through this she activated her lightsaber and with a single swing she cut through one of the supports holding the door open, promptly bringing it crashing shut behind her and sealing Odan and his guards inside. Brae left her lightsaber active as she ran through the colony. Though Odan had alerted the colony's security force to the presence of intruders he had not seen fit to deploy more guards outside the laboratory and Brae encountered no-one as she ran between the pre-fabricated structures. On the other hand there were still numerous droids at work and she lashed out at each one she encountered to prevent them from being used to track her. At the same time Brae pulled out her comlink and activated it.

"Tylo!" she exclaimed, "Tylo I need help."

At first there was no response and Brae was about to try signalling again when Tylo's voice finally replied to her.

"Calm down, tell me what's wrong." he said.

"Tylo, they're after me. They've got Uncle Jayk and they'll be hunting for me now. I need you to come and get me."

"They? You mean the colonists?"

"Yes, we found some sort of secret laboratory and were investigating it when they surprised us. Uncle Jayk was shot and I only just got out."

"Jayk's been shot? Is he dead?" Tylo asked.

"No, I don't think so. The colonists had set their blasters to 'stun'."

"Okay well that's one good thing at least. Now set your comlink to act as a beacon and I'll bring the *Swift Exit* in to pick you up." Tylo said before the channel went dead.

Brae continued to run through the colony and as she came towards the illuminated perimeter she sensed the presence of guards just moments before she heard them shouting to one another.

"She's over there!" one cried out, having noticed the blue glow from her lightsaber around a corner. The guard then appeared in front of her and fired his blaster. Instinctively Brae used her lightsaber to deflect the blaster bolt and it struck the same guard that had fired it. Using the Force, Brae plucked the falling blaster from the air and caught it so that she wielded it in one hand and her lightsaber in the other. Then when the first of the glow lamps illuminating the perimeter appeared ahead of her she fired the blaster at it, knocking out the lamp with a shower of sparks. She repeated this as more of the lamps came into view, creating a channel of darkness through the perimeter that Brae ran towards while more guards closed in around her. Brae deflected three more blaster shots aimed at here, using one to knock out another of the lamps while the other two were just sent away from her. Then she shut off her lightsaber and dived into the darkened channel in the perimeter, knowing that the lights to either side would ruin the guards' night vision and make it harder for them to track her as she ran into the wilderness.

"After her!" someone yelled from behind her, "She must have a ship out there somewhere."

Tylo kept the *Swift Exit* at the same low altitude he had used previously as he followed Brae's signal.

Technically Cal's holocron was capable of acting as an autopilot while Tylo operated the ship's gun turret but he knew that his skills as a pilot were of more use than having a gunner.

"Two thousand metres." Cal announced.

"I don't see her." Tylo replied as he looked out of the cockpit, hoping to catch sight of Brae.

"No, but I think that all those lights give us a clue as to where she is." Cal said and he pointed to a cluster of lights that was moving towards them.

"A hunting party?" Tylo suggested and Cal nodded.

"I wouldn't be surprised if they put those scouts up in the air and had their transport start scanning from orbit when they see us." he said.

"Yeah, well I've got an idea about that." Tylo responded before there was a chirping sound from the console, "That the one kilometre mark." he said and he activated the communication system, "Brae we're close. Where are you?"

Brae knew that her pursuers were close and it came as a great relief when she heard Tylo's voice coming from her comlink. Ahead of her she saw a rocky outcrop and she ran behind it and took cover before swapping her lightsaber for her comlink.

"Tylo I don't see you." she transmitted as she searched the sky for the *Swift Exit*.

"I'm coming in low without lights." Tylo replied, "Can you give me a visual signal?" and Brae smiled as she looked at her stolen blaster.

"I think so." she said, "Watch this." and she leant around the rock she was hiding behind and fired at the light of the glow rods held by the guards following her.

The flash each time she pulled the trigger was easily visible not only to Tylo but also to the guards chasing after Brae. The initial shots from her blaster forced them to seek cover, some just throwing themselves to the ground. But then they used the flash as a means of targeting Brae and returned fire, instead forcing her to cease fire and take cover while the shots being fired at her blasted chunks of rock from her hiding place.

However, before the rock could become too small to act as a practical shield there was the sound of repulsorlift engines from overhead and the *Swift Exit* appeared from above a cluster of trees before coming to a halt right over the guards where the down force from its engines pushed them away.

