

## Star Wars Friend's Journey Saga

### The Dark Side Of Do'Naar

#### 1

#### Gorek II

The X-Wing's cockpit erupted in bright yellow light as the laser blast passed closely by, then just as quickly faded once again to show the cold black nothing of space. Putting the small craft into a steep dive, New Republic pilot Tarl Kreethen tried once again to shake off his pursuer. The move sent him careering towards several other fighter craft vying for superiority, and not surprisingly the one shadowing his every move had once again managed to stay right with him through his manoeuvre. It was rare indeed that Tarl came across a pilot with enough skill to match his own, but each and every one of these attackers seemed to control their craft with abilities far in advance of anything he had ever experienced. It was as if they were aware of what was about to happen and acted accordingly. He'd even seen one bank to avoid one of his attacks before he'd even pulled the trigger. With these abilities he wondered how his pursuer hadn't blasted him out of the stars already. After all, it seemed most of his allies already had been.

Still trying to shake off the aggressor behind, Tarl set his sights on one of the gloss black enemy craft in his forward view screen and made a decision. If he was going to die here, he was going to take as many of these wretched foes with him as he could. The fighter in front of him was rapidly closing in on another of his New Republic comrades, and he guessed he'd need a little bit more speed to attempt an intercept. With a flick of a switch to his left, he diverted power from his front deflector screen to the engines, and forced the throttle to one hundred percent. He was met with a satisfactory growl as the engine's power output increased, driving the craft forward at full attack speed.

The enemy fighter was firing now, peppering yellow bolts of energy against the rear deflector of its target X-Wing. The X-Wing's pilot dodged and weaved as best he could, but it looked as though his craft would not take much more punishment. Tarl gritted his teeth and pulled the trigger. His X-Wing's four laser cannons roared, spraying red lines of death towards the enemy. As before, his rival reacted instantly and pitched his ship starboard to avoid the first barrage. This time however, Tarl decided this one would not get away. Ignoring another hit on his own rear deflector that dropped it down to just thirty two percent, he set off in pursuit and pulled the trigger again.

Once more, the red lasers streamed forth to threaten the enemy ship. As the fighter snaked one way in avoidance, it was caught in the wider sheet of firepower that Tarl had rapidly laid down. Several hits slammed into its deflector shield, and Tarl wondered if one of his enemies had actually started to panic.

He pressed on, staying with the stricken enemy ship as it banked sharply to try and evade him. Again more laser fire impacted on its deflector shield, and quicker than Tarl thought possible, a shot found its way through and struck one of the engines. As the engine overloaded, it took the rest of the ship with it in a blinding explosion that Tarl had to roll to avoid. It seemed these enemies were not unbeatable after all. Obviously their confidence in their own abilities had convinced them they didn't need very resilient deflector shields.

His feeling of triumph was quickly subdued as his ship rocked from another hit to its rear deflector. Another hit would eradicate his own defence for good, and leave him wide open to be blown out of the stars. He quickly pitched the ship to port, trying desperately to escape the target lock of his pursuer, but it was no good. Another two yellow blasts of laser fire soared passed his vision, getting ever closer to the final hit. With his teeth grit and his hands sweating he turned the ship into another dive, but he knew it was only a matter of time. The enemy ship lined him up for the attack...

Suddenly a torrent of laser fire struck the chasing craft, and it veered off in avoidance. Tarl quickly flew around a full 180 degrees to see the X-Wing he'd saved earlier had come back to do the same for him.

'Nice timing Hendon,' he told his ally.

'No problem,' he heard Hendon reply over the com link. 'Now help me finish off this fiend.'

'You got it,' he concurred, and joined Hendon in firing at their enemy. Against double the firepower, the black fighter could not weave and elude for long before a shot breached its defences, causing great damage and tearing the ship apart.

Tarl's victorious thoughts were immediately cast aside as Hendon's X-Wing exploded under fire from another of the enemy craft. He rolled away from the explosion, and observed on his instruments that he was in desperate trouble. Including himself, only five Republic pilots remained, and they were outnumbered nearly three to one. There was no way now that they could repel these attackers, he realised, and the Republic outpost and population of the nearby planet Gorek II would be left defenceless. If they had received earlier warning of the attack they could have sent for reinforcements, and maybe they would have stood a chance. But at that moment the situation was hopeless.

Tarl searched his mind, and was left confused. The sudden and swift onslaught these unidentified enemies had

executed would be easier to understand if there was a logical reason to control this sector, but he could not think of anything. There was nothing special about Gorek II, or any of the other planets in the star system, that could not be found in hundreds of other places around the galaxy. The pointlessness of all this death made Tarl hate these aggressors even more.

After one last glance at the planet, and a fleeting thought to his friends down there, he banked his craft around again and prepared to go down with all guns blazing. As a number of the enemy craft came at him, an enormous starship suddenly appeared from hyperspace. Its great form dominated his view, and he saw its appearance had also surprised his enemies. After the initial shock Tarl smirked as he recognised it was no less than a Mon Calamari cruiser, a type of Republic vessel so large and powerful they were normally used as flagships of entire fleets. Someone out there had smiled on him and the other survivors.

It seemed like just seconds until his radar scope picked up another squadron of X-Wings, heading towards the battle zone at great speed from the direction of the cruiser. As they neared, his com link came alive with the sound of a strange voice.

'This is Jedi Master Reeldo of the flight wing *Force's Vigour*,' the voice said.

Tarl was even more elated to discover their assistance was in the form of the Jedi, but he couldn't think of a reason why they would be all the way out here in such large numbers. However it was not the time to ask stupid questions. He was just glad of the help.

'We urge all Republic pilots to fall back and save yourselves,' Reeldo continued. 'Allow the Jedi to handle these intruders.'

'You are welcome to them, Master Jedi,' Tarl answered, guessing that from the name and the sound of his voice that the Jedi was Rodian. 'We will pull back closer to the planet and recharge our shields in case you should need us.'

'Very well,' Reeldo agreed, before issuing his orders. 'All Jedi lock s-foils in attack position. Let's drive these enemies back.'

Tarl followed the other Republic pilots limping away from the battle, as the black hostile craft now sped towards their new targets.

'May the Force be with us,' Tarl heard Reeldo say, just before the lasers started flying again.

Jedi Knight Meja Codan jumped down from his open cockpit and landed perfectly on the floor of the hangar, as around him, other surviving pilots carefully directed their fighters in to land inside the cruiser *Dawn Of Peace*. It had been a long, tough battle, its outcome only in their favour because their X-Wing fighters were more impressive than those piloted by their enemies. If the enemy craft been protected by heavier shielding, or armed with more lasers, things would have been drastically different.

Codan began to walk towards the rear exit of the hangar. As he passed one of the other X-Wings, its cockpit popped open and a familiar face appeared.

'Dark Jedi,' Codan growled as Li New climbed down from his ship.

'Yes,' Li New nodded. 'The battle was tainted by the presence of the dark side.'

'And there was something else also,' Codan explained as Li New joined him heading towards the hangar exit.

'I felt it too,' Li New confirmed. 'Something all *too* familiar.'

'Yes,' Codan agreed, as a young fair-haired Jedi in his early teens fell in behind them. 'I fear a face from our past has returned to haunt us.'

'Be mindful now my apprentice,' Li New said to the young Padawan behind them. 'This mission is becoming ever more dangerous, and our success becoming ever more imperative.'

The young man nodded.

They emerged from the hangar and made their way down an enormous corridor, which took them to a grand assembly room. Soon the other Jedi and the few surviving fighter pilots stood gathered in its confines. Li New and Codan spoke to those present, and all expressed their regret and grief at the deaths of their friends and allies. Of the Jedi, three had been lost. They were a short female Zabrak of great ability called Talaksa Lanicope, a Dug named Droksin, and a tall elegant man of great stature called Hyo Moffis. Neither Li New nor Codan had spent much time in the past conversing with the fallen Jedi, and both regretted that they would no longer have the chance to get to know them.

A short while later the doors to the room slid open, and a respectful silence fell over the crowd as two figures entered. Li New recognised one as Haran Baska, the captain of this cruiser. He was a Mon Calamari male of middle age, and with his red skin and bulbous eyes looked to Li New just like any other Mon Calamari he had seen. Still, his posture was one of authority and he gave off a feeling of self confidence most beings did not.

By his side walked a woman with vivid red hair of shoulder length. On her tall physique she wore a dignified uniform that made her look both important and striking at the same time. Towering over Captain Baska by a good five inches, she would easily look intimidating were it not for the unmistakable look of shock and sadness on her face.

They reached the centre of the room, and Captain Baska introduced the woman to the Jedi who had not met her before. She was the commander of the outpost on Gorek II, and her name was Azra Neema.

'Greetings, exalted Jedi,' Commander Neema began. 'May I firstly offer our most sincere gratitude for your timely arrival and assistance.'

'Your gratitude is not necessary, commander,' Jedi Master Reeldo answered. 'But it is humbly accepted.'

'Is it necessary indeed, master,' Neema insisted. 'Our defences would have been overrun without your aid.'

'Perhaps you can tell us more about what happened?' inquired Captain Baska.

'Of course captain.'

Neema proceeded to explain the exact order of events, from the moment the enemy craft appeared in-system through to the conclusion of the battle. The Jedi listened with close intent until the end.

'This was a very unprovoked attack,' Neema concluded. 'And a most surprising one.'

'There were only fifteen of them, against over two dozen of us,' the pilot called Tarl explained. 'Even with all our combat training and strength of numbers they still managed to blow us out of the stars.'

'Your attackers were Dark Jedi,' explained Wilcra Li New. 'Fuelled by the malice and hatred of the dark side of the Force, they are a different kind of enemy all together.'

'You were indeed lucky to survive yourself,' Jedi Master Reeldo told Tarl. 'For not even the Jedi with our abilities and the Force by our side are impervious to their harm.'

'Indeed,' Tarl bowed his head in respect. 'I am truly sorry for your fallen comrades, Master Jedi.'

'As we are yours,' Reeldo responded mournfully. 'But we can do little for the deceased. Only try our utmost to save this happening again.'

'I could not agree more,' said Captain Baska. 'What shall your move be, Master Reeldo?'

'I do not feel the Dark Jedi's business here has ended,' the Rodian regretted. 'We must concentrate all our energies on finding them and stopping them before they manage to strike again.'

'I do not understand why these Dark Jedi would wish to drive us away from this sector,' Neema puzzled. 'There is little of value here.'

'Who knows what goals their anger and greed drives them toward?' Reeldo said.

'Master Reeldo,' Codan said from across the room. 'I believe I may have found an answer.'

Reeldo, Li New, Captain Baska and Commander Neema approached the other Jedi, who had been busy working on a nearby computer terminal. As they neared he prepared something on a monitor and pointed to it.

'I've just completed a scan of the system,' Codan explained. 'And look here. One of the moons of Gorek II harbours large quantities of Ultride crystals beneath its surface.'

'Ultride crystals?' asked Neema. 'I thought apart from looking pretty those things were absolutely worthless? We've never seen it worthwhile to mine for them.'

'We believed that also, until recently,' Reeldo explained. 'We have discovered that by using the correct refinement techniques these crystals can be used in the construction of lightsabers, and it seems members of this new Dark Jedi upsurge have been doing just that.'

'We try our best as Jedi to protect places where lightsaber-compatible crystals form naturally,' Li New added. 'But the Ultride crystal discovery has caught us on the back foot a little.'

'You could make lightsabers by the hangar full with the crystals inside that rock,' Codan said with a raise of his eyebrows.

'That can not be allowed to happen,' Reeldo decided. 'This menace must be halted immediately. Codan, retrieve information about all the nearby star systems.'

Codan nodded, and once again went to work. Within moments, he had found what he was looking for. 'Here Master Reeldo. There are only five star systems that are in range for staging a short ranged fighter attack. The Dark Jedi must have some kind of headquarters in one of these systems. Either that or they have capital ships out there somewhere.'

'Do they even have capital ships?' asked Neema. 'That would be a sobering prospect.'

'None we have seen so far,' Li New answered.

'Then we will search these systems,' Reeldo instructed. 'Master Vizna will investigate the Kaloris system. Li New, you and San Rylo head for the Do'Naar system. Jedi Mila, if you can head to the Gowden system, that will leave the Raddus system for Codan and the Ma'Qun system for myself. Remember this is reconnaissance only. Find and report. We should not tackle these dangerous foes without strength in numbers. Jedi Knight Distor and her apprentice will stay here to protect the cruiser and the outpost should the Dark Jedi return.'

With the general consensus reached, they each made for their spacecraft and set about their tasks. Within minutes, the six X-Wings were entering hyperspace and heading for their destinations.

It was nearing the end of the day in the city of Tyrena on the planet Corellia. The evening rush of patrons had died down, and the diner had once again returned to normal. Situated on the top floor of a five storey building on the outskirts of the city, Rinn's Place was quite popular for its fine view across the ocean to the south. During the present time of day the view was even more breathtaking as the low sun cast a warm red glow across the waves.

Rinn Copla, the owner and runner of the diner, gave his almost bald head a quick scratch before gathering a collection of dirty dishes and cutlery and carrying them into the back kitchen. There he carefully deposited them into a large basin filled with cleaning fluid, and stepped away as his series B-12R worker droid took his place and began washing them. Although the thing had been expensive and had ceased to function properly on numerous occasions he was still glad he had purchased it. The thought of doing all that scrubbing himself was not one he enjoyed.

Leaving the droid to its business, he left the kitchen and took his place behind the counter. Two new people had entered the diner, both Human males in the uniforms of CorSec - the Corellian Security Force. He recognised the one man as Chandroth Jaco, who was somewhat of a regular. Jaco had been a member of CorSec now for many years, and was well known by a lot of people in this part of the city. The other one was younger and taller, but was a skinny kind of a man and seemed a little on edge. As far as he could remember Rinn had never met him before.

'Good evening Rinn,' Jaco greeted him as they neared.

'Officer Jaco,' Rinn replied. 'Nobody round here's in trouble I hope.'

'Not at all,' Jaco smiled, and nodded to the other man with him. 'It was the first day as a full fledged law enforcer for young Pastor here. I thought I'd bring him in for some of your famous cuisine, to cap off a hard days work.'

'Ah,' Rinn looked at Pastor. 'I trust there was nothing too dangerous for your first day?'

'It has been... interesting,' Pastor gave a nervous smile.

'You'll soon settle into it,' Rinn assured him.

'He's a natural,' Jaco added, and somehow Pastor managed to look even more uncomfortable.

'So what can I get you both?' Rinn asked, and proceeded to take their order. 'Grab some seats. I'll bring it to you.' The two officers thanked him, and moved to a nearby empty table. He moved into the kitchen, and began to prepare their meals, frequently checking into the diner to see if anyone else was waiting.

Before long, a young dark haired woman entered through the door, striding towards the kitchen in the jovial way only she could. He shook his head, a little annoyed at himself. In all the rush he had forgotten she was even dropping by.

'Hello Uncle Rinn,' she poked her head through the kitchen entrance and smiled.

'Lerri,' he welcomed her as she stepped closer. 'I almost forgot about you.'

'What's new?' she joked. 'You're always forgetting something.'

'Except the Quermian sweetener,' he winked, and sprinkled some of it onto the officer's meals. 'Everyone likes the Quermian sweetener. It's my secret weapon.'

She nodded agreement and glanced around the room. 'So you got it working again?' she asked, spying the droid. 'Hey B-12.'

The droid turned its head through 180 degrees to see who was talking. 'Oh,' it said in a low metallic voice. 'Good evening, Miss Lerri.'

Rinn smiled to himself as the droid went back to its business. It was amusing to him how his niece couldn't help but talk to people, even when it was his droid, which was not a very advanced one at that.

'What's so funny?' she asked, noticing his expression.

'Oh nothing,' he replied. 'Nothing at all.'

Leaving her with a curious look on her face, he moved out of the kitchen to deliver the freshly cooked food to the two officers. After wishing them a good meal, he turned to make his way back, and noticed Lerri had positioned herself behind the counter. She looked around, closely observing the remaining people still in the diner. Rinn knew exactly what she was checking for. His sister's daughter was a largely gregarious person, even by Corellian standards. He'd never known anyone so confident, friendly and outgoing. Though these could be good traits, when mixed with her constant need for male company they would often bring her to the attention of the more unsavoury characters of the city. Not that she would ever discourage them, either.

As he stood next to her behind the counter, he caught a glance of the man she was looking at. A strange one, Rinn believed, though he didn't look particularly odd. For some months now the mysterious figure had visited this place once or twice a week to just quietly sit on his own, seemingly happy to be ignored by anyone and everyone as he stared blankly out towards the horizon. Rinn had never even caught his name. Thinking about it, the only time he'd ever heard the man speak was when he ordered something to eat.

'Who's that guy?' Lerri asked inevitably.

'I don't know,' he answered with a sigh. 'Comes in here from time to time and just sits there, looking out across the ocean.'

'He looks sad,' Lerri observed.

'He looks like he wants to be left alone,' he warned her. 'So don't you go getting any ideas.'

'What do you mean?' she asked, trying to seem shocked or offended, but knowing all the time her uncle could see right through it.

'You know exactly what I mean,' he said, forcing her out from behind her fake innocent façade. 'If there's one thing that worries me more than all the criminals and pirates out there it's your constant pursuit of the opposite sex. Need I remind you about what happened a few weeks ago?'

'No uncle,' she sighed, quickly putting the bizarre memories out of her head.

'And this guy, you know nothing about him. He could be trouble.'

'Oh come on,' she pleaded. 'He doesn't look like trouble.'

'A lot of people don't look like trouble.'

'But how will I know if I don't ask?' she wondered out loud. 'What does he drink?'

He sighed and gave her an infuriated look, trying in vain to persuade her out of taking her usual course of action.

'Come on,' she nudged his arm. 'He might just need someone to cheer him up.'

'Don't do it, Lerri,' he calmly suggested.

'I'll be careful, OK?' she promised. 'So what does he drink?'

He watched her for a moment longer, but she countered his warning glare with her own, full of resolute expectancy. He wondered if, at some point in the future, she might actually listen to him, but saw that there was no chance of that happening here. 'He never does,' Rinn conceded, a little annoyed. 'He'll occasionally eat. But he doesn't touch the liquor.'

