

STAR WARS

DARKNESS RISING

5-09: CATCH & RELEASE

BY STEPHEN J DUTTON



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Teron Sharr's decision to take over parts of the galactic underworld turns into a liability when one of his new lieutenants is arrested and the Jedi seek to have him taken to the temple for questioning. However, the Jedi are not the only ones keen to question him while Teron seeks to ensure his silence...

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1.

The man known only as The Hand smiled as he walked along a hallway while one of his subordinates briefed him on the progress they had made in infiltrating and subverting the criminal underworld of the planet to their own ends and he heard a scream from elsewhere in the building.

"Ah, I think our guest is awake." he said.

"Yes Hand." the subordinate replied, "The surgical droid indicated that she would recover from the anaesthetic about now. Would you like to go and see her?"

The Hand considered this idea for a moment before he shook his head.

"No I don't think so. I want her to be able to properly evaluate her situation before we offer her a way out of it." he said.

The Hand's primary method of gaining control of underworld groups was partly inspired by what had happened to him when his own criminal organisation had been taken over by a young man called Teron Sharr. One of Teron's servants, a warrior named Krovak had broken into The Hand's home and single handedly hacked his way through the entire security detail. Then as a final act he had severed both of The Hand's arms at the elbow before offering him an ultimatum, serve Teron Sharr or his head was likely to be next.

The Hand had chosen to give control of his organisation to Teron Sharr.

Now his own missing limbs had been replaced by advanced prosthetic ones and Teron Sharr had even encouraged him to have them upgraded with pain inflicting repulse field generators. The Hand did not use these on the captives taken from other criminal gangs though. He knew that the inflicting of pain to gain answers was an unreliable method at best, beings were known to say whatever they thought their questioner wanted to hear to get the pain to stop. However, The Hand had come up with an alternative that worked by rewarding co-operation. By subverting the programming of a surgical droid The Hand's engineers had created a machine that lacked any of the ethical programming that was universal to them. Once captured, The Hand had his captives sedated before being handed over to the surgical droid which would then proceed to amputate their limbs before they would be left alone to awaken and discover what had been done to them. After that the availability of cybernetic replacements for their lost limbs would rely entirely on how co-operative they proved to be. Those who provided all the information needed of them and joined the cause of Teron Sharr would be allowed to return to a normal life while those who refused would be left to spend their lives entirely dependent on the mercy of Teron's followers. In the three weeks since The Hand had introduced this policy more than twenty beings had turned on their previous masters. The Hand now hoped that the twenty-first would offer them inroads into another organisation entirely.

"As you wish Hand." the subordinate said and they continued to walk until they reached a room where a pair of transports were being loaded with crates.

"Ah I see the next shipment is ready." The Hand said.

"Yes Hand. Six tonnes of spice worth in excess of a hundred million credits. Lord Sharr will be pleased with the income I'm sure." his subordinate replied but The Hand snorted.

"I'm not really sure the boy who would be a prince is capable of pleasure. It goes against what he is part of." he said.

"What do you-" the subordinate began but he was interrupted by the sound of an amplified voice from outside the building.

"Police! We have a warrant." it called out.

A series of small explosions followed this as every door to the building was blown open by carefully placed charges were triggered simultaneously. This included the large doors for the transports and The Hand and his subordinate were both stunned by the explosion, flinching and bringing their arms up to try and shield their faces.

Immediately following the explosions police officers in body armour and breath masks came charging into the building from every direction, all of them heavily armed and there were the sounds of blasters being fired. Although he had no blaster of his own, The Hand was still able to fight back against the police who rushed towards him and he reached out to grab the first to come close, triggering his repulse hands as he did so. The officer cried out in pain as the energy field discharged through him, penetrating his armour and as he collapsed The Hand grabbed hold of his blaster before rolling out of the way of the fire from the officer's comrades.

The blaster that The Hand had seized was set to 'stun' and he quickly changed this to a lethal setting before returning fire and killing one of the officers. Then he fired several more rapid shots that forced the other police officers to pull back long enough for The Hand to rush out of the garage and into the hallway. Expecting the police to be closing in on him from every doorway into the building The Hand sought an

alternate means of exit and he ran along the hallway and around a corner where he reached a wall that was lined with windows. To prevent these from being used to observe activity inside the building they had been all been painted over but they had not been strengthened in any way, they were still ordinary windows and as such fragile.

The Hand raised the blaster and fired it again, shooting repeatedly at the window until it shattered, creating an exit point that was not blocked by the police. Then he rushed to the broken window and began to climb out just as a pair of police officers appeared in the hallway behind him.

"Stay where you are and drop the blaster!" one yelled at him but The Hand ignored him, focusing on escape instead.

Before he could finish climbing through the window though there were two more flashes of blue as the police opened fire, both of them hitting The Hand and he fell the rest of the way through the window to land unconscious in the street outside.

"This is trill six to control. Target is secure. I say again main target is secure." one of the officers signalled using his comlink.

Teron Sharr held his hand close enough to the flame that it was painful without inflicting actual harm to his flesh. The fire came from a container of oil that had been set up in the centre of his throne room. There were holographic torches mounted on the walls as well but there was only one genuine flame in the chamber. This was a method of meditation that his new gen'dai advisor Turlan had suggested to him, it being something that the millennia old alien had witnessed Sith lords doing in reign of their empire. It had taken some time to get the technique right but Teron had to admit that the pain made it easier to draw on the power of the Dark Side.

Fear.

"It's bad news isn't it Sinsa?" Teron said when the door to his chamber slid open and he sensed the emotional state of the woman standing outside. Sinsa Turgen had been the leader of the criminal organisation based aboard the skyhook that Teron now used as his headquarters and her familiarity with the station made her the logical choice to act as his chief operations officer.

"Yes Lord Sharr, I'm afraid it is." she replied.

"Afraid is right. Your fear is easy to sense but if you are to keep the privileged position I have let you have then you must accept the risks that come with it. Tell me what has happened." Teron said, still staring into the flames created by the burning oil.

"The police have raided the spice warehouse on Tro'Dan. We lost millions of credits of stock." Sinsa told him.

"Credits do not concern me Sinsa, you know that. Now how about you tell me what you are keeping back before I decide to force it out of you. Or perhaps bring Krovak in here to force it out. Less effective I know but that man is capable of such charming brutality that I think needs to be nurtured."

"It's The Hand." Sinsa said suddenly, "He was at the warehouse at the time and he was arrested along with everyone else. The authorities have him, his crew and also a number of captives he was holding at the time."

"That is indeed a problem. The Hand knows too much about our operation here and given his prior failure on Commenor it is only a matter of time before the Jedi Order become involved and eventually they will make him talk." Teron said, pulling his hand away from the flame and looking directly at Sinsa.

"How do you want this handled? Should we try and using legal means to get him released from custody and then smuggle him off world or should we mount a direct rescue operation?" she asked and Teron smiled at her.

