

STAR WARS

DARKNESS RISING

5-1 1: REBUILT & REARMED

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Tracking the renegade droids to their source, the Udras discover that they have been able to establish a manufacturing base with which they can increase their numbers and weaponry. Lacking the time for the Republic to assemble a large assault force the jedi must look for an alternate way to destroy it and prevent a mass droid revolt...

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1.

The Republic Judicial Department frigate *Durrant* remained close to the scout ship *Pree-Val* while its crew carried out the final repairs to its hyperdrive. Until just a few hours earlier the two vessels had been docked together while engineers from the *Durrant* helped with the repairs but now the frigate's captain wanted his ship to be ready for combat at a moment's notice. The frigate had been sent into Wild Space in response to a distress call from an independent colony but by the time it had arrived it had found only the colony stripped of all technology and the corpses of the settlers lined up where the fusion generator had been. Following this another distress call had been received from the *Pree-Val* and this time the *Durrant* had arrived soon enough to help. The raider vessel had withdrawn when it realised that a warship was on the way but not before it had disabled the scoutship's hyperdrive and left it stranded.

Also aboard the *Durrant* were the Jedi knights Jayk Udra and Kat Maran as well as Jayk's padawan and daughter Brae as well as their pilot Tylo Kurrast, owner of the YT-700 class freighter *Swift Exit* and this freighter had been used by the Jedi to check on a survey ship launched from the *Pree-Val* that had not been responding to warnings to return. The Jedi had found this ship in the midst of being attacked by a modified bulk freighter, its hyperdrive also disabled. Luckily they had been able to drive the pirate ship off using the *Swift Exit*'s turret, saving the surveyor's crew and in the process gained a lead on who was responsible for the attacks. Or in this case what was responsible.

The renegade droid K-6 had been able to break free of its own life preservation programming and likewise modified a number of other droids to turn them into potential killing machines in the Corulag system in the Core Worlds. Last seen ejecting from a stolen transport ship the droid had evidently been picked up by the same bulk freighter that had attacked the survey ship and then made its way out into Wild Space where it was continuing with its stated aim of organising a droid revolt against organic beings.

"There must be thousands of systems K-six could be hiding in." Brae said as she looked at the star chart in the *Durrant*'s flight deck where the Jedi and Tylo were gathered with the frigate's command crew.

"If we were dealing with a band of living pirates then I'd be inclined to agree with you Padawan Udra."

Captain Trasem, commanding officer of the *Durrant* replied. Initially the captain had seemed somewhat hostile to the idea of having the Jedi aboard his ship, convinced that they could not offer anything to a mission that his crew were well trained to handle themselves. However, the revelation that they were dealing with a large hostile force that was growing ever stronger had caused him to be glad of their assistance.

"You have an idea captain?" Jayk asked.

"Yes I do Jedi Udra." Trasem said and he looked at Tylo, "One I think your smuggler friend ought to be well practised in."

"Decoy jumps." Tylo responded from near the back of the crowded flight deck, smiling and Trasem nodded.

"Exactly. Every competent spacer knows that an exit vector can be tracked and used to plot potential destinations. That's why it's been standard practice for thousands of years for retreating ships to make a short decoy jump in a random direction to throw off pursuit before heading to their genuine destination." he explained.

"And you think that the pirate ship we engaged didn't make such a decoy jump?" Kat said.

"I'm fairly confident, yes." Trasem said as he called up the data recorded on the sensors of both the *Pree-Val* and the *Swift Exit* as the pirate vessels they had been facing jumped into hyperspace, "You can see here that we have radar tracks, Cronau radiation readings and visual records of both ships' jumps into hyperspace and by synchronising all of them we can determine their exact headings when they left."

"Is there a pattern?" Jayk said and Trasem turned to his bothan first officer.

"Lieutenant Harn tell the Jedi what you found." he said.

"Yes captain." the bothan responded before he called up a pair of diagrams on the screen above his own console, "On a visual inspection only the two exit vectors appear the same but on closer analysis they differ by about two and a half degrees." he explained.

"That's too similar for it to be random and if they were following a fixed decoy retreat bearing then there wouldn't have been any difference at all." Kat commented.

"On the other hand then for two ships leaving star systems only a handful of parsecs apart and both heading for the same destination then those exit vectors make perfect sense." Harn added.

"So where do they lead?" Tylo asked, "I mean, I take it you have extended those vectors to see where they intersect."

"I have, yes. Unfortunately it leads into a dense star cluster located a hundred and sixteen parsecs from here. The competing gravity wells would make jumping directly to any of the systems inside difficult from anything other than close range so the ships were probably jumping to a staging point from where they'd

make the final jump to their base." Harn said.

"We need to shake out that staging area." Jayk said, "If we can catch one of K-six's ships on its way in or out then we might be able to track its course back to its base."

"You know this could be a trap don't you? There could be a minefield or sentry ships just waiting for anyone stupid enough to try following them back home." Brae pointed out.

"Jedi rush in where angels fear to tread." Tylo muttered.

"That would require a large volume of space to be covered. I doubt that K-6 has a full navy yet." Jayk told Brae.

"If he did then he wouldn't be using bulk freighters with blaster cannons bolted onto them." Kat pointed out.

"The problem is Jedi Udra that I have to keep the *Durrant* here until the *Pree-Val* is able to depart under her own power." Captain Trasem said.

"Don't say it Jayk." Tylo said.

"In that case captain we'll go on ahead in the *Swift Exit* and observe the cluster until you can arrive with the *Durrant*." Jayk said and Tylo winced.

"I knew it." he said, "I've got a bad feeling about this. A very bad feeling about it."

The *Swift Exit* came out of hyperspace close to the dense star cluster the pirate ships had been heading towards but still deep enough into interstellar space that even these stars were nothing more than pin pricks of light in the darkness.

"Okay we're here." Tylo said, "So now what?"

"Now we wait." Jayk replied, "If Lieutenant Harn's calculations were right then the droid ships should have come out of hyperspace within a parsec of this point. That's close enough for us to get a reading on our long range sensors."

"Only just." Tylo said, "I don't fancy just sitting here waiting for something to trigger them though."

"I don't either." Jayk agreed and he looked behind them at where Brae and Kat were sitting, "Brae do you have Cal there?" he asked.

"Right here." Brae answered and she produced a fist sized crystalline cube from under her robes.

"I take it you need me." the hologram of an older man in Jedi robes said as the cube began to glow and the image appeared in the cockpit. This hologram was a virtual recreation of the original Cal Udra, a distant ancestor of Jayk and Brae's who had created the holocron to store his knowledge and experience. What Jayk and Brae now called Cal was an advanced artificial intelligence that acted as a guide to the information inside the holocron as well as limiting access to it on the basis of criteria that the original Cal had laid down thousands of years earlier.

"Yes I want you to connect to the *Swift Exit*'s long range sensors and watch for any ships coming out of hyperspace." Jayk told him.

"Ah a job too dull for a living Jedi to do." Cal said, "Ironic given how dull the Jedi Order seems to be nowadays. Okay I'm patched in. I'll let you know if anything comes our way."

"So what are we going to do in the meantime?" Kat asked.

"Probably meditate." Tylo commented.

"While you put your liver through its paces perhaps?" Brae added.

"Actually I thought we'd go through the data we have on this star cluster." Jayk said.

