

STAR WARS

DARKNESS RISING

2-07: BLOOD & STEEL

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An independent scout hopes that the droids he salvages on an exploration mission will make his life easier, in fact they bring disaster to him and an entire space station before the *Swift Exit* happens to pass that way...

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1.

Like most beings that explored beyond the reaches of known space, Jerron Marr dreamt of making that one big discovery that would set him up for life. However, also like most explorers he repeatedly failed to succeed at this. Every now and again he would come across rich veins of minerals but he lacked the ability to exploit these and so he did not even bother to register claims on them. The most reliable source of income he had was unrelated to exploration, instead chartering his ship out to passengers who wanted to travel off the beaten path or acting as a courier to and from remote colonies. Every now and again though he came across something more interesting and this trip had been one of those times.

The wrecked starship bore the hallmark of having been manufactured by the Republic thousands of years earlier and so there was little value in the technology itself, but not everything aboard the ship had been totally destroyed when it crashed onto the remote airless moon and so there were still things aboard that could be sold for their practical value such as tools that were still compatible with modern devices or emergency ration bars and space suit repair kits. Unspent fuel from the ship's hangar that had been meant for the shuttles and fighters it had once carried had even been usable to restock Jerron's own ship fully. Other items would be of more interest to collectors of Old Republic military memorabilia, including uniforms and equipment that still bore identifiable military markings.

The prize finds however, were the droids. Most of the droids aboard the ship had been smashed beyond repair when it crashed but there had been some military types aboard that had survived in good enough shape that Jerron was able to cannibalise some to restore others to full working order. Now he had half a dozen droids laid out in his workshop. Their black armoured humanoid form suggested to Jerron that they were a utility model intended to provide support to the Republic crew in hazardous environments and his intention was make use of them aboard his own ship for cargo handling and general maintenance. Jerron could afford only a small crew and having droids that would work for free would make all of their working lives a lot easier. First though they needed to be recharged and to have their memories erased to remove any lingering programming restrictions. Just in case they turned out to be dangerous Jerron had already taken the precaution of fitting a restraining bolt to each one.

"Still working with your new toys captain?" a voice asked from behind Jerron and he smiled as he looked around to see one of his crew standing in the workshop doorway.

"Almost done." Jerron replied, turning his chair to face the newcomer, "I'll have this one powered up in a few minutes and then I'll run the memory wipe. After that I may as well set the thing up to do the same to the others to save me the trouble of doing it myself." and the other crewman smiled.

"As long as you don't decide that you don't need any of the rest of us anymore." he said.

"Of course not. You think I want to go space crazy on my own out here?" Jerron replied and all of a sudden he noticed that the crewman's face had fallen.

"Don't make any sudden movements." the man said.

"The droid?" Jerron asked and the man nodded.

"It's active. It's watching you." he said.

Slowly and cautiously Jerron turned his head to see that the droid had sat up on the workbench and was looking straight at him.

"Can you reach the controller for the restraining bolt?" Jerron asked softly.

"Sure, it's right here." the crewman said, picking up the controller and passing it to Jerron who then pointed it at the droid and activated it.

There was a buzzing from the controller to indicate that it was functioning correctly but the droid did not collapse back down onto the workbench as it ought to have done. Instead it looked down at the restraining bolt stuck to its chest and ripped it away.

"Oh kriff!" Jerron exclaimed as the droid got up and stood in front of him, "Get out of-" and then before he could finish his sentence the droid lashed out with a metal fist and struck Jerron on the side of his head, sending him flying across the room before it turned on the other crewman present.

The ship was spotted by the space station as soon as it dropped out of hyperspace. Located in an otherwise uninhabited system, the station acted as a refuelling and repair port for vessels travelling throughout this sector of the Outer Rim Territories and in accordance with protocol an attempt was made to establish contact with the approaching vessel. However, when no response was received the station went onto high alert. The possibility that a space station in such a remote location could come under attack had been planned for and the duty commander was quick to order shields raised and weapons powered. No definitive action was taken for the time being though since the unresponsive vessel appeared to be adrift and had no active weapons of its own. Therefore, when communication continued to go unanswered and repeated scans detected no

powered weapons the duty commander ordered the use of a tractor beam to latch onto the vessel and bring it aboard.

“Security detail report to the hangar. Full environmental protection.” he ordered, unwilling to take any chances and he watched on the hangar security feeds as a squad of men in armoured vacuum suits and armed with blaster pistols assembled beside the mysterious ship and prepared to force an entry. A shaped charge was placed on an airlock and there was a flash as it blasted a neat hole through the outer hatch. With a wave of his hand the leader of the security detail ordered the first of his men forwards towards the hole but just as he reached the outer edge of the cloud of smoke left behind by the explosive charge an armoured mechanical figure stepped out of the vessel with a sword in its hand that it used to cleave the man in half. The rest of the security detail opened fire with their blasters and from the command centre the duty commander watched in horror as every single one of them was killed.

2.

"I'm not picking up any comms." Tylo Kurrast, owner of the light freighter *Swift Exit* said as his ship exited hyperspace in close proximity to the space station. From this distance the station appeared to be intact and although no surface details could be picked out with the naked eye there were spots of light emanating from the inside of the station in many places, suggesting that at least the internal lights still worked. In addition to its internal hangars the space station also featured numerous external docking ports and some of these were occupied by civilian transport ships too large to fit inside the hangars.

"According to the Judicial Department there has been no contact with the station for more than a week." Jedi Knight Jayk Udra replied from beside him.

"Yeah, I get that. But why not just send in some local troops?" Tylo asked.

"They did. An entire squad of sector rangers reported that they had managed to board the station without incident and then there were no further communications from them." Jayk answered.

"Well the station has power so we can try going aboard without worrying about zero-gee if you want." Tylo said and Jayk nodded.

"It would be a shame to come all the way from Coruscant and just turn back." he said, "Take us closer. I'll go and make sure that Brae is ready."

Jayk then got up and left the *Swift Exit's* cockpit, making his way as far as the ship's lounge area where his niece and padawan Brae Udra was sat on the floor meditating while a cup floated in the air in front of her. At the same time a holographic image of another jedi was being projected from a fist sized cube in the corner of the room. The cube was a holocron, a crystalline data storage device and the hologram was a representation of the jedi knight who had originally placed all of his knowledge inside. In this case the jedi was Cal Udra, a distant ancestor of Jayk and Brae's whose experience in teaching his own sister the ways of the Force had been judged to be of benefit to Jayk when in a move that broke with most jedi tradition for the last seven and a half centuries he was assigned his niece as his padawan.

"Did we just come out of hyperspace master?" Brae asked, opening one eye.

"We have." Jayk said, "And it is just as we were told to expect. There has been no attempt by the station to make contact. Do you sense anything?"

