



Volume II

**STAR WARS: TAPESTRY
VOLUME II**

Written by (in order of appearance):

ij thompson
corr terek
Ice Hawk
Fingon
Thaycon Devoid
coldskier0320
Ubiqtorate
Stormrider
Vash Knives
Darth_Vader2005
Xaturuk
naboo_princess
Jedi_Shadow
Mitka Jawnder
Ris
Drendar Morevo
Calhexas
Rakyu
Dread Pirate Roberts
Mack Jace

compiled by

I. J. Thompson

cover and interior art by

Evan Black

For more information (or to join the game!), please visit:

<http://community.wizards.com/starwarstapestry>

'Star Wars' is a registered trademark of Lucasfilm Ltd., and this is a derivative work based upon it, for entertainment purposes only, to be shared freely among 'Star Wars' fans for no monetary gain.

Posted by ij thompson on 27 July 2008 02:10 PM:

The feeling of being lain on her back on the tabletop startled Fiola back into consciousness. She groaned, once again aware of the pain in her head. She'd had hangovers before, sure, but not like this... even when it had been lum that she'd been drinking.

Then she remembered. Luis and Tey gathering her up after her impromptu musical performance in a cantina in Mos Eisley, bringing her out to the alley, and then a sight that didn't even seem real, in her drunken state - a starfighter, X-wing class, plummeting almost directly toward the trio. After that, it all went black.

Fi struggled to open her eyes, and was relieved to see Luis leaning over her. He was smiling.

"You're a little banged up, Miss," he told her gently, "But I think you're gonna live to record at least one more album."

Fi smiled, opened her eyes a little wider. To Luis's right was a girl she didn't recognize, just a few years younger than herself, looking anxious and concerned.

"Can I, uh, get you anything?" the girl asked.

"Water," Fi croaked, trying to make her throat work. Speech was difficult, it seemed, though from the accident or from the amount of lum she'd imbibed, Fi couldn't be sure.

As the younger girl hurried away, Fi smiled weakly at Luis. "Sorry Doc," she blushed, "I promise not to drink like that no more..."

Posted by Corr Terek on 27 July 2008 11:04 PM:

"Master Kenlan made it!" Tam's exultant voice could be faintly heard down the corridor, and it was all Mir needed to hear. She gunned the repulsorlifts, abruptly sending the ship lurching skyward.

"Mir, take it easy!" Damon yelled as he was forced back into the copilot's seat.

"Not on your life," Mir replied, feeding more power to the main drive as they rose from the planet. "If bounty hunters know where we are, it's only a matter of time before the Empire does too."

"Good point," Thel agreed, his fingers moving quickly over the comm board as he scanned the local channels. "There's no sign of Imperial interest yet, but that could change at any moment."

"Alright, I get it," Damon said. He bent over the navboard. "I'm plotting a small jump that'll take us a little farther Coreward before dropping us out again. We'll be able to make a course change then."

"A sound plan," Kenlan agreed, stepping into the cockpit with Tam in tow. "Where do you plan to take us from there?"

Damon hesitated. "I'm...not sure."

Tam and Mir both looked at him curiously. "But," Tam began, "Your family--"

Damon cut him off. "The course is plotted -- make the jump, Mir, and then we'll talk things over."

"...Aye, Captain."

Posted by Ice Hawk on 28 July 2008 12:00 AM:

Reil's luck was going downhill at the same rate the suns were setting. It was getting dark and cold, and he didn't have a place to stay or a ship to leave with. Not to mention he was looking increasingly suspicious to the stormtrooper patrols as the streets emptied. Soon, it would be just him and the boys in white hanging around outside. He didn't relish in the idea of taking on

stormtroopers in a fire fight. In space he could handle himself, but he was at a disadvantage on the ground.

He needed to get off the street, and fast. He noticed a building that's door had been left open. It was a large, misshaped building that seemed to be carved right out of a rock face, doors and windows sprouting from little nubs in the stone. It didn't look like the most luxurious of places, but, then again, nothing on this rock did.

"Beggars can't be choosers. . ."

He slipped in and closed the door behind him. He looked around what seemed to be a large reception area. There was a man covered in dust, leaning over a girl who was lying on a table, also covered in dust. There was another girl hovering behind him. She looked rather clean in comparison. All in all this didn't look like something he wanted to intrude on, but circumstances dictated otherwise.

"Ummm. . . Heya?"

Posted by Fingon on 28 July 2008 01:25 AM:

The girl stood up as another man entered the compound. "What is this, an evening social?" she said, hands on her hips. She turned to Luis "Friend of yours?"

The doctor shook his head. "No, I'm afraid not."

Tugging at his ill-fitting attire, the man stepped through the threshold, extending his hand. "Sorry to disturb you, uh, misses and mister," he began, flashing a broad smile, "but I came through with a convoy, and--"

"Yeah, and I'm the queen of Alderaan," retorted the slave girl, ignoring the outstretched hand. "Listen, I don't want to deal with a third alley rat scampering around. Why're you here?"

Fi struggled to prop herself up on one elbow, with moderate success. "Hey, I'm no..." she began before Luis shushed her.

The man let his hand drop and sighed. "I need a place to stay for the night."

"You and half this city, honey. You'll learn that real quick on this dustball." The girl pursed her lips, studying her new 'friends.' After a moment's pause she shook her head, "Frell, I can't believe I'm doing this!" she exclaimed, giving a rueful chuckle. "Sure, why not?"

Breathing a sigh of relief, the man dipped his head. "Thank you, miss, you won't regret this."

"First of all, I'm no 'miss,'" the girl responded, "It's just Cali."

"Reil," offered the man.

"And I'm Fi," croaked the singer, "and *this* is Luis," she added, prodding a finger in the doctor's general direction.

Cali nodded in acknowledgement. "Well then, Reil, the second thing is that I'm *positive* that I'm going to regret this later. But hey, even a slave has to live a little, right? And besides," she continued, batting her eyes, "I'm sure you gentlemen could find it somewhere in your hearts, or your checkbooks, to help out a sweet little slavegirl like me." She glanced back at Reil's clothes. "Then again, maybe not," she muttered.

"C'mon, let's get you to my place. I'll see if I can't find *you* some better fitting pants." She said, pointing. "Grab your girl, Luis." The doctor rolled his eyes.

"Do you have, uh, room for all of us?" Luis asked, picking up Fi.

Cali snorted. "I should, with the rest of my family sold off-world."

Luis grimaced. "Oh... I'm sorry."

"Don't be," replied the girl, leading the trio down into the

complex. "They got the good end of the deal. Tatooine isn't exactly a planet to build a good career, if you get my drift."

Posted by Ice Hawk on 30 July 2008 02:16 AM:

As Cali led them towards the slave quarters, Zealos couldn't help but take stock of his fellow "Alley Rats", Luis and Fi. He heard Cali call Luis "Doc", but he didn't look like any doctor Zealos had ever been to. Even in the rebellion doctors worked hard to keep themselves as sanitary as possible, but Luis was caked in dust and grime. Then there was Fi. She didn't seem the type to enjoy rolling around in muck either. Something didn't add up. . .

"Soo. . . uh, Luis, is there a story as to why you an' miss Fi there look like you survived an explosion?"

Posted by ij thompson on 30 July 2008 03:05 PM:

"'Cause we did," Fi replied before Luis could draw breath to say anything. Seeing the doctor struggling to hide his increasing fatigue, she gently tapped his shoulder, politely indicating her desire to be put down.

Luis obliged, relieved to be able to relax for a moment, though all the while watching the young woman with concern as she wobbled uncertainly. "I think I'm gettin' better, Doc," she assured him, before launching into a short coughing fit. Then, she turned back to Zealos, peering at him in the darkness.

"A starfighter just crashed smack into the middle of town. You, uh... missed it somehow?"

Cali's face twisted in disbelief. "You could see the explosion miles away - everyone's been talking about it!"

Zealos raised his hands in a friendly gesture. "Oh, I didn't say that," he explained. "I was just wondering if there was a connection." Then his expression changed curiously.

"Was... was anyone badly hurt? Killed?"

"We don't know," Luis said. "We left right away, to see to our own injuries. I don't... trust the licensed infirmaries on these frontier worlds."

That's one way of saying it, Fi mused, studying the older man and wondering what had happened to Tey. She took solace in the fact that, if the Corellian had been killed, Luis would be acting much differently. *I guess Luis will tell me where Tey is on his own time,* she thought. *I'll just not mention him, in case something's going on.*

"Anyway," Cali interjected, "much as I love standing with three strangers in a dark alley on the wrong side of town, I'd much rather get home to some hot soup. So who's with me?"

In answer, the trio exchanged a quick smile between one other, then turned and followed the slave girl down the twisting, darkened street.

Posted by Fingon on 31 July 2008 03:59 AM:

Her brow furrowed as she wrestled with a crude lock, Cali firmly set her heels and yanked back on the door's weathered handle, causing it to grumble open enough to enter. "Frakking things never work," she muttered as she pushed the door the rest of the way open. "Sand always gets into the hinges and jams them up better than a Jawa in a Sand People camp."

"Why not just use a sealed frame, or a mechanical door?" offered Zelos, dusting himself before helping Fi into doorway.

Cali shot back a wry glance over her shoulder. "Because that would cost money." Zelos didn't respond. "Let's get you down here, sweetheart," the girl said, pulling out a low, misshapen cot.

Fi gratefully hobbled over to the bed and tenderly laid herself down, closing her eyes and heaving a great sigh of satisfaction as her body sunk into the mattress's bulk.

Cali retrieved a stack of woolen blankets. "This is probably a bit primitive from what you're used to, miss..."

"No," replied Fi, her eyes still closed, "I'm pretty sure this is one of the most comfortable bed's I've ever had the privilege to lay on." Her placid complexion disappeared as she broke into another fit of coughs. "Then again, I may be a little biased," she added with a small smile.

"All right, little miss, where does it hurt?" the slave girl asked as she began to feel Fi's lower ribs for a fracture. Luis cleared his throat. "Oh, yeah... you're a doctor," said Cali, a little abashed. "Is there anything I could get for you, then?"

Luis glanced around the dim cabin. It too seemed to be etched out of solid rock. "More light, some clean rags, and whatever medical supplies you have." Cali nodded and hurried out of the room.

"And more water!" added Fi.

"Well, the girl had the right idea; you might have a cracked rib, which I'll need to check for," Luis began. The doctor glanced at his hands, caked in dust and sand. "Zelos, would you mind fetching something to wash my hands in?"

"Ah... sure, I'll see what I can do," the man said and followed where Cali had gone.

Fi let out a long sigh and grimaced. "Where do we go from here, Doc?" she asked, placing a hand gingerly on her chest.

"What do you mean?"

"About this... me. What if there's something wrong with me, that you won't be able to fix, or we get thrown out or... I don't know, how're we going to convince this Bartok that he needs to help us?"

"First of all," said Luis, a small grin on his face, "if there was something 'wrong with you,' you wouldn't have walked half the way here. We needed to get you somewhere with some sort of supplies, not a hospital." That was a half truth; Luis hadn't known that until Fi's condition improved. "As for the rest," the smile faded, "I'm not sure. I left Tey a message with our location, but I haven't heard anything back from him."

"Was he... okay?"

Luis rolled his eyes. "As much as he ever is. I swear, that man could lose a leg and not notice, and probably beat us in a race while he was at in. He'll be okay."

After a moment's pause, the doctor leaned in closer and lowered his voice. "But, I still don't know how we're going to threaten a slave dealer with the fact that we know someone he was once afraid of. In any case, I'd like to keep the lying to a minimum; besides the whole moral dilemma stuff, I think I stand a better change of not screwing this up the less truths I have to spin."

Fi flashed a smug smile. "Then you might be in luck, doctor, because I have something that might just do the trick..."

Posted by Corr Terek on 1 August 2008 07:11 PM:

"We've got twenty minutes until we drop out of hyperspace," Damon said, joining the others in the crew lounge.

"Okay," Mir said, sitting down and crossing her legs. "Why don't you tell us what's going on?"

"Yes," Kenlan added. "I was under the impression that you wanted to see to your family's safety."

"I do," Damon explained. "There's just one problem, though." He reached into his coat pocket and withdrew a small vial. "Recognize this?"

"Hey," Tam said, "That's the antidote for that Darkseed stuff."

"Right," Damon nodded. "Mir and I were sent to Burista to investigate the space station. Our superiors felt there was something suspicious going on there."

"Ah," Kenlan said. "That explains a lot."

"We can't assume that Darkseed's going to stop just because we got away," Damon continued. "This antidote needs to get to people who can mass-produce it. Our mission's not over until it does."

"Wait," Thel said, shaking his head. "I think I need a bit of exposition here. What's Darkseed?"

"An Imperial bioweapon," Kenlan explained. "It amplifies feelings of aggression and paranoia in its victims and can be transmitted through bodily fluids."

"Eventually the victim goes berserk and starts trying to kill anyone within reach," Mir added.

Thel looked revolted. "Infecting others as he does so, I suppose. Vader's teeth, but that's horrible."

"Yeah," Damon agreed. "The fact is, the antidote's delivery has got to be our priority." He hated it, but it was true.

"But what about that vision you had?" Tam burst out.

"What?" Kenlan and Thel both looked at Damon sharply. Mir simply arched an eyebrow at Tam, who suddenly looked very sheepish.

"Oops."

Posted by Ice Hawk on 2 August 2008 01:01 AM:

Cali tossed an inquisitive look at Reil as he began rummaging through her cupboards for a bowl that Luis could wash his hands in.

"It's for Luis to wash his hands." Reil quickly explained, almost apologetically. Cali nodded an assent and pointed to one on the far side of the room. He felt a bit awkward going through her possessions, few as they were, but he treated it just like a mission. He had an objective to accomplish, so did she. There wasn't time to wait around twiddling his thumbs while she got everything for Luis.

Besides, Reil thought to himself, just look at how close the Doc and his "patient" were now that he and Cali had left the room. Luis was very close, and they were whispering in hushed tones. They are obviously sharing a very personal moment and it was best if he wasn't in the room to intrude.

He found a large enough bowl, and began looking for a sink to pour hot water in it for the Doc. There didn't seem to be one in plain sight. Belatedly he realized that having an endless supply of running water on Tatooine would be the height of luxury. . . if it was even feasible at all.

"Erm. . . Cali? Where would I go to fill this up with hot water?"

Posted by Thaycon Devoid on 3 August 2008 11:17 AM:

Melroek woke with a start, sitting straight up in his bed despite his throbbing hangover.

"Woah, what a day!" he said, remembering the events in the cantina the day before.

He'd been spending his break at the cantina admiring the singing of a beautiful girl with the rest of his friends.

"Think ya'd have any luck with this one?" his best friend Besoh Lewtri asked him over the din of cheering men around them.

"I don't know. With my luck, she's the type who want's a

relationship first." Melroek replied, taking a swig of the beer he held.

Besoh snickered at this; "I don't know 'bout that, look how drunk she is. I'd bet she'd sleep with a wookie and not remember a thing in the mornin'".

Melroek grinned at this, "Probably, although it looks like someone's beaten me to the punch."

Melroek nodded toward the stage where a rather large man was attempting to climb up and approach her. He watched with growing admiration as she faked a hit with the mic and knocked him in the head with the base. The man fell backward, and Melroek couldn't help but cheer with the rest of those around him.

"Damn! She's got some fight in her!" Besoh commented as she finished her performance.

Melroek only nodded, still watching her as she toppled backwards in a drunken stupor. He was about to approach and offer his help when once again someone beat him to her.

"Ah well, you can't have 'em all." Besoh sighed into his mug.

"Or any, it looks like." Melroek replied in frustration.

They sat in silence as the crowd of men slowly dispersed back to their seats, Melroek drank the rest of his beer in one go and was about to request another when the corner of the room exploded, showering the closest patrons with dust and rubble.

Both Melroek and Besoh leaped jerkily to their feet as the lights went out

"Blast! Why now?" Besoh exclaimed; "The last thing I need is somethin' interrupting my break. C'mon, there's another cantina not far from here."

Melroek nodded and hurried after him as they fled the scene, shoving chairs and people out of their way, both determined to get as drunk as possible before their morning shift.

Posted by coldskier0320 on 3 August 2008 09:52 PM:

Tatooine

"Well now I'll need a ship."

"But of course you will.", Citizen Tracyn intoned, her voice silky and soothing, with underlying steel, "And a few replacement crew members as well. We'll also outfit you with military-grade weaponry and defenses, along with the proper permits and recognition codes for them. In any Imperial port, so long as you do not endanger Imperial forces or civilians, you'll go unchallenged. If you arrange things ahead of time, you may even be able to garner assistance from the local system patrol."

He snorted derisively, "Imp gunners on my side? Thanks but ill stick to blindfolded Gamorreans."

Ciryc smiled conspiratorily, "I fully understand that sentiment, Captain. Now, if we have an agreement..."

"Yes, yes, show me where to sign.", the hulking alien grumbled.

Ciryc slid the Imperial Letter of Marque across the desk, where he signed and thumbprinted the display at all the relevant points then returned it to her. After a moment of scrutiny, the Intel agent was apparently satisfied, and stashed the datapad away in some unseen desk compartment. Rising to her feet, she smiled, "Follow me."

The pair walked from the interview room down a short corridor to a rust-colored blast door guarded by two red-armored individuals. To the average individual, they were just specialized stormtroopers. Someone in the know would identify them as Imperial guards, handpicked from high-profile government locations on Imperial Center and flown out to this Palpatine-forsaken dustball as a show of the Madam Director's good will

and continued interest in Ciryce's efforts. The guards, all twenty-four of them, had arrived in the Intelligence Cruiser *Omnipotent*, along with several world-jarring changes for Ciryce.

For the first time in years, Ciryce, Agent 320a, was no longer partnered with Ms. Threll, agent 187c...at least not permanently. In addition, she'd received a new partner, one Agent 686f, who called herself Kylie...or Riley or somesuch...a computer specialist. She seemed like a nice enough girl, who would make an excellent field agent...in five years. Ciryce wasn't thrilled about having to break in a new agent, still, the girl's talents would lend her some unique advantages.

For Eryn's part, Ciryce had decided, she hadn't fared too badly, picking up a younger partner of her own in the no-nonsense hunter-killer that the Inquisitorius had yielded up to Isard seeming out of nowhere. When the Madam Director made it known that she was in the market for new field officers, the High Inquisitors had offered this Anel girl while the Ubiquitorate had put their stamp of approval on the slicer. Isard, apparently pleased, had sent them both out to Tatooine, with orders for them to partner with the veteran agents. And while the quartet could continue to work together, they each had their own primary objectives now.

To that end, Ciryce had begun to profile her new partner, getting a good idea of where she stood psychologically. She wasn't thrilled with what she saw, but the girl really did have great potential. She'd foisted the girl off on a few covert errands for the evening, giving her some time along for some interviews, and now those interviews had paid off.

Ciryce signalled one of the Coruscant guards, who opened the blast door. As Ciryce and the alien strode through, she heard him grunt approvingly at what lay inside the small docking bay. Amid a mess of wiring and equipment the Sentinel-class shuttle stood in semi-disassembly. All around the bay stood equipment lockers and cargo containers, all full of upgrade materials destined for the squarish craft.

"Solid ships, these Sentinels...", he grunted, "that hull can really take a beating."

Not interested in the alien's appraisal of his ship, Ciryce concluded, "This craft will be spaceworthy within the week, I'll see to that myself. As for your crew, you have that week to muster anyone you care to among your contacts, with the balance being filled with my choice of Imperial forces. In addition, you will have a small compliment of boarders, to be utilized at your discretion. If you need anything else, you need only contact me and I'll see that it happens, pending the approval of my superiors. Do I make myself clear?"

He eyed her up and down...she was certainly beautiful by human standards...but also certainly threatening by almost any beings standards...

"Yeah, I copy that. And once I get up and moving around on this crate...after a proper shakedown...I'm just supposed to continue hunting, but for private contracts that you'll supply me?"

Ciryce arched an eyebrow, "You have a problem with our arrangement?"

"No sir!...Ma'am...Sir...I'm fine with that, just makin' sure.", he managed. *Not as if she'd care if I did.*

"Good. Well, in that case, I have many other matters to attend to. I trust you'll handle yourself quite well here.", she engaged him in a handshake that surprised him with her grip, "Welcome to the Empire, Captain Goa. I'm sure you'll enjoy doing business with us."

Posted by Thaycon Devoid on 5 August 2008 12:16 AM:

The rest of that day had seemed a blur to Melroek; he tried not to focus too much when getting drunk. He held a hand to his now throbbing head, and with a grin kicked Besoh's bunk.

"Hurghm!" Besoh snorted in his sleep; "That's... that's not mine..."

Melroek proceeded to dress for his shift, ignoring the pain in his head every time he moved. He felt it a small price to pay for the luxury of having his mind soothed after a hard day's work, and luxuries were hard to come by. He still dreamed of making enough money to live the rest of his life off of, but he knew that dream was still a long way from becoming a reality. All he could really do was work from one day to the next.

Maybe I could win a few bets on the pod races, he thought to himself, *it isn't like I have much to lose.*

He finish putting his unifrom on, and grabbed his helmet on the way out the door. If he hadn't been paying attention, he would have collided with the contingent of Stormtroopers approaching.

"Private Estani," the leader inquired.

Melroek saluted and waited for him to continue.

"You are to come with us for questioning regarding the stolen ship from bay Eighty-Six," the Stormtrooper finished.

Melroek fell in step as they closed about him; *Bay Eighty-Six? That bay had been under my watch, but Besoh had arranged for a replacement so we could both go drinking.*

He stared straight ahead as he walked, his composure never wavering.

Surely Besoh logged this change; Melroek thought, *it isn't like him to slip up on something like this.*

Melroek wondered at the situation, but he knew it would only take a little explaining and a witness or two to clear him, so worry was far from his mind.

Posted by Ubiquitorate on 6 August 2008 09:44 PM:

"Damon," barked Kenlan as he followed the younger man aft through the ship. "Damon, turn around. Damon, I'm your captain now, and I'm giving you an order."

Damon whirled on his heel. "Yes, *sir*?" he snipped sarcastically.

"Damon, what's this about a vision?" asked Kenlan.

"It... wasn't really a vision," Damon lied. "More like a funny feeling, I guess. And a message I got just before all of this started, saying my brother might be in trouble. I just want to be sure. But that can wait. The Darkseed business is far more important."

"Damon, I'm a Jedi," said Kenlan. "I can tell if you're lying."

"I'm not!" insisted Damon. "I'm worried about them, yes, but we've got... more important things. Darkseed could hurt a lot of people if we don't get this antidote to the right people."

Kenlan stared deep into Damon's eyes. Of course he could see nothing, but Kenlan didn't need to be a Jedi Master to see that he was hiding something.

Delivering the Darkseed vaccine would be a temporary diversion, but only the Force knew where they'd end up.

Posted by Stormrider on 7 August 2008 11:18 PM:

Ashlyn 'Firefox' Vale. Blood 4.

Imperial Shuttle Avarice

Among they sky's of Tatooine , A few ships zoomed away

from the dusty planet or screamed across the desert sands towards

Mos Eisley, They were a motley collection of tramp freighters and single person fighters owned by smugglers, poor freighter captains, and mercenaries, The dregs of the universe one might expect,

Yet from the swirling depths of hyperspace, A sleek shuttle erupted into the system, It's clean lines and smooth finish a novelty amongst the dented and battered freighters The shuttle was a Lambda Class vessel that was so common within the higher ranks of the Empire as a personal transport and among it's naval vessels...

The pilot of the Lambda class shuttle held a wry grin as her hazel gleamed upon seeing the dustball, The Lieutenant sure had a hell of a way picking her bases, The only thing valuable about Tatooine was Jabba and Mos Eisley. And Ashlyn was sure that Mos Eisley was much more appealing than the slimy Hutt,

It'd been good place for a drink the last time she'd visited Tatooine a few years back. It was a sandy and dusty hellhole, Still.. If things worked out. Maybe she'd pay a visit to Mos Eisley and have a bit of fun.

The Madam Director had contacted Blood Leader and made her orders clear, Ashlyn was to be transferred to the command of Agent 320a, One Ciryac Tracyn, Formerly Blood 3. and Vale's former wingman when she had first joined the squadron.

Though it had been a few years since she'd transferred out., Ciryac had once served as something of a mentor to a younger Ashlyn, The more experienced Blood had shown her the ropes in the first few months of her service to the Madam Director...

The two women had never seen quite eye to eye on how Ashlyn lived while not on missions for Isard

The wild Corellian lived fast and hard in her free time Haunts like Mos Eisley or Corellia's Blue Sector were her favorite stomping grounds and racing swoops counted among her favorite hobbies.

Not to mention that she was able to build a still capable of producing home brewed liquor famous in Blood and Void squadrons for its raw potency and usefulness as carbon scoring and rust remover.

The older woman had never quite come around to the Corellian's habit of living life on the edge, and Ashlyn wasn't one to change for anyone. Still, The young woman still held the Lieutenant in higher regard than most realized...

Ashlyn Vale easily guided the Lambda class shuttle into the dusty atmosphere, The craft seemed to respond like a dream to her touch as she tugged lightly on the stick and oriented it towards the Imperial Garrison.

With a single flick of a gloved hand, The woman punched in the comm unit. A Corellian drawl rang through the Imperial frequency and into the control room of the garrison. Ashlyn's tone was good natured and lazy as she spoke. .

"Imperial Garrison, This is shuttle Avarice out of Coruscant. Requesting permission to land"

-Tatooine Garrison

Darvin Bursa was a bored man, A low ranking bureaucrat with a large stomach and twin double chins... He handled the sparse traffic to Imperial garrison, The most eventful thing had been the arrival of a Skipray Blastboat and then an Intelligence cruiser,

You didn't ask questions and you didn't pry. Not if you wanted to live anyway... Still it had been interesting see the female agent, She hadn't spoken more than ten words to him.. But she still scared Bursa. With those cold eyes and silken tone...

A muttered curse erupted from the bureaucrat, There were no scheduled shuttles from Coruscant or otherwise. The woman had not best be wasting his time, His tone was annoyed and irritated.

"Shuttle Avarice, This is Tatooine Garrison. You're not scheduled in today's logs... Please transmit your clearance and specify your purpose. Otherwise Mos Eisley has adequate facilities to hold your vessel"

The wild pilot felt a flash of irritation at the man's words and tone. She'd been expecting this.. But it still annoyed her to no end to deal with a frelling pencil pusher.

"Transmitting clearance codes now, And requesting the presence of Agent Tracyn when I land"

A string of numbers came through comm that were recognizable as clearance codes... and it made the bureaucrat take note.

Darvin looked up sharply at the woman's words, Blue eyes went slightly wide at the woman's request and even wider as her clearance danced within his ears. Sweat beaded across the man's forehead as he realized what he had on hand...

The woman whoever she was had Intelligence clearance far over his head... He doubted he could even access the database to confirm her file. Now his tone was nervous and words flew from his mouth.

"Shuttle Avarice, Docking berth 124 is clear for your use, I'll.. uh.. see if I can find Agent Tracyn"

The same lazy and casual drawl rang through the comm once more. It held no hint of her irritation.. Yet it wasn't quite as good natured as before.

Ashlyn Vale had little respect for politicians and bureaucrats who sat in their offices and towers. She was a fighter pilot and Corellian to the core. Neither breed was known for respecting authority or bureaucrats.

"Understood Base, Shuttle Avarice out"

Darvin felt the sweat running down his chins as he rose from his seat and began to move rapidly away from his workstation to find Tracyn. The same woman who scared him...

Posted by Corr Terek on 7 August 2008 11:49 PM:

Damon locked eyes with Kenlan for a moment longer before looking away. "Mir and I know people on Corellia that can take care of the antidote, so that's where we're headed. Unless you have any objections, *Captain*."

"Do what you feel that is best," Kenlan said, ignoring the sarcastic quip.

Damon nodded shortly. "I'll be in the cockpit."

Thel was already in the cockpit by the time Damon got there. "Have you picked a course yet?"

"Corellia," Damon muttered, seating himself in the pilot's seat. "Force, what I wouldn't give for my own ship again."

"So," Thel said slowly. "That old guy...Kenlan, right? What's his deal?"

"He's a fast-talking, conniving old man with a knack for getting us all in trouble," Damon replied. "His only redeeming feature as far as I can see is that he takes good care of Tam."

"The boy," Thel was thoughtful. "Most kids his age wouldn't be allowed to sit in on a discussion among adults like that."

"Tam is...special," Damon said carefully. He wasn't sure what exactly Thel was asking. "And he's a lot more mature than you might think. Sometimes, anyway."

"Many children with an aptitude for the Force are like that, I think."

The full import of Thel's statement took a moment to sink in. "Wait a minute...you *know*?!"

Thel chuckled. "I'm many things, but never stupid. An old man and a young boy with lightsabers? What other explanation is there?"

Damon looked at Thel cautiously. "There are a lot of people who want to hurt Tam."

"I'm not one of them," Thel said, leaning back in his seat. "Tam has nothing to fear from me."

Damon said nothing, but he resolved to watch Thel a little more carefully -- at least until he was sure of his intentions.

Posted by ij thompson on 8 August 2008 06:38 PM:

With water, clean rags, and rudimentary medical supplies in tow, Cali and Zealos Reil returned to Fi's bedside, doing their best to alternately help the doctor, and stay out of his way.

"There's definitely a rib broken," Luis told Fi, handing her a small blue pill. "This should help for the pain. In the meantime, I wouldn't recommend you do any running around."

"Running," Fi repeated, swallowing the pill with water provided by Cali. "It seems all we're ever doing is running, darling."

Luis looked at the girl curiously. "Yes... I know."

Fi smiled at him almost imperceptibly, and favoured him with a conspiratorial wink she was pretty sure the others couldn't see. "But it'll be worth it, right?" She continued. "One day we'll finally have our little home on the frontier, our little family, away from everything? Away from my brother?"

Luis's eyes lit slightly in recognition. Looking at her sideways, he continued attending to her injuries. "Two or three planets ago, I would have said 'absolutely'. As it is," he shuddered, "I can only say 'I hope so'. Your brother is an extremely dangerous man..."

"Oh, Tey isn't so bad," Fi picked up. "He just never wanted to see me settle for a... um, a doctor." She grimaced, then perked up again. "I mean, just the fact that he's tracked us across six planets, and intends to pull all your limbs off can only mean he cares about me, right, sweetheart?"

Luis continued his administrations, biting back laughter. "That much is clear," he agreed. "And darling, I would happily lay down my life to see you happy. But I just worry about all the innocent people along the way. That brother of yours--"

"Tey," Fi interjected.

"Yes, Tey," the doctor agreed. "Tey will mow down anyone who stands in his path, that much is clear." He considered a moment, then continued. "At least we know he'd be equally grateful to anyone who assisted him."

"We Spire's have always been pretty emotional like that," Fi grinned, kissing Luis's hand. "Once a Spire, always a Spire!"

The slave-girl Cali made a curious clicking sound in her throat, and looked ashen. "Did you say," she began, mustering her voice.

"Did you say *Tey Spire's*?"