'Well that's promising from the start, right?' she guessed with a shrug, trying to assure her rightfully worried uncle. 'He can't be a gambler, or a smuggler, because how often is it that you come across one of those guys and find out they never drink?'

'You just you watch yourself,' he advised. 'You have no idea what he's really like.'

'I'll be fine,' she promised, starting to make her way from behind the counter. 'I'm just going to introduce myself. Nothing bad is going to happen.'

He watched her thoughtfully as she walked away, hoping she would be right.

Macan suddenly twitched alert. Once again he'd lost track of the time here in this small diner, watching the tide go in and out as his mind replayed mostly unwanted memories over and over. He shook it off, trying to clear his head. Someone had approached him, he realised, and turned to look at her.

Everything about her, from her stance to the smile on her lips and the sparkle in her eyes, gave off way too much friendly energy. At one time he would have been intrigued, excited and probably even flattered at the mere presence of an attractive young woman, but it was something he no longer had much time for.

'Let me guess,' the woman said. 'You're not Corellian, are you?'

Though he was a little annoyed at this intrusion, Macan forced a small smile. 'You can't get more obvious than that.'

'So where are you from?' she asked, not waiting for an invitation to sit opposite him at the small table. 'Come on, I don't bite. Not unless I'm asked, anyway.'

'Ord Mantell,' he conceded with a sigh.

'There,' she smiled. 'Not so bad was it? Oh, by the way, I'm Lerri.'

He smiled a rather fake smile and looked back out of the window. He hoped his posture and expression would convey to her that he didn't want to talk, or even want her to be there. If it didn't he tried to discourage her further by not revealing his own name.

'So what are you up to on Corellia?' she asked, obviously not seeing his desire for privacy, or choosing to ignore it.

As he considered how to answer her question his mind retreated into the past, and he once again struggled with his unwanted memories instead of taking in the peaceful ocean view.

'Are you alright?' she asked. 'You seem really lost, or something.'

'Sorry,' he dipped his head a little, trying to shake it off. 'I'm not that good with company these days.'

'So why come in here?' she pushed. 'Quite a public place for someone who wants to be alone.'

'Everyone's gotta eat, right?' he shrugged, hoping the answer would be enough to gratify her curiosity. The look on her face soon convinced him it wasn't, and he sighed again. 'Alright. Watching the ocean helps me sometimes. I like the way that the tides are never ending. Unlike some things.'

She looked at him thoughtfully, trying to figure out exactly what it was he was hiding. 'Tell you what. Why don't I get you a drink and we can talk a little? It might do you good, you know?'

'Thanks,' Macan shook his head. 'But I doubt it.'

'Why not?' she asked innocently. 'You're not going to get any better with company if you never accept it. You

don't have to sit alone all the time.'

'I appreciate the effort,' he told her, forcing himself to lie a little. 'But you can't help me. I mean no offence. It's just, I *am* alone.' She noticed the unmistakable sounds of regret and sorrow in his voice. Maybe a little guilt too. 'I always will be.'

From his words, something told her she wasn't going to get her way, at least not yet. Clearly something had happened in this man's life that had destroyed his self confidence, and to continue pestering him would only drive him away further.

She remembered her uncle saying he visited the diner quite often, so she decided she would try and catch up with him again in the future. It was a strong willed man, or a very strange man, that could resist her indefinitely, she had come to believe.

'It's okay,' she told him. 'Not a problem. But if you'd like we could maybe meet up here another time, when you're feeling more up to it?'

'Maybe,' Macan told her, making a mental note to steer clear of the place from then on. 'I should be on my way. It was nice to meet you *Le*ri.'

Turning away, he started to rise, but as he did so a powerful hand grabbed his shoulder and forced him back down onto his seat. Startled, he looked up to see two darkly dressed people standing beside him. The nearest one was a Zabrak male, whose face was covered in black and white war paint or tattoos, giving him a frightful look. The other, a female Togruta, stepped closer with an equally malicious look in her eyes. They definitely did not look friendly.

'Finally,' the Zabrak snarled. 'We've searched a long time for you, *Macan*.'

'That's not my name,' *Macan* told them. 'So whoever you are, leave me alone.'

'Really?' the Zabrak chuckled. 'Do you take us for fools?'

'Hey,' *Le*ri interrupted, springing to her feet. 'Is there going to be a problem here? Because if there is you can take it outside.'

'Shut up,' the female Togruta warned, and pushed *Le*ri back hard onto the seat. 'This does not concern you.' She noticed *Macan* looking ready to try and intercede, and pointed her finger at him menacingly. 'Worry not about her, *Macan*, for now you should be worrying about yourself, should you not?'

*Macan* suddenly found himself unable to contain the obvious question. 'What do you want?'

'You are to come with us,' the Zabrak told him. 'Now.'

'And what if I don't?'

'Then you will find out what it means to defy us,' the Togruta grinned, seeming to almost beg him to try something.

'All right people,' a voice across the diner spoke. Looking across in its direction, *Macan* saw two security officers, blasters raised. The man who spoke must have been the elder of the two, for the younger man did not look all that confident. The Zabrak and Togruta turned to see, the sneers on their faces showing neither was impressed. 'I don't know what your quarrel is, but you will cease it immediately or we will place you under arrest.'

'Lower your weapons,' the Zabrak ordered. 'You do not want to make us angry.'

'But they can if they wish,' the Togruta smirked at her partner. 'For we would enjoy it, would we not?'

'We're not playing around!' the officer warned. 'Stop this and leave now!'

The Zabrak snarled, then with a speed that probably only *Macan* amongst the patrons had ever seen before, he kicked out and sent one of the nearby tables flying through the air in the direction of the officers. Before the table had even hit them, the Togruta leapt forward, ready to finish them off.

The two officers flinched back, using their free arms to instinctively try and defend themselves. As they repelled the table to the floor, the Togruta finished her leap, kicking the younger looking officer back onto another table behind him. The two Corellians trying to eat at it had the same shocked look on their faces that *Macan* imagined must be on his own.

The older officer tried to take action, but he didn't even have time to train his blaster on her before she swung a vicious backhand to the side of his skull, which sent him to the floor.

She watched them for a moment to see if either would get back up, then sighed disappointingly. 'Surely, is it not too much to ask for more of a challenge?' she moaned.

Suddenly *Macan* saw the chef come running out of the kitchen brandishing some kind of large metallic cooking utensil. The Togruta was immediately alert again, and turned to face him. As he stepped forward to threaten her, she raised her leg and kicked the makeshift weapon from his hands.

'Uncle *Rinn*!' *Le*ri panicked, immediately getting up to help but once again was thrown back down onto her seat, this time by the Zabrak.

*Macan* still watched the proceedings, unsure of what to do. The Togruta pushed *Rinn* to the counter, her left hand thrust around his throat. As she raised her right arm to strike him, *Macan* made a decision. 'Wait!' he shouted. The Togruta held her stance, but turned to look at him.

'It's me you want,' *Macan* stood, trying his best not to look intimidated. 'Leave everyone alone, and I'll go with you.'

'How noble of you,' the Zabrak spat. 'But you were coming with us anyway, whether you accepted it or not.'

'Look, whatever,' Macan shook his head. 'Just don't hurt anybody else.'

'Disappointing,' the Togruta explained, glancing at the Zabrak. 'We were told there would be more of a fight in him, were we not?' He nodded as she let Rinn go with a shove to the floor.

'Move,' the Zabrak ordered him. 'Now.'

Macan hesitated a moment, and glanced around the room. Lerri had a very frightened look on her face, as most of the other diners did. He figured he really would have to go with these people so the patrons could get back to their normal evening. With little other choice, he left the diner, closely followed by his captors.

'That's right,' Rinn shouted, as he struggled to his feet. 'Don't you dare come back if you're gonna bring scum like that here!'

'Oh be quiet uncle,' Lerri scolded him. 'It wasn't his fault. He didn't even know them.'

'I know,' Rinn sighed. 'I'm sorry. But it's hardly like he was our most valued customer.'

'There are other things in this life than the pursuit of wealth,' Lerri explained, looking thoughtfully at the now closed door.

'Yeah, there's clearing up other people's mess,' Rinn moaned, moving the damaged table so he could help the fallen officers. 'Now give me a hand here.'

The light of the early morning sun glistened through the trees as the trio of fighter craft approached. Kreygor stood in his command room, and scoffed at the results of his radar scan. Only three there were that had returned, of the fifteen he had sent on the mission. Obviously they were not as ready for action as they had claimed or he had hoped. Through a one way observation screen that looked out into the hangar, he watched for a moment as the three ships came in to land, before turning disgustedly and leaving the room.

Including himself, there had been eighteen Dark Jedi living in this secret underground lair, and for the last eight months he had been instructing them in the ways of the dark side of the Force. His master had trusted him with this task, believing him to be the most powerful and advanced of all the current students. Until today things had gone well, but he would have a hard time indeed explaining the loss of twelve Dark Jedi in one battle. His master was a cold, cruel, and very powerful being, and would probably destroy him where he stood when told the news. That is, if he didn't know already.

Kreygor grit his teeth, before thinking of the other two Dark Jedi he had sent on another mission. If they were not successful he would definitely be branded a failure. He saw his only chance now was to recruit new, more powerful Force-sensitives, and train them to an even better standard. Yes, he would make his enemies pay for these losses, and that would show his master what he was capable of. Maybe then, he could take his place among his master's personal retinue, and be there should a chance arise to take ultimate rule of the Dark Jedi.

The door to his quarters slid open and he stepped inside, the idea of the possible future still dashing seductively through his mind as he walked to the far side of the large room. Those days would be glorious indeed, and the galaxy would whimper before him as he brought it to its knees.

His personal quarters were easily four times the size of those possessed by the other, less powerful, Dark Jedi, indicating Kreygor's higher status amongst them. It was just as he believed it should be, in that those with the most power claimed the greater wealth and possessions, and be shown the most respect. He activated a holographic imaging device set into the wall, and watched as re-enactments of several great battles from years gone by played out upon its surface, invigorating him by its scenes of violence.

Before long, the buzz of someone at his door got his attention. He deactivated the imaging device, and turned.

'Enter,' he commanded, and the door opened. The three Dark Jedi stepped forward, all of whom were trying to look brave and strong, but he could sense their fear of what his reaction was going to be. He flicked his gaze across them, and didn't have to try very hard to look menacing as he did.

On the right as he looked, he was surprised to see that the Gran had returned. He was one of the less developed students, and his powers were weak. Kreygor wondered how he had survived when some of the more promising students had perished.

The shallow and selfish side of him was glad to see the sight of the purple skinned female Twi'lek. Inside he smiled to himself, for she had proven she did not need to be good in battle to be of use to him. He had taken great pleasure using her in many ways most beings could not even imagine. What pleased him even more about their encounters was the fact she seemed to enjoyed them too. There could be few in the galaxy more depraved and immoral as she.

The last of the three warriors was not a surprise to Kreygor in the slightest. The red and black armoured Human cyborg was easily one of the more dependable of his students, and one he had known for a long time now. Formerly a Jedi apprentice, he had grown tired with the rules and restrictions of the Jedi Order and had turned against them. The injuries he had sustained in battle against them, which had left him requiring a mechanical right arm and leg, had only cemented his hatred of the Jedi. He had developed into a cold and calculated fighter, and his piloting skills were arguably the best among them, Kreygor included. Not that he would ever admit it out loud.

'You are all that have returned?' Kreygor asked, using it as a statement of his disappointment rather than a question.

'We were ambushed, Kreygor,' the Gran answered. 'The Jedi arrived, in a Calamari cruiser. We could not fight them without more numbers.'

'Could not fight?' Kreygor scoffed. 'What have I been teaching you here? Do you learn nothing?'

The Gran was tempted to step back, away from his instructor's malice, but dared not show him another sign of weakness.

'Ro-Donic speaks the truth,' the cyborg explained. Through his helmet, his deep voice was distorted as though it was mechanical, making him sound even more intimidating. 'Not even you would have been able to survive that battle for long.'

'You dare insult me?' Kreygor asked plainly. 'If just one of you had but half the power that I had, then maybe you would not struggle to complete some of these simple tasks that I set.'

'We could not have foreseen such an intervention,' the female Twi'lek purred.

'Our master will not be pleased at this setback, my dear Karynna,' Kreygor explained. 'Do you wish to be the

one to tell him about it?' When she did not answer, Kreygor continued. 'The recruiting continues at pace. Gorek II must be taken to keep up with demands. What is the state of the outpost's defences?'

'We had almost decimated them when the Jedi arrived,' Karynna explained.

'That is something of merit at least,' Kreygor snarled.

'Their annihilation would have been total,' Ro-Donic assured him. 'Were it not for the Jedi, Gorek II would already be in our hands. I do not understand how they knew where we would attack.'

'I have warned you all in the past,' the cyborg said. 'Master Skywalker sees much. His power is great.'

'Power? Ha! He knows nothing of power,' Kreygor alleged.

'You would be wise not to underestimate him, or his Jedi.'

'I have nothing to fear from such pitiful warriors,' Kreygor bellowed. 'Only one possesses more power than me. And one day I will surpass even him.'

'That I do not doubt,' Karynna said with a wicked smile. 'But what if the Jedi come here? Our numbers are now depleted.'

'You need not worry about that,' Kreygor assured her. 'This facility is well hidden, and many more will soon join us.'

'This is a risky scheme,' the cyborg figured. 'If the Jedi discover why we attacked Gorek II, they will not waste any time in hunting us down.'

'Sometimes I wonder if you made the right decision,' Kreygor said, staring hard into the vision slit of the cyborg's visor.

'Meaning?' the cyborg responded.

'When you turned your back on the Jedi, was it a tough choice?' Kreygor asked sarcastically. 'Did it tear you up inside, Ghyron? Did it?'

'No!'

'Oh?' Kreygor asked. 'Then why do you always seem so eager to praise them?'

'I would *never* praise the Jedi,' Ghyron insisted. 'But you should not presume they are as weak as you do.'

'So you think because you spent time in their precious Academy, or because you have met the almighty Skywalker, that you have authority to instruct me?'

'No,' Ghyron accepted. 'I do not.'

'Good,' Kreygor told him. 'Never forget that the powers of the Jedi are nothing when compared with the power of the dark side.'

The three Dark Jedi nodded their agreement, so Kreygor turned and dismissed them with a wave of his hand. As they neared the door, he made a decision. 'Karynna,' he said.

'Yes?' the Twi'lek answered, turning back to him.

'You will stay,' Kreygor told her. 'Your presence is required.'

Karynna smiled a twisted, flirtatious smile. 'Of course, Kreygor.'

Ghyron and Ro-Donic left, making sure to close the door as they did so.

Through a viewing screen immediately to his right, Macan caught his first glimpse of the planet he was being taken towards. As far as he could tell, the entire planet seemed covered in trees and vegetation. A great place for someone to hide, he realised.

His journey here in his captors' transport had not been pleasant, and neither one of them had given him any clue as to why he had been abducted like this. Actually neither of them had really said anything all the way here. But down there on that deserted forest planet, he believed he would soon find out the reason.

The transport shook for a few moments as they passed through into the atmosphere, and then Macan could finally appreciate in full the natural beauty of the landscape. The rich dense forests stretched out like an ocean in all directions. There was nothing but green extending to the horizon all around, except for straight ahead where the trees rose even higher atop a succession of large hills.

Macan watched as the Zabrak, who was flying the ship, reached down and touched a switch in front of him.

'Transport F01 approaching,' he said. 'Deactivate the cloak.'

The female Togruta turned and caught him watching her colleague. She cast him an ominous glare and he shifted his gaze back through the view screen. At the base of one of the hills they were approaching he saw some activity, and squinted to make it out. Seconds later, an area that had been covered in trees had vanished to reveal an entrance to a large hidden hangar buried right into the side of the hill. It was an impressive disguise indeed, but he could not imagine for the life of him why a structure hidden underground on a distant planet would even need one. Macan suddenly realised he was in the company of very desperate people if they needed to hide away to such an extent. It didn't seem good at all.

The transport came to rest on the dirty metal floor of the hangar. The side hatch opened, and they ordered him out. He soon saw that the area was fairly empty, but for a few small and swift looking black craft dotted around the place.

Two large sliding entrances were set into the back wall of the hangar. They had landed nearer the one on the right, and it was this one that his kidnappers pushed him towards. As they stepped through it, they were met by a disgruntled looking Gran who appeared out of another door some way up the corridor.

'You return at last,' the Gran said. 'We were beginning to wonder about you.'

'You should wonder not about us, Ro-Donic,' the Togruta told him. 'For you should be at Gorek II, should you not? I take your presence here as an indication of failure. Would I be right?'

Macan cringed at the frustrating way his captor structured her sentences, which was capped off by the slightly irritating accent in her pronunciation.

'We returned several hours ago,' the Gran lowered his head in shame. 'Our mission was foiled by a Jedi strike force that arrived without warning.'

'Jedi?' she asked. 'Now, you were careful in not allowing them to track you here, were you not?'

'Of course we were careful, Xeroque,' Ro-Donic stated. 'I am not as useless as you sometimes think.'

'We shall see, shall we not?' Xeroque taunted him.

'Where's the boss?' the Zabrak asked.

'He awaits your delivery,' Ro-Donic answered casting a glance at Macan.

'Then we shall waste no more time,' Xeroque recommended. 'Raelag. Take our guest to the meeting chamber.'

'As you wish,' the Zabrak complied, and pushed Macan further down the corridor. A little way down, another corridor split off to the left, which contained two nearby doors both opposite each other.

'In here,' Raelag pushed him through the entrance on the left. 'You are wanted inside.'

Macan stood just inside the new room for a moment and waited as Raelag moved away down the corridor. A dark and cold feeling crept up his spine as the door slid shut.

