

STAR WARS

DARKNESS RISING

2-08: LOST & FORGOTTEN

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Tracking the source of the Sith war droids, the crew of the *Swift Exit* are sent to make sure that they will pose no more threat to the Republic. However, they are not the only ones interested in where the droids came from...

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1.

The space station swarmed with activity now whereas just a few hours earlier it had been almost totally abandoned. Most of the beings now aboard were technical personnel here to inspect the station for damage and repair any systems found not to be functioning at optimum capacity. In addition to these were a large number of medical staff. This was not because there was anyone aboard who was in need of urgent treatment but there was the sombre duty of clearing the station of the bodies of its previous occupants. A small number of Sith war droids had been inadvertently brought aboard the station and had then begun to slaughter everyone aboard as well as an entire team of sector rangers sent to investigate why the station had lost contact.

The droids had eventually been destroyed by a team despatched by the Jedi Order aboard the YT-700 class light freighter *Swift Exit* and now they were preparing to resolve the issue presented to them by the unexpected appearance of the droids that were all supposed to have been deactivated or destroyed centuries earlier. Now all of the *Swift Exit's* crew all sat in the ship's lounge to hear about where their next destination would be. Two of the three were Jedi, Jayk Udra was a knight with decades of experience while Brae Udra was not only his padawan learner, but in a break with Jedi tradition that kept the few closely related Jedi separated from one another was also his niece. On the other hand the third member of the crew was the *Swift Exit's* owner. Tylo Kurrast was a former smuggler who had accepted having to transport the Jedi in exchange for being pardoned for past crimes.

This trio was now gathered around a table so that the unofficial fourth member of their crew addressed them. Cal Udra had been a Jedi knight thousands of years earlier at a time when the Jedi Order still permitted its members to marry and have families. During his lifetime Cal had been assigned to have his own sister as his padawan learner and it had been decided that the knowledge he had placed inside a holocron that included his training of a close relative would be of benefit to Jayk in his efforts to teach Brae. Now the holocron's guardian, a virtual recreation of the original Cal Udra served not only as a mentor and adviser to both Jayk and Brae but also a useful source of technical support.

"This was the only ship that matched the profile of the one that brought the droids to the station." the hologram of Cal explained while an image of a scout ship floated in the air beside him, "The forensics team that went aboard confirmed that the time of death for the crew is at least a day before the ship got here so the droids must have killed them en route."

"I'm guessing that the nav computer has logged the route that it took?" Tylo asked.

"Correct." Cal replied, "The ship was returning from a survey mission into Wild Space just past Hutt Space. It seems that they set down on a moon and then headed straight back here. The examination of the ship also revealed a number of items that appear to have been manufactured in the Republic around two thousand years ago. That also tallies with the approximate date of manufacture of the particular model of war droid we faced here. Most likely this means that the droids were found at the sight of a battle between Republic and Sith forces from that period."

"So the crew of the scout ship found the droids on this moon in Wild Space, took them aboard their ship and then the droids activated and killed them all." Brae said.

"And now we need to go to that moon." Jayk added and he looked at Cal, "I take it that you have the navigation co-ordinates we need?" he asked.

"I do. Taken straight from the scout's own nav computer. I can upload them into ours any time you want. Assuming you're set on us going rather than handing this over to anyone else." Cal replied.

"You know if you pass this on to the Jedi Order then they're just going to order us to go anyway, don't you?" Tylo said.

"We are the closest Jedi." Jayk pointed out.

"Plus I don't think the council members like you." Tylo added, "Especially that little guy. What's his name? Yodel?"

"Yoda." Brae corrected him.

"Whatever. So sending the four of us off into Wild Space from where we may never return is bound to be appealing to at least some of them."

"Nevertheless we must inform them of our intended destination." Jayk said, "Something I will attend to. Tylo you need to make sure that the nav computer is properly programmed and that the ship is ready to leave."

"What shall I do uncle?" Brae asked.

"Speak with the new station staff. Arrange for as many provisions as possible to be loaded aboard. If anything does go wrong out there in Wild Space then I don't want to die because we're lacking a few ration bars."

"Oh and see if you can rustle up some more grenades for that launcher we grabbed from the sector ranger

ship." Tylo added, "Ideally without letting the sector rangers know I've still got it."

"Masters we estimate that it will take the *Swift Exit* eight days to reach the moon where the war droids were found." Jayk told the assembled Jedi council, his two dimensional image floating in the centre of their meeting chamber.

"Care you must take Jedi Udra." Yoda said from his seat at the side of the chamber while Grand Master Ress nodded in agreement.

"Your ship is not designed as an exploration ship." he said, "If we do not hear from you in twenty days then we'll send another ship to investigate."

"Thank you grand master." Jayk replied, "We will plan our supplies around that."

"Then unless there is anything more you are cleared to proceed Jedi Udra." Master Ress said, "May the Force be with you." and then the transmission was cut off.

In the cockpit of the *Swift Exit*, Jayk looked to his side where Tylo sat checking the programming of the nav computer.

"See? They're willing to send a rescue ship." he said.

"Yeah," Tylo replied, "To pick up our bodies so they can be sure we're dead."

In a darkened chamber within Hutt Space a recording of the conversation between Jayk and the Jedi council was watched with interest by a human male and he smiled as it came to an end.

"So Kurrast and his friends haven't found the tap in their comm system yet then Mara?" he asked the woman standing beside him.

"Obviously not if they're transmitting this close to us." Mara replied, "The station they're on is at the limit of the transmitter's range but we picked this up about an hour ago. I thought you'd like to hear about it Morton."

"You were right. Take a ship and head to those co-ordinates they gave. I want to know what's there. If there's anything Sith related then grab it before they can. This could really save my skin."

"Going to try buying off Rylee?" Mara said.

"Exactly. We still haven't got back what Teron Sharr stole but maybe there'll be something on this moon that can get Rylee to overlook that. With the hutts on my back for rent I need to sell her something fast."

"Then I'll be as quick as I can." Mara said as she turned and began to leave the room.

"Oh and Mara?" Morton called out after her.

"Yes?"

"Don't forget to kill Tylo Kurrast."

2.

The *Swift Exit* came out of hyperspace on the outer reaches of a system that lacked habitable planets. Only one world present even had an atmosphere and that was made up of crushing high pressure gases and clouds of acidic particles that would eat through ordinary protective suits in a matter of hours. All of the other worlds were either gas giants or barren lumps of rock. In a more heavily travelled system the light freighter would have come out of hyperspace much closer to the moon that was their destination but beyond the borders of the Republic there was too little data available on objects present that could cause a hazard to hyperspace travel and rather than risk his ship being destroyed in a collision with an uncharted gravity well Tylo chose the safer option of dropping to sublight speeds in an area where the chances of colliding with an object able to inflict serious damage on his ship could be minimised.

"I'm not picking anything up." he said to Jayk who was sat beside him in the co-pilot's seat, "No large scale metallic structures, no obviously artificial energy emissions and no abnormal thermal signatures that could indicate habitation."