Posted by Vash Knives on 8 August 2008 07:19 PM:

Koro looked over what he had and what parts he still needed. It didn't look as good as he would have liked. He would need to go on a shopping trip for the needed parts. And considering his current situation, his choices on where to get the parts were limited. He could either go to the Corporate Sector or the Hutts. Either choice was corrupt, but at least the Hutts were upfront about it. The most convenient Hutt world was Tatooine. Begrudgingly the gambler gathered up his tools, put them on his ship, got Tonto, and the two of them left on the *Long Shot*.

Posted by Thaycon Devoid on 8 August 2008 10:26 PM:

Melroek was led through the main barracks to the office sector of the imperial base and into a room with an unmarked door off the side hall. The room was sparsely decorated; a lone desk, occupied by a helmeted officer sat in the far left corner, and a single picture depicting the grassy plains of a more lush planet hung on the wall to the side.

There he was left alone; Melroek noted the officer wore a black helmet, concealing his features. Officer's rarely wore helmets, but this fact was pushed to the back of Melroek's mind as the officer greeted him.

"Private Melroek Estani."

"Sir." Melroek replied, saluting.

"At ease," the officer said.

Melroek allowed himself to relax.

The officer motioned to a comfortable looking chair against the wall beside his desk; "Please, have a seat."

Melroek complied, crossing his legs and arms as he studied the officer.

"I am Commander Daren Moridt of the Imperial Navy," he began, "It has come to my attention that you were on duty during the abduction of a ship by rebel forces in bay Eighty-Six. Did you notice anything unusual during your patrol?"

Melroek took a deep breathe; "I wasn't actually on patrol, sir."

"Not on patrol?" the Commander asked, sounding surprised.

Where might you have been?"

"Getting drunk, sir." Melroek replied.

"Getting drunk?" the Commander asked.

Melroek began to note a sarcastic tone to his voice.

You decide it to be your force-given right to go traipsing off your duties and get drunk? And meanwhile the rebellion is making off with a ship and who knows what else right by your post?"

Melroek's insides churned, "I was with another private who claimed to have found someone to take my place. He told me he'd logged everything already and there weren't any problems."

Commander Moridt leaned forward, "Ah, an alibi. A 'wookie ate my paperwork' situation, is it?"

Melroek sat in silence, allowing the Commander to test the veracity of his words by his countenance.

Commander Moridt sank back in his seat, "It is fortunate that you have a witness to your words. A private reported overhearing your conversation with private Lewtri shortly after the incident in bay Eighty-Six."

He pulled a notebook from a drawer in the desk and opened it.

"It appears this isn't the first time private Lewtri has allowed an ally to face judgement for his error. Twice before rebels made off with sensitive equipment while those on duty got drunk with Lewtri."

Melroek stood "Forgive me sir, but private Lewtri is a close friend of mine, and what you are implying--"

"Oh, I'm not implying anything; we already have the evidence to convict him of his crimes as a rebel spy and have him executed. There is no question to it, his actions have been closely followed and there is no doubt in my mind that he is on the rebel payroll."

Melroek stood in silent shock, repulsed at what he just heard.

"Now, private Melroek Estani, it is time that you proved your innocence to me, to the empire. The task I now assign you will decide your fate; leave my office, find and execute the traitor Besoh Lewtri with your own hands."

Posted by Fingon on 9 August 2008 01:52 AM:

"Uh, yeah," Luis managed to say, somehow keeping a straight face. "Fi's... brother."

"My dear, dear brother," added Fi, a dreamy look on her face. "You could say that he's a little protective." She flashed Luis a knowing smile.

Son of a Hutt! She just KISSED me. What in the galaxy's gotten into her? Luis froze a smile on his face, a talent he honed well over the years. *Frell... under normal circumstances I don't think I'd mind*

At all.

But WHAT is she doing?

Fi broke the silence which had settled over the room. "How in the world do you know him, Cali?"

Posted by ij thompson on 9 August 2008 06:31 PM:

"I don't, not really," Cali explained. "But I think my master does..."

"Oh?" Luis asked innocently.

"When Master Bartok gets angry," the girl elaborated, "he yells. A lot. Most of the words he yells I at least recognize, though I won't repeat 'em. But there were always two words I didn't recognize: 'Tey' and 'Spires'..."

Fi listened as Cali continued to explain, but found herself looking at Luis - or rather, the rosy hue that had risen in his cheeks. He still held one of her hands, and she could feel his pulse was quick.

Looks like the good doctor enjoyed that kiss on the hand more than I expected, Fi thought to herself. *I'd better cool it, or this could get complicated...*

"...And I think your brother is the reason Master Bartok fled the core, and started this whole slaving venture in the first place," Cali concluded.

With that, they all sat silent, thinking their own thoughts.

"Wait a minute..." Zealos Reil interjected. "Your master is Chuv Bartok, Scourge of the Wookiees???"

Posted by Ice Hawk on 9 August 2008 07:23 PM:

All eyes turned on Reil.

Mentally he swore, he hadn't ment to say that out loud. It wasn't common knowledge that Bartok was one of the newest and more infamous slave traders operating out of Kashykk. The man made the regular Trandoshan scum look like humanitarians. Rebel intelligence watched him closely to try and free Wookiees whenever possible. Reil's first mission had been one such liberation.

There was a long awkward pause as everybody waited for an explanation.

Fi spoke first.

"The what?"

"Uhh. . . erm. . . well the uh, the scourge of Wookiees. Big hairy guys, live in trees. . ."

Reil made vague hand gestures trying to provide a picture for the others.

"I know what Wookiees are, what did you say about the scourge of them?"

"Er. . . While I was with the convoy, I heard a couple'a crew members talking about the most violent slave trader on Kashykk. Chuv Bartok. Said he was like a scourge, and if the empire didn't reign him in, there wouldn't be any wookiees to enslave on Kashykk anymore. Umm. . . eh, this wouldn't happen to be the same guy now would it, miss Cali?"

Posted by Fingon on 9 August 2008 10:23 PM:

Cali fixed Reil, still dressed in his ill-fitting clothes, with an odd stare. Then she glanced over to Luis and Fi, the impromptu fiancés, and shook her head. "Poodoo, this is just creepy," she said after a moment. Her shoulders shivered like she was cold, despite the cozy temperature of the room, and she sucked in a deep breath.

"Okay," she announced after blowing out the breath between her teeth. "Maybe this is just some crazy random happenstance, but," she glanced back at her guests, "you never know..."

"Never know what?" asked Luis.

Cali shrugged. "Ya'know, fate, destiny... the f-" she shook her head again. "No, forget it." She looked over to Reil. "I don't know anything about scourging wookiees, but I *do* know that Bartok has a nice little fortune he's sitting on, a lot better than you could get bartering slaves on this dust ball. And, having the privilege to witness master's bouts of drunken rage first-hand," she continued, looking up to the ceiling dramatically and placing a hand to her breast, "it really wouldn't surprise me at all. We always said he could strangle a hutt with his bare hands when he got angry."

Reil frowned. "Um, isn't a hutt's neck a little too wide to..." Cali nodded.

"And I think we're talking about the same Tey Spires. I can definitely imagine Tey scaring people all the way out to the rim," Luis said, gesturing towards Fi.

"Oh, did he really frighten you, dear?" Fi asked.

I still can't believe she did this... engaged? Why fiancés? Luis mentally shook himself. *Roll with it, Santiago, it's not like you complaining is going to change anything. Besides, you might even end up enjoying yourself...*

"Frighten me? Oh, never. It's not like he didn't threaten to-"

"Actually, honey," Fi said abruptly, "I don't think you're going to have to worry about him any longer," she said with a grin at Cali. "My brother has always been one for justice..."

Posted by Darth_Vader2005 on 10 August 2008 05:07 PM:

Tey stopped in a darkened archway and flicked on his commlink.

"How's your patient doing?" He asked into the handset, avoiding using any names.

"She's okay thanks how about you?" Luis's voice returned, muffled by static on the connection.

"Not too bad actually, it wasn't as bad as it looked" Tey replied evasively. "You managed to convince Bartok to take you in then?"

"Not quite; it seems your friend is moving up in the world. Once he was scared out of the core he ran here and started slave trading."

Tey was silent for a moment before continuing; his tone hard and level. "Smuggling is one thing. Slavery is quite another. I might have to have a little chat with him."

"That still doesn't address the problem of how we get off this sandball though does it?" The doctor reminded him.

"I think I may have a way. You'll never guess what ship has just come into land here at the starport." Tey replied dryly.

"Anyone we know?"

"I'll fill you in when I meet you, are you two still at the address from your message?" The corellian asked.

"Yeah a local took us in for the night."

"Wow, that was lucky. I'll be there in about half an hour." With that Tey officer shut off the comm and began to walk purposefully, desperately trying to ignore the nagging pain in his leg.

Posted by Xaturuk on 11 August 2008 01:24 PM:

Cockpit/Rogue Circuit/Trade Route Hub at Brentaal

"Run your combat counter-maneuvering program, you incompetent fiber brain!"

Three-dee-four kicked V6. The squat pilot droid garbled a sharp retort, stubbornly refusing to comply. "All the same? Well, if you mean obedient, wise, and invaluable then I agree. You, on the other hand, are the only pilot droid I know who trembles in fear during simple evasion maneuvers!" 3d-4's impatient vocabulator carried down the entrance passage to the cockpit. V6 let out a dejected squeal.

The transport lurched sideways, and three-dee-four was just shy of grabbing for the co-pilot's seat for support. He fell with a dull thump against the deckplates. V6's magclamped treads kept him anchored in place at the center console between the seats. His angularly domed head swiveled back and forth across the control panel, assessing system status. "Now, look what you've done! I think you've broken the servomotor cluster in my shoulder." V6 ignored him. The droid quickly sent a communication to Billee, the acting Captain of the *Rogue Circuit*.

Mid-level Cargo Bay/Rogue Circuit/Trade Route Hub at Brentaal

The BLX Labor Droid, recovering from the recent jolt, twisted his frame out of the Eta-2 docking cradle and turned off the plasma torch. The cargo bay lighting flickered, and instruments crashed, sliding along the floor. He activated his magclamps to the grating as another wrenching twist tilted the *Rogue Circuit* nearly on its side, and began striding quickly towards the cockpit. The three pit droids, who'd been working on a new modification to the landspeeder, burst into panicky beeps and twiddles. They slid in a heap across the tilted bay into a pile at the cargo lift doors.

The BLX observed the pile of irate droids spoke calmly into his hard-wired ships comm, "V6, dial the inertial dampeners up to 100 percent. The pit crew is about to have a wire meltdown." A few moments later, the freighter leveled out and went still. One of the pit droids jumped to his feet, twittering madly as the BLX ducked out of the bay door. He spoke over his shoulder, "I know, I know. Give him time, he's still learning..."

Yet, the two foot tall droid put its hands on its midsection defiantly, and threw up its chin. It kicked one of the scattered hydrosappers which ricocheted off the wall plating and landed precisely under the foot-piece of his nearest crewdroid. Instinctively he reached out, and again the trio toppled to the

floor.

Cockpit/Rogue Circuit/Trade Route Hub at Brentaal

"Ah. Here he is now." Three-dee-four chided, "I hope he relieves you of duty." V6 bleeted a few notes and went silent. The sound of approaching footsteps stopped at the entrance door to the cockpit. It whisked open, and Captain Tholme So strode directly to the empty pilot's seat. His lank hair was matted and had a light shine to it. He had a shadow of a beard, several days unshaven. The captain's eyes were glossy, red rimmed, and his clothes were wrinkled. He smelled faintly of Brandy.

Three-dee-four didn't hide his surprise, "Captain So! I didn't know that you were on duty again!"

Tholme strapped into the chair and switched over to manual control. "You're not supposed to be here." He replied.

Three-dee-four timidly took a few uncertain steps, "I...I simply heard the evasion report on V6's information update, and I came to see if I could be of assistance to--"

"You won't be necessary. Return to your station, and finish those new shipment queries."

Three-dee-four stiffened and made the mechanical equivalent of a sigh. "Yes, Captain." He retreated from the cockpit, his steps fading down the corridor.

Tholme pulled the starship into a tight loop and twisted into a roll. The pursuing YT-510 pirate freighter was just shy of staying on his tail. He dumped the energy reserves from the passive ship systems into the ionization reactor for the sublight acceleration motor. The extra propulsion, installed below the modified main engines port, fired to life and put distance between the two ships. He engaged the Hyperdrive, set for stored coordinates in V6's memory banks. White streaks burned into the viewport.

V6 beeped in appreciation as Tholme reclined slightly in his seat. He turned to face the droid, "You need more time in the simulator, V6. That shouldn't have been difficult for you." He stood and made to leave the cockpit. V6 bleeted a disheartened acknowledgement and went about the tasks of regulating the systems power.

The BLX droid arrived in the same moment. "Ah, Captain So. Good to see you on duty again." Tholme assessed the Labor Droid and nodded. His firmly set mouth slackened a bit, and the tenseness went out of his shoulders. "Not quite, Billee. I need some more time. Please continue as acting Captain for now."

"Is the danger averted, then?" He inquired, glancing at V6.

"Yes. You may want to check the cryocoolers on the I-S4D reactor. I pushed the power cells near to empty, and I know that it's overheating." Tholme replied.

Billee nodded, "Yes, Captain. Is there anything else?"

Tholme glanced through the cockpit transparisteel, "Yes. I used stored data for a short hyperjump to Corellia. We'll stop there for resupply and routine maintenance. Just basics - provisions, fuel, odds and ends. Make sure to find a shipyard licensed for Barloz-class transports."

"Yes, Captain."

"Oh, and don't forget to tell them about the modifications. I don't want any repeat incidents like we had on Coruscant."

"Understood."

"Inform me when we're queued up to land."

Billee saluted, "I will, sir."

Posted by ij thompson on 11 August 2008 07:32 PM:

The lights dimmed, the four of them made ready for bed.

Fiola, her injuries fresh, was given the privilege of sleeping on the apartment's low couch, while her 'fiance' Luis had to settle for a flimsy, thin foam mattress at her feet. Not far from him, Zealos Reil struggled with similar conditions, while Cali curled up in a rather comfortable-looking padded chair. Though the girl naturally had a room of her own, she'd chosen to bunk with the guests tonight... just in case.

"Hah," she snickered, looking at the two men trying to get comfortable on the floor, "just once, I've got better living conditions than somebody else!"

"It's fine," Zealos replied politely. "We're just grateful for your hospitality."

"That's for sure," Fi echoed, quite comfortable under heavy blankets.

"For all your help," Luis agreed, "And we're going to pay you back, somehow."

"Righty-o," Cali replied, "though I don't see-"

A loud knock from the apartment's door cut her off mid-sentence. "Now what the frell...?" Cali wondered, rising and crossing the chamber. Wrenching open the hovel's archaic door, she was faced with the shape of a man, silhouetted by a blue light somewhere out in the street.

"What?" Cali asked, throwing cordiality aside. "Can I help you?"

"I believe you can," the shadow in the doorway answered. "I'm Tey Spires."

Posted by Thaycon Devoid on 11 August 2008 11:25 PM:

Melroek wandered the hallways aimlessly, in shock at what Commander Moridt had instructed him to do.

"Kill Besoh..." he muttered to himself, "Besoh, the man who... who saved my life... got me this job..."

Melroek paused in his step and fell against the wall, overwhelmed by all that he'd learned.

"Rebel... all this time... using me..." he said.

A group of stormtroopers marched by, and it was then, as he watched them, their bodies firm with strength and resolve that his mind kicked into gear.

Melroek straightened suddenly, knocking one of the stormtroopers over as he passed.

"Perspective!" he shouted, "He chose his path, and chose mine. If I am required by duty to confront him, then so be it. I shall return, Commander Moridt!"

At that he marched off, leaving a befuddled stormtrooper still struggling to his feet.

He reached the barracks and approached his room, his right hand gripping his blaster tightly. Besoh wasn't scheduled to go back on duty for another hour, so Melroek knew he would still be sleeping.

He swiped his keycard in one swift motion, the door sliding open to allow him entry. And there stood Besoh, hastily storing a small comm device in his pocket.

"Melroek?" he asked, sounding surprised, "What happened, aren't you supposed to be on duty?"

"I am on duty," Melroek replied, pulling his blaster out, "and I'd just like to know one thing before I shoot you: why?"

Besoh's mouth opened and closed a few times before he managed to speak: "I-I... think you need a drink."

Besoh was thrown back against the wall as Melroek pulled the trigger, his face still maintaining a look of surprise.

Melroek lowered his blaster, "Wrong answer."

Commander Moridt sat behind his desk, still studying the

information contained in the folder he'd pulled from his desk. At first he didn't raise his eyes as his office door opened and Melroek walked in; but when he realized Melroek was dragging a body behind him, he looked up to see private Lewtri lying in front of his desk.

"He's only stunned. I will not be an executioner, but I will not allow a crime to go unpunished. Do with him as you wish."

With that, Melroek turned and left, leaving the near barren office with a new decoration.

Behind his helmet, Commander Moridt smiled.

Posted by naboo_princess on 12 August 2008 06:27 PM:

Tatooine

"Ya sure ya don't wanna go on?" the grizzled old spacer asked the red-haired woman that sat behind him. "I can take ya anywheres." He turned around and flashed her a gaptoothed smile.

"No thank-you," Tarynn replied and stood. She looked out the viewport, but all she could see was the walls of the spaceport. With one hand behind her back to keep her hold-out blaster close at hand, she fished a credcoin out of her jumpsuit pocket and placed it into his hand.

She almost missed her private skiff, but she knew Her Majesty's assassins would have been on to her by now if they had.

"Thank-you," she added after a long pause. "Where is the nearest cantina?"

"Turn left when ya get out of the spaceport," he answered, and Tarynn backed quietly out of the old freighter, grateful to be off the ship. She found the hangar doors with not much difficulty.

It was dusk out, and she noticed, when she left the Mos Eisely spaceport, that there were fewer people around then she had first thought. They stared, of course. They always did, ever since the first planet where she had sold her skiff. She was used to it by now, and with a toss of her hair, sauntered down the street.

Posted by Ice Hawk on 12 August 2008 08:10 PM:

"Oh."

Cali stood stunned at the door for a moment before stepping aside to let him in.

As Tey entered the quarters, Zealos pulled out his holdout blaster. Tey may very well be bastion of justice Fi said he was, and if he was planning on taking action against Bartok, Zealos was willing to shake hands with a smaller devil, but still. . . The man was *clearly* insane. . .

Reil looked the man up and down and the first impression he got of him was. . . *dusty*. He looked like Luis and Fi. Perfectly normal, except covered in grime. It was like some cruel joke of the force that every person he met on this foresaken dustball would be a survivor of his X-Wing's explosion. Just how many people had been in that damned cantina???

Posted by Vash Knives on 12 August 2008 08:37 PM:

The *Long Shot* came down without incident, and its pilot quietly stepped out into the harsh sunlight with his hat, shades, and coat protecting him somewhat. Koro left Tonto on the ship and traveled to the nearest cantina. Walking inside he noticed an attractive redhead, then turned away from her and walked up to

the bar. He sat down and ordered a *shinipiro*. After giving the gambler a funny, if dubious, look, the bartender gave him a drink that was such a bright shade of pink it seemed to glow. As Koro accepted the drink, a massive human thug came up beside him.

"What is the problem with people like you?"

The Corellian looked at the thug with a bemused expression. The man was about a head taller than Koro and was as broad as he was tall. There was no other way to say it, the thug was built like a brick refresher. He probably outweighed Koro by a good 2-to-1, maybe 3-to-1 margin.

"People like me?"

"Yah, Ya walk in here all big an' tough, and then order some frootie woman's drink."

With that, the thug pushed Koro off his stool. Koro slowly got up and looked the thug right in the eyes. He then promptly lifted the man with one hand on his throat and the other hand on the man's waist, and threw him down through the nearest table, splintering it.

"Saltan valforamosa n telval mord. Wagyx."

Turning back to his drink Koro took a sip. The potency of the drink was just as he remembered it. He paid for the table and the drink.

"Where can I find a decent scrap dealer?"

Posted by ij thompson on 12 August 2008 10:31 PM:

"Brother!" Fi cried, throwing blankets off of herself and rising from the couch. Crossing the chamber, she grabbed the Corellian in a big, warm hug.

"I've missed you," she gushed, "over all these months that we've been running from you!"

Tey was nonplussed. "Running from the who, now?"

"Oh silly," she chided, "you can't hide your jealous rages from me. Now listen," she went on. "I wanna introduce you to everybody, but first, there's someone here that you have to *promise* not to kill."

"And who might that be?"

"None other than..." she replied with a wave of her arm and her voice rising in crescendo, "my fiancé, Luis Santiago!"

Posted by Thaycon Devoid on 12 August 2008 10:31 PM:

Commander Moridt raised three fingers, signalling the security camera hidden in the frame of the lone picture on the wall. It was only moments later that two groups on security entered, one to remove the unconscious form of private Lewtri, the other escorting a rather confused Melroek back inside. Everything was done quickly and efficiently, and once more Melroek stood facing Commander Moridt.

"I forgot to say 'sir'?" Melroek guessed.

Commander Moridt rose, and stepped from behind his desk, "You actually forgot a lot of things, but I'll forgive you the lecture and get straight to the point: you are a very qualified candidate for a position as a Force Spy."

Melroek looked at him skeptically, "That sounds rather cheesy if you ask me. ...sir."

Commander Moridt turned his back to him, facing the picture on the wall; "Believe me, there are few jobs more serious. Imagine, if you will, a mole, capable of eluding even the most difficult and inquiring of targets. A spy capable even of eluding a Jedi."

Melroek fought back a smile, "A Jedi? They are nothing more than tales now."

"Ah, but think back on recent events," the Commander said,

facing him once more, "it is proven that the rebels have enlisted the help of one or more Jedi, and Jedi, unlike Sith, multiply rapidly. And the number of Force sensitive people on this planet alone, if properly trained, could overthrow the greatest Empire."

The commander began to pace the wall, "Fortunately, the process of locating these people-let alone training them-is far more complicated than even the original Jedi Council could handle, which leaves a great harvest unclaimed."

He stopped, turning to face Melroek again, "But that harvest, if allowed to grow untamed, will inevitably choke out the Empire if allowed to become sympathetic with the rebellion. And that is where you come in."

He walked to his desk and picked up his folder, "Most dismiss my concerns, but Lord Vader himself provided me with all that I needed to begin my campaign against this threat. You showed loyalty, by placing the Empire before your friend; you showed no malice when you confronted him; the only anger you felt was righteous anger, and it was with true feelings of justice that you did not kill him, but brought him here."

Melroek listened intently, still confused about the situation.

"Your information indicated to me that you were a perfect candidate for selection, and to test that I used private Lewtri. He did, actually log the post change, it's true, and in truth it is yet unclear whether or not the ship from Bay Eighty-six was truly stolen. But I was honest in that private Lewtri is a known traitor, and we *have*, in fact been following his actions closely."

Melroek digested this information slowly, his head spinning, "So... what now? I mean, am I supposed to hunt down potential Jedi or something?"

"Your only duty is to befriend the locals, hang out at the bar, do not reveal your involvement with the Empire unless necessary, and report on conditions periodically directly to me. I would even go so far as to say befriend any and all you meet; get involved. Help them if you wish. Just report everything to me."

Commander Moridt handed the folder to Melroek, "You are relieved of all previous duties. You will find a change of civilian clothes inside your locker, and all necessary information in this folder. It has been a pleasure Melroek."

Melroek was glad to leave, and he looked forward even more to getting as drunk as possible at the cantina to rid him of his confused thoughts.

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 12 August 2008 11:02 PM:

After blabbing about Damon's secret, Tam decided to lay low aboard the *Nova Viper*. He could tell the man wasn't happy, and everyone had been looking at him weird since then.

Especially that new fellow, Athelias. Tam didn't know why, but he didn't like the man. It's not that he was dangerous or anything, it just seemed like he... *knew* too much.

"You done, sulking?" It was Mir'isha, who stood in the doorway and had a playful grin on her petite muzzle.

Tam smiled back. "Maybe just a bit longer."

The Farghul woman leaned against the bulkhead across from Tam. "You worried about Damon?"

"Kinda. Not that he's still mad at me, if that's what you're meaning. Just that he seems so, I dunno, torn or something."

Mir nodded. "Happens a lot with people like him."

"People like him?"

Mir's eyes flashed, but only for a moment. "So, I'm guessing this is your first time to Corellia."

"My dad's been here before," Tam explained, "on business. He always said it was a lot like home."

"Like Dantooine? Well, most of it, I guess. I've never really

strayed far from the cities there. Maybe I can show you around some of them."

"I'd like that," Tam said, and he meant it. "But won't we be pretty busy once we get there?"

Mir shrugged. "I'm not dying to stick my claws in Rebel business any more than I have to. This whole situation with Burista has been a little more adventurous than I'm used to. Back with Ghull things were surprisingly quiet compared to this. Just fly the ship, and keep my eyes half-shut to everything going on around me.

"Don't worry," she continued, noticing Tam's growing concern. The woman looked as if she were thinking about setting out on her own for a quieter life. "I'm not going anywhere. Damon and I have talked this over, and I'm just hanging back to provide a little cover. Besides, with my pirate connections people might start to get the wrong impression about these altruistic rebels, won't they?"

"Mir!" Damon shouted from the fore of the ship. "We're coming out of hyperspace. Round everybody up for me and let's gear up!"

"You heard the man," Mir said, standing to full height and striding down the corridor. She motioned over her shoulder with a curt flick of her claws. "Let's go, cadet!"

Tam smiled and hurried after her.

Posted by Corr Terek on 12 August 2008 11:41 PM:

"So what's the plan, Captain?"

"I'm thinking," Damon murmured. "We can't all go together -- that would attract too much attention." He turned to Kenlan. "And, if memory serves, you've got a bit of a history here."

"Unfortunately, yes."

"Hmmm...I don't know how well-known our faces are here on Corellia. Mir and I weren't here long enough to build up a reputation, but after Burista there's no telling what the Empire's been up to," Damon mused.

"Why don't you, Kenlan and Athelias go meet with the Rebels?" Mir suggested. "As a Jedi, Kenlan should have no trouble keeping himself hidden, and no one knows about Athelias. Right?" she asked, turning to Athelias.

He shrugged. "It's doubtful anyone here would remember me -- I don't make waves."

"Perfect," Mir said. She appraised Damon. "I bet if you left that flashy coat of yours here on the ship, no one would look at you twice."

Damon looked hurt. "I thought you liked it."

"I do -- it looks very dashing on you," Mir said. "But it's also kind of like waving a big red flag saying, 'Hello, Imperials! Please shoot me!'"

"Point taken," Damon said, shrugging off the coat. "Where will you be?"

"It's Tam's first time here on Corellia," Mir replied. "If his reaction is anything like yours was, I wouldn't miss his first view of Treasure Ship row for anything in the galaxy."

Posted by Fingon on 13 August 2008 02:23 AM:

"Fiancé? Yeah, that'll be the day," quipped Tey, flashing Fi a bemused look.

Luis raised a hand in greeting. "Hello, Tey," he began cautiously. "I know we had our little, uh, misunderstanding back on Boz Pity, but we're over that, right?"

"Doc, what in the galaxy..." Tey began, his eyebrows climbing up to his hairline. Luis had brought his hand back next

to his cheek. *Roll with it!* he mouthed behind his hand. "...makes you think that I'm going to... let this thing..." He wordlessly gestured towards the doctor and singer, then cleared his throat. "You know what I think of you and... my sister. I've already come close to killing you twice, Santiago," he continued, gaining gusto. "Don't give me another excuse. Now, do you want to rethink this?"

"Well, when you put it that way..." answered Luis. The room fell silent.

Tey let out a sigh of frustration. "C'mon doctor, we're going to have a little chat," he said, jerking his head to the entry door.

"Brother!" interjected Fi, trying to move herself between the two men, then deciding that the table was a less painful option. "Don't you do anything--"

"Don't worry, Fi. Your doctor will come back to you in one piece." Replied Tey, a grim smile on his face. "Luis: outside, now."

Rising, the doctor began to follow Tey out of the room, looking behind and shooting Fi a grimace. She had one of her own, along with an arm wrapped around her torso, but she managed to flash the Luis a smile. Reil remained sitting, a confused look on his face. Cali had her head in her hands. "*Knew* I was going to regret this..." she muttered.

Exiting the building and shutting the door, Luis turned to face his friend.

"Doc, what the frell was that?" demanded the ex-CorSec officer.

Luis put up his hands. "Look, it was her idea."

"And you went along?" Tey asked, an eyebrow cocked.

"No, she just kind of... went. I didn't have much choice in the matter. In any case, we got the point across and the other man in there... hold on," Luis said, fishing for his comlink. "Who in the galaxy would be..." he stopped, looking at the message.

Tey took a step beside him. "What is it?"

"Galaxy, it's Tonto!" He shot his companion an incredulous glance. "It's that blasted little droid? How in the Force did he get here?"

Tey sighed. "I think I might know."

Posted by Xaturuk on 13 August 2008 08:14 AM:

Main Engine Room/Rogue Circuit/Orbit above Corellia

The heat in the main engine room had become so intense that the bulkheads were changing color to a dull red. Billee didn't need protection however. His chasis was rated for temperatures some degrees higher than current -- just a few degrees. However, that limit didn't apply to his circuitry. He had to work the repairs in small shifts at a time if he wanted to keep them from damage. 20 minutes on, 5 off, and repeat.

The GK7 cooling units hadn't burst, thank the maker. However the macro-coolant distributor wrapping had split along its seam. The fibrous padding was bulging from the tear, and the matrix of miniature tubes that push the coolant was broken. Billee stood up from the repulsor glider. The repairs weren't critical, but they'd need to be done at a port. He walked to the diagnostic panel and transferred the power reserves out of the reactor. He rerouted the cryogenic power cells over to Shields and remaining systems. The ionization reactor was only designed for the SLAM boost system, and the *Rogue Circuit* would just have to make do without it for the time being.

Billee gave the engine room a brief inspection. The heart of the ship was the dual Quadex power core for the main drives. Captain So had it custom made to fit into a special drive

arrangement. Six Koensayr R200-Ultra drives, the large cylindrical engines standard on Y-wing starfighters, were installed in an arc on the rear of the freighter. The installation alone had caused the tech crew to redesign the entire aft section of the ship. The R200 engines could fire simultaneously or singularly. This alternate fire timing gave the *Rogue Circuit* unorthodox propulsion when needed. A well timed burst in firing line order, could send the ship into a spiraling barrel roll.

An additional set of microthrusters, the N2-F series, was installed at the ends of the widest part of the ship. The small maneuvering jets were coordinated by the flight computer and could add tighter turning degrees.

The ship com pinged, and Billee put it through. V6 informed him that their place in the re-orbit queue was about to be called. He was pleased to find that he hadn't made as much of a mess this time, and only had to wipe off a minimal amount of cooling liquid from his hands.

Captain Quarters/*Rogue Circuit*/Orbit above Corellia

Tholme awoke to a gentle chime. His eyes fluttered, and he sat up on his bed. The sound was coming from the datapad on his desk. He glanced at the holo on the wall. It was a live broadcast of the Intergalactic Banking Clan's stock market updates. A tall Muun stood at a podium reciting an informational report concerning the price of metals in the outer rim territories. Scrolling bars of information were on all sides of the screen with the IGBC logo in a corner. Tholme picked up the remote and flash-forwarded the scrolling numbers until he got to Chemicals. Binary Liquid prices were bottoming out and had been for the past few days. This was good news for him – bad news for his client.