"I didn't think it had been surveyed yet." Tylo said.

"It hasn't but there are long range observations." Jayk told him.

"K-six could have had access to some of those and used them to select a hiding place." Kat suggested and Jayk nodded.

"That was my thinking as well." he said, "Before we left the *Durrant* I sent a request to the Jedi temple and they sent everything that was in the archives. If it isn't in there then it isn't known."

2.

Despite covering almost three hundred star systems the information on the star cluster turned out to be rather sparse. Long range observations had determined the classifications of the stars as well as identifying planetary bodies orbiting a number of them but without probes or close range observations nothing could be determined about the conditions on any of these planets.

"This is a dead end." Brae said after the Jedi had spent more than an hour in the *Swift Exit's* lounge area going through the data and achieved nothing more than ranking certain stars that because of their unstable emissions and their effects on electronics made unlikely hiding places for an army of droids.

"Until we have a droid ship to follow this is all we have." Kat pointed out.

"Yes, unfortunately we can't just trigger the arrival of one of them." Jayk added.

"I thought you Jedi could do anything at the click of your fingers." Tylo commented.

"The Force doesn't work like that Tylo. See?" Brae said and she held her hand out close to his face and clicked her fingers.

"Okay everyone look sharp. We just picked up a contact. Vessel coming out of hyperspace about point four of a parsec away." Cal's voice announced over the intercom.

"Stang kid." Tylo said as he and Brae stared at one another.

"Let's go." Jayk said, tossing his datapad onto the lounge table as he removed the glasses he had been wearing while reading and got up to hurry back into the cockpit, followed by the others.

"What sort of ship is it Cal?" Brae asked as she sat down behind Tylo.

"I have no idea, it's much too far away for me to be able to tell. All we have is a flash of Cronau radiation." Cal replied.

"Let's take a look." Tylo said as he studied the sensor readings that Cal had alerted them to, "Yeah that's a ship coming out of hyperspace alright." then all of a sudden there was another brief flash of energy on the sensors.

"And there she goes back into hyperspace." Jayk said.

"I think that proves Captain Trasem's theory about this being some sort of staging ground." Kat said.

"Yes but unfortunately we're too far out to have been able to get vector readings on either that ship's arrival or departure." Tylo said.

"But we do now know the exact location of the droids' staging area." Jayk pointed out.

"You want to go in closer, don't you Jayk?" Tylo said and Jayk smiled at him, "I knew it, plotting a jump now. How does a light hour away from those energy spikes sound?"

"Closer." Jayk told him, "If another ship happens to jump in when we leave hyperspace then it won't matter how far away we are they'll see us but I want us to go silent as soon as we arrive. That's something we can't do if we have to move at full sublight power to get close enough to get a good look at the next ship to arrive."

"Okay I'm plotting this for within a million kilometres of where the spikes were." Tylo said.

"Good. Oh and transmit the co-ordinates to the Durrant. If anything does happen to us I want them to be able to continue our mission." Jayk replied.

"Right, sending the co-ordinates now. Stand by for jump. This should be quick." Tylo said before he activated the *Swift Exit's* hyperdrive again. This time the freighter was in hyperspace for barely a minute before it returned to realspace but the view outside the cockpit canopy had barely changed. The *Swift Exit* was still in interstellar space and there were no other ships in range of its sensors.

"Shut everything down. We're running silent from now on." Jayk said and the cockpit's occupants hurried to turn off all unnecessary systems that could give away their location. An active radar scan would still detect the presence of the *Swift Exit* in the area but it would not necessarily identify it as anything other than a piece of debris drifting through the depths of space.

"So now we wait again?" Brae commented.

"Again? What are you saying kid? This is totally different." Tylo responded.

"How is it different?" Brae asked.

"Because now we're in the dark." Kat said.

All of a sudden there was a flash of light from outside the ship as another vessel appeared after dropping out of hyperspace.

"Stang that was close." Tylo exclaimed as he looked at the other starship that was close enough for him to make out its outline without needing any instruments.

"It looks like another freighter." Brae commented as she looked at the large boxy vessel that was obviously designed to maximise the internal volume of the space frame. Although the freighter's running lights were still

active there were no lights coming from any of the viewports, suggesting that the interior of the vessel was in total darkness.

"It is, a Trade Federation type from the markings." Kat said.

"That's not standard on a federation ship though." Tylo replied and he pointed to the dorsal hull where a single turbolaser battery had been mounted."

"Tylo can you get us in closer without us being seen?" Jayk asked as he too studied the silent vessel ahead of them.

"How close?" Tylo replied.

"Close enough to use the docking claw. A ship like that shouldn't be able to detect us latching on." Jayk told him.

"You're planning on hitching a lift to wherever they're going?" Tylo said and Jayk nodded.

"They look to be heading into the cluster." he said.

"Can we make it in time before they jump again?" Brae added.

"Probably." Tylo said, "That type of ship takes a few minutes to reboot the hyperdrive between jumps. Firing thrusters now."

Using only the *Swift Exit's* manoeuvring thrusters Tylo moved the light freighter closer to the other massive vessel while keeping its energy emissions low enough that the droid controlled vessel could not detect it. When the two ships were just a few metres apart Tylo lowered the *Swift Exit's* landing gear and began to rotate the ship, aligning it with the hull of the larger ship facing it. Then with one last burst from the thrusters the *Swift Exit* made contact with the larger ship and there was a 'clang' as the two vessels made contact with one another.

"Magnetic seals confirmed. We're locked on." Jayk said, looking at the flight console in front of him.

"Will they hold when the other ship goes into hyperspace?" Kat asked and Tylo grinned.

"Trust me Kat, I know every system aboard this ship inside and out, we'll hold together." he replied.

"I'm picking up a power build up from inside the other ship." Jayk said, "It looks like she's about to jump into hyperspace."

"Baby, baby hold together." Tylo muttered before all of a sudden there was a flash of light outside the ship and the star field shifted into a bright tunnel of light as the droid controlled vessel entered hyperspace.

"So now we just have to wait to see where we end up." Brae commented.

"Yeah and hope that this ship isn't being sent on a sun scuttle or we're going to end up crispy." Tylo added.

"I'd be more worried about arriving in an uncharted system full of hostile droids if I were you." Cal said.

"Did you ever do anything like this?" Brae asked and Cal's hologram smiled.

"My sister Lara and I once found an abandoned Sith war droid factory that had been hidden for a thousand years. The Sith lord who built it was known to his peers as The Artisan as I recall. Of course he was long dead by the time Lara and I found him." he said.

"So how did you destroy it?" Kat asked.

"We didn't. In fact we barely got away with our lives and a few months later all those droids were used by the Founding Families to form an army they used against the Republic. Mark my words one day someone will make a droid army so big even the Jedi Order won't be able to stop it." Cal said.

"Is that the same Founding Families who hired Morton Crayne?" Brae said.

"The very same according to what you've been able to tell me. Of course back then they were operating more openly." Cal said.

"You don't think that they'd try to get control of K-six's army then?" Brae suggested.

"I doubt it. I think K-six isn't the sort to lend his army to organic beings when he could use it against them instead." Jayk answered before Cal could respond.

It was then that the droid freighter dropped out of hyperspace again and Jayk quickly checked his instruments.

"Where are we dad?" Brae asked.