"Then I suggest we proceed." Jayk replied, "We'll keep scanning just in case we pick something up but I get the feeling that this is a dead system."

"Yeah, well as long we don't end up the same way." Tylo said as he steered the *Swift Exit* towards the moon they had come here to investigate.

Moving at sublight speeds it took several hours for the *Swift Exit* to reach the moon that orbited one of the system's gas giants and upon reaching it Tylo put his ship into orbit around it and began to scan the surface. "There's something." Jayk said as he watched the return from the sensors, "Looks like a metallic object about four hundred metres long."

"A light cruiser?" Tylo suggested and Jayk nodded.

"That would make sense." he replied, "A vessel such as that would have been assigned to long range patrols that could have brought it this far out." then the sensors chirped again as something else was detected.

"And it wasn't alone either." Tylo said, "Looks like we could have a couple of other ships down there as well. Can't tell what type they were though, all that's left of them is debris scattered over a wide area and buried under a few metres of dust."

"Probably frigates." Jayk said, "Escorts for the cruiser."

"You want us to head down there now or would you rather I ran some more scans?" Tylo asked and Jayk paused, letting the Force flow through him to see whether he could sense anything. For a moment he thought he sensed a slight tremor as if he had touched something sensitive to the presence of the Force but that sensation passed almost immediately and Jayk discounted it.

"I think we have all the information we need for now. Take us down to the main wreck and make a low level pass to see if you can detect anything else of note. If not then set us down nearby, right where the scout landed if possible. I'm going to go and see if Brae is ready." Jayk told him as he got up to leave the cockpit.

Jayk found Brae in the crew quarters. His padawan had donned the main part of her brightly coloured vacuum suit while the helmet and life support pack remained absent.

"We're almost there." he told her, "Can you sense anything?"

"I'm not sure master." Brae replied, "I feel as if something dreadful has been here in the past but all that's left of it is a faint echo."

Jayk nodded.

"That could be a residual disturbance from whatever caused three ships to crash here, two of which were utterly destroyed." Jayk said, "Somehow I doubt that it was an accident if Sith war droids were involved."

"I've got a visual on the light cruiser." Tylo's voice announced over the intercom, "Or at least what's left of it. I'm taking us down now about five hundred metres from it."

After landing the *Swift Exit* Tylo joined the two Jedi and all put on their vacuum suits. Each suit was a distinct colour that would stand out against the dull grey dust covered surface of the moon and make it easy for the others to find them if they got into difficulties. After suiting up the trio gathered in the ship's cargo hold and Tylo de-pressurised it before lowering the access ramp.

"Gravity is just under point two." Tylo said, "So watch your step, it's easy to trip."

The group was still under the influence of the *Swift Exit's* artificial gravity field as they walked down the access ramp and stepping off it felt strange to all three as all of a sudden gravity became less than one fifth of what it had been when they took their previous step. After that they had to adjust their walking style to suit the lower gravity as they made their way towards the crashed light cruiser.

In the centuries since it had crashed on the surface of the moon the Republic warship had become covered in dust and despite its size it blended into the surrounding terrain from a distance.

"How could anything have survived this wreck intact?" Brae said when she saw the state of the ship. Large sections of the hull had been torn open and other were obviously bent out of shape.

"A lot of that's not crash damage." Tylo replied and he pointed to a large hole in the side facing them, "That looks like an energy weapons astrike to me."

"So there was a battle then?" Brae asked, "I mean a proper space battle not just a boarding action by the droids."

"That is how it looks." Jayk answered. Then he too pointed to one of the holes in the hull, "We'll enter the ship there and make our way to the bridge. Perhaps there is still something left that we can use to discover the identity of this ship and what they were even doing out here in the first place. Bear in mind that this is a warship. As well as the ordinary dangers of exploring a wreck there could also still be unexploded ordnance aboard. If you see any, don't touch it."

"Yes master." Brae responded.

The hole in the hull that Jayk had pointed out was not at ground level and so the team had to climb up the hull in order to reach it, with Jayk leading the way. Upon reaching the hole he saw that its edges were jagged and so he drew his lightsaber.

"What's wrong?" Tylo asked from beneath the jedi when he saw the light cast by the blade.

"I'm just smoothing off the edge of the hole." Jayk replied as he used his weapon to take off the jagged edge that could possibly tear a vacuum suit. Then after smoothing off a wide section of the base of the hole he put his lightsaber away again and climbed inside the ship.

Even though the light cruiser was around two thousand years old, having been built in the Republic its design style was familiar to Jayk and he recognised the function of several pieces of equipment set into the bulkheads despite their inactive status.

"Master I can sense a presence aboard." Brae said just after she had climbed through the hole.

"It couldn't be one of the crew could it?" Tylo responded, "Would a ship like that have had cryogenic chambers aboard that someone could have survived all this time in?"

"There could have been cryogenic chambers in the ship's medical facility." Jayk replied, "But I do not think that is what Brae is sensing because I can sense it too."

"What is it?" Brae asked.

"Think Brae. You should know this, haven't you ever sensed anything like this before?" Jayk said.

"Yes master, the feeling is familiar but I can't place it."

"Then consider how it might feel if the sensation was stronger. Much stronger." Jayk told her.

"Cal." Brae said as a smile spread across her face and Jayk smiled back at her.

"Cal." he repeated, nodding and then he looked around.

"I don't get it. What about Cal?" Tylo asked.

"Cal exists as an interactive artificial intelligence," Brae said, "and the reason he is so lifelike is because the original Cal was able to duplicate his personality into the holocron. That was made possible because the structure of the holocron resonates with the Force."

"So you're saying that somewhere aboard this ship there's another holocron?" Tylo said.

"Correct." Jayk answered, "Thankfully given the way this one resonates with the Light Side instead of the Dark it will be a jedi holocron rather than a Sith device."

"So if you can sense it's here can you find exactly where it's hidden?" Tylo said.

"If I can get close enough, yes. Though I expect that part of the reason its presence is so faint is that its power source has become depleted. Even a holocron can't last two millennia without recharging." Jayk said,

"Now where are we?"

"Looks like crew quarters to me." Brae replied.

"Yes, in that case it's my opinion that there was a jedi knight aboard this vessel when it was attacked.

Whoever it was had a holocron in their possession and it is probably still in their quarters. We need to search this entire section." Jayk said.

"There, they're heading down for a landing." the pilot of Mara's transport told her when his ship's passive sensors finally detected the thermal flare from the *Swift Exit's* engines more than two hours after Tylo had landed.

"Do we have a clear enough path to that moon to be able to use the hyperdrive?" Mara asked and the pilot nodded.

"Yeah, I've been plotting all of the debris big enough to cause us any problems and none of it is within fifty million kilometres of a straight line course between here and there."

"Good, because I'd rather not spend hours more heading there at sublight. Plot us a course and then jump us into orbit. I want to take a look at what they're up to now." Mara ordered.