"Neither." he said, "The Hand has failed me for the last time and I do not intend to go before my master and explain why resources are being expended on getting him out of this mess of his own making."

"But we can't let the Jedi interrogate him. You said it yourself, he'll talk. He'll tell them everything." Sinsa said.

"The Dark Side of the Force is a pathway to abilities that many would call unnatural." Teron told her, "But even the Sith can't make a dead man talk. The Hand will not live long enough to tell the Jedi anything. Do you understand that Sinsa?"

"Yes Lord Sharr. It shall be done."

"See that it is Sinsa or I promise you that by the time you die you won't even remember a life without endless suffering in it." Teron said.

The communication system in Rylee Drud's office was allowed direct incoming calls from only a handful of individuals, all others would be filtered by subordinates before being passed to her. The spider like alien known only as The Assembler was one of those select few who came through to her directly though and she looked up at the holonet transceiver pad when his hologram appeared.

"Assembler." she said. Assembler was the name of the alien's species although Rylee knew of no others than this one and its mindless young. If it had any other name or if there were any other members still living she did not know.

"Miss Drud, I have information you may be interested in." The Assembler said. The alien was an infomerchant, the best in the galaxy if his reputation was anything to go by and it cost Rylee a lot of money to have him continuously monitoring the galaxy for anything of interest to her.

"Another source of artefacts?" she asked. Her family was part of a group that had spent thousands of years scouring the galaxy to try and unlock the secrets of the Sith to try and use them for their own benefit. Unfortunately while their collection of such objects was now vast they still lacked the ability to use or duplicate most of the more interesting items. However, it was still hoped that something could be found that would change this.

"No. A lead to Teron Sharr." The Assembler said and Rylee frowned. Teron had worked for her indirectly for a time as part of a gang she contracted to steal objects for her, all the time no-one aware that he was Force sensitive himself. Then one day he had stolen a valuable artefact and seized control of the gang for himself, severing its ties with Rylee. Now instead of serving her he was a rival and a dangerous one at that.

"You've found him?" Rylee said.

"No." The Assembler answered, "But I have found an associate of his. One whose identity and location I can provide to you. Given his current situation I feel certain that he would prove most co-operative if your were able to relocate him to somewhere under your control."

"How much?" Rylee asked, knowing that anything other than subtle hints would come at a great price.

"One hundred thousand credits." The Assembler said.

"A hundred thousand? Just for a name that might lead me to Teron?" Rylee exclaimed, although she knew better then to try and haggle.

"The name of a being who has had direct contact with Teron Sharr." The Assembler said and Rylee sighed.

"Very well, I'm transferring the funds now." she said, entering the instruction to pay the money to The Assembler into the computer terminal on the desk in front of her.

"Payment is confirmed." The Assembler said, studying his own computer terminal.

"Okay so tell me who I'm going to be sending a team after." she said.

"The being you must make contact with is currently known as The Hand, the latest in a line of beings to hold that title. He was the leader of a criminal organisation on Fulter's Reach. There were three major criminal groupings on that planet until recently when they suddenly united. My sources have confirmed that Teron Sharr was the reason for this. He has been recruiting heavily from the criminal underworld for several months now and Fulter's Reach was his first operation to gain control of major criminal organisations. He was able to bring The Hand and the other criminal leaders on Fulter's Reach into his own organisation and now they act as his lieutenants as he continues to expand his criminal empire. However, after a set back on Commenor The Hand was sent to the Mid Rim world of Tro'Dan where the authorities were able to arrest him. The Assembler explained.

"So all we have to do is go in there and snatch him from the authorities and make him talk." Rylee said.

"Yes but you must do so quickly," The Assembler warned her, "The Authorities on Tro'Dan have identified The Hand as being wanted by the Jedi Order and they will most likely have reported his capture to The Republic. The Jedi could have agents on their way to question him now."

"Thank you. I'll get right on it." Rylee said before she broke the connection and turned to her intercom,

"Mister Mott would you mind coming in here as quickly as you can?" she said into the device.

"I'm on my way now." a man's voice responded and a short time later a man wearing armour patterned after one of the ancient warrior orders of Mandalore entered her office. Like Rylee Mott was just the latest in a long line of his family who had been searching the galaxy to uncover and take control of the secrets of the Sith. However, his family had always been the footsoldiers in this endeavour and despite the fact that he was the head of his family while Rylee was just the daughter to the head of hers Mott still treated her as his superior.

"Mister Mott I think I have need of your skill set." Rylee said as she checked her messaging system for the full data packet from The Assembler. The strange alien was incredibly thorough in providing information and she knew that every detail relating to The Hand would be provided to her.

"And what is it this time Miss Drud?" he asked, "An obstacle to be removed?"

"No. Another rescue operation of sorts." Rylee told him and he smiled.

"Ah, a kidnapping." he replied, "So who is it you want bringing back here?"

"A man known only as The Hand." Rylee answered.

"So no-one pretentious then." Mott commented before he added, "So where is he?"

"On a planet called Tro'Dan. Are you familiar with it?"

"No, never heard of it until now. How much resistance is likely?" Mott said.

"Quite a lot. He's in police custody and the Jedi could be on their way as well. You need to get him out and return him here to answer my questions about the location of Teron Sharr."

"He knows where Teron is?" Mott said, knowing how important dealing with him was to their families' plans.

"He works for him. Possibly directly under him. Even if he doesn't know Teron's exact location he must have a way of contacting him that we can exploit." Rylee said before she noticed the message containing the data

packet from The Assembler arrive, "Here's the information now." she said and Mott took out a datapad, connecting wirelessly to Rylee's computer.

"I've got it." he said, "Looks like there are structural drawings of a police station in here I take it that's where he's being held?"

"I assume so. I also see some legal papers." Rylee responded. Coming from a family of lawyers Rylee was familiar with legal systems across the Republic and she opened up the legal documents to see what they contained. Most of them related to The Hand's arrest, including the evidence submitted to the court to obtain the warrant used to carry out the raid, but there was also another document that had not been drawn up by the authorities. This was an application for his release on bail, "This could complicate matters." she said, "His people are obviously looking at getting him out. If they pull it off I've no doubt they'll smuggle him off world." "It's also an opportunity." Mott said and Rylee frowned.

"Perhaps you missed the part where I want him back here." she said.

"He's also being held in a police station. If you wanted him dead then I could do it wherever he is whether by bomb or sniper's blast but you want him back alive. Even if I put together a full scale assault team that can storm a police station and occupy it long enough to get him out of there while holding off everything the planetary authorities can throw at us there's no guarantee that he wouldn't get hit in the crossfire. The courthouse would be the same but the transport between the two is another issue entirely. It'll be far more vulnerable no matter how much security they put on it." Mott explained.

"Then you can do it?" Rylee said.

"I think so. Of course a little more local knowledge would be good. That would require making contact with the underworld on Tro'Dan. Is Morton Crayne available?"