Brae closed both her eyes again and took a deep breath as she reached out through the Force. Brae's midi-chlorian count was exceptionally high, even for a jedi and Jayk was curious to find out just how far her power could extend. The problem was that Brae also often had difficulty in controlling the amount of power available to her and every so often she would act too quickly and inadvertently draw on the Dark Side.

"Nothing." Brae replied, "I don't think there's anyone alive over there."

"Well we're about to find out." Jayk said and then he looked at Cal, "Cal can you access the station's computer?"

"Not from here." Cal replied, "But if you can get me to the command centre or main computer core then I should be able to."

"Uncle is that wise?" Brae asked, "If anything happens to Cal's holocron—"

"I'm quite durable." Cal interrupted.

"Plus it's quicker than dismantling a computer and bringing the drives back here." Jayk added, "Brae, you will be responsible for carrying him."

"Yes master." Brae said.

"We're on approach." Tylo's voice then announced over the intercom, "I'm taking us into an external docking port. We'll make contact on the starboard side. It looks like the station has atmosphere and heat as well so we won't need suits."

"That's something at least." Brae commented as she got up and walked over to Cal's holocron. She waited for the hologram of the jedi to vanish and then picked the cube up and tucked it into her robes. The two jedi then made their way to the *Swift Exit's* starboard side docking port and just as they reached it there was a loud 'clump' as the ship made contact with the station.

"Docking complete." Tylo announced from the cockpit, "Seal looks good. I'll be with you in a minute."

Tylo appeared soon after this with his rifle in his hands. As he checked the weapon Jayk and Brae both drew their lightsabers and Jayk opened the outer hatch of the *Swift Exit*. On the other side of this he found himself facing the space station's hatch and this opened just as easily as the *Swift Exit's* had done.

"No security seals in place." he said as he looked into the station's air lock.

The air lock's inner door was also open and this allowed the *Swift Exit's* crew to see that all of the more remote observations about the state of the station appeared correct. Its environmental systems were fully functional and no protective clothing would be required by the trio.

"So where to first?" Tylo asked.

"The command centre." Jayk answered as he entered the station, "I want to know what could possibly overcome an entire space station so quickly that they couldn't even send a distress signal."

Advancing into the station it did not take long for the crew of the *Swift Exit* to come across the first dead body. This was of a male bith who did not appear to have been a member of the station crew. Instead he wore a Trade Federation uniform, suggesting that he had been a crew member of one of the transports docked at the station. Lying face down on the deck, the bith had clearly been shot several times in the back by a blaster weapon.

"Was he running away from something or towards something?" Brae commented.

"Could be both." Jayk replied, "We passed some escape pods back there. Perhaps he thought he could get off the station in one before his killer caught up with him."

"Wrong then, wasn't he?" Tylo added as he looked around, "But that's some pretty precise shooting. Look at the walls, not one shot missed."

Jayk and Brae both looked around as well and saw what Tylo meant. The walls of the corridor were completely unblemished, indicating that none of the blaster shots had struck them.

"That's better aim than I would expect from pirates." Jayk said, "Perhaps the station's logs will shed some light on this."

Leaving the body of the bith where it was, the trio continued on their way until they reached a turbolift cluster. Like everything else about the station's systems before now these appeared to be perfectly functional and a car arrived soon after being called. However, when the doors opened the interior revealed more hints of violence. There were no bodies in the turbolift car but the surfaces were all sprayed with blood, the mix of colours suggesting that they came from a range of species.

"No blaster inflicted the wounds that would have caused this." Jayk commented, "That would have cauterised the wound."

"Probably a blade of some kind." Tylo said, nodding in agreement, "But whoever swung it must have been strong to cause blood to spray like that."

"At least we have our lightsabers." Brae said, "We won't be quite such an easy target no matter how strong they are."

Despite the blood splatters the trio still got into the turbolift and Jayk looked at the control panel.

"I need Cal." he said and Brae reached into her robes for the holocron.

"So what do you need me to do?" Cal asked as his image materialised inside the turbolift.

"This panel doesn't permit travel directly to the command centre." Jayk replied, "Can you get into the system and take us up there?"

"Hang on, I'll see what I can do." Cal said as he searched for a wireless connection to the station's computer but then his image frowned, "No." he said, "If this turbolift can get to the command centre then there must be a physical key. I can't find any wireless terminals."

"In that case we'll just have to go as high as we can and see what we can do from there." Jayk said and as Cal disappeared again Jayk set the turbolift to go to the top of the shaft where the panel indicated the station's administrative section was located and the turbolift started to move.

When the turbolift came to a halt and the doors slid open it revealed a scene of devastation outside and both jedi brought up their lightsabers in a defensive posture while Tylo also raised his rifle. The administrative area outside the turbolift had been wrecked but it appeared that it had been the station crew themselves who had inflicted the damage, ripping furniture out of mountings and then piling it up to form barricades that blocked passage far from the turbolift. However, the barricade had clearly proven itself to be inadequate and in addition to holes being blasted through it with blaster fire a gap had been smashed through it that was wide enough for all of the *Swift Exit's* crew to fit through side by side. But worse than the physical damage to the furniture were the scattered bodies, some hit by blaster fire, some stab or hacked at with blades and other with wounds from more than one type of weapon. Some of the bodies lay near weapons, mainly blaster pistols but also a number of tools that had been pressed into service as weapons in the battle to defend the barricade.

"So they had chance to prepare a defence but not to call for help." Tylo commented.

"But how many of these were defending the way to the command centre and how many trying to force their way there?" Brae asked as she looked at the various different styles of clothing worn by the corpses. Some bore the logo of the station and were obviously part of the crew whereas others either wore uniforms of different types or plain clothing that did nothing to identify their allegiance.

"I don't see anyone holding a sword." Tylo pointed out and Jayk nodded.

"No, I think all of these beings died trying to stop something from reaching the command centre." he said and then he pointed towards another turbolift at the far side of the room, beyond the barricade, "Which I think we can reach from over there." he added.

Quickly crossing the room, the trio stood in front of this other turbolift while Jayk attempted to summon it. However, after waiting far longer than should have been necessary the turbolift car had yet to arrive.

"So not everything's still working after all." Tylo said.

“Could the crew have disabled the turbolift to keep whoever did this from the command centre?” Brae asked.
“Unlikely.” Jayk replied, “There will be an emergency stair after all. We just need to locate it.”
A set of stairs leading both up and down were soon located and the trio began to climb them. No effort had been made to try and block these and there were no signs of violence anywhere before they reached the top and opened the door leading to the command centre.
“Master I sense something.” Brae said as the door opened and Jayk nodded.
“Yes, I sense it too.” he said.
“What? What can you sense?” Tylo asked.
“The Dark Side.” Jayk told him.

3.