'Welcome, Macan,' a voice surprised him, as two figures entered from another door on the far side of the room. The sight of one of them instantly grabbed his attention, as he was clad almost all over in red and black armour and helmet. The motors in his cybernetic right arm and leg whirred as they powered the frightful looking limbs, and the metal foot rang out on the floor as he paced. The other man appeared more regular, but for the bright red streaks in his otherwise dark hair, and a malevolent look in his eyes that chilled Macan where he stood. Straight away he gave off the impression that he was the one who ran things around here. 'I'm glad I finally have this chance to speak to you,' the man said.

'What do you want with me?' Macan asked.

'I wish only to talk,' the man claimed. 'I foresee you and I becoming great friends one day.'

'I seriously doubt that,' Macan believed, finding he disliked the man already.

'Of course you do,' the man agreed. 'Because you do not know what it is I offer you yet.'

'I don't want anything,' Macan told him, 'except to return to my home.'

The man looked at him coldly. 'Return home to do what? Continue your pointless existence? Continue being the waste of space that you have become?'

'If I'm such a waste of space then why bother with me?' Macan asked. 'There is little point to my presence here.'

'Because I can make you strong. I am *going* to make you strong,' the man promised. 'Stronger than you have ever been. Stronger than you have ever thought possible.'

'No, thank you,' Macan told them. 'Why would I possibly want that?' His only response to the question was a malicious sneer, and the feeling that his captors looked down upon him as though he was far, far beneath them. He felt his patience start to wear for the first time, and a strange sensation suddenly came about him. Something cold washed over and through his form, despite the fact there was no discernible breeze at all. He realised the sensation had come to him through the Force, and it made him believe that something was definitely not right. There was evil most dark in this room, an evil that was somehow as familiar as it was terrifying.

'Who are you people?' he found himself asking, now wanting to know what was really going on. When they refused to answer once more, he found his mind tugging him back to his years as a Jedi apprentice, studying the ways of the Force under Master Skywalker and Master Katarn. He saw flashbacks of the times he had spent training and maturing along with the other students, his dear friends. For the last four years he had shunned his basic Jedi training, trying his hardest to turn his back on the Force and its powers. He did not want the grief, anger and fear he felt to tempt him to use those powers in the darkest of ways. But here in the presence of these people the Force now begged him for its attention once again. What could it want him to know? He worried whether he could even use and control it again, as it had been so long, but something incessantly nagged at him, and he found himself with almost no choice. He calmed his mind, and reached out with his feelings.

Slowly at first, he began to sense things about his surroundings. Weak as his connection seemed to be, outside of this room he could just sense the presence of those he was sure had accosted him, and he could vaguely make out two others. He tried to stretch out to the boundaries of the construction, and beyond that into the trees and plants where the many forms of life roamed the land. It seemed more difficult than he remembered, almost as if wading through a thick cloud of fog. Still, the feeling of being connected to the Force again did not fail to fill him with wonder. Had he really lived for so long disconnected from these sensations? He felt like he had truly been blind.

With the initial connection made, he breathed deep and focused his attention on the immediate vicinity. He reached out towards the man who had spoke to him, and instantly felt cold and afraid at what he sensed. Surely this was the evil the Force had wanted him to know about. Terrible power of the kind he had never felt before emanated out from his form, fuelled by much anger, hate and cruelty. At last he understood what it meant to come face to face with someone who had given them self completely to the dark side. Worry instantly began to gnaw at him.

'I sense you awaken again at last,' the man said. 'That is good.'

Macan found that hard to believe, and moved his focus onto the cyborg in the armoured suit. Those familiar sensations and distant memories were triggered again as he did so, and in his mind's eye he could clearly see the moment in the past when he had last been in the presence of this man. He was startled at his discovery.

'Ghyron?'

'It's been a long time, Macan,' Ghyron confirmed, his voice almost unrecognisable through his helmet.

'You see?' the other man asked. 'It can't be so bad to take what I offer. Your old friend here is more than happy with his new power.'

'*Friend* isn't exactly the word I'd use,' Macan said.

'You would be wise to listen,' Ghyron explained. 'Kreygor's teachings can indeed make you powerful.'

'What if I don't want that?'

'But you do, don't you?' Ghyron inquired. 'Everyone, deep down, craves ultimate power, even if they do not know it. Besides, taking us up on this offer will be the only way to save your sorry existence.'

A feint beeping in the room beyond caught Kreygor's attention. With a nod of the head, he instructed Ghyron away to see what was happening. The cyborg vanished through the door which slid closed behind him.

'If you wish to kill me then just do it,' Macan said after a short while.

'That is not what I want,' Kreygor explained.

'Then what is it that you want?'

'You are weak, Macan,' Kreygor told him. 'You cannot achieve, and will never achieve, your true potential because of the hurt and self doubt that you feel.'

'I do not believe my feelings are any business of yours.'

'But they *are*,' Kreygor smiled. 'They are the reason why we have sought you out. Your feelings are impossible to hide from us. You wear them like a brightly coloured flight suit. It's pathetic. Poor, poor Macan. Filled with such sadness and self-loathing. Crippled with such fear and guilt!'

'Stay out of my head!'

'Give yourself to the dark side,' Kreygor growled, bearing down upon him, the glint in his eye maniacal. 'Join us, and you will no longer know self doubt, or fear. You will only know power. Pure, radiant power.'

'I do not want that,' Macan assured him, backing away. 'Those who seek power inevitably end up seeking conflict, and that is not my way.'

'Surely you would rather be rid of all that frustration and misery? Were you to give into your anger and find the warrior that is within, you would be able to use the abilities you have been bestowed without any ill feeling or remorse. You would be set free!'

'No!' Macan denied. 'I would become a slave. A slave as you are, driven only by the dark side. I will not become an instrument of its desire to kill and conquer.'

Macan watched as Kreygor stood silent for a moment, seeming to ponder whether to bother continuing this pointless conversation or just strike him down where he stood. The pause ended, as Ghyron entered again and approached. Kreygor moved away with him, and they spoke quietly so that Macan could not hear.

They talked for a moment, and the look on Kreygor's face turned to thunder. He turned back towards his captive. 'I'll deal with you later,' Kreygor told him. 'I have other guests to accommodate.'

Macan watched as Kreygor followed Ghyron back into the other room. Once they were gone the door again slid shut.

'Contact the others,' Kreygor instructed. 'We must make ready for these new visitors.'

'What of Macan?' Ghyron asked.

'Seal the room,' Kreygor instructed, and Ghyron complied by entering the command into a panel near the door. Kreygor moved to the centre of the command room to a large holographic display showing the two X-Wings approaching the planet. 'He will turn, Ghyron. Even if we have to exploit his biggest weakness, his deepest fears and frailties. Yes, he will turn.'

Li New looked thoughtfully at his scan of the forest planet. The second planet from the sun seemed like an unspoiled world, teeming with life but untouched by the hand of industry. There were no signs of advanced civilisation or structures anywhere on its surface, just like the other three planets in the Do'Naar system.

It hadn't taken them long to realise there was little of interest to be discovered about the four planets. The closest one to the single sun was so small it could barely be classified as a planet, as it was more of a large asteroid. The third and fourth planets were both large gas giants that orbited so far away from the sun they could almost be in systems of their own. Of the four only the forest world had a breathable atmosphere, so Li New had decided to investigate it first. They could look a little closer at the other planets on the way out of the system, just on the off chance that there were space stations orbiting any of them.

Li New gazed down upon the small green planet that filled his view screen. Despite the complete lack of evidence of anything important, he had a strange gut feeling about the place that he couldn't explain.

'What is it?' Rylo asked intuitively.

'I don't know exactly,' Li New was forced to admit. 'Are you feeling anything a little odd?'

'No,' Rylo answered after a moment, stretching his own senses in the Force to their maximum. 'I feel nothing master.'

'Hmm,' Li New mulled, trying to focus on the feeling and discover what it meant. Yet as he did so, the strange sensation gently diminished until he could no longer feel it. With a sigh he looked back out to the planet, then back to his scan. Perhaps he was just being a little paranoid, wanting to find something that wasn't there. Though on the other hand, he didn't want to miss something that was.

'Shall we move on?' Rylo asked.

Now they were further in system it had become apparent to Li New just how close the first planet was to the sun. Even in a cooled and greatly shielded station one would find the temperature near that planet unbearable to stand. But although it seemed very unlikely anyone could exist there he thought it best that they make sure.

'Very well,' he agreed, and prepared to power up his thrusters. 'We'll make a quick pass and scan of the first planet, then investigate the gas giants.'

'Understood.'

As Li New made an adjustment to his controls, the feeling he had been getting came back to him far greater than before. Through the Force, he became aware of a somehow familiar presence, almost as if it was waking up from a long sleep. More worryingly, it carried with it innate feelings of cold and dread.

'Perhaps you were right master,' Rylo told him. 'I just felt something also. It did not feel good.'

'This merits a closer investigation,' Li New decided. 'Start your landing cycle. We're going down.'

Codan set his craft down in a small but well looked after hangar on the planet Raddus-Bor. During his approach he had observed that the planet was heavily populated, with many cities and other trading towns dotted all over the three main continents. If they were here it would be difficult indeed to find a hidden pocket of Dark Jedi on a planet so thriving with activity.

As he jumped down from the cockpit, one of the hangar droids rushed to him and offered to service his craft for a staggering fee of three thousand credits. He waved it away with an amused smile, and left the hangar through a door at its rear.

He emerged out onto a small side street, and decided to follow its length down to the bustling main street. The sight of his surroundings forced a smile from his lips. The place could almost be Coronet, the capital city of his home planet of Corellia. The wide open street was bathed in sunlight, both from the sky itself, and also in reflections from the large gleaming buildings that rose all around him. He promised himself he would go and visit that place again some time soon.

What he needed was somewhere to find information about the planet. After almost being bundled over by a busy looking group of Vurks, he set off to find anyone or anywhere that might be helpful. After making his way down most of the main street, some kind soul finally gave him directions to an older looking building down one of the side streets called the Hall Of Records. It would be a good place to start, he figured, and walked inside.

Li New and Rylo moved away from their X-Wings and pressed on into the forest. It had taken them a while to find a clearing big enough to land just their two small craft, but had eventually come across several near a range of large hills. It was just as well really, as the Force presence seemed stronger here than anywhere else. Li New just wished he could pinpoint it more clearly.

The forest was quite dense but seemed to be fashioned from the standard green types of growth found in many

wooded areas on planets all over the galaxy. Where trees and bushes didn't grow, long thick grass had took root, proving soft underfoot. As they moved towards one of the nearby hills, Li New reached out to the Force, trying once again to get a better feel for exactly what it was that was out there. The forest proved swarming with activity, and the many life forms surrounding them all gave their own manifestation in the Force. Focusing on anything clearly was a challenge, as if a veil were drawn over his Force senses, but he was sure that the familiar presence was close by.

After pressing on a short distance further he became aware of another presence, one that harbored sinister intent, which immediately triggered a cautionary posture. Rylo stopped walking and removed his saber from his belt. Obviously he had sensed it too.

'What *is* that?' the young Padawan asked.

'Something draws near,' Li New could feel. 'Some irrepressible feral conscience.'

Rylo turned and scanned his eyes through the dense woodland, his senses on high alert. 'It wishes us harm,' he realised.

Together, they both turned in the direction of an abrupt vicious snarl. Some way ahead of them, a large muscular cat-like creature paced purposefully into view, emerging from the cover of the forest. The black-green fur on its body rippled in an intriguing way, almost allowing it to blend back in to its surroundings. Another growl revealed a set of large sharp teeth in its mouth, and it fixed them in the centre of its icy gaze.

'Hmm,' Li New nodded. 'It seems we are being hunted.'

'What do we do?' Rylo asked.

'Killing the resident wildlife isn't exactly part of the plan,' Li New explained. 'But if it becomes necessary then do what you must.'

'Understood.'

They continued to watch the animal as it slowly came forward. Li New was part way through wondering whether it would leave them alone if they were to walk away, when he suddenly received a firm caution through the Force. 'Rylo, behind!' Barely in time, he turned as another of the creatures leapt up at him from the undergrowth. Grabbing its powerful front legs, he fell back into a roll, and using the creature's weight as momentum kicked it over his head. It had been a clever ploy, with one creature acting as a distraction, while another attacked from a different direction. Against anyone other than a Jedi it would have probably worked.

Rylo ignited his saber and turned in one fluid motion, swinging the blade round and slicing into the airborne animal. Its two halves fell heavily before the feet of the first creature. If it knew fear, it showed no sign as it stepped forward, fixing the Jedi with a stare filled with what looked like both anger and contempt, if such a beast was capable of those feelings.

Jumping back to his feet, Li New removed his saber from his belt and ignited it, as Rylo brandished his own blue blade in the direction of the brute, trying to caution it away. Not impressed, the creature reared its head back and let out a deep, thunderous roar. Within moments, Li New could sense a more widespread threat approaching. The creature had called for help.

'We need to leave this place,' Li New advised. Soon, even over the hum of the sabers, he became aware of rustling in the trees and bushes all around. 'We must go now!'

They turned and bolted, triggering action from the creature who immediately started to give chase. As he passed a nearby tree, Li New swung his saber straight through its trunk, then reached out to it with the Force as he continued to run. Just at the right time, he gave it a shove, sending it toppling down on top of their pursuer and crushing it into the soft earth.

But that beast, it seemed, had been the least of their worries. In the woods all around them the sounds of the hunt had intensified. Bushes parted and branches snapped as the creatures ran them down, their huge clawed feet pounding the turf as if to some dark and menacing rhythm.

Suddenly, one appeared in Rylo's peripheral vision. It charged towards them and pounced, but the young apprentice had been given fair warning. He dived forward, hitting the ground in a roll as the animal flashed passed above him. As he continued his roll, one quick stroke with his saber ended its life.

While his apprentice returned to his feet, Li New himself came under attack from two other creatures. Delving into the powers of the Force, he leapt high out of reach of their claws, and landed squarely on a thick branch thirty feet above the ground. As more and more of the creatures appeared around him, Rylo saw the logic in his master's plan and leapt up into one of the other trees himself.

'This is only a temporary respite,' Li New said, as he observed a couple of the creatures beginning to climb the thick trunks, their claws easily providing them with enough grip to ascend. 'They seem as comfortable in the trees as they are on the ground.'

'We may not be able to escape this without killing them all,' Rylo conceded.

Li New nodded, regretfully. Though it was a pity, as these creatures had probably never been encountered by the Republic before now, he could see no other choice. He got the distinct feeling that even if they jumped from tree to tree, their hunters on the ground would continue to follow them.

Leaving his lightsaber ignited, he dropped it from the tree, then reached out and caught it using the Force when it was several feet from the ground. He closed his eyes momentarily to focus his mind, then started to rotate the saber

where it hung in mid air. Satisfied with its speed, and more importantly his control, he began to move the blade through the air, striking at the animals and cutting them down where they stood.

The animals began to back off, not knowing what to make of the whirling blade of death flashing back and forth amongst them. Li New lifted the saber higher to strike at those climbing the trees, and as their dead began falling down on and around them, the surviving creatures on the ground turned and beat a hasty retreat, snarling at each other in panic and frustration.

Once the saber returned to his hand, Li New deactivated it and clipped it back to his belt.

'They shouldn't trouble us again,' Rylo speculated, and jumped down from the tree. Li New waited a moment and stretched out once more using the Force. Though the Padawan seemed to be correct, he could not help but feel their adventure on this planet was not yet over. Something ominous still lurked amongst these trees, he could sense. It was all just so unclear. With little other option, Li New rejoined his apprentice on the ground, and they continued their exploration.

After almost an hour of trudging through woodland and evading other creatures, their attention was captured by something strange up ahead. Through the trees, something metallic reflected the sun brightly back towards them. As they approached, they observed it was some kind of door buried into the side of the hill. What lay behind it was a mystery, but there was an extremely cold feeling about the place.

'The dark side is strong here,' Li New explained, suddenly very concerned. Rylo nodded in agreement.

'The dark side is strong everywhere,' an evil, metallic voice boomed.

Looking in its direction, Li New spotted someone moving in the forest a short distance away. The green and yellow bushes failed miserably at hiding the Dark Jedi's flamboyant red armour. 'Ghyron,' he realised.

'The great Wilcra Li New,' Ghyron said as he emerged into the open. 'Some day I knew that we would meet again.'

'Though I *had* always hoped we wouldn't,' Li New told him.

'Come now. Don't hurt your old friend's feelings.'

'You ceased being my friend a long time ago,' Li New said coldly.

'You upset me, Li New,' Ghyron said, his voice filled with false grief. 'But never mind. I don't need you as a friend, and I never did. I have what I need right here.'

Li New suddenly caught a glimpse of movement off to his right. Out of the bushes strode another Dark Jedi, a Togruta. She raised her saber and ignited it, and the red blade droned menacingly. Around them, other Dark Jedi emerged, blocking off all their logical escape routes. One by one the Zabrak, the Twi'lek and the Gran all ignited their sabers and readied themselves for battle.

As they stood surrounded, the mysterious door behind them slid open, and they turned to see a Human male step out into the forest.

'Greetings, Jedi,' he said, mockingly. 'Welcome to the Do'Naar system. I am Kreygor, and you will soon learn that it was a mistake coming to my planet. Take them!'

The green and blue sabers instantly ignited again as the Dark Jedi rushed towards them. Li New was immediately forced onto the defensive as the Zabrak and the Togruta attacked him ferociously, while Rylo parried desperately against the Twi'lek and the Gran.

Kreygor and Ghyron watched as the fight raged in front of them. Though they fought valiantly it soon became obvious that even Jedi could not possibly hold off so many enemies. Li New was pressed back further, and found himself in the shadow of an enormous tree, its trunk many feet in diameter. Ghyron found he couldn't wait any longer, and rushed forward to join in.

Rylo ducked and parried again, also on the back foot as the cackling Twi'lek and the wildly erratic Gran swung their sabers at him. Suddenly Rylo noticed the Gran fall forward, nearly cutting himself open with his own orange saber. The stupid idiot had tripped over a protruding tree root, and in his rage had not been able to keep his balance.

Kreygor shook his head with embarrassment, unsure of how had he managed to put up with that fool's pathetic efforts for so long. He then watched as the Padawan attempted to fight back with increased verve, but Karynna was much better trained, and stepped up her efforts accordingly.