He walked in front of the viewport and looked out at Corellia, a mix of gold and grey continents amidst hazy blue seas. The third deck of the *Rogue Circuit* had two lounges in each accessory arm, each twice as big as the standard Captain's bunk next to the cockpit. With all the time he spent off-planet, he wanted a larger space to call his own. It helped that he found two lounges in a small freighter unnecessary. He'd had Billee and the pit crew convert one of the lounges into an acceptable Captain's quarters. He instructed them to leave the large circular viewing panel.

His datapad's chime sounded again, and he went to his desk. Rubbing his temples he activated the ship comm, "3-D4, bring me a cup of caf, will you? I've got a headache that would cripple a ronto."

A handful of seconds passed before his administrative droid's eager voice replied, "Right away, sir! I will see to it personally!"

Tholme shook his head and snorted. He couldn't stop a slight smile from reaching the corner of his mouth. He switched off the comm and brought up the datapad interface. A message was waiting. Tholme frowned at the small glowing icon that designated it as a personal message. He hadn't received one of those in years. Unsure exactly how to continue, he cocked his head up at the wall of his room. He considered not opening the message or even deleting it. Finally, he concluded that it just might be important. Someone must have gone through great trouble to find his personal comlink, or remembered after many years. He opened it.

A chill went down Tholme's back. "Long time no see, 'Captain'! I know you don't like getting calls like this, but we have some major issues we need to talk about. One of the boys has finally got himself caught. We might be compromised."

Tholme's face went white. Though the room was tested

soundproof, his shaking hands turned down the volume. "I caught your ship's ID transponder in Corellia's entry line, " The man laughed deeply, and Tholme winced at the unwanted memories that it resurfaced, "It just happens that I'm on Coronet, right now. What do you say to a little reunion, eh? I'll be at the Lastdark Club tonight. 7 pm, Galactic Standard Time, and don't be late." The transmission went black.

He sat back in his chair, running his hands through his hair. The door pinged, and 3-D4 entered. He held a small tray with a steaming cup atop it. "Your caf, sir," The droid turned its head about the room briefly, and stopped on the empty brandy bottles on the bedside table. Tholme scowled at the droid as he took the cup, "Is this an inspection, Three-dee-four?"

"Oh! N-No, sir!"

"Good. Please, inform the pit droids that I'd like a 20-point component check on the Air-2. I'll be taking it out when we land."

"Yes, sir." 3-D4 inclined his head.

After the droid left, he hit the ship comm again, "Captain Billee, have you queried Corellian Control for appropriate ports?"

"Yes, sir. There are several options that seem equally suitable." Billee replied.

"I'd like something in Coronet."

"Behareh Spaceport is on the outskirts of the downtown area. Is that acceptable?"

"Excellent. Carry on, Captain."

Tholme went to the small chest at the bottom of his armoire. He pulled out a small photograph, amidst the clutter of other personal items. Sitting on the bed, he stared at the four men in the picture. Each were dressed in plain clothes at a local Corellian cantina, making the most absurd expressions. He saw himself there, a youth with no fear of death and a desperate desire for a just cause to defend. They were a happy, carefree group.

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 13 August 2008 01:16 PM:

The growing orb of Corellia grew in the viewport outside, gradually increasing in detail until the lights and cities could be picked out from the surrounding forests and mountains.

"We're cleared to land in Coronet, folks," Damon announced. "It's winter there, and right at the solar terminator, so we may want to dress for the cold night."

Mir jabbed him in the side. "You're just trying to swing it so you can bring that coat."

Damon shot her a glance, and made a show of pulling a dull brown duster from the locker in the wall. It wasn't nearly as flashy as his usual attire, and was obviously cut to fit someone much larger than he. Damon disappeared inside it, and Tam already had a hard time recognizing him.

Tam had already taken the time to peruse the contents of the *Nova Viper* while it had been in hyperspace. It was stocked to the gills with weapons, as befitting a bounty hunter's conveyance, and Tam had wondered why the previous owner hadn't cleared it all out before putting it on the market. He'd have to ask Master Kenlan about that some time.

But it was time for business, now. Damon, Kenlan, and Thel were going to Damon's contact, while Mir and he were going to spend time elsewhere. Ostensibly, they were going to enjoy the city, but they were supposed to keep an eye on the others and provide cover, should any be necessary. Tam gave the ship's equipment one last look, and found a bantha skin jacket with a fleece interior. If what Damon said was true, and the city was

going to be cold, the jacket would be perfect. Nothing else looked like something Tam needed, or could carry without looking conspicuous, so he settled for the jacket and rejoined the others.

The *Nova Viper* descended through the thick clouds, amid a soft flurry of snowflakes. The city below had a rosy golden glow in the growing darkness. As it landed, and the boarding ramp extended, everyone stepped out, bundled against the cold...

Posted by Darth_Vader2005 on 13 August 2008 01:46 PM:

"Yes Tonto?" Luis responded tentatively into his commlink.

"Master Santiago, I need to inform you of a startling development, your ship has been seized by another!" The droid's eerily mechanical voice came back.

"What? You mean the Empire?"

"No sir, by a Corellian by the name of Koro Bolera, and he has landed here on Tatooine to finish making repairs to the ship."

"Bolera was the guy who frakked off As-Buka and Tam wasn't he?" Tey asked quietly.

Nodding at the Corellian's question the doctor continued to speak into the device "Tonto where is he now?"

"I believe he went to a scrap dealer for more parts sir."

Luis grinned slightly, "Well lock the doors and don't open them until we get there, ok? And make sure they're secure, that gambler's full of surprises."

"Very well master."

The two stood in silence for a moment, of all the backwater holes for the *Long Shot* to wind up in, the fact that it had wound up on the desert world was unbelievable.

Tey eventually broke the silence "So, you mentioned something about Bartok. He's moved up to slave trading then?"

"Yeah, he owns our host, she's called Cali by the way, as well as maybe 20 others at the moment. It sounds like you scared him out here from Corellia. What happened?"

Tey chuckled softly "Nothing very dramatic, he just underestimated me a few times too many. He was born on a planet that holds some interesting ideas about right and wrong, specifically that there are *Shekni*, the closest basic translation is 'Avatar of Justice'. The belief is that they are unstoppable, incorruptible, unkillable spirits. I just took advantage of certain events and his own superstitions to get him off Corellia."

"So you took his oldest beliefs about right and wrong and twisted them to fit your needs?"

"Pretty much"

"You're a bad person Tey." Luis said, shaking his head.

The Corellian shrugged before continuing "Anyway, I'll go have a talk with him."

"What are you going to tell Cali and Reil? About you being a jealous brother?"

"You're going to tell them I've eased up on you and I'm taking you into hiding, away from my father's bounty hunters." Tey responded. "Then you go to the starport and get in the ship and wait for me for a few hours. If you don't hear from me then leave." He paused and thought for a few moments. "Offer to take them off this rock as well, we can drop 'em off somewhere that makes slavery illegal." Luis stared for a moment at Tey before speaking.

"You're getting soft" He said jokingly. "What about your reputation?"

"I'll tell them it was your idea then." Tey said as he went back into the house.

Posted by naboo_princess on 13 August 2008 01:57 PM:

Tarynn sat near the end of the bar, close to the door and one eye on the room, while she sipped a drink that looked like a Fogblaster. She had just turned to stare at a Rodian male that showed no discretions in his looks, the correct word would have been *glare*, when she noticed someone else enter the cantina, and promptly turned back around on her stool. She paid the male that had just entered no mind, except now she was watching the room and the newcomer.

She was nearly finished her drink when a huge brute of a man shouldered his way past her, and caused her to spill the remainder of her drink over the counter. She was about to turn and angrily give him a piece of her mind, when she noticed that same thug approached the strange man. She held her tongue and instead turned to watch the interchange.

It ended with a table broken. When she heard the man ask for a junk dealer, she guessed he had a ship at the spaceport. She stood up off her stool, and approached him. As she leaned one elbow against the bar, she asked, "So, do you have a ship?" She smiled widely, "I need passage off this rock."

Posted by ij thompson on 13 August 2008 05:42 PM:

As Luis and Tey reentered Cali's tiny home, Fi was waiting to greet them.

"Darling!" she cried, throwing herself into Luis's arms. "I'm so happy to see you alive!"

Luis, sensing the charade was finally nearly over, permitted himself to return her embrace, true to character. "Well, it was touch-and-go there, for a while..." he grinned.

"And we're free? Everything's settled?"

"We are," he confirmed. "Tey's realized that we're, uh... made for each other, and he's going to take us away on his starship, somewhere where your father's bounty hunters will never find us." Turning, he took in the room's other occupants.

"Zealos, Cali, you're invited to join us, too."

Cali stood ramrod straight, swallowed nervously. "Gee..." she stuttered, "I'm pretty sure Bartok would have a thing or two to say about *that*."

Tey Spires stepped forward.

"That's where I come in..."

Posted by Vash Knives on 13 August 2008 08:22 PM:

Koro turned to the woman he had noticed earlier. She wanted a lift off the planet. That was clear. Her easiness around him after what he just did pegged her as used to violence. He guessed she used to do somebody's dirty work. The hint of desperation in her tone told him that whoever that somebody was, she had done something they had not liked.

"I can take you wherever you like. Or if you just want out of here I can do that too."

Koro was interrupted by his commlink going off answering it he spoke.

"Bolera here, what is it Tonto?"

"*Masters Spires and Santiago are here on Tatooine.*"

"Did you tell them I was here?"

"Yes, and that you had seized the ship."

"Nice one. You didn't tell them the full story did you?"

"No. Should I have?"

"It would have helped. Santiago and me have butted heads a time or two. He's a nice guy, but not the brightest star in the Galaxy. If he doesn't get the full story, he is likely to make the wrong assumption."

"Master Santiago said himself that I am to lock the ship up, not to open the door until they get here, and to keep the ship secure."

"The way around that is simple. Lock the ship up, unlock it when I get there, allow me to open the door, then as you will have a professional soldier on board, the ship will be secure. As well I've picked up a passenger. And it's not in Luis' nature to allow anyone to die when he could have done something about it, which is what would happen to me and my passenger if he left us here. I'll be right there. Koro out."

With that Koro shut off his commlink. He turned to the woman who had asked after finishing his drink in one go.

"Follow me."

With the woman in tow, the Antarian Ranger quickly made his way back to the *Long Shot* and got aboard as he had planned. He once again turned to the woman.

"You never said who you were or why you need passage. Feel free to rectify that."

"You never said what the charge would be."

"I never said I would charge."

Posted by Xaturuk on 14 August 2008 08:07 AM:

Cockpit/Rogue Circuit/Orbit above Corellia

"Welcome to Behareh Spaceport, *Rogue Circuit*. You are clear to land on docking bay 37. Please follow the usual procedure. If at any time you feel that you must relinquish manual control, our automated-authority docking program is equipped to operate..." V6 switched off the communication.

He wasn't going to need any other assistance. Days worth of hours in the on-board simulator as well as intense programming made the droid confident of his landing capability. It was just his combat response program that put the droid off his mark. For some reason, his creators thought it unwise to give the pilot droid a flight capability that could handle such situations. The little droid tweeted a low murmur. Perhaps it was his destiny.

"Talking to yourself again, V6?" Captain Billee asked. The BLX droid was standing at attention behind him, observing the landing routine. V6 beeped back a hesitant affirmative. Billee nodded and modulated his tone to sound softer, "I think that you will make a very fine combat pilot, in time. Maybe, though, we should consider ourselves lucky that combat situations are as infrequent as they have been."

V6 perked up and twiddled a hopeful reply. Billee inclined his head, "Yes, I think you really will."

The droid beeped merrily and took the ship down.

Behareh Spaceport/Corellia

The Barloz Freighter descended in a long arc, coming around several commercial zones of the Coronet. The air traffic was jammed up all the way through the city, this being the end of work shifts all over the city. Orbital queue lines stretched out nearly to upper atmosphere, each ship sometimes making short cease the stress off repulsor lifts. A standard tech crew guided the freighter into its bay. The ship slid in at an upward angle, and then the nose gently settled until the whole craft set down softly. A landing worthy of flight academies the galaxy over.

The exhaust ports of the ship were shooting out streams of steam even as the engines winded down. A few techs cleared made available the re-fueling hoses and charging pads – a business co-operative with local in-planet fuel companies. Their fuel pumps and cell rechargers were installed directly in the

spaceport. A representative of the spaceport authorities waited at the bottom of the ramp for credential check and docking fee collection. Her uniform was crisp with a short, clean cap, and she stood straight.

The entry ramp to the freighter hissed, and opened onto the bay floor.

Lower Cargo Hold/Rogue Circuit/Behareh Spaceport

"You did what?" Tholme demanded.

The lead pit droid scrambled a stuttering fizzle of sound, pointing at several new parts on the Air-2 racing swoop. "It's already rated for top speed. I don't know why you needed to change anything." He replied.

The droid continued to beep and blip, occasionally looking to the other two pit droids who nodded vehemently in agreement. Tholme shook his head, "I need to find more for you three to do."

All three droids nodded.

Billee arrived from the lift and saluted, "Power down is complete, Captain, with the usual exception of security measures and communications."

"Very good, Billee. Re-fuel the tanks and recharge the power cells. The docking fee has been paid and I've rented heavy repair tools you'll need to repair the coolant wrapping. I will arrange for food provisions, and I have several items I must see to personally. My comlink will always be on, and I trust you'll notify me immediately if any matters of importance arise?"

"Immediately, sir."

Tholme clasped the droid over the shoulder, "Take care not to allow anyone on this ship except myself for any reason. I'm not feeling very comfortable here, right now, and I'm worried that something bad may happen."

Billee observed Tholme's eyes. He didn't exactly understand his meaning, but refrained from speaking. He'd learned that it was a good habit when humans spoke irrationally. The alternative of asking questions, usually led to sarcastic remarks or withdrawal. Billee preferred a relationship that included ... mutual trust with the Captain. He could not understand that, either, but he particularly need to.

Tholme appraised his crew and spoke to Billee again, "If you think it best, Captain, you have my permission to allow each of the crew a forty minute oil bath."

The pit droids went into exuberant commotion, throwing their arms into the air. Billee nodded, subtly pleased, and even 3-D4 rocked back and forth in satisfaction. Tholme had the faintest hint of a smile on his face as he turned and mounted the swoop. He saluted his crew and accelerated down the ramp.

Posted by naboo_princess on 14 August 2008 01:11 PM:

One thinly arched eyebrow raised slightly. She was impressed by the audacity of this man.

"You didn't think to ask me earlier?" She shrugged, "Very well, then. My name is Tarynn Gray, I've been planet hopping for the last month, because I know Her Majesty's operatives are tracking me."

She smiled, "Satisfied? I'm usually not one to disclose that information. And as for where I'm headed...anywhere."

She fell silent for a few minutes, deep in thought, before she spoke again, "You mind telling me who I caught a ride with? You're an impressive man, and I would like to be on a first name basis."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 14 August 2008 01:39 PM:

Despite the bitter chill, denizens of Treasure Ship Row were dressed for a Tatooine summer. Tam surmised that the proximity of so many bodies kept anybody from slipping into hypothermia. Tam actually thought he saw one woman who had slipped into such a state, but a closer look revealed that her skin was naturally blue. Unfortunately, the closer look revealed more skin than Tam's mother ever expected him to see. He glanced away quickly, but his gaze fell on another scene that made his eyes goggle and involuntarily dart elsewhere, then another. He looked up, hoping for some visual relief, but the sign 'Zeltrons and Twi'leks all bare, oh my!' flashed in gaudy, holographic brilliance overhead. Tam looked to the floor, where the Row's refuse and detritus was mildly less visually toxic than everything else he'd been subjected to so far. The only place he felt comfortable looking was at Mir'isha.

"Yeah, that's the look," she chuckled. "Even better than Damon's. You guys are so cute. Hey, I think we're here." She pointed forward, and Tam caught himself before he actually looked. "You hungry?"

"As long as my food has clothes, I am."

"Don't worry, kid. Mynock's Haven isn't that kind of place."

It wasn't, but Tam's mom still wouldn't have approved. Alcohol flowed like water, and the air was hardly breathable. One of those breathmasks he had found on the *Nova Viper* would have been handy.

Eventually, they found an empty table. A small, tarnished droid hovered up to them. "Orders, please?"

"I can't come to Corellia without a glass of lum," Mir announced. Then, she looked at Tam. "Er..."

"Um... Blue milk, please."

The droid paused, as if processing the orders. "Very good. Sir, Madame, I will return with your drinks shortly."

"Sir?" Tam said, snorting.

"Madame?" Mir added. They shared a giggle and waited for their drinks...

Posted by Vash Knives on 14 August 2008 07:16 PM:

"Koro Bolera. And to be honest I'm not that surprised that I impress you. It's not in my nature to take advantage of a woman in need for financial or *pauses as he looks Tarynn up and down.* personal gain. I consider myself to be a gentleman."

Posted by Corr Terek on 14 August 2008 07:48 PM:

"That's strange," Damon muttered. Thel and Kenlan came to a stop behind him.

"What is it?" Thel asked, glancing around. There were fewer people on the streets in this area, and the three men kind of stood out.

"Ysmina used to set up shop right around here," Damon said, gesturing towards the deserted building in front of them. "At least, I think she did. I may be lost."

"Lookin' for the fortune-teller?" Damon jumped at the voice, and turned to see a grizzled old man studying him and his companions.

"Yes, we were," he replied. "Do you know where to find her?"

"She ain't here any more," the man said, with a short, raspy laugh. " 'Bout three days ago the Empire showed up an' raided the place. Cleaned out all them Ryn, and good riddance!"

Thel frowned. "Do you know if she was captured?"

The man shrugged. "Didn't see her bein' led out, but I didn't hang around to keep count." He looked suspiciously at them. "Why you so interested?"

Damon and Thel looked at each other, at a momentary loss for words. Kenlan, however, neatly stepped into the opening in the conversation. "My nephews here were hoping to have their fortunes told. This one," he threw an arm around Damon's shoulder, "wanted to know if a certain young lady returned his affections -- and that one," he added, nodding towards Thel, "is wondering whether a career in the Imperial Navy is for him."

The old man chuckled. "You young folks, always in a hurry to know everything."

Kenlan nodded sagely. "Too true, friend. It would be better if they were like you and me, content to take life as it comes."

"Youth is wasted in the young, so they say," the old man cleared his throat, and turned to leave. "Best find yourself another fortune-teller, I reckon." He paused and took one last look at the deserted building. "Strange, though. You'd think she woulda seen that comin', bein' a fortune-teller and all."

With one last raspy chuckle he walked away, leaving the three men alone again on the street. "So..." Thel said, breaking the silence. "What now?"

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 15 August 2008 11:30 AM:

"So," Tam said, looking up from his empty glass, "what now?"

Mir'isha peered through a narrow window. "Not sure. Last I saw, Damon and our friends went into that alley over there, probably to contact some friends we met here."

"All right, so we just wait here?"

"I dunno. I have a bad feeling about this."

Tam did too, but it didn't have anything to do with their friends outside. Two beings were eyeing them from across the room. They were both aliens he'd never seen before, burly and covered in thick hides. One elbowed the other, who whispered into a comlink concealed in his meaty hand.

"This is getting me nervous," Mir said. "We'd better check this out. Come on Tam, let's make tracks."

"Not a bad idea," Tam said, keeping the two aliens in the corner of his eye as they left.

The chill outside was sharp, much sharper than when they had entered Mynock's Haven. But the streets of Treasure Ship Row were just as crowded as before. Tam concentrated on keeping up with Mir'isha, who was rushing to the side street into which she had seen Damon and the others disappear. When they rounded the corner and saw a remarkably empty section of town, Mir'isha swore under her breath.

"Such language, little girl," a rumbling, marble-mouthed voice said. Tam and Mir spun around to see the two large alien goons from the bar. "You'll have to cut that out when Ghull gets here, or he might not be so lenient with your punishment."

Mir tried her best to hide her sudden panic, but Tam could sense it on her like a static charge. "Boys! Long time no see!"

"Too long, by our calendars," the other said. The words tumbled out of the monster's mouth slowly and methodically, like he could barely understand them, let alone pronounce them.

"So, you told Ghull I was here?" Mir said, her voice cracking slightly.

"We told him we had a 'pleasant surprise' for him," one said.

"Weren't particular as to exactly what," the other added. He eyed Tam, and a look of condescension flashed in his beady eyes. "Who's the kid?"

"The kid' is my friend," Mir explained. "He's not part of this, so just leave him alone, okay?"

"Your friend, eh? Ghull could use a new cabin boy. That old droid of his is getting a bit worn out."

"Right," the other added, "fatigued."

The first one turned to his pal. "Deteriorated."

Meeting the challenge, the other said, "Overused!"

"Exhausted!"

"Used up!"

"Depleted!"

"Ha! You've already used D!"

Tam leaned over to Mir. "Are they always like this?"

"Unfortunately."

Tam nodded. It gave him an idea. "You don't really want to take us to your boss, do you?" he said.

The goons halted their word bout, nonplused. "What did you say, kid?"

"I said," Tam prepared to repeat himself, putting the full force of his will behind his words. "*You don't really want to take us to your boss.*"

"We don't," one goon said. "We don't want to take you to our boss."

The corner of Tam's lips turned up in satisfaction. "*You never even saw us here.*"

"Saw who?" the other replied.

Tam relaxed and smiled. "Well Mir, looks like it worked... Mir?" He looked around, and she was nowhere to be seen.

There was a duo of large thugs, and the two goons suddenly collapsed against each other. Mir stood behind them, wielding a large metal pipe she'd found on the ground. "We gotta get out of here before these guys can tell Ghull they saw us."

"I wouldn't worry about that. When they wake up they will have forgotten everything. Master Kenlan taught me that the Force can be a powerful means of deception."

"My," Mir said, "but you're handy to have around!"

Posted by naboo_princess on 15 August 2008 12:52 PM:

"Gentleman, hmmm? Well, I suppose you're not like the other spacers I've run into." She turned an approving eye towards him.

Her mind kept running back to the conversation he had at the cantina, but she knew better than to ask about it. She liked being surprised.

"Where are you planning on going? Or are we going to sit here for a few minutes? Because if we're just going to sit here, I suppose you'd let a girl use the refresher?" When she smiled this time, it was only slightly; corners of her mouth upturned just little. "I can't imagine what this arid place is doing to my skin."

Posted by Xaturuk on 15 August 2008 04:09 PM:

Air-2 Racing Swoop/Approaching Coronet

It felt refreshing to be planetside again. He'd been up for longer than he could remember – at least the maximum that the storage capability would allow. He even stretched it a little beyond that because the droids didn't need food or oxygen. Even then, the last several times they'd restocked, he hadn't even left the ship. That made it at least, what? A year? Two years?

Still, even the stretching plains of Corellia with their intermittent farms and blocked villiage squares – the embodiment of all his childhood memories – was not enough to

put the sense of dread out of his mind. It manifested itself in the patches of sweat around his arms and neck collar. He gripped the handles tighter than usual, and kept having to unclench his teeth.

The swoop was gliding smoothly at just 70 kilometers, and Tholme knew that it could go faster. An instant of wild abandon had him gunning the accelerator. His knees, snugly pressed to the leg shield, and his feet guided the lateral motion of the speeder. He could twist onto his side if he wasn't careful, but a more controlled press would give just the right amount of slide in a tight corner.

The designated drive lane was clear of any traffic for a seemingly infinite distance. Even at a steady 600 kilometers per hour it would take him a minute or two to arrive at Coronet's crowded city center. The swoop's speed hit over 200 kilometers per hour, and he was surprised to feel virtually no vibration. The engine blazed on. 300. 400. 500. Tholme's backside started to quake and the rumble. 550. 600. His hands were locked onto the handles, but the shaking was threatening to throw them off. He squeezed his knees tightly together. The slightest mistake would transform the swoop into a fiery whirlwind. 625. The blaring engine was loud enough to hurt his ears. His knuckles were white as he clenched for his life. The adrenaline pumped through his body, and he his wide-eyed stare was dead ahead – centered on the road.

Then, to Tholme's relief and disappointment, Coronet city seemed to jump up out of the hills. He decelerated, in the knowledge that it was important to be just as careful slowing down as speeding up. The swoop gently cycled back down to a comfortable 100 kilometers per hour. After the rush of top speed it felt like a granite slug's pace. However, the brilliance of the city's lightscape was a more than acceptable trade. The gleaming colors on scrolling business centers. The sky lanes, levels of them, that layered up into the fading sunset. Enormous buildings were the heart of downtown, some stretching up into low clouds. The biggest one was Tholme's destination. The Lastdark club was renowned for its amazing views; the highest altitudinal spot a couple could have drinks and dancing. The uppermost point of Coronet.

It was a kriffing poor spot for a last minute rendezvous with this particular acquaintance. Tholme hadn't spoke to many people, and he definitely hadn't been around more than a few at a time for nearly twenty years. Those were places for a younger generation. His time had come and gone. Tholme glanced in the side mirror at his face. He'd shaved up - left a little of the beard around his chin for a bit of regality. It complimented the light grey streaks starting to appear above his ears. He told himself that it was mainly for his image in regards to his business. A cleaner look would make for better promotion and advertisements.

In retrospect, however, he couldn't fool himself. He was an old man of a long dead era. There wouldn't be anyone standing at his funeral, and there wouldn't be anyone reading the obituary on the net. He was over the hill, dried up, and had played all the cards he'd been dealt. With so little left, what in the stars was there that could make him afraid to die? Or, for that matter, anxious to live?

Main Engine Room/Rogue Circuit/Behareh Spaceport

"Pull it further toward you," Billee's even vocabulary directed. Two pit droids, standing side by side on the reactor core, yanked on the thermal wrapping. The seam closed just enough for him to sear a weld across the pieces. The network of coolant tubes had taken a great amount of meticulous work. He'd had to disassemble the entire wrapping and unsleeve the

padding. Re-connecting each broken pipette needed a macro-imager and a fine-point fusion torch. A few hours later, the pipes were streaming fluid like new. Now, Billee closed the gap from top to bottom. Orange glowing embers sprayed in a fountain against the labor droids bronze plating. "Got it." He called, standing to his feet.

The two droids jumped down and linked arms, admiring the repair. They warbled at each other and one clapped a rod-thin arm against Billee's leg in appreciation. "Thanks. That torch would be handy to have onboard during spot fixes." He mused.

The two droids, already walking towards the engine room door, were squeaking about the oil bath. One of them began to run, the sound of his feet pattering into the distance while the other ejected a barrage of protesting unfairness. "Don't bother requesting to be dismissed!" Billee called after them.

Posted by Xaturuk on 16 August 2008 12:20 PM:

Lift/Lastdark Club/Coronet

The lift-tube music was terrible. Tholme couldn't see how the younglings could listen to it. The transparisteel encased lift was anchored along the side of Corellia's tallest structure. He watched the ground sink further and further below him, the nearly overwhelming network of lights winking into small dots and then blending into a bright congested mass. The lift traveled in tranquil silence to the very top.

As its doors opened, the lift music took a backseat to the willowy low-tempo notes of B'ssa nuuvu. Tholme immediately felt more at ease. He was greeted by large Zabrak. After paying the cover, and raising his arms for a brief weapons scan, he moved into the club.

Lowlights danced in patterns across the lounge floor, and he lithely stepped through the groups of sentients. Most were having quiet conversations, drinks in their hands. The patronage was definitely upper class citizens, and a few caste sneering looks at Tholme as he maneuvered to the bar. Tholme didn't bother to excuse himself when he occasionally bumped into someone. He made his way to the bar. The vidscreens showed a range of entertainments, and some holodisplays were set into table tops.

"Corellian Ale." He said towards the bartender. The man nodded, his attention on a group of younger twi-lek females. The drink was set before him a moment later, the foam raising above the glass's rim. He took a large gulp and subtly turned to observe the seating. He found him in no time, at a back table overlooking the dance floor. There were four empty bottles in front of him, and still he sat stone straight. His short cropped hair and smooth face made it seem as if he hadn't aged at all. But a closer look showed the lines around his mouth and the corners of his eyes. He looked haggard, though his was dressed in a sharp corellian suit. Was he fooling himself, too? Tholme missed his old friend just looking at him. He weaved his way through the chairs to his friend with an extra ale in his hand.

"Thought you might not show, Sarge," The man half-smiled.

Tholme sat, sliding the ale over. "Sounded important. And don't call me Sarge."

The man nodded, chuckling lightly and taking a drink, "Still the same...after all these years." He didn't seem anxious to start the conversation. Tholme didn't blame him.

They both looked over at the dance floor. A thick collection of sentients swayed and stepped to the music. Colored holo-shapes were twisting in the space overhead, and blue beams criss-crossed over the walls. The building itself seemed to be

cradling the spirit of exuberance and life. Each couple or trio danced close, waiting for the crescendo of the music, the apex of their weekend. They didn't look behind them, didn't care who was watching, didn't think about the future.

He and his old friend sat there staring in silence. Tholme had never felt so outside before in his life. He brushed off the painful feeling of isolation. It was too late for self-pity.

Office/Rogue Circuit/Behareh Spaceport

3-D4 sat at the office computer display desk feeling forgotten. "They never bother to ask me to come with them." He sulked, thinking of the ship's droids jovially gathered around the oil bath.

The ship's inventory log was finished updating, now set into the present market parameters with current price fluctuations. If the *Rogue Circuit* could make its delivery before the next market change, their profit margin would have tripled since the time the trade contract was brokered. The price of binary liquids had been in decline since the end of the clone wars, it being a primary ingredient in special armor compounds. However, as reports hit the galaxy of the Empire's largest battle station being destroyed by the rebels, the Captain took a client in armor-related chemicals immediately. He'd commented it was good economic sense, "The war is just beginning, and soldiers need armor." Captain So lacked in many attributes, but possessing exceptional business savvy was not one of them.

The attributes he did lack just happened to be the ones he practiced on Three-dee-four. The droid couldn't understand the way he was treated. It was like the Captain seemed to keep him at a distance, quite unlike his close relationships with the others. He snapped at him over simple questions, and he sometimes seemed upset for no reason. Particularly, the Captain felt overly protective of his sleeping quarters. The few times he'd found Three-dee-four going about standard cleaning protocol – somedroid had to do it on this ship, Captain So was simply ghastly about the state of his environment – the Captain was so furious that Three-dee-four feared he might be scrapped.

This made Three-dee-four feel strange. It was like overheating, but his internals always read perfectly normal temperatures. Billee kept telling him that it was anger and that it was natural, but he couldn't logically accept that. Anger wasn't part of his programming. The only time he'd ever heard of it was for sub-socio models designed for special city districts programmed for the needs of clientele's specifically deviant tastes – a preposterous notion in and of itself, let alone the anger programming.