Bursting through this doorway the crew of the *Swift Exit* came across another battleground, with the bodies of station officers and technicians scattered around. A few of these were armed but most looked to have been defenceless when they were killed. Most of the control consoles still appeared to be active but here and there were some that had been struck by a blaster shot or smashed by some physical blow. In addition to this there was a repetitive hissing sound coming from somewhere close by.

"I've got a bad feeling about this." Tylo said as Jayk started to move cautiously towards the source of the sound.

"Sector rangers." he said suddenly as he rounded one of the console to discover the bodies of several sector rangers lying on the floor. All of the bodies wore armoured vests and helmets marked with the logo of the Judicial Department and their weapons lay close by them.

"Master." Brae said as she looked at one of the dead sector rangers.

"What is it Brae?"

"This woman was killed by a blade. Look." Brae told him.

"A blade wouldn't cut through that armour." Tylo said as he looked down at the corpse lying on its side but then he saw that Brae was correct. The dead woman she had been looking at had a split in her armoured chest plate that aligned with another on her back and both holes were surrounded by blood, "Stang." he hissed.

"At least now we know why the turbolift didn't come." Jayk said suddenly and as Brae and Tylo looked up they saw that he was looking towards the command centre turbolift. The door to this was the source of the hissing sound as it repeatedly attempted to drop shut and then rose again when its path was blocked by the body of another sector ranger, this one a duros whose armoured vest was preventing the door from crushing his torso. The cause of the duros' death appeared obvious, a large patch of burned flesh on the side of his head indicating that he had been shot with a blaster.

Jayk started to walk towards the turbolift, intending to drag the dead sector ranger clear of the door rather than leaving him there to be repeatedly struck by it but before he could reach the doorway he sensed a tremor in the Force.

"Get back!" he yelled just before a metallic hand reached forwards from the rear of the turbolift to hold the door open before the droid stepped forwards.

"What the kriff is that?" Tylo exclaimed as he looked at the armoured machine, its shape making him think of images he had seen of ancient warriors clad in metal armour that had often fought from the backs of riding beasts with primitive hand to hand weapons. This droid was clearly the product of a technologically advanced civilisation though, not one that had yet to discover even crude internal combustion technology and in addition to the ominous looking sword it held in its hand the droid was also armed with a pair of blasters that had been deployed from housings built into its forearms.

"It is a Sith war droid." Jayk replied.

"How do we defeat it master?" Brae asked as she stood beside him and the two jedi raised their lightsabers.

"I don't know." Jayk answered, "I've never faced one before. The last of them were supposed to have been destroyed with their creators."

"How about like this?" Tylo said and he opened fire with his rifle, sending a brief stream of energy bolts towards the droid. The powerful blasts struck one of the droid's shoulders but failed to penetrate the tough armoured plating there and in response the droid turned and fired back at Tylo.

Jayk reacted quickly to this, throwing himself between Tylo and the droid and deflecting each blaster shot with his lightsaber. Meanwhile Brae charged forwards and swung her lightsaber at the droid, intending to slice through its sword and hopefully its torso as well. Instead the droid raised its sword to protect itself and when Brae's lightsaber blade struck this it remained held in place rather than cutting through it as she had expected.

Surprise.

Brae gasped as she looked at her weapon, startled that what appeared to be an ordinary sword could resist a lightsaber blade. Then though, she realised that the presence of the Dark Side in the command centre was not centred around the dead bodies scattered all around it. Rather it was the droid and its blade that were the cause of the disturbance in the Force and she realised that this droid was more than just some mundane mechanical construction. Instead it was the product of their perverse manipulation of the Force.

"Brae get out of the way." Jayk shouted as he leapt forwards and as Brae retreated she fell back, giving Jayk the room he needed to be able to strike at the droid with his lightsaber without the risk of hitting her by accident. The droid turned to meet this new threat and it attempted to parry Jayk's attack with its sword. Jayk had counted on this, however and at the last moment he dropped his blade beneath that of the droid before

lifting it upwards as fast as he could. The result of this was that Jayk's lightsaber struck the droid where it was more vulnerable at the wrist joint between the armoured forearm and hand. The blade sliced straight through the droid, severing its hand and sending it as well as the sword it held dropping to the floor. The droid was still well armed though, with its blasters still fully functional. However, to make the best use of these the machine needed more room than it had available and so it tried to retreat, stepping back as it raised its arms towards Jayk. This was something that the Jedi had expected, it was common for opponents of Jedi knights to try and get out of the reach of their lightsabers and so the Jedi were well trained in keeping their enemies close. Every step that the droid took backwards was matched by Jayk taking one forwards and he struck rapidly at the machine, forcing it to hold its arms across its body to defend against these rather than allowing it to point its blasters at either himself, Brae or Tylo. The armour of the droid was resilient but not as resilient as the blade of its sword had been and each hit from Jayk's lightsaber scored and pitted it. Then there was a shower of sparks as Jayk's lightsaber struck one of the droid's arm mounted blasters and the weapon exploded, leaving it with just one set that it was still unable to use because of Jayk's proximity. While Jayk was keeping the droid's attention focused on him Tylo did his best to aim his rifle at the machine as well.

"I've no shot." he called out when the movements of both Jayk and the droid kept the Jedi in his line of fire. "I've got it." Brae responded and she charged across the room, leaping up onto a control console and then bounded from one to another until she landed beside the droid and thrust the blade of her lightsaber straight forwards through the side of its neck.

The droid shuddered as its primary control lines were severed and Brae took the opportunity to twist her blade so that she cut entirely through the droid's neck and its head toppled from its shoulders. Then she stepped back and shut down her lightsaber, smiling at Jayk.

"Very good." he said, smiling back at her, "But next time could you perhaps be a little quicker with your intervention? Even I tire eventually, the droid on the other hand would not."

"I am sorry master. I thought Tylo would want to take a shot first." she replied.

"Hey," Tylo said, "don't go blaming me. It's not my fault." then he looked down at the remains of the droid, "So this thing killed everyone aboard the station, including a sector ranger tactical team?" he added.

"Unlikely." Jayk answered, "As powerful as these droids were just one of them is no match for the numbers it would have faced here. It especially could not do so before the crew were able to send for help."

"Oh I've got a very bad feeling about what you're going to say next." Tylo said.

"There are more of them aboard, aren't there master?" Brae said and Tylo winced.

"Don't you say it as well." he said.

"That is the only explanation I can think of." Jayk responded.

"Okay, so how many more of these things are we dealing with?" Tylo asked.

"For that we'll need to access the main computer." Jayk said and Brae took Cal's holocron from her robes before placing it on a nearby console.

"Okay I've found a wireless connection." Cal said as his hologram appeared, "But my access is limited for now. If you want to see some of the more restricted files then either you'll have to physically wire me into a secure port or wait while I slice through the network defences."