"I've not got him doing anything else right now." Rylee replied. Morton Crayne was the criminal she had hired a number of years earlier to help her procure illicit Sith artefacts and it was his gang that Teron Sharr had seized control of, "Oh and I'm with you too Mister Mott. I'd like to begin questioning this man as soon as possible and if something does go wrong then a confession from his dying breath is as good as a long meaningful talk."

"You? You know this could be dangerous?" Mott said.

"Then it's a good job you've taught me to protect myself isn't it?" Rylee said.

2.

Among the various starfighters and long range shuttles docked in the main hangar of the Jedi temple on Coruscant the YT-700 class freighter *Swift Exit* stood out as Jedi knight Jayk Udra walked towards it. The ship's owner, Tylo Kurrast, had worked for Morton Crayne prior to being arrested and since then had made a deal with the Jedi Order to provide Jayk and his padawan with transport and assistance in exchange for staying out of prison. Of course this had made Tylo a large number of enemies but having a pair of Jedi around him constantly made him a hard target for would be assassins.

Walking up the *Swift Exit*'s access ramp Jayk walked through the hold into the lounge area of the ship from where he could hear voices and he found himself facing three women in Jedi style robes. One of these was his padawan Brae, who also happened to be his daughter from a relationship he had had while on an extended assignment for the Jedi Order. The second was Kat Maran, the Jedi knight with whom he had shared an informal romantic relationship for a number of years. The third however, was not a member of the Jedi Order despite the clothing she wore.

"Hi Jayk." Kat said, smiling when she saw him, "Brae and I were just talking to Zara. Getting to know her now that she's going to be around more."

"The Jedi Order is not particularly fond of house guests." Jayk commented.

"No but if she's going to be living here on the *Swift Exit* with Tylo then they won't exactly have a choice will they?" Brae added.

Until recently Zara Rosk had been the chief executive officer of a refinery until a fallen Jedi knight had arrived there in pursuit of Tylo and taken it over. Zara had subsequently fled the facility with Tylo and the pair of them were now romantically involved with one another. Arriving at the temple without even any clothing, she had been provided with the robes she now wore by the Jedi Order.

"I thought you planned to get an apartment nearby Zara." Jayk said and Zara sighed.

"I did. But my former employers didn't take what happened at the refinery too well. They've seized all my stock options and are actually suing me. They've managed to get my accounts frozen. I couldn't even pay Tylo the five million credits I promised him for getting me out of there. I still want to find somewhere to live though. I don't like the bunks on this ship, they're too cramped and I like to be able to spread out more in bed."

"Yes, we saw the video of you spread out and tied to a bed." Brae commented and both Jayk and Kat glared at her while Zara cringed, embarrassed that a number of personal photographs and videos of herself and Tylo had been intercepted and seen by the Jedi Order.

"I will speak to the council." Jayk said, "Neela was a Jedi knight before she drove you out of your previous place of employment after all. Perhaps one of the senate apartments can be made available for you, although for now I suspect that quarters among the service corps are more likely for the next few days."

"So we're being deployed?" Brae asked and Jayk nodded.

"Yes. Is Tylo around?" he said.

"Tylo's right here." the *Swift Exit*'s owner said as he entered the room, walking over to where Zara sat and kissing her as he sat down beside her.

"Very good, I sense that you will be pleased to hear what I have to say." Jayk said, "We have received word that the individual known as The Hand has been arrested on the world of Tro'Dan."

"You mean the guy who had his goons torture me? The guy who works for Teron Sharr?" Tylo replied.

"The very same. According to the police he was directing criminal operations on Tro'Dan when they carried out a raid and arrested him. They are holding him in custody while they wait for us to arrive and take him off their hands." Jayk explained.

"They don't want to deal with him themselves then?" Brae asked.

"No, they're quite happy to get rid of him and he is likely to have information important to us about Teron." Jayk said, "The council has ordered us to go to Tro'Dan and bring him back here."

"You know that Teron's not just going to sit back while one of his minions who could lead us right to his front door sits in a prison cell, don't you?" Tylo pointed out.

"That's why we're going there instead of having the Sector Rangers handle the extradition." Jayk added, "Tylo the ship needs preparing for launch but first I think you may want to escort Zara to the service corps quarters and find somewhere for her to stay while we are on Tro'Dan. Unless she is coming with us of course."

"Err, no thanks. Being shot once was enough." Zara responded before Tylo could speak.

"I suppose I'd better get back to the firing range then." Kat said, getting up from her seat.

"I'll walk with you." Jayk replied and he accompanied Kat from the ship.

"That Zara is a very interesting lady." Kat commented as they entered a turbolift and she selected the floor she wanted.

"Yes." Jayk agreed, "Even without our power it would be easy to see why Tylo is so taken with her. Although I understand she was far more confident when the council were speaking to her about Neela than what we saw of her in the videos Tylo shot." and Kat smiled.

"Brae and I quizzed her about that. It seems that while she has an assertive attitude towards business she does not enjoy the same approach to her more intimate life." she said before all of a sudden she added, "So have you ever given any thought to us doing anything like that?"

Surprise.

"Jayk are you shy about talking about-" Kat began.

"No. I just wasn't expecting it, that was all. Somehow I doubt that the Jedi Order would approve. You know as well as I do that we can't be seen to develop a strong attachment to one another." Jayk interrupted.

"And you've never considered what it would be like if we could be together?" Kat asked and Jayk hesitated before he answered.

"After I found out that Brae was my daughter and the council had separated us, I expected them to expel me from the Jedi Order when she and I went to rescue Tylo." he said, "During that time I considered what I would do if they did and my first thought was to ask you to leave with me."

Before Kay could respond to this the turbolift came to a halt and they opened to admit another jedi and neither Jayk nor Kat chose to continue their conversation in the presence of a third party.

When the *Swift Exit* arrived at Tro'Dan the ship was given clearance to land on the roof top landing pad of the police station where The Hand was being held in custody and as the occupants walked down the access ramp they were met by a senior uniformed officer with a stern look on his face.

"I take it you are Jedi Udra." he said.

"Good guess." Tylo muttered.

"I am Jedi Udra." Jayk responded to the original question, "I understand you have our fugitive."

"Yes, downstairs in the cells. I'm Captain Orris by the way, it was my people that caught your man for you. Come with me and I'll take you to him." the police officer said.

"You don't seem too happy to have us here captain." Brae said as they began to walk.

"What I'm not happy about is the monster that was loose on my planet because you couldn't catch him. Right now I have an undercover officer in the hospital waiting to be fitted with a full set of cybernetic limbs because of him. Apparently he considered dismembering people alive as a fun thing to do." Orris told her.

"Sounds like I got lucky." Tylo commented as they entered a turbolift that then began to descend, "All I got was a beating. Mind you his goons did plan on killing me before Neela showed up."

The turbolift stopped on the police station's detention level and Captain Orris escorted the Udras and Tylo through the security checkpoint to the cell where The Hand was being held.