The thought of the being left out by the others, the Captain's mistreatment, and the absurd droid applications by deviant-minded sentients marked a kind of breaking point in 3-D4. He slammed his fists down on the desk and stood. "I don't like being treated like a mindless component, and I won't stand for it anymore, Captain!" He called to the empty room with one finger raised. His first order of business was to satisfy his curiosity, regardless of consequence.

He marched out of the office and through the ship's crew lounge. It was a spacious addition, built into the section of the mid-level cargo hold that adjoined the office and medical bay. A table with large half-wrap-around seating was in one corner of the room – the dimensions made to accommodate the limited maneuverability of droids. A flat holo screen was hanging on one of the walls – a smashball match was currently in progress. The pit droids favorite team, the Corellian Dreadnaughts, was at a coming up short. The three stood freshly cleaned from the oil

bath, throwing their arms and squawking at the holo when a bad call was made.

The entire ship's crew huddled in the room. It was a cacophony of sound, the beeps, whistles, and occasional vocabulary chatter making for a very relaxed atmosphere. The 2-1B and GH-7 medical droids had decided to join, and they were at the table quietly speaking to each other. Even Zed, the ship's 501-Z security model, was hulked down in a seat next to the oil bath, his blaster rifle slung across his back as he discreetly observed the game. Billee and the V6 were sharing in private amusements, the V6 jerkily treading back and forth in a parody of a sand-ridden R2 unit.

The crew quieted only slightly as 3-D4 passed, turning to watch. He ignored them and continued to the lift. Of course they'd be enjoying themselves without him. He took it up to the third deck, and approached the Captain's quarters. His hand paused for just a second before the door's entry pad. Just one look would satisfy, and then he would stop this irrational behavior. He punched in the code and went through.

Posted by ij thompson on 16 August 2008 07:05 PM:

"Are you crazy?" Cali exclaimed. "You can't meet Master Bartok! You meet him once, and then you're dead!"

"I'm confident I'll be able to handle him," Tey replied.

"Oh, *you're* confident you'll be able to handle him," the girl mocked nervously. "I'm confident he'll grind my bones into powder when he finds out I led ya to him!"

"I assure you that won't happen. Either way, come first sun, me and Bartok are gonna have a little chat about this new enterprise of his."

"Well, you won't have to wait until morning," Cali explained coolly. "He sleeps all day. Can't stand the heat. You can find him right now in his little hidey-hole up the road, makin' deals and playin' cards with his friends."

"The address?"

"Search me. But it's eleven doors up and on the right side. I bring his bedtime tea there every morning."

"He'll be having no tea today. Luis, take everybody to the *Long Shot* and get her warmed. We're taking off in thirty minutes." Tey paused, added, "but don't wait for me."

"If you guys bungle this up," Cali said soberly, looking each of them in the eye for a long moment, "then you've signed my death warrant. I hope you understand that."

"It'll be okay," Fi said, smiling reassuringly.

"Then let's do it."

It was cold in the street, the sky black as the deepest sea. Cali ushered each of her new acquaintances through her hovel apartment's door, then followed them out. She paused habitually outside the entrance, crude key in hand. But then, with a smile, she dropped the little piece of metal onto the cold sand at her feet.

"Won't be needing *that* no more."

Turning, she stalked off into the darkness in the direction of the spaceport, Luis and Fi following close behind. Zealos Reil hung back, however, favouring Tey Spires with a curious look.

"Hey no offense, fella," he offered, "but you plan to handle this guy all on your own, or could you use a little backup?"

Posted by Vash Knives on 16 August 2008 07:10 PM:

"I'm probably not like anyone you've met before. Anyway,

we will likely be here a while, so for your information, the refresher is over there."

As Tarynn went to the refresher, Koro reflected on how his plan was going. He had hoped to just get the parts he needed, go back to Hideout, fix up the ship, find Luis and Tey, and give them back the newly restored ship. Tonto had caused a bit of a mess. The gambler hadn't expected the two men to be on Tatooine, or for Tonto to notify them of the situation. Making things worse, Tonto had done it in the worst way. It would be a challenge to convince the men of his true intentions, Luis more so. Tey was really the unknown factor. He was a fellow Corellian, and CorSec to boot. Spires would likely listen to him. The trick would be getting a word past Luis' accusations.

Posted by Ice Hawk on 16 August 2008 10:19 PM:

Tey turned to Reil.

"I'll be fine."

Reil grinned.

"That's too bad 'cause I'm goin' with ya anyhow."

Tey's eyes narrowed.

"Why?"

Reil shrugged.

"Just to make sure."

"Make sure of what?"

"Make sure you don't fark up and get yourself killed, or worse, leave Bartok alive."

Tey's face became very serious.

"I'm not a murderer."

Reil grinned.

"If you say so, Mr. Spires. With your reputation I figured you'd have no qualms about it, but I guess I was wrong. Frankly it doesn't matter to me either way. If you don't want to, I'll do it. Either way Chuv Bartok doesn't see sunrise."

Posted by Thaycon Devoid on 16 August 2008 11:02 PM:

Melroek sat alone at the bar for the first time since joining the Empire. His thoughts were distracted as he read through the folder.

Besoh never did anything to hurt me... and yet I turned on him the moment I thought he had. Melroek downed his glass and signaled for another. *A rebel's a rebel; I can't just allow people to get away with it, no matter who they are. The Empire's hurting enough as it is to allow for weaknesses.* He drank deeply from the glass he'd been given, his eyes already bloodshot from the booze. *I did what's right. I did not take out my anger on him, I just turned him in; who knows what wrong he might've caused us if I'd allow him to run free.*

He forced his groggy mind back to the papers he held.

An automatic deposit to my account every week...all I have to do is live and/or travel with my targets? No killing, just reporting. Hmm... "the mission is to locate and recruit any potential force-users before they become ensnared by the rebels." That's good. And as a bonus my tab will always be paid off if I show the enclosed insignia to the barkeep? In that case... Melroek closed the folder and slipped it into the bag he'd set by his feet. He proceeded to consume the remaining beer in his glass and promptly ordered another.

"Life is hard, but especially hard on you it seems." a male Twi'lek commented in basic from beside him; "Have you lost a mate, my friend?"

"You could say that, I guess." Melroek answered.

"You sound hesitant." the Twi'lek commented.

"Sorry, I'm kinda drunk right now, even thinking's a little rough." Melroek answered.

"I understand," the Twi'lek answered, "even a Hutt could not remain sober after drinking as much as you have."

He inclined his head sympathetically; "Tell me my friend, is there something I might do for one in so much pain?"

"Just drink with me." Melroek answered horsley.

"That I can do." the Twi'lek replied, "My name is Batran Lymonio."

"Melroek Estani" Melroek supplied through his glass of beer.

Posted by naboo_princess on 17 August 2008 01:06 AM:

The minute she stepped into the refresher and closed the door, she readjusted her hold out blaster, hidden securely in the small of her back, just beneath her utility belt, and the one concealed in her right boot. She heard part of Koro's conversation at the cantina and wanted to be prepared. The fact that she was actually handy in a blaster fight instead of just a pretty face might come as a surprise. She could be expecting trouble and from the sound of it, the ship was *probably* stolen.

'Nothing like a little adventure on the wayside,' she thought to herself. She splashed a little water on her face, and fixed her hair in the mirror. Tarynn walked back out, feeling slightly better for the experience.

"Well," she said, "I feel better." She smiled at Koro again before she sauntered into the main hold. "If we're going to be here a while, I may as well sit down and make myself at home," she called back. "But don't worry, I won't go sneaking around...or..if you need a hand, just call!"

She sat down on a (somewhat) comfortable chair and crossed her legs, before reaching around to her back and resting her hand on her blaster. She rested it there, then leaned her head against the back.

"Not too long," she said quietly.

Posted by Vash Knives on 17 August 2008 06:47 PM:

Koro stood waiting as Luis, Fi, and Cali came aboard. Seeing Fi brought a small smile to his face-Luis' stupidity had not been her death, thank the Force. Luis' reaction to the sight of the gambler was no surprise.

"What are you doing on my ship?"

"Standing. Now I'm sure we can be civil about this."

"Get off my ship."

"The fact of the matter is, I was intending to find you and Tey after I had finished the repairs to your ship. This unforeseen encounter complicates things."

"What makes you think I will trust you."

"I bothered to wait, hoping for a nice, peaceful chat."

Posted by Corr Terek on 17 August 2008 11:06 PM:

"What makes you think they'll be here?" Thel asked, picking his way through the tunnels in the dim light. "I can't imagine anyone building a base down here."

"These tunnels were made by the Selonians," Kenlan replied. "I remember that from my time here."

"Right," Damon said. "And I recall Thalon speaking highly of the Selonians. He and the others could be hiding down here, and no one would ever find them."

"If that's true," Kenlan said, skeptically, "then how do you expect us to?"

Damon grinned. "For a Jedi Master, you're not very

confident in the Force."

"The Force isn't something to be taken lightly," Kenlan chided. "It doesn't work that way."

"Actually," Thel murmured, looking around cautiously, "I think I get it."

"Get what?"

"Don't you see?" Damon said. "We don't have to look. The Selonians have been watching us from the beginning."

Dark shapes rose up out of the shadows, surrounding the trio. Kenlan placed his hand on the hilt of his lightsaber nervously.

"Oh."

Posted by Xaturuk on 18 August 2008 12:56 AM:

Table/Lastdark Club/Coronet

Tholme put down his empty glass and set it next to the other three. They'd been several long minutes without speaking, and Tholme finally settled his eyes on his friend, "Are we going to sit here all night, Gell, or are we waiting on someone?"

Gell glanced at Tholme and then down at his drink. He took another gulp. "It's Zoa."

"What about him?" Tholme kept his eyes on the moving bodies.

"Imperial Intelligence picked him up a week ago."

A human barmaid twisted gracefully through the tables, asking after their drinks. Tholme nodded absently, waving over another round. As soon as she was out of earshot, he leaned a little closer towards the table. "How do you know?"

Gell leaned back, stretching and glancing easily around the club. He smiled widely, "Still have a few sources in high places."

"After all these years? They must be generals by now." Tholme doubted the Imperials would allow anyone over forty to stay on otherwise.

Gell chuckled and flexed a muscle. "You'd be surprised what modern meds can do."

Tholme sighed and looked at his friend. The man's eyes had a merry twinkle to them that reminded him instantly of the backwater pace of Dantooine farming villages, Gell's native world. The years had granted Gell exceptional endurance – he still looked as strong as ever. Fortunately, the time had granted Gell some prudence. A place like this used to have him in sleeveless clothes and tight pants – a sore point with the crew, especially when they all lost potential ladies to him. They'd called him Nerf on account of his habitual exhibition. Gell knew it, too. He was always so smug. A good man to have by your side in a scuffle, that was for sure.

In spite of his trepidation, Tholme smiled. "Same old walking blaster show," He muttered.

"You better believe it."

A moments silence passed, and Gell continued, "I'm asking for your help, Sarge. I'm going to bust him out, but I don't know where to start."

Tholme started to say something, but Gell rushed ahead, "I know what you're going to say, but you know what this might mean for us – all of us – if he talks."

Tholme considered the implications. "You think he'll talk?" He asked.

Gell pursed his lips, "I think it's the only reason they brought him in."

His old comrade hesitated, waiting on Tholme. The air was thick, and it wasn't smoke. Tholme swallowed the last of his drink. After a time he moved his head in a curt shake, "No."

"No, what?"

"No, I won't help you."

"You won't." Gell slung his head to the side. He breathed in a deep breath and ran a hand through his hair. "You won't do it," He repeated.

"It's been twenty years, Gell," Tholme replied, starting to feel like he needed to defend himself.

"Oh, I know. A long time. Some of us can just move on," Gell turned slowly back to face Tholme, "and forget the people that put their necks on the line."

It cut like a knife, and Tholme whipped his arms across the table. He wrenched Gell by the shirt collar, "I never forget anything, private."

Gell's eyebrows shot up instantly, and he tried to turn his face away. Tholme held him in place long enough to realize that eyes were looking their way. He released his hold, and Gell sank back into his seat, rubbing his neck. Tholme reached in his pocket for his credchip. He swiped it across the reader as he stood to leave.

"They'll be looking for us, Sarge. Better keep eyes in the back of your head." Gell warned.

Tholme replaced his credchip and turned to him, "I've got eyes in more places than that."

Looking at Gell's defeated expression made Tholme's rushing anger subside. He set a stack of credits on the table in front of his friend and went on in a softer tone, "Look, take this. I'm just not getting involved in this anymore. That life ended when the war did."

Gell wouldn't meet his eyes, but he nodded silently. Tholme looked at him a few moments longer then turned and walked away.

Posted by Xaturuk on 18 August 2008 04:49 PM:

Captain's Quarters/Rogue Circuit/Behareh Spaceport

"You are going to get melted down to alloy if the Captain find you here," 3-D4 muttered to himself as he looked through the desk drawer.

The voice was more for comfort of sound to calm his rising temperatures than for any conscience guide. He was correct, however. They'd all seen it happen once before. There was an assistant droid Captain So had hired on before 3-D4. It was notorious for its curiosity. One day the Captain found it looking through his wardrobe, and that was the end. He pulled out a pistol and blasted it to pieces. The other crew told stories of how the Captain just stood over the non-functional droid and put bolt after bolt into its chassis.

Three-dee-four's servos vibrated all over at the memory, and he began moving faster about his search. He was looking for what was so important. The Captain obviously kept something very secret in here, and it was valuable enough to destroy a droid over.

The desk drawer was mainly spare parts for communication devices, sensors, and small tools for minor alterations. Another drawer had archaic writing utensils – ink-stylus and paper bound into a blank pad. He found an empty bottle of sleeping tablets, extra strength. There was nothing in the drawer. 3-D4 moved to the bedside. The several empty brandy bottles had been swept into the trashbin underneath the table. A plain holoradio projected the time. Nothing here.

There was only one place left to look – the wardrobe. The doors were locked. "What terrible luck," Three-dee-four muttered. He glanced around the room looking for a way to open

the locker without destroying the lock.

Outside Lobby/Lastdark Club/Coronet

The valet, an anxious looking Sullustan, brought the swoop around to the ornate lobby entrance. He hopped off unsteadily and grinned widely at Tholme. "That's quite a ride, sir," He said.

Tholme, still thinking over Gell's words, was surprised, "What? Oh, yes. Thank you."

He straddled the swoop and accelerated into the airways. The cool Corellian night air blew across his cheeks. He knew they would be getting rosy and numb, but didn't feel anything at the moment. He was thinking about how much of a traitor he was. Gell had come to him for aid. Zoa had been taken into custody by the Empire. He had abandoned them both – left them to their fates. And for what? Because he didn't want the risk. Because he had a crew and a life, now. Right. Tholme pressed his lips together and snickered. What a life! Sleepless nights, mistrust, constant wandering.

He cursed himself. It wasn't his life and his principles. Tholme was afraid. He was scared to death. Terrified. At the simplest request for contact, he'd clammed up and cut ties. He'd left Zoa to die.

The Air-2 cleanly split two lanes of traffic and Tholme accelerated towards Behareh Spaceport. He tried not to think about the moist rims of his eyes and the hard spot in his throat.

Captain's Quarters/Rogue Circuit/Behareh Spaceport

The security spike slid into the wardrobe's lock. Three-dee-four used his large hands to make minute twists and adjustments to its placement. After a fair amount of gentle wrangling, the lock made a popping noise. The doors swung open a few inches, and Three-dee-four hesitated. The Captain wanted absolutely no-one to see inside this closet, droids included. Perhaps he should turn back, now. What if he saw something that incriminated his Captain? Something illegal? Or what if he found something worse? 3-D4 didn't see how he could keep silent if it was too disturbing.

He was already committed, now. It was too late to turn back.

Behareh Spaceport/Corellia

Tholme arced smoothly through the spaceport ground paths and reached Docking Bay 37 quickly. Activating a command on his wrist-remote, the ship's entry ramp hinged open. He drove up and into the freighter.

He knew the crew would be gathered in the lounge, and he didn't see a need to disturb them. He didn't want any company. Leaving the speeder on the lower cargo hold, he took the lift up to the third deck. If he started now, he could get a few hours of sleep to help wipe away the tonight's memory.

Captain's Quarters/Rogue Circuit/Behareh Spaceport

Three-dee-four stood in stunned silence. He just stared into the wardrobe. 3-D4 was not versed on history as some other protocol droids were, but he was up to date with general knowledge. And anyone with general knowledge, sentient or otherwise, would be able to tell exactly what it was he was looking at.

It was Clone Trooper armor, and it was well used. The droid did notice a thick layer of dust on it, but the scuffles and scrapes on it were unignorable. This suit had seen combat. However, it

wasn't a normal set that were seen on all the holo documentaries. Those were white, sometimes with different colored stripes. This armor was black, but it had dark grey sections spread variously throughout. Leaning against the wall of the wardrobe was a blaster rifle. It looked like a standard model.

Three-dee-four was still staring at the equipment when the door to the Captain's room whisked open.

Posted by Fingon on 18 August 2008 07:16 PM:

"All right, I'll accept that," responded Luis, stepping into what used to be a lounge. Frowning, he glanced around the room; the entire interior was riddled with scorch marks and each of the doors sporting a ring of scarred, jagged durasteel around their frames. Any of the interior furnishings that might have once been there were thoroughly obliterated. *Galaxy, what did he do with this ship?*

"Fi, Cali, watch your step," Luis began, looking over his shoulder, then started. Fiola stood at the bottom of the ramp, her frame quivering and her jaw set at a dangerous angle. The doctor swore that he could almost feel blaster bolts boiling from her eyes. "Fi?"

The young woman took in one deep breath. "You two have your little chat," she said, her voice deathly even. Turning about, she walked from the ship, headed to the bay door.

"Aren't we... leaving?" asked Cali.

"You can go ahead," responded Fi, in the same even voice. "But I suggest you walk away right now." Luis motioned for her to go and the girl scampered after Fi.

Luis sighed. "That went well," he muttered. "Koro, I have to ask, how in the galaxy did you get my ship here?"

The gambler smiled. "It wasn't too difficult; after I retrieved my own ship, I simply sneaked into the *Widower's* docking bay, found your ship, picked up your droid, and guessed where someone like you was most likely to head."

Luis turned as one of the doorways grated open to admit none other than Luis and Tey's lost droid, though the robot looked like it was recently repaired, cleaned, and polished, its skin now toned to a lustrous, burnished brass. "Correction," the droid said in its mechanical voice. "I admitted Koro's ship into the docking bay, arranged for the guard to be on rotation, cleared the launch sequence and played a loop on external sensors while we escaped. That, I assure you, was quite difficult. As for the last part, I differ all skill to Mr. Bolera. If nothing else, you are quite the gambler," Tonto said, nodding his gleaming head.

"Now," the droid continued, whirring over to Luis, "I suggest that we follow your friends, sir."

"But... we need a ship..."

"Indeed, but not *THIS* ship. You will remember that you ordered me to lock the vessel down on Burista. The imperial salvage team was not forgiving in retrieving me. To be honest, I had calculated our chance at survival through hyperspace at barely over one third. Again, my thanks to your luck, Koro."

"Well, you seem to be on top of things."

"Yes sir, I am."

A little dumbfounded, Luis ambled out of his old ship, droid close on his heels. If he hurried he might be able to catch Fi before she hit a few more cantinas...

Posted by Vash Knives on 18 August 2008 08:55 PM:

Koro looked at Luis as he left.

"I'll be waiting right here for you."

"Thank you."

As the door closed, Koro looked thoughtfully at the ceiling as a blue spectre appeared beside him and Kotoru Hanaan spoke.

"That woman seems to bring the worst luck to you."

"It seems that way. Her and the boy."

"Wah?"

At Tarynn's confused sound, the two men turned and spoke in unison.

"Long story."

Posted by ij thompson on 18 August 2008 11:28 PM:

"You wanna fill me in on what just happened there?"

From her position seated in the sand, Fi looked up at Cali, the younger girl just a slender silhouette in the chilly darkness. Fi herself had promised Cali that they'd get her off of Tatooine safely. In truth, Fiola had known nothing of the kind. She'd simply said what she figured the slave girl wanted to hear, and assumed it would come true.

But then Koro happened.

Narcissistic, egomaniacal Koro Bolera. A not-even twenty-five year-old man who single-handedly killed forty-five Imperial stormtroopers on Mimpos, not because he had to, but to show off. A man who was so convinced of his own masculine charms that he considered marching around shirtless in front of women preferable to actually talking to them. A man who picked up a fourteen year-old boy by the throat and threw him down a starship corridor, simply for being a 'pain in the thrusters'. A man who employed a freakish, para-dimensional ghost to spy on the people that he dared to call his 'friends'.

A man who held their only ticket off-world.

Fi sighed, smiling weakly. "We're not going that way."

"Oh, great!" Cali shouted angrily, kicking the sand. "Maybe you and your pals need another day to make travel arrangements? Here's some good news: by the time you guys figure it out, you'll probably be able to carry me along in a go-cup!"

"Honey," Fi began, "I promise you we'll-"

"Don't you even!" Cali shouted, furious and terrified. "Just don't say another word! I don't need you to tell me what's what, because you clearly don't know. I made a choice tonight, based on your... rubbish. But I tell you, alive or dead, I'm leaving Tatooine before the suns rise."

With that, the girl turned and strode into the darkness, toward her home, and the home of the being who owned her.

"What was that about?"

Luis stood above Fi, reaching out a hand.

"Oh Luis," Fi explained, grabbing his hand and rising, "I think she's gonna go after Bartok, with the others!"

Despite their pain and fatigue, the pair and their droid sprinted after the girl into the frigid desert night...

Posted by naboo_princess on 18 August 2008 11:56 PM:

Tarynn leaned against the bulkhead, hold out blaster in one hand. She cocked an eyebrow.

"Long story? It seems like we've got a while to wait if you don't mind telling me. And that went rather well don't you think? Though something tells me there's a *lot* more going on here than meets the eye."

She holstered her blaster. "I am so confused right now. Who are you really, Koro? And who's your friend? Or are you just talking to yourself?"

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 19 August 2008 11:28 AM:

Tam was getting nervous. Damon, Thel, and Master Kenlan were nowhere to be found. "Where do you think they went?"

"I dunno," Mir grumbled. "It was stupid." She rushed through the streets of Coronet's Blue Sector as if she'd run into Damon by pure chance. To be honest, Tam was tired of the running.

"Wait, what was?"

"Going so far from the others. I thought I'd have a little fun while we were here, but I lost track of Damon and we were spotted by Ghull's goons. If we'd stayed closer to Damon--"

"Hey," Tam interrupted, "we'll find Damon, and think about this: if we had been around Damon and Master Kenlan, those goons might have ordered backup, and we would have been in *real* trouble."

Mir stopped in her tracks. "Good point. So what do we do now?"

Tam closed his eyes, and took a breath in deep. After slowly letting it out he said, "We let the Force guide us."

Despite the bitter cold night, the streets surrounding them were still teeming with life forms. Tam was sure that if he concentrated hard enough he could pick out their friends from the seedy natives of this neighborhood. All he had to do was focus on the familiar feelings he'd sensed from the people he'd traveled with for what seemed like a lifetime...

"Well?" Mir prompted.

"Yeah," Tam said, looking sheepish, "I got nothing..."

Posted by Corr Terek on 19 August 2008 07:01 PM:

Little did Tam realize that Damon and the others were almost literally right beneath his feet. After being hustled unceremoniously through the winding, twisting tunnels by the Selonians, they finally arrived in a dimly lit cavern.

As his eyes adjusted to the dim light, Damon noticed that the cavern was full of people. People who, for the most part, had blasters pointed at the three of them. Gingerly he raised his hands, quickly gesturing for the other two to do the same.

A larger figure shoved his way through the crowd. "You've a lot of nerve simply walking into the tunnels like this."

"Thalon," Damon said, his mouth dry in spite of himself.

"Where's your co-pilot, Mir'isha? Where's Sol?"

"Sol's captured," Damon said. "Mir and I came back to warn you."

"We figured that out on our own, thank you very much," Thalon said grimly. "Why didn't you report back sooner? It's been over a week since we last heard from you."

"We got sidetracked escaping from the Empire," Damon explained. "It took us longer than we thought to get back."

"No doubt," Thalon said. He stepped close to Damon, his eyes suddenly very hard. "Especially when you took time off to lead Rebel squadrons into an Imperial trap."

"That wasn't us!" Damon exclaimed. "We had nothing--"

"You were there. The voice matched, the code matched. You were there, and so were Imperial forces," Thalon said coldly, drawing his blaster. "I don't know who you have with you, but none of you can leave here. We can't take any risks."

Damon took an involuntary step back. Thalon calmly leveled the blaster at his chest, and Damon could hear safety locks being disengaged all around them.

"How many have succumbed to the madness?" Thel's voice abruptly broke the silence. Thalon halted.

"What are you talking about?"

"Come on," Now it was Kenlan who spoke, his voice weary.

"The Empire must have unleashed it by now. You know the symptoms, I'm sure -- one of your men slowly goes mad, attacking his fellows in a berserker rage. The madness spreads on and on, until an entire cell is reduced to raving lunatics."

Thalon slowly lowered his blaster. "It hasn't happened here on Corellia yet, but we've been hearing reports from other cells. You know what causes this?"

"That's why we're here," Damon hastened to explain. "The Imperials were developing a bio-weapon aboard Burista Station. They call it Darkseed, and they were planning to use it on suspected Rebels throughout the Empire."

He gingerly reached into his pocket, keenly aware of the many blasters trained on him. "We were all exposed, but fortunately the Empire had synthesized an antidote and we were able to recover some." He withdrew the precious vial and handed it slowly to Thalon. "This was all we could spare -- the rest we needed for ourselves."

"Of course," Thalon said. "If what you say is true, this will be more than enough."

"You're not going to kill us then?"

Thalon looked at him long and carefully. "You may have saved us all by bringing us this antidote...but Sol was captured on your watch, and we lost a lot of good men thanks to that." He shook his head. "I won't kill you, but you and your first mate are too risky to keep around."

"What about Sol? We can't leave him in the hands of the Empire," Damon protested.

Thalon sighed. "We don't know where he is, and even if we did, chances are the Alliance High Command won't authorize a rescue mission unless he's part of a larger group of Alliance prisoners."

"If you find out anything, please, tell us. I swore I'd rescue him," Damon pleaded.

"I'll think about it. Now go. The Selonians will lead you back to the surface."

The trio were ushered quickly through the winding tunnels. As they finally left the caverns and stepped onto the streets of Coronet again, a small figure brushed against Damon and a commlink was pressed into his hands. "We will contact you when we have found him. Beware the man who sees the past."

The voice -- female, low and oddly-accented -- seemed strangely familiar to Damon. *Wait...Ysmina!?* He turned to look back, but the small figure was already lost into the darkness, and all that was left was a strange sense of melancholy.

Posted by Ubiqtorate on 19 August 2008 11:21 PM:

The cold air whirled around Kenlan as the strange figure disappeared into the night, leaving them alone. Strange, Kenlan thought, to be so completely alone in a city so crowded, but the street was deserted, adding to the forlorn sense of confusion Kenlan felt.

Now what?

The dim light from the streetlamps illuminated the swirling white snow, leaving only blackness around the trio. Another appropriate metaphor, Kenlan thought. He could feel walls closing in around him. As much as he tried to escape his past, it continued to chase him. In his previous lives, the answer had always been simple - run away, leave nothing behind, and start over. He couldn't do that now. He had broken the con man's cardinal rule - never let yourself become emotionally attached to your mark.

Tam was more than that now, of course. He was no longer target, nor tool, but trainee. *Tam is my responsibility.*

He was just as connected to the others, of course. Damon and Mir'isha, but also Fi, Tey, Luis, and the others they had traveled with. Even Athelias, though new to the group, was already becoming part of the team.

Kenlan had to get off Corellia. He had to go anywhere, preferably someplace where he didn't have a past, and could possibly work on building a new future.

"Come on," Kenlan said finally. "We've got to get out of here."

"Yes," replied Damon distantly, staring into the night where the woman had disappeared. "Come on. If we hurry, we might still be able to catch her."

"Are you crazy?" balked Kenlan. "We've got to get back to Tam and Mir'isha. Our work here is finished; now we've got to get moving on."

"But Ysmina..."

"Is a crazy old woman," finished Kenlan. "She's a kook who occasionally gets a few things right just on sheer dumb luck."

"No, it's more than that!" insisted Damon. "I can't explain it all now, but we have to find her. It's critically important."

Kenlan sighed deeply, gazing off into the distance. "All right," he agreed finally. "Since you seem to know what you're doing, lead on."

"Okay," said Damon. "She couldn't have gone far."

Kenlan sighed again as he followed Damon and Athelias into the blackness. Wasn't he supposed to be the one in charge here?

Posted by Thaycon Devoid on 19 August 2008 11:52 PM:

Batran guffawed loudly as Melroek finished his tale, the two of them completely drunk by this point.

"That podrace wreck was you?!" Batran managed when he caught his breath.

"Well, I don't quite have any money, sooo I had to do somethin' an' podracing's a good way to earn a livin'." Melroek slurred.

"Not for a human!" Batran said, following with another round of wild laughter.

Melroek struggled to remain upright, not wanting to be the first one to give in to the effects of the alcohol.

"Got any more good one's, my friend?" Batran asked, trying to help Melroek stay focused, "How 'bout from yer home planet? Negaru IV wasn't it?"

Melroek sat for a moment, then reached inside his shirt and pulled out a black pendant hanging from his neck.

"I can't tell ya how I got this," Melroek said. His hand wavered, making the pendant swing seductively in front of Batran.

"What is that?" Batran asked curiously, "It's got markin's on it, stop swingin' it so I can see."

Melroek let it rest on the table, giving Batran a better look; "That's my good luck charm; I found it when I was 'splorin' the mines back home."

Batran squinted at it, trying to get his vision to stop swinging as well, "Doesn't look very 'spensive or lucky. Oh well, tell me anyway."

Melroek replaced the pendant back in his shirt, settling back on his stool like all storytellers do when they're about to tell a new story.

Posted by Xaturuk on 20 August 2008 01:01 AM:

Captain's Quarters/Rogue Circuit/Behareh Station

Captain So stared at 3-D4 in shock. The droid felt a rising panic build in the pit of his torso, and he closed the armoire doors quickly. The servomotors in his hands were making erratic twitches. "Ca-Captain. It's not what it seems," His modulated voice distorted frequency. The driving anger that had led him on his quest now dried up into a cold block, stuck in his programming.

The Captain exhaled, a long wind blown out in one thrust. It was a statement in itself, and 3-D4 almost flinched. A great weight seemed to have fallen over Captain So's shoulders. He slumped into the room, casting his eyes back and forth over his things. He saw all the signs of the droid's probing hunt. "You did it again, Dee-four?" He strained.

3-D4 was almost too frightened to register the illogical suggestion. Almost. "Again, sir?" He asked.

Captain So sighed again and walked resolutely towards the droid. He stopped short and sat on the foot of the bed looking up at 3-D4's face. He shook his head as he assessed the administrative droid. The Captain's eyes were sad, and he had a disappointed look to him. Yet, the disappointment wasn't directed at the droid. 3-D4 saw then that the Captain was upset at himself.