Brae saw that the *Swift Exit's* access ramp was open and she dropped her blaster, drew her lightsaber and burst out of hiding as she ran towards the ship. Some of the guard caught on the edge of the blast from the *Swift Exit's* engines fired at Brae who was easy to spot with her lightsaber glowing brightly. Brae parried each shot with her lightsaber, taking care not to send any of the shots upwards towards the *Swift Exit* and when she had built up as much speed as she could she leapt into the air, using the Force to give her an additional boost as she propelled herself towards the opening beneath the hovering starship.

Brae narrowly missed landing on the access ramp and instead found herself clinging to the end of the ramp by one hand while she held her lightsaber in the other.

"Tylo!" she called out, hoping that he would be able to hear her over the sound of the engines.

"I think that Brae may need your assistance." Cal said and Tylo nodded.

"Take over and get us out of here. Fly us straight back the way we came and keep us at about one hundred metres." he said.

"That'll make us visible to their tracking system." Cal pointed out.

"Maybe. But it'll stop you crashing us into the ground or dragging Brae through any trees." Tylo responded as he got out of the pilot's seat and ran from the cockpit. Hurrying into the hold he saw Brae now clinging onto the end of the ramp with both hands as the *Swift Exit* turned to leave, "Hang on kid." he called out.

"Seriously?" Brae yelled back at him, "What else am I supposed to do?"

Tylo took a safety harness from the wall beside him and quickly fastened it around him. Then he hurried down the ramp and grabbed hold of Brae before dragging her up onto the ramp.

"Come on," he told her, "we need to find somewhere to hide and then you can tell me what happened."

Tylo and Brae rushed to the cockpit where Tylo took back control of the *Swift Exit*.

"So now what?" Brae asked.

"Like I said, now we find somewhere to hide." Tylo replied.

"Hide? Where?" Brae said.

"I saw some caves on the way here that looked big enough. Providing we can get to them quick enough we should be able to use them for cover." Tylo said and he transferred more power to the *Swift Exit's* engines, accelerating away from the colony.

"We've got company." Cal said, "I'm, picking up a launch from the colony."

"Just one?" Tylo said and Cal's hologram nodded, "It looks like one of their scout ships."

"Hopefully that means the other one's not operational right now." Tylo said.

"What else could it mean?" Brae said.

"That the colonists think that one scout ship more than outclasses us enough that they don't need to send both and waste fuel they don't need to." Cal said.

"Well they're going to be too late to find us." Tylo said, "There we go." and he looked down at a large opening at the base of a cliff at the edge of a lake, "Hopefully that water will absorb enough engine heat that they won't be able to detect it." Tylo put the *Swift Exit* into a dive until it was just a few metres above the surface of the water and kicking up waves as it flew towards the mouth of the cave. Then he cut back on the power to the engines, slowing the *Swift Exit* down rather than rush into the cave at full speed without knowing what was inside.

The cave was more than large enough inside that when Tylo brought the *Swift Exit* to a halt he was able to turn the ship on the spot so that it faced back towards the mouth of the cave before landing. Then as he shut down all of the ship's systems to avoid detection he looked at Brae.

"So tell me exactly what happened." he said.

5.

When Jayk awoke he found himself still in the laboratory only now he was secured to the inside of a transparent tube similar to the one that held the tremone. Rather than the large numbers of tubes connected to the alien there were only a small number hooked up to Jayk, all of them apparently feeding chemicals into his arms.

"Ah Jedi Udra, you are awake." Odan said from close by and when Jayk turned his head he saw the colony leader standing between two guards while other colonists inspected the damage caused during Brae's escape, "I hope you don't mind but I went through your belongings and found your identification. I do so prefer knowing who I'm talking to."

"Where's Brae?" Jayk said, looking around for his niece.

"Is that the young lady who made all this mess? Oh she managed to escape with the help of someone in a freighter. Don't worry though, our scouts will find them soon enough and then we'll bring them here." Odan said before a man dressed entirely in white walked up to him.

"None of the damage is serious." he said, "The pathogen will be completed on schedule."

"Pathogen?" Jayk said, "What are you doing here?"

"Oh I'm sorry Jedi Udra." Odan said, "But I'm not about to boast of my plans for galactic domination while you think up some complicated way of escaping. Now I have a search to co-ordinate while Doctor Hellik continues with his work." and Odan then turned around and strode out of the laboratory. Meanwhile the two guards retreated only as far as the doorway where they took up positions that allowed them to watch Jayk. Hellik, the man dressed in white then walked over to the tube that Jayk was imprisoned in and started to check the readouts on the display mounted on its side.