"This is it." Orris said, pausing by a cell that had a display beside it that simply had the letters T.H. marked on it, "We don't have a proper name for him yet." and then he used his identity card to open the cell door.

Inside the cell was clearly meant for the interrogation of prisoners with a table in the centre and chairs either side of this. On the far side of the table there was just a single chair on which The Hand sat staring at the people who had just entered the room. It was obvious that normal procedure would be to secure a prisoner to the table using binders hooked through a metal ring built into it but this was not possible with The Hand. The police could not let him keep his repulse hands so these had been removed, leaving him with just the stumps of his forearms that were useless for applying binders to. Therefore, the police had instead fixed a collar around his neck that was chained to the desk. This did not even need to be locked though, without hands he was unable to release even the most simple of latches or buckles.

Fear.

Jayk and Brae smiled at one another when they sensed The Hand's reaction to their entrance to the room but it was Tylo that spoke first.

"Yes, that's the guy who ordered me killed." he said and then he smiled at The Hand, "I guess you aren't so tough without your thugs are you? Or even those nasty little hands of yours. So what do we call you now? The Stumps?"

"Joke while you can. I've witnessed the power of Lord Sharr in person and I've stood before his master as well. I'm not afraid of you."

"Yes you are." Brae replied, "You're terrified of what we could do to you. Right now though we're all that's keeping the local police from taking their revenge for what you did to those people whose arms and legs you cut off."

"Tell us about Teron Sharr's master." Jayk told The Hand, "Whose bidding is Teron doing?"

"I don't know his name. I only spoke to him over the holonet. All of us did. No-one I met has ever seen him in person, except Teron himself." The Hand said, "I think he's off in the Outer Rim or something but don't ask me where."

"Okay so you can't tell us where Teron's boss is. What about the sleemo himself? Where is Teron Sharr?" Tylo said, leaning across the table towards The Hand but before he could respond the door to the interrogation cell opened again and a woman in a smart suit entered the room.

"That's enough I think. You should know better than to question a man without his legal representative present." she said.

"Why didn't you say he had a lawyer?" Tylo asked, looking at Captain Orris.

"I didn't know. He never mentioned a lawyer." the police officer replied as the woman handed him a datapad.

"You'll see that that is a court order demanding that this man be presented to the court immediately for a bail hearing." she said.

"A bail hearing? Are you serious?" Brae exclaimed.

"Kid I don't think this rancor cow has a sense of humour." Tylo commented.

"You might want to watch your tongue Mister-" the woman began.

"Captain." Tylo interrupted, "Tylo Kurrast. I'd say at your service but I'm not. I'm at theirs." and he gestured towards Jayk and Brae.

"Bear in mind that this unauthorised questioning of my client will be raised with the court as an example of how my client's rights are being abused while in custody." the lawyer said.

"This all looks in order." Captain Orris said as he read the datapad, "We're going to have to end this interview now while I arrange his transfer."

"Of course captain. We will defer to your authority of course." Jayk said.

"I need to speak with my client in private." the lawyer added and Captain Orris nodded.

"I'll go and make the arrangements." he said before he, Tylo and the Udras left her alone in the room with The Hand.

"Captain." Jayk said as soon as they were outside the interrogation cell and the door slid shut behind them.

"Yes Jedi Udra?"

"Captain I sense a trap." Jayk told him.

"I can't disobey a court order Jedi Udra. Even if it's a certainty that the court will order him held in custody. I'll just produce photos of what he's done to people who have the misfortune to end up as his prisoners." Captain Orris pointed out.

"Of course not but you can arrange a significant security detail." Jayk said, "One that we will join as well of course."

"Of course. I'm glad to have a pair of jedi with us. It should make anyone think twice about an ambush." Orris replied.

3.

Four identical repulsortrucks were lined up in the police station's basement parking lot when The Hand was brought down to it by a pair of police officers and his lawyer. All four vehicles were identical aside from the serial numbers marked on each face. They were obviously police vehicles and sufficiently armoured to be able to resist small arms fire. They had been further modified to have the windows of their rear compartments blacked out to prevent anyone from seeing inside. This meant it would be impossible for anyone to tell which one held The Hand and which held a team of well armed police officers.

"Captain I object to the presence of the jedi in this convoy." The Hand's lawyer said when she saw Jayk and Brae standing beside the transports.

"Object all you like lady." he replied abruptly, "Given the heinous nature of your client's crimes I've officially requested the support of the Jedi Order and they have kindly agreed to provide it. Do you want a transcript of the relevant holonet comms? Because I'm sure the judge will be happy to order me to provide you with one. Until then just accept that they'll be riding along with you."

Anger.

The Hand's lawyer knew that there was no further point in arguing so she remained silent as her client was loaded aboard one of the repulsortrucks and the police officers who were to be riding with him strapped him into a seat.

"She's not happy." Brae commented as she and Jayk watched this.

"No she isn't." Jayk responded.

"Lawyers like to win and the captain just put her in her place." Tylo commented.

"No I think there's more to it than that." Brae said.

"I agree." Jayk added, "I sense a great of apprehension in her."

"And impatience." Brae said.

"Now that is weird. She'll be charging by the hour so the longer she drags this out the more money she makes." Tylo said.

"Which vehicle do you want to ride in Jedi Udra?!" Captain Orris asked, walking up to the jedi as his men began to embark on the transports as well..

"We'll ride with the prisoner." Jayk said and Orris smiled.

"I thought you might." he said.

"Great. We get to keep an eye on stumpy and we'll probably piss off that bottom feeding lawyer as well. A win-win scenario." Tylo said, grinning as he started to walk towards the transport that The Hand and his lawyer had just embarked in.

Tylo didn't speak as he sat down directly opposite The Hand and his lawyer, followed by Jayk and Brae.

"What are you doing?" the lawyer demanded.

"The other transports are full." Jayk lied, "You could always try taking the issue up with Captain Orris if you want but I doubt that the convoy will be held for you."

"I should inform you that you're giving me all the justification I need to file a harassment suit against the Jedi Order." the lawyer replied.

Deceit.

"Ha!" Brae exclaimed, "She's lying dad. She's got nothing."

"Told you, lawyers don't like to lose so she's trying to get us off balance." Tylo added.

The transport's engine then started and the driver's voice was heard over the intercom.

"Okay we're off. We'll be the final vehicle in the convoy." he said as the door slid shut with a 'hiss' and then sealed before the vehicle began to move, falling into position behind the other three repulsortrucks as they exited the police station and turned towards the courthouse.

"Okay I'll tell them." Morton Crayne said when he received a signal on his comlink and then he looked at Rylee and Mott. All three of them were in an apartment that overlooked the city in which The Hand had been arrested and there were several of Mott's men present in their signature mandalorian style armour as well. The main force of troops though was deployed elsewhere in accordance with the information that Morton had been able to glean from the local underworld.