"It looks like we're within a solar system. Obviously one of the systems towards the outer rim of the cluster or we couldn't have reached it so quickly." Jayk replied.

"Sounds like we're underway." Tylo added when the rumbling of the droid freighter's ion drive reached them through the physical connection between the two ships.

"Release the magnetic clamps. Let's get a good look at where we are before rushing in." Jayk said and Tylo nodded as he disengaged the clamps holding the *Swift Exit* to the larger ship and then fired the thrusters momentarily to push away from it.

"Any idea where that ship is heading?" Kat said as she watched the droid vessel continue to accelerate away from them.

"There seem to be a number of vessels in orbit around one of the planets towards the centre of the system." Jayk said, "I can only see one other planet closer to the local star so unless there are more hidden behind the star it's the second. As you'd expect it looks like a rocky world but I'm not picking up any atmosphere."

"Droids don't need air." Cal pointed out, "In fact oxygen can corrode some of their components. Of course a magnetosphere would help shield them from energy emissions from the star."

"The planet doesn't look to have a magnetosphere but I am picking up a magnetic field from the surface." Jayk said.

"A shield?" Tylo suggested and Jayk nodded.

"I think so. Quite a large one in fact." he said.

"How large?" Brae asked.

"Enough to cover a city." Jayk answered.

"An entire city of droids that want to kill people. Just where I always wanted to spend my vacation." Kat said.

"Do you Jedi actually get vacations?" Tylo said.

"Sure, it's just that the form we have to fill in is very complicated so we don't often bother." Kat joked.

"This is interesting. It looks like the droids have one of those old reliance-class heavy cruisers." Jayk said.

"Reliance-class? Stang, those were a thousand years out of date in my day. I wonder where they found that thing?" Cal commented.

"A ship like that is going to be difficult to keep running." Kat pointed out.

"Yeah, plus the hyperdrive is going to be so slow that it could never keep up with newer ships. Hell, those modified bulk freighters could outrun and out turn it." Tylo added.

"We're going to have to get closer." Jayk said.

"Closer?" Tylo exclaimed, "Jayk you said it yourself that's a heavy cruiser orbiting that planet. It may be even more out of date than that dimel-class attack ship but it still has enough firepower to crack us open like an egg."

"I know but we need to get more information about what's going on down on that planet and we're too far away to get any meaningful readings through the shield. If you bring the ion drive up to full power we should be able to use the freighter that brought us here as a shield against any fire they send in our direction. Then we make one quick flyby and get out of the gravity well and jump into hyperspace." Jayk replied.

"Where to?" Tylo asked.

"Anywhere. Just set the controls for a half light year jump dead ahead and then we can plot a route out of the cluster and back to the *Durrant*." Jayk said and Tylo sighed.

"Okay I'll lay in a course but I've got a very bad feeling about this." Tylo replied as he began to set the controls.

"Kat we might need covering fire." Jayk added and Kat nodded as she got up from her seat.

"I'll get in the turret." she said.

"I guess I'll just sit here with Cal and watch then." Brae commented.

"You can watch. I'm going to be checking out everything Jayk picks up on the sensors." Cal responded.

The *Swift Exit* accelerated rapidly when Tylo brought the ion drive on at full power, speeding towards the droid controlled freighter that they had clung to through hyperspace. It did not take long for the droids controlling the other ships in the system to detect this but Tylo quickly took his ship into the shadow of the freighter, preventing them from targeting it while also keeping out of the line of fire of the turbolaser mounted on the freighter itself.

The larger freighter still maintained its course towards the second planet though and Tylo remained in its shadow until they were close enough to make detailed scans of both the planet and the other ships in orbit around it, at which point he turned sharply and flew beneath the droid controlled freighter.

"I'm picking up a new group of contacts." Jayk said when he saw a cluster of sensor returns on the sensors.

"Missiles?" Brae asked.

"They'd never have got a lock on us kid." Tylo pointed out.

"Droid fighters heading this way." Cal said.

"Kat we've got company. Fighters, about twenty of them." Jayk said into the intercom.

"I see them I can't identify the type though." Kat responded as she turned the *Swift Exit*'s turret to face this threat.

"The energy profiles don't match starfighters. I think they're uglies." Cal said. When applied to starfighters the term 'ugly' meant an improvised attack craft that may have been built from the parts of different types of starfighters combined or even one built from scratch and because of their improvised nature they were well known for being unreliable and having poor performance compared to dedicated starfighters.

"Cal says they're just uglies Kat." Jayk said and in the turret Kat grinned.

"No problem." she said and she opened fire.

Kat's first burst was just a warning as well as a way to test the reactions of the droid pilots and as she had expected the fighters all turned as soon as she fired, seeking to avoid the stream of energy blasts.

"Jayk those ships are piloted by droids and they're coming right for us." Cal said.

"I thought they were nothing to worry about." Tylo said.

"They aren't. But think. Droids." Cal replied.

"If we can capture one then we can examine its memory files for information about K-six and its forces." Jayk said.

"Okay so how do we manage that?" Tylo asked and Jayk looked over his shoulder at Brae.

"Brae if you can identify a droid among the wreckage of a fighter do you think you can get it into one of our airlocks?" he said.

"I can try." she said.

"Remember, there is no try. Only do or do not." Jayk told her repeating the mantra of many jedi instructors at the temple and he got out of his seat and rushed from the cockpit. Brae then moved forwards to occupy the copilot's seat and studied the sensors closely.

Kat was still firing the *Swift Exit's* turret at the droid fighters and this was delaying their attack as they all took evasive action. All of a sudden there was a flash as one of the fighters suffered a hit and due to its poor construction it flew apart as the energy blast combined with the force of its own acceleration proved too much for its improvised space frame.

"I got one." Kat said over the intercom.

"Can you see the pilot kid?" Tylo said, glancing briefly at Brae but she shook her head.

"No, I think it went up with the ship." she answered.

"Kat, Cal says we need one of the droids intact. Don't get cocky about just smashing them." Tylo said.

"Intact? You know the sight on this turret doesn't focus to something the size of a droid turning sharply at ten thousand kilometres?" Kat protested before she fired again and a second droid controlled fighter was hit, this one producing a trail of fire behind it before suddenly exploding in a brief ball of flames that consumed both the crude attack vessel as well as its pilot.

"Two down and eighteen more chances to grab a droid." Brae commented.

"It might interest you to know that our sensors have scanned the ships in orbit as well as the surface of the planet. We can head for free space and get out of here at any time you want." Cal said from behind Brae and Tylo, "Of course with a droid in our hold would be good."

"You jedi and your brilliant ideas." Tylo muttered.

"Tylo these readings show some of the orbiting ships powering up their ion drives. I think we're about to have a lot more company than just twenty home made starfighters." Brae said.

"Is that reliance-class ship coming after us?" Tylo asked.

"No she seems to be staying put but there's an old corvette that we weren't able to see earlier." Brae told him.

"I think I'd be happier with the antique cruiser." Tylo said,

Just then Kat's fire from the turret struck another of the starfighters. This one had a long, thin construction and the laser blast snapped the ship in half, the front section breaking up as it tumbled on through space while the aft section spun out of control for a few seconds before it exploded. However, this meant that the droid pilot was clear of the blast by the time it happened and no longer encased in the structure of the fighter.