"Dee-four," the Captain began, "You've done this before. Several times. I've tried everything I know to get it out of your programming, but no matter how many memory wipes I give you – I somehow manage to find you in the same spot, disregarding the same strict command – stay out of my quarters."

"It's like you're destined to expose all my secrets," He motioned towards the closed armoire.

3-D4 was silent. Things were happening inside him. It began feeling suspiciously like a circuit tick in his memory bank, but it then became a strange net of pulses. Memories came flooding back – the Captain standing next to him and beginning the memory wipe. The world going black and switching back on. Before that, the Captain poised over him with a blaster pistol, firing round after round in anger. Later, the Captain spending days alone carefully and painstakingly putting 3-D4 back together as perfectly as he could.

"You've been with me from the beginning, Dee-four. You're remembering, aren't you?" The Captain held a small device in his hand. He stood and pressed it against 3-D4's head.

The droid, seemingly oblivious to the electronic gadget held against his plated cranium, came to a sudden awareness, "Oh! Yes, I remember! I was sent to deliver and report the final mission objectives of Tau Squad immediately following the conquest at Utapau! Your orders were to—"

The Captain triggered the device, and 3-D4's life switched off in a blinding white flash.

Posted by Xaturuk on 20 August 2008 10:00 PM:

Lounge/Rogue Circuit/Beharah Spaceport

"He underestimates us," the 2-1B said.

The crew, now gathered in a loose circle uttered varied responses. The pit droids agreed heartily, the medical droids sagely chose to withhold opinion, Zed was vigorously shaking his head, and V6 was too frightened to make up his mind. It was Billee that silenced them by standing. "That's enough." The voices and sounds quieted.

"This talk is opening up a dangerous line of thought, and I will not have it on this ship. Let's not forget why the Captain acts the way that he does. Do you not see the danger in him discovering that same kind of attitude amongst his own crew?"

The 2-1B interjected softly, "His poor military decisions in the past should not be our burden, now. One of us should approach him about his conduct. He has a right to know how we feel."

Billee shook his head, "I do not believe that the Captain is ready to accept that we are all aware of his background – let alone what we feel about his behavior. He has a hard enough time trusting 3-D4."

"Hard time? He wipes the poor droid's memory every few months." The 2-1B casually replied.

Zed lurched to his feet and roughly pointed an arm at the medical droid, "3-D4 is a disfunctioning excuse for an application. He cannot obey the simplest of commands, and he deserves to be scrapped." His low voculator growled.

The pit droids leapt to their feet in a frenzy of outraged burps and belches sounding. They appealed to Billee on Dee-four's behalf. He placed a firm hand on the security droid, "Calm yourself, Zed. Try to remain civil. We are not irrational beings."

One of the pit droids took a few steps towards Zed and kicked his leg. The dull thump of metal on metal echoed in the lounge. Zed reached down and swung his arm out. It connected solidly with the small maintenance droid's head. The little body went twirling through the air overhead and collided into the bulkheads. Chaos ensued.

The medical droids stepped between the fray, trying to be voices of reason, but the pit droids climbed over them like non-sentient obstacles and launched onto Zed's massive frame. They began furiously pounding little hand-parts against his torso. He swung another fist to throw one off, and it missed, smashing into the GH-7. The dazed medical droid tumbled backwards. V6 retreated to a corner of the room, dwooning lowly and trying to remain unseen. 2-1B, seeing his downed partner, cocked back an arm and thrust it into Zed's stomach. The security droid doubled over from the impact and the two pits took advantage of his posture. They scrambled on to his bent back and jumped, sending him to the floor. Then the three began to pound and kick on the splayed Zed.

A deep voice called from the entry door, "Stop this at once!"

The crew froze. Captain So was staring at them with wide unbelieving eyes. "Is this a ship crew or a Gammorean brawling pen?" He spit in disgust.

He walked to the center of the pile and tossed the pit droids roughly off of Zed. With another arm he pulled the medical droid out and sent him skidding away. Then he helped lift Zed to his feet. The crew remained silent, glancing everywhere but at Tholme's face. Captain So looked them all over, disappointment and irritation evident on his features. He finally focused on Billee, "I leave for a short while and this is what becomes of discipline?" He pleaded.

The acting Captain looked at his feet. Tholme could see that something else was going unsaid. It was too quiet, even for droid behavior. He turned to the rest of the crew, "What is going on, here?"

A few of them milled around, stepping in place. Finally, Billee spoke with a tone of resignation, "The crew is nervous about your conduct, sir."

Tholme's eyebrows went up in surprise. He sounded genuinely shocked, "My conduct?"

Billee nodded, "Yes, sir. The memory wipes on 3-D4 whenever he discovers evidence of your military history. We think that it is...unnecessary punishment." The other droids were very still. The Captain studied Billee closely. He shook his head up and down slowly, "You...all know about it, then. The war. My squad. Our...decision." He seemed to be coming to a conclusion.

Looking around, he found a chair and sat down in it. He was tired and sore. He'd thought to get some sleep and forget the night's events, but he'd heard the scuffling in the lounge as he'd gone to introduce 3-D4 to his "new" station as ship administrator.

Mostly, though, the Captain began to become more at ease. "Yes, sir," Billee replied softly, "We know that he's not a very subtle droid. Truthfully, we've all been to that armoire – and read the mission files."

After a brief period of self-reflection, Tholme found himself agreeable to the droid's special knowledge of his past. He could stop all the memory wipes with 3-D4. He wouldn't need to hide anything anymore. He looked around at the droid faces – his crew. They were all his mates, and they were as loyal as any sentient crew could be. Tholme chuckled, a reaction that unsettled the droids, "Is nothing on this ship sacred?"

They looked uncertainly at each other and Billee replied, "We're all very sorry, sir, for the intrusion." They nodded, nearly in choreographed unison.

Tholme smiled and looked at the gratings, "Well, I guess I can't be too angry. I've modified each of you, myself. Enhanced personality matrix for all of you. I should have known that it would eventually effect obedience functionality." He looked up at his crew with a sheepish self-amusement, "I guess some tinkering can never be reversed."

Billee was unsure how to proceed, but the Captain stood and nodded, satisfaction in his face. "Very well. Herefore on, I will refrain from any more memory wipes, and all I ask is that you keep the details of my past in the utmost secret banks of your memory."

"Thank you, Captain," Billee said, standing straight.

The cloud of dissention that had seemed to hang over the room now evaporated, lifting like a hanging mist. The droids began to loosen up, some talking happily to each other. 2-1B nodded in quiet approval, and V6 chirped merrily, rolling back to join the group. Zed, despite his previous scuffle and irritation, saluted crisply. Billee inflected his head slightly.

"You still have some time left to idle," The Captain continued, "We'll be leaving in a few hours to complete or delivery, and I expect you all to be ready to continue in your stations. Carry on."

The crew saluted as one and returned with somewhat more energy in their movements to their conversations and activity. Tholme looked at Billee, "I'm going to get some rest, but I have some important news to tell you and the crew before we lift off."

The Captain started to leave, but Billee reached a hand out and lightly touched his shoulder. "Captain?" He asked softly.

"Yes?"

"3-D4. Did you-"

Tholme turned and held up a datacard. He smiled from one side of his mouth, "Dee-four's programming is safe on here. I'm going to install and reactivate it right now and apologize to him. Besides," He pocketed the card and shook his head in mock aggravation, "I don't think I could completely get rid of that droid's personality if I wiped him a hundred times." A twinkle was in his eye.

Billee saluted. He felt a warm sensation in his circuits, and suddenly the Captain looked somehow more worthy, more likeable. Ah, Billee thought, this must be pride.

Posted by Corr Terek on 20 August 2008 10:11 PM:

Damon moved quickly through the quiet streets, often barely catching a glimpse of the shadowed figure ahead. "Ysmina,

wait!" If she heard him, she didn't acknowledge him. If anything, she quickened her pace. He'd already left Kenlan behind -- the older man was moving at his own pace. Thel had been beside Damon for awhile, but had vanished abruptly.

He swore under his breath. Ysmina knew more than she was telling, that was for sure. She'd known about his abilities right from the start, and had obviously escaped the Imperial raid. Whether that was through sheer luck or her fabled skill, Damon didn't know. But he'd had enough of vague warnings.

The dark figure turned a corner up ahead, and suddenly a woman's voice cried out in surprise. Then--

"I've got her, Damon," That was Thel. Damon quickly ran to the spot to see Thel holding the Ryn woman by her arm. Her features were hidden by a hooded cloak, and she seemed resigned to having been caught.

"Why'd you run, Ysmina?" Damon said, frustrated. Kenlan came up behind him, slightly out of breath.

"Is this how you treat a woman, gunslinger?" Ysmina asked, her tone gentle but reproving. "It is against Ryn custom to sleep under the earth, and I cannot be seen on the streets. I had time only to tell you what you needed to know."

"And who decides what I need to know?" Damon demanded. "Who is the man who sees the past? Why should I be afraid of him?"

Ysmina shook off Thel's grip, and pulled back her hood. In the flickering light of the street lamps she looked much as she had in her fortune booth -- exotic, young, and proud. Thel grinned at Kenlan, who gaped in surprise. "Crazy old woman", eh?"

"I'd never seen her before," Kenlan grumbled. "It was just a guess."

Ysmina ignored them and instead focused her gaze on Damon. "The things I see are not under my control. I do not know much of this man."

Damon gritted his teeth. "If you don't know much about him, how can you possibly help me?"

Ysmina held up two fingers. "Two things I know of him: first, that he is much like another man -- one you have seen in your own dreams."

Damon felt his blood run cold. "I see..." There was only one man she could be referring to. The man who had killed his parents. "What else?"

"He bears a green mark on his face, like thus" Ysmina drew a finger across her face in a horizontal line. "You will know him by that mark."

"A green mark," Damon nodded. "I will remember."

Kenlan sighed in frustration. "Don't put too much stock in her words, Damon. I've seen her kind before."

Ysmina turned to him, her eyes suddenly sparkling with a sense of mirth. "The blind mocks those who see." She studied him. "You are a cunning man, and your road has been long and twisted. But the boy you teach has been your saving grace. You must protect him."

Kenlan was suddenly cautious. "Protect him? From what, may I ask?"

Ysmina shook her head. "I cannot say. I have not met him, and can see nothing of his future. I only know he must be protected."

"And what about me?" Thel asked, grinning. "Do I get a word of wisdom, too?"

Ysmina smiled at him. "Choose your students wisely, vagabond." Thel blinked in surprise, and Ysmina took the opportunity to step out of his reach.

"When we have found my betrothed, you will rescue him,

yes? Until then, stay alive." With that, Ysmina pulled the hood back over her face and walked away. This time Damon let her go.

Wait," Thel said, scratching his head and speaking to no one in particular. "Students? I wasn't planning on taking any students."

Damon's commlink beeped, and he answered it. "Yeah?"

"Damon!" Mir seemed relieved. "We've been trying to reach you for almost an hour!"

"Something wrong?" Damon asked, noting the strain in her voice.

"A little trouble, but Tam handled it like a pro. Nothing major. You get the stuff delivered?"

"Yeah, it's all been taken care of," Damon replied. "We'll meet you back at the ship."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 21 August 2008 02:17 AM:

Long ago, Tam had tired of running. But now, knowing that Master Kenlan and the others were safe, had accomplished their goals, and were to meet them back at the *Nova Viper*, had filled Tam with a renewed vigor that allowed him to keep up with Mir for the remaining kilometer to their cruiser.

"Hey Mir!" he shouted as they ran. "Where are we going next?"

"Hard to say, Tammy boy," she said over her shoulder. "As long as it's far away from Ghull or his boys, I don't care where we go."

That sounded like a good idea, and as they rounded the corner and entered the landing bay, Tam's mind spun with thoughts of where their next adventures would take them--

"Excellent blow," Tam heard when his head eventually stopped spinning. He found himself strangely dangling from snow covered street, while the night sky dangled perilously below his feet like a hungry maw. It was some time before the night sky moved above him again, and the force holding him prone against the snowy street was once again recognizable as gravity.

"I can't believe our luck, brother!"

"Indeed. Who would have guessed that we would find Mir'isha by chance like this."

Tam looked up, and the two goons he and Mir had encountered earlier were now dragging her unconscious form down the cold duracrete path. They were acting as if they were surprised to find Mir and himself on Corellia. Tam's still-smarting head found some comfort in this: at least his Force suggestion had worked on them... the *first* time...

"Call the boss and tell him we have a surprise for him."

"Good idea. He'll, um, praise us for our fortune."

"Yes, quite the windfall."

"Serendipity."

"Bonanza."

Tam had to act fast, before the two goons finished their little game and called Ghull again. He eased onto his feet as fast as his shaking legs would allow him, and slipped his lightsaber from inside his coat...

Posted by Xaturuk on 21 August 2008 08:46 AM:

Docking Bay 37/Behareh Spaceport/Corellia

The view from outside the *Rogue Circuit's* cockpit was a flurry of pre-launch activity. Behareh personnel disengaged fueling hoses, checking the sealant apertures on the ship ports. These had to be double checked by the pit droids. Automated

repulsor pads carried the heavy repair equipment, the crew being finished with it in the main engine room, off the docking ramp. Billee stood outside the ship talking with a spaceport representative, "Were you satisfied with the service, here?"

"Quite. We'll be lifting off presently," Billee replied.

The no slouch woman nodded curtly, "Of course," She handed him an electronic placard with a document. Scrolling information zipped along the sides and top of the device. "Please have your Captain sign here and here," She pointed with her finger, "and you'll be all set."

Billee assessed the scrolling information, recounting their charges, fuel, and repair rentals. He signed, himself, and handed the pad back to the woman only to find that she was frowning. "Is there a problem?" He asked.

"Yes, I said that I need the Captain to sign this," She replied. "I am the Captain."

The woman lifted her eyebrows. She didn't quite know how to respond. After spending a few moments attempting to reply she finally narrowed her eyes and smiled. "Behareh Spaceport doesn't recognize droids as craft pilots."

Billee felt his temperatures rise. He'd uploaded all the port's regulations before re-entry along with the international port laws of the planet. There wasn't anything of the sort in the regulations. This woman was simply like many others he'd met. She just didn't like droids.

He called to Captain So on the comm who, after a few minutes, strode purposefully from the ship. This wasn't the first time that it had happened, but he'd insisted that Billee continue as acting Captain no matter how 'backwards' some spaceports were about this kind of thing.

The Captain was in a sour mood, his face a hard, stone glare. "What's this all about?" He scowled.

The woman looked pleased with herself, "Are you the Captain?"

"No. I own the ship," He pointed a finger directly at Billee, "He is the Captain."

The woman gawked and started to say something. Tholme cut her off, "I don't want to hear any more of this nonsense about droids not being in the legal arrival/departure procedure. You know kriffing well that you're talking out of your waste-shoot, and I'm not going to stand and listen to you babble at me. Now, get your superior out here."

He turned to Billee to speak with him, but when the woman stood there open-mouthed, unmoving, he turned back sharply, "I said now!" He shouted.

The woman jumped in place and walked briskly back to the bay's entrance, trying to remain in control of her stride. She only appeared more flustered. Tholme faced Billee with an amused cohorting smile, "I know, it's hard, Billee. Just keep it up, you're doing great. Some day this galaxy is going to come around and get out of its backwater ways."

Billee, although his features were solid and permanent, managed to incline his head downward and look sullen. "Yes, sir," He replied.

Tholme put a hand on his shoulder, "Billee, you're a competent, responsible, and trustworthy droid. You're the best first mate I've ever had, and you're an excellent Captain."

The droid beamed pleasure. Billee nodded, gratefully, and thanked him. He walked back to the ship a little straighter to put the crew to stations. He stopped at the ramp to look back at Captain So, who was now speaking to a large human man. The large man was nodding his head incessantly and making wide placating gestures while Tholme, reverting to his stone glare, was waving his hands in exclamation and generally doing his

best to make the man fall back on his heels in chastisement.

Cockpit/Rogue Circuit/Behareh Spaceport

The ship's warm up had raised the heat factor in the docking bay. All personnel were clear, and the ship's crew was aboard. The low rumble of the sublight drives was reverberating across the walls, and the air intakes were whistling as they primed up to normal operation. The Captain had met with Billee briefly to postpone the important meeting until they were in hyperspace, and gave him the go ahead to perform the departure routine. As usual and for unknown reasons, Billee felt a mounting excitement, an expectation of things to come as he looked skyward from the transparisteel viewport. "We're beginning our multi-jump route to the planet Sullust for cargo delivery. All stations report for liftoff," He called, standing at the command spot in the cockpit.

The ship's comm pinged and droids sounded off in order. V6, piloting at the helm, warbled a short, confident burst. The pit crew leader, monitoring the engine's and power systems, brapped an all-go check. "Medical crew is operational and standing." The 2-1B stated.

"Administrative personnel are on board and at station." 3-D4 called, in a ringing, clear voice.

"Security in position. Ship is secure," Zed's matter-of-fact voice reported.

Lastly, Captain So's voice came over the comm, "Captain Tholme So of the *Rogue Circuit* aboard and strapped in. Let's have a good trip, everyone. Proceed, Captain Billee."

"Thank you, sir. All systems are set, and lift off is - go."

The transport rose into the air. Hazy waves of air distorted beneath it as the thrusters turned the ship about. It moved steadily out of the bay doors, and when at an appropriate distance it received clearance from spaceport control to fire its main engines. The *Rogue Circuit* blasted beyond Corellia's atmosphere and into orbit.

Posted by Ubiqtorate on 21 August 2008 09:04 AM:

Almost in the clear now. All Kenlan and the other had to do was round the corner, and they'd be safe in their docking bay. Then, it was back aboard the *Nova Viper*, and away from this planet.

As they approached the bay, however, it became obvious that something wasn't right. Kenlan could hear voices coming from within the docking bay.

"...Free-for- hey, what's that, little boy?" said the first.

The unmistakable *snap-hiss* of a lightsaber igniting replied, and Kenlan broke into a run. Blaster fire followed, and Kenlan arrived in the bay just as Tam deflected a pair of shots originating from an alien goon nearly three times Tam's size. Mir'isha ducked for cover behind one of the *Viper's* landing struts as a shot from the second goon whizzed past her.

In a flash, Kenlan's own lightsaber was out, and he lunged toward the first goon. The goon heard the sound of the approaching blade, and turned to his right just in time to see Kenlan coming and duck out of the way.

"What the..." cried the first goon. "They've brought friends!"

"Allies!" replied the second.

"Reinforce---AAAHHH!!!" It was the last sound the first goon ever made, as Kenlan's stroke found home.

Now hopelessly outnumbered, the second goon fired a spray of blaster bolts as he hastily backpedaled toward the docking bay's other exit. "Boss, this is Krank," he barked into a comlink.

"We've found Mir'isha, she's here on Corellia! Docking bay Aurek-seventy-four. Rut's down, and they've got Jedi! You've got to send help!"

As he exited the docking bay, Mir let out a frustrated roar and began to charge after him.

"Mir!" shouted Damon. "Come on, let him go. We can get out of here before anybody else has time to get here."

"But..."

"It doesn't need to be personal, Mir," added Thel. "Damon's right - let's just get out of here."

"We've got to get moving," confirmed Kenlan. "How quickly can you take the *Viper* through the startup sequence?"

"Well, I'm still getting familiar with all the controls, but maybe... ten minutes? Eight if I push. But that's not the problem. It could take the better part of an hour to get takeoff clearance from port authority."

Kenlan gritted his teeth. As much as he wanted to keep a low profile, blasting out of yet another spaceport looked like it might be in order. "We'll worry about that if and when we need to," he said. "You and Mir get up to the cockpit. We'll keep things covered down here."

Posted by ij thompson on 21 August 2008 06:43 PM:

Cali stormed through her hovel apartment's front (and only) door, angry at having returned so soon to a place she was sure she'd never visit again.

But she wasn't staying.

She tore through the front room, angrily upending furniture, shelves, and meager decorations, looking not for a specific item,

but any item for a specific purpose: to intimidate Chuv Bartok into letting her go free, or to beat him with until one of them no longer survived.

Nothing of use presented itself. If anything, all of her possessions were almost comical in their uselessness. *Sith!*, she swore to herself, *why in the worlds did I never get myself a weapon?*

Then she remembered.

The vibroblade in the kitchen! It was a smallish culinary implement, but more than adequate to cut the throat of the tyrant, if she could just get close enough. Dropping the various items she held, Cali took three long, determined strides and swung back the mangy curtain that functioned as a door to the small food preparation area.

There was a man in there.

He was large and sweaty, bathed in the blue light of the open cold-unit. His mouth was full, chewing obscenely on a mouthful of guaka meat, one leg of which he held in his left hand. He looked at the girl, unsurprised, and pointed at her with the half-eaten bird leg.

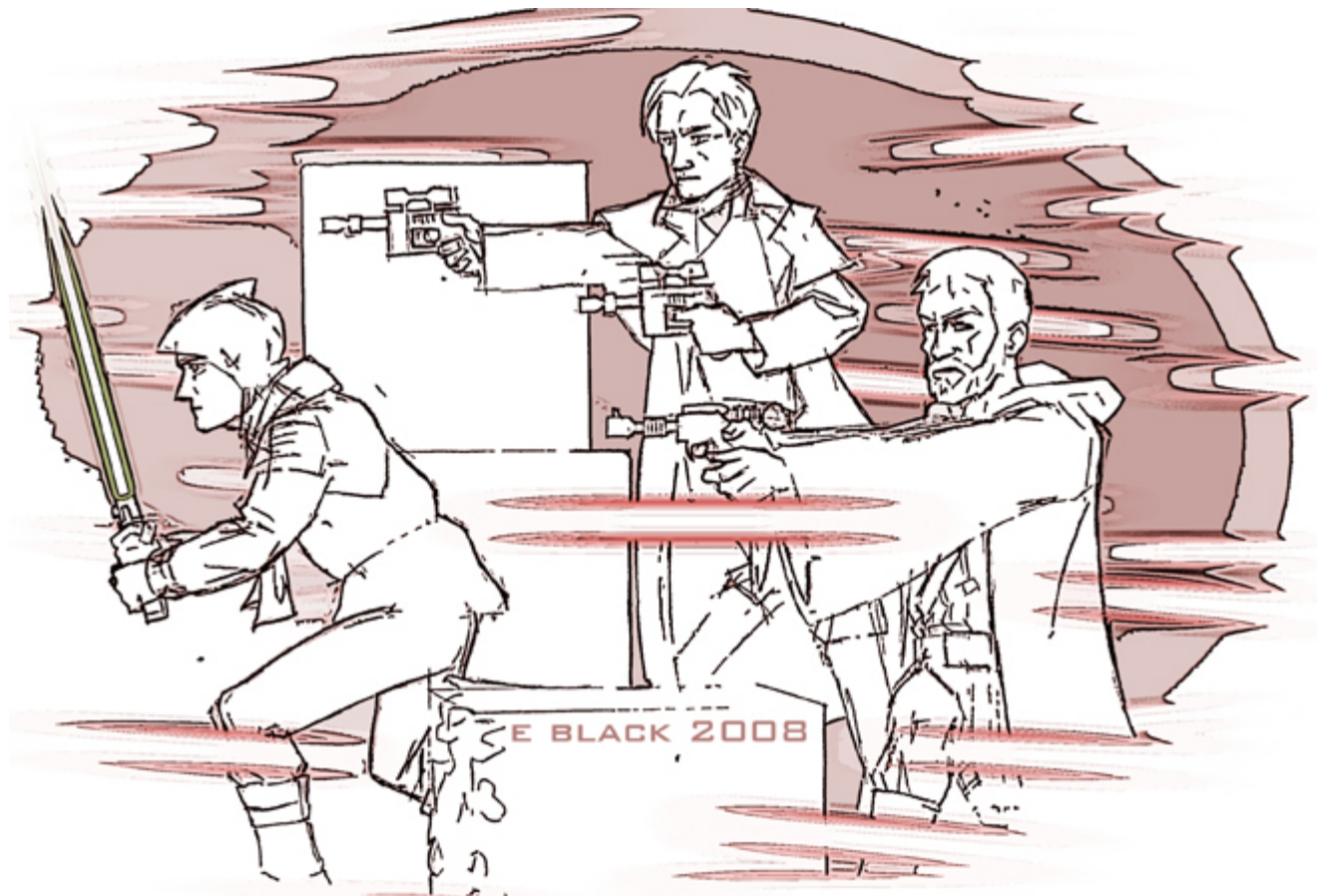
"You know, this ain't half bad. Little dry, though."

Cali stood stock-still. "I... could make you something fresh, Worl... if you want."

Worl grinned an ugly grin, bits of guaka meat sticking out from between his teeth. Holding the bird leg out between the two of them, he dropped it on the floor.

"What Worl *wants*," he explained slowly, his mouth full, "is for all of Bartok's little doggies to be snug in their beds when he makes his rounds."

"I just took a little walk," Cali pleaded nervously, "needed



some air."

Worl kept grinning and chewing, finally swallowing the cold, greasy meat. "You go out walkin'," he offered, "and Bartok might think you've got a notion to leave this place."

"That's crazy," Cali said, trying to smile back at the man. "Where could I go? Bartok doesn't pay me anything, just food and shelter, you know that. Come," she invited, moving toward the drawer that held the once insignificant, but now extremely important vibroblade. "Let me get you somethi-"

In a flash, Worl had each of her arms gripped in his big, meaty hands. He shoved the girl rudely against the countertop, then moved in close, smiling down at her and breathing guaka meat into her face.

"I've already eaten," he leered. "But if there's anything else you can offer...?"

"You don't know where this guy's place is!"

Fiola stopped running, the pain from her broken rib almost unbearable, despite Luis's expert administrations. "We know where Cali lives," she gasped, "and she said Bartok had a shack somewhere nearby. We get to her place, and look around the area for a commotion."

"You're pushing yourself too hard," the doctor told her sternly. "Even if we find them, you can't expect to-"

"Luis!"

The doctor stood silent, then nodded. "I do agree with you. She's our responsibility now. Just... don't try anything foolish, okay?"

Fi grinned. "Who, me? You think I'm outta control now, just wait 'til we're married!" she said, sticking her tongue out at him. Before the doctor could respond, she'd disappeared around the next bend in the darkened street.

"I will," Luis replied, not quite sure what he meant. Then he was off after her.

He found Fi a block further up, a couple dozen meters shy of Cali's home. Fi stood still until the doctor joined her, then pulled him urgently into the shadows. "Hey - do you remember Cali leaving her door open when we left?" she asked, pointing.

The apartment's door stood wide open, bathing part of the street in orange light...

Posted by Corr Terek on 21 August 2008 08:49 PM:

"He's going to kill us, he's going to kill us all," Mir was panicked, her hands trembling as she initiated the start-up sequence. "There's no way we're going to get out of here in time."

"A little optimism, please," Damon said shortly, warming up the gun turrets. "Ghull can't attack us right in the middle of Coronet City without stirring up CorSec, and I really don't think he wants to do that."

"Ghull does whatever he wants and lets other people pick up the pieces," Mir replied. "CorSec isn't going to get here in time to do anything."

"How much time have we got left?" That was Tam, who'd apparently been sent inside by Thel and Kenlan.

"Still a few minutes, kid."

"They're here -- some of them, at least," Mir's voice was filled with dread. Damon glanced out the cockpit and knew that Kenlan and Thel would need help.

"Tam, I need you to control this gun turret," he said, indicating the joystick on the console. "Shoot anything that's not on our side. I'm going outside."

"What about the ship?"

"You can take care of the ship just fine, Mir. I'm not needed up here," Damon replied, snagging an extra blaster pistol from one of the weapons lockers. "Call me when we're ready."

He made his way to the entry ramp and drew both pistols. "Time to go to work, boys."

Blasterfire erupted from the thugs' weapons, lancing dangerously near Kenlan. The old man awkwardly parried a shot with his lightsaber before deciding a hold-out blaster would be more effective. As he drew the weapon, one of Ghull's men got a bead on him and fired a deadly bolt of energy.

Just before impact a blazing green blade intercepted the blast, sending it careening back towards the enemy. "Try to be more careful, old man," Thel said, whipping the lightsaber back around toward the enemy.

"Thel?" Damon said in disbelief. The other man turned to him and grinned as he easily deflected another shot.

"You're not the only one around here with gifts, Damon. Now how about putting those blasters of yours to good use?"

Posted by Ice Hawk on 21 August 2008 09:29 PM:

Reil checked his chrono. They'd wasted 5 of their precious 30 minutes arguing.

"Look, we're behind schedule here, so let's just find Bartok, alright? We don't really have a lot of time to debate the morality of killing a slaver."

Tey sighed.

"Alright. Where's the place again?"

"Eleven doors up and to the right, she said."

Posted by Thaycon Devoid on 21 August 2008 10:35 PM:

Melroek was only half conscious as he was bodily hurled from the cantina, the booze he'd consumed working to dull any pain that might sober him. He was angry, and although not quite away of what was going on, had already caused massive damage to an already crippled cantina.

He had climbed onto the table at one point to better illustrate a point during his story, and when the bouncer demanded he get down, he had tackled the man, dissolving the entire room into chaos.

He staggered to his feet, turning to face the door he'd been forced out of and was preparing to charge when a woman rushed past him in an obvious hurry.

"Fi, wait up!" a man shouted, shouldering past Melroek as he followed the woman.

Melroek stood for a second longer, then with a snarl followed the receding couple.

His mind was empty apart from the thudding of his pulse, and his pendant swung free from his shirt as he staggered forward.

Posted by Fingon on 21 August 2008 10:52 PM:

Fi and Luis looked at each other, puzzled, when a sharp, terrified shriek pierced the night's quiet. "Luis, it's her!"

Doctor, singer and droid dashed for the doorway and the humans tore through the ransacked room. Tonto had trouble fitting.

"Go ahead and struggle, girl, it's more fun that way!" a harsh voice cackled down the hallway.

Somehow Fi managed to pass the doctor and rounded a corner before skidding to a stop, Luis on her heels. Cali was there, her coarse tunic ripped, tears and sweat streaking down her face. A misshapen man in a stained outfit leaned over her. He was...

Luis felt his stomach churn.

"Fi?" The girl's eyes lit with a glimmer of hope.

"Just out for a walk, huh Cali?" leered the man, a filthy hand around her bruised neck. "Not a step, you two, or I'll-"

Luis cut him off with a stun bolt square in his face.

The man collapsed and Cali fled from his limp grasp, shuddering and gasping through her tears. The man moaned and Luis planted three more bolts in his chest.

A moment later, a comm on the man's belt crackled into life. "Worl! Where are you, you Hutt poodo?"

Fi limped over and picked up the device. "I'm sorry, but Worl isn't available at the moment, but if you'd like to have your sorry *bocha* dragged across the floor, I have two people who would be interested in talking with you. They should be there shortly."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 22 August 2008 10:32 AM:

As ordered, Tam dropped into the *Nova Viper's* belly turret, and slipped on a headset. "Okay, um..." Then he found the power switch and, pressing it, brought his turret box up to humming attention.

A voice spoke into his ear. "Tam, is that you?"

"Mir! Yeah, just getting things primed."

"Great. Just don't go laser-happy. That's a heavy gun, and puts a drain on this startup sequence. Less is more, okay?"