Many of the doors in the crew quarters section of the light cruiser had been sealed since before the ship had crashed and nothing after that had caused them to open. Even if there had been power to operate the doors

there was obvious damage to the frames around many that would likely jam them in place and so rather than try to open them normally or by using the Force to manually push them, Jayk and Brae used their lightsabers to simply cut through them.

Most of the cabins they found revealed more or less the same thing inside, possessions that obviously belonged to crew members from the Republic's Navy in the days prior to the Ruusan Reformation that had disbanded the Republic's armed forces such as uniforms and personal items used to personalise and decorate the limited living space that had been available to them. This pattern was repeated until Jayk cut through a door that led to one of the large cabins, obviously intended for a senior officer and as soon as the door fell inwards the Jedi sensed the disturbance in the Force that he and Brae had picked up on grow stronger.

"Over here." he called out and both Brae and Tylo came to see what he had found.

"What is it master?" Brae asked as she and Tylo stepped into the cabin with Jayk.

"Looks like another cabin to me." Tylo replied, "An empty one."

"Officers quarters." Jayk said, "Look at the size and the reason it appears empty is because it wasn't occupied by a member of the regular crew."

"Our mystery Jedi?" Tylo suggested.

"It seems logical. The military would have treated them as a visiting officer so would have provided quarters suitable for someone of their rank while the Jedi would have brought little with them." Jayk said.

"Over here." Brae added and she began to move across the room, "I think the holocron is over here somewhere."

"Yes, I sense it too." Jayk replied and he followed Brae across the room until the pair of them were standing in front of a cabinet made of a toughened polymer that was fitted with a lock, "Stand back." he said as he drew his lightsaber and activated the weapon. Then he pressed it against the lock, taking care not to push the blade all the way through the casing of the locker and risk damaging any of the contents. It took just a few seconds for the lightsaber to melt through the polymer surrounding the lock and Jayk shut off his lightsaber as soon as he saw it drop down inside the cabinet. Then it was just a matter of pulling the door open to reveal the contents.

Inside the cabinet a set of Jedi robes and a datapad were visible, but no holocron.

"That's it?" Tylo said, "What happened to the holocron?"

"Easy." Jayk replied, "There are not many places to hide it in here." and he reached inside to remove the robes, exposing the crystalline cube beneath them, "We'll take the datapad as well." he added, "There could be valuable information stored on it."

Taking both the datapad and the holocron with them, the group headed back to the hole in the hull and climbed back down to the surface before starting to make their way towards the *Swift Exit*. As they walked across the surface of the moon Tylo noticed a point of light in the sky that moved in relation to the others and he frowned.

"Look." he said, pointing up into the sky, "That's a ship."

"But who else would be out here?" Brae asked in response.

"I don't know." Jayk replied, "The only beings I gave the location of this system to were the Jedi Council. Even the sector rangers don't know where we came."

"But they could have pulled that data from the nav computer on that scout ship just like we did?" Brae suggested.

"Why would they bother? The Judicial Department has more than enough to keep them busy in Republic space."

"It's possible that that the original exploration team managed to tell someone about this moon before the droids reactivated and killed the crew." Jayk said.

"That means they could be thinking of landing here." Tylo said.

"But if there are more war droids they might activate them." Brae added.

"Then we need to warn them." Jayk replied and he broke into bounding leaps across the surface of the moon.

Brae and Tylo copied Jayk and the three of them soon reached the *Swift Exit* where they ran up its access ramp, returning instantly to normal gravity. As soon as the access ramp was sealed and the hold re-pressurised Jayk and Tylo raced to the cockpit where they scanned for the ship they had seen above the moon.

"I've got it." Jayk said, "Looks like another scout ship."

"Maybe we can warn them off." Tylo suggested and Jayk reached for the *Swift Exit's* communication system, making sure to activate the video transmitter as well as the voice system. He knew that without an image of himself to back up his statements then the crew of the orbiting vessel

"This is the Republic Judicial vessel *Swift Exit*. This moon is under quarantine. Do not, I repeat do not attempt to land. Acknowledge my signal."

“Well?” the pilot asked Mara after they had both watched the transmission from the surface, “What do you want me to do?”

“You heard the man.” she replied, “Acknowledge receiving his signal.” then just as the pilot was about to activate his own ship's transmitter she placed a hand over his, “Voice only though. I'd rather they didn't see me.” she added.

3.

"Acknowledged *Swift Exit*." a voice from the scout ship responded, "We will remain in orbit." and then the channel went dead.

"Think he's lying?" Tylo asked, looking at Jayk and the jedi nodded.

"Undoubtedly." he said, "I never explained why the moon is under quarantine and any genuine explorer would withdraw in search of a prize that doesn't come with the risk of death. Whoever's up there knows more about this moon than is safe."

"So what do we do? Send for reinforcements?"

"No, not yet at least. It would take days for a ship to get here anyway. We'll see what more we can find out about why those ships came here in the first place and if the Force is with us we'll be able to remove any traces of a threat before that scout finds a way down here without us knowing about it." Jayk answered and he held up the holocron he had recovered from the wreck of the light cruiser, "Hopefully this will contain all of the answers we need."

Exiting the cockpit, Jayk and Tylo headed for the lounge area where Brae waited for them.

"What happened?" she asked.

"They're still up there." Tylo told her, "Your uncle and I both think they're up to something."

"Cal I need your help." Jayk added and Cal's hologram appeared beside him.

"Of course." he said and Jayk then placed the recovered holocron on the table.

"Can you tell me whether this is still functional?" he asked.

"That's interesting." Cal commented, his hologram bending over as if he was taking a closer look. In reality the sensors built into Cal's holocron were scanning this second device. The two crystalline cubes were the same size and almost identical in their details but unlike Cal's holocron there were none of the lights that indicated activity visible within this other device, "Physically it's fine." he said, "Obviously there's no power though but I don't see why it shouldn't be possible to reactivate it."

"So how do we put power into it?" Tylo asked, looking back and forth between the two jedi, "It's not like I've ever seen either of you plug Cal into a charger."

"No, a holocron's internal power cell will last for well over a century between charging. We'll have to improvise." Jayk replied.

"A variable supply master?" Brae suggested.

"A good idea." Jayk said, "We can start with a low voltage and dial it up until we hit the right level. Go and fetch one Brae."

"Yes master." Brae responded and she hurried from the lounge.

While he and Tylo waited for her to return Jayk picked up the recovered holocron again and studied it closely, searching for the charging port he knew had to be included somewhere in its design. He found this in the form of a wire coil located in the centre of one of the cube's faces and he smiled.

"Good, it's contactless." he said, knowing that this removed the issue of having to determine the polarity of any physical connections as well as locating a suitable plug.

Brae then returned with the power supply, a low profile disc that had physical input and output ports as well as adjustment controls on the side and a flat top marked with a spiral to indicate the position of its contactless output coil. While Brae plugged the supply into a wall socket Jayk placed the recovered holocron on the contactless pad and turned down the supply voltage to minimum before switching on the supply.