But there was no worry here, Kreygor soon realised. Raelag and Xeroque forced Li New back against the immense trunk of the tree, and the Jedi managed to fight a moment longer before Raelag kicked out and sent his green saber falling from his grasp. Ghyron, who had been waiting for just the right moment, immediately stepped in and aimed one of his blasters directly at Li New's forehead. To stop the Jedi trying any sneaky tricks, Xeroque hovered her saber closely in front of his neck.

Rylo continued his gallant effort, but it had been for nothing. The Twi'lek had seen what was going on, and diverted Rylo's attention towards his master's predicament.

'Throw down your weapon,' Ghyron ordered the young Padawan, 'or I kill him.'

'Do not disarm yourself,' Li New advised. 'They will kill me anyway.'

Rylo didn't move. He continued to hold his saber ready as the Twi'lek and her magenta blade came closer.

'I will not tell you again, Jedi,' Ghyron's voice was louder and much more insistent. 'Do you wish to see your master destroyed right in front of you?'

Rylo hesitated a moment longer, looking more and more unsure. He knew he could not take all of these enemies alone, and though it seemed likely that the Dark Jedi would kill them anyway, he decided he had no other choice. Surrender was the only possible way that they could survive this day. Putting his faith in the will of the Force, he deactivated his saber and threw it to the floor.

'That's a good, young, stupid Jedi,' the Twi'lek told him, a sardonic smile on her lips.

'You should have listened to your master, fool!' Ghyron laughed, and prepared to pull the trigger.

'Stop!' Kreygor ordered. 'Do not kill them.'

'What?' Ghyron asked, astonished. 'Do not kill them? Are you insane?'

'We can not pass up this gift,' Kreygor explained.

'Gift?' Ghyron asked. 'They are no gift. They will only bring trouble.'

'If they can be turned they will become very useful indeed.'

'Turned?' Ghyron scoffed. 'Turned? I know this Jedi. His name is Wilcra Li New, and even as an apprentice there were few Jedi more dedicated than he. He will not turn.'

'Maybe, maybe not,' Kreygor pondered. 'But his apprentice is not yet so set in his master's ways. There is much potential in this one.'

'You are seeing opportunity where there is none,' Ghyron explained. 'We must destroy them, and then get out of here before more Jedi arrive.'

'Do not fear the Jedi, you weak fool,' Kreygor taunted him. 'They are no threat to you here.'

'It is you who are afraid,' Ghyron told him. 'You are only taking this course of action to try and prove yourself to our master, because you fear his wrath when he finds out you have failed.'

'I fear nobody!' Kreygor bellowed. 'And I will *not* fail. Their decision to come to this planet was not driven by knowledge. They could not possibly have detected our facility through its cloak. If any other Jedi do follow them they will be faced with the same problem. Karynna, Xeroque, find their ships and get them into the hangar. They will not be detected there.'

'Of course Kreygor,' Karynna purred, and the two female warriors moved off into the trees.

'You are making a mistake Kreygor,' Ghyron said.

'I do not make mistakes,' Kreygor assured him. 'Even if they cannot be turned I still know of a use for them. Bring them inside.'

Li New and Rylo walked, with Ghyron's blasters and the heat of several lightsabers urging them along.

Raddus-Bor and its close neighbour Raddus-Kon were remarkable planets, Codan had learned. He'd never known two planets follow exactly the same solar orbit before, but these somehow did. Raddus-Bor itself trailed Raddus-Kon by just a few weeks on their seventy two week rotation of the sun. The main species of both planets had once been the proud and supposedly noble Mokderians, and both worlds had prided themselves on being wonderful places to trade. It had been the competition between the two populations that had proven to be the species' downfall. Several hundred years ago, this competitive nature, and what Codan could only assume were greatly inflated egos, had somehow sparked a bloody war between the worlds. It had only ended when Raddus-Kon was hit with a massive orbital barrage from the Raddus-Bor fleet, reducing all of its once fine cities to rubble. The Raddus-Kon survivors fled the planet, scattering all over the galaxy. Their fate was unknown.

The victorious Bor-Mokderians had been left with problems of their own, however. The losses they had suffered in the war had proven far greater than they had anticipated. Due to tradition, only males were allowed to take up arms and fight, which, coupled with the fact that a very small percentage of Mokderians were ever born male, meant that the rate of reproduction dropped to worryingly low levels. Once the aftermath of the war had died down, the Bor-Mokderians found their trade profit steadily rose, but their numbers sharply fell. Later, as the planet became more and more popular as a trading port, it attracted more and more residents from other species. At that present time the Mokderian population of the planet was less than five percent.

He leaned back in his seat and stretched, then reached forward and turned off the data console. As intriguing as the history lesson was, it was not going to help him in his hunt for any traces of Dark Jedi activity. By all accounts the planet seemed to have a reasonable reputation, and other than the occasional trading dispute it was surprisingly peaceful, considering its blend of cultures.

He stood up to leave, intending to try the usual places such as bars and cantinas, or to find a local subspace news feed, when he felt someone approaching. Turning to face them, he realised it was a Mokderian, the first one he'd seen since arriving. Like others of its species, it stood tall and slender. Its single eye spied him from the centre of its elongated green skinned head. He couldn't quite deduce from its appearance whether it was male or female.

'Me Akkam Songar,' it hissed, definitely sounding more masculine than it looked. 'My job give help.'

'Oh, good,' Codan told him. 'Because I'm looking for some information.'

'Information here,' Akkam assured, holding his long slender hands out wide as if marvelling at the building. 'Hall Of Records.'

'Yes. Very impressive.'

'Here,' he pointed at the rows of data consoles. 'You look?'

'I have,' Codan explained. 'But I do not think I will find what I seek using these consoles.'

'No?' the Mokderian asked, tilting its head inquisitively.

'Have you ever heard anything about Dark Jedi activity in this system?'

'Dark Jedi?' Akkam asked, perhaps flinching a little.

'Yes,' Codan confirmed. 'There have been reports that they are operating in nearby systems. Your data store has no references about them at all.'

'No, no, no Dark Jedi,' Akkam guaranteed him. 'Not Raddus system. Not Raddus-Bor. Bring bad trade.'

Codan really didn't like the way the Mokderian spoke. His voice made him sound untrustworthy, like someone who would be unwilling to share information even if in possession of it, but Codan guessed it could easily be the natural Mokderian accent. One thing seemed certain though - Akkam didn't seem like the kind of being who was supposedly of a proud and noble race. The last few hundred years must have driven that out of them, if they were ever like it to begin with.

Reaching into the Force, he quickly stretched out in the Mokderian's direction to see what he could feel. There was definitely a strange essence surrounding the creature, but despite his concerns he could sense no deception.

'Why hunt Dark Jedi? Are you Jedi?' it asked, suddenly leaning forward curiously. 'Have come long way?'

'A very long way,' Codan told him. 'And I wouldn't want my journey here to have been a waste.'

'Not want that,' Akkam's eye blinked as he shook his head. 'Not want that for Jedi.'

'Why is it that your data stores have no references to the Dark Jedi activity? Everything else from the neighbouring systems seems to be intact.'

'No Dark Jedi,' Akkam repeated. 'No records here.'

'Well,' Codan sighed. 'Is there anyone else who might be able to help me?'

'If Akkam not help you, then nobody help you,' it told him. 'This Hall Of Records. Me Keeper Of Records.'

Something in the back of Codan's mind really troubled him about this creature, but despite its seemingly evasive discourse he could still not sense any nervousness or dishonesty. Maybe he was just a strange being who really didn't like the Dark Jedi. He could understand that.

'Are there any other places like this?' he tried again, feeling like this was getting him nowhere. 'Are there any other Mokderians who collect data like this?'

'Long time ago, many,' it nodded. 'But none now.'

He stretched out with the Force again, but after a short while decided it was pointless to waste any more time here. 'Well, thank you for your assistance, Akkam.'

'Jedi welcome,' it said as he walked away. 'Always welcome.'

Codan left the building, a little downhearted. He had really hoped to pick up some sort of trail that he could have then followed, without having to visit all the local bars and confronting all the local hoodlums. Directly opposite him he spotted one such place, and started to move towards it. Had he turned around, just for a split second, he may have noticed through one of the large glass windows of the Hall Of Records that Akkam Songar was making an urgent transmission to a mysterious cloaked figure who had appeared before him on a computer terminal.

Li New coughed as Raelag took another swing at him, hitting him hard in the stomach. He gasped, trying to replace the air that the strength of the blow had knocked out of him. Rylo winced slightly at his master's plight, but tried stoically not to show it to his captors.

They were in a small confinement room in some kind of secret underground installation, restrained to a cold metal wall by energy bonds at the wrists and ankles. There was very little illumination in the room apart from the orange glow of the energy bonds, which Li New and Rylo could see reflecting back at them in the menacing eyes of the Dark Jedi.

'What do you think of this?' Ro-Donic addressed the younger Jedi, then swung his big hand round and caught Li New across the cheek. The Jedi's head whipped back and clattered into the wall, forcing him to close his eyes and grit his teeth at the impact. The Gran turned to Rylo expectantly. 'Tell me, young one. How does that make you feel?'

Rylo struggled pointlessly against his restraints, but kept his cool and said nothing. Through the Force, Li New could sense his Padawan's frustration, but was both glad and proud that he was managing to keep it in check.

The entrance to the room suddenly swirled with activity. Even through Li New's blurred vision, he could make out the unmistakable forms of Kreygor and Ghyron as they entered.

'How are they finding our... hospitality?' Kreygor asked with a grin. Raelag smiled a twisted smile.

'We will not do what you want,' Li New promised. 'Torture us all you want. We will never turn from the light.'

'Yes, yes, yes,' Kreygor waved the bold statement away. 'I've heard all that before.'

'It's not too late,' Li New told them in vain. 'The Jedi can help you. All of you. Even you, Ghyron.'

Li New observed as Ghyron raised his cybernetic hand, as if studying it through the dark visor in his helmet. He could sense the cyborg's anger rise at the mere suggestion of re-joining the Jedi.

'If you think that is true then you are a pathetic fool,' Ghyron stated. 'The Jedi did nothing for me. They gave

me *nothing*.'

A very bad feeling washed over Li New as Ghyron looked up at him, and he found himself imagining the look of hatred in his former comrade's eyes.

'Though,' Ghyron began, and indicated his hand, 'I guess they did give me this. Do you want to know what it feels like?'

The Jedi gasped as the robotic hand thrust forward and clasped tightly around his neck, the appendage constricting tighter and tighter, painfully restricting his air flow until he could not breathe at all. Using the power of the Force, Li New was aware he could hold his breath for much longer than a normal Human, but he could not hold it forever.

'Do you not realise, Jedi?' Ghyron taunted him, not allowing him even a whisper of air. 'I am not the one that needs help. *You* are the one who needs help. But where are your Jedi friends now? Where is your precious Skywalker now?'

'Ghyron,' Kreygor warned after some moments had passed. 'Do not kill him yet.'

The cyborg turned his head slowly to look in his master's direction, waited a short time longer to show his disagreement, and then finally released his hold. Li New wheezed as he tried to take air into his lungs, and reached into the Force to try and help ease his pain.

'So, I see no reason to waste any more time,' Kreygor clapped his hands together with a smile. 'Bring me Macan, and let us see how well he reacts to these two innocent Jedi being brutally tortured before his very eyes.'

It took Li New's aching brain a few moments to realise what Kreygor had said, and questions immediately began to form. Could it really be his old friend Macan, here in this building with the Dark Jedi? Had they captured him too? Were they trying to turn him, or could he already be one of them? It became obvious that it must have been Macan's presence all along that he had been sensing. Li New's head dropped, and he mentally kicked himself at his short-sightedness.

'Yes master,' Ro-Donic cackled, and left the room as Kreygor rose his arms towards the captives. As the door slid shut behind him, the Gran smiled at the sound of Force lightning, and the agonized shouting of the two Jedi.

Macan suddenly shuddered. Someone was in pain, he could feel. He couldn't tell who, or where, but they were close. Perhaps they were the guests Kreygor had mentioned earlier. If just the Force would tell him, but his connection to it seemed so weak.

He again ventured regretfully into his past. For a short while, several years ago, he had reached a point in his life where he could see only good things happening in his future. But everything had changed that day. It had definitely not been in the plan to end up trapped in a hidden metal cave, a prisoner to dark side users. Had he not abandoned his training his skills would be greater and he would have had a fair chance at actually getting out of the mess he was in. Of course, if he hadn't abandoned his training it was probable he would never have ended up in such trouble in the first place. Why should the Force tell him anything, when his use of it had been so dire?

There was no time to speculate on any answers, as he suddenly sensed a presence approaching along the corridor. Trying his hardest, he stretched out to discover more. The evil and hatred within the individual's mind soon became apparent, but despite the risk, Macan realized this may be his only chance. He didn't want to remain there another moment, so positioned himself across the room directly opposite the door. He again reached out, putting all of his faith in the Force, knowing timing of the move was critical.

The person was right outside the door now, he could sense. There was a faint beeping as switches on the access panel were pressed.

Something in his mind triggered action, and he immediately started to sprint straight at the door. The room was not all that large, and the still-closed door quickly loomed before him. Had he moved too soon, he worried? Just at the right time he saw light from the corridor start to beam through into the room as the door slid aside. As he reached it there was just enough of a gap to fit through, and the stupid looking Gran hadn't even seen him yet.

He turned side on and crashed into his opponent with a bone-crunching shoulder block. Unfortunately, the Gran was well built, and Macan wondered whether he would feel the after effects of the collision even more than his target would. However, the surprise and power of his move had proven enough. Ro-Donic crashed back against a door on the other side of the corridor and slumped to the floor. Before the fallen Dark Jedi had enough presence of mind to alert his comrades, Macan was already sprinting away down the corridor.

'How did this happen?' Kreygor roared as he watched his holographic radar in the centre of the command room. On it, the stolen Dark Jedi transport containing Macan was already leaving the atmosphere of the planet. 'What kind of idiotic, useless fool are you?'

Ro-Donic shrank back slightly, afraid of what his instructor would do to him.

'Ghyron, you will track Macan immediately,' Kreygor ordered. 'And when you find him, bring him back here.'

'Surely I should just kill him?' Ghyron suggested. 'We can't risk him contacting other Jedi.'

'No, you fool,' Kreygor warned. 'Are you blind? He has fled our facility, and that means he is afraid. If he succumbs to his feelings this easily we should not find it too difficult to tempt him over to the dark side.'

'What if he doesn't want to come back?'

'Make him.'

'And what if I can't?'

'Then I will kill you myself for being so useless!' Kreygor snarled. 'Now stop wasting time with pointless questions and do as I order.'

Ghyron started to turn, slowly at first, as if deciding whether to obey. The moment of hesitation passed, and he proceeded to leave the room, heading for the hangar.

'Raelag. Take this imbecile and give our Jedi friends a new cell mate,' Kreygor ordered, casting his ominous gaze upon the Gran. 'I will be along to teach him the meaning of failure in a short while.'

Ro-Donic started to struggle as Raelag's hands took hold of his shoulders.

'But Kreygor,' the Gran begged. 'I will not fail you again. Believe me.'

Taking a disgusted look from his boss as the cue, Raelag stopped the other Dark Jedi's protests with a powerful punch that dropped him to the floor. Then grabbing a leg, he dragged the fallen warrior out of the room and down the corridor.

Kreygor found himself struggling to contain his rage and fury at the constant display of incompetence he was surrounded by. He walked over to the observation screen overlooking the hangar and beat it with a clenched fist. Through the cracked glass panel he observed with gritted teeth as Ghyron's ship lifted off and sped away into the sky.

The stolen Dark Jedi ship returned to normal space after its short leap through hyperspace. Macan quickly checked his controls and entered a new set of hyperspace coordinates. If he could make the jump to light speed quickly enough along a different route, there would be no way for anyone to track him.

As the navigation computer processed his command, he looked out to a nearby planet. It looked pretty much all desert, and the land was riddled with dozens of what seemed like collision craters. The place must have been in the path of one wicked asteroid shower at some point, he thought.

He wondered exactly what system it was that he'd punched into the navi-com during his hurried escape from the Dark Jedi facility, but he was given little time to think about it. His radar beeped wildly. Another ship had appeared from hyperspace close behind him, and it already had him in a target lock. There was no doubt to its intentions. It was not friendly.

'I just want to be left alone,' Macan muttered to himself, quickly banking the craft in an evasive pattern. After throwing a quick glance at the navi-com that informed him the ship was still not ready, he blinked as several blue flashes of energy passed closely by. Ion weapons, he realised. They still wanted him alive. 'Why can't they just kill me and be done with it?'

The dogfight initiated, Macan did everything he could to escape his pursuer, as one hit from those ion cannons would immobilise his craft completely. Even using all the ability he was capable of, he soon found himself outclassed. Just as the navi-com signalled ready, several ion shots slammed into the stolen ship. The control panels flashed and sparked with blue waves of electricity, and he quickly removed his hands from them.

Completely out of control, the transport became caught in the gravitational pull of the nearby planet and began to drift down towards it. A short way behind, the enemy craft followed in its wake. Yet in the heat of the moment, neither pilot noticed another small ship approaching from the direction of a neighbouring planet.

It took a great effort from his aching body, but finally Macan managed to open the side hatch and struggle out onto the soft white sand. After ricocheting awkwardly off of several large sand ridges, the ship had come to rest a short distance from what had once been a vast city, but had now fallen into ruin. His entire body felt like it was bruised, and he had to give everything he had to even remain standing as the world span around him.

Fighting back the urge to vomit, he slowly began to walk towards the city. He couldn't remember why at first, but all his instincts were telling him to hide. The reminder he needed came as he heard the sublight drive of the small black ship that had shot him down. He had trouble focusing in on it as it sped across the sky above him, the pilot no doubt checking if he had survived the crash.

As the craft became just a speck in the clear sky, he redoubled his efforts to reach the ruins. The ship would probably double back very soon, and his only slender chance was to hide in the devastated city. He hoped his pursuer would get bored and leave, preferably without causing any further damage to the crashed ship.