"Tylo I think I've got one." Brae said when she was able to pick out the energy emissions of the helpless droid on the *Swift Exit's* sensors. Then she reached for the intercom, "Dad are you ready?" she asked.

"Yes Brae. I'm by the starboard side air lock. It's decompressed and the outer door is open." Jayk responded.

"Okay then. Here goes." Brae said as she lifted her hand, pointing her arm towards the canopy in front of her and she took a deep breath as she drew upon the Force.

Not being a living creature, the droid had no presence in the Force and Brae had to rely on the data from the *Swift Exit's* sensors to tell her where the machine was but this was still enough for her to be able to focus on it enough to exert a telekinetic pull on it, putting a stop to its tumble through space. Bringing the droid aboard was more involved than simply dragging it using the Force though. Brae could have pulled it straight towards the *Swift Exit* but had she done so then at best it would have crashed into the inside of the air lock at such a speed that it would have been smashed to pieces instantly. Instead Brae had to direct the droid away from the ship but along the same path that it was flying in and at a slightly lower speed. This enabled Tylo to catch up with the droid flying alongside it, at which point Brae dragged it closer, aiming for the open air lock door.

"Great shot that was one in a million." Jayk exclaimed when he saw through a viewport in the air lock's inner door that the droid was now aboard the *Swift Exit* and he slammed his hand down on the control to close the outer door before the droid could attempt to fling itself back into space.

"Now let's blow this joint and go home." Tylo added, "Or at least back to the *Durrant*." and he turned the *Swift Exit* away from the planet, racing beyond its gravity well before engaging the freighter's hyperdrive.

Jayk was watching the captive droid through the viewport when Brae and Kat arrived to join him.

"So what have we got?" Brae asked.

"A C-one series astromech droid." Jayk replied, "It looks like it's trying to escape."

Brae and Kat peered through the viewport as well and saw that the metre tall machine was attempting to gain access to the mechanism of the outer door.

"I suppose we'd better get in there before it can hurl itself into deep space then." Kat said and Jayk nodded. "We'll need to disable its manipulators and antenna. We can't have it hacking our computer." he said, drawing his lightsaber and then there were three 'snap-hiss' sounds as all of the jedi drew their weapons and activated them before Jayk opened the airlock's inner door.

The moment the door opened the droid let out a shrill squeal and raced towards it, obviously intending to try and ram past the three jedi standing on the other side with its three mechanical arms flailing. However, the jedi moved too quickly for the machine to match and each jedi sliced off one of the droid's arms as they leapt out of its path. Following this up with a second rapid strike Jayk sliced the wireless antenna dish from the droid's head before Brae waved her hand to manipulate its recessed shutdown switch and the squealing came to a stop as the droid toppled forwards and crashed to the floor.

"One droid. Memory hopefully intact." Brae said, smiling as she shut off her lightsaber.

"I told you it would work." Jayk added and he patted his daughter on the shoulder.

3.

When the *Swift Exit* returned to the system where the frigate *Durrant* was waiting the crew found the Republic Judicial warship now alone in the system, with no sign of the *Pree-Val*.

"*Durrant* this is the *Swift Exit*, mission successful. We have the location of K-six's hideout as well as scans of the planet for analysis." Jayk transmitted, "But what happened to the *Pree-Val*?"

"Nothing happened to her Jedi Udra." Harn's voice responded, "Our work crew got their hyperdrive back on line and their captain decided to head back to Republic space to finish repairs to his ship."

"Who can blame him?" Tylo commented, "Tell them about our prisoner."

"Did Captain Kurrast just say 'prisoner'?" Harn asked.

"That's correct lieutenant. We were able to get our hands on one of the droids from K-six's army. We're hoping it will be full of useful intelligence so we're going to need one of your engineers to take a look at its memory core." Jayk told him.

"Jedi Udra this is Captain Trasem. Welcome back and congratulations. I'd like to take a look at your sensor readings while my engineer cracks that droid open." Trasem said.

"Yes captain. We're moving in to dock now." Jayk replied.

When the *Swift Exit* docked with the *Durrant* the crew were met by Captain Trasem in person along with the frigate's chief engineer.

"The droid's in the cargo hold." Tylo said, "Minus the bits that these three sliced off."

"Engineer Farris see to it. I want a full report on everything in its memory banks." Trasem ordered and the engineer nodded.

"Yes captain. I'll get right on it." he replied.

"Captain we also have the results of our sensor scans." Jayk added, handing a memory stick to Trasem.

"Thank you Jedi Udra. We'll examine these in the forward section." he responded as he took the memory stick and looked at it. Then he turned around and began to walk towards the *Durrant's* forward pod, the crew of the *Swift* exit following him.

When they arrived in the lounge area of the pod Trasem plugged the memory stick into the wall mounted display while the others sat down.

"Brae I think Cal's input would be of benefit here." Jayk said and Brae nodded as she took the holocron from her robes, "Cal has been able to review the data while we were en route back to you captain." Jayk added before Cal's hologram appeared.

"So what can you tell me about the force this renegade droid has assembled?" Trasem asked.

"There were a total of seventeen ships in orbit around the planet that K-six has fortified." Cal said, "Most were civilian types but there were four warships, none of which were dimel-class so we must assume that there are more ships that we haven't seen yet."

"And yes, that is a reliance-class heavy cruiser you can see in orbit." Tylo commented but Trasem snorted.

"I'm not worried about an antique like that." he said, "The *Durrant* is faster, more manoeuvrable and has superior shields. Plus our turbolasers have about three times the range of the archaic models aboard that ship. It may take some time but we can bring that ship down."

"Oh you don't need to worry about the droids using that ship against you captain." Cal said, his hologram smiling, "Not only is it not operational, it gets further away from being operational with every hour."

"What do you mean Cal?" Brae said when she heard this.

"I've been studying the sensor readings we took of the ship and also of those ugly type fighters that the droids threw at us and I've come to the conclusion that they realise that a stock reliance-class ship is more of a liability in modern space combat than an asset. Instead of making it ready for battle they're using it as a source of parts to make other weapons from. For example I'm pretty sure that each of those uglies was propelled by a manoeuvring thruster unit taken from the cruiser. Plus the turbolaser on the transport that we hitched a ride on looked to have been taken from one of its main batteries as well."

"That is more worrying. The amount of material aboard a ship like that could be used to build a dozen space frames for ships the size of the *Durrant*." Trasem added.

"And I think that the droids could manage that pretty quickly. Say within a week or two." Cal said and he accessed the display screen wirelessly to bring up information about the planet that K-6 had turned into his headquarters, "According to our scans that shield covering the surface facility is a modern planetary shield. The *Durrant's* turbolasers could fire at it non-stop for a thousand years and still not punch through but what is more interesting is what is underneath. The droids have obviously been plundering machinery from wherever they could get it."

"Hestra for example. "Kat commented, naming the destroyed colony whose distress signal had brought the *Durrant* and the Jedi to this region of space.

"Yes and more beside that. K-six and his droid army must have raided dozens of colonies that we haven't heard about to amass everything they have down there." Cal said, "The energy emissions match those of a large industrial city on a developed Republic world. From the looks of it they're using the main reactor from the reliance-class cruiser to power it all as well."

"So they have weapons, troops, ships and an industrial base to support them." Trasem said.