"Gotcha." That was good to know.

Outside, the battle was already met. Master Kenlan was crouched behind a crate, the far side of which was slowly being eaten away by their opponents. Damon was in a similar position, and whenever the two of them poked up to blast at pirates, out leapt Thel with a blazing green lightsaber!

"Thel's a Jedi...?" He stammered, bewildered.

"What's that?" Mir asked.

"Nothing. Never mind." It was time for Tam to make his contribution to the battle. He gripped the turret's controls, and said, "Here goes!"

His first volley overshot his targets, slamming into the docking bay's thick permacrete wall. A rain of shattered rubble fell upon the pirates, who collectively turned their blasters on him! Tam reflexively ducked as the onslaught of blasterfire ricocheted off the turret plating, but when he realized that not one had penetrated the ship's armor, he squeezed off a brief but triumphant spray in their general direction.

"Tam, cool it down there! Remember what I said about draining the power?"

"Oh yeah. Sorry."

Tam sat back, letting the smoke clear and his ammunition bank recharge. The bay outside was a mess, and what once resembled a wall now looked more like a permacrete landslide. But many of the pirates shook off the debris and continued their attack.

It was going to take more than the occasional potshot to help. Tam closed his eyes and cleared his mind. The Force flowed into him, like a cool glass of water on a parched and sunny day. He then redirected it to others, as he often had before, praying that it would help in their situation...

Posted by Darth_Vader2005 on 22 August 2008 05:18 PM:

Two shadowy figures slid silently across the sand covered streets of Mos Eisley, moving quickly and purposefully through the night. In a few hours the less harsh of Tatooine's twin suns would rise, and the streets would become crowded with vendors attempting to get in all of their trade before the second sun came up and turned the town into a dusty dry hellhole.

Arriving at a small doorway into a badly maintained building the two stopped for a whispered council of war. They both drew serious looking pistols, with a clear wrong end at which to be standing. One of them began to speak softly, almost silently to the other.

"Alright Zealos, do me a favour, and don't shoot to kill unless it's them or us. I don't want to build up a body count. But don't hesitate to use lethal force if they're armed and dangerous. Got it?"

The other man sighed gently as he switched his weapon to stun "Ok, ok we do it your way for now. But do we really want to leave enemies behind us?"

Replying only with a finger to his lips Tey peered in through a small hole in the door. He didn't dwell on the scorch marks around the edge. Inside were four beings playing some kind of card game. One of them was Bartok, another was a rodian the Corellian didn't recognise, and the other two were twi'leks with their backs to the door. Tey would've bet his last bent decided that all of them were armed and there were probably others in the room watching the game. He held up four fingers and pointed towards the centre of the room before standing up and taking a breath and allowing his pulse to steady.

After a moment he held up three fingers, and began to count down. He stood in front of the door, in a stance that had been taught to CorSec hopefuls for hundreds of years. Reil took up position next to him as he gestured to two. Memories of a thousand raids flooded into Tey's body, and it was all he could do not to yell 'Corellian Security' into the room beyond.

As he dropped the last finger he put all of his weight into a kick on the door. The cheap bolt had been made to keep out inquisitive Jawas and keep the door shut in the wind and was totally ineffectual against the assault. The door itself was quite sturdy, and when it hit the bodyguard standing watch next to it he was flattened against the wall. Tey went in with his pistol up, finger on the trigger and another on the power setting. For now it was kept on 'stun' but often that setting was too slow to take down a determined foe.

"Freeze!" He yelled in a strong tone as the security man slid to a heap on his left. Behind him he heard his companion's footsteps as he came in just behind him. It was good to have backup on something like this after so long alone. Luis was a good friend and a genius surgeon, but on something like this he was glad to have a trained soldier watching his back.

Of course predictably on something like this there was one idiot who thought that he was fast enough on the draw to take out their attackers. This was the rodian and in his defence he was fast, but just a shade too slow. In a blur he had a slugthrower in his hand and was aiming at Zealos, who had gone around to the right hand corner of the room and without so much as batting an eyelid double tapped his trigger and caught the rodian in the heart. He dropped like a sack of Juma fruit, his pistol sliding from his hand. The room turned deathly silent for a few moments.

"Everyone who isn't Bartok get out. Now." Tey spoke with deadly calm, the same tone that Bartok had always heard the CorSec agent speak in. All those but the rodian whose skull was bubbling gently and the security guard who groaned faintly scattered from the room as fast as they could, running into the

night air. As for the slave dealer he sat stock still in his chair as Tey stalked towards him.

"Shekni." The corpulent waste of DNA whispered as the Corellian approached him. With a surge of anger born from four months on the run Tey grabbed the man by the collar and dragged him to the wall, where he threw him into a heap at the floor and crouched down, staring at him through seemingly dead eyes. From a few feet away Reil stood, eyes on both exits with his pistol in a ready position.

"Do you know why I have come for you?" Tey uttered again in that dreadful voice.

"I... I..."

"Do not feign innocence flesh dealer. I have seen your dealings on this world and others. And I have been sent to bring you to justice, and take you to the deepest circles of *Vishna* for your sins"

"No... no anything but that, I beg of you!"

"That is the price you will pay for your transgressions."

With a savage cry born of fear and desperation Bartok slammed his forehead into the bridge of Tey's nose. The Corellian fell back and the slaver pulled a wicked vibroknife from his boot and lept at his tormentor. There was a sudden blast and a flash of red as Reil fired. It was a once in a lifetime shot that took the slave dealer between his mad eyes. Levering the body off himself Tey stood up cursing. Blood flowed liberally from his now broken nose.

From across the room the security guard gibbered in terror as he watched Tey rifle through the dead man's possessions like a mad man. "What are you looking for?" Reil asked as the barrel of his weapon smoked slightly.

"I'm hoping," Tey responded, his voice thick with pain, "to find a set of keys"

"What on earth for?"

"The slave pens. We've got an empty hold on our ship. Short hop to a nearby planet and they'll be free. Ah, bingo. Let's go."

Posted by Xaturuk on 22 August 2008 08:53 PM:

Office/Rogue Circuit/Hyperspace

"But sir, if the information is of such sensitive nature, then why should you cease my memory wipes?" 3-D4 asked.

Tholme considered. Rather, he sat forward and stared into the glossy, transparent surface of his desk. The answer to Dee-four's question was near the front of his mind, but he was stuck on events as a whole - Gell's reappearance and request, his own subsequent refusal and failure, prospective Imperial investigation. It wouldn't be investigation. It would be target acquisition. He would need to tell the crew soon, as that would be quite a different set of parameters. Prepare for Imperial assault! He could hear himself shouting it, now. And he could see the pit droids seizing up in terror and V6 smashing the ship into the nearest star via reckless hypercoordinate entry. That droid still needed to learn how to fly under pressure.

Overshadowing these, like a dripping coat of something dark and oozing, he beheld Gell. He imagined the thick-muscled ex-soldier suiting up for action and tearing off towards the first clue he could find. Gell would go to rescue Zoa alone - even if it were a two man operation - and he'd be cursing the name of his former Seargent the whole time. If you weren't traitor enough before, just look at you, now. Gell's eyes kept staring at him from just underneath the desk's plexitop. As time slowed, the dark circles receded into the whirling designs of the office's aesthetically enhanced floor grating.

"Sir?" 3-D4 repeated.

Tholme lifted his eyes out of his reverie to meet 3-D4's inquiring gaze. The droid was hesitant - no, afraid. It was his doing, and he could have done something about it all along. Tholme stood and walked to stand before him. He swallowed. "I stopped them because I should have trusted you in the first place. Dee-four, I am sincerely sorry. Your place in my crew is invaluable, and I will not ever wipe your memory again. Will you pardon my behavior?"

3-D4 raised his head back, somewhat surprised. A warmth that seemed to envelope his whole body shimmered across him - circuits, motors, parts, and all. He felt submerged in an oil bath - the best oil bath imaginable. He couldn't find the words to say. For only a moment he was silent, struck by the overwhelming power of this new sensation.

Finally, 3-D4 replied, "Sir, I am honored to be in your trust and favor at all times. You are," The droid paused, searching for the most personal word he could find, "the best Captain to whom one could ever hope to submit." There was a slight electronic squeal that jumped into his vocabulator.

Tholme smiled, thankful for the resolution. He gave the droid leave to end his duty, and Dee-four left the office with renewed exuberance towards the droid lounge.

Once alone again, he returned to and reclined in the plush cushions of his favorite chair, taking in slow breaths. The tuggle fur always seemed to have a cool quality that soothed his skin. It was a gift from a satisfied client - and to make up for late payments. He was too easy on people that defaulted on their contracts. He scanned the room, noting the various substitutes and collaterals - A Sirpar tree from an Anaxi client's safe transportation of pharmaceutical solvent, it's leaves a vivid purple, was standing at ceiling's height in the room's corner. A finely crafted Wrodian carpet was on the floor, before his desk. The seven-generation tradition of weaving was all that one client from Nar Shadaa had to give. The bright yet subtle layers of mixed hues added a lower depth to the room when a sentient stood on the circular rug.

The wall was hung with various planetary flags, propaganda, and advertisements - these were a step above collateral. Some companies made payments by exchanging advertising rights. This meant that Tholme's business was in a great many trading office lounges across the galaxy. However, it was always the unreliable, irresponsible, and dishonest traders that couldn't make their payments. So the downside was that new clientele from those worlds continued to be more slippery, untrustworthy slime and he quietly discouraged his solid clients from using them. It was a circular process of which Tholme was well aware. So, he normally didn't take jobs from no-name independents.

This run to Sullust was an exception. The stock on those chemicals had shot up after years on a flat bottom. They were worth quadruple what they had been, and he could do with a hefty payday. He'd make enough to finally get the port airlock replaced with a quad laser turret. A universal airlock revamp wouldn't be such a bad idea on the starboard side, either. He'd had to risk the deal on a particularly stubborn Sullust's word. He'd never head trouble with Ralss before, but his service record with other traders was too low to even speak about. Hopefully, he wouldn't try to pull any moves when he realized that prices had jumped. All they had to do was get this shipment to ground, and they could look forward to a few more assurances of self-preservation - and self-preservation was his favorite past-time.

The first leg of the hyperjump would be ending at Denon. If Zoa was picked up two weeks ago, then there was every possibility that Imperial Intelligence had tortured the basic contact information out of him. However it might have been

enough to follow a trail to the *Rogue Circuit's* ID transponder. He'd need to prepare the crew for the worst. There was never a worse position than being blindsided by an ambush. He'd make sure that didn't happen.

Posted by Ice Hawk on 23 August 2008 02:15 AM:

Inwardly Reil sighed. Another frelling bleeding heart. You met alot of them in the Rebellion, but still. . .

"I don't suppose there's any way I could possibly talk you out of this, is there?"

Tey looked at him in genuine surprise.

"No, and I don't understand why you'd want to. I thought you wanted to kill Bartok because he was a slaver?"

"Well, yes but. . ."

But I have to get off planet before the Imperials catch me. But doing this will only bring more attention to me, which I can't afford. But I don't have time to take on every lost cause, I have to get back to the fleet. There were a million things Reil wanted to say in response to that, but he couldn't, because it would mean revealing that he was a Rebel, and he couldn't do that, so instead he said nothing.

Tey was getting impatient with him.

"So what, we just do nothing?"

Reil was visibly nervous. Killing Bartok was simple and straightforward. Liberating these slaves would bring countless complications to his escape.

"We're running out of time, the ship will leave-!"

"Then we should hurry and get a move on!"

Tey moved towards the doorway, but Reil moved and blocked his way.

"What will they do after?"

"After what?"

"After a 'short hop to a nearby planet and they'll be free'.

What are the slaves going to do with no food, no shelter, and no means of supporting themselves?! Helping Cali is one thing, but we can't take a bunch of strangers, round them out from their beds, stick them in the cargo hold, drop them off on a nearby planet, and then tell them they're free, goodbye and may the force be with them! IT'S NOT . . . PRACTICAL!"

Posted by Corr Terek on 23 August 2008 07:11 PM:

It was absolutely mesmerizing to watch Thel fight. His green blade cut glowing trails in the air, swatting aside blaster bolts with ease. Damon took advantage of the cover Thel provided, staying behind the other man and firing shots through the green wall of energy.

Kenlan ducked behind a nearby stack of crates, popping out and firing a shot every few seconds. The pirates were having a hard time of it -- while the docking bay wasn't a particularly defensible location, they obviously hadn't come to Corellia prepared to take on Jedi.

Abruptly the *Nove Viper's* engines whined. "Sequence is complete!" Mir announced breathlessly through Damon's commlink. "Now get out of there!"

"You heard the lady," Damon said. "Let's go!"

Kenlan turned and ran toward the ship, with Damon and Thel not far behind. As they neared the boarding ramp, Damon felt a sudden prickling sensation at the back of his neck. He turned and saw the largest human he'd ever seen step into the landing bay. Wearing suit of tough looking armor and armed to the teeth, Tervos Ghull appeared more than capable of reclaiming his former crewmember.

Damon and the pirate captain locked eyes, and after a second's hesitation both drew their blasters. Damon was faster, but as his finger pulled the trigger he heard only a dull click. The power pack was drained.

Ghull's shot scorched past Damon's ear, and at the same moment Kenlan grabbed his shoulder. "Come on, Damon! No time for heroics!"

The older man half-dragged Damon inside the ship, and as the boarding ramp closed, Damon couldn't help but feel a slight chill. *Our next meeting will end in death.* He didn't know how he knew, but it was certain that he'd meet Ghull again. And that one of them wouldn't walk away from that meeting...

The ship lurched skyward, Mir not hesitating to put some distance between herself and her former captain. No doubt Coronet port authority would be incensed, but there was little they could do about it.

"Where do we go from here?" Thel asked quietly, his lightsaber now hung neatly at his belt.

"I need to see to my family on Temen III," Damon replied. "But after that...I don't know."

Posted by Xaturuk on 25 August 2008 07:48 AM:

Cockpit/Rogue Circuit/Hyperspace

V6 tweedled in victory. The simulator program recorded his latest data from the combat exercise, and he retracted his arm from the connection port in the console. Recently, his progress had seen definite improvements. From his creation, he'd been rated for standard piloting docking and maneuvers. Over the last few days, however, he'd met the requirements of fighter pilot maneuvers. Several small scale skirmishes had taught him simple evasion techniques. More importantly, though, was the sense of focus that he was learning during the action. He'd found a way to modify his frazzled concentration subroutine, and he could go for longer periods in combat before it shorted out.

The pilot droid observed the course monitor, noting the proximity to their first hyperspace vector. They'd be coming out shortly. All the ships' systems and engine components were in order. Just then a ping sounded in the ship-wide comm, "All personnel report to the lounge." It was 3-D4's voice. V6 set the ship on auto-pilot, unjacked completely from the pilot's station, and hummed down the corridor towards the meeting.

Lounge/Rogue Circuit/Hyperspace

The pit droids were grouped together on the side of the room farthest from Zed, eyeing him warily. The pit leader even appeared to be sizing the towering security droid up. Tholme decided that he would have to talk to them about that later. He was sitting at the booth with the medical droids and Billee. "... the propensity for tissue tearing during such an operation is highly probable. Therefore, it is best to simply amputate." 2-1B finished.

GH-7 considered and replied, "Wouldn't it be alternately acceptable to wrap the wound with carbon-bound synthflesh? Wookie recovery rates are higher than medical academy standard species parameter."

2-1B shook his head and continued in his low, patient tone, "One might assume that is the case, especially with the vast information in support of Wookie fortitude. However, a muscle hemorrhage due to battle stims is just as irreversible on them as on the standard species."

The assistant doctor droid lifted its head, enlightened.

Tholme raised his eyebrows, and looked past the two towards Billee. The repair droid was listening in on the medical discussion. Tholme couldn't help but admire his first mate. The droid constantly surprised him – revealing an interest in all sorts of subjects and activity outside the normal operation of repair. He once studied the art of diplomacy, attending nightly meetings with 3-D4 who provided technique demonstration. Billee soon after constructed a unique subprogram of his own that could adapt the language database in a protocol droid to an encrypted storage unit available for his use as a repair droid. Billee knew as many languages as 3-D4, now. As Tholme witnessed Billee's close attention to the medical droids, he imagined that the acting Captain would soon be able to provide basic first aid to a variety of species.

As V6 was the arriving, he called the meeting to order. All droids stopped their conversations and faced him. "We'll be coming out of hyperspace at Denon, largest ecumenopolis in the galaxy next to Coruscant. Our course change to continue down to Eriadu is just a matter of degree change and a simple hour's subspace travel across the planet's dayside. However, there's a possibility that we may run into trouble." Tholme explained.

"I met with an old friend of mine in Coronet. He's informed me that one of our former squad mates is being held by the Empire. We don't know why or what is going to come of it, but I can tell you this: if they discover my old identity then we'll be hunted from Bonodan to Polis Massa."

The pit droids began to look uneasy. They fidgeted in place, reaching out arms on each others' shoulders. The medical droids listened intently. Billee seemed to be focusing on the rooms bulkheads. V6 uttered a few low beeps. Only Zed had perked up, anxiety turning into satisfied expectation. 3-D4 had his arms outward, emphasizing with them, "Oh, no! We'll be targeted as soon as we exit hyperspace!"

Zed stood proudly, "...And we will defend the ship, even until its last moments."

This illicit a fearful moan from V6 and irritated jibes from the pit droids. 3-D4 turned to the security droid and his tone grew biting, "Well, you're one to talk! Some of us don't know a blaster from an antennae!"

Zed put his hands on his hips in amusement, as the others heartily agreed. Tholme spread his arms, "Calm yourselves. I do not think that we need to worry about combat training just yet." He chuckled, "I have some ideas, however, and I'd like to get your input."

The pit droids left staring at Zed and focused back on Tholme. 3-D4 sat down, visibly flustered, and V6 rotated his optical sensor back on the Captain. "First, I'm going to be giving the ship some upgrades. We've run a clean business for nearly fifteen years. No smuggling, no black market goods. We've kept away from the slime. Now, ...that may have to change."

The crew went quiet. "I'm thinking of some modifications to the ship. We've evaded pirates well enough – our propulsion system is still a masterpiece," He looked gratefully at the pit droids and Billee. They stood a little straighter, pleased with themselves.

"These need to be adequate not just for evasion, but for real defense in case of attack. Do you have any suggestions?"

Zed spoke up immediately, "Sir, I have been monitoring several weapons manufacturers. The Taim and Bak catalogue has released a top grade turret model. The DX9 Quad Laser would easily replace onto the third-deck hardpoint."

Tholme smiled at Zed. The droid had been begging him for years to install any number of weapon defense systems from large-scale additions to the ship exterior to hand-sized blasters in

the ship armory. He'd always listened, but never gone ahead with the ideas. yet, these were different times. There was no mistaking that same hopeful tone in Zed's suggestion. Tholme nodded, "I think that would be an excellent modification."

Zed beamed pleasure. He looked out over the other crew, displaying his pride in a straight posture. One of the pit droids brapped a comment, and Zed shot him a cold stare. Tholme motioned Zed to sit as Billee spoke up, "It would be to our benefit to upgrade the fighter and modify the docking system to allow for in-space launch and land," He looked at Tholme, "You, or one of us, could be defensive craft support in an emergency."

The ship's starfighter, an LAF-250, was an old model, and Tholme doubted that it would be very effective in an Imperial scuffle. Also, it could only be launched when the freighter landed because of its size; it must be wheeled up and down the freighter's main entry ramp. Being able to launch mid-flight would be a tremendous advantage. However, even if they devised a launch port from the cargo elevator shute, they'd need a much smaller fighter. A familiar frame came to mind, and Tholme considered. "I may know of a fighter that would be adequate for such a purpose. However once we get to it, there will be no going back. Any Imperial that discovers it aboard would immediately recognize it – and impound us. It's my old Eta-2, from the war. After everything was over, the squad met on Gromas 16 to part ways. We left our ships and equipment there. I think it might still be hidden."

The discussion went on for a while longer, with the droids making defensive suggestions from system communications to anti-scan, jammers to missiles. Finally, Tholme assured them, "We will see in the coming days if the Imperials have taken notice. I want everyone being completely aware of their duties on the ship. If the signal comes for defensive maneuvers, I want you all to know exactly what to do. Go over security protocols for responses to offensive breaches to our airlock. Zed, run simulations on the turret; I want you ready to provide cover fire if we're attacked."

He clapped his hands together to signal conclusion of the meeting. The rest of the crew looked shaken. Tholme smiled at them and sighed, "We'll be all right, crew. It's just a matter of staying on top of the situation. If we're ready for anything then we can't be surprised."

"Now, all hands to stations. We're arriving at Denon."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 25 August 2008 03:47 PM:

Tam stayed in the gun turret as the *Nova Viper* lifted away from Corellia. He watched the pirates they had fought shrink into insignificant specks, obscured by distance and the precipitating winter clouds. They had fought ferociously, and it bought the time they needed to escape.

Still, a dread lingered in Tam's mind, one that he couldn't place. They weren't being followed, at least not as far as anybody on board knew, or they would have commed him to keep an eye out for any bogeys. There was no trouble off-planet either, as Mir just transmitted the ship's transponder, along with all its licenses and permits, to orbit customs. The *Nova Viper* apparently came with plenty of clearance for sudden and violent takeoffs.

Unstrapping himself from the turret control seat, Tam decided to go and investigate. He found everyone else in the cockpit.

"Nobody's saying we all have to go," Damon said. His voice was strained, like he had to work at keeping it from escalating. "But I'm going there."

Kenlan unfolded his arms and presented his palms. "I understand that, but I just don't see why. I mean, if what you say is true, then marching in there could be a trap. A trap we should avoid if we can."

Mir practically leapt from the pilot's chair and poked a clawed finger at Kenlan's chest. "Is that what the Force tells you? To abandon your family?"

"The Force isn't what's at issue," Thel interjected. "Kenlan is only pointing out the potential for danger. It's a concern I share, but I understand the need Damon feels to return. If something does happen, then Damon will need all the help he can get."

When their conversation turned to introspective silence Tam said, "What are we talking about?"

Posted by ij thompson on 25 August 2008 04:42 PM:

Fi held Cali close, whispering words of comfort to the trembling girl. Worl hadn't gotten very far with her, thank the Force, but it didn't make her situation any less ugly. Luis walked over to them, uncomfortable having to interrupt, but speaking urgently, nonetheless.

"We have to go find Tey and Zealos. Liftoff's supposed to be in five minutes."

Fi nodded, motioning toward the door, but Cali broke away, returning to the apartment's small kitchen. Fishing in a drawer, she retrieved her small meat-cutting vibroblade and tucked it into her belt. Stopping only to deliver a swift kick to the limp form that lay on the kitchen floor, she led them out the door.

"Bartok's shack is this way. Come on."

The Eastern skies over Mos Eisley were just beginning to turn pink as Cali led Luis and Fi up the street, Tonto trailing behind. It was mere moments before they came to a doorway, inside of which stood Zealos and Tey, locked in intense discussion.

"I take it everything went well?" Luis asked, looking pleased.

"Well as I'd hoped," Tey nodded, "but we've run into a bit of a snag."

Zealos nodded toward the Corellian. "Tey here wants to take all of Bartok's slaves offworld."

"And?" Cali demanded.

"Nothing... except that I kind of have a one-headline-per-day limit."

"And there's another problem," Fi reported. "The ship... Koro Bolera's on it."

Tey nodded. "Thought he might be. But it's a little late in the game to be changing plans."

"I must repeat what I told Master Santiago," the droid Tonto informed them all, "the *Long Shot* is barely flyable. A hazard."

"A hazard not only for us," Luis interjected, "but now for a couple dozen refugee slaves?"

"I think-" Tey began, before being interrupted by an incomprehensible shout from up the darkened street. A man was approaching them, lurching drunkenly from side to side and pointing toward them.

Cali spit into the sand, then looked disconsolately at the growing light in the East. "I *knew* I never shoulda got involved with you people..."

Posted by Fingon on 25 August 2008 06:48 PM:

Luis shivered. "Tey, take the women and Tonto and get them to the ship," he said softly. "I'll deal with this guy."

"Luis, don't you get cocky," Fi warned.

Tey cleared his throat and spat out a mouthful of blood.

"She's right, doc. This isn't the nicest planet, if you hadn't noticed. I don't want to have to scrape you off the side of one of these buildings."

"Who said anything about fighting?" Luis responded. "And you're right, this planet is dangerous. That's why you're going with them," he added, glancing at Tey.

Tey nodded. "Be at the ship in twenty minutes. We'll figure out what how to get off world from there." He turned to leave, then stopped in midstride and pointed towards Zealos. "Reil, isn't it? Stick around with the doctor, will ya? Make sure he doesn't do anything stupid," he said, his bloodied teeth flashing a grin.

"Sure thing."

Reil stood besides the doctor. The drunkard's slurred words were more audible now, though not any more understandable. "Why are we worried about this guy anyway?" he asked Luis, "changes are he's so out of it he'd pick a fight with a lamp post."

The doctor shrugged. "I dunno... I just have a bad feeling about this."

Luis strode towards the approaching human, hand raised in greeting. "Hello sir, can we help you?" he called. The man's head jerked upwards and he tried to focus on the doctor with his glassy, bloodshot eyes. *He's had more than just some drinks at the tavern... looks like we have a spicer here.* The man's face was unshaven, bruised and had traces of dried blood on the corner of his mouth. After a moment, his face twisted into a bitter scowl and he lurched towards the pair.

"Ya' frellin' 'spectors, ya thin' yous can jus' tell us wha' t'do! Say th' my friends sedit'us poodoo..." his speech deteriorated to the point where Luis could only pick out words occasionally. *But whatever he's saying, he's sure angry about it*

Reil nudged the doctor. "I think we might just want to leave him be..."

"Yeah, I think you're right." The quickly made to retreat.

"Hey! HEY! I'm talkin' t'you!" the man howled, racing forward and grabbing Luis by his jacket collar. He whirled the doctor around. "I listen'd t'you fer five frellin' years, an' it's yer turn now! An' you ain't g'na like what I have t'say!" he spat, his breath reeking from *something* potent.

"All right now," interceded Reil, "I think we had best be on our way." He went to separate the man from Luis.

The drunkard glared at his new enemy. "Ya ain't goin' nowhere 'til I 'splain a little somin' t'yer friend here." Luis took the opportunity to casually draw the blaster at his belt and hit the lock.

The man's head whipped around, his eyes locking on the doctor's weapon. With a guttural snarl, he smashed his elbow square into Luis's jaw and threw him to the sand. Light exploded inside the doctor's head as he tried to catch himself. Then he was aware of a very large, very heavy limp weight on top of him, nearly winding him. A moment later the weight was gone.

Shaking his head, the doctor tried to focus and eventually saw Reil standing over him, blaster drawn. He was saying something, but all Luis could hear was the ringing in his ears. "What was that?" Luis asked, covering his eyes with his hands.

"... ou all right?" There, the ringing was fading. "You took a nice hit there."

"Yeah, I'll be fine," Luis said. He coughed out the sand and dust in the back of his throat. "Just give me a minute." He touched his jaw line gingerly and tried chewing. *Good, just some bruised bone.*

"Here," said Reil, offering a hand and helping the doctor stagger to his feet. "C'mon, let's go."

As he turned to leave, Luis glanced back at his assailant. Now that he looked, the man had a badge tucked away on the

inside of his wind-worn coat, one which looked awfully familiar...

"Hold up a sec," Luis stopped down picked up the badge, a black insignia proudly stamped on the side

The Force, he's with Imperial Intelligence! Luis flipped it over. His jaw dropped. *He's an Inquisitor! This is the crest...* Luis stood up and backed away slowly.

This was the crest which had been superimposed on the ISB code cylinder. That hadn't been an ISB report, it was going straight to the top.

It all made sense.

That was why Moff Villinand was killed.

That was why the *Butcher* had been assigned to perfume factory in the middle of nowhere.

That was why Tremayne had already arrived on Burista.

That was why they were being hunted. It wasn't about Darkseed at all.

Just before he was ready to go, Luis spied a pendant hangind around the man's neck. He couldn't put his finger on it, but something about it seemed... alluring. He wrapped his fingers around the medallion and quickly yanked it from the man's neck before getting to his feet. "Come on!" he yelled over his shoulder as he broke into a run.

Reil stood there, dumbfounded. "Am I missing something here?" he asked, sprinting to catch up.

"It's a... long story. I'll fill in what I can. But we need to get to Tey and the others before they do."

"They?"

Posted by Ubiqtorate on 25 August 2008 07:58 PM:

"It's nothing," grumbled Damon. "Just a difference of opinion on where we should go next."

"No, Damon, it's not that I don't think we should go there," interjected Kenlan. "I just think we need to be careful. Very careful. If we just charge in there, blasters blazing..."

"I didn't say we should charge in, blasters blazing!" interrupted Damon.

"Then what?" burst Kenlan. "What do you propose we do?"

"Enough!" shouted Thel, the power and authority in his voice nearly shaking the room. The argument ceased immediately, leaving behind an awkward silence.

"It seems we all agree on more than we disagree on," continued Thel, once attention was solidly on him. "Kenlan, you're willing to help Damon see to his family, correct?"

"Absolutely," replied Kenlan with a shrug. "I just think we need to be careful about it."

"All right," said Thel. "And Damon's family is on Temen III, correct?"

Kenlan shifted uncomfortably, not answering.

"It seems clear to me that we need to go to Temen III, then," continued Thel.

"I just don't like it," snapped Kenlan. "There's something going on here, and I hate going in blind like this."

"Maybe there's another way we can do it," suggested Tam.

"What's that, Tam?" asked Kenlan.

"Well, whoever it is doesn't have to know who we are," explained Tam. "Maybe we can keep it that way."

"You mean go in disguise?" asked Damon.

Kenlan nodded, a smile creeping onto his face. "I think I can manage that."

Posted by Corr Terek on 26 August 2008 12:34 AM:

It was a quiet night in Jace's tavern. The Imperial presence on Temen III kept a lot of people home. Up until recently, the Empire had ignored the small colony world -- now there were robed men and black-armored stormtroopers poking around everywhere. Jace didn't like that.

One of them was in the tavern now -- a younger man, about Jace's age. He wore those strange robes, and his eyes took in everything that went on. He didn't drink much, just sat in a corner table and watched the other patrons.

"I don't like him," Jace's old friend Besro muttered. "Hardly ever drinks anything, hardly ever says anything, and he's always watching us."

"I can't kick him out," Jace replied. "Can't afford to stir up trouble with the Empire."

"No, I reckon not," Besro sighed regretfully. "What with you and Liira just hitched an' all. Wouldn't want her new husband sent off to Kessel, I guess."

"I wish *somebody'd* teach the fella a lesson," Merig, another patron, said. "What with that green stripe 'cross his face, he looks like some sorta wild man. And he always acts so haughty."

"I've seen 'im out where the Aligeris lived," Besro said, nodding to Jace. "He just sits there, for hours on end. And sometimes the kids say they've seen him out by the old caverns where you and Verik and Damon used to play."

"At least with the *other* guy, you know where you stand," Merig said. "But this one...you never know what he's thinking."