"Just the unsecured files will do for now." Jayk replied, "Can you find anything that tells us how many of those droids are aboard?"

"Hang on, I'm searching now." Cal said and then he paused, "Ah, here we go. The security feeds are all behind the network defences but there's a message in the subspace transmission antenna buffer. Take a look at this." and the image of Cal disappeared to be replaced with a projection taken from one of the station's security cameras and appended to a transmission that the crew had been unable to send. The camera had been located outside one of the station's hangars and it showed a sealed hatch around which were gathered a large group of security guards, all armed with blaster pistols. Several of them also carried portable blast shields that they had linked together to form a protective barrier between themselves and the hatch. The door began to glow as it was struck repeatedly by blaster fire from within the hangar before it exploded outwards and the guards ducked behind their shields before the first of the Sith droids appeared, firing its arm mounted blasters as it came through the hatchway until it was close enough to strike at the guards with its sword and the weapon even sliced through the blast shields. In response the guards fired their blaster pistols back at this droid and the ones that followed it through the hatch. But their weapons lacked the power to penetrate the droids' Sith created armour and those guards that did not flee were cut down without mercy. Even some of those who did run died, shot in the back as they fell back while the droids steadily marched onwards.

"Six of them." Jayk said after counting the droids as they came through the hatchway one after another,

"Including this one." and he looked at the remains of the droid Brae had decapitated.

"Kriff that one." Tylo said, "I'm more worried about the five still walking around this place. It took the pair of you to bring down just this one. Can we take on five?"

"Master," Brae said before Jayk could respond to Tylo, "why was this message not sent?"

"Cal can you answer that one?" Jayk asked and Cal reappeared in front of the Jedi.

"There's a problem with the station transmitter." he said, "The antenna circuit has been interrupted. From what I know of these things they are smart enough to try and disable a transmitter. One of them probably went outside and cut the optical link."

"How much experience do you have in dealing with these things?" Tylo asked.

"Too much." Cal answered, "Lara and I had to fight entire armies of them thanks to a Sith lord leaving a production plant buried nearby that no-one ever bothered to turn off. Most of the time they were operating under the control of a centralised computer system but they weren't necessarily tied to one."

"But why would they want to attack this station?" Brae said.

"They were created by the Sith. Just causing death and destruction would be enough." Jayk pointed.

"Perhaps there's something else in the station logs that could help with that." Cal said, "Not long before the time stamp on that security recording the station was put on high alert when a ship dropped out of hyperspace but didn't make contact."

"Can you identify the ship?" Jayk asked and Cal appeared to nod.

"Yes, it's an old Seinar survey ship. A mark sixty. It was judged not to be a threat and brought aboard with a tractor beam. The next thing I can tell those droids got off it and killed everyone." he said.

"An exploration ship." Brae commented, "Do you think they found something unexpected while poking around beyond the Outer Rim master?"

"Sounds like as good an explanation as any to me." Jayk replied, "To a collector a deactivated Sith droid would be worth a lot of money. Assuming they even knew what they'd found. Perhaps they thought they could make use of them themselves. Whatever happened aboard that ship it was just a taste of what happened aboard this station."

"That's all very interesting guesswork but none of it really helps us figure out how to deal with the other five." Tylo said and then he looked at the remains of the destroyed droid in the command centre, "Now will the others know that we've taken this one out?"

"Possibly." Cal responded, "The droids have a built in comlink so they can receive updated orders from their controller. When operating as an independent unit they use these to maintain contact with one another. If they were in constant communication then the others will have become aware of our presence here as soon as this one did. Otherwise it depends on how often they check in with one another. That could be as often as every minute or maybe even never depending on how they were configured when they were activated."

"Oh that's just great. They could be on their way here right now." Tylo said.

"What if they aren't? Where would they be likely to go?" Brae asked.

"They'd want to secure the key strategic areas of the station." Cal replied, "Command centre, armoury, engineering, power plant, shield generators and communications. They'd go for weapons as well if they were centrally controlled but on a station like this that would mean trying to control every turret and missile battery individually and that's more than fifty."

"We need to improve our firepower." Jayk said.

"How?" Tylo asked, "I doubt that the station crew left any big guns in their armoury after they saw what they were facing. Or any guns at all for that matter, some of those people we saw below had to improvise weapons."

"Perhaps not, but the sector rangers didn't know what they were facing and may have left more powerful support weapons in their ship for fear of damaging the station." Jayk pointed out.

"Okay, right. The sector rangers." Tylo said, "I was going to suggest that myself."

"Where is their ship?" Brae asked, looking at Cal.

"I can't tell you. It arrived after the station's logs stopped being updated so it wasn't allotted a particular landing slot." he told her.

"I didn't notice any Judicial Department ships docked on the outside of the hull." Tylo said.

"Which leaves just the hangars." Jayk added, "Just like us they would have wanted to get to the command centre as quickly as possible. So that means they are likely to have selected the hangar closest to here."

"That's eight levels down." Cal said, "You can get there from the turbolift."

"That droid was probably waiting for them when they came out of it." Tylo commented.

"Quite possibly. Now let's go." Jayk said, "Brae and I will stand in front of you Tylo, just in case any of the others are waiting when we get to the hangar."

4.

As expected the Judicial Department assault ship that had brought the unit of sector rangers to the space station was located in the hangar closest to the command centre and the body of another armoured sector ranger lay face down on the ship's access ramp.

"Looks like the droids got here first." Tylo said, pointing his blaster up the ramp into the assault ship.

"Brae and I will go first." Jayk said as he started to walk up the ramp.

"Hang on," Tylo said, "What if they try and ambush us from behind?"

"You could go first." Brae suggested, "Of course if there's a droid waiting inside the ship-"

"What about Jayk in front of me and you behind?" Tylo interrupted.

"That should work adequately." Brae replied and Tylo stepped behind Jayk, "Unless of course the droids decide to divide us from one another and attack from the sides."

Tylo snarled.

"Get in front of me kid." he said and Brae followed Jayk up the ramp.

Just like the space station itself, the inside of the assault ship gave the impression that everything remained functional. All of the vessel's lights remained active and there were no signs of damage to its structure.

"The cockpit." Jayk said softly as he began making his way towards the front of the assault ship and when the trio reached it they found the two pilots still in their seats, both of them dead. One had obviously been shot by a blaster while the other had been impaled through her chest by a blade that had made its way right through her reinforced seat before passing through her.

"Just like the others." Tylo commented.

"Most likely a single droid did this." Jayk added. Then he looked back out of the cockpit, "We should locate their arms locker." he said and Tylo smiled.

"Now that's an idea I can get behind." he said.