"And the longer we delay in attacking the tougher it will be to crack as they build even more." Jayk said, "Or worse yet spread out."

"You mean the droids and factories problem?" Tylo asked. This was an issue that had often been posed by academics studying how a modern society could wage war should something like that ever happen again. It began with a single factory that could make droids. This would make a batch of labour droids before being turned over to military production. These droids would then be used to build other identical factories, each of which would first produce another batch of labour droids that could build more factories and continue to process. The only way to stop this was to destroy every last factory and every last group of droids or the process would begin all over again.

"K-six could be spreading his forces out right now." Kat pointed out.

"Then we can't wait for reinforcements from the Republic. We have to attack." Trasem said.

"It will have to be a surface attack." Jayk said, "We'll need to land outside the shield and make our way into the city on foot then sabotage the reactor."

"Jayk we might be able to shut that reactor down and inflict enough damage to make sure it never comes back on again but we'd have to overload it to take out that city and by the time we got clear the droids would either repair what we did or pull the plug themselves." Tylo said.

"I've got a bad feeling about what you're about to suggest Jayk." Kat said, staring at Jayk.

"Don't worry Kat, I'm not about to suggest that we all stay there and die when the reactor melts down. I'm hoping that destroying the reactor will buy us enough time to call in reinforcements from the Republic to destroy all their ships. The droids will need to pull back to stop the *Durrant* from bombarding the city from space."

It was then that the intercom sounded and Trasem answered it.

"Yes?" he said.

"Captain it's Engineer Farris."

"Farris, have you completed your analysis of the droid's memory banks already?" Trasem asked.

"No captain we haven't even started analysing its memory banks yet, just its core operating system and we've found something interesting." Farris told him.

"Go ahead Farris, the Jedi are listening in as well." Trasem said.

"Well it looks like all of the droid's core functional programming has been removed. This is little more than a semi-autonomous drone right now." Farris said and Tylo frowned.

"Wait so that thing can't think for itself? I'm using the word 'think' in the widest possible term of course. I know no droid really thinks." he said.

"Yes sir. This droid has no innate purpose. It will just carry out any order that it is given from an approved user." Farris said.

"Let me guess, that user is going to be K-six." Brae commented.

"Looks like he's gone from just wanting to wipe out organic life to wanting to be the god of all machines." Tylo added.

"I think this has just given us our answer." Jayk said, "Engineer Farris can you duplicate the command signal?"

"Of course. I can send an order that looks like it came from the approved user but then they could just countermand it." the *Durrant*'s engineer responded.

"We'd be going back and forth. It might disrupt the droids but we couldn't keep that up forever." Trasem said.

"We wouldn't have to if we found and destroyed K-six." Jayk pointed out, "Sending droids out on raiding missions is one thing but if K-six is keeping total control of his army then he'd need to duplicate himself to create another colony and spread. All we need to do is get to him before he can do that and destroy him. Then Farris can shut down the rest of them."

"That sounds like it could work. Of course the problem is that K-six is going to be at the heart of that city. You'll have to fight your way past his army to get to him." Cal said.

"Which is why we will need to focus his attention elsewhere." Jayk replied and he looked at Captain Trasem, "Do you think you can evade the ships orbiting the planet while we penetrate the city?" he asked.

"Of course. There's nothing on these scans that we can't outfight, outrun or out turn. We just need to make sure that they can't box us in." Trasem said.

"Then that is what I need you to do captain." Jayk said, "To begin with take the *Durrant* in low over the surface and fire on the city with your turbolasers."

"Cal told us that won't do anything." Kay reminded him.

"It won't penetrate the shield, no. But I'm planning on it creating enough disruption to jam their sensors in our direction long enough for this pod to be released no more than about fifteen hundred metres outside the shield. This will have the four of us plus the *Durrant's* marines aboard and we'll make our way into the city while the *Durrant* retreats into space and engages the droids there. Then we find K-six and destroy him once and for all." Jayk said.

4.

The crew of the *Swift Exit* and the *Durrant's* marines gathered all the weapons that they could carry from the frigate's armoury and even the jedi strapped blasters to their hips just in case additional firepower was needed. Given her previous assignment of teaching marksmanship to padawans in the jedi temple's firing range Kat also drew out a long barrelled rifle fitted with a high powered optical sight and everyone took as many grenades as they could fit to their load carrying gear. As well as weapons Tylo was also issued with an armoured spacesuit from the *Durrant's* stores identical to the ones worn by the marines.

"You know this thing could come in handy." Tylo said to Jayk as he finished fitting the main body of the suit, leaving only the helmet yet to go, "Reckon there's any chance that we could forget to return it afterwards?" "I think forgetting to return the suit is out of the question." Jayk replied, "But I sensed that you may want to hang onto it so I was careful to chose the right form when I arranged for you to be issued with it." and he handed Tylo a datapad that had the requisition form shown on it and Tylo smiled when he saw it.

"A permanent transfer. Thanks Jayk. So I notice you and the ladies are wearing your regular vacc suits. Aren't you tempted to grab something with a little more protection?" he said.

"Rigid armour is fine for using a blaster rifle at a hundred metres or more but when we confront K-six I expect that we'll be close enough to use our lightsabers and for that we need the freedom movement a lighter vacc suit offers. Besides, I don't think that the *Durrant* has any of those suits in sizes small enough to fit Brae."

Jayk pointed out and he looked where his daughter was clipping grenades to her vacc suit. Whereas the Udra family tended to be tall, even their women, Brae was an exception to this and she stood barely one and a half metres tall.

"If you say so but I still think you'd all be better off with a good blaster at your side and some decent plasteel and ceramic composite plates to block blaster fire this time. Those droids are going to be coming at us from all sides you know."

"Then it is lucky for you that there are three of us this time Tylo. One can stand in front and one either side. Of course we'll already have destroyed all the droids behind us." Jayk responded before the leader of the marines, Sergeant Enopa spoke up.

"Okay marines time to seal your suits and get into the pod. We exit hyperspace in five and drop in ten." he said.

The assault force then made its way to the *Durrant's* forward pod to where there were rows of seats fitted with safety harnesses and everyone strapped themselves into one, fixing their helmets in place and making sure that all their equipment was secure. This pod was detachable and it offered a way to get the assault force to the surface of the planet without needing to land either the *Durrant* or the *Swift Exit*, a process that would take longer than what was planned.

The *Durrant* came out of hyperspace as close to the planet K-6 had constructed his base on as possible and the frigate's helmsman accelerated towards the surface.

"Incoming. It looks like they've seen us captain." Harn announced.

"All weapons fire at will. Concentrate deflector shields forwards until we're through them." Trasem ordered and immediately there were flashes of energy from the *Durrant's* two turbolaser turrets. The modern weapons were more than a match for anything in the droids' fleet and the approaching transports were rocked by explosions that caused them to pull back while a force of smaller starfighters sped towards the frigate and the *Durrant's* gun crews opened fire with their close defence laser cannons.

Like the craft sent against the *Swift Exit* this wave of fighters was made up entirely of ships known as uglies because of their improvised nature. However, after the failure of twenty such craft to deal with even a light freighter K-6 was obviously trying to make up for their individual inadequacies through sheer weight of numbers and now a vast swarm of them headed towards the Republic frigate.