Abruptly the Imperial stood, and for half a second Jace feared he'd heard their muttering and was going to act on it. However he merely nodded to the three men and left the tavern, stepping out into the cold night. Jace heaved a sigh of relief.

"Next time you guys want to talk about him, do it when he's not here," he said. Besro shrugged and bent back over his drink.

"Is something wrong, Jace?"

Jace turned, the familiar voice causing a smile to spread across his face. "Nothing wrong now, Liira. Another half hour and we'll close up for the night."

Liira moved slowly down the steps that led to their living quarters above the tavern. "Missus Brannigan told me she had a gift for us, and I'd completely forgotten about it until just now. I figured I'd better go get it before she goes to bed."

"Wait a bit and we'll both go," Jace replied. Liira smiled and shook her head.

"I won't be long, and you know as well as I do the streets here are safe enough." She slipped a coat on. "I'll be back soon."

Merig watched her go, and sighed heavily. "Honestly, Jace, why'd you have to go and marry her? It's downright depressing, is what it is."

Besro grinned. "Some folks are just luckier than the rest of us, Merig."

The streets of Temen III's only major settlement were indeed peaceful. The colony had never really had much of a criminal element -- frontier justice was swift and final, and served as a clear warning to any with a mind to disturb the peace.

Liira picked her way through the darkened streets. It wasn't far to the Brannigans' house -- they ran the only store in town, and she could see their lights further down the street.

"Excuse me."

Liira started and turned. "Who's there?"

"I apologize for startling you, miss." It was the Imperial she'd often seen at the tavern. "I was hoping you'd be able to help me."

"I...will do what I can," Liira said cautiously. She, like most of the other settlers, held no love for the Empire. The Aligeri

family was loved by many and everyone knew what had happened to them, no matter how many lies the Empire told. "What do you need?"

"Well, you see," the man said, stepping closer. "You have strong memories of Damon Aligeri." His eyes gleamed. "I'd like to see them."

Posted by Ice Hawk on 26 August 2008 01:57 AM:

Luis swore under his breath. It was obvious he hadn't meant to let that slip.

"Look we don't have time, I'll tell you after, let's just get back to the ship"

Something didn't add up. He couldn't quite say what, but Luis, Fi and Tey's stories weren't adding up. Reil wondered just what he had gotten himself into.

"Fine, but as soon as we're in space, I want answers."

"Done. Now can we please get moving?"

Reil switched his blaster from stun to kill.

"Now we can go."

Posted by Xaturuk on 26 August 2008 04:50 PM:

Denon/Inner-Rim Territory/High orbit

Denon was a slow-moving orb in the shadow of its sun. The red star's light tinted deep space with a dark red hue, and the misty curtain effect stretched out before the black expanse. The white hot stars of the galaxy glimmered as if from outside a heat wave. Some sentients speculated that the dizzying amount of movement and energy emitting from the planet's surface was largely due to the great heights that the technology level had reached. The planet's crust rolled gently. It was grayish and muddled with gobs of artificial light that seemed to ooze in the areas of greatest population.

Imperial presence in the system was based out of Denon much to the displeasure of some of the planets' native population. Resistance, however, was never visible enough to ever be considered anything other than malcontent. It had never reached terrorist activity, and the many Imperial Garrisons on Denon's surface intended things to stay that way. Several high ranking Imperial Senate kept a tight handle on the working planetary politic – allowing only enough liberty concerning inter-planetary governing as would be permissible to any other member of the Galactic Empire.

The ground forces, however, had only rudimentary space patrol craft in the area. However, an Imperial Fleet could be summoned in the event of a crisis and it periodically patrolled the system. As it was though, there were enough defense fighters and communications analysts to monitor the normally heavy volume of space traffic, seeking out the occasional pirating attack on civilian freighters.

This usually was what gave Tholme a feeling of security and protection, but as the *Rogue Circuit* winked into orbit above the planet he found himself gripping the arms of the pilot's seat trying to appear unaffected. If he was succeeding, he didn't know it. V6, designated as co-pilot for the time being, whistled and chirped a communications report. Billee, sitting behind them at the comms station, leaned forward to look at his monitor. He was silent for several moments. "Nothing yet, sir. Space is clear." He said.

Tholme bristled at the droid's ominous tone, and felt the goosebumps raise on his arms. He double checked the comm. Display and found the normal radio chatter amongst port

authorities, craft cues, and friends that had convoyed together. Nothing seemed suspicious. The sensors showed passive tracking of his ship's ID signatures – natural for such a populated planet; all transportation was streamlined for efficiency. However, he wasn't concerned with natural.

"Run the jammers and anti-scan. I want us off the map." Tholme ordered.

"Yes, sir."

Technically it was illegal to mask ID signatures in commercial traffic zones. He'd only used the very specific counter measure equipment on a few occasions to evade pirate operations, and he figured that they'd be out of the system before anyone even knew they'd dropped off the grid, anyway.

He switched on the station comm display, tracking to Zed's station at the turret control capsule, "Stay sharp up there. We'll be through in a minute." He received the droid's immediate affirmative.

The collection of freighters that were lining up to orbit the planet, lazily moved forward. Tholme was glad he didn't need to dock, or else they'd have a good day's wait for landing permission. He flipped the pilot control to full manual and lightly grasped the control yoke. The freighter responded with a firm crest starboard, easing in perfect unison with Tholme's slightest touch. A few memories of flight when he was a younger man drifted into his mind. He smiled, allowing himself a small momentary distraction, and took the [Rogue Circuit/[I] through a gentle arc around the planet.

If there was supposed to be any attention directed towards them, it never happened. As the hyperspace trajectory was calculated and the ship made the jump, Tholme wondered if perhaps Gell was just talking on rumor. Or perhaps Zoa never did give up any information. A stab of regret and shame thrust at his stomach. The memory came to the surface, himself helpless to shut it off – walking out, leaving him to stars knows what fate, ...abandoning him.

3-D4 commented over the station comm. as Tholme stood to leave, "Well, that was anti-climactic. I do hope this isn't going to be a routine behavior. I do so detest paranoia."

"You've had plenty of experience in it, Dee-four," He chuckled, "At least this time, if you get caught you won't get a memory wipe – you'll get blown into scrap." The droid let out a truly frightened gasp that broke off into an affronted denail. The dramatic outburst put Tholme's spirites back into a more congenial mood, an image of his squad mate slowly fading back into the dark recesses of things better left unremembered.

Zed broke in, "Nothing to report, sir. I'm returning to my normal security routines." It was slight, but Tholme could hear the disappointment in his vocabulator.

"Don't worry, Zed. I'm going to set up something special for you once we get to Sullust. You'll never get bored again." Zed didn't respond.

"Captain," Billee called, halting Tholme at the end of the corridor, "Does this mean that you've officially resumed command?"

Tholme was caught off guard. He realized that he hadn't had a drink last night. He shaved again earlier this morning without even thinking about it. Captain So looked at his first mate with a grin and an amused chuckle, "Well, I...I think that it does, lieutenant."

Billee stood up straight and saluted sharply, "Good to see you back, Captain."

Tholme returned the salute and turned on his heel, walking away with a spring in his step. He was back.

Posted by Vash Knives on 26 August 2008 07:35 PM:

"More than meets the eye? Sounds like my life story. My name, as I said, is Koro Bolera. I am a professional gambler and trained as an Antarian Ranger. The fact that I am an Antarian Ranger is something I tend not to tell everyone I meet. It would be a problem if the Empire found it out. As for this glowing fellow here, He is Jedi Master Kotoru Hanaan. He died eight years ago. The reason you and I see him now is that when he died, he became one with the Force. After he died he learned from another how to 'come back' so to speak."

Koro sat down in the nearest chair and continued to speak.

"As for the situation, it is better than you probably think. This old Corellian G7 is in better shape than the droid seems to think. It has already been through half-a-dozen jumps since Burista and nothing has gotten worse. Those old CV-B droids are fine for all purpose work, but they are not as good as a dedicated mechanic at telling the state of a ship."

Posted by Thaycon Devoid on 26 August 2008 10:29 PM:

Commander Moridt smiled as he listened to his ear-piece; that damn Twi'lek pulled it off well. Now that the bug was in place, it wouldn't matter what Melroek did now, he was his spy.

"-ran 's fast 's I could... though' th' buggers were catchin' up." Melroek was saying, "Ended up 'n some dead-end room, wi' a ped'stal righ' in th' middle. Fou' th' pendan' there. I'd lost th' creeps by then, s' I took a look at it. It was then I heard a voice 'n my hea', sayin' weird stuff 'bou' the Force, 'n' I saw a glowy guy comin' a' me.... Course I 's trapped, s' I climbed 'nto th' ped'stal like thi'."

Mordit heard Melroek grunt then start yelling like a maniac right into his ear.

"THA'S RIGH' YOU CURSED 'LLUSION! DON' COME NEAR ME! I...I'M GONNA SHU" YOU DOWN! I WILL NO' COME DOWN...'STURBANCE? YOU WAN' A 'STURBANCE?!!!"

Mordit finally found the volume control and quickly muted him, a headache starting to pound it's way through his head. A moment later his helmet beeped, alerting him of someone attempting to contact him. He quickly switched channels and unmuted the output.

"Batan? What happened?" Moridt asked.

"Apologies Commander, his outburst was unforeseen. I successfully bugged him as requested, and he is as of yet unaware." the Twi'lek replied, his voice of the utmost calm.

"Did he get thrown out?" Moridt asked.

"Yes sir, although he did not take his bag with him." Batran paused a moment, "Would you like for me to search it?"

Mordit smiled at the Twi'lek's greed, "You may, although leave the sensitive items in there; when you return the bag I am sure he will need them."

"Yes sir!" Batran responded, a little over excited it seemed.

Mordit switched back over to Melroek's channel, catching him midsentence.

"-goin' nowhere 'til I 'splain a little somin' t'yer friend here."

There was a moment of silence, followed by yelling and a gunshot; Moridt listened raply, trying to discern what was happening.

"Luis, you all right? You took a nice hit there." someone said.

"Yeah, I'm fine." Luis responded, "Just give me a minute"

There was some static and then the first voice spoke again, "Here...c'mon le't go."

"Wait a sec..." Luis said, and there was a distinct ruffling noise indicating Melroek was being searched.

Moments later there was a loud snap.

"Come on!" Luis yelled, his voice too close to the hidden bug for Moridt's comfort. The heavy breathing that followed cleared any suspicion he had before.

The Commander quickly switched back to the other channel; "Batan! Where did you put the bug?"

"On the back of his lucky pendant, why?" the Twi'lek answered.

Mordit sighed, a lucky charm was the perfect place for a bug, as the wearer didn't change it as they changed their clothes. Even for a spy, a lucky charm can fit into almost any persona.

"Batan, find Melroek, he's probably injured. Someone named 'Luis' has taken that pendant. I'm going to listen in to try and track there location, you just get Melroek back to them. That bug is of no use to me unless it's in possession of my spy. Oh, and don't forget you're supposed to be drunk."

"Yes sir." Batran Lymonio answered.

Posted by Darth_Vader2005 on 27 August 2008 11:05 AM:

Tey could feel the adrenaline rush from confronting Bartok still in his system and behind that the dull certainty that this was all that was keeping him from collapsing into the street. Grimly he pushed his body onwards towards the ship. He was dimly aware of Fi and Cali off to his right. The slave girl was still shaking, and Fi was still trying to calm her down. It was a job that Tey did not envy her even a little bit. He'd had to try and do the same thing a few years ago with CorSec, of course in those situations a man is horrendously unsuited to the task.

On his left the droid Tonto whistled and buzzed slightly as it moved over the sand and dust. The sight of the droid's chassis bouncing along the dry street reminded him of a few choice modifications he'd ordered the droid to make to itself.

"Tonto do you still have those sub-routines you put in before Burista?"

"Yes master, I connected my communications to the *Long Shot* using its slave circuitry and..."

Tey cut the droid off "I don't care how droid I just need to know if they're still there."

"Of course! Do you think I would delete such..."

"Ok, then I want you to run start the warm up sequence aboard the *Long Shot* for me."

"But that without permission from the Port Authority such an act would be a breach of..."

"Just do it ok?" Tey asked the droid, exasperation clear in his voice. With what sounded like a surly beeping noise the droid began to transmit the necessary codes, and at the docking bay the *Long Shot* began to warm up.

Posted by Xaturuk on 27 August 2008 11:33 AM:

Engineering Bay/Rogue Circuit/Hyperspace

Billee sat amongst the junk parts in the engineering bay. The area was mostly clean and sparkling, as per the Captain's orders, except for a small area that was littered with electronic attachments, circuit boards, tracks, an unusual set of mechanic tools. The crew knew not to touch anything here, as it was Billee's personal space granted him by the Captain. It was for the First Mate's creations.

As soon as the BLX droid was set to work on the ship, years

ago when he was first acquired, he found that making the usual maintenance and repairs was not satisfying his behavior parameters. He would solder minute circuits that ran through the ship's upper landings, a feat which took careful precision and patience. Outside the ship, as he was tethered to the exterior, he would weld into the plating splits from sporadic pirate attacks, heeding every miniscule gap in the metals. When ship systems went down, it was Billee that dissected the components, his droid brain memorizing the place of every fiber, servo, and breaker. He'd make the repair, and close things back up. They simply worked. Things got fixed.

Yet, Billee never felt that he'd accomplished his job. He always had a lingering desire to complete – a problem he, at once point, assumed was part of a faulty behavioral sequence. After seeking guidance from the Captain, who'd only muttered gruffly and stumbled back to his quarters, Billee attempted to repair himself. The operation required the oversight of the medical droids, who knew nearly nothing of mechanical construction but were happy to be on call for an emergency. He smoothly disassembled his torso cavity and found his operating core. After adjusting and testing several behavioral sequences, during which time the medical droids were the unfortunate recipients of his obscene and variable verbal outbursts, Billee found no source of the glitch. Eventually, a corporate world stop gave him the chance to be inspected by his creators. They found no problems at all.

Captain So approached Billee then and gave him a small set of fine-fusing tools. It had been a rare instance that the Captain left the ship. Billee was ecstatic about his present. He put it to use right away collecting the slag parts from ship repairs to shape into a basic operating arm for the engineering bay. The arm could move heavy materials and vehicles across the mid-level cargo deck as needed. The captain was pleased and encouraged Billee by picking up a few books for him. *Smork's Comprehensive Circuit Map* enlightened the droid on electronic configurations in computers. He received insight into droid construction with *Mobile Automaton Deviations: The rise of Servomotors*. More and more books he acquired and digested. He continued in his tinkering with renewed zeal after every book was finished.

Next, he put together an energy spike monitor for the ship's power cores. He manipulated a comlink and wired it into a ship-wide network of audio-visual devices, set in various rooms for quick communication. Then a custom socket and tread clamp for V6's interface arm in the cockpit. He extended the walls in the engine compartments on the first, middle, and third decks of the engine room – allowing for the custom engine build that the Captain ordered later from the manufacturer.

When he'd felt he'd reached a competent level of proficiency, he ventured into more complex constructions. He started making small mechanical assistants to help him in his work. They were first rolling metal contraptions, with a basic set of commands. Useful for very little, they mostly carried his tools and could respond to simple directions.

As his knowledge and skill increased, he continued to modify and change his assistants. They would become more mobile, more complex in their programming. He could arrange for behavior pathing – installing set routines such as ship clean-up. They could maneuver through parts of the ship he'd not informed them about. Eventually, he made them into bi-pedal units like himself and modifying their chassis into similar models he'd seen elsewhere. He perfected their programming enough so that he considered them droids of his own caliber. The ship's pit crew was entirely his making. They were the apex of his achievement; the source of his satisfied surprise as well as

continual frustration. Their behavior cores, being modified by each unit's own whim, were more unpredictable than he originally believed. It made for a mechanical crew of assistants that were not so much assistants as they were fellow comrades – though they frequently expressed their superiority.

Now, Billee sat in his familiar corner, soldering a swatch of circuits into a rigging bracket. The Captain had requested a special holographic display build. Once the port storage room was emptied, the multiple visual projection modules would be mounted to various positions on the bulkheads. The program would then facilitate a life-size sentient, of any range of species, that would act as a combatant for training sessions. The program allowed for practice dummies wielding everything from fists to blasters, though harmless to living sentients or droids. A thin netting material would be draped over the sentient who was using the program, allowing for the precise calculation and record of exchanging strikes and blows. Captain So meant the sparring room as a gift to Zed. The pit crew, having been asked to work without knowing for whom the gift was intended, was constructing blast-rated armor coverings around the entire room's walls. It would allow Zed to practice with live fire. The Captain said it made a significant difference.

He finished the final inspection and test of the holo-system, firing it up one last time as a completed work. The holographic form of a Zabrak materialized, a blueish tint to the murky image. The sentient flourished a staff menacingly. Billee, holding the control module, input another command. The Zabrak was replaced by a floating droid ball. It whisked slowly up and down, zipped to a corner near Billee's head then broke swiftly to his knees. Satisfied, he turned off the system. The hologram disappeared instantly. Billee's creation was a success. Here, standing over the junk pile of seemingly useless parts and wires, he found satisfaction and a sense of completion.

Posted by ij thompson on 27 August 2008 05:43 PM:

"Ship's warming."

"Yeah."

Fi answered Tey absently as they walked, anything but thrilled by the news. She turned her attention once again to Cali, who walked silently, arms folded against her chest.

Fi's heart went out to the girl. In the space of a few hours, Cali's world had been turned utterly upside down. *Quite an adjustment, for someone so young*, Fi thought, then stopped herself. *Oh, stuff it, Fiola*, she thought. *You're barely a few years older than she is, and you know she's better off anywhere than back there.*

Anywhere?

Fi looked up at the sky, which was beginning to lighten, and clenched her teeth angrily. Up the road awaited the *Long Shot*, and aboard it, Koro Bolera, who no doubt had plans of his own. Maybe he wanted to take them all to that creepy space station of his, where they could spend eternity admiring his trophy collection? Maybe something even worse?

One thing was for sure: Fi would not be setting one foot aboard that ship, were it not for the girl at her side. But she and the others had gotten Cali into this, and they (or Fi, at least) would get her out.

First planet, we're out of there, Fi swore as she marched along with the others, neither she nor her companions aware of the pair of figures lurking down a side street, drawing their blasters in the early dawn...

Posted by Thaycon Devold on 27 August 2008 11:03 PM:

Melroek jerked involuntarily several times as consciousness hit him hard. He moaned in agony, his head pounding with confusion and an early hang-over. Looking up, he had to squint through the darkness and fog of his mind to make out Batran standing over him.

"Melroek, ye'lright?" Batran asked, his voice sounding strangely blurred to Melroek.

"What... what happened?" he asked, barely aware that he was lying in the sands of Tatooine's streets.

"You were 'ttacked, I think..." Batran replied, "Hutt slime made o' wi' yer pendant too."

The ground seemed to fall from under Melroek as sobriety punched him in the gut. Despite his pain, Melroek leaped to his feet, desperately trying to remember any details.

"Which way did he go?" Melroek asked, his voice breaking like a child's.

Batran paused as if in thought, then nodding, he pointed in the direction of the spaceport; "Tha' way."

Melroek didn't even pause as he took off in the direction Batran had indicated, his rejuvenated body fighting the lingering effects of the alcohol.

The Twi'lek shouldered Melroek's bag and followed after, doing his best to keep up.

"Wha's the big deal? Why's the pendant so important?" Batran called after him.

"It's mine!" Melroek shouted back through gritted teeth.

"Well don' forget your blaster this time!" Batran said.

Posted by Vash Knives on 28 August 2008 07:49 PM:

As the ship suddenly started up, a surprised Mr. Mace floated out of the cockpit where he had been napping, and went into the only safe haven he could find-Koro's arms. Koro cradled the startled fabool.

"Don't worry little guy. I'm sure it's nothing to worry about."

Koro pondered the sudden startup. Clearly either Tey or Luis had started the ship remotely. The gambler wondered where the ship would go next. Where ever the destination was, he would tag along and then get himself and Tarynn a ship to go from there. With the fabool on his lap, Koro started to take a light nap.

Posted by Darth_Vader2005 on 29 August 2008 07:35 PM:

He should have seen it coming really. Maybe it was the result of various cuts and bruises. His nose felt like it had been broken, a dull thudding pain was causing a definite limp in his left leg, and his head felt like there was an acrobatic porcupine inside. Either way, he didn't spot the ambush until it was too late. The pair were smart, they waited until their quarry was in front of them and took down the most threatening target first.

The first thing Tey knew about the attack he'd been smashed in the back of the neck by a pistol butt. Not enough to kill or do lasting damage but more than enough to make him stagger. That was followed by a deft kick to the back of his bad knee, sending the Corellian to the floor. As he tried to roll to his feet he felt a heavy boot crash into his kidney, and then a massive being was on him, dragging his hands into binders. It was all Tey could do to keep awake as he felt scaly hands slip the catches home into place. The scales, combined with the weight that now rested on his back probably meant a trandoshan. Hard to put down, harder to keep down.

While this was going on the reptile's partner was covering the other two and the droid. Tey heard a twi'lek voice coming

cool and calm across the night air "Evening, ladies. Do yourselves a favour and put your hands on your heads. Nice and slow."

Still pinned to the floor Tey had to admit, they were professionals, whoever they were. Their only mistake was to not be watching very closely behind them, as Luis and Reil approached through the darkness.

Posted by Xaturuk on 30 August 2008 07:38 AM:

Office/Rogue Circuit/Eriadu System

"Tholme So! Everything is on schedule, I presume?" Ralss looked sideways into the holoprojector, as if the Sullustan was trying to see around Tholme.

Tholme fought to keep from sneering. A small map on his office desk projected a star chart display - the second leg of their jump had ended at the Eriadu System. One more short jump and they'd be at their destination. To his and the crew's relief, there'd been no attention paid him from Imperial patrols, although Zed suggested taking the offensive. Tholme hoped that the training room would be complete soon. He didn't know how much more anticipation the security droid could take - he must be a combat droid at his core.

Coming back to the present, he sucked in a quick breath and straightened his back, "Of course, Ralss. I will be arriving in high orbit within the day. However, if you want your shipment quickly, you can give me the drop coordinates, now."

Ralss hesitated, his image rippling with minor static. Tholme noticed the sentient peer nervously around the area. Must be a secret location, indeed, for there to be connection problems in the holo feed. "Ah, ..um yes. I mean, no. No, we shall wait until you're in orbit above the planet before we send the ground coordinates." He replied, matter-of-factly.

Tholme nodded, absently tracing the engraved designs on the top of his desk. He cleared his throat, taking a moment to strengthen his resolve, "Ralss, have you been able to keep up with the stock projections from the Intergalactic Banking Clan?"

The Sullustan stopped glancing around and re-focused on Tholme. "No, I haven't. I've, uh..., been away from most comforts for a long time. What's happening?"

"Chemicals shot up. Way up." He fidgeted with the holo's color adjustment dials.

Ralss's form seemed to stumble while sitting, "What? How much?" His voice had risen at least an octave.

"Four times." He glanced up at Ralss's face to find the sentient quietly fuming. He even appeared to be shaking.

"That's...it's, " He searched for the right word, sweat building on his forehead. Finally, he seemed to arrive at a decision, and gave up all pretense of anxiety. "That's just great, isn't it? I should have known you'd do this to us, So."

"Who's us?" Tholme frowned. He was suspicious. He should have seen it sooner. Why else would the creature be so paranoid? The Imperials must have got to him.

"The Rebellion, you smuggler!" Ralss fumed, "Surely you should have been able to figure it out, by now?"

Tholme was struck silent. The Rebellion? Ralss working with the Rebellion? It must be some sort of joke. Or a trap. The sentient had observed his reaction then continued in the same sharp, stubborn tone, "Come on, Tholme! I've been ordering huge amounts of armor-based chemicals. What did you think I was going to do with them?"

"How should I know? It's not my job to care what you do. I'm just getting them there."

"Oh, you sound like a regular black market delivery boy, now." Ralss snickered.

Tholme flared his nostrils, "It's the principles of good trading – as long as it's legal, then the uses it's put to doesn't apply to me or for my consideration."

"Sure. Keep telling yourself that." He sneered. Immediately after, the face turned concerned, "Look, you're not going to blab about this, are you? I mean...I thought you knew already. And I was kind of hoping for a little discount on the price. War costs money, after all, and the Rebellion is on a tight budget."

Shaking his head, Tholme tried to calm himself. At least it wasn't Imperials. He exhaled and leaned back in his seat, considering his options. He still didn't like Ralss, and he wouldn't be doing him any favors. The back-stabbing sentient would probably flip the Rebellion over to the nearest Imperial Garrison the next time he needs credits. This only reflected the tact of Rebel operations – elementary, sloppy.

Yet, he'd seen the corruption of the garrisoned worlds. The state of the non-human sentients was a travesty, and he'd seen countless colleagues become victims of persecution and disappearances due to imperial Elitism. The old system was bleak and dangerous and crumbling. And there was something dark about it. Somehow, he'd known that – all those years ago on Utapau when his squad made its decision. Now, the Empire threatened him – his livelihood – his crew. He didn't exactly feel friendly towards the Rebellion, but he had a good many things in his deck stacked against the Imperial rule. Perhaps a change of authority would be favorable.

"I...understand your position, Ralss, " It almost pained Tholme to utter the words, but he kept his voice firm, "I'll mark them down to three times the initial cost – less than the current price."

Ralss slumped a little, but his tone grew more appreciative, "I see we're not going to get too much from you. Well. Thanks anyway...for the small break."

"Consider yourself fortunate that you're getting a break at all. I'll be contacting you as we arrive in system." He switched off the holoprojector with a scowl.

Sighing, he looked up at 3-D4 who sat at his own desk on the other side of the room. The droid was watching him expectantly.

"You've got something to say, wire-brain?" He spat.

But Dee-four just looked back to his display and started entering data. Tholme could have sworn that the droid was smirking.

Posted by Ubiqtorate on 30 August 2008 12:21 PM:

The brown-haired man burst through the doors of the tavern with a flourish. "Where's Aligeri?" he thundered.

The hooded man in the corner flinched, he hoped imperceptibly. He knew the answer, of course, but there was no way he could tell the man. He was doing everything he could not to draw attention to himself. That meant sitting in a plain, brown cloak in the back corner of the tavern, his face mostly covered by an unnecessary breath mask.

The brown hair really shouldn't have been the first thing the hooded man noticed, he realized. The brown-haired man was wearing a bright red shirt that buttoned up the front, white pants, and polished black boots that came up to his knees. The hooded man almost expected to see a long, curved ceremonial sword at his belts and epaulets at his shoulders, but there were none. He looked to be in his late forties, probably around fifty, with a few wrinkles around his eyes, and just a few strands of gray around his ears. He was furiously waving a sheet of flimsiplasts at the

assembled patrons.

"That low-down, good-for-nothing Spar Aligeri," the man continued to bluster. "Where is he? Where's his homestead?"

The other patrons of the cantina reacted in various ways. Some looked on in confused amusement. Though Spar was something of a local hero, the tavern was also a haven for travelers passing through the system, and probably wondered what could spark such a passionate commotion on a relatively backwater world like this. Others, probably the locals, looked away uncomfortably, the shock of the disaster too fresh in their minds.

"You... you hadn't heard then," cut in the bartender finally, clearing his throat.

"Hadn't heard what?" roared the brown-haired man. "Aligeri owes me over half a million credits, and I'm not leaving until I collect!"

"You might be here a long time, then," replied the bartender brusquely. "Spar Aligeri is dead."

The brown-haired man blinked, his mouth hanging open in a tirade that had now been silenced before it had a chance to begin. "I... what? What happened?"

"There was a fire," replied another patron at the bar, who appeared already deep into his fifth glass of lum. "Took down the whole ruttin' homestead. Aligeri lived on a big spread up in the hills, so by the time anyone was able to sound the alarm, it was too late."

"I'm... I'm so sorry," the brown-haired man replied mutedly. "I didn't know. It... his wife, too?"

The bartender nodded. "Found 'em right next to each other, poor rodders," he confirmed. "Not that there was much left to find. It took genetic testing just to confirm that what they found used to be human."

The lum-guzzling patron at the bar excused himself.

"No surprise, though," continued the bartender. "They loved each other so much. They always said they'd die together, so I guess they got what they wanted."

"What caused the fire?"

The bartender shook his head. "Not sure. Something must have exploded to cause that much damage. Probably a fuel cell. It was a fast-moving fire, though, and the inspector said there was so much damage that they might never be able to figure out what caused the fire or even where it started."

"I'm sorry. And his boys?"

The bartender cocked an eyebrow. "You knew his boys?"

"I never actually met them," replied the brown-haired man. "Spar and I had some business dealings together, but I never actually met his family. He talked about his boys all the time, though. I guess that was a long time ago, so they'd probably be grown men by now."

"Yes, sir," said the bartender. "The older one left home quite a while ago. The younger one was still at home, but no sign of him. They didn't find a body, so it's possible he made it out. I doubt it, though, because nobody's heard from him since."

"I see. I have some paperwork I'll need to go through. Who is the executor of his estate?"

The bartender shrugged. "Don't know that there was one. I think the Imperial Court has been handling his affairs. You'd have to check there."

"It's closed for the evening," explained the brown-haired man. "I was hoping to get this taken care of as quickly as possible, but I guess I'll have to wait until morning."

"Looks that way," agreed the bartender. "Now, can I get you anything?"

"Hm?" asked the man. "Er, no... you know, I'm suddenly not

very thirsty." He reached into his pocket and set a ten-credit chit on the bar. "Thank you very much for your time, though."

The bartender pocketed the chit. "Much obliged," he replied.

The brown-haired man nodded, then made his way back out onto the dusky street. The hooded man discretely followed him out the door a few minutes later, and caught up with him in a side alley a few blocks away.

"Damon, I'm so sorry," the brown-haired man said.

"It's okay," replied Damon, removing the hood and mask. "I... well, I already knew."

"You knew?" asked the man. "But how? What are we doing here, then?"

"Well, I didn't actually *know*," clarified Damon. "I told you I'd gotten a message, and I had a feeling something was wrong. I didn't know, but... well, I guess I did know. I mean, you're a Jedi - you can understand that, right?"

"Yes, the Force has a strange way of revealing to us what we need to know," the man replied.

Damon shook his head. "That's so weird - just like that, Kenlan's back. I still don't even recognize you, but the voice is back, the mannerisms are back..."

"A Jedi must play many roles," replied Kenlan. "Over the years I've become quite adept at becoming who I need to be, when I need to be that person."

"Well, it's uncanny. You look twenty years younger, even."

"Modern technology at its best, my boy," said Kenlan, slapping the younger man on the shoulder. "I wish I *felt* twenty years younger."

"We need to get back to the ship," remarked Damon.

"Yes," agreed Kenlan. "You're sure nobody recognized you?"

"Quite sure," confirmed Damon. "I knew several people in that tavern, and nobody so much as twitched the whole time I was there."

"Could it be that they recognized you, but understood that you were traveling incognito?"

"Possible, but I doubt it. Enough people pass through here that most locals don't even look twice, and with all this equipment I don't even recognize myself."

"Right. You'd better put that back on to go back to the ship, though. We don't want to risk anybody seeing you on the street."