The sector rangers had armed themselves with just blaster pistols and rifles when they left the gunship, the compact weapons being adequate for dealing with most threats. This meant that their heavier weapons, those intended for use on planetary surface rather than aboard starships and space stations were still aboard the assault ship. The most potent weapon among these was a tubular concussion missile launcher designed for attacking vehicles and fortifications and Tylo reached for this as soon as Jayk used his jedi access code to open the sealed arms locker.

"We want to secure the station not blow a hole right through it." Brae commented.

"Then I'll only aim at inner bulkheads." Tylo replied.

"Perhaps Brae is correct." Jayk said, "We should consider something less destructive"

In addition to the missile launcher there were also several grenade launchers. These were meant mainly for crowd control and so most of the ammunition was labelled as being non-lethal types. But there were also some fragmentation and concussion grenades intended for use in more military orientated operations. Tylo took one of these from the locker and passed it to Brae.

"More to your liking?" he asked as he then took a second grenade launcher for himself and she smiled and nodded. Then her smile disappeared.

"Err, I don't know how to use one of these." she admitted.

"Never mind that now." Jayk said, "We'll determine what weapons we'll use first, then I'll instruct you in how to use any that you are unsure of. Ah, this looks like it could be useful."

At the back of the arms locker there was a long and bulky repeating blaster. Rather than using standard blaster power packs that could be held in the palm of the hand this weapon required a heavier power pack that was worn on the back and the whole thing was connected together by a harness that included a stabilising arm for the weapon itself.

"The Jedi Order taught you how to use one of those?" Tylo asked in amazement as Jayk took the repeating blaster from the arms locker.

"Not the Jedi Order no, but I did learn to use one while on assignment." Jayk answered as he began to don the harness used to mount the weapon and its power pack.

"How did that assignment go?" Brae asked.

"Not well actually." Jayk said, "But I'm sure that this time things will be far better. Now I suggest that you consult with Cal about that grenade launcher. In his day the jedi used a far wider range of weapons that they do now."

Taking Cal's holocron from her robes she set it down and waited for his hologram to appear, holding her grenade launcher in front of her. However, when Cal saw this his eyes widened.

"Oh no, not you as well." he said, "I had enough of this with Lara."

"What's wrong?" Jayk asked and Cal frowned at the sight of him finalising his preparations to make the

repeating blaster ready for battle.

"How about you lot looking like you're about to start the first full scale war since the Ruusan Reformations?" Cal replied.

"Lightsabers are all well and good if we can guarantee that the Sith droids will be isolated from one another but if all five come at us at once then Brae and I will not be able to hold them back." Jayk replied, "With these we can at least engage them from a safer distance."

"And do you have plan for locating the rest of the droids?" Tylo asked.

"As a matter of fact yes I do." Jayk said, "We'll head back up to the command centre and secure it, disabling turbolift access so the droids will have to use the stairs. Then we'll lie in wait where the station crew attempted to make their stand."

"So we'll be relying on the same defences that failed to protect the station's crew." Tylo commented, "I've got a very bad feeling about this."

Given that his repeating blaster could be used even at close range without danger to him, Jayk took the lead on the return journey to the space station's command centre. Behind him came Tylo with his grenade launcher and then Brae, now carrying her lightsaber again just in case they were ambushed by the droids while her grenade launcher was slung across her back. They reached the command centre without incident and the only droid waiting for them when they arrived was the one they had already destroyed.

"They obviously aren't in constant contact then." Tylo commented.

"Not now, no. Though I expect that will change when they realise that we are here." Jayk replied and he started to disconnect his weapon from its harness, "Now let's jam that turbolift and get back down to the barricade. The other droids are bound to notice that they have lost one of their number eventually."

Using chairs to jam the turbolift in place by blocking the door from closing, the group then made their way back down to the level where the station crew had made their ill fated stand against the droids. The stacks of furniture were rearranged to fill the gap and then Jayk, Brae and Tylo all settled down to wait for the droids to come and investigate why one of their number had lost contact.

This happened a short while after the trio had repaired the barricade and at the sound of the turbolift opening the trio prepared themselves, aiming their weapons over the barricade.

"You two first." Jayk whispered as he lowered himself behind it again, "Fire as soon as you see the first droid and then take cover. Then when the grenades go off I'll start shooting."

"Sounds good to me." Tylo replied softly, nodding as he listened to the sound of metallic footfalls as they came closer.

The first droid to appear had its sword held out in front of it with both hands while its blasters were retracted and not visible.

"Fire!" Tylo yelled and he and Brae both fired fragmentation grenades towards the machine. The droid immediately recognised the grenades for what they were and threw itself aside before they detonated. Two more Sith droids were behind the first and they also attempted to seek cover before the grenades went off but with nowhere for them to hide all were caught in the open when the explosions occurred. Meanwhile behind the barrier Tylo and the two Jedi felt their hiding place shake. Jayk took the twin explosions as his signal and he leapt to his feet before pointing the repeating blaster across the barrier at the droids. Jayk's first targets were the second and third droids that were still close to one another as they lay on the deck where they had landed and he fired a sustained burst at them. Though individually the shots from his weapon were not much more powerful than those from Tylo's rifle the sheer number of them made them more deadly and before either could get back to their feet one burst into flames under the barrage.

Jayk would have continued to fire on the other droid but before he could do this he saw movement from the corner of his eye and turned just in time to avoid the first droid running him through with its sword. The bladed weapon did strike the barrel of Jayk's repeating blasters, however and it cut a deep slot in the barrel that rendered it useless.

"Brae! Cover me!" Jayk yelled and he jumped back from the barrier to begin pulling the repeating blaster and harness from his body.

The droid's sword blade smashed through the barrier a fraction of a second after Jayk had pulled back from it and the droid itself then came crashing through as well. Knowing that the machine was too close for her to be able to safely make use of her grenade launcher, Brae switched back to her lightsaber and there was a 'snap-hiss' as the blade ignited. It heard this and its ancient programming told it that anyone wielding a lightsaber was a priority target and so in the absence of specific orders to the contrary it turned towards Brae and swung its sword at her. Sensing the attack before it happened, Brae ducked and she felt the blade as it passed close over her head before she thrust her lightsaber upwards. The blade of her weapon clipped one of the droid's arms and the blasters fitted to it sparked as their power supply was shorted out. The brief surge of power also made the droid freeze momentarily and Brae attempted to decapitate the droid while it was vulnerable. Unfortunately the droid recovered just in time to dodge the full potency of her attack and all she succeeded in doing was slicing off a section of one of the ornate side plates that stuck out on either side of

the droid's head.