Struggling on, he tried to run. At first the soft sand that moved beneath his feet gave him trouble, but a little further on his head began to clear and things came back into focus. Nearer to the city still, the sand became firmer, and he found himself able to run at a moderate pace. Surprised to say the least, he managed to reach cover without the craft returning, and it left him wondering what was the pilot up to.

Observing the ruins, Macan realised the city that had once stood must have been built many millennia ago, or by a race of creatures that were either not very advanced, or preferred to use stone over metal. It seemed quite a shame that the place had met this fate. A city so large, built purely by this kind of orange rock, would be a fantastically different place in this time of steel and industrial engineering.

Some way into the city, he heard a strange sound in the air. While at first it was quiet, it steadily built up to a whine almost like that of a fighter engine. For a split second Macan was sure he could hear the sound of an X-Wing, but he quickly changed his mind as the approaching sound came nearer. It was definitely some kind of engine exhaust, but did not remind him of any he'd heard on any space craft. As it got louder it dawned on him what it could be. Somewhere in his memory he could vaguely recall seeing a rocket pack built in to the back of Ghyron's suit of armour. He sighed, realising one former Jedi student had been sent to find and recapture the other.

Quickly breaking into another run, Macan leapt into the remains of an old building, trying to take cover. The sound of the rocket pack drew closer still, now almost like thunder in his throbbing head, booming out across the otherwise silent terrain. Ghyron could not be far away.

As the sound of the rocket pack died, Macan became aware of how loud his heart was thumping in his chest. Now Ghyron was on foot, he would need all his senses at their maximum to evade him, especially his hearing, so he took a slow, deep breath and urged himself to relax. Crouched down in a suitable area surrounded by shattered brickwork, he waited.

From somewhere nearby there came the sound of footsteps as the stalker paced over the rubble and rocks.

'I don't know why you bother hiding, Macan,' Ghyron's voice sounded out. 'I can sense your presence, and eventually I will find you.'

There were more footsteps, and Macan surprised himself with how quiet he was managing to be.

'I'm kind of glad we've been able to spend this short time together,' Ghyron continued. 'I am invigorated at the discovery of just how much you fear me.'

It was just like Ghyron to say something like that, as he surely knew Macan had no fear of him at all, that the only thing he truly feared was being forced over to the dark side. Macan would gladly take a few of Ghyron's jibes if it gave him the chance of evading that possibility.

'Even back at the Academy, I got the impression that you were scared of me. Did you know that?'

*I've never liked you Ghyron,* Macan thought. *But I have never feared you.*

'Is that so?' Ghyron asked after a moment. Through the Force, he had managed to pick up on what Macan was thinking. 'Then why do you hide away like a scared little child?'

Being careful not to take the bait, Macan cleared his mind and remained silent. He continued to listen as the cyborg nattered on, his voice sounding louder and louder, as if he was moving closer.

'Has there always been such fear in your heart? Some day you must have known it would drive you to the dark side.'

*That will never happen,* Macan thought determinedly.

'You really are a failure. You were even worse as an apprentice than I was. At least I've never been a simple slave to my emotions.'

The Dark Jedi was very close. His footsteps sounded like they were just outside the building, possibly even inside. Did Ghyron know where he was hiding? It seemed he had a very good idea, and getting caught in this cowardly position wouldn't help his cause at all.

There was another footstep, this time surely inside the building. He had to make a decision and fast. Was he just going to wait there to be seized? In the panic of the moment his brain didn't disappoint him. The answer came to him fast indeed. It was a resolute *no way*.

Springing to his feet, he made a dash for a nearby hole in the wall easily big enough for him to fit through. Ghyron, as he expected, was already waiting for such a move. Two blaster shots flew passed in front of him, close enough to worry him but clearly not aimed directly at him. It seemed Ghyron was just trying to deter him from fleeing, but he would have to do a lot better than that. He hit the rocky street on the other side of the wall and opened up into a sprint. After passing a couple of other ruined buildings he turned and cut diagonally through the next one, reaching another street-like area beyond it.

He ran for a while longer, making several more twists and turns, before risking a glance behind. There was no sign of his pursuer. At the next suitable location he stopped and ducked behind cover, once again relaxing himself and stretching out with his hearing as best as he could. For several moments he waited, but heard nothing.

After another couple of minutes, he braved a glance out from behind his cover. Not only was there no sound from the Dark Jedi, there was no visible sign of him either. Macan knew that he wouldn't have just given up, that he was probably playing some sick twisted game. He didn't want to sit about and be found again like he did last time, so as quietly as he could, he began to creep through the city, sticking close to shadows and any cover he could. After a while he noticed he was passing a wall that had taken very little damage. He hugged it carefully until the end, ready to cautiously peer around the corner.

Suddenly there came a warning through the Force, but he failed to act quickly enough on it. From around the corner, a cybernetic arm reached and grabbed him by the neck. The next thing he knew Ghyron had dragged him into the open and cast him to the floor. His hands hurt as he steadied himself on the sharp rubble.

'Why do you make this so hard on yourself?' Ghyron asked, kicking Macan back against a short broken wall. 'After all, I did try and ask nicely.' In a slow, meaningful motion, the cyborg raised one of his blasters, and aimed directly between Macan's eyes. 'But not anymore.'

'I'm not going back,' Macan declared. 'I will never become what you have.'

'Oh, you are going back,' Ghyron told him. 'You have no choice in the matter. The only thing you can decide is how much pain you will be going back in.'

Macan flinched, closing his eyes at the sound of the blaster firing. Stone and debris from the freshly made hole in the wall hit him in the face and tumbled down his chest. Grimacing, he opened his eyes as the small cloud of dust began to dissipate. Through it, he could see that Ghyron was once again aiming directly at him. He almost wished Ghyron would just finish him off. Being toyed with like this was one thing he really didn't enjoy.

'I know you are capable of making the right decision,' the Dark Jedi said. 'So what will it be?'

Macan didn't even have chance to think of another response. Ghyron's blaster was abruptly torn from his hand, and it sailed through the air away from him into the waiting grasp of another. Shocked and angered, the Dark Jedi turned to see who it was that would dare bother him in such a way. Appearing through the ruins several dozen feet away, a Human male in light grey Jedi robes strode forward.

'But of course,' he snarled as he recognised this new player. 'Why am I not surprised?'

'Well well well,' Codan said, throwing the blaster to the floor and readying his two sabers. 'Just look who it is.'

'Leave us,' Ghyron ordered. 'Or you will wish you hadn't come here.'

'I don't think so,' the Jedi declared as he started to move closer. 'I've waited far too long for this moment.'

The Dark Jedi sniggered and prepped his own saber. He could think of no greater entertainment than having to kill this fool first. 'Then why wait any longer?'

Macan impulsively scuttled away as the two combatants charged at each other, sabers flaring into existence. From a safer distance, he watched as they clashed.

After the first exchanges, Ghyron delved fully into the dark side and began unleashing blisteringly fast, enraged attacks. His orange saber darted back and forth, but Codan surprised and frustrated him with an equally impressive defence. The purple and green blades moved gracefully round and round, deflecting attacks left and right before Codan found the chance to initiate an assault of his own.

Suddenly forced back, the Dark Jedi parried and dodged frantically, seemingly a little staggered at the skill and control of his old rival. He backed off into the shade of a building that, although heavily damaged, still stood three stories high. As Codan stepped forward to attack again, Ghyron reached out to the building with the Force, using his mind to grab at an area high on the nearest wall.

The already shattered section of building needed little coercing to bring it down. As it fell in several large pieces, Ghyron ignited his rocket pack, which sent him careering aside and out of the way. Codan immediately focused his mind on the falling debris, and impressively managed to hold all of the parts that may hit him in mid air.

Macan watched as the Jedi fought to throw the fragments aside, before noticing that Ghyron had already regained his footing and was aiming at his opponent with his other blaster.

'No!' he cried, instinctively summoning his own Force abilities to hurl several nearby rocks in the Dark Jedi's direction. Despite these efforts, Ghyron got off a shot before he was distracted into repelling the rocks with his own Force powers, but Macan need not have worried. Codan was already alert and easily deflected the attack with one of his sabers.

It then took little time for Ghyron to make his mind up about what he should do next. As Codan came at him again he jumped away, the power of the Force allowing him to ascend high into the air. At the pinnacle of his jump, he activated his suit's rocket pack, and began to soar across the sky in retreat.

Macan scrambled to the abandoned blaster and gathered it up, before turning and hastily firing off several shots at the fleeing Dark Jedi. His aim was awry, and Ghyron soon escaped over the ruins of the city.

'We'll meet again,' Codan muttered under his breath at the rocket pack trail, as behind him his old friend dropped the blaster to the floor.

'Meja Codan,' Macan shook his head slightly in disbelief. 'This has been the strangest day.'

'I never figured I'd see you again,' Codan admitted, turning off his sabers. 'What brings you to the Raddus system?'

'Oh, you know,' Macan explained. 'Hunted by Dark Jedi. Taken to their twisted leader who tried to turn me. Barely escaping with my life. That sort of thing.'

'Taken to their leader?' Codan asked, his tone more urgent. 'Where?'

'I'm not exactly sure,' Macan shrugged. 'Some kind of underground hideout, on a forest planet not too far from here. The coordinates should still be in the ship I stole.'

'Take me to it quickly,' Codan urged. 'I need to find where they're hiding.'

'Yeah, of course,' Macan said. He indicated the direction he thought the ship lay, and they began to jog. 'So just what is going on around here? The Dark Jedi are all over the place.'

'With your help not for much longer,' Codan said. 'There are Jedi searching all the nearby systems for their hideout. Once we get the location we'll move in and extinguish their threat for good.'

Macan suddenly thought about what Codan had said, what Kreygor had said, and the pain he had sensed in the underground structure. 'Guests?' he asked himself.

'What?'

'Something one of the Dark Jedi told me,' Macan explained. 'Ghyron said his name was Kreygor.'

'Kreygor?' Codan cast a weary glance at Macan.

'Oh?' Macan realised. 'Met him before, I see?'

'No,' Codan shook his head. 'Just heard of him, that's all.' From what he could sense, Macan obviously hadn't found out exactly who Kreygor was during his time as a captive.

'So he doesn't spend his whole life hiding underground on a backwater planet then? I was beginning to wonder.'

Codan thought for a moment. He could tell Macan the truth, but this would not be the best time. He was unsure how Macan would react to knowing Kreygor was the man responsible for ruining his life.

'Well, this Kreygor guy,' Macan continued, completely oblivious to Codan's quandary. 'He said he had got other guests to attend to. The thing is, the planet seemed pretty much unpopulated. I'm guessing there would have to be a pretty special reason for anyone to just drop by, you know?'

Codan nodded understanding. 'He said guests? Plural?'

'Yes,' Macan confirmed.

'All of the Jedi are searching alone,' Codan explained. 'Except one, who is with his Padawan.'

'Anyone I know?'

'Yes,' Codan nodded. Then he looked at Macan with a serious expression on his face. 'One of them is Li New.'

Macan glanced at Codan for a split second before the feeling of guilt made him look away. Without even realising it he had left one of his old friends at the mercy of the Dark Jedi. He hadn't even bothered to try and find out who those new guests were, let alone try and help them. No wonder he had never made it as a Jedi.

Codan stood up and stepped out of the crashed Dark Jedi ship. 'It's definitely them,' he said. 'The Do'Naar system.'

'Do'Naar?' Macan asked quietly, and dipped his head. Codan didn't need to use the Force to sense how Macan had felt about himself these last couple of years, and this situation with Li New and his Padawan had only made him feel worse. He realised there was a chance of helping his friend back onto his path, but Kreygor's involvement made it an extreme risk.

'I'll contact the other Jedi, but they're hours away,' Codan said, making up his mind. 'We must help them ourselves.'

'We?' Macan asked.

'You're coming with me, aren't you?'

'Back to Do'Naar?' Macan scoffed. 'Yeah, right.'

'We need to get Li New and Rylo out of there, as soon as possible.'

'I'm getting this ship operational as soon as possible,' Macan explained. 'Then I'm out of here.'

'Is that your solution? Run away?'

'It's what I'm good at,' Macan said regrettably. 'It's the only thing I'm good at.'

'No it's not,' Codan assured him. 'When are you going to stop running away from your problems? If you continue to run away they will continue to chase you. You must face them, and deal with them. Let the past go.'

'It's not that easy,' Macan explained, fighting back his memories. 'I can't let it go. I cannot let *her* go. Thinking of her and the short time we spent together is the only chance I get for a moment's peace. Peace from the pain, and the sorrow. My memories of her are all I have left.'

'But she is *gone*, Macan,' Codan said. 'You *must* let her go. Your memories of her are the source of all that pain and sorrow. Can you not see?'

Macan closed his eyes and turned away. With all he had been through today, this conversation was the last thing he needed. He still hurt so much.

'There is a great strength within you,' Codan told him. 'Everybody sees it but you. And I could sure use it now. Li New could sure use it now.'

'I don't want to fight,' Macan declared. 'I don't want to be there when other people I care about die.'

'That is a risk,' Codan nodded. 'But it is an almost certainty if we do nothing. Would you rather Li New and Rylo be left to the torment of the Dark Jedi?'

'Of course not,' Macan accepted. 'But I would be of no use to you or them in battle.'

'You will,' Codan told him, and offered one of his sabers. 'Take this, and come with me to Do'Naar. If you cannot fight for your friends, then who can you fight for? And maybe by doing this you will learn to fight for yourself again. You owe yourself that much.'

Macan looked down at the saber hilt and pondered it. He was getting a little tired of people telling him that he should fight again, but he knew deep down that what Codan said was true. If they did not help Li New and his apprentice they would no doubt come to all manner of harm at the hands of Kreygor and his Dark Jedi, if they were not dead already. But it had been so long since he had wielded a saber or the Force that he knew he would likely go to his death. If not death, then he feared something far worse. The feeling of terrible power he had grasped from Kreygor still haunted him, and he knew if he used the Force again without first letting go of his grief and anger, he would be fighting the lure of the dark side as well as fighting the Dark Jedi. He could not go back there and risk becoming the same as Kreygor.

Codan seemed to sense his decision, and tried one last time. 'Please, take it,' he urged.

Macan glanced up and caught the look in Codan's eyes. He was taken back to his time at the Jedi Academy, to the months he had spent with Codan and Li New during their training. The friendship they had shared back then had meant so much to him, and still did. Thoughts and memories of the experiences they had been through came rushing back, and he was staggered that he was actually thinking so hard about whether to go to Li New's aid. In that instant he knew what was required. If there was any little way he could help, then he must. He nodded in realisation and took the saber.

They made great haste in repairing the stolen transport, as Codan knew it would be the only way to return to the underground facility undetected.

6  
Dark Decision

Li New stopped concentrating on healing himself with the Force and opened his eyes. Scanning the room, he saw that nothing had changed. Beside him, Rylo was still in his own state of Force heal, and across the room the restrained Gran Dark Jedi continued to moan under his breath. Their current guard, the female Togruta, stood near the entrance, watching him.

'So, you awaken at last,' she said, and took a couple of paces towards him. 'Perhaps I should now make you suffer a little more, should I not?'

Li New ignored her, instead focussing on something else. He had received the impression through the Force that someone or something familiar had just entered the room. He was a little confused to see that nobody had. Reaching into the Force once more, he searched for answers. Though nothing came to him in certainty, he thought he could feel something, and it did seem familiar. After another moment of further concentration he realised why.

*Codan?* he asked into the Force. *Where are you?* There was no reply, but he was sure he could feel the presence of his good friend, and it was getting stronger and clearer. *Codan*, he tried again, reaching as deep as he could into the Force and concentrating on the familiar sensation. A short time later he sensed a reply, though it was hazy as if through a cloud of some sort. At least he was certain now that it actually was Codan. He struggled to sense what was going on.

Codan was approaching in a ship, and he wasn't alone. Li New was a little surprised to learn that it was Macan who was travelling with him, but he realised that this all made sense. The reason the Dark Jedi were showing little interest in him and Rylo recently was because Macan had escaped. And now he had returned with help. But what was it they were thinking? They couldn't seriously be planning to land in the hangar and fight their way through to the cells?

*No*, he warned Codan immediately. *That will not work. But there maybe another way.*

'Are we really about to do this?' Macan asked, glancing at Codan. For the second time that day he had just passed into the atmosphere of the forest planet in this small transport vessel, and he couldn't really say he wished to be there any more this time than he did the last. At least this time there was no mystery concerning his attendance. The lightsaber in his hand didn't hurt either.

'Just relax,' Codan told him. The Jedi himself had been looking away thoughtfully, and at Macan's question seemed to bring all of his attention back to the matter at hand. 'Use the Force, and focus. You'll be fine.'

'Just relax?' Macan raised his eyebrows. 'We're about to throw ourselves into mortal danger against three times as many enemies. On top of that, we don't even know if Li New is even still alive.'

'He's alive,' Codan said. 'And as far as I can tell so is Rylo. For now, at least.'

'I don't get it,' Macan wondered. 'Why haven't they killed them already?'

'You don't know?' Codan asked, a little surprised. He thought his old friend was smarter than that. 'I think we can safely assume Li New and Rylo were to be tortured in front of you, as another method of trying to turn you to the dark side.'

Macan's soul sunk with the weight of understanding. Li New and Rylo's suffering was because of him, because he was weak and emotional.

'No,' Codan told him, sensing his thoughts. 'Don't think of it like that. In a way they're actually still alive because of you. If Kreygor didn't think he could turn you then Li New and his Padawan would be dead already. Now you must relax.'

Macan tried to do as his friend recommended. He closed his eyes and took a slow, deep breath, seeking clarity of the mind. Though he was eternally glad his friend was still alive, he couldn't help but focus on the fact that Kreygor truly believed that he could be turned. It hurt to know that people saw him as weak and manipulatable, but he couldn't deny the fact that he had never done a thing to make anyone see otherwise. Worry began to gnaw at him. What if it was true? Would he, upon finding himself in the wrong circumstances, give in to his base emotions and submit to the dark?

He shook it off, and concentrated on remembering the Jedi meditation techniques he had learned at the Academy. Slowly, the thought began to fade, and the worry dissipated. True peace of mind eluded him though, as a beeping from Codan's R2 astromech droid put them both into alert mode.