"Release me." Jayk said, moving his hand as much as the restraint would allow but for some reason he could not concentrate his thoughts as he was usually able to and Hellik smiled.

"You'll find your powers aren't going to work." he said, "We're keeping you dosed with a blend of stimulants that will affect your ability to relax and concentrate. You may also notice some pains in your chest from the effect they'll have on your cardiovascular system. Now you look healthy enough so we'll commence pathogen infusion as soon as we have a reasonable amount ready. You'll be our control subject to check that we won't be affected when we release it."

"So what do you suppose they were doing in this laboratory then?" Tylo asked when Brae was done telling him and Cal what had happened at the colony.

"It sounds like a biological warfare facility to me." Cal said, "One specifically targeting the tremone. I'd say that the colonists were planning to tailor a pathogen from tremone DNA, hence the bone marrow. That could then be released into the tremone population and because it was made from their own DNA they'd have little to no resistance against it. Their immune systems couldn't attack the disease without attacking their own bodies at the same time. In fact that could be one way that it would work, turn the body's own immune system against it."

"But why would they want to do that?" Brae said.

"Ah, I think I may have found something about that in the files the Republic supplied." Cal said, "I checked the intelligence files on the individuals believed to have been behind the setting up of this colony and found out that in addition to all being part of the same political group they also have something else in common. Each of them has lost a close relative to the tremone after they ended up in tremone space for some reason or another. Revenge makes for a very good motive."

"Okay so they wipe out an entire species. But then what?" Tylo said, "The Republic's not going to let that lie."

"It wouldn't know." Cal said, "There are no diplomatic links between the tremone and the Republic at all. If the tremone disappeared then it would be very easy for someone else to take over their territory and pretend that nothing's happened. That is until they're ready to strike."

"Strike? Strike where?" Brae asked.

"The Republic of course." Cal answered, " Their movement wants it destroyed and they'd have a base from which to build up a considerable force without being watched."

"Okay so how do we stop them?" Tylo said.

"And rescue Uncle Jayk." Brae added.

"The tremone ship." Cal said, "If we could get aboard it then we could use it to alert the tremone to the presence of the colony."

"Which would lead to war according to the Jedi Order." Tylo pointed out.

"Only if the colony is still here when the tremone get here." Cal replied, "If we just send a distress signal without saying what's wrong then it'll attract attention. We make sure that the colonists know what we've

done and do what we can to make sure that they can't protect themselves. That'll force them to leave, hopefully without the equipment they've already set up here."

"That still doesn't explain how we rescue Uncle Jayk." Brae commented.

"That'll have to be done first." Cal said, "How far away can you sense him from?"

"Pretty far if I try and there are no other Force users around." Brae replied.

"Then we infiltrate the colony and rescue Jayk before we sabotage their reactor and whatever else looks interesting." Tylo said, "Then we send the distress signal and tell the colonists to get the kriff away from here before the tremone fleet turns up and wipes them out."

"I recommend planting charges before you rescue Jayk." Cal said, "You can trigger them by remote as a distraction."

Moving out while still under cover of darkness, Brae and Tylo darted out of the cave and headed directly towards the colony. Most of the terrain between the cave and colony was wooded and this allowed them to proceed without worrying about being seen from the air by the scout ship they could hear searching for them. "When we get back to Coruscant I'm going to requisition a missile launcher." Tylo commented when he looked upwards as the scout ship flew overhead again.

"I'm thinking of asking for a speeder bike." Brae replied, "To save all this walking."

"Not far now." Tylo said, "I can hear their ground patrols."

Brae listened and she too heard the sound of voices as the guards from the colony worked to reinforce their perimeter. From just a few metres ahead she and Tylo could see the perimeter and they saw that the droids that had been assembling the prefabricated structures brought down from the transport were now being used to create a physical barrier around the colony. This consisted of a ditch being dug and the soil removed from it piled on the far side so that anyone inside the ditch would have to climb twice as high to get out of it on the colony side as they would on the other. The barrier being created had a flat surface on top that allowed the guards to walk around on it, giving them a raised position from which to survey the surrounding area.

The problem was that the colonists had relatively few specialised excavation droids and most of the work was having to be carried out by more mundane labour droids with hand tools. This meant that in the just under three hours since Brae had left the colony the defensive ditch was only partially complete and most of the perimeter still relied on just the glow lamps. However, now that the colonists knew there were jedi on the planet they had increased the number of guards on duty drastically. Some of these now wore blast vests but there was no uniformity to their design and it still appeared that the colony was making do with whatever it had rather than employing a properly organised defence force.