At the same as Brae was duelling with the droid Tylo switched to his rifle and looked over the remains of the barricade. There he saw the burning droid that Jayk had destroyed and also the third machine that was staggering back to its feet. Tylo saw that this droid had not escaped unscathed from the grenade blasts and fire from Jayk's repeating blaster and cracks were visible in its armour. Acting quickly Tylo took aim and fired his rifle on automatic. He aimed for a spot on the droid's chest where its armour appeared most badly damaged and the droid staggered back as it was hit. Then one of the energy blasts struck an already cracked part of the droid and the break in its armour was torn wide open, allowing the energy through into the interior of the droid. This then struck one of the droid's internal power cells and caused a massive spike in its temperature, enough to trigger an explosion. Some of the energy of this was able to escape through the hole in the droid's armour but most remained within the droid and smashed its internal circuitry before blowing its torso apart completely. Tylo threw himself back to the floor as this happened, not wanting to be hit by any of the shrapnel from the explosion.

After its initial failure to land a blow on Brae, the last remaining droid tried a multi-pronged attack, slashing at her with its sword in one hand while attempting to get a clear shot with the still functioning blasters built into its other arm. Fortunately Brae was too nimble to allow herself to become an easy target and she was able to remain ahead of the droid, blocking its sword strikes and dodging its other arm. Behind the droid Jayk saw what was happening and drew his lightsaber. However, for the time being he did not activate the weapon, not wanting the droid to hear the characteristic sound it made and realise that it was about to come under attack from another direction as well. Instead Jayk pressed the emitter of his lightsaber against the droid at the base of its neck before activating the weapon. The blade promptly bored right through the droid and thanks to its significantly greater height than Brae's, being more than half a metre taller than the padawan who was unusually short for a member of the Udra family, the blade passed harmlessly over her head. Jayk did not pause to see how effective this would be against the droid, instead lifting the lightsaber upwards and cutting its head in two.

Jayk then shut off his lightsaber again and stepped back, looking over the barricade.

"Are there any more?" he asked.

"Doesn't look like it." Tylo answered, "I guess that still leaves two more of them running around somewhere."

"But where?" Brae added just moments all the lights went out and left her lightsaber as the only major source of light in the room.

"The reactor." Tylo said, "They cut the power."

"We still have gravity." Brae commented.

"Shutting off the gravity would disrupt the ability of the droids to operate just as much as it would us." Jayk pointed out, "I think that the droids have specifically shut down systems that benefit us more than them. Listen."

"Listen to what? I don't hear anything." Brae replied.

"Exactly." Jayk said.

"The vents." Tylo added, rushing over to the nearest vent and placing his hand against it, "They shut down the air cycling system."

"How much air does that leave us?" Brae asked.

"Plenty. A station this size has enough breathable atmosphere inside it to last us a long time. If we remained aboard and did nothing about it then we would likely freeze to death first as the remaining heat was radiated into space." Jayk said, "Fortunately for us though, the droids have just told us exactly where they both are."

"Life support and the reactor section." Tylo responded.

"Precisely and since life support is closer to our location I suggest that we begin there." Jayk said and he began to walk towards the turbolifts, igniting his lightsaber to provide him with illumination.

"Hey hold on a second while I get this." Tylo called out as he quickly retrieved his grenade launcher.

5.

The disruption to the station's power also affected the turbolift systems and this meant that the group had a choice between using the emergency stairs or climbing down the ladders built into the turbolift shafts. Given that it would be easier for the two remaining droids to spring a trap in the stairwell where they could conceal themselves beneath the stairs themselves it was decided to use the turbolift shafts instead.

After cutting through the shaft doors with his lightsaber Jayk peered through and looked down. The shaft went down too far for him to be able to see all the way to the bottom and so he took a chemical light stick from him belt, lit it and then tossed it down the shaft.

"That's a long way down uncle." Brae commented.

"Then we should get started immediately." Jayk replied as he produced a second light stick that he proceeded to hook onto his robes so that he would have the use of both of his hands as he descended the ladders. Then he climbed into the shaft and began to climb downwards.

The design of the station meant that it had a relatively small number of levels, each of which had a large surface area and this meant that what could have been an arduous descent in many stations was much shorter here and after only about ten minutes Jayk came to a halt.

"The life support control systems are on the next level down." he said.

"Okay, so you down and cut through the door, right?" Tylo asked but Jayk shook his head.

"No." he replied, "Now I go down and destroy the motor for the door."

"How does that get us through it?" Tylo asked.

"Because then it becomes just an inert mass that Uncle Jayk and I can lift using the Force without having to fight against the resistance of the motor as well." Brae said.

"Quite." Jayk said as he started to climb further down the shaft, "But we'll need Cal's help as well. If there are droids waiting for us outside the shaft he'll be able to detect them for us while we stay out of sight."

"Oh great." Cal's voice said from inside Brae's robes, "I get to be bait."

"Hey hang on," Tylo exclaimed, "you heard that? I thought you were switched off."

"Holocrons don't get switched off." Brae told him, "It's just considered traditional of those that have guardians like Cal to have their guardian appear when being spoken to."

"So those times when I—"

"When you were watching those movies aboard the *Swift Exit* while you thought you were all alone?" Cal interrupted, "I was in the corner making sure that everything I saw and heard never found its way into my long term memory. I also remember a number of actual women entering the ship with you and then leaving after a gap in my memory. Obviously I blanked those events out as well. Fortunately I can do that."

"I wish I could do that with this conversation." Brae muttered.

There was a sudden 'snap-hiss' as Jayk then activated his lightsaber and with a single stroke of it he destroyed the motor that drove the turbolift door.

"Now pass me Cal." he said, looking up at Brae.

Taking the holocron from her robes she tossed it down the shaft and Jayk caught it one handed. Then he set it down opposite the door and climbed far enough back up the shaft that when the door opened he would not be in sight of anyone standing right outside.

"Tylo be ready with your grenade launcher. If either of the droids are out there then I want you to put a couple of rounds through the doorway before Brae and I drop it shut again."

Tylo nodded and unslung his grenade launcher, holding it one handed as he aimed it towards the door. Then he nodded.

"Ready when you are." he said.

"Okay Brae, focus on the door." Jayk said, reaching out with one hand.

The door began to shake as the two jedi exerted their influence on it through the Force and then it slowly moved upwards to expose the hallway outside the turbolift shaft. With the holocron located directly opposite the doorway Cal's limited sensors were able to search the hallway.

"Clear." Cal announced.

"Tylo you first." Jayk said as he picked up Cal's holocron and Tylo climbed down past the jedi knight before exiting the turbolift shaft. Crouching beside the doorway and watching the approaches he waited while Jayk and then Brae also exited the shaft, at which point the door slammed down behind them and Tylo flinched.

"Well if those droids didn't know we were here before they sure will now." he said.

"Then we should keep moving" Jayk replied, "The quicker we act the less time they will have to prepare a defence."

"Besides, we're probably just dealing with one of them." Brae added.