"Cal, let me know if you pick up any activity." he said and then he slowly began to increase the supply voltage.

To begin with there was no reaction from the holocron at all, the supplied voltage was too low to trigger a reaction from its charging input.

"So how come you don't make these thing with standard fittings?" Tylo asked.

"Because we've been making holocrons for thousands of years and during that time the available materials have varied considerably." Jayk replied, watching the readouts on the power supply closely. All of a sudden the output monitors indicated a surge in current being drawn as the voltage reached the correct level for the holocron and it began to draw power.

"That's it." Cal said, "I'm picking up activity."

"Brae can you sense anything?" Jayk asked, looking across the table at her. The manner in which jedi holocrons resonated in the Force varied depending on the amount of activity within them and Brae's much greater sensitivity meant that she was, at least in theory, more likely than Jayk to notice any such changes. However, Brae noticed sensed nothing and shook her head.

"There is activity there." Cal said, "Give it a couple of minutes and then try interacting. There might not be a guardian after all."

"What does that mean?" Tylo asked, "I thought that all Jedi holocrons were created to store the knowledge of a specific Jedi."

"Most are, yes." Jayk answered, "But some are used in the same way as ordinary civilian holocrons – As mere data storage devices that need to be manually searched in the same way as a computer drive."

"Having a guardian makes things a whole lot easier but it also takes more work to impart a personality." Cal said and then he smiled, "Obviously a holocron with a guardian was created by a superior Jedi who cared about future generations."

"Or that wanted to boast about his accomplishments for the rest of time." Brae muttered.

"Here goes." Jayk said, ignoring Brae's comment and he took a deep breath and let the Force flow through him before channelling it towards the recovered holocron and all of a sudden there was a flickering of light before another hologram of a Jedi appeared in the lounge. This hologram was also of a human but this time it was an elderly female.

"Who are you?" she said in a startled manner.

"I am Jayk Udra," Jayk answered, "and this is my Padawan Brae."

"And I'm Cal Udra." Cal added.

"I'm Tylo if anyone's interested." Tylo commented, "Other than that I'll leave you all to this Jedi poodoo and get myself a beer."

"I am the guardian of the holocron created by Jedi Master Shayal Jup. How did I get here?" the holographic woman asked.

"We recovered you from the wreck of a Republic light cruiser." Jayk told her.

"A two thousand year old light cruiser." Brae added.

"Has it been that long?" Shayal said.

"About that long yes." Jayk replied, "What can you tell me about how the cruiser came to be out here in Wild Space Master Jup?"

"We were sent out here of course. Our unit was acting as part of a larger operation to take out the forces of a Sith lord who was raiding Republic shipping lanes and isolated colonies. We'd followed his ships out into Wild Space and our reconnaissance craft reported that this system was home to a small observation post so we were sent to destroy it so that the main thrust of the attack could be launched directly against his fortress unseen. But the outpost was more heavily defended than was anticipated. The surface defences were able to take out our escort frigates and we were boarded. Jedi Ansol and most of the ship's marine complement were already on the surface attacking the outpost itself by this point and the crew were overrun. The ship's engines were damaged and it crashed into the moon. After that I waited for someone to come and rescue me. I didn't think that it would take two millennia for my absence to be noticed."

"An outpost." Brae said, "Could that exploration ship have found it? Maybe that's why there's another ship up there now. They couldn't get inside and called for help in doing it."

"That is a worrying possibility." Jayk said, "Six droids killed everyone aboard a space station, there's no telling how much damage an entire outpost garrison could do if they reached Republic space."

"Not to mention the trouble that could be caused by any of the other artefacts that could still be in the outpost." Cal pointed out, "Who knows what sort of sorcery went on here?"

"I don't get it." Tylo said, lowering the beer bottle from his mouth, "Even if the initial attack failed then wouldn't the Jedi Order have just sent another squadron to destroy the outpost?"

"They may not have even known it was here." Cal replied, "Unless the Republic fleet was able to keep their headquarters fully updated on their movements then it's quite possible that no-one back home knew what was going on out here."

"The council didn't mention anything about knowing about this system when I reported it to them." Jayk added, nodding in agreement, "But maybe now we can give them more information they'll be able to do the same back to us."

"And if they don't know anything? What then Master?" Brae asked.

"Oh don't ask that." Tylo said, wincing, "I know exactly what he's going to say and I've got a really bad feeling about it."

"If there is the slightest chance that the Sith outpost still exists then it is our duty to destroy it." Jayk replied.

"Oh I knew you were going to say that." Tylo said, bowing his head and shaking it slowly. Then he looked at the bottle of beer in his hand and added, "I'm going to need something stronger."

"Mara!" the scout ship's pilot called out from the cockpit, "The Jedi are sending a transmission."

"Can you tell where?" Mara asked when she came rushing back into the cockpit and sat down.

"Coruscant I think." the pilot said, "I'm sure I heard a reference to the Jedi temple. Listen." and then the pilot switched the output of the communication system away from his headphones and to a speaker.

"-and two frigates." Jayk's voice said, "All three vessels are confirmed as destroyed. Does the council know anything about this outpost?"

"An outpost?" Mara commented and a smile spread across her face, "A Sith outpost all the way out here

where no-one knew about it.” and then she continued to listen in on the conversation.

“No Jedi Udra.” another voice said and Mara guessed that this was a member of the Jedi Council, “The force you are referring to was reported lost and Jedi Ansol assumed dead. A search was carried out but no evidence of what happened to them recovered. If Jedi Ansol was not able to destroy that outpost then it may still exist.”

“Understood Master Ress.” Jayk said, “According to the holocron of Master Jup the outpost is six kilometres north of our location. We can cover that distance in under an hour. We will assess the status of the outpost and determine the best course of action.”

“The Council agrees Jedi Udra. You have twenty four hours. If we have not heard from you by then reinforcements will be despatched. Good luck and may the Force be with you.” the individual Jayk had identified as Master Ress said and then the subspace connection was broken and the channel went silent. Mara turned to the pilot once more.

“Take us down.” she said, “We need to reach that outpost before the Jedi do.”

“I’m taking us down now.” the pilot replied as he adjusted the scout ship’s course. Then while he was piloting the ship towards the location given for the outpost Mara got up and headed to another of the ship’s compartments. Here she found four more members of Morton’s gang that she had brought along with her. All four already wore vacuum suits, ready for deployment onto the surface of the moon but had yet to put on helmets. As Mara appeared in the doorway they all looked up at her.

“We’re heading for the surface now.” she told them, “The Jedi think that they’ve located a Sith outpost and we’re going to try and get there before them. Our mission here is easy, we grab anything we can get our hands on before the Jedi turn up and then hopefully get out without engaging them directly. The exception is Tylo Kurrast. We know he’s with them so if anyone gets a clear shot at him they are to take it. Understood?”

“Is there a bonus for taking out Kurrast?” one of the men asked and Mara frowned.