"Lieutenant why are those ships still my sky?" Trasem said as he watched the starfighters getting closer.

"There's too many of them captain. Our lasers are being overwhelmed." Harn responded.

"Stabilise rear deflectors. They may try to get behind us." Trasem ordered before the ugly starfighters finally got close enough to make use of their own weapons against the *Durrant*. These weapons varied in their type and power, ranging from archaic pulse wave weapons to relatively modern blaster cannons but even with several dozen of them firing together the *Durrant's* shields held as the frigate continued to approach the planet and the fighters sped past it.

"They're turning to follow us captain. Do we break off?" Harn asked.

"No we need to deliver our troops to the surface. Concentrate all fire on those fighters though, I'd rather not have them see use dropping the pod." Trasem answered.

With no atmosphere surrounding the planet to worry about the *Durrant's* helmsman was able to dive steeply towards the surface with the droid operated fighters following close behind. Normally starfighters were too agile to be accurately targeted by turbolasers but the improvised nature of the uglies combined with their dense formation meant that the frigate's main guns were also able to fire on them with reasonable accuracy and while the uglies hammered away at the *Durrant's* shields in vain the frigate continued to thin out their numbers.

"Levelling out." the helmsman announced when the frigate got to within a kilometre of the surface and he performed a high-gee turn that brought the *Durrant* into a horizontal flight path, heading directly towards the droid city beneath its shield. This manoeuvre was too sharp for some of the following droid fighters to match and whereas normally they would have been able to make a wider turn and come back around to engage the frigate again this was not possible now and the fighters that were unable to match the *Durrant's* sharp turn instead slammed into the surface, producing a rapid succession of explosions.

"How many are still on us?" Trasem asked.

"Fourteen captain." Harn answered before he saw two more of their pursuers explode as they were struck by blasts from the frigate's weapons, "Correction twelve."

"I want them all brought down before we release the pods but the turbolasers need to angle ahead. Tell their crews to open fire as soon as we have a line of fire on the shield." Trasem ordered.

"Aye captain." the combat officer responded.

There were still three of the ugly fighters following the *Durrant* when the glow of the shield protecting the droid city came into view over the horizon and the frigate's turbolasers opened fire at it. The powerful energy blasts were useless against the shield that was intended to defend against an entire fleet bombarding a planet though and each impact on the shield produced nothing more than a flash of light from the competing energies. The *Durrant's* weapons continued to fire though, the turbolasers firing forwards seemingly ineffectively while its laser cannons fired aft, shooting down the last three fighter following the frigate.

"Range three thousand metres." Harn announced.

"Detach pod." Trasem ordered, "Helm pull up."

There was a blast of rockets as the pod detached from the *Durrant* and the interior shook.

"Here we go! Brace yourselves for impact" Enopa exclaimed and a few seconds later the pod impacted on the surface, bouncing twice before its braking thrusters were able to slow it down enough that it came to a rest on a low hill.

"Navigation shows we're seven hundred metres short of the shield." Jayk announced as he checked his datapad, "If the *Durrant* was successful then the droids will have no idea we're coming. Everyone disembark and may the Force be with us."

Although there was no indication that the droids in the city were aware of their presence the strike force deployed from the pod as if they were, covering all directions against attack. The they began to move towards the shield less than a kilometre ahead of them. The energy barrier was transparent enough that they could see the structures of the city on the other side and the lack of any movement towards them suggested that they had indeed managed to avoid detection when they deployed from the *Durrant*.

"Look at the buildings." Enopa said when he raised his macrobinoculars, "They look like they're open to the vacuum."

"They probably are. K-six built this city for himself and his droids. They don't need air like organic beings do." Jayk replied before he and the rest of the assault team halted just outside the shield.

"So who goes first?" Tylo asked.

"Ladies first I think." Brae said as she suddenly stepped forwards. A deflector shield would block the passage of a fast moving projectile or speeder that had no connection to the ground but a person who kept at least one foot on the ground could still get through, the shield morphing itself around them as if the ground was changing shape and Brae was able to pass through unharmed.

The rest of the assault team then followed, their weapons raised.

"So which way now?" Tylo said and Jayk pointed ahead to a tower that appeared to be at the centre of the city.

"There. That's where K-six will be." he replied and the assault team began to advance.

Although they had been able to land and penetrate the shield without being noticed this situation did not last forever and it was inevitable that they would be detected at some point as they made their way through the city. Quite how they were discovered the team did not know but it was when they had got about a quarter of the way to the central tower that the jedi sensed a disturbance in the Force.

Danger.

"Down!" Kat snapped as all three jedi ignited their lightsabers just moments before the first blaster shots came towards them.

At first there were just a few shots fired from a building ahead of them but while the assault team was taking cover as the Jedi deflected the incoming blaster bolts a larger force of droids came into view on the ground. This force was made up of a wide variety of droids varying from human sized labour droids to heavy duty loading droids and all of them had at least one weapon either carried in their hands if they had them or mounted directly onto their bodies. It was clear that none of these machines were actual battle droids though and they displayed no more tactical ability than marching forwards en masse and firing their weapons. In response Tylo and the marines took cover and returned fire with short bursts from their rifles while the three Jedi continued to protect them from the blaster fire coming from above. However, although the assault team was able to cut down dozens of droids without any loss to their own numbers the size of the force seemed to be getting bigger as more and more droids were sent to reinforce it.

"There's too many of them!" one of the marines shouted before getting to his feet and starting to run back towards the shield.

"Holwer stay down!" Enopa ordered but he was too late and several blaster shots hit the fleeing marine. All of a sudden Brae thrust her hand forwards and released the strongest telekinetic blast she could towards the steadily advancing droid army. This blast was not focused on any particular droid, instead it spread out as it slammed into their front rank with the force of a speeding vehicle. The entire front row of droids was smashed to pieces by the impact while behind them the machines were hurled back into those that in turn were behind them.

"Kriff Brae what did you just do?" Tylo exclaimed when he saw the piles of broken machines lying helpless as the marines fired at any that tried to get back to their feet or point a weapon at them, "Whatever happened to not using the Force for attack?"

"Droids don't count." Kat told him, "They aren't alive."

"That's a very fine line you're not crossing there." Tylo muttered.

Only the handful of droids in the structure now remained and Kat shut off her lightsaber, swapping it for the sniper's blaster she had slung over her shoulder.

"Cover me." she said to Jayk and Brae and while she took aim at the droids above them the other two Jedi stood in front of her forming a shield with their lightsabers to block any incoming fire. Kat quickly identified four droids high up in the structure using harness mounted blasters to shoot down at the assault team. These droids appeared to consider themselves too high up to be vulnerable to return fire and they were not in cover, thus making it very easy for Kat to pick them off one by one.

"Clear." she announced as the last droid tumbled from the structure, bouncing off the side several times before it landed in a heap close by.

"We should hurry." Jayk said, "It won't take long for K-six to organise another force to use against us. Brae don't hesitate to do that again if you have to."

"Of course master." Brae replied, smiling at Jayk through her helmet visor.

Despite having little tactical skill K-6 knew enough not to try sending another hoard of droids at the assault team. Instead it deployed smaller groups within the buildings all around the central tower where they could appear just long enough to fire several shots before retreating out of sight. The Jedi were able to deflect most of the shots fired at the assault team in this way but they had to pause each time they came under fire, slowing their progress down significantly.