"I take it that was your contact?" Rylee asked and Morton smiled back at her.

"Yes. She says that the convoy has left the police station and look to be heading along the route she told us about. They'll run right into your men." he told her.

"So how long will this take?" Rylee said, turning her attention to Mott.

"Eight minutes. Any longer and we risk reinforcements arriving." he answered.

"My contact told me that they're bringing their own reinforcements with them. Four vehicles, that means three squads of cops. Probably well armed cops." Morton added.

"I'm not worried about that." Mott replied, "The vehicle holding our target will remain sealed. The ones holding the escort detail will open and the police officers will be vulnerable as they emerge. Clustered together, uncertain of where their opponents are located and possibly still suffering the effects of our attack on their vehicle. Our repeating blasters will make short work of them."

"I hope you're right Mister Mott. Teron Sharr is a growing threat to us. If we don't deal with him then sooner or later he is going to be coming after us and the other families and my father won't forgive me for letting that happen." Rylee said. Then she looked at Morton and added, "Or you Morton."

"Me? What did I do?" he said.

"Teron Sharr was your subordinate. He took over your gang. My father will see all his as being your fault as much as mine." Rylee told him.

"This deal is getting worse all the time." he muttered in response.

"Mister Mott are you certain that your men can stop that convoy? If the information from Morton's contact is good then the vehicles will be well protected." Rylee said.

"Don't worry Miss Drud. I've thought of that. They won't see this coming." Mott reassured her.

"You know what this reminds me of?" Tylo said as the convoy continued to work its way through the city streets and he stared directly at The Hand, "That time when I was captured by a pair of this sleemo's thugs and he ordered them to beat me to death. Of course that time it was me tied to a chair, not him."

"I suppose it must be his turn." Brae responded.

"Jedi Udra would you kindly inform your apprentice and your – whatever he is, that my client has no wish to communicate with any of you." The Hand's lawyer said.

"Who's communicating with him?" Tylo asked before Jayk could say anything, "Brae and I are having a private conversation."

"As you can see Miss -" Jayk began and then he frowned, "I just realised that I don't actually know your name."

"Fronner. Felina Fronner." the lawyer said.

"Wow, she can speak without making demands." Tylo said and Felina glared at him for a moment and then glanced down at the chronometer on her wrist.

Anger.

Impatience.

"Are you late for another appointment Miss Fronner?" Jayk asked.

"No." she said, "Now tell your-"

"As I was about to tell you Miss Fronner," Jayk interrupted, "Brae and Captain Kurrast are free to speak to one another about any subject they chose providing it is not classified or illegal and comparing this situation to the one your client subjected Tylo to is neither of them. I'm sure we'll be at the courthouse soon and then you won't need to remain in the same room with us if it bothers you. I know I have no desire to remain close to either you or your client for any longer than is necessary."

Brae frowned for a moment, considering her father's tone to be far more abrupt and confrontational than it usually was. However, she then sensed something from Felina. It was not a feeling or emotion though as most of what a Jedi would sense through the Force was. Instead it was a word, something she was doing her best not to think of too much but that had popped into her mind as a reaction to Jayk telling her that he wanted to be able to get away from her as soon as he could.

Ambush.

"Six to one, do you read me?" one of Mott's men signalled and Mott activated his comlink.

"This is one. Go ahead." he responded.

"Sir the convoy is approaching our position and we're picking up the communication signals between the vehicles. Most of them look like exchanges of navigational information but there's something else. It's repeating at regular intervals and is on a low energy channel as if whoever is sending it is trying to avoid it being noticed."

"Is it coming from just one vehicle or all of them?" Mott asked.

"Just one. The one at the rear according to our direction finding." his subordinate answered.

"It's a beacon isn't it?" Rylee said when she heard this and Mott nodded.

"Yes it is." he replied.

"So our guy is in the transport at the back. Can you use that information?" Morton said.

"Yes but it does raise an issue that will complicate our operation. My men have a number of concussion missiles that may be able to destroy the transports. I intended them to be used against any reinforcements if we were delayed but now we can target the escort vehicles with them. The beacon marks out the vehicle that

contains our target and it can be avoided.”

“So what’s the complication Mister Mott?” Rylee said.

“The police would not put such a beacon in their vehicles. Therefore, it must have been placed there by a third party.” Mott explained.

“Teron.” Morton said.

“That is the most logical answer. He must already be planning a rescue of his own. We may have to deal with them as well.” Mott said and a smile spread across Rylee’s face.

“What’s so funny Rylee?” Morton said.

“I was just thinking that maybe we won’t need this being who calls himself The Hand to tell us where Teron is hiding. Maybe he’ll be here right when we’ve got a large force ready to take him down.” Rylee said.

4.

The convoy was moving through a commercial area of the city along a street raised almost a hundred metres above ground level with office blocks either side that stretched even further into the sky when both Jayk and Brae sensed a disturbance in the Force.

Danger.

"Yes I felt it too." Jayk said when Brae looked at him.

"Felt what?" Felina asked.

"I've got a very bad feeling about this." Tylo commented when the two jedi reached for their weapons and he also drew his blaster right before there was the sound of an explosion.

The concussion missile was fired from one of the nearby office blocks and it struck the side of the police transport in the lead position of the convoy. Although it was armoured this did not offer enough protection to resist the missile's warhead and the vehicle exploded in a ball of flame, the burning wreckage tumbling forwards before plummeting over the edge of the road.

Two more missiles then flew at the convoy in rapid succession. One of them was hit head on and the crew compartment exploded. The repulsorlift field keeping the transport aloft promptly failed and the wreckage dropped to the road and skidded forwards out of control until it hit the safety barrier at the side of the road and was brought to a halt. Meanwhile the third transport suffered a hit to its engine and the fuel cells exploded, shattering the entire vehicle and reigning debris over a wide area while what little remained of it ploughed into the road and came to a rapid halt.

"We're under fire. Missiles coming from the surrounding buildings." the driver of the final vehicle exclaimed and Brae looked at Felina. However, what she felt from the lawyer was not what she had expected.

Surprise.

Fear.

Obviously whatever she had been expecting this was not it and Brae hoped that Felina had been double crossed by whoever she was working for. If not then it meant that there was still more to come.

"Can you keep going?" Jayk responded to the driver, knowing that ambushes were generally designed to be most lethal to anyone who either tried to retreat or stood their ground. Pushing onwards meant getting out of the line of fire more quickly.

"Perhaps. All the other vehicles have been knocked out and traffic has come to a halt." the driver said.

"All the other vehicles?" Tylo repeated when he heard this, "How did they know which ones were the escorts?"

"You were expecting an ambush. I sensed you thinking about it." Brae adding looking straight at Felina.

"I had nothing to do with this. Honestly." the lawyer replied and Brae sensed no deception.

"But you are planning something. Tell us what, now before the next missile hits us." Brae said but Felina did not get the chance to respond.