Moving quickly towards the life support control section the group came across more bodies, mainly members

of the station's technical crew who had been cut down by the droids as they made their way through the station. A few of them appeared to have died fighting with improvised weapons still in their hand but the majority had been killed as they tried to flee, the droids showing no mercy at all.

Jayk paused before the final junction leading to the life support section and signalled for the others to stop behind him. Then he stepped out, holding his lightsaber out level in front of him so that it would illuminate the corridor and be in position to defend him without obscuring his vision. Ahead of him the Jedi saw more bodies littering the corridor that led right up to the door of the life support section. Or rather what remained of the door. A large hole had been cut into the door and Jayk guessed that the crew of the station had sealed the life support section to keep the droids out, perhaps out of fear that they would shut down the life support systems and leave a station full of people to suffocate or alternately it could have been done by the technicians inside in the hope that the door would have been enough to keep the droids out. Whatever the motivation had been for this, the move had obviously failed and the way was clear for the group to enter the life support section without needing to find a way to force open the door themselves without any power to operate it.

"We must take care." Jayk told his companions softly, "The light from our lightsabers and Tylo's glow rod will have already given away our presence to the droid."

The trio gathered together beside the destroyed doorway, listening for any signs of movement that would be the only method by which the droid would give itself away. Without a presence in the Force, the Jedi could not use their powers to sense its location. The interior of the life support section was eerily quiet however, with none of the machinery inside responsible for pumping air around the station and reprocessing it to keep it clean of toxins functioning.

"I'll go first." Jayk whispered, "I'll go straight across. Brae you take this side. Tylo wait out here. If the droid is clear of vital machinery we'll call you in to use your launcher."

"Got it." Tylo replied, nodding as he held up his grenade launcher.

Jayk then charged through the doorway, his lightsaber held up in a defensive posture while Brae jumped through and then quickly headed in the opposite direction. Both Jedi swiftly found positions of cover behind pumping equipment that looked solid enough to be able to absorb a direct hit or two from a blaster while not containing anything volatile enough to create an explosion should it be damaged. However, there was no storm of blaster bolts when the Jedi burst into the large chamber and the Sith war droid did not come charging out of the darkness to challenge them with its sword. Instead when the Jedi both came to a halt the room remained as silent as it had been before their entry and Jayk and Brae both began to search the darkness for any signs of where the machine might be.

"Hey!" Tylo called out after he became tired of waiting for the Jedi to let him know why everything had gone quiet, "What's going on in there?"

"Nothing." Brae responded, "The droid's not here."

"Huh?" Tylo said, leaning around the side of the hole in the door.

"Brae is correct." Jayk added, "The droids have abandoned this section."

"Why would they do that?" Tylo asked, "Have they sabotaged the equipment?"

"I don't see any obvious signs of damage." Jayk replied, "Although reactivating it could be problematic."

"You mean as soon as we turn it on the droids will know where we are?" Brae commented.

"Exactly. Given the lack of a droid protecting this section of the station it seems highly likely that the remaining droids are both protecting the main reactor."

"Strength in numbers?" Tylo suggested and Jayk nodded.

"I expect that they will try to lay a trap for us. Most likely attempting to kill either Brae or myself before we have the chance to react." he said.

"So what's your plan now?" Tylo asked.

"Spring the trap." Jayk said.

6.

The main reactor was housed in the lowest section of the station where unwanted waste heat could easily be radiated out into space. The necessity of distributing power from here to all other sections of the station meant that there were numerous different means of accessing it varying from turbolift and ladder shafts to the ducts that housed the cabling used to carry power. The sheer number of these access points made securing them all, especially with only two droids available to carry out the process, unlikely. On the other hand the entire reactor section could be controlled from one central monitoring station and it was towards this that the crew of the *Swift Exit* moved.

"The power is still active here." Cal said unexpectedly, his voice muffled from being inside Brae's robes and the young jedi reached into her pocket to remove the holocron, at which point Cal's hologram appeared.

"So why are all the lights out?" Tylo asked.

"To keep you all at a disadvantage most probably." Cal replied, "But it's just the lights. Gravity is the same as everywhere else in the station and I'm picking up open wireless communication ports. I've not attempted to log onto the system though, just in case it's intended to trick us into giving away our location. Also have you noticed how all the doors we've come across have been open? Odd for droids that would want to make our approach to their location as difficult as possible."

"It's so they can seal them once they know where we are." Jayk said, looking back and forth along the corridor.

"Handy if they can separate us." Tylo commented, "They attack together while we have to act on our own."

"We've passed security cameras." Brae pointed out and he pointed her hand towards a camera set near the ceiling of the corridor, "Do you think the droids already know where we are?"

"I doubt it." Cal replied, "The feed from those will be going back up to the security office, or at least it would if there was power to send it up there."

"Cal, can you access the security cameras and door controls?" Jayk asked.

"You mean we take control of the system from the droids and turn it against them?" Tylo said, "I like the sound of that."

"At the very least we may be able to locate them. I remain convinced that they are located somewhere close to the main reactor control room, any extra intelligence would be useful."

"What about the network access giving away our location?" Brae said.

"That's only a problem if we remain together." Cal replied, "If we leave Cal here and remain in comlink contact then we'll be somewhere else if the droids try to locate us by tracing the network access."

"Sounds good to me." Cal replied, "There's a wireless access point about ten metres up ahead. Get me closer and I'll patch in when you give the command."

Brae set Cal's holocron down as he had instructed and then she, Jayk and Tylo continued on their way towards the reactor control room. When they had gone about another fifty metres Jayk paused and took out his comlink.

"Okay Cal, we're clear." he signalled.

"Understood, accessing network now." Cal responded at the same time as he began to connect to the active computer network.

As soon as he began to do this Cal noticed other activity within the network, someone monitoring data traffic from the reactor control room.

"Jayk," he transmitted, "someone's taking an interest in what I'm, up to. I'm going to see whether I can trick them into thinking there's more to this." and despite there being no-one else in the corridor to see it Cal activated his hologram, projecting it so that it gave the appearance of being crouched beside the nearby computer access port. At the same time he used his own access to the network to disrupt the video feed from the security camera located nearby, though taking care not to block it entirely.

In the reactor control room the two remaining Sith war droids stood in front of the control console they were using to monitor the status of the remaining active systems in this part of the station. It was just a matter of seconds before the droids were able to isolate the location of the intrusion and by accessing the security camera feed from that corridor they attempted to call up a picture of whoever was responsible for this intrusion. The result of this was a distorted image however, as Cal prevented the signal from reaching them without distortion. The resulting picture that the droids saw was of a figure wearing jedi robes attempting to download data directly from the computer port. What the distorted picture did not make clear was the incorporeal nature of the figure or the presence of the holocron nearby. In response to this one of the droids called up the system that gave them emergency control over all of the doors on this level and it triggered the pair of doors either side of Cal's holocron.