“I can tell you what will happen if you pass up the opportunity.” she told him and then she reached out to take hold of her vacuum suit that was hung nearby before heading into an adjoining room to change into it.

4.

On the moon's surface the crew of the *Swift Exit* disembarked from their ship again. Jayk carried Shayal's holocron with him, hoping that the device's guardian would be able to provide more useful information about what they might find. Given Cal's experience in dealing with the Sith the crew had also brought his holocron along with them and Brae carried this in a pouch of her own vacuum suit.

Making their way across the moon's surface on foot the group was about half way to the supposed location of the outpost when they saw a starship come over the horizon, heading towards them.

"Cover!" Jayk snapped and he Brae and Tylo threw themselves to the ground, all three of them drawing weapons. However, the ship did not continue straight towards them either to attack or even to fly above their heads. Instead it came to a sudden stop and hovered not far above the surface while a small group of figures leapt down to the ground, taking advantage of the low gravity to be able to make the jump from a much greater height than it would have been safe to do in standard gravity.

"Looks like you were right." Tylo said, turning his head towards Jayk, "The crew of that ship did call in their friends. They must have found the outpost before the droids wiped them out."

"We need to hurry." Jayk said as he got back to his feet and at the same time as the scout ship rose back into the sky Jayk began to bound towards the outpost.

When Mara and her four troops landed on the surface of the moon their landings kicked up clouds of dust and this revealed that there was a number of bodies covered by a layer of dust. Each of these wore an armoured vacuum suit marked with archaic Republic marine insignia and there were discarded weapons beside many.

"Looks like the Republic troops never even made it through the front door." Mara said as she looked around at the bodies.

"Isn't there supposed to be a jedi knight among this lot?" one of her troops asked.

"Probably. But that's not why we're here. We need to figure out a way inside so get searching." Mara ordered. There was no distinct structure that identified the exact location of the Sith outpost so it seemed likely to Mara that it was concealed underground, meaning that there was probably a hatchway located in one of the hills that littered the area. Mara and her troops began to spread out, searching for any signs of artificial construction hidden under the dust that covered everything.

"Not you." she ordered one of her men and then she pointed in the direction of the *Swift Exit*, "Kurrast and the jedi will be approaching from that direction. I want you keep an eye out for them and don't hesitate to take a shot if you can tell which one is Kurrast." the man then nodded at Mara and lay down in the dust, pointing his rifle in the direction she had indicated and using its optical sight to watch the horizon.

Concentrating their search on the areas of raised ground, it took one of Mara's other men less than five minutes to discover that one of them was in fact a low pyramid that had been covered in dust during the two thousand years since and set into one side of this was an opening.

"It must fold downwards to form a ramp." the man who found it said.

"Then get searching for the mechanism." Mara said, "I want to be inside before the jedi get here."

Mara and her men quickly began to clear as much of the all covering dust from the pyramid as they could until one of them uncovered a control panel close to the base of the pyramid and he waved Mara towards him, "This looks like it." she said as she took a pouch of tools from her belt and opened it up. The first tool she took from this was then used to pry open the control panel and reveal the inner workings. Abandoned for centuries, the mechanism that operated the ramp was as lifeless as everything else and Mara could tell that it would be possible to simply short circuit the lock and let the ramp open itself. Instead she took a power cell from her tool kit and ripped out a bundle of wires from the mechanism, making sure to leave some of their length still connected to the circuitry. This allowed her to determine where each different colour of wire connected to the circuit and she began to touch different pairs of wires against the power cell's contacts, trusting that a system of this vintage would be compatible with the cell. After several tries Mara felt rather than heard the motion of the ramp and she looked around to see the wall of the pyramid folding down inside it, just as she had predicted it would do. But this lasted only a short amount of time until the power cell was drained from being put to such heavy use and the ramp ground to a halt only partially open.

"Inside." she ordered before looking around at the man she had detailed as a lookout, "Except you." she told him, "You stay here. Fall back if the jedi get too close but warn us when they're coming."

The interior of the pyramid consisted of a passageway that rather predictably sloped downwards as it led away from the ramp that Mara and her men had to leap down from. The most significant source of illumination in the passageway were the glow rods built into the sides of helmets worn by Mara and her men and as the beams from these shone across the walls of the passageway it was revealed that they were

covered in writing carved into the structure.

"What the kriff is all this?" one of Mara's men asked.

"Sith." Mara replied, recognising many of the characters as being the same as ones she had seen on various Sith artefacts she had handled even if she did not understand their meaning, "Who's got the recording rod?" "Right here." one of her men called out.

"Good, get images of as much of this as you can. We'll meet you up ahead." she told him and along with the three other men in her group she began to descend further down the passageway.

The crew of the *Swift Exit* took bounding leaps across the surface of the moon as they hurried to try and reach the Sith outpost before the figures they had seen drop from the scout ship could trigger anything that would make the situation worse. All three of them carried their weapons but none were active and so from a distance there were no glowing lightsaber blades to pick out which of them were the Jedi. However, the man left behind by Mara as a lookout could tell immediately which one of them was Brae from her height. Though she possessed the same fair hair and pale eyes that were universal in the Udra family she did not possess the same height and stood barely one and a half metres tall. This left just two possibilities for which of the trio was Tylo Kurrast and the lookout focused his sight on each of them in turn. Unable to see through their visors or pick out the weapons they held from this distance the look out could only wait while they came closer. Only then could he pick out that one of them, Jayk, held a lightsaber in one hand while Tylo carried a blaster rifle and the lookout lined up his own rifle for a shot.

Danger.

Sensing that they were about to come under attack Jayk suddenly activated his lightsaber, the usual 'snap-hiss' sound absent in the vacuum of the moon's surface and he swung his weapon into Tylo's path.

"What the kriff?" Tylo exclaimed as he saw the blade pass close in front of his helmet visor right before the blaster shot that would otherwise have taken his head off his shoulders was deflected away.

"Over there." Brae said, pointing towards the low hill the look out was using for cover at the same time as she ignited her own lightsaber, "The shot came from that way."

"Tylo cover us." Jayk said and Tylo grinned.

"Gladly." he said in return and he dropped to one knee and brought up his rifle. At the same time as he opened fire, using rapid bursts aimed in the general direction of the hill to prevent the lookout from firing again the two Jedi continued to bound towards it. Rather than both coming at the hill from the same direction Jayk and Brae moved in different directions, Jayk heading to the right while Brae moved left. In this way Tylo fired his rifle between the Jedi while they were in place to cut off the look out's retreat no matter which way he tried to run.

"They're here." the lookout signalled, cowering behind the hill while Tylo blasted chunks out of the ground in front of him. All of a sudden the blaster fire ceased and the lookout raised himself up in preparation for firing again. However, the reason for Tylo ceasing fire was not due to running out of ammunition or some technical malfunction, instead he just did not want to hit Jayk who now landed right in front of the lookout, "Stang!" the man hissed as he tried to aim his rifle at the Jedi. Jayk was too quick for him though and with a single swing of his lightsaber he not only sliced the man's rifle in half but also cut through his arm.