As the driver of the transport wove his way around the wrecks of the other vehicles in the convoy as well as the civilian traffic that had been brought to a near standstill he suddenly saw a flash from a nearby rooftop. At first he thought it was another missile being fired at his repulsortruck but instead of a rocket plume heading towards him he saw that it was an energy blast. This was not one of the typical colours associated with blaster technology though, instead it was a bright white teardrop of energy that slammed into the vehicle. An ordinary blaster cannon would have cracked open the armour of the repulsortruck but this attack inflicted no physical damage at all as lightning appeared to dance over its surface and all of the electronics were overloaded by the ion cannon blast.

"We're hit!" the driver exclaimed as the repulsortruck dropped to the ground and began to skid along the road but the intercom had shut down along with everything else.

"What's happening?" Felina cried out as the passengers felt the repulsortruck suddenly drop and heard the sound of it grinding against the road before it hit a civilian landspeeder and flipped over, landing on its roof before finally coming to a halt.

Although dazed, it did not take long for Jayk and Brae to recover and both jedi released their harnesses before dropping to what had been the ceiling of the repulsortruck before they activated their lightsabers to provide some illumination in the compartment that had been plunged into blackness when the lighting failed. The ion cannon had disabled all of the repulsortruck's other systems as well so when Brae tried to open the hatch nothing happened.

"It seems we will have to make our own way out." Jayk told her and then he swung his lightsaber at the door. While Jayk was cutting his way out of the repulsortruck he had ridden in the police officers from the second vehicle in the convoy were making their exit from their own ruined transport. Between them they were able to force the hatch open and they tumbled out of the smoke filled interior, coughing and gasping for air. However,

in doing so they came into the line of fire of another of Mott's team of soldiers and there was a sudden volley of blaster fire from a repeating blaster that had been set up in another office block that ripped through the already disorientated police, scattering them even further as they took cover behind other nearby vehicles. It was then that Jayk and Brae emerged from their own transport, the door falling to the road as Jayk finished cutting through it and the repeating blaster was turned on them.

Danger.

"Cover!" Jayk snapped but Brae had already sensed the same disturbance that he had and both Jedi threw themselves out of the path of the blaster fire before they could be hit.

"One this is three we are engaged." one of Mott's team leaders reported, "All escorts taken out. Primary target vehicle disabled. Survivors confirmed from one escort being engaged now. Wait, we've got movement from the primary target. Stang! They're Jedi. Two of them."

"Jedi?" Rylee exclaimed.

"They must be here to take our guy back to Coruscant." Morton said, "Of course if we let them then they'll likely take care of Teron for you."

"Yes and we lose all of the artefacts that he's been able to amass since he took control of your gang Morton." Rylee pointed out, "Including one that is particularly valuable just in case you've forgotten."

"Your orders Miss Drud?" Mott asked, "My men are well trained. They may be able to handle a couple of Jedi especially from a distance where their powers are less effective."

"Can we get a look at them?" Rylee said and Mott nodded, handing her a datapad.

"This has the feed from the targeting system of the repeating blaster streaming to it." he told her and she took the device, looking at the screen and scowling when she zoomed in enough to be able to pick out the faces of the Jedi outside the transport.

"Jayk and Brae Udra." she hissed.

"The Udras? That means Tylo Kurrast is likely down there somewhere as well." Morton reminded her and she nodded.

"Yes I realise that Morton. Mister Mott tell your men that there is a second target for recovery. I want Tylo Kurrast taken alive as well if possible." she said.

"Yes Miss Drud. I'll pass on the order." Mott replied.

"Hey what's going on?" Tylo called out from inside the repulsortruck.

"We're getting shot at, that's what." Brae responded.

"Tylo we're going to need your rifle. Plus some others if we can find them." Jayk said.

"What about over there?" Brae asked and she pointed to where the police officers who had been able to escape their stricken transport only to be gunned down in the street were lying, their weapons scattered around them. These included a number of blaster rifles with optical sights mounted for precision use.

"They will do." Jayk said, smiling as he shut off his lightsaber and then reached out with his hand towards the dropped weapons. Concentrating on the rifles he then summoned two of them in rapid succession to him with the Force, catching them and passing one to Brae, "Now you get to put Kat's lessons into action." Although Jedi did not normally carry blasters they were trained to use a wide variety of weapons and Jayk and Brae both checked that the rifles were ready for use. At the same time Tylo peered out of the transport and pointed his rifle towards the source of the blaster fire. Tylo's rifle was a military model and was capable of fully automatic fire. It was this mode that Tylo now used his weapon in, firing short bursts towards the window from which the repeating blaster was being fired. The window was too far away for Tylo to be able to target precisely which was why he was using automatic fire instead of semi-automatic, hoping to disrupt the gunner's shooting.

In this Tylo was successful and the volume of fire reduced sufficiently for Jayk and Brae to be able to lean over the vehicles they were using for cover and take aim. The police rifles they were armed with lacked the fully automatic fire capability of the weapon Tylo was armed with but they were built for accurate firing at a much greater range, featuring superior optical sights. This enabled the two Jedi to line up their rifles on the window that the gunner was firing through precisely before they too returned fire. They fired almost in unison and all of a sudden the repeating blaster ceased firing entirely.

"Are we clear?" Tylo asked.

"Almost." Jayk replied before he fired again, sending two more shots in rapid succession through the window to disable the repeating blaster itself before anyone else could take over the operation of the tripod mounted weapon.

"Now we're clear." Brae said, smiling as she watched the destruction of the repeating blaster through the optical sight on her own rifle.

"None of this makes sense." Jayk said as he got to his feet and looked around.

"What do you mean dad?" Brae asked.

"They destroyed the first three transports but only disabled ours. That suggests they intended to release the prisoner but instead they fired on us from a distance again when they should have sent in an assault force." Jayk answered before there was a crashing sound as a heavy repulsorlift vehicle smashed its way through the stationary traffic. This vehicle came to a halt about a hundred metres further along the street and its hatches promptly opened so that the troops it contained could disembark.

"Have you ever heard of the phrase 'tempting fate' Jayk?" Tylo said from inside the repulsortruck. Jayk and Brae both cast aside the police issue rifles they held and drew their lightsabers again, igniting them with a 'snap-hiss'. They then began to advance along the street towards the oncoming soldiers, using their lightsabers to deflect the shots fired at them as the soldiers also advanced. Fortunately by this time the occupants of the other vehicles that had been on the roadway when the shooting began had abandoned them and fled on foot, leaving no civilians to be caught in the path of any stray blaster bolts. Behind them Tylo darted out of the transport and began firing between the Udras, again using rapid bursts to try and suppress the newly arrived soldiers instead of killing them outright and this seemed to work as they halted their advance less than half way towards the crashed repulsortruck and took cover among the halted vehicles littering the roadway.

Jayk, Brae and Tylo maintained a close formation as they pressed onwards, with the two jedi acting as a shield to Tylo while he kept firing on the soldiers who held their position staunchly.