'We're coming up on the hills,' Codan explained. 'Are you sure we're on exactly the same approach trajectory?'

Macan checked the control panel, then looked out of the viewing screen. 'Yes, I'm certain. It's that third hill on the right. An entire section of it is disguised by some kind of hologram.'

'Did you get that R2?' Codan asked. The silver and blue domed droid beeped its affirmative. 'Alright, now plug in.'

The little droid whistled excitedly and extended its interface into the cockpit's computer terminal.

'What's going on?' Macan asked.

'My R2 unit will fly the ship into the hangar,' Codan explained, before turning back to the droid. 'Take us down

low, and try to fly a little recklessly. Think of yourself as a Dark Jedi.'

The droid beeped in nervous confusion, but soon went back to its duty.

'So, what are we going to be doing?' Macan asked, a little baffled.

Codan smiled and opened the side hatch. 'Going down,' he said, pointing down to the forest as the wind from outside swirled around him.

'I don't know what this plan is,' Macan told him. 'But I don't like it already.'

'Just give yourself to the Force, and jump,' Codan instructed. 'You will not come to harm.'

'I'm sure there'll be plenty of opportunities for coming to harm later.'

A hint of amusement flashed across Codan's eyes, but vanished immediately. Li New's situation meant now was the time to be serious and focussed. Seeing the look of determination on his friend's face, Macan understood also, and stepped up to the hatch.

'When we hit the ground, follow me as fast as you can,' Codan told him. 'We must get to Li New before the Dark Jedi realise what's going on, or they will kill him.'

Macan nodded, trying once again to free his mind into the Force.

'It's time,' Codan observed as the hill came ever closer. 'Are you ready?'

Macan gripped the saber tightly and took in another deep breath. 'As I'll ever be.'

'Alright. No need to rush now R2. Give us as much time as you can.'

The droid beeped again, and took the ship down low so that it almost touched the tree tops.

'Let's go,' Codan ordered, and leapt from the craft. Macan hesitated just a moment, before a reassurance from the Force prompted him to jump as well. He passed through the canopy of trees, and the Dark Jedi transport and R2-G3 vanished from his vision.

The ground approached rapidly, and he hit the floor hard, allowing the Force to flow through him. Strengthened by its energies, his leg muscles took the strain with little difficulty and he continued forward into a roll. Codan left him barely enough time to return to his feet and cast a note of thanks to the Force before he had caught up from his own landing spot.

'Come on,' the Jedi said. 'This way, and quickly.'

Macan followed as fast as his Force motivated legs would carry him.

In the heart of the Dark Jedi structure, Karynna and Raelag were carefully monitoring their respective control panels when a warning sound beeped annoyingly. Karynna reached to her instruments and entered a command, prompting a large image to appear on the holographic display in the centre of the room. On it they could see a transport approaching the hills.

'Is that Ghyron?' Raelag asked. 'It is about time.'

'Maybe he had a little trouble handling our former Padawan,' Karynna smiled wickedly.

'Always some drama,' Raelag agreed with a shake of the head, and pressed a few buttons on the communication array. 'Now what's he playing at?' he barked. 'He's not even answering my hails.'

'Raelag, dearest,' Karynna smirked. 'Surely by now you should be used to Ghyron's entire lack of regard for Kreygor's command. I would not be surprised if he's killed Macan rather than recapture him, just to show Kreygor yet more disrespect.'

'This is hardly the time for petty squabbling. Not with the Jedi closing in on us.'

'Well I know that and you know that,' Karynna agreed. 'But this is Ghyron, after all.'

'I think I'll be having words about this later,' Raelag decided. 'Deactivate the cloak and let him land. I will inform Kreygor.'

'Very well,' Karynna said, turning her hands to the control panel underneath the hangar observation screen.

Raelag moved to another nearby control section and pressed a button. 'Master Kreygor,' he said. 'The transport approaches.'

'Understood,' a voice came back. 'Have Macan brought to me immediately. I will teach him the consequences of this defiance!'

'As you wish,' Raelag obeyed, and flicked the communication switch to off.

'Well now,' Karynna tutted. 'The naughty little failed Jedi is going to have his wrists slapped.'

'It's all a lot of fuss about nothing if you ask me,' Raelag said. 'Macan's potential is only average at best.'

'Oh,' Karynna taunted him. 'Are you feeling a little jealous of the attention he is getting, my sweet?'

'Of course not,' the Zabrak snapped, causing the Twi'lek to smile widely. 'Do not tempt me to hurt you, for I would not hesitate.'

Karynna pretended to tremble a little in her seat, before casting him a playful grin. 'Stop teasing me,' she toyed, excitement flashing across her eyes.

'You will wish I was teasing you,' he promised. 'Now come with me to retrieve the prisoner. Again.'

'It's always work with you, isn't it?' she moaned as she rose to her feet, before crossing the room to him. 'Why do you never find time to enjoy yourself, or allow someone to enjoy *you*?'

He sneered down at her and turned away, ignoring her advances. She couldn't help but smile as he left the room. In her interactions with males she either greatly pleased or highly irritated, and she did so relish the chance to do either.

She followed him through the nearby equipment store room, and they appeared in the hangar as the ship came in to land. They observed as the transport touched down and its engines expired.

'What's he doing?' Raelag asked when the side hatch didn't open.

'Something is wrong here,' Karynna realised, instinctively clenching a hand around her saber. 'There is treachery in the air.'

Raelag observed her posture as she reached out to the dark side, and seemed to agree. He readied his own double edged weapon and moved towards the craft. As he approached, he ignited his saber and flicked the door release switch using the Force. As the hatch hissed open, it revealed the interior of the craft and the sight of a playful R2 droid as it beeped at them. Quickly sprinting to the panel at the back of the hangar, he thumbed the communicator.

'Kreygor. We have a problem.'

'That is it,' Codan said, pointing through the trees to the small metal construction just visible.

'What's it?'

'The other entrance Li New informed me of.'

'Through the Force?' Macan finally understood as they jogged up towards it. 'And here's me not even able to sense him at all.'

'You're just out of practise,' Codan assured him. 'And for some reason the Force is a little clouded around this planet. Sensing anything at all is difficult.'

'That makes me feel so much better,' Macan moaned.

'Look around,' Codan instructed. 'If we can just find their sabers, hopefully the attention of the Dark Jedi will be drawn to the hangar just long enough for us to get in and free them.'

'Awful lot of hoping we're doing,' Macan realised, before spotting Li New's saber a short distance away by a large tree, which Codan beckoned to him using the Force. It took a little more rummaging to find Rylo's buried in the scrub, but they were soon passing through the steel doorway and heading into the underground structure.

Luckily the entrance made little noise, but as it slid shut behind them Macan scowled as the familiar dank smell of the structure hit his nostrils. The sight of the dark corridor did little for his unease, but nevertheless, he continued to follow as Codan pressed on towards the heart of the facility.

They came to come to a place that Macan recognised. The new corridor, which was better lit than the one they had just come from, was one of the corridors he had been forced along earlier. They stood pretty much where his two captors had spoken with the Gran, the door nearby leading back out to the hangar. He pointed it out to Codan, who nodded.

'Li New and Rylo are this way,' the Jedi whispered. 'Not too far away either.'

Macan followed as Codan made his way down the corridor, passing two doors and approaching another on their right. The door was directly opposite an adjoining corridor, and they moved with extreme caution, knowing they could now be spotted from any one of several directions.

'This it?' Macan asked.

'I believe so,' Codan confirmed. 'If the situation has not changed, they will be guarded, so you free them while I hold off the Dark Jedi.'

'Alright,' he nodded his agreement, much rather having it that way than the opposite way round.

'Get ready,' Codan said, his own saber in his hand as he reached out towards the door activate switch. Just before he touched it, they were both surprised by a blaring alarm that echoed down the corridors.

'I have a bad feeling about this,' Macan stated as Codan ignited his saber.

'No time for sneaking around now,' the Jedi decided, and opened the door. As they rushed inside, the Togruta female turned to face them, a shocked but alert expression on her face. Over the com system, Kreygor's voice suddenly bellowed out into the room.

'Xeroque,' he shouted. 'Kill the Jedi prisoners! Kill them immediately!'

In a flash the Dark Jedi's red saber ignited, and she turned towards Li New and Rylo with slaughter in her eyes. Codan was moving before Macan had even sent the move command to the rest of his body. The Jedi leapt forward, his purple saber cutting through the air to parry the attacking blade just inches from Li New's chest.

'Kill him Xeroque,' a voice shouted as the two sabers clashed again. Macan ignited Codan's green saber and spun to face it. He realised he had no need to worry. It was just the Gran, who was now also secured to the wall by energy bonds. It seemed he had even managed to drive his own comrades to despair.

'Macan!' Codan shouted as he ducked and parried. 'Free the prisoners. Hurry!'

Macan nodded and moved over to Li New and Rylo, scanning his eyes over the nearby control panel that governed the restraints. He could make little sense of it.

'Makes a change, you doing the rescuing,' Li New greeted his old friend with a smile.

'Nobody is more surprised than I,' Macan reckoned. He checked the control panel again as the combatants continued to fight behind him, but as far as he could tell he would need a code to deactivate the energy bonds, and there was little time for that. Figuring he had no other option, he raised the saber and drove it deep into the control board. The damage caused it to crackle and short out, and he quickly retracted the saber as it gave way with a small explosion. All around the room the energy bonds vanished, and the prisoners found themselves free again.

Ro-Donic rubbed his wrists and quickly vacated the room, not wanting to be there once all of the Jedi were armed and fighting. Though the Gran was a weak coward, Xeroque realised he had a point. To fight four opponents by herself would be stupid, so after parrying Codan's saber aside once more, she turned and followed him in retreat.

Codan relaxed and took a heavy breath, before copying Macan in deactivating his saber.

'Thank you both,' Li New expressed his gratitude, mirrored by his apprentice.

'How are you feeling?' Codan asked.

'Better than earlier,' Li New explained. 'They've left us alone for the last couple of hours, and we've been able to heal ourselves somewhat.'

'You can heal yourself a whole lot more when we're out of here,' Codan urged. 'Let's go. We have a ship in the hangar.'

'No,' Li New told him. 'We must take Kreygor now. This operation must be stopped.'

Codan raised his eyebrows at his fellow Jedi. 'We're not exactly set to take on a group of Dark Jedi here,' he pointed out. 'Besides, Master Reeldo and the others are on their way.'

'They may arrive too late,' Li New insisted. 'If we retreat now then the Dark Jedi will be allowed to escape and harm others. I could not rest if that were to happen.'

Codan considered their options. His friend was right, but the four of them would struggle to take on five enemies in their current state. It would all depend on one thing. 'It's up to you Macan,' he explained.

'What? Why?'

'We're really going to need your help. We need to know you are with us here, one hundred percent.'

The former Jedi apprentice thought it over. If he could do anything to stop Kreygor and his Dark Jedi then he should, even if it meant the end of him. 'I'll do everything I can. You have my word.'

Codan nodded, satisfied with the response, and handed the retrieved sabers to Li New and Rylo.

'Let's go.'

'And may the Force be with us,' Li New added.

The Jedi quickly moved through the structure, searching for any signs of activity. Turning into one corridor on the opposite side of the facility to the prison, they spotted Raelag and Karynna looking a little confused as to what was going on. The Dark Jedi saw them approaching, and vanished through a door part way down the corridor's length. Neither the Jedi or Macan spoke any words as they followed, eventually appearing in a large square room.

Immediately upon entering, the Jedi could sense the anger and bitterness that seemed to resonate from the walls of the room. It appeared they had found the area where their enemies delved most deeply into the dark side and practised their skills on each other. Even to Macan, the room almost stank from the dark arts and their influence.

The floor of the room was plain, cold metal, and though its illumination levels were low, they could clearly make out the strange symbols that were painted on the walls and ceiling in some kind of red dye. On the furthest wall, the largest and most twisted symbol of them all was easily visible, and beneath it, the Dark Jedi stood rallied around their leader.

'I am greatly amused,' Kreygor said. 'They mean to stand against us.'

'It's over, Kreygor,' Codan told him. 'No longer shall you be free to inflict pain upon this galaxy. We will give you one chance to yield, otherwise we will be left with no choice but to destroy you.'

The volume of the laughter that burst from within Kreygor could probably have matched that of a Rancor's growl, Codan believed. The man must indeed be a fool, no matter how powerful he was, to underestimate the Jedi to such a degree.

'Well,' Kreygor managed as he allowed his laughter to subside. 'Such typical Jedi hauteur.' His Dark Jedi readied their sabers, instinctively knowing what was coming next. 'Kill them all!'

Igniting their sabers, the Dark Jedi obeyed their master and charged down their opponents. In reply, the blue, green and purple blades of the Jedi flared into existence as they moved forward into the fray. On their flank, Macan cast aside his doubts and nervousness as battle loomed. Negative emotion would do him little good here, and he gave control of his actions to the Force, hoping that it would be enough to save him.

As the two lines of adversaries neared, all eight sabers were brought onto the offensive, and battle was joined. Codan parried and countered against the double-bladed saber of Raelag, as Li New and Rylo teamed up against Xeroque and Karynna.

'I owe you this one, Macan,' Ro-Donic said, his foul temper evident due to the circumstances of Macan's escape earlier. The Gran swung his saber round, but the former Padawan brought his saber up and managed to parry the attack aside.

Ro-Donic's attack came on, but with his mind clear and his focus governed by the Force, Macan was able to defend time and again. He had almost forgotten the astonishing things the body could do when supported by the Force,

and the speed and power he was able to channel into his arms surprised him. The Gran seemed very disgruntled as a partly trained former apprentice held him at bay.

A short distance away, Codan and Raelag put Macan and Ro-Donic to shame as their sabers moved at blinding speeds. The Jedi parried left, right and left again, before leaping over one of Raelag's low attacks. As he somersaulted over the Zabrak's head, his purple blade flashed, forcing his opponent to quickly duck and roll aside. Codan landed right behind Ro-Donic, and the Gran was stopped dead in his tracks as the Jedi's saber burst out through his chest.

Not even pausing to confirm the kill, Codan spun back in to action as Raelag charged him down again. Macan stepped back and watched Ro-Donic fall, a look of disbelief on the Gran's repulsive face.

Still observing from the back of the room, Kreygor shrugged off the loss of one of his warriors, quite appeased and not at all surprised that Ro-Donic had been the first to fall. He had been tempted to kill the useless Gran when all this was over anyway. As the battle and Ro-Donic's death fuelled his bloodlust, he cracked an evil smile, switched on his saber and charged forward into the fray, intent on showing these puny Jedi the true power of the dark side.

Li New had just managed to catch Karynna off guard and hurl her back with a Force push as Kreygor came at him. The Dark Jedi's red saber came down in a powerful arc, and Li New had to put maximum energy into his parry in order to deflect the attack. The Jedi stepped back as Kreygor came on again, his attacks fuelled by his deep connection to the dark side.

With Li New standing against this mighty threat, San Rylo found himself wanting to rush to assist his mentor. However, the young Jedi and his blue saber were already stretched to their utmost capability in defending the attacks of the assertive Xeroque.

Macan stepped in to help Codan against the wickedly fast saber of Raelag, but he only managed two simple parries before the shrieking purple Twi'lek charged him down. After quickly ducking her first attack, he was forced to leap back and then parry the next. As she came forward, Macan could see she was of a much greater skill level than his former Gran opponent, but he pressed on doggedly, heartened by new belief. As she realised the pressure of her attack was starting to wear him down, her face twisted into an expression of delight.

Macan's situation was pretty much echoed all across the floor. In each of the individual duels, the Dark Jedi furiously attacked their opponents, who were forced to defend with all the determination they could muster.

Seated in his small black fighter, Ghyron entered the atmosphere of the planet, knowing very well what was probably happening in the facility at that moment. He had followed the Jedi and the failure here in the stolen transport, and though his lust for battle cried to him to go down and participate, he nevertheless managed to restrain himself for now.

He had found plenty of time to think since his retreat in the Raddus system. Everything that had gone wrong today, from the loss at Gorek II, through to the Jedi discovering the hidden base, had been the fault of one man's feeble orders and delusions. Under no circumstances was he was going to go down there and rush to that idiot Kreygor's aid, not after his pitiful decisions had brought an abrupt end to months of hard work and planning.

For a man who claimed to know nothing of fear, it was clear now that Kreygor had let his choices be dominated by it. He had been so caught up in trying to prove himself a great warrior and leader, that he had lost sight of the bigger picture. Stupid decisions would not help defeat the Jedi, and that was all Ghyron truly wanted. He wanted it more than anything.

So he had made his own decision. Though their fall had been delayed, the Jedi would do just that. He vowed to make sure of it.

The battle in the duelling arena continued to rage, and the combatants found themselves forced or drawn towards the centre of the room. In such close proximity, it was a minor miracle that nobody was immediately struck down. In a phenomenal display of saber skills, the fighters continued to parry, duck, roll or jump out of harm's way.

After dodging away from Raelag once more, Codan found himself having to evade another red saber as he stepped within range of Kreygor. The Dark Jedi leader relished the chance to display his skills to another of his enemies, and attacked again.

Rylo continued to match the skill of Xeroque, but was under such constant pressure that he could not find chance to counter. Li New found himself free to rush to his Padawan's aid, and together they began to push the Togruta back. Karynna stepped in to even the odds, almost cackling with glee as she attacked the young Jedi.

With his original target under the attack of his leader, Raelag smiled at the chance to clash with Macan, believing that surely the weak Jedi reject could not withstand his assault. Macan backed off as the Zabrak charged forward aggressively, parrying for all he was worth and barely able to match the superior combat skills of his opponent.

Li New was aware that they could not continue to be dominated like this, as it would surely not be long until one of them fell. Taking a chance, he goaded Xeroque into making an obvious attack, and when she took the bait he sidestepped at the last possible moment, leaving her defences wide open for a killing blow.