The lookout screamed in pain, his remaining hand letting go of the rifle and gripping the stub of his severed one tightly. Had Jayk used a conventional blade to cut through the arm then the stump would have been left exposed to the vacuum of space and the man would have died rapidly as his blood boiled. However, the lightsaber blade also cauterised the wound as it went and also melted the fabric of the man's vacuum suit to his arm to create a seal that maintained the pressure inside the suit.

Brae then landed behind the man and grabbed hold of him. Then with great care she brought down her lightsaber so that it burned out the comlink built into his suit without otherwise damaging it, thus cutting off his communication with the rest of his group.

"Hold him." Jayk said and Brae nodded while he looked around, searching the area for any indication that there were more snipers lying in wait.

"Are we clear?" Tylo asked as he bounced up to them and Jayk lowered his lightsaber, shutting off the blade. "I think so." he said, "Now we just need to see what this individual can tell us."

From a pouch on his belt Jayk then took an ordinary comlink and checked that it was set to broadcast only on the frequency being used by the group's vacuum suit comlinks. Then he pressed this against the faceplate of the lookout's helmet.

"Do you know what is inside this outpost?" Jayk asked as the man glared back up at him but he did not respond.

"We should just stun this guy and make our own way inside." Tylo said and the man looked towards him instead.

"Enjoy what's left of your life Kurrast. Mister Crayne isn't going to forget how you turned informant on him." he said and Tylo and the Jedi exchanged glances.

"Morton Crayne sent you? You're not just independent scouts?" Brae said and the man smiled.

"I'm not afraid of you. I know you won't kill me. But my associates won't be as merciful to any of you. Especially him." and he looked at Tylo.

"You know I get the feeling that he isn't going to co-operate." Tylo commented.

"I agree and we don't have time to try tricking him with the Force." Jayk said and he reached out his hand, "Tylo I need your blaster."

"Sure." Tylo replied and he handed over his rifle. Taking the weapon pointed it at the man who stared back at him, still obviously convinced that Jayk would not use it. There was a sudden flash of blue from the rifle as Jayk switched it to 'stun' and then fired, rendering the man unconscious.

"There." he said, "Now we can carry on without worrying about him."

"You know I could have done that." Tylo said as Jayk returned his weapon.

"I know." Jayk replied, "But then I'd have had to tell you to change the setting and I didn't want him to know."

"You mean you wanted him to think he was about to die?" Brae asked in astonishment.

"I thought it might unsettle him enough to blurt something out at the last moment. Obviously he was more strong minded than I thought."

"Good job we didn't try using the Force then. It wouldn't have worked either." Brae said.

"So now what?" Tylo said and he looked towards the nearby opening, "I suppose we're going in there?"

"Correct. But be careful, we know this man was not alone and he may have warned his friends of our approach before Brae was able to disable his comlink." Jayk replied.

Tylo remained at a distance from the opening while Jayk and Brae moved cautiously towards it, both jedi holding their lightsabers in front of them. These combined with the glow rods built into their helmets would mean that anyone waiting just inside advanced warning of their approach but the added security of having their weapons already active to protect them from attack was considered preferable to them.

"Someone's inside master." Brae said as she and Jayk drew closer to the partially open ramp, "I can sense them."

"Yes, I can as well." Jayk replied, "Plus that entrance does not look like it is properly open to me. Getting inside may be difficult."

"Perhaps one of us should concentrate on widening the entrance while the other acts as a protector master." Brae suggested and Jayk nodded.

"An excellent suggestion my young apprentice." Jayk said.

"I should be the protector. I can fit through a smaller gap." Brae said and Jayk smiled.

"Ordinarily I would agree but on this occasion we must differ." he replied, "You still have the occasional tendency to draw on the Dark Side when under stress. In there that could prove fatal if you inadvertently bring down the roof on us. I will go in first and protect you while you make any changes to the entrance that are needed to allow us to get through it quickly."

Jayk moved forwards, crouching down as he neared the narrow opening. It looked just about wide enough to permit a human in a vacuum suit to pass through but a person would have to be careful as they did so to prevent themselves from accidentally damaging their suit. This was where Jayk had to be careful, the narrowness of the gap would force him to move slowly though it as well as framing him as a target neatly to whoever it was that was waiting for him inside the outpost. Jayk could tell that although whoever it was that was just inside was slightly agitated but overall they were not afraid. That was a matter of concern to Jayk since this suggested that the individual had confidence in his abilities.

Pausing right before he reached the ramp, Jayk extended his hand and reached out through the Force to search for the mind of the being waiting inside. If the look out had been anything to go by then this being was likely to be resilient to being influenced using the Force but Jayk could still use it in other ways. Judging the position of the opening into the outpost Jayk calculated how much time he would need to get inside and then focused on the mind he could sense inside. Closing his hand, Jayk used the Force to take hold of the being standing guard and in bringing his hand back towards his body he used the Force to exert a powerful telekinetic pull on him.

Panic.

Jayk sensed the effect his action had had on the guard and he got up and leapt forwards, guiding himself towards the opening. He landed right in front of the narrow opening and rolled through the narrow gap, dropping down into the passageway just beyond it. It took a few moments for Jayk to steady himself after landing and ordinarily that would have been enough for a gunman to have opened fire on him while his defences were down. However, at that moment the individual standing guard was also still picking himself up after Jayk had assailed him with the Force. This gave Jayk the time to adopt a more defensive stance before the first blaster bolts came flying towards him.

"Brae now!" he signalled as he started deflecting blaster bolts. Whoever was firing at Jayk had shut off their helmet lights and although his presence in the Force told Jayk which direction he was in the jedi could not positively identify his opponent. He could, however guess that he was in a position of cover after a blaster bolt sent back almost directly along its original path blew a chunk of rock from the wall rather than striking the firer.

Meanwhile outside the outpost Brae bounded towards the opening while Tylo also closed in all the while keeping a watchful eye out for anyone else outside the outpost. Brae immediately swung her lightsaber at the stone near her feet, first cutting a deep furrow across the partially open ramp. Her next strikes cut diagonally from her first cut to the end of the block, breaking it into sections that she could then move with the Force.

"Tylo get back." she said as she stepped away from the opening herself and then Brae began tearing the sections of stone free using the Force, hurling them aside without caring where they landed. After the third block was torn loose the gap created was easily large enough for her and Tylo to jump down into the passageway and that was what the pair did.

"Glad you could join me." Jayk said as they appeared right behind, "Now let's push forward and end this." Blaster fire continued to head towards the trio as they advanced down the passageway until all of a sudden a figure was captured in the beams of their glow rods.

"Got him." Tylo said and he returned fire, a single shot striking the guard in his shoulder and spinning him around before a second hit him in the chest and he collapsed.