5.

While the assault team continued their advance on the planetary surface in space the *Durrant* fought with the droid fleet. On their own none of the droid vessels could hope to challenge the modern Republic warship but acting together they could bring enough firepower to bear to destroy the frigate in spite of its reinforced hull and powerful shields. Therefore, the strategy of Captain Trasem was based around keeping the enemy ships from co-ordinating their actions well enough for more than one or two of them to be able to target his ship at once while the *Durrant's* gun crews concentrated their fire on one target at a time. While these weapons had proven ineffective against the shield protecting the city below they were powerful enough to punch through the shields of any of the droid fleet, even those of the few actual warships they possessed and every hit inflicted more damage. One droid controlled vessel, a converted tanker that now mounted a pair of powerful if greatly outdated turbolasers of its own that had been taken from the reliance-class cruiser that sat silently in orbit was broken in half when the two main guns of the *Durrant* struck its hull amidships. The forward section tumbled onwards through space while the aft part was rocked by a series of secondary explosions that then tore it apart from the inside.

The greater threat to the *Durrant* came from the fighters that the droids continued to send against the vessel. Once again the danger posed by these tiny improvised craft did not come from the power of any one of them but from their numbers and no matter how many the *Durrant's* laser cannons were able to shoot down it seemed that there were always more of them that were able to slip past and attack the frigate where its shields were weakest. More than once some of these shots were able to penetrate the frigate's shields and an alarm sounded in the bridge as some system was damaged before the fighter was destroyed by its guns. "How many of those things can they have?" Trasem said angrily as his console indicated another hit.

"Comscan shows at least forty of them within a hundred kilometres with more on the way captain." Harn responded, "So far all of them appear to be powered by thruster units taken from that heavy cruiser."

"So how many of those did that ship have?" Trasem asked.

"On a ship a kilometre long? About two or three hundred of them." Harn answered.

"We're taking too many hits from them. Sooner or later they're going to hit something important like a turret. Stabilise our deflector shields for all round coverage, it's not like any of those modified transports can keep up with us." Trasem ordered before the *Durrant's* sensors showed two rapid pulses of energy as another pair of ships came out of hyperspace.

"Two new contacts captain." Harn announced, "One looks like that dimel-class ship we knew they had and the other fits the profile of a sullustan police gunship."

"That would make them the strongest part of their fleet." Trasem said, "Okay helm bring us around and lay in an intercept course for the new arrivals. Weapons, target maximum firepower."

"There it is." Brae said when she saw the base of the tower at the heart of the droid city. This structure appeared to have an enclosed core but the wider part of the building was made up of a framework that held a multitude of machines and when Jayk lifted a set of macrobinoculars to his eyes he saw numerous droids moving around within this framework tending to the machines' operation.

"There's an entrance over there." Tylo added, pointing towards an illuminated opening close to the base of the tower that was reached by a ramp.

"We'll have to move quickly." Jayk said, "There are droids above that might be able to attack as we make our break."

"Squad is ready to move whenever you say Jedi Udra." Sergeant Enopa told him and Jayk nodded.

"Then let's not hang around and wait for the next ambush." he said before he charged towards the entrance. K-6 had obviously predicted that the central tower would be the target of the assault team's attack and as well as the maintenance droids there were several armed machines hidden within the framework that opened fire as soon as the team was in the open.

"Keep going! Get to the door!" Jayk exclaimed as he held his lightsaber above his head to deflect as many of the energy blasts as he could and while the Jedi covered them Tylo and the marines charged to the ramp and up to the entrance. However, at the top they found their way blocked by a large labour droid that had had its chassis reinforced and loading arms replaced by a pair of heavy duty blasters. The machine opened fire as soon as the marines appeared and two of the marines were blown off their feet in an instant.

"Jayk we've got a problem here." Tylo said as he and the other marines returned fire only to discover that the improvised armour plating was tougher than it looked and withstood the blaster shots even at point blank range, "They must be using starship hull plating." Tylo added.

"We're coming. Hold on." Kat responded as the jedi joined the marines on the ramp and the droid turned its fire towards them.

The fire from the droid's arm mounted blasters was enough to stop the jedi in their tracks, forcing them to use their lightsabers just to defend themselves and the droid began to advance. However, as the huge machine strode forwards Tylo noticed that where one piece of the reinforced plating had been fitted to the droid's body it had created a small opening beneath its arm and an idea occurred to him. Taking one of the grenades he carried on his webbing he pulled out the pin and then charged at the droid while it was focused on the jedi. Running towards the opening he had spied Tylo rammed the grenade into it, letting the lever fly off first.

"Fire in the hole!" he yelled as he dived aside and the droid turned towards him. Before it could open fire though the grenade exploded, the blast largely contained by the added on armour plating and was instead focused inwards. The droid promptly exploded, its weapon arms flying out of their mounts as the torso shattered to leave only a pair of legs that were no longer balanced and fell forwards to crash to the floor.

"Where to now?" Enopa asked.

"Up I suppose. After all why build yourself a tower then live on the first floor?" Brae replied.

"Please tell me there are turbolifts." Tylo added.

Although the tower did have a turbolift cluster at its heart the assault team did not take this given the danger that K-6 could suddenly cut the power and leave them trapped. Fortunately though there was an alternative. In the majority of structures in the Republic such alternatives to turbolifts would be either ladders or stairs leading from one level to another but both these were of no use to many droids that relied on wheels or tracks for motive power and instead the tower was fitted with a series of ramps to connect the different floors that the assault team made their way up. As they ascended these ramps the assault team remained alert for yet more ambushes but even when the very top of the shaft was in view they had yet to be challenged.

"I don't get it. Shouldn't K-six have tried to stop us." Brae said.

"I think that the droid in the entrance was supposed to do that." Kat replied.

"You mean that murdering trash can is finally running out of droids to throw at us?" Tylo said.

"It's possible. After all we must have encountered close to a thousand on our way here and he needs to crew all those ships in space as well." Kat pointed out.

"I doubt he will have left himself totally defenceless. We may yet have to face the best of his army." Jayk added.

"Well they better get here soon because if your padawan is right then the emperor droid is going to be somewhere on the other side of that door." Enopa commented and he pointed to a large doorway at the top of the ramp they were walking up. This door opened without the assault team having to do anything and the three jedi immediately sensed the disturbance in the Force as it did so.

Danger.

Leaping forwards the jedi raised their lightsabers to parry the energy blasts that came towards them. The droids standing in the hallway beyond the ramp were not mundane labour or service droids that had been modified with weapons, these were purpose built battle droids. As with most types of battle droid these machines were an antiquated design and the weapons they carried were some of the earliest form of blaster but they were still just as lethal as a modern weapon. The three jedi frantically parried the rapidly fired blaster shots and they were unable to focus on any particular shot long enough that they could direct it back at any of the droids, let alone counter attack. Instead Tylo and the marines formed up behind them and took aim at the droids between the rapidly moving lightsaber blades and they returned fire, shooting the droids down where they stood and as their numbers thinned out the jedi were able to concentrate more on each shot they parried.

Brae was the first of them to be able to control where she sent a blaster shot that she parried and the energy blast blew the head of another droid, leaving only four left standing. This was few enough that Jayk and Kat were able act against them, both releasing telekinetic blasts that hurled the droids aside, smashing them against walls. The droids' armoured bodies were able to resist this impact but before they could stand and open fire again the marines fired their own weapons and destroyed all four, leaving the way clear for the assault team to enter the hallway.