Cal then gave his hologram the appearance of running from one door to the other as if attempting to escape before looking up at the camera right before he shut off its feed entirely.

"Okay I've got their attention." Cal signalled to Jayk, "If they've been paying attention to you before now then they probably think that you're stuck in here where I am while Tylo and Brae are still loose."

"Brae take the lead." Jayk said, "Tylo you follow her and I'll bring up the rear. Now Cal's got the droids confused let's take advantage of this."

The group pressed on ahead towards the reactor control section and it was only when they reached it that they noticed any change to the pattern of open doorways. Instead the main door to the reactor control section had been damaged in exactly the same way as the door to the life support control, indicating that the station's engineers had attempted to hide themselves behind the reinforced door to no avail.

"Should I go first?" Brae asked as the group stood at the end of the short corridor leading up to the destroyed door, Jayk still remaining out of sight.

"Going together would be better." Tylo said, "I can't believe I'm about to say this but I might be able to draw some fire away from you." and at the same time he slung his grenade launcher over his back and swapped it for his blaster rifle, "Better get rid of this thing as well." he added, "The last thing we need is me firing a grenade into the reactor."

Jayk nodded and shut down his lightsaber, cutting off the glow it produced.

"I'll wait here." he said, "Call me when you have the two droids engaged. Now go and may the Force be with you."

Brae and Tylo then sprinted down the short corridor towards the reactor control section, both of them aware that this was the most dangerous element of their advance. Should the droids open fire along the corridor then there was nowhere for them to try and hide. However, there was no reaction of any kind from within the reactor control section and both of them quickly leapt through the breach in the door. Inside the reactor control section was dominated by the six main fusion reactors that powered the station. These were arranged in a circular pattern and right in the middle of these was what looked to be a narrow tower that led all the way from the floor to the ceiling about twenty metres above.

"My guess is that's where those droids will be." Tylo said, pointing towards the tower and Brae nodded.

"Let's go and say 'hello' then shall we?" she said and the pair of them started to head towards the central control tower. As they moved Tylo kept his rifle trained on the only visible entrance to the control tower, a doorway on a raised platform that was accessible from a ladder leading up to it. Rather than simply run straight for the ladder the pair circled around the tower somewhat, using the structure of the reactors to hide their advance as much as possible until they both ground to a halt just before the final area of open deck that they needed to cover before reaching the bottom of the ladder.

"If I was laying an ambush in here then this is where I'd do it." Tylo whispered, "We've no cover for these last twenty metres or so and that's a long way to cross while being shot at."

Brae then frowned.

"But they know I have a lightsaber." she said, "Shooting at us from the platform up there doesn't make much sense if they know that I can just send their blaster fire back at them. If they're going to shoot at us then it makes much more sense for them to be-" and then Brae trailed off and she looked around nervously.

"They're right here, aren't they?" Tylo whispered.

"I'm sure of it." Brae answered and Tylo turned, shining his glow rod at the reactor machinery surrounding them and tracking the movement of the light with his rifle. If he saw either of the droids then he was ready to shoot at them immediately.

The light from the glow rod was also giving away Tylo's position and actions though and right before it could be illuminated by the beam one of the droids opened fire from among a set of coolant tanks.

"Stang!" Tylo exclaimed as he ducked out of the line of fire and a volley of energy blasts struck the armoured casing of another reactor.

Responding to this attack Brae turned and leapt into the path of the blaster fire, using her lightsaber to deflect the most dangerous shots away from herself and Tylo. She tried to send as many of these straight back at the attacking droid as she could but the angle was never quite right. However, one of the deflected shots did strike a coolant line and the contents erupted from the hole this created, showering the droid below with the freezing liquid.

It was then that the second droid appeared, charging towards Brae and Tylo's position while firing both its blasters at the same time. Tylo leant around the machinery he was using for cover and returned fire, aiming low in an attempt to disable the droid's legs. Several of the blasts did hit the droid's legs but only on its armoured shins where the shape helped deflect the energy away from them before the armour was penetrated. At the same time the first droid also began to charge towards Brae and Tylo, emerging from the cloud of vaporising coolant. This droid did not continue firing, however. Instead it drew its sword and charged straight at Brae.

Having both droids coming together like this was all that their targets had been waiting for and Tylo activated

his comlink.

"Now!" he signalled.

Moments later there was a 'snap-hiss' from close to the doorway as Jayk entered and ignited his lightsaber before the two droids reached Brae and Tylo.

"Fall back." Brae said as she parried an attack by the sword wielding droid and then ducked out of the way of a second swing.

"I'm going." Tylo replied, firing again at the other droid as he began to move away from it.

The second droid then drew its own sword as it turned away from Tylo and towards Brae. Before Brae could find herself surrounded though, Jayk reached out through the Force and took hold of the second droid. Too heavy for him to lift without major effort, the Jedi instead dragged this machine across the floor and Tylo took advantage of this to fire at it again. This time his firing angle enabled him to strike the top of the droid's head from an angle its armour was not optimised to provide protection from. The droid was being dragged straight towards Tylo and this allowed him to fire a sustained burst from his advantageous angle until all of a sudden the droid's head burst into flames and exploded.

Meanwhile Brae remained locked in combat with the other droid and Jayk charged in to assist her. Knowing that he was on his way, the droid switched to a one handed grip on its sword and extended its free arm out towards Jayk. Then it fired the blaster built into its arm, spraying shots in Jayk's general direction while it continued to duel with Brae using the sword held in the other. This splitting of effort made the droid vulnerable though and Brae quickly stepped sideways before bringing her lightsaber upwards in an arc. Realising that it would have its extended arm sliced off if it did nothing to counter this the droid was forced to turn aside in order to get its sword in position to parry her attack. As soon as Brae saw the droid start to turn she shifted the direction of her swing from vertical to horizontal and her lightsaber cut right through the droid at its waist.

Immediately the droid came crashing to the deck in two pieces, its legs twitching without control until the last of the charge held within them dissipated. Meanwhile the upper half of the droid flailed about, attempting aim its blasters or strike with its sword as Brae pulled back out of reach and it was unable to turn to track her.

"Brae do you have this?" Jayk asked from close by and Brae smiled.

"Yes master." she replied, "I have this." and then she used the Force to take hold of the droid's power cells now visible through the hole where its waist had once been and she tore them out of place, sending them flying across the room as the droid's eyes went dark and the sword fell from its grasp.

"Nice work." Tylo said as he and Jayk came closer and Brae smiled.

"Indeed." Jayk added, "Now we need to let the Republic know what happened here and as soon as a relief crew arrives we can finish this."

"Finish this?" Tylo said, "Isn't this the last of the droids?"

"The last of the ones that were brought aboard maybe." Jayk answered, "But they had to come from somewhere and that source needs to be investigated."

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