Jayk and Brae paused, reaching out through the Force to see if they could sense the presence of anyone else hiding in the darkness. But when they detected no-one Jayk waved them on and they headed deeper into the outpost.

5.

"They're coming." one of Mara's two remaining men said as she crouched in front of a door, working to disable the seals, "Hurry."

Moving through the outpost had proven slow going. Though it had been abandoned long ago the evacuation had been orderly and the Sith had made sure to lock up after them. This meant that every door was closed and without power Mara had to disable the physical security on each before they could be forced open. The result of this was that so far they had yet to recover a single Sith artefact.

"This can't be hurried Wylas." Mara replied, "The Sith took security seriously and – Stang!" and then she jumped backwards instinctively. In the low gravity she flew all the way across the corridor and struck the wall on the far side before she could stop herself.

"What happened?" Wylas asked.

"You distracted me." Mara told him sternly, "Now I've tripped something."

All of a sudden the lights inside the outpost began to flicker on and Mara and her men felt the pull of gravity increasing rapidly until it was about what was considered standard by the Republic.

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

The crew of the *Swift Exit* were just as surprised by the sudden activation of the outpost's lights and artificial gravity field.

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

"So have I." Jayk replied and then he heard a hissing sound coming from outside his suit.

"Master, is that air?" Brae asked when she heard it too.

"I think it could be." Jayk said, "But we best not remove our helmets just yet. We need to consult Cal."

Brae then produced Cal's holocron and the jedi's image appeared in the now well lit passageway.

"Interesting." Cal said, connecting to the trio's vacuum suits via comlink rather than just engaging the speaker house within his holocron, "Seems like a standard type one atmosphere to me."

"Crayne's men must have brought the life support on line." Tylo said.

"Or maybe not." Shayal's voice responded and Jayk took out her holocron so that her hologram could also appear.

"She's right." Cal said, "The Sith often made use of poison gas to defend their facilities. But gas is useless in a vacuum so they'd have to make sure that there was breathable air available to tempt an intruder into removing his helmet.

"It also means that a doorway we came through must now be sealed." Shayal pointed out, "Otherwise all this air would be rushing out through that hole Brae cut into the entrance."

"Well if we need to get out of here in a hurry you two can deal with any door can't can't you?" Tylo said, looking at the two lightsaber wielding jedi.

"Ordinarily yes. But the Sith were known to produce materials that could resist lightsaber blades." Jayk reminded him.

Mara hurried back to the door and examined the now powered security mechanism.

"Nerf herders." she said, "Now there's power I can just do this." and she reached inside the open panel to squeeze two wires together, prompting the door to hiss open to reveal a control room on the other side, "Jackpot." she said.

Hurrying through the doorway Mara and her two remaining troops began to inspect the computer terminals that were now coming to life. The major problem was that most of the displays were in the Sith language that none of them understood. However, here and there were systems using graphical displays that were easier to understand.

"If I'm reading this right," Wylas said, "then the main reactor is now on line."

"But why?" the other man asked.

"Never mind." Mara replied, "See if you can find anything that looks like a detachable hard drive. That's probably the best we're going to get from this place. Wylas, stand watch. The jedi can't have missed all the lights coming on and they'll be heading right for us."

Mara and the other man began to search the control room for anything that they could detach and take back with them. All that they found however, were consoles that relied on their connection to a large central computer core. Growing frustrated at this, Mara was about to give up and suggest that they try their luck moving on to another location within the outpost when she noticed a display that showed what she took to be images of various key locations inside the outpost. Most of them showed empty rooms but one showed row after row of Sith war droids and Mara reached out and tapped this. As she expected this act enlarged the

image so that it filled the entire screen.

"Stang," she hissed.

"What's wrong?" the man searching the room with her asked.

"Droids," Mara replied, "and they look like a combat model. Somewhere in this facility there are hundreds of the things and they're waking up. Just a few of them are moving for now but I bet that will change."

"Kriff! We need to get out of here." Wylas exclaimed when he heard this.

"Not so fast." Mara replied, smiling, "Perhaps we can make those droids work for us. But first we need to lure them here. The Jedi too."

"What are you talking about?" the other man asked.

"Those are Sith droids Terno," Mara replied, "and we just so happen to have two of their sworn enemies on hand."

Jayk and Brae alternated taking the lead as they darted from one junction to the next, searching for Morton Crayne's team. From what they could tell the band of criminals had not entered the outpost with a specific idea of how to get where they wanted to, or even if they knew the layout of the base. Doors had been opened to reveal empty chambers before the intruders had doubled back to try another route. This meant that it was easy for Wylas to strike at them from behind while they investigated yet another dead end. The blaster bolt impacted the wall close to where Tylo stood and he spun around to return fire only to see Wylas vanishing around a corner.

"I've got him!" Tylo snapped as he then broke into a run in pursuit of the disappearing man.

"Wait Tylo, it's a trap." Jayk called out after him, sensing that Wylas had revealed himself deliberately, "Brae come on, before he gets himself killed."

"Yes master." Brae responded as the two Jedi set off after Tylo.

"It's just like you said, those droids are heading this way." Terno said when he returned to the control room.

"And so are Kurrast and the Jedi." Wylas added as he ran through the open doorway behind Terno, "They're right behind me."

"Good." Mara said, "Now get over there." and she waved them towards the only other exit from the control room while she dashed to the door that they had just come through, one that she had already tampered with the mechanism of. Pressing the control to close the door she then ripped out the circuit from inside the panel, "That ought to do the trick." she said before running over to the other door and as soon as she was through it she closed it behind her and then fired her blaster at the mechanism, "Now we wait." she said, "I left a comlink in there so we can hear what's going on."

6.

"He must have gone in there." Tylo said, pointing at the door ahead of them.

"Someone's certainly forced that door open before." Jayk said in agreement, "We'll go together." and the group hurried towards the door. Jayk stood right in front of it while Brae and Tylo positioned themselves either side of it, Brae's hand hovering over the controls.

"Ready when you are." she said, looking at Jayk and Tylo.

"Do it." Jayk said and he leapt forwards at the same time as Brae slammed her hand down on the control.

Immediately the door slid upwards and Jayk dived beneath it just before Brae and Tylo followed him through into the control. Unexpectedly the door then dropped shut again behind them and when Brae looked around she saw that the control panel for it was smashed.

"Master it won't open." she said.

"The other door." Jayk replied and he ran across the room to the second door, only to find that its controls did not function either, "We appear to be confined." he said.

"It was a trap. But what sort of trap leaves us in a command centre?" Tylo said as he looked around, "Surely we can control everything from in here."

"If we can figure out the control systems perhaps." Jayk replied, "Which means we should hurry."

"Good idea jedi." Mara's voice suddenly called out and everyone in the room turned to look at the comlink they had not noticed lying on a seat beside one of the consoles, "Hurrying I mean, given that there are about a dozen Sith war droids heading right for you. Oh and they won't have any trouble opening that door from the outside. Morton Crayne sends his regards by the way."