"I suppose this must be it then." Jayk said as he walked up to a nearby door and tried to open it. However, the door remained sealed, "Locked." he said, "Fortunately I have a key." and he plunged his lightsaber into the door.

Brae and Kat stepped forwards to join him, all three cutting into the door while Tylo and the marines stood behind them, ready just in case there were more battle droids on the other side. However, when the centre of the armoured door finally gave way and collapsed the assault team found themselves looking into a room lined with hundreds of monitor screens that had just a single occupant.

K-6 itself.

The droid turned as the assault team came through the hole in the door and pointed their weapons towards it and then it looked straight at Jayk.

"Jedi Knight Jayk Udra I had hoped that you would not follow me beyond the Republic." it said, making use of the assault team's own comlink frequency to transmit to Jayk's helmet

"We wouldn't have if you hadn't chosen to commit mass murder. Now we have to do what should have been done a year ago." Jayk responded and he leapt forwards, swinging his lightsaber at neck height to decapitate the droid. Then as the headless corpse dropped to the floor he turned and looked at the marine carrying the long range comlink that could communicate directly with the *Durrant*, "Send it now." he told the marine.

"Captain we've just received the signal from the surface." Harn said, "The target has been eliminated."

"Broadcast the shutdown." Trasem ordered without taking his eyes off the dimel-class attack ship visible outside the viewport that was still firing at the frigate.

"Sending now." Harn said as he activated the *Durrant's* transmitter to broadcast the shut down command to the entire droid fleet.

In an instant the droid controlled vessels were paralysed, their engines cutting out and they began to drift, following their previous courses without making any hostile moves towards the frigate.

"It worked." Trasem said, smiling before all of a sudden there was another flash of laser fire from the dimel-class attack ship that hit the *Durrant's* forward shields, "What the hell? Those ships are still operational!"

6.

"Still operational?" Brae said when the marine with the long range comlink relayed the message from the *Durrant*, "How can that be? K-six is destroyed."

"How little you organic beings understand what it is to be a droid." the voice of K-6 said to the entire assault team over their comlinks, "The body you destroyed was just a shell that I have discarded."

"Wait a minute." Jayk said and he swung his lightsaber down at the droid's severed head, cutting it open to reveal the basic relay circuitry inside instead of the electronic brain that there should have been.

"So if K-six isn't there then where is he?" Tylo asked.

"I am everywhere organic." K-6 said and Kat winced.

"Oh no." she said, "I've got a bad feeling about this."

"K-six is this tower." Jayk said as he looked around at the monitors that suddenly all shifted to show the inside of the room they were in.

"Even with all the weapons we brought with us we can't bring down this tower." Enopa said.

"No. Sergeant get your men out of here and take Tylo with you." Jayk said.

"What about you?" Tylo asked.

"Brae, Kat and I will stay here. We need to destroy the shield emitter on the roof of this tower. Then the *Durrant* can destroy it with her turbolasers." Jayk told him, "Now go."

"No. You cannot succeed. Your only hope is to flee." K-6 said.

"If I could sense that thing in the Force I'm sure it would be terrified right now." Brae said.

"It knows we can destroy it." Kat added.

"Come on sergeant, let's get out of here." Tylo told Enopa and he and the marines hurried back through the hole in the door.

The three jedi followed the marines out into the hallway but instead of heading back down the ramp they made their way to the side of the tower's core and used their lightsabers to cut a way out into the framework that surrounded it. Once outside they began to climb toward the top of the tower where the emitter for the shield protecting the city was located. Aware of the jedi's plan K-6 was not idle while they climbed and they saw a pair of ugly type starfighters fly past the tower hunting for them.

"That doesn't look good Jayk." Kat said.

"Maybe not. But perhaps we can make use of them to speed things up." Jayk responded and Kat winced.

"Oh you can't be serious." she said.

"Has my dad ever joked about hurling himself into danger?" Brae commented.

The jedi continued to climb until they reached the top of the framework where the shield emitter was located. This had the appearance of a large dish antenna and although a lightsaber could have cut through the component housing eventually it would take even three some time to do this. However, the droid fighters now turning towards the jedi offered another possibility.

"Do you really think this will work dad?" Brae asked.

"If it doesn't then we won't get a second chance." Kat pointed out as the three jedi all raised their lightsabers as if to try and parry the fire from the incoming fighters and they let the Force flow through them, waiting for the tremor that would warn them that they were in danger.

"Now!" Brae snapped when she sensed the disturbance ahead of Jayk or Kat and all three jedi leapt from the tower at the exact moment that the fighters opened fire.

Focused entirely on the jedi, the droids piloting the fighters had ignored the shield emitter behind them and with the jedi no longer in the path of the energy blasts they struck the emitter instead, blasting it to pieces and immediately the shield above the city began to collapse. Meanwhile the jedi fell towards the ground but did not panic. Instead they waited until they were almost at the surface before they reached out through the Force to grab hold of the framework around the tower and pulled themselves towards it, slowing themselves down so that they could grab hold of it just a few levels above the ground. Then with another Force enhanced leap they jumped down to the ground just as Tylo and the marines were emerging from the tower as well.

"We need to hurry." Jayk said, "When the *Durrant* fires its turbolasers everything here will be destroyed."

"On course captain. Target identified." Harn said as the *Durrant* sped back towards the city, weaving between the ships of the droid fleet.

"Weapons, do we have a target lock?" Trasem asked.

"Confirmed captain. Target is acquired, bombardment pattern plotted. In range in ten seconds." the frigate's combat officer replied.

“Captain all droid vessels are converging on our location. I think they intend to ram.” Harn said as he saw the droid fleet abandon its attempts to co-ordinate their firing and simply accelerate directly towards the *Durrant*. “Stand by with that shut down signal lieutenant. Weapons fire as soon as we are in range.” Trasem ordered. “Aye captain. Five seconds to range. Three. Two. One. In range. Turbolasers firing.” the combat officer said and as soon as the warship was in range of the surface its turbolasers fired towards the city’s central tower. The first volley of powerful energy blasts utterly destroyed the top ten levels of the tower along with what was left of the antenna arrays on the top after the destruction of the shield emitter, then those that followed razed the rest of the tower to the ground in a short lived storm of plasma that consumed everything within five hundred metres.

“Target destroyed. Sending shut down signal.” Harn said as he broadcast the order for the droids to shut down once again.

This time the shut down of the droids was not countermanded, the essence of K-6 having been consumed in the destruction of the tower. This left all of the droid controlled vessels on a collision course with one another even after the *Durrant* was able to turn aside and the command crew of the frigate watched with satisfaction as one ship after another ploughed into one another and was destroyed.

Meanwhile on the surface the assault team stopped running when the bombardment from space ceased and looking up they saw the two droid controlled fighters that had been tricked into destroying the shield suddenly shut down and plummet towards the ground, both of them exploding on impact.

“I guess that means we won.” Tylo said.

“If only we could have managed to finish K-six off a year ago. How many people would still be alive?” Brae added.

“Try not to focus too much on that Brae.” Jayk said, “As Tylo said we won today. Now it’s time to go home.”