"I don't think there's anywhere not covered by a guard." Tylo said as he looked through his macrobinoculars.

"Yeah, I don't see any way of getting down there without being caught." Brae replied and Tylo smiled.

"What?" Brae asked.

"I've got an idea." Tylo told her.

"Move!" Tylo snapped as he shoved Brae out of the trees and she stumbled forwards with her hand behind her.

Ahead of them a group of four guards all turned to see what was going on, raising their blasters when they saw Brae being forced along at gunpoint.

"What's going on over there?" one of the guards called out.

"I caught her trying to sneak back around towards the river." Tylo replied as the guards kept most of their attention focused on Brae.

"This isn't going to work." she whispered.

"Sure it is." Tylo replied softly, "They're not going to ask about who I am until we're right on top of them.

Now keep going and make sure you keep your hands out of sight. You're supposed to be tied up."

Reaching the illuminated area of the perimeter Tylo and Brae walked right up to the guards and one of them finally took a more careful look at Tylo.

"Who are you?" he asked, "I don't recognise you."

"And I don't recognise you either." Tylo replied.

"I'm going to call this in." the guard said and he reached for his comlink.

"Of course you should. You should do it – Now!" Tylo exclaimed and there was a sudden 'snap-hiss' as Brae brought her hands out from behind her and activated her lightsaber. Tylo dived back out of the way, leaving only the four guards standing right in front of the young jedi and with a single swing of her weapon she despatched all four of them before any could make a sound.

"Nice work kid." Tylo said, looking down at the bodies, "Now dump your cloak and grab a blaster and the least damaged jacket from these guys. We need to blend in."

Brae did as Tylo suggested and then after concealing the four bodies among a nearby stack of cargo cases the pair started to make their way through the colony

"Can you tell where Jayk is yet?" Tylo asked as they walked.

"Just about." Brae answered, "I think he's still in the laboratory."

"That's useful." Tylo said, "Right where we want to place one of our charges. I suggest we do that one last and start with the reactor."

Heading towards the generator at the heart of the colony the pair found that the building was still as heavily guarded as it had been when Jayk and Brae had first inspected it earlier in the night and Tylo paused while watching one of the guards patrolling around it.

"That thing's big up close." he said, "I don't think that all of the explosives we brought with us together would put a dent in it from the outside."

"Then we'll just have to get inside won't we?" Brae responded, "We've only got three charges and three targets."

"Then stay here while I deal with that guard." Tylo told her and he calmly walked towards the guard that was now heading away from them, "Hey! Over here." he called out and the guard turned around and frowned at him.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"Has Han come past this way?" Tylo said, still walking towards the guard.

"I don't know anyone called Han. What does he look like?"

"Oh he's about this tall." Tylo said, holding his hand up to the level of his own height, "Wait, there he is over there." and he pointed over the guard's shoulder. Instinctively the guard turned around and it was at that moment that Tylo produced a knife from behind his back and thrust into the guard just beside his spine. Held so that the blade was horizontal, the knife slid between the guard's ribs before Tylo twisted it to open up the wound and then pulled it back out.

The guard collapsed immediately, choking as his lungs filled with blood. However, with his lung punctured and his chest cavity open he could not call out for help and this gave Tylo the chance to finish him off by stabbing him through his heart without the alarm being raised. Tylo looked around quickly to see whether anyone was around who could have witnessed the attack and when he saw no-one he dragged the body into the narrow gap between two nearby structures.

"Brae." he hissed, "Give me a hand covering this blood before the next guard comes past."

With the guard disposed of and the trail of blood covered Brae and Tylo were able to enter the generator building unopposed. The fuel for the fusion reactor housed inside was in storage tanks mounted on the exterior of the building and so most of the inside was dominated by the reactor itself and despite the armoured and thermally insulated shell it was contained inside enough heat was still able to escape that the inside of the building was uncomfortably hot for people in outdoor clothing. There were no colonists inside the building when Brae and Tylo entered but there were three of the latest mark II reactor drones moving from one monitoring point to another so that they could maintain a steady output from the reactor.

"As long as we don't try and interfere with the reactor these things ought to ignore us." Tylo said.

"But where's the best place for a charge?" Brae asked and Tylo looked around.

"There." he said, pointing to a piece of machinery that protruded from the bottom of the reactor, "That's one of the magnetic field projectors. Take that out and the plasma inside the reactor will cease to be contained."

"You mean the reactor will breach?" Brae asked.