As the green saber flashed up at her, she displayed blindingly fast reactions in ducking aside, lucky that the

attack only scored a glancing hit on her left arm, slicing down into her humerus. She snarled, partly in pain, partly in fury at herself for falling for such a cheap trick. Reduced to a single handed grip, her attacks lost much of their strength, and a determined Li New pressed on, eager to bring an end to the duel.

Kreygor grit his teeth, frustrated that all four of their enemies still fought on. He had believed his pupils stronger than this, but found himself now contemplating their weaknesses. Why could they not bring about the end of such meagre opponents? Even the young Padawan and the pitiful failure still stood. This anger gave new fuel to his attacks, and each one proved more difficult for Codan to parry as they battered his defences.

Then, almost as if Kreygor had willed it, Macan fell and his saber clattered away as he was hit in the face by a powerful kick from Raelag. As the Zabrak prepared to strike the killing blow with his double bladed saber, Kreygor paused for a split second to savour the moment. There was no hesitation on Codan's part, however, his purple saber flashing to block Raelag's strike just inches from Macan's face. Snarling in frustration, Raelag once again engaged the Jedi.

The Zabrak was not the only one annoyed with the proceedings. Kreygor found the hate that swelled in his chest was now directed at his own students as much as it was the Jedi. The incident with Macan went beyond the boundaries of uselessness. With Xeroque visibly faltering, Karynna unable to defeat a lowly Padawan and Raelag wasting the chance to destroy a helpless opponent, his Dark Jedi had proven themselves failures time and time again. Obviously they were not as powerful as they had often boasted. Had it been purely his own abilities that had carried them all this far? Did they even deserve his leadership?

Kreygor felt pure rage building inside, and he welcomed the power it bestowed upon him. With a roar, he unleashed a torrent of dark side energy into the melee, regardless of who was in its path. Differentiating between friend and foe meant little to him now, as the will of the dark side urged him to dominate and destroy.

The combatants before him braced themselves as the Force push hit them, some drawing on the Force themselves to try and deflect or absorb it. Macan had only just staggered to his feet and gathered his saber when the energy hit him like a tidal wave, lifting him airborne and hurling him out into the corridor where he landed in a stunned heap.

It pleased Kreygor to see these Force-sensitive warriors, supposedly powerful ones at that, stumble and fall before his sheer power. All around him they clambered to their feet or steadied themselves to continue the fight, but his twisted mind had just switched on to an alternate course of action, one that would give to him an even greater pleasure.

It was clear now that there was no future for him at this training facility, and it galled him to know it was Macan that had taken that away from him, escaping and interfering as he had done. Perhaps he should have counted on that resistance, but the incompetence displayed by his own students had proven unforeseeable, and entirely unforgivable. Now the actions of his tormentors would cost them all dearly.

Through no fault of his own, all of his plans had unravelled today. The anger and hatred in his soul demanded retribution, demanded destruction, and he now saw Macan as the perfect outlet for this fury. The perfect victim.

He had known all along that the Jedi reject was the weakest one among them by far, at least in terms of physical strength, and seeing him tumble helplessly through the air had only proven this. Had he been granted the time to bend the former Padawan to his will, Macan would have had the power of the dark side to strengthen him, and he would have had a promising new student and ally. But Macan had denied himself the opportunity to become something more, and deserved everything he would receive from that moment on.

Macan was weak. Not just physically, but mentally and emotionally as well. Nobody else among them had all these flaws. None of them could potentially be so utterly broken. Perhaps when it was done his craving for ruin might be appeased.

He would not feel for the man he had hoped to turn. He did not have that kind of emotion in him, and Macan had brought his doom down upon himself.

With the devious plan fully-formed, he moved into action, intent on having his fun and then taking his leave. He strode through the battle, blocking any blade that came at him and casting their wielders back as he bore down on his intended target.

'Hold them!' he demanded, issuing his last order to the followers who had disappointed him so completely. From this moment on their fate would be of their own making. If any of them survived, he would consider finding it in himself to respect them a little more in the future.

Believing their leader to be following a course of action that would win them the day, Raelag, Karynna and Xeroque stepped in to cover him as he left the room, stopping the Jedi there from interfering with whatever Kreygor had planned for Macan.

The former Padawan had not even managed to return to his feet yet, so Kreygor took him in a powerful Force grip, dragged him upright, and slammed him against the wall of the corridor.

The fear in Macan's eyes intensified as he approached, and he could not have hoped for a more satisfying response. This was going to be too easy, he realised with amusement. His prisoner could barely even bring his lightsaber round to defend himself as he struggled against his invisible prison.

'Weak, pathetic fool!' he roared, hurling Macan down the corridor with a cast of his arm. Twisting instinctively as he fell, Macan somehow prevented his saber from slicing into his own flesh as he hit the metal floor.

Kreygor stalked forward, enjoying the view as Macan scrambled back away from him and into the equipment store room, eventually making it back to his feet.

'You have made incorrect decisions today,' Kreygor told him. 'Now it's time to pay the price for those mistakes.'

Once he reached the centre of the room, Macan readied his saber and took up a fighting stance, despite his obvious intimidation. Perhaps Kreygor could rely on a fight from him after all.

Macan's mind raced as he attempted to form some kind of plan to get out of this, and he breathed long and deep, seeking for calm. There was no possibility he could fight Kreygor one on one and expect to last longer than a few seconds, but he needed to keep him busy until Li New and Codan were free to assist. Remembering their conversation earlier, he knew Kreygor liked the sound of his own voice. If he could keep the Dark Jedi talking long enough...

'I thought you were the powerful one,' Macan taunted. 'Yet you pick on the weakest of your enemies. Is that what it means to follow the path of the dark side?'

'Yes, I *am* the powerful one,' Kreygor snarled, bringing his saber around in a loose attack that Macan easily stepped away from. 'Compared to me, *everybody* is weak.'

'Then surely, wouldn't someone of your abilities prefer a more rigorous challenge?'

The red blade flashed again, and Macan parried with little difficulty. He could not figure out what the Dark Jedi was up to, other than toying with him.

'You appeal to my sense of honour when I have none,' Kreygor chuckled. 'Fool. That is one of the reasons why you are the weakest of us. As if your physical inadequacies weren't pathetic enough, your mind and your heart are just as devoid of strength.'

'At least I'm consistent,' Macan offered, before their blades clashed again. This time, Macan's saber was parried aside easily, allowing Kreygor to kick him in the gut. The cold floor met Macan's back hard as he fell.

'Despite your weaknesses you still have all the accursed nobility and sentiment I've come to expect from Jedi,' Kreygor said as Macan struggled back to his feet. 'Even now, I realise are just trying to distract me long enough for somebody to save you. That, perhaps if you can just keep me talking long enough somebody will do just that.'

'It was worth a shot,' Macan conceded.

'Not if you consider this, failure. What if talking is exactly what I want to do?'

'Honestly, I wouldn't be surprised,' Macan countered with a shrug, belying his inner confusion.

'Do you think I can not see right through you? Do you think I am blind as to why you have sought isolation all these years? Because I am not. I know *exactly* why you turned your back on the Jedi Order.'

'You know nothing,' Macan told him, readying himself again. 'Or you would know I would never betray my friends and turn to the dark side as you have done.'

Macan swung Codan's green saber again, and as before Kreygor blocked with little effort, pushing Macan away with a laugh.

'Is that so?' Kreygor's grin remained. 'But I know your weakness, Macan. Your entire soul is defined by it. It stinks of it. The love you couldn't have.'

Macan instantly recoiled. His memory unloaded images and feelings into his mind's eye, bringing with them joy and pain, all at once soothing and unbearable.

'Yes, you are transparent to me,' Kreygor goaded him. 'It weakens you, and torments you. The love you could have had.'

'Shut up!' Macan snapped, his voice suddenly deep and guttural. 'Do not speak of it.'

'Ha ha ha,' Kreygor laughed. 'There it is. The pain and anger. Now draw close, and release it upon me.'

Macan snarled, more in annoyance at himself and his emotions than in response to his opponent's words. He was truly stunned by how quickly his anger had risen, and he forced himself to breathe deep, to relax. 'I shall not.'

'You will!' Kreygor promised. 'And though it will be your undoing you will not care. For would you not seek vengeance on the man who struck her down?'

'What?' Macan asked, comprehension eluding him for a short moment as the revelation threatened to shatter what was left of his soul.

'Mmmm,' Kreygor teased him further. 'I can not argue with your taste, Macan. She had such a pretty face, that one.'

'You?' Macan's heart thumped in his chest, and each beat felt like a thermal detonator. At last, after all these years, he stood opposite the bane of his existence, the cause of all the hurt and torment. Already, he felt his anger screaming for release, and his self control struggled to contain it. How had he not seen it earlier? How had he not *felt* it?

The part of his mind that was still clear fought with his trembling right arm, trying to keep it still and prevent it from taking action, for to attack in anger would be to take a step on the path towards the dark side, and there was not one piece of him that truly wanted that.

'Yes, so sweet, and yet so strong. She was a worthy adversary.'

The temptation to seek revenge grew almost too strong for Macan to bear, the memories of that fateful day now fresh in his mind. He considered action either way. Part of him understood that to back down would save his soul,

though it would cost him his life. Fear of death was not something he had ever felt, and it would be easy to release his saber and accept his fate, but that would mean missing this chance. Destroying Kreygor would not only satisfy his own desire for justice, it would also remove a threat capable of inflicting much harm on other innocent beings of the galaxy.

'You would have been so proud of her,' the Dark Jedi told him, a mocking tone evident in his voice.

But could he justify taking a life in such a manner? Would taking the path to destroying one menace be worth the price he would pay? Drawing upon those dark energies now begging for his use would turn him into that which he despised the most.

'It was indeed a pity,' Kreygor sneered malevolently, 'that I had to cut her down.'

The words inflicted more pain than any physical blade ever could, and Macan could take no more. His will was not strong enough to stand by and do nothing as this villain gloated of his ruining of lives. Though anguish threatened to cripple him, and tears threatened to blind him, he readied himself for battle. This man would pay for his crime, and by any means necessary. He raised his saber for the attack.

Kreygor smiled.

Xeroque backed away from Li New as he continued to search for a weakness. Slowly but surely, the fatigue in her sword arm was becoming evident, and the Jedi had detected her less aggressive style. He powered another attack home, forcing her to stumble, as nearby the sabers of Rylo and Karynna kept up their frenetic pace. In contrast to her ally, the young Twi'lek had not yet shown the slightest sign of fatigue. Her eyes were wild, her expression full of anger, and as she fought it appeared as if she might only just be getting warmed up. She screamed wickedly and swung her saber again, revelling in frenzied combat. Rylo calmly focused all of his energy into his arms and gave everything he'd got to match her blow for blow.

Still the bitter contest between Codan and Raelag persisted. The fighters forced each other back in turn, so closely matched in skill that nobody in their right mind would ever gamble on the outcome.

As the Zabrak attacked again, a sudden flicker of doubt passed across his face. Codan immediately sensed why, as Xeroque slumped to the floor, her body sliced in two where Li New's saber had just passed through it. Raelag was not given the time to regain his concentration, and he staggered back as Codan's blade sliced his saber hilt apart. The saber deactivated, the damage to the intricate equipment inside causing a short. He quickly threw the two halves to the floor as they sparked and died.

In less than a second the outcome of the battle had been decided. Li New and Rylo pressed Karynna back, and Raelag withdrew from Codan as he sought the telling blow. The Dark Jedi found themselves with so more space to back into...

Li New abruptly spun round and brought his saber up for defence, his actions automatically triggered by the Force. A wave of blaster fire came at them, and he caught sight of Rylo going down in his peripheral vision. Codan grimaced as he saw Ghyron in the room's entrance, his blasters drawn and firing on full automatic.

The two Jedi deflected the remaining attacks away, with Li New quickly moving to cover his injured apprentice. One of the blaster shots had passed right through the Padawan's shoulder, and he groaned in pain as he rolled over on the floor.

Raelag and Karynna saw this as their chance, and hastily made their getaway. Once they were safely into the corridor, Ghyron vanished after them, pausing only to send a mocking glare in Codan's direction.

'No!' Li New demanded, as Codan moved to give chase. 'It's Kreygor we must find. He has Macan.'

'What about Rylo?' Codan asked.

Li New knelt down and checked the wound, as the young Jedi grit his teeth in pain.

'The wound is not life-threatening,' he explained. 'But it could do with immediate medical attention.'

'Just get Kreygor,' Rylo agonised. 'I'll be alright.'

'We will return soon,' Li New promised, and the two Jedi quickly moved away.

'Where have you been?' demanded Raelag, as the fleeing Dark Jedi moved rapidly towards the hangar and their escape.

'Waiting,' replied Ghyron coldly.

'Waiting for what? For us all to die?'

'No.'

'Then for what?' Raelag bellowed. 'If you had been there to help we would not have found ourselves in that situation.'

'I could not interfere, and would not, if it meant coming to Kreygor's aid.'

'What is that supposed to mean?' Raelag asked, before understanding came to him. 'Traitor! He is your master!'

'He is not my master,' Ghyron explained, his voice showing no emotion. 'He is nothing.'

'This is unacceptable,' Raelag claimed. 'We should go back. Together we will easily crush the Jedi. Karynna?'

The Twi'lek smiled wickedly as she reached out to the hangar door controls. 'Didn't you see?' she explained.

'He had no problem leaving us to meet our doom. So I have none doing the same for him.'

'Do not worry,' Ghyron told them as he moved through the entrance and towards his ship. 'I have spoken with our *true* master, and he agrees with this course of action. Kreygor has demonstrated his distinct capabilities for failure. We will not rise to the height of our power and defeat the Jedi without much stronger leadership.'

'And you have a better person in mind, I take it?' the Zabrak enquired.

'Indeed,' Ghyron confirmed, prompting Raelag to follow into the hangar, his interest piqued. 'The master has requested our presence on Terrinak. We will be taking instruction directly from him now.'

Karynna and Raelag gave each other an excited glance. They had heard many great things about their enigmatic supreme master, and had long wished to prove themselves to him and allow him to improve their power. They took to the skies and left Do'Naar behind without giving Kreygor a further thought.

Kreygor stepped back, then once more, as Macan's onslaught came at him. The green saber flashed again and again, the attacks wild and erratic, full of venom.

He reached out with the Force, and delved into Macan's psyche. Amongst the rampant emotions, he sensed things were going well. The former Jedi was on the verge of giving into his hate and anger completely, and when it happened, he would be left an emotional and mental wreck. Then all that would remain would be to dominate and destroy Macan in battle, annihilating the pathetic failure completely and utterly.

Sensing Macan needed just a little more coercing, Kreygor drew upon the power of telekinesis, and sent his opponent sprawling backwards with a mighty demonstration of the Force ability he possessed.

The former Jedi apprentice crashed through one of the many storage racks arrayed around the perimeter of the room, and collapsed to the floor surrounded by spare installation and starship components.

It took a moment for Macan to regain his focus and struggle to his feet. His body ached, his legs were tired, and his heart was heavy with the understanding of what was about to occur. He felt as though there was nothing more he could do to contain it, and it was the only way he could see of ridding himself of this malicious rival. Though the act would bring with it an evil into him far worse, nowhere could he find the strength to care.

'Is that all you can muster?' Kreygor scolded him. 'Your feelings for that woman couldn't have been that strong if that was your best effort. Does her death not warrant more of an endeavour on your part?'

Though he hated himself for agreeing, Macan knew that those words were true. Desperation to avenge her death came over him, and he required more power, and quickly, if he was going to be able to achieve it. He closed his eyes, ready to accept his decision.

But in that moment, as the last shred of integrity threatened to leave him, the world around him slowed. In the background, the drone of the structure's power generators faded from earshot, as did the hum of the sabers. The only sounds he could hear were the long, slow beats of his heart, and each breath of air that seemed to last as long as an eternal breeze.

Under no circumstances could this be what it would feel like to give himself to the dark side, he realised. There was no anger or frustration left in him, but rather peace of mind the like of which he had never before experienced. Basking in its presence for a moment, he came to the conclusion that he could only be dreaming, but when he commanded his eyes to open they obeyed.

He was still in the same room, he observed, but it was not dark and foreboding as it had been. Light radiated from an unknown source, bathing the area in a wonderful warm glow. Kreygor was absent. In his place, a semi-transparent blue and white luminosity shifted and changed until taking on a shape that could be described as roughly humanoid. Within the blue, the white continued to morph and sharpen, taking on the appearance of someone from his past. His eyes grew wider, and he breathed ever deeper.

It was her.

'Peta?' he tried to ask, but no sound materialized. He tried to move the rest of his body, but it would not respond, as if it were under a debilitating influence of some sort. As the apparition began to take slow steps towards him, his mind sought an answer as to what was going on.

At first he considered it may be a trick of the dark side, taunting him with his heart's true desire, but he quickly dismissed that idea. He had sensed the influence of the dark side within Kreygor, and had almost given into it himself, and this was definitely not of its foul making.

It was possible that this was all a hallucination, his mind gifting him this one last vision before he fully gave himself over to the dark side and his own ruin.

But that could not be it either. He did not know how, as it was surely impossible, but he sensed her in the room with him, and the same feeling of warmth and comfort he had always enjoyed when in her company enveloped him. Reaching out with the Force, he gently touched the essence before him, and all of his pain was instantly forgotten.

She opened her soul to him, and joy, passion, and a dozen other emotions he thought lost to him flooded back through him, invigorating his spirit. He couldn't remember what had been happening before, and couldn't think how her presence there was even possible, because nothing else in the galaxy mattered, or even existed, in that moment.

It was her. It was Peta.

She now stood so close that he could have reached out and touched her, if just his arms would move, and it were actually possible to touch such a spirit. He urged himself to try, but his body still would not respond. She looked right into his eyes, and smiled.

Despite the elation washing over him, a colossal guilt suddenly came down upon his shoulders. With all his heart he willed himself to speak, to tell her how sorry he was for his behaviour, and the choice he had just accepted. He would have died from the shame if she didn't relax him as she did.

She moved one finger to her lips, as if to quieten his concern. Through the Force, he could sense her feelings, almost as clear as his own. She didn't want him to feel that pain any more, or to suffer in solitude. More importantly, with everything she had she was willing him not to make this fatal mistake and lose himself in a futile bid to avenge her.