"Tell him to go kriff himself Mara." Tylo hissed and then he fired his rifle at the comlink, causing the device to explode when the energy bolt struck it.

"Uncle Jayk, over here. Look!" Brae called out beckoning Jayk towards her and both he and Tylo rushed to see what she had found. There they saw the security monitor panel and dominating the display was the image of row after row of Sith war droids, each stood in a charging alcove and it was obvious that a number of those on the front row were empty.

"Stang. I'm guessing that those things are coming this way." Tylo said, "How are we supposed to stop them?"

"Perhaps there's something around here that we can use against them." Brae suggested.

"I think now is the time to consult our advisers." Jayk added and he took Shayal's holocron from the pouch on his belt while Brae did the same with Cal's. Moments later the holograms of both jedi appeared, "We need—" Jayk began.

"Yes, yes, you need a way out of this command centre before those war droids get here." Shayal interrupted, "I was listening you know."

"There could be an override somewhere." Cal said, his hologram giving the impression of looking around the room, "Something in here must have triggered their activation sequence after all."

"Most likely it was those scavengers poking around that tripped an alarm." Shayal added.

"There's an entire army of those things somewhere in this base." Tylo said, still staring at the monitor.

"I've seen this before." Cal said, "There could be a command code that would provide whoever possessed it with control over them all."

"A code that your former associates could now have in their possession." Jayk pointed out.

"Then we need to destroy the entire army." Brae added and Jayk nodded.

"How?" Tylo asked.

"The main reactor." Cal said, "If that could be overloaded then it would take out the base and everything in it. Probably everything for fifty kilometres in fact."

"Okay, so supposing we can set the reactors to overload," Tylo said, "we either blow them up while we're still here or we risk the droids shutting them down after we leave."

"It should be fairly straight forwards to put the necessary controls out of action." Cal said, "Sith war droids are not programmed to carry out repairs."

"There is still the issue of figuring out how to overload the reactors though." Jayk said as he looked around the room, "None of these systems are familiar to me."

"There is a more obvious solution." Shayal said, "Cal or I could patch in directly."

"How?" Tylo asked.

"Holocron technology was acquired by the Jedi Order from the Sith." Cal explained, "That means our design is compatible with their technology."

"What about preventing the droids from reversing whatever you do?" Brae asked.

"I can do that." Shayal said, "Trust me. Now find me a port to plug into. This has to be done directly."

"What will it look like?" Tylo asked.

"It'll be a crystalline panel about five to ten centimetres across." Cal told him and Tylo nodded.

The Jedi and Tylo then spread out, searching for a panel like Cal had described.

"Over here!" Brae called out when she found something that looked like what Cal had described. The crystalline panel was flat on the top of a control console and all around it were small rods with glowing tips. "Then set me down." Shayal said and Jayk picked up her holocron and carried it across the room, placing it down on the pad. As soon as he did this the glowing rods extended upwards and bent over to make contact with the holocron, "I'm in." Shayal's voice said even though her hologram was no longer visible, "I think I've found the reactor controls. I've also found the door controls."

"Then you can get us out of here?" Tylo asked.

"Of course. I'll just command every door currently sealed to open and lock them that way. It's easy. Now are all your suits sealed?"

"Fully." Jayk replied.

"Good. Then hold on." Shayal said as she started to open all of the outpost's doors.

"Can you hear anything?" Wylas asked as Mara pressed her ear up against the door in an effort to hear what was going on inside the control room.

"Nothing. If the droids were there yet then I'd expect to hear something." she replied.

All of a sudden there was a power gust of wind as the air inside the outpost was blown out into space.

"The Jedi!" Mara exclaimed as she reached for her helmet, hurriedly putting it back on before she suffocated, "They must have figured out how to override the doors. Come on, let's get out of here before this one opens." she she turned and started to run.

"There," Shayal said as the door Mara and her men had left the control room through opened, leaving the other one still closed.

"What about that door?" Tylo asked.

"I thought it prudent to keep all the doors between you and the droids sealed." Shayal replied, "Now I'm going to set the reactors to overload in three hours. That gives you plenty of time to get out of here and back to your ship then take off."

"What do you mean us? You're coming too." Brae said.

"Oh no Padawan Udra, I cannot." Shayal said, "You see the only way I can guarantee that the droids will not be able to reverse what I do is to draw some of the excess power from the reactors and send it through the consoles in this room. Unfortunately that means I shall be destroyed. It is a sacrifice I am willing to make, however. Do not let it be in vain."

"There must be another way." Jayk said, "Perhaps-"

"There isn't time Jayk. Those droids are on their way." Cal told him, "Let her do it."

"Very well. Your sacrifice will be remembered Master Jup." Jayk said, standing up straight.

"Here goes." Shayal said, "There, the reactors are building up pressure. At this rate you have two hours, fifty-nine minutes and forty-four seconds left. I've left the lights on along your fastest exit route. Now just to-" and before she could finish the consoles in the control room began to explode.

Tylo threw himself forwards and suddenly snatched the holocron from its interface. But just as he lifted it from the pad there was a flash of bright light from within the crystalline cube before it went totally dark.

"Stang." he hissed, "I thought maybe I could-"

"You couldn't" Jayk replied, "Now perhaps we should honour Master Jup's wishes and get out of here before those droids can break down the doors barring their path. Brae, bring Cal."

"Yes master." Brae replied as she picked up the holocron.

The trio then ran through the open doorway and followed the illuminated corridors all the way back to the same entrance they had used to get into the outpost. As soon as they were back on the surface of the moon gravity returned to its previous low level and the trio were just about to start leaping across the surface when Brae remembered the stunned lookout.

"Where did the guy we stunned go?" she said when she saw that he was no longer present.

"His friends must have already come out this way and found him." Jayk replied, "In any case we do not have the time to search for him."

The group then began to bound across the surface of the moon again, heading back towards the *Swift Exit*. Reaching the vessel with plenty of time to spare they rushed to the cockpit where Tylo ran through the preflight checks as quickly as he could.

"What was that?" Brae asked as the console chirped.

"The sensors just picked up a ship jumping to hyperspace." Jayk replied.

"Could the war droids have escaped?" Brae said.

"More likely it was Mara getting away." Tylo answered, "Now hold on. We're getting out of here too." and he pulled back on the controls in front of him, causing the *Swift Exit* to rise up from the moon's surface.

The moon rapidly shrank beneath the ship until it reached orbit and from below there was a flash of light that

grew in size as the outpost's reactor exploded, taking with them the outpost and all of the war droids it contained.

"It's over." Jayk said as he got out of his seat, "Now I'm going to get out of this suit and back into my robes."

"Me too. I've been in this thing far too long." Brae added.

"Well I'm going to make sure we get out of the gravity well and into hyperspace first." Tylo said, remaining in his seat as the two Jedi left the cockpit. Then once he was alone he reached down to a pouch on his belt and removed the darkened crystal cube that had been Shayal's holocron, "Now I wonder what you're worth in this condition?" he said to himself.