"At the very least it'll have to be shut down. But if there's enough plasma inside to melt through the shell before it cools down then yes, it'll breach." Tylo answered.

With one of their charges placed against the reactor, Brae and Tylo moved on to their next target. This was the tremone ship that had been captured by the colonists and was now under going repairs at their landing field.

"Place your charge in the cockpit under the main console." Tylo told Brae, "Oh and check the communication system. Don't send the message yet but we need to know that this will work."

"Where are you going?" Brae asked.

"To check that scout ship." Tylo replied, pointing to the single scout ship that was still on the ground while the other patrolled, "That's our way out of here so I want to make sure no-one else gets to it first."

The pair then split up. Brae ran aboard the tremone ship and then cautiously made her way into the cockpit. Though the craft had been designed and built by an alien species it was easy enough to pick out design features that were common with Republic made vessels that allowed Brae to identify the communication system and she briefly activated it, listening for any signals it might pick up. Almost right away the system locked onto a distant broadcast that Brae could not understand but revealed to her that the system was functional. Then she shut off the system again before clamping an explosive charge beneath the console. While Brae was investigating the tremone ship Tylo headed into the colonists' scout ship and also made his way to the cockpit. Tylo's interest was not in the communication system however, instead he briefly inspected the flight control system and smiled when he saw that the previous pilot had not thought to lock out the control systems. After running a brief check to make sure that the vessel was flyable, Tylo opened up the control panel and located the initialisation circuit before detaching it and stuffing it into his pocket.

"Now at least you'll still be here when we get back." he muttered before he made his way back out of the

scout ship to rendezvous with Brae.

"The communication system is functional and the charge is in place." Brae said, "We can activate the distress beacon any time we want then blow the charge to stop anyone sending a cancellation notice."

"Good." Tylo replied with a smile and he held up the circuit he had taken from the scout ship, "This should make sure no-one other than us can take that ship. Now let's go rescue that uncle of yours."

6.

The colonists at work repairing the damage to the laboratory paid no attention to Jayk as he tested the strength of the restraints holding him down. Normally he would have tried to use his powers to free himself either by striking directly at the tube and restraints or by manipulating one of the people in the room. But just as Doctor Hellik had said would be the case, the medication being pumped into his body prevented him from focusing his thoughts enough to make use of the Force. However, they did not remove his sensitivity to it and when he felt a familiar disturbance in it he smiled.

"Brae." he whispered to himself.

Following the damage Brae had inflicted on the door to the structure concealing the laboratory it had been removed entirely and the way down to the underground facility was wide open as well as being unguarded. This allowed Brae and Tylo to walk right into the structure where they paused at the top of the ramp.

"I'll go down first." Tylo whispered, "Follow when I call for you or you hear the shooting start."

"Okay. Good luck." Brae replied and she concealed herself from view just inside the structure beside the door while Tylo calmly walked down the ramp with his rifle slung over his shoulder.

"I've been sent to relieve you." he said to the first guard that came into view at the bottom of the ramp.

"Which one of us?" the second guard said, stepping into view beside Tylo.

"I don't know." Tylo said as he looked around and spotted Jayk staring back at him from the tube, "I was just told to come here and relieve a guard. I didn't even know that there were two of you."

"You go." one of the guards told the other, "you've been on duty longer." and the other guard nodded before leaving the laboratory. Meanwhile the remaining guard looked at Tylo, "So how come I've not seen you around before? I thought I knew everyone in the security force."

"Oh I've not been in it long." Tylo replied as he unslung his rifle, "In fact I suppose I only joined it when I lied about coming here to relieve your friend." and before the surprised guard could react Tylo shot him at point blank range.

Hearing the shot the other guard turned around while he was still only half way up the ramp but before he could come back to investigate he heard a 'snap-hiss' sound from right behind him just before Brae impaled him with her lightsaber.

"Brae go get Jayk." Tylo shouted as he opened fire in the laboratory, firing his rifle on automatic.

Unconcerned about any damage he caused, Tylo had the rifle set to kill and equipment burst into flames as it was hit while the laboratory staff screamed and dived for cover.

"No!" Hellik cried out, "My work!" before one of Tylo's shots hit him and he fell dead.

Brae then dashed across the room to the tube where Jayk was being held and using her lightsaber she cut through the latches.

"Uncle Jayk, what are they doing to you?" she asked.

"Drugs. To stop me using my powers." he responded, "Get them out." and Brae pulled the tubes out of his arms before undoing the restraints holding him down. Jayk tried to get up but the effects of the drugs still in his system left him without full control over his limbs and he fell to the floor.