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

"You mean the fact that their assault has faltered and they are pinned down but none of them seemed to be at all afraid?" Jayk responded and Brae nodded.

"You mean it's a trap?" Tylo asked but before either of the jedi could answer him there was the roar of rockets as a dozen armoured figures with propulsion packs mounted on their backs descended from the sky and surrounded the overturned repulsortruck that The Hand and his lawyer were still in the back of.

All but two of these figures began firing on the jedi and Tylo while the final pair climbed inside the repulsortruck and found both The Hand and Felina hanging upside down, still strapped into their seats.

"What's going on?" Felina said when she saw the two armoured figures appear and for a moment mistook them for police tactical officers. It was only when one of them aimed a weapon at her that she realised her mistake, "No wait I-" she began holding out her hands in front of her but the armoured figure simply shot her. The two armoured soldiers then slung their rifles and rushed to The Hand. One of them drew a knife and quickly used it to cut through the harness holding the man in his chair and both soldiers caught him as he fell.

"Who are you? Did Lord Sharr send you?" The Hand asked as he was dragged out of the repulsortruck and into the open air but the armoured soldiers ignored him. They continued to keep a firm hold on him though as they and the other ten men of the second wave triggered their rocket packs again and shot upwards into the air, taking The Hand with them.

As they disappeared the first wave of troops also began to move again, now falling back towards their transport just as the sounds of police sirens could be heard in the distance.

"Stang!" Tylo yelled, looking up in the sky where the rocket pack wearing soldiers had gone, "We lost the sleemo."

5.

"Six to one do you read me?"

"This is one." Mott said.

"We have him sir. The primary target is in our possession and unharmed. Unless you count the arms he's missing but it looks like those aren't new wounds."

"What about Tylo?" Morton said.

"Six what is the status of the secondary target?" Mott asked.

"Negative on target two sir. We had a positive ID on him but he was too close to the jedi for us to extract and four reported that police reinforcements were on their way." the team leader told him.

"Understood six. Take the primary to the rendezvous point immediately. We will meet you there." Mott ordered.

"Poodool!" Morton hissed, "I can't believe that traitor Tylo Kurrast slipped through our fingers again."

"Tylo was just a bonus." Rylee said with a smile on her face, "The man who can lead us to Teron Sharr is the real prize and he is ours now. As far as I'm concerned we won today."

"We still haven't got the information out of him yet." Morton pointed out.

"No but we will. One way or another he will be made to talk." Mott said, "In the mean time we should get going to the rendezvous point."

"Yes." Rylee agreed, "Call ahead though and have the crew start to warm up the ship for take off. I'd rather not stay on this rotten planet for one moment more than I have to."

"What are the numbers captain?" Jayk asked Captain Orris when he arrived.

"Twenty-two officers dead and fourteen wounded, eight of them in life-threatening condition." Orris responded.

"I'm sorry." Jayk said.

"And to make matters worse our prisoner escaped and we don't appear to have a single lead." Orris said.

"The lawyer Felina Fronner was in league with someone planning an ambush but she denied knowing anything about this." Jayk told him.

"Did you believe her?" Orris replied.

"I sensed no deception but it is possible that the people she was working for double crossed her. That might also explain why they killed her, to stop her talking to us after they changed their plan from whatever it was." Jayk said.

"Which leaves us with nothing. No judge is going to give me a warrant to start searching the offices of a law firm or let me access their messages on the basis of a conversation had with a woman who is not now here to back it up herself. Her firm will just deny everything." Orris said before Brae's voice called out.

"Dad!" she shouted and Jayk looked around to see her approaching with Tylo.

"What is it Brae?" he asked.

"Dad I just finished checking out that lawyer's body and belongings and I didn't find anything out of the ordinary." Brae told him.

"You checked her comlink?" Jayk said and Brae nodded.

"Yes. It was still active but there was nothing on it that could have acted as a beacon." she said.

"You realise what this means don't you?" Tylo added, "She must have slipped it to old stumpy. Probably just in case they were separated for the transit. Of course that makes it less likely she was in on this ambush. If they ended up in different vehicles then she'd have been killed in the missile attack instead of shot while hanging upside down."

"More importantly it means that we may have a way of tracking the prisoner." Jayk said and he looked at Captain Orris again, "Captain can your communications experts study local records to see if they can isolate the tracking signal while it was coming from the convoy? If we can identify it then we may just be able to turn it to our own use."

"Not that I'm ungrateful for you getting me away from the police and the jedi but I'd really like to know who you are." The Hand said when his rescuers set down again beside a cluster of plain looking landspeeders with enclosed passenger compartments that would limit how clearly the occupants could be seen from outside.

"Just get inside." one of the armoured warriors told him, shoving him towards the nearest vehicle and The Hand stumbled.

"Watch it!" he snapped as he barely avoided falling over before he got into the speeder, another warrior holding the door open for him. The door was then slammed shut and The Hand found himself alone in a

compartment that was separated from the front of the speeder where the driver and two other passengers would be able to fit side by side. As far as he could tell neither the doors nor the screen that separated the two parts of the speeder were locked but without fingers to operate the controls The Hand was effectively a prisoner once more.

He could still see through the speeder's windows though and outside he saw the armoured warriors removing their rocket packs and stowing them in luggage compartments before also getting into the speeders, at which point the vehicles finally began to move off.

Returning to the police station with Captain Orris the crew of the *Swift Exit* were met by one of the station's support staff.

"Captain," she said, "our tech boys just pulled this from the city communication system." and she handed him a datapad.

"Jedi Udra I think we have your tracking signal." he said, showing Jayk the information on the datapad.

"An unshielded extremely low energy level beacon." Jayk commented.

"Is it still being broadcast?" Brae asked and Orris looked at the woman who had met them.

"Yes captain. A signal matching those parameters is being detected along the East Highway out of the city. It's moving fast." she replied.

"Then we need to be faster." Jayk said, "Tylo how fast can you get the *Swift Exit* in the air?"

"I'll skip the warm up." Tylo told him, grinning.

The convoy of landspeeders pulled off the highway and came to a halt among a small cluster of buildings in the midst of a rural area and from the rear of his speeder The Hand saw a shuttle concealed inside one of the larger structures.

"Okay out." one of the warriors who had brought The Hand here said, opening the speeder door from the outside and The Hand slid across the seats to get out of the vehicle.

By this point the other warriors had formed a ring around him, facing outwards to keep watch for something.

"I take it I am to be taken aboard that ship over there." The Hand said, pointing an arm towards the shuttle.

"You get aboard when Miss Drud says you can. Until then our orders are to keep you right here." the warrior told him.

"And who is this Miss Drud?" The Hand asked but the warrior ignored him.

Moments later there was the sound of an approaching vehicle and The Hand as well as the warriors around him all turned towards the source, however the warriors relaxed when they recognised the oncoming vehicle and they parted to allow it to drive right up to their own speeders. When it came to a stop the back of the speeder opened and three figures got out, all obviously human and The Hand studied them closely.