Then she tilted her head slightly and gently shook it. Upon her face, her eyes and smile formed an expression of amusement, and to Macan this proved the most amazing thing. For even in this, his most hopeless hour, she had taken the seriousness of his situation and had cast it aside with her light of heart. As he felt the last shred of the allure of the dark side leave his body and mind, she opened her mouth to speak.

'You are never alone,' she reminded him compassionately, and then came closer, moving as if to kiss him. As their lips neared, he closed his eyes again, lost in the moment and oblivious to the fact that he would never truly touch her again.

But that didn't matter. Because it was her. It was Peta.

His eyes snapped open and he took a sharp intake of breath. Kreygor was again standing before him, his scarlet lightsaber held at the ready, illuminating his malevolent face with its red glow.

Before he even understood why, he turned off the lightsaber in his hand and lowered the hilt to his side. Kreygor watched him with what was perhaps a hint of disbelief in his eyes, before it was quickly replaced by an entire mass of disgust.

'You disappoint me,' Kreygor told him. 'Again.'

'Yeah,' Macan confessed. 'I've been doing that a lot lately, disappointing people. But I won't disappoint the one who matters.'

'I killed the woman you loved!' Kreygor yelled. 'And now I am before you. Take your retribution!'

As his answer, Macan tossed the saber aside. It hit the metal floor with a clank and rolled away into the shadows. Kreygor watched it for a moment before shifting his gaze back towards Macan.

'As you wish,' the Dark Jedi understood, and moved forward, his saber raised for the killing strike.

Macan didn't need to think about his decision again. With his head held high for the first time in years, he stood ready to accept his fate. As he awaited the end, a green blur flashed before him and the wicked crack of sabers colliding rung in his ears as Kreygor parried. He looked to his right to see Li New and Codan in the room's entrance. Using the Force, Li New summoned his thrown lightsaber back to him, and the two of them charged into action.

Macan stepped back out of the way as his two friends took on the challenge. Their sabers swung round onto the attack as the expression of anger on Kreygor's face intensified to near demonic proportions. He swung his own saber round in defence and parried both attacking sabers in one stroke, and before Li New could regain his balance, he threw him aside using the power of the Force.

Codan quickly moved back onto the offensive, but Kreygor rolled out of the way and held his left arm out. The Jedi watched, annoyed, as his own green saber landed in Kreygor's awaiting hand. The blade ignited, and Kreygor charged forward with both sabers flailing, a colourful dance of death that Codan had to retreat from. His own purple blade flashed left and right with great speed as he tried to fight off the assault.

As quick as he could Li New leapt back to his feet and rushed forward. Kreygor whirled around, parrying Li New's attack as he continued to harass Codan with the other saber.

Macan watched with respect and admiration for his old friends. They left him a little awe struck, their skill level far greater than what they had been when he had last seen them at the Academy. Neither of them displayed any signs of fear or anxiety as they took on this formidable enemy.

The fight raged on, and Kreygor was pressed back out into the corridor. Now in a more confined space, the two Jedi found it difficult to attack at the same time, and Kreygor sought this as an advantage. His sabers came around again, and Codan quickly back stepped. The green blade in Kreygor's left hand severed one of the pipes fastened to the wall, and an oily liquid spewed out across the floor.

Codan found himself standing on a very slippery surface, and was easily pushed to the floor by Kreygor's Force power, but as the red blade came down for the finishing blow Li New was there in time to parry the attack. The Jedi then ducked as his enemy's green saber flashed passed overhead, and Codan found time to jump back to his feet.

Deciding to give the Dark Jedi some of his own treatment, Li New used the Force to bend the oil pipe, pointing it straight towards Kreygor's face. The Dark Jedi faltered slightly and backed away, trying to clear his eyes of the dense fluid.

Macan stood watching the fight from just inside the corridor. Steadily getting more frustrated at his apparent uselessness, he decided he must do something constructive. Through a nearby door on his right, he caught a glimpse of a control panel, and peered inside the room. He realised he had found the heart of the facility. More control panels and monitors lined the walls of the room, and in the centre an enormous holographic display of the nearby systems was being projected from a device within the floor. In seconds Macan hit on an idea and moved into the room.

Kreygor was forced back even further, and again found himself in the duelling arena. Rylo had struggled to the back wall, and was sitting against it with a hand across his wound. Without being able to take up his saber he too was reduced to just a spectator as the conflict raged.

Glad of more room to move again, Codan and Li New spread out and attacked from both sides, but Kreygor, now totally immersed in the dark side, continued to wield both sabers with terrifying efficiency and neither Jedi could find a telling blow. As the fight fell further back into the room, they neared the fallen body of Ro-Donic, and with a simple command to the Force, Kreygor sent it sailing through the air towards his enemies.

Codan stepped back out of the body's flight path, but with split second reactions Kreygor altered its course and it crunched into the Jedi, bundling him over. However, the event was the opening Li New had been watching for. Though only for a millisecond, Kreygor's attention had been focused completely on taking Codan down. Li New's saber was already on the attack, and before Kreygor could react his left arm was severed just below the elbow. The forearm had not even started to fall before Li New's blade was coming around again, searching for the strike that would end it. He was stunned with near disbelief as the red blade in Kreygor's other hand came across in defence, and the force of the parry sent Li New stumbling.

Codan pushed the body of Ro-Donic off of him, flipped back onto his feet, and witnessed an astonishing sight. Kreygor, minus an arm but with a new expression on his face of absolute rage and ferocity, was proceeding to press Li New back with some of the fastest and strongest saber attacks he had ever seen. For a short moment he stood, finding himself almost unable to believe there were beings so evil, and so totally immersed in the dark arts that they could not even feel it when such pain was upon them. Shaking it off, he saw his green saber, still in the hand of Kreygor's severed arm, was lying not far away, and he summoned it to him.

Codan raced up behind Kreygor to attack once more, taking some of the pressure away from Li New, and the two Jedi began to force their enemy back.

Continuing to move and spin with staggering speed, Kreygor parried all three attacking sabers for several moments, but even he could not keep up such a defence. Li New deflected the red blade aside with all of his strength, leaving the Dark Jedi open to attack. Codan's purple blade thrust forward, effortlessly slicing through his chest, and pierced his heart.

The Jedi stepped back, and for a moment it seemed Kreygor was going to continue to attack despite his injury, but as the effects of the wound took over him, he finally fell to his knees in defeat. The grip of his right hand failed, and his saber fell to the floor. As the blade retracted, Kreygor's face changed to one of realisation. He wearily reached his arm toward the two Jedi, longing to take them both by the throats and throttle them, a task he would have thoroughly enjoyed performing.

As death came over him, he let out a final, deafening roar, and a torrent of Force lightning erupted from his outstretched hand. Taken by both the surprise and power of it, neither Li New or Codan found enough time to react, and they were sent sprawling through the air before crashing back to the hard metal floor.

Kreygor's arm dropped to his side, and then the lifeless body fell forward in a heap.

Codan groaned, managing to sit up through pain and clenched teeth to see their adversary lay beaten. It was finally over. Beside him Li New lay still, taking deep breaths and immersing himself in the Force for its support. It had been a truly exhausting day for both body and mind.

For several long moments the Jedi lay still still, only struggling back to their feet when Macan appeared at the entrance to the room. At the back wall, Rylo also stood and slowly made his way over to them, joining them in the relief

of the moment as they looked down upon their defeated enemy.

Codan could see something in Macan's eyes as he stared down at Kreygor's body.

'He told you,' the Jedi realised.

Macan nodded.

'I'm sorry,' Codan told him, unsure how Macan was going to react. 'I didn't mean for you to find out like this, but we had such little time, and your head needed to be clear. I couldn't risk telling you before.'

'It's alright, really' Macan told him calmly, and let out a relieved sigh. 'I'm fine now.'

Codan stretched out with the Force to sense Macan's emotions, and where once he would have sensed nerves, fear, and even anger, now he only sensed calm and contentment. Something big had happened, and not just Kreygor's death. Macan looked up at him and smiled a little in acknowledgement of his friend's concern.

'Well there's no use hanging around here,' Li New urged. 'Let's leave this place behind.'

'Yes,' Macan agreed. 'But give me a few minutes in the command room first. I figured something out.'

It was getting late in the day by the time they launched their ships. Codan and Li New took point in their X-Wings, with Codan flying the injured Rylo's craft. Behind them, Macan followed in the Dark Jedi transport, with Rylo and R2-G3 along for the ride. In a strange way Macan was glad that the Dark Jedi that had escaped had not taken this ship, as he had become quite attached to it. Besides, their decision made sense in one way, as their smaller fighters would obviously be more useful to them when they next found themselves in combat.

As they left the atmosphere, Macan initiated a scan of the surface, and grinned as a large explosion registered at the site of the Dark Jedi's facility.

'Nice move, Macan,' Codan's voice sounded out over the open communications channel.

'Some people really should put more consideration into their choice of power generators,' Macan explained with amusement. 'Some cheaper models are known to be quite dangerous when configured incorrectly.'

'Well no more Dark Jedi will be using that as a training ground, for sure.'

'And nobody else will ever be tortured within its confines,' Macan added.

'I am thankful for that,' Li New said, checking his controls. His readings indicated three more fighters were now approaching the planet, and he nodded with satisfaction as he saw their identification. 'A little late I'm afraid,' he said into his com unit. 'The party's over.'

'Is everyone alright?' Master Reeldo's voice came back. 'What happened?'

'Just another wonderful day in the life of a Jedi,' Codan explained.

Macan listened as his two friends discussed the events with the Rodian Jedi Master. It had been a long time since Macan had last spoken to him, and he wasn't sure what to say when Reeldo was informed of his presence.

'Macan?' the Rodian asked. 'I must admit to being a little surprised to hear of your involvement.'

'It is good to speak to you again, Master Reeldo,' Macan greeted him, remembering that Reeldo too had once shared a special connection with Peta, being her primary mentor on her way to becoming a Jedi Knight. 'It was quite a shock to me also.'

'I'm sure,' the Jedi Master said. 'There is much I have long wanted to discuss with you.'

'I understand,' Macan said, and then allowed himself a deep breath. 'And I'm finally ready.'

'That is good to hear,' Reeldo was pleased. 'Will you be accompanying us back to the Academy?'

'If that is no trouble master,' he replied after a moment's thought. 'There are people I need to speak to, and poor decisions that need rectifying.'

'Then let us waste no time. We will rendezvous back at Gorek II, and see if Captain Baska is ready to take us back to Yavin.'

'Sounds good to me,' Codan agreed.

'Let's go home,' Li New wished.

The six small vessels entered hyperspace once more.

The cool forest breeze felt good against Li New's face as he walked slowly through the grounds of the Jedi Academy. It had been two days since their return, and things seemed to be back to normal. Well, as normal as they could be for the Jedi anyway.

Beside him, Jedi Master Luke Skywalker strolled contently along. With the defeat of Kreygor, another one of the many enemies of peace had been removed from the galaxy. He was well aware that finding the remaining Dark Jedi would be a difficult task, but the loss of one of their most hidden training centres should at least halt their plans for a while.

'Tell me Wilcra,' Luke said. 'How is your apprentice?'

'Better, master,' Li New replied. 'The bacta treatment did a good job, but only rest and the Force will get him back to full health. Still, I don't think he minds having the chance to take it easy for a few days.'

'Well it's not like he hasn't earned it,' Luke admitted. 'Like all of you have done.'

'Thank you master,'

'I am truly proud of the way you handled yourselves facing an enemy as powerful as Kreygor. Not one among us enjoys those kind of situations.'

'Regardless, we would all enter those situations gladly. Defeating the likes of Kreygor is what is needed to ultimately free the galaxy from tyranny.'

Luke smiled. 'Spoken like a true Jedi.'

'Though the day was long and the battle arduous, I am glad that we found the hidden structure when we did,' Li New admitted. 'Had you not sensed danger at Gorek II then many more Dark Jedi would have been trained on Do'Naar and we never would have known.'

'Yes, we have been fortunate,' Luke agreed, and then looked across the courtyard. 'And I can not help but wonder, did the Force show me that vision purely so the facility could be destroyed, or for something else also?'

Li New followed his gaze towards the surprisingly calm looking Macan, sitting deep in thought on a low eroded wall. 'It's good that he's back,' he admitted.

'Yes,' Luke said. 'Macan will be a fine Jedi, if he can just learn to control his emotions.'

'He seems much calmer now,' Li New observed. 'Perhaps he is at peace at last.'

'It is a positive development,' Luke agreed. 'He does seem to be more relaxed and acceptant since his return, and the change has given me much hope.'

'I wonder what did happen out there?' Li New pondered.

'He made a choice. He faced the killer of the woman he loved and came out the other side a stronger man. It must have been hard, but in all truth it was the exact thing he needed.'

'Only when up against our greatest adversity do we discover our greatest strengths.'

'Indeed,' Luke nodded. 'I think Macan has finally found proof that he has got what it takes to be a Jedi. That belief was never truly in him before.'

'So what will happen next?'

'That is what I am about to find out,' Luke explained. 'If you will excuse me.'

Li New respectfully bowed his head, and took his leave as Luke made his way towards Macan. As the soft footsteps approached him, the newly reinstated Jedi Padawan rose to his feet and turned to face them.

'Master Skywalker,' he nodded.

'I trust you're settling back in ok?' the Jedi Master asked.

'Yes, thank you,' Macan answered.

'That's good,' Luke smiled. 'So your training can resume whenever you're ready.'

'Actually, I've wanted to get back into it from the moment I arrived. I've wasted far too much time. Mine and yours.'

'You've not wasted any of my time,' Luke assured him. 'You would have been wasting it, if you had continued your training without really being sure of yourself.'

Macan sighed. 'But I realise now I could have made things much easier on myself, and on others around me.'

'Try not to spend too much time getting lost in the past, thinking about what you could or should have done,' Luke explained. 'What has happened has happened and can not be changed. Instead, focus all your energies on the present, and the future.'

'I understand,' Macan nodded. 'And from now on I will.'

'I'm sure you will,' Luke told him. 'I've spoken with Codan. He hasn't taken an apprentice yet since earning his promotion, and I asked him what he thought about completing your training.'

'And?'

'He seems happy with the idea,' Luke explained. 'If that's alright with you?'

'It is,' Macan realised after a moment's thought.

'Your future was clouded for a long time,' Luke told him. 'It was never clear that you would return, but I thought it best that I keep this safe in case you did.'

Macan watched as Luke held out a saber hilt to him, and he immediately recognized it as the one that had once belonged to Peta, the one she had constructed when she became a Jedi Knight, the one she would have been using when Kreygor struck her down in battle.

'I always figured you would be its most obvious owner.'

Macan reached out and clasped the hilt with his hand, ignoring the flicker of doubt that passed through his mind, warning him against possessing an item that would be a constant reminder of the love he had lost. There would be no greater honour, he believed, than to carry it with him everyday, and to use it while he was helping to defend the innocent people of the galaxy. With it in his hands, he immediately felt safer, stronger somehow. There was no way for him to explain it. It just felt right.

'Thank you,' Macan nodded.

'Welcome back,' Luke said, and turned to walk away.

'She came to me,' Macan decided to say, prompting Luke to turn back and listen on, interested. 'When I was in the most desperate of need, when I was ready to give myself to the darkness, she came to me.' He shook his head slightly. 'She saved me.'

'I did wonder,' Luke smiled. 'It is an extremely difficult task to cast aside anger and confusion so quickly and so absolutely.'

'I don't understand it master,' Macan shrugged. 'I keep thinking it could only have been a dream, but it felt so real. It *was* so real.'

'You weren't dreaming,' Luke explained with a shake of the head. 'It's quite possible for Jedi that have become one with the Force to continue to communicate with us.'

'How?'

'Through the Force, all manner of wonderful things are possible,' Luke told him. 'For a time, I was able to see the spirit of the Jedi Master that had taught me. I would not have been able to rebuild the Jedi Order were it not for his guidance and support.'

'I'm never alone,' Macan realised.

'She will always be with you,' Luke nodded his confirmation, before smiling again and taking his leave.

Macan felt refreshed, invigorated. For the last four years he had hidden himself away to suffer his torment alone, all because he thought he had lost the most dearest person to him. Now he had discovered she had been with him all along. She had never truly been lost. Were it not for all the pain he had felt, he would have probably found his seclusion amusing. It had been a long, pointless waste of time, and not what Peta would have wanted him to do at all.

Indeed it seemed he had a lot of time to make up for. Proudly fastening the lightsaber to his belt, he took a deep, calm breath, finally glad the pain had left him. With immediate practise in mind, he turned and started to make his way back into the Academy.

The End

For Now...

The Dark Side Of Do'Naar, by Stebloke  
Started July 2004  
Version 1.0 completed 03.12.2004  
Version 1.1 completed 02.01.2005. Simple spelling mistake corrections.  
Version 1.2 completed 03.04.2005. Simple spelling mistake corrections by M. Willemse.  
Version 2.0 completed 24.05.2011. Moderate re-writes and new bits added throughout.

~ **Dramatis Personae** ~

***Jedi***

Wilcra Li New	Human male
Meja Codan	Human male
San Rylo	Human male
Reeldo	Rodian male
Peta Sailin	Human female
Luke Skywalker	Human male
Udré Vizna	Human female
Mila Jenlo	Kel Dor female
Grace Distor	Human female
Jayzi Toth	Human male

***Dark Jedi***

Kreygor	Human male
Yazh Ghyron	Human/cyborg male
Raelag	Zabrak male
Karynna Andera	Twii'Lek female
Xeroque	Togruta female
Ro-Donic	Gran male

***New Republic Military***

Tarl Kreethen	Human male
Azra Neema	Human female
Haran Baska	Mon Calamari male
Nate Hendon	Human male
R2-G3	Astromech droid

***Corellia Civilians***

Macan Vesso	Human male
Lerri Turzo	Human female
Rinn Copla	Human male
Chandroth Jaco	Human male
Pastor Galevatai	Human male
B-12R	Service droid

***Raddus Civilians***

Akkam Songar	Mokderian male
--------------	----------------