"Tylo, I need your help." Brae called out.

"On my way." Tylo replied and, still firing his rifle he walked across the laboratory as well. This created an opening and the laboratory staff made a break for the exit.

"He can't stand." Brae said when Tylo reached her and Jayk.

"Okay, I'll support him." Tylo replied, "You set the charge and grab his stuff." and he glanced at where Jayk's belongings had been placed. Then while Brae rushed to get them he helped Jayk to his feet, "Wrap your arm around me." he said, "And don't worry, we've got a plan."

"I've got a very bad feeling about this." Jayk moaned.

"What about him?" Brae said suddenly and she looked at the captive tremone.

"We can't help him." Jayk said, "The colonists have drained most of his bone marrow already. We don't have the facilities aboard the *Swift Exit* to keep him alive long enough to get him to a proper hospital."

"Then let's just set the charge and get out of here." Tylo said, "Brae, "You'll have to cover us."

"Stay close." she replied.

The escaping laboratory staff wasted no time in alerting the other colonists to the presence of Brae and Tylo. Therefore, as they made their way back towards the landing field with Jayk the colony was becoming more active. Brae was able to lead them around the largest concentrations of colonists and the handful she could not evade were easily distracted using the Force. However, as they kept going Brae sensed a growing number of colonists closing in around them.

"They're surrounding us." she said.

"Then perhaps it's time to give them something else to think about." Tylo said and he took out his comlink. Then he used the device send the triggering command to the charge in the laboratory and there was a dull booming sound as the explosive went off underground. He followed this with the signal to the charge fixed to the fusion reactor and there was a much louder explosion that was accompanied by a sudden flare of light as the contents of the reactor ceased to be contained and burst out of the reactor housing, consuming the entire building in a large fireball. The effect of this was immediate and the entire colony was plunged into darkness, resulting in mass panic as the colonists tried to determine whether they were under external attack. In his command centre Odan yelled at his subordinates.

"Send all guards to the perimeter." he shouted.

"But the jedi are inside." one of the command staff replied.

"Yes but they'll be trying to escape." Odan said, "or they'll be waiting for reinforcements from outside. In either case we need to reinforce the perimeter rather than having people stumbling around in the dark while the jedi sneak around behind them. Now get someone out there to pass on my orders."

Outside Brae sensed the guards moving away and in the darkness two of them ran right past the group without even noticing them just a few metres away.

"Come on." she whispered, "The way is clear."

Between them Brae and Tylo were able to help Jayk to the scout ship and sit him down in a chair. Then Tylo looked at Brae.

"Go and send the signal." he said, "I'll get the ship ready for launch."

Brae nodded and hurried to the nearby tremone ship. It took just a few seconds for her to reach the cockpit and trigger the emergency beacon then she ran back towards the scout ship, arriving just as Tylo powered up its engines.

"I did it." she said, "The beacon is active. The tremone ought to pick it up soon."

"Just in time." Tylo said as Brae sat down beside him, "Now let's take off and get back to the *Swift Exit*."

Odan was walking towards the perimeter with a unit of guards when he heard the sound of repulsorlifts and he looked towards the landing field.

"They're stealing our ship!" he exclaimed, "Quickly, we have to stop them." and he turned and ran towards the sound with his guards accompanying him.

They arrived at the landing field just as the scout ship was taking off and it hovered over their heads.

"What are you waiting for?" Odan yelled at the guards, "Shoot it down!" and the guards started to fire their blasters at the scout ship. The small arms did little damage to the vessel though and the scout ship continued to hover as the blaster bolts bounced off its hull. The guards continued firing anyway, hoping that they would find a weak spot until there was a sudden explosion as the cockpit of the captured tremone ship blew up when the explosive charge inside it was detonated.

"Hello down there." Jayk's voice boomed out from the scout ship's communication system, "As much as I enjoyed being your guest my associates and I will be leaving you now. In fact I suggest you also arrange to leave as quickly as you can and return to Republic space given that my young apprentice was able to use the tremone ship to send a distress signal that should be bringing their fleet here very soon. You will of course all be arrested on your return to the Republic but somehow I doubt that the tremone will be very impressed to find you here and their reaction is likely to be far, far worse." and at that point the scout ship suddenly accelerated away, leaving Odan and the guards staring at the sky.

"Sir, what do we do?" one of the guards asked and Odan scowled.

"Call back our other scout," he said, "and contact the transport. We need them to send down shuttles immediately. The jedi was right, we have no choice but to evacuate and return to the Republic."