One was clearly another warrior and the way that the ones surrounding him reacted he guessed that this man was their commanding officer. A second man was also armed but he did not look like a soldier. The

Hand had seen his sort before though during the many years he led his criminal syndicate and he guessed that he was the group's contact with the criminal underworld. The final individual was easier to identify though, as the only female in the group the dark skinned young woman could only be the Miss Drud referred to by the warrior who had told The Hand that he would be meeting with her.

"Miss Drud I presume." The Hand called out to her, "I hope you'll forgive me if I don't offer to shake your hand in thanks for securing my release from custody but the police confiscated mine."

"You my dispense with the pleasantries." Rylee responded, "Let's get down to basics. You have information that I want so the way that I see it you have two choices, you can either co-operate voluntarily or Mister Mott can force you to talk."

"A mind probe?" The Hand asked.

"No. No not the mind probe." Mott answered, "Those things don't work reliably but trust me I know how to loosen tongues."

"It might help if I knew what it was that I am supposed to know that is of such interest to you." The Hand said.

"Teron Sharr." Morton responded, pointing towards The Hand, "We know you work for him but he can't help you any more so-"

"If I might stop you there." The Hand interrupted, "Everyone today seems so interested in Teron Sharr so now I'm going to tell you something I didn't tell the Jedi. I will happily tell you everything I know about how you can find Teron Sharr and what his security arrangements are and in return I won't ask for anything other than my own continued well being. Do we have an agreement?"

"I don't trust him. No-one would sell out Teron that easily." Morton said to Rylee and she nodded.

"Why should we trust you?" she asked and The Hand raised the stumps of his arms.

"This is why Miss Drud. It was one of Teron's henchmen, a thug by the name of Krovak that did this to me before I was given the choice of servitude or death. I'd just like to be able to chose who it is that I serve and in doing so get some measure of revenge for what was done to me."

"Very well. Then tell us where we can find Teron Sharr now." Rylee told him and he smiled.

“Teron Sharr has established a-” The Hand began before his torso suddenly exploded in a cloud of red vapour.

“Sniper!” Mott yelled as he leapt in front of Rylee and several of his men returned fire, shooting in the direction that the powerful blaster bolt had come from despite not having a clear target to aim at, “Get Miss Drud to the shuttle now.”

6.

From their hidden position on a nearby hill the two bodyglove clad women watched as Mott's men hurried to get Rylee aboard the shuttle before she could become their next target.

"Excellent shot?" the woman looking through a set of macrobinoculars said to the woman lying down and looking through the large optical sight of the turbolaser rifle she had mounted on a bi-pod in front of her.

"It was nothing. Just like mother taught us." she replied.

"Well we better get out of here." the spotter said, "Miss Turgen will be eager to report success to Lord Sharr." and the woman with the rifle snorted.

"Lord Sharr. As if we need to take orders from a man." she said as she began to get up, "Still, I waited years to be able to take out The Hand. I'm sure if I wait long enough Miss Turgen will order us to take out Teron Sharr as well."

"Very messy." Tylo said as he, Jayk and Brae looked down at what was left of The Hand.

"What could do this to a person?" Brae asked.

"A turbolaser rifle." Jayk answered, "Assuming that this was done by the person who arranged for the beacon to be planted on the prisoner then they were probably planning to use it to attack the convoy as well."

"Only someone else got to him first." Tylo added, "So what now Jayk?"

"Back to Coruscant." Jayk said, "The jedi council will be expecting a report."

"Jedi Udra you and your padawan appear to have returned to the temple without your prisoner, this being known as 'The Hand'. Would you care to explain why?" Grand Master Ress asked.

"When we arrived at Tro'Dan a lawyer presented court papers demanding that the prisoner appear at a bail hearing. There was nothing that we could do to prevent this but every effort was made to ensure the security of the prisoner during transport." Jayk began, "Unfortunately the court hearing was a ruse to get the prisoner outside the police station and the convoy was ambushed. The lawyer who presented the court order was involved in this plot and planted a beacon on the prisoner so the vehicle he was riding in could be identified."

"So ambushed you were?" Master Yoda asked from the side of the room and Jayk nodded.

"Yes. First missiles were used to destroy the escort vehicles before an ion cannon disabled the vehicle that the prisoner was being transported in. After that two waves of infantry were used. The first deployed from a ground transport and were used to draw Brae and myself away from the prisoner so that a second unit using rocket packs could secure him and escape before either we could react or police reinforcements could arrive. We were able to track the beacon used to locate him but by the time we arrived he had been killed. From the look of his remains he was killed by a sniper armed with a turbolaser rifle." he explained.

"All very elaborate for a man I understand they then killed." the grand master commented, "Even if the kill had to be confirmed in person then the infantry could have killed him and taken proof of death away with them. Or a specific individual wanting to kill him could have joined the second force."

"Grand master I suspect that there were two competing groups wanting to get the prisoner out of our custody. One wanted him free, the other dead. Or at least they were willing to kill him if they couldn't have him. The lawyer was genuinely surprised by the ambush so it seems likely that she was working on the instructions of the second group." Jayk said.

"A failure your mission was then." Yoda said.

"That depends on how you quantify failure." Brae commented.

"Padawan Udra you have something to add?" Grand Master Ress asked and Brae nodded.

"Yes grand master." she replied, "We were able to talk to the prisoner briefly before the lawyer turned up and he confirmed the claim by Teron Sharr that he has a Sith Lord instructing him."

"We are dealing with two Sith." Jayk added, "A master wielding the power and an apprentice craving it."

"Worrying this is. If survived the Sith have then idle they will not have been." Yoda said.

"Jedi Udra this information is greatly worrying." Grand Master Ress said, "Teron Sharr must be found and taken alive. He is the only link that we have to this mysterious Sith master."

"What about Thal N'Krey and the Founding Families?" Brae asked.

"The hunt for Thal N'Krey must continue. His own interest in the Sith may lead us to them. The Founding Families that your ancestor defeated are of secondary importance. They will be challenged if they are encountered but from what we know they are collectors of Sith artefacts, not Sith themselves." the grand master said and then he looked back at Jayk, "Jedi Udra given the importance your mission has acquired you may request additional resources if you wish."

"I do grand master. If I am to challenge a Sith Lord then I may need extra help from a second jedi knight.

There is room aboard the *Swift Exit* for one extra individual." Jayk said and Grand Master Ress nodded his

head.

“Then you may select any jedi not currently on assignment. Go now and may the Force be with you.” he said and Jayk and Brae both bowed to the grand master before they turned and left the council chamber, heading straight for the nearby turbolift.

“I’m guessing you want the level that the firing range is located on.” Brae said when the door dropped shut.

“Why would you think that Brae?” Jayk asked and Brae smiled back at him.

“So you can tell Kat that she’s to join us aboard the *Swift Exit*.” she replied.