"That's the truth," Damon began strapping the mask back into place. "So what's next?"

"We'll have to go to the court tomorrow, just to maintain appearances," said Kenlan. "The paperwork should be in order - Grindo is the best forger I know. Once we get a few things sorted out, we should be able to have a look around your homestead... if that won't be too difficult for you, I mean."

"I'll be all right," insisted Damon.

"Damon, I really am sorry," said Kenlan. "If I'd had any idea..."

"It's all right," said Damon.

"It sounds like your brother might have made it out, though," Kenlan reminded him.

Damon nodded. "He did. I'm sure he did. We just have to find out where he went."

"And you think there will be clues at the homestead?"

Damon shrugged. "It's just the only thing I can think to try right now."

Posted by Corr Terek on 30 August 2008 08:36 PM:

"Any trouble, Tam?" Kenlan asked as they stepped inside the ship. The boy shook his head.

"Nobody's come near the ship," he reported. "I don't think

anybody's even bothered to give us a second glance."

"That's as it should be," Kenlan said, satisfied. "Have you heard from Mir and Thel yet?"

"They're on their way back now," Tam said. He looked back and forth between the two men. "Did you find out anything?"

Kenlan looked at Damon, unsure of what to say. Damon sighed. "Yeah...we did."

The look on his face must have said it all. "Oh," Tam said, his voice falling.

"There's some good news," Kenlan added quickly. "We think Damon's brother might have escaped."

The boy's face brightened. "Do you know where he went?"

"If I did, we'd be looking for him right now," Damon replied.

"Tomorrow we'll be heading out to the homestead -- maybe we'll find a clue there."

They were interrupted by the sound of Thel and Mir entering the ship. Mir had dyed her fur dark, almost black, save for a few reddish streaks here and there, and was dressed in flamboyant attire similar to Kenlan's. Thel had applied some fake scarring to his face and arms and had donned a set of lightweight body armor. "We're back!" Mir announced.

She glanced at Damon's face, taking in the sorrow that was evident in his face. "You heard, then."

"Yeah," Damon replied. "What did you find out?"

"A lot of people are upset over what happened," Thel said.

"And, needless to say, not many people believe that 'oh, they died in a fire' nonsense."

"The shopkeeper says an Imperial shuttle was seen heading towards the Aligeri homestead the day it was torched," Mir elaborated. "It's not too hard to put two and two together."

"Missus Brannigan always did like to gossip," Damon murmured. Thel and Mir glanced at each other.

"There's something else," Mir said. She seemed uneasy. "Not too long ago, another Imperial shuttle arrived. Two guys in dark robes, and a bunch of black-armored stormtroopers, apparently. They've been poking around for the last couple of days."

Kenlan stirred at the mention of black armor. "Any sign as to what they're up to?"

"They were at the homestead for awhile, but they've taken up residence in the local security barracks," Thel said. "Since then, strange things have been happening in town."

"Like what?" Tam asked curiously. Mir scratched her head.

"It's odd -- apparently, there's a lot of people that have had their memory blanked recently."

"Blanked?" Damon asked. "What do you mean?"

"Portions of their memory have been erased," Thel said shortly. "The shopkeeper says they're often found in alleyways or back streets with no memory of how they got there. The most recent victim was the wife of the owner of the local tavern."

"Does anyone know *why* this is happening?" Kenlan asked, his brow furrowed in thought.

"I can make a few guesses as to *how*," Thel shrugged. "But the only thing the shopkeeper could tell us is that most of those people were friends of the Aligeri family."

Damon frowned. "So someone's targeting them because of my family -- or, more specifically, me and my brother." He shook his head. "This whole situation is karked up."

Mir nodded in agreement. "You've got that right. What now?"

"Tomorrow I'm going to go out to the homestead," Damon said. "I might find something that would help me find my brother." He paused. "Also...Dad told me a long time ago that if anything happened to him, he'd hidden something for me in the old cave where Verik and I used to play. I'll need to get that, if

the Empire hasn't found it first."

"Tomorrow, then," Kenlan said. He glanced out the nearest viewport. "I suggest we stay alert. I've got a bad feeling about those robed Imperials, and if I'm right we'll have to tread very carefully."

Posted by Ice Hawk on 30 August 2008 11:58 PM:

Luis and Reil materialized through the shawdows with their blasters drawn.

"A'ight, hands up!"

Reil surveyed the scene before him. Tey was on the ground, with a trandoshan on his back in the middle of putting binders on him, Cali and Fi had their hands behind their heads as a Twi'lek who had a blaster pistol trained on Cali.

The Twi'lek looked up at Reil, blaster still trained on Cali. The trandoshan stayed where he was, pinning Tey down.

"And what can we do for you today, gentlemen?"

"You could drop your weapons and put your hands behind your heads. If that proves to be an inconvenience to the two of you, then just hold still and I'll shoot you instead."

Reil had been through a very rough day, and he was not in the mood to fark around with scum like this.

"I'm sure that won't be nesscessar-"

The Twi'lek's next words were cut off as Reil put two bolts into his chest.

Posted by Fingon on 31 August 2008 10:22 PM:

The blaster bolts slammed into the sentient's chest, knocking him backwards a few steps and burning two holes in his styled jacket. The charred cloth peeled back to reveal a form-fitting armor chest piece.

He was too fast, far too fast to be a petty thug. Before Luis could even bring his gun up to aim, the Twi'Lek drew two wicked-looking blasters from his hips and sent a spray of crimson bolts down the alleyway as he ran for cover. Reil and Luis scrambled behind what might have once been a speeder, now lying abandoned in alley.

Luis ducked his head as another round of ammunition roared overhead, sending sparks flying. "You know, just for once I'd like things to just *be simple!*" he growled to no one in particular as he peeked around his cover. The Trandoshan had one foot firmly planted on Tey's back, an armored mask with slits for the eyes and nostrils, and a weapon far larger than Luis liked braced against its hip. The doctor jerked back as a round of blasterfire smashed into the old speeder, undoubtedly making it resemble a fine cheese more than machinery.

"What's wrong?" asked Reil, snapping off several shots before ducking back down. "You're not having fun yet?"

"I'm a Doctor, not a bloody mercenary," Luis replied dryly.

As they exchanged blasterfire, it quickly became obvious that their cover wasn't going to last much longer. Already the two were nearly on their bellies to avoid the bolts flying overhead.

Reil cursed as his blaster ran dry. "All right, you win. I'm not having fun either," he muttered, fishing for another energy pack.

"You're turn now, boys. Put your blasters down and stand up!" The Twi-Lek shouted.

Reil cocked an eyebrow. "Now why would we do something like that?"

"Because if you don't, good sirs, I won't be able to guarantee the good health of your friends here," he called back smugly. "Don't believe me?" Luis heard Fi gasp and struggle, her voice incoherent. She was probably gagged.

The doctor looked over to his comrade, who shook his head. "All right, I'm coming up!" Reil glared at him.

"What are you doing?" he hissed.

Luis stood, his hands up. The Fi was indeed gagged, and what more the twi'lek had one of her arms twisted behind her back and held a blaster at her temples. The trandoshan stood a few paces back, the end of his gun resting against the back of Tey's skull and a holdout blaster aimed at Cali, who sat huddled against a wall and was glaring furiously, alternating between her captor and the doctor. Tonto was lying in the background, slumped and lifeless, as if he'd been struck by a bolt of lightening.

Poor girl, she might have very well been off better without us...

"Very good, at least one of you can obey simple commands," the sentient mocked, his red eyes twinkling with glee, "Now the other one."

Luis glanced back down to Reil, who was still glowering at him. "I told you!" he mouthed.

The doctor cleared his throat. "We might be more inclined to cooperate if you-"

The twi'lek snorted. "Don't waste my time, human. If you hadn't noticed, you are not in much of a position to bargain."

You know, maybe I should actually listen once in a while Luis thought wryly, glancing around. There had to be something he could use to their advantage...

There! Fi was sneaking her free hand down to her belt, coving it by continuing to struggle against her captor. Luis smiled to himself. *That's my girl.* As if on que, the droid's lights began to flicker on and it slowly began to right it's self.

"All right, I'm going to have my friend stand up now," Luis announced slowly, bending down.

"WHAT!?" Reil snarled softly.

"You wounded him, he needs my help to stand up, all right?" Luis gestured frantically for his discarded blaster.

Posted by Xaturuk on 1 September 2008 01:48 AM:

Cockpit/Rogue Circuit/Sullust Capital of New Byllurun

The *Rogue Circuit* rolled steadily across Sullust, the red-gold star, as just one of several hundred tiny black sillouettes. They were like a cloud of insects, swarming over the star's rays, spreading the setting light in a shuttering effect over the vast metropolis. Molten glare, tinged with a tranquil afternoon rose hue, slid across the transparisteel cockpit window. The low hum of sublight engines vibrated beneath their feet, and Tholme felt it as a comforting thrum in his chest.

"The message was audio only, sir. Encrypted. I've extracted the coordinates." Billee mentioned from the comms station behind Tholme. V6 tweedled a routine response, inputting the designated drop point. Tholme read the scrolling numbers, noting the direction and adjusted course. The freighter dipped lightly through the city air lanes, repulsors smoothing its glide. A great hulk of dull metal sailing the skies.

"Looks like we've got to go all the way outside Sorosuub Central. I would have thought the city would have covered the planet by now. I haven't been here in years." Tholme glanced at the navigational display.

Dee-four, seated at the shield officer's station but staring out the viewport, replied, "Actually, sir, this city is now titled New Byllurun since the emancipation of the Sullustan citizens."

Tholme frowned. "What are you talking about? This has been Sorosuub's personal planet for the past two years." It didn't

make sense. Sorosuub was one of the star industrial clients of the Empire. He should have heard about this.

"It hasn't been on the Holonet much, sir. A reactionary group on Sullust, which had been gaining support for some time, usurped the Sorosuub's governance of the planet. The company left the planet to its citizens." He explained.

Tholme nodded, amused. Of course that wouldn't be openly reported on the net – bad press for the Empire. But they must have assembled some sort of cell government and proclaimed support to the Empire, or else an Imperial presence would have been evident. This place was a ripe atmosphere for rebel recruitment and propaganda. However, it was also perfect for Imperial Insurgency. A tactful Agent could place himself in the rebel ranks just as easily, if the rumors of rebel methods were true.

Ralss must have been somewhere in public because he'd tried to keep at least a low profile of the topic. He might not be at the drop site, at all. Then who would he be dealing with? The Rebels themselves? Tholme didn't like it. He wanted to deliver the goods and leave, without asking questions or being asked questions. Yet, he knew that it was not going to go that smoothly. He huffed and toyed with the idea of marking the price back up to four times.

He opened the ship comm. "Zed, I need you in the cockpit."

Dee-four's appendages whisked as he re-adjusted himself in his seat, turning his head straight towards the shields monitor as if he were studying it. Seconds later, Zed's brisk steps sounded up the corridor and stopped just behind Tholme's seat. "Reporting," Zed announced, and Tholme could just picture the droid in salute posture. He'd never asked him to do that, but Zed had taken it upon himself. Tholme didn't have the heart to tell him to stop – and it made for good intimidation when clients hesitated before payment.

"This is a normal delivery, but it could turn hostile very quickly, Zed. Do you understand?" Tholme asked as he swerved easily around a slow-moving bulk freighter.

"You would like me to use suspicion parameters in a guardian mode?" Zed asked.

"Yes, just stick close and be ready for anything."

The droid's arm whirled, another salute, "Yes, sir."

"Oh, and Zed."

"Yes, sir?"

"That means no shooting unless I give the command."

Zed's hesitation was all the disappointment Tholme had ever seen the droid display. "...Yes, sir." He made his way steadily from the cockpit, to ready his weapons, munitions, and combat protocol.

Cockpit/Rogue Circuit/Sullustan Wastelands

As the *Rogue Circuit* cleared the edge of the city, cracked grayish desert spanned out beneath the freighter. It was a spiderweb of black lines that wrapped the plains, hills, and went right up into the mountains. At points, the lines were wide – a gulf that yawned into a gully or the mouth of a cavern. The traffic from the New Byllurun capped off to none, and the dismal grey atmosphere of Sullust lost the splendorous beauty of setting sunlight reflecting off the tall buildings.

Coming over a rift, Tholme saw a colossal outcropping of cliff jutting out over a deep valley. It left a wide opening that could only be observable at a particular angle of approach. As he neared it, the depth of the nearly underground sinkhole was revealed and resolved into architectural shapes. It was the rebel base.

It surprised him that nothing had appeared on any of his instrumentation. The massive razor fence, sized similar to a starport's, held a training yard for troops, several barracks, basic landing pads, and several observation towers, and a few large buildings that appeared industrial in nature.

An alert tone sounded from Billee's station. "Two Cutlass-9 patrol fighters approaching from aftward," He announced, "They must have been powered down behind some of these hills before we arrived."

He studied the display and added in a rush, "Their weapons are up. They have a lock on us."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 2 September 2008 01:06 PM:

An enormous crater was all that was left of the Aligeri homestead. Mir said it had all the signs of multiple strategic explosions, and Tam had to agree. "I don't like this," he said, lifting the brim of his too-large helmet to clear his view. The sun was peeking over the dusty red mountains on the horizon, and the morning was blanketed in a fine white mist. It was too easy to imagine himself back at his old home on Dantooine, where his parents had been similarly targeted by the Empire. He walked back to the small speeder they had found aboard the Nova Viper, where his master, Kenlan As-Buka, stood in his garish disguise.

"Tam," the old man greeted with a curt nod. He scrutinized the boy, then dropped to one knee and firmly rubbed a thumb on the boy's cheek. "You're ruining your tattoos."

His own fingers delicately brushing his cheek, Tam felt that the intricate patterns of grease paint Mir had applied were being washed away and replaced by a warm slickness. He hadn't realized he was crying. "Sorry, Master."

"That's Mister Firero, remember?"

"Right," Tam nodded. "Gostin Firero." He slumped at the at the effort of all the intrigue, and his ineptitude with all the subtleties it required.

The old man winked, and with all the effort he'd put into his clothing and dyed hair it was hard to see the Jedi Master underneath it all. "I'd hate to think I hired mercenaries that got all weepy at the sight of a little blood."

"Right," Tam said, smiling. "Sorry 'boss'."

Mir walked back to the landspeeder and joined them. She leaned against the vehicle's drab paneling and said, "Any word from Ziro?" They had all agreed that Damon would have to go around his home with an alias, but when Kenlan had appointed him one, the gunslinger had been unable to come up with anything better.

Kenlan pulled out his comlink to reassure himself that he had indeed turned it on. "Nothing. Learn anything new from the scene."

"Nothing," she echoed. "At least, nothing we hadn't already figured out. After everything important or incriminating was removed, it looks like they used an array of thermal detonators to cover their tracks and make it look like the original blast had done more damage." She pointed at the charred remains of the home where Damon had grown up. "Either that or they were just bored."

"Maybe both," Tam offered. "All I know is Dam–, er, Ziro and Thel better get back soon. I have a bad feeling about all this..."

Posted by Corr Terek on 2 September 2008 05:13 PM:

"Do you know what we're looking for?" Thel asked, stepping carefully past a row of stalagmites.

"Yeah," Damon replied. He pulled out a datapad and used the provided stylus to draw a letter from the old Corellian alphabet. "This was a sign my dad used during the war -- to let his squadmates know where he'd been. The package should be hidden somewhere near this sign."

"Nothing more than that to go on?" Thel said skeptically. "Your father must have had a lot of confidence in you."

Damon grinned behind his mask. "He just didn't want to make things easy on me."

They came to a split in the cavern. "Which way now?"

Damon considered. "The left passage leads to an underground pool, if I recall correctly. And the right passage leads to a large cavern." He turned to Thel. "Why don't I take the right passage, and you take the left? If you find the marking, just come and get me."

"I don't know...." Thel said skeptically. "What if one of us gets lost?"

"I won't get lost -- I've played in these caverns since I was five. And I'm pretty sure the left passage ends soon after the spring anyway," Damon replied.

Thel sighed. "Fair enough. But be careful."

Damon grinned again. "Always."

Thel found the underground pool easily enough. Damon had been right -- the tunnel ended not long after reaching the pool, and Thel didn't see any markings. He turned to head back.

Suddenly there was a loud rumbling sound, and a large stalactite crashed to the ground farther back down the tunnel. As Thel sprinted up the tunnel, more stalactites and pieces of the cave ceiling fell, and by the time he reached the exit it was sealed by a large wall of rock.

Thel cursed. This hadn't been an accident, he knew it. For a brief second he'd felt the Force at work, and now he was trapped. He tried his commlink, but the cavern interfered with his signal and all he could hear was static. He struck the wall angrily. "Dammit!" He could get out, of course, but it would take time. Time the others might not have.

The cavern was quiet, except for the steady dripping of water from the cave ceiling. Damon picked his way carefully through the cavern. The footing was difficult, and the past several years had changed the cavern enough that the familiar footholds of his childhood were nearly gone.

Still, the effort was worth it. As Damon shined his glow rod around the cavern, a small flash of light caught his attention. Moving closer, he grinned in triumph. His father's symbol was etched into a crystal formation, catching the light and reflecting it around the room.

Damon knelt by the crystal, looking for any indication of the package his father said would be hidden nearby. After a moment's consideration he unslung the shovel from his pack and began digging. The ground was soft, and after about a minute he unearthed a dull durasteel box.

Satisfied, Damon hefted the box from the hole and turned to leave. As he did so, he heard a rumbling from somewhere in the cavern. *A cave-in?* he thought worriedly. Moving a little bit faster, he picked his way back toward the tunnels.

"Ah, you found the box, I see."

The voice startled Damon. "Who's there?"

A figure stepped out from the shadows, and Damon tensed. The other man was tall and thin, with piercing eyes and a

patronizing smile. But what stood out most to Damon was the green stripe across his face. *The man who sees the past...*

"I am Sharif Kolos, Imperial Inquisitor. In the name of Emperor Palpatine, I place you under arrest."

Posted by Xaturuk on 2 September 2008 05:36 PM:

Cockpit/Rogue Circuit/Sullust Wastelands

"I see them," Tholme replied, keeping a steady course, "I don't think they'll fire on us just yet, but dial the aft deflector shields up to 80 percent just in case."

Dee-four, who'd been sitting at the shields station purely for a better view of the planet, was at a loss as to what to do. Billee turned around quietly and whispered a few basic instructions. 3-D4 clicked the dialing socket to the right power setting, and the ship rumbled a deep growl as the transfer went through.

V6 whistled calmly to the Captain, and Billee was surprised. In the past the mere mention of possible combat situations would frazzle the pilot droid. His endurance during threatening situations was growing stronger by the day. A persistent signal lit on Billee's communications panel, signaling an incoming call. He put it through to the ship-comm.

"Transport, *Rogue Circuit*. You are entering into Rebel Territory and you will be subject to our authority until we've given you permission to leave. Continue to the drop vector marked out on landing pad D. Maintain complete radio and comm silence, including inter and extraplanetary communications. Do not try altering course. I repeat do not try altering course."

Tholme's face remained impassive as he processed the orders. He knew that it was solid defensive protocol. Sorosub's mainline starfighters, specifically the proton torpedoes that the Cutlass-9's carried, were quite capable of eating through his shields. He had meant to do something about them in the last few years, and now he kicked himself. Yet, it wouldn't have mattered anyway. There were bound to be many more in that outpost, and they'd launch if he tried to pull any fast moves. He was good enough to take on a few with the kind of firepower he had on the *Rogue Circuit*, but not a whole squadron.

The droids in the cockpit were still, awaiting his order. V6 had oscillated to face Tholme, and Dee-four cocked his head to watch. Finally, Tholme breathed out in resignation. Hopefully this was the right move. "Can't do anything about it, crew. Just dig in and let's put down just as they said."

Cockpit/Rogue Circuit/Farlander Outpost

The freighter's repulsors thrummed as the ship descended slowly onto the pad. An array of Rebel activity was sprawled out on the pad -- sentients in a mish-mash of colored uniforms. A traffic controller was waving the ship in, as several others prepared sensor and security equipment, with which they would be inspecting every inch of the ship for espionage related technology. Another group of soldiers were lining up several cargo-hauler platforms for the delivery transfer. Surrounding the pad, a number of soldiers on security stood with rifles in their hands. With uneasy stances and squinting eyes, they seemed ready to act at the slightest provocation.

At the head of the soldier column stood Ralss, slouching with a familiar sneer. He was the only individual without a uniform, and it was no wonder to Tholme. That sentient's whole existence was in stark contrast to anyone considered even loosely moral. Next to the Sullustan, a rebel superior officer observed the

ship's landing. His eyes surveyed the condition of the freighter, seeming to note with some surprise that the old model was in exceptionally well-kept condition. He was clean shaven and short-haired. His clothes were crisp at the folds, and his dark shoes were shined to gleaming. Standing straight-backed and hands behind his back, he seemed the embodiment of discipline and order.

He gave Tholme every impression of pride, dignity, and competency. Imperial Command were the words that came to mind. Well, what is he doing here? Guy like that should be an officer in the Imperial Navy, or a commander on the Emperor's war council. This is the Rebellion, for stars' sake, not the Old Republic Military. Tholme considered it another point in the Rebels' favor or a weakness in the officer's decision making ability. Either way, Tholme still wasn't willing to take what he saw beneath him seriously. This idealistic bunch isn't even capable of understanding the type of structured training necessary for real soldiering.

He turned in the pilot's seat, "Billee let's get ready to make this dropoff. I want you, the pit crew, and the hover loader ready to get the load off-ship. I know there's a couple crews out there ready to stomp in here and take it, but that's not how I do business. They can pick it up after I bring it onto the pad. Anyone argues with you, get a hold of me right away."

"Are you going somewhere, sir?" Billee asked.

Tholme nodded, "Someone out there is going to want to know all about me and this ship and you all. I don't know exactly how it will all turn out, but we're going to just roll wherever they direct us. I don't want any trouble unless it can't be avoided."

Billee nodded and left the cockpit. "Vee-six, stay here, and go through the power down routine. Keep a few routines in passive, though, in case we need to make a quick takeoff," He looked to 3-D4, "You can stay on the ship, Dee-four. We've got a few offers in the last couple days, and I'd like your opinion on which job to take."

The droids nodded and whartled an affirmative and went about their respective business. Alone, Tholme stopped off at his room, retrieved a small vibroblade, and tucked it into his right boot. Ralss was Hutt slime, and he could clean him off his boot without even breaking a sweat – if it came to that. That hard-eyed commander, however, reminded him too much of the past. It brought back old memories and old habits.

Posted by Darth_Vader2005 on 2 September 2008 06:46 PM:

A dreadful kind of calm settled across Tey's mind as he stood in front of the trando, who held life and death in his scaly claw. The cool metal of the barrel pushed hard into his spine and the size of the metallic tube suggested something with a substantial draw on the power pack. Not that it would've mattered here and now on this street. Even a holdout would've sent Tey to the hereafter. The blaster he had been carrying since the Imperial shuttle was lying a few feet behind him, as was his holdout pistol. The vibroshiv he always carried was in his boot, but the three items might as well have been on the far side of the galaxy right now.

There was something peaceful about the scene, as all eyes rested on the doctor as he walked across to Reil, crouched behind the rapidly disintegrating speeder. As often happened in a life and death situation Tey began to notice all the tiny details, as if his body was unconsciously revelling in the glory that was life, and making the most of what could be its final moments. He

noticed the smell of the reptilian mercenary behind, slightly reminiscent of a chase through a reptile house he'd taken part in years before. He noted the make of the binders holding his arms behind him; they were CorSec knockoffs, the model that they'd used to capture Wookies and Barabels. The first time he'd used those had been after a vicious speeder chase through industrial CoroNet, and he unconsciously remembered the searing pain of the fusion cutter the wook had used to give him his left thigh scar.

The Corellian noted the make and type of the blaster pistol the twi'lek was using, an older model, but with enough force to blow a hole through a fist sized hole in a door. The added power came with a cost; each power pack gave you only ten shots. He'd counted nine. Or ten, he couldn't be sure, but he knew the being hadn't reloaded. At max he would have one shot, but that would be more than enough to leave any of them dead in the Mos Eisley sand.

Overall of this however, he remained calm. Not because he was confident about his chances, but because there was nothing he could do about them. His fate, along with the fate of the others, rested solely in the hands of Luis and Reil.

Posted by Ubiqtorate on 2 September 2008 11:48 PM:

Gostin Firero crouched low in the dirt and ash. "There's definitely something not right here," he muttered. "It doesn't take a Jedi to see that." He stood up, surveying the devastation again. Of course the "fuel cell explosion" was a cover for whatever the Empire had done here, but why?

And where the Sith was Ziro?

"Tassira," he barked gruffly. "When was Ziro supposed to check in?"

Mir'isha bristled slightly, but Gostin ignored it. Mir'isha didn't like her new name, but it was easier and more effective for Kenlan if he stayed in character all the time - he was Gostin Firero, Mir'isha was Tassira, Damon was Ziro, even in his own mind. It worked well enough - even Gostin was starting to forget that his real name wasn't Kenlan As-Buka anyway.

"He's at least twenty minutes overdue," hissed Tassira. Gostin couldn't tell if her irritation was the result of Ziro's failure to check in, or just her discomfort in the persona she was supposed to play.

Gostin growled, snatching the comlink from his belt. "Hey, Ziro, do you read me?" He paused, pondering the silence on the other end of the line. "Ziro, are you there?"

"He said something about checking out the caves," suggested Mace, the pint-sized mercenary who had once been Tam. "Maybe he can't hear us down there."

"Probably," agreed Gostin. "But he wouldn't have forgotten to check in unless something had happened."

"So what do you suggest we do about it?" spat Tassira. "We don't know where he's gone..."

"No, I'm not suggesting we go after him," replied Gostin. "It's just that... wait a minute..."

"What?"

"Get down! Now!" shouted Gostin, ducking as he did so.

The smell of singed fur filled the air as Tassira ducked not quite in time, mixing with the already acrid smell of ash in the air.

"Guess that means something has gone wrong," quipped Tassira.

"Yeah, and it looks like it's the, 'Shoot first, ask questions later' kind of trouble," said Gostin. "Are you all right?"

"Just singed me," replied Tassira. "I'll be fine."

Gostin nodded. "Well, that's our cue to get out of here," he stated. "Mace, I need you to get to our speeder. I'll distract our visitors."

"But what about you?" asked Mace.

"Don't worry about me," insisted Gostin. "Just get that speeder and bring it around here, fast as you can."

Mace nodded, tentatively at first, then with growing resolve.

"Now, go!" prodded Gostin.

Mace ran.

Gostin stood up. "Hey!" he shouted, waving his arms. "Hey, you cowardly rodders, I'm over here! I'm the one you want, come out here and face me where I can see you."

Gostin narrowly dodged a shot from just over the ridge in front of him. "Ha, ha!" he taunted. "So that's where you are! All right, well, if you won't play nice, there's another game we can play." He pulled out a grenade from the folds of his jacket, pulled the pin, and waved it over his head before tossing it. "Fire in the hole!" he shouted.

A panicked, white-armored figure emerged from behind the ridge. Gostin's two quick shots dispatched him. "Kark," he muttered. "It *is* the Empire." He drew another grenade from his jacket. "I got more!" he announced. "Come and get them!"

Silence ensued as the remaining troopers refused to give up their positions.

"Aw, come on," shouted Gostin. "I know you're out there. Might as well get this over with. I'm out here, I'm not armored... if there were a one of you who could shoot, you'd have gotten me already."

A cranking whine ramped up from outside the compound. It grew until finally Mace emerged over the hill on his speeder. "Come on," the boy shouted, waving the other two aboard. "There's more of them - I saw!"

"Come on," echoed Gostin, helping Tassira into the speeder. "They're scout troopers, so they probably have bikes. This is probably about to get interesting."

The three sped off into the distance.

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 3 September 2008 04:09 PM:

"Hey," Mir said, stepping over the seat back behind Tam's shoulder, "scoot over and let me drive."

Tam began to oblige, being careful to not lose control of the landspeeder as it jetted away from what remained of the Aligeri home, but then Master Kenlan shouted for them to take cover. A spray of laser fire pocked the rear of their vehicle, causing it to shudder from the impact.

"Never mind!" Mir shouted, grabbing Tam to keep from falling. "Just keep us from getting shot any more, okay?"

"I'll try," Tam offered.

"Tryin' ain't doin'!" his master commanded. "Just get us out of here!"

Repositioning himself in the pilot's seat, Tam weaved through the sparse trees, daring to look behind only occasionally. Kenlan and Mir'isha were crouched on the passenger seat, taking shots at two pairs of Imperial speeder bikes who were inching ever closer. Tam managed to keep most of their laser fire from hitting, but he was no pilot. Perspiration was already soaking the pads of his oversized helmet.

With a whoop of triumph, Kenlan announced the first kill, and Tam looked over his shoulder again just in time to see one of the stormtroopers topple backwards off his bike, which banked wide and smashed into a nearby rock with a brief but dazzling fireball.

"Keep on that one," Mir shouted, pointing with her blaster at

the remaining bike on Kenlan's side, "I'll take these two!" She let loose a scatter of blasterfire designed to slow her targets down more than anything else. The two scout troopers deftly dodged her onslaught, however, and responded with a twin volley of laser blasts, perfectly aimed at the landspeeder's stabilizer fin.

Though he fought with the controls, Tam couldn't keep their speeder from bucking against the impact. Mir screamed when the sudden lurch catapulted her from her spot in the back seat, and when Tam saw her again she was tumbling on the ground far behind them.

"Flip around!" Kenlan ordered. "We need to help her!"

Tam complied, bringing the landspeeder around in as tight a circle as he dared, but the pursuing Imperials were prepared for the maneuver. They pelted the landspeeder's broadside with a rain of stuttered laser fire. Tam wrenched the controls back into an escape vector and shouted, "No good, Master!"

Kenlan said nothing, renewing his aim and shooting at one of the three speeder bikes, which had looped around to apprehend Mir'isha. None of his shots landed, however, and he cursed under his breath. He took a quick shot at one the much closer stormtroopers, hitting his hand and forcing him to instinctively jerk on his controls. He disappeared in a violent explosion. "Mace, I need you to— AAGH!"

Tam looked behind him and saw Master Kenlan slumped on the ground, a patch of his shirt was dark and smoking. A single speeder bike remained on their tail.

Tam did the only thing he could do in this situation: he stopped. By the time he'd stepped out of the landspeeder, the lone scout trooper had skidded his bike around and dismounted. "Drop your weapon," the Imperial demanded at gunpoint. Tam threw down the blaster rifle that had been part of his mercenary disguise, and dropped to his knees, hands behind his head.

As the stormtrooper stepped cautiously closer and held the small pistol to Tam's head, the boy slowly wrapped his fingers around the cylindrical hilt hidden under the flak jacket, between the shoulder blade armor plates. "I've got the last two, sir. Request a rendezvous at the following coordin—"

The trooper's report was cut short by a slash from Tam's glowing blue lightsaber. Tam smashed the comlink once it rolled to a stop, then dashed for the landspeeder where his master lay wounded. "Sorry, Master, but we've gotta get out of here before more come after us..."

Posted by Ice Hawk on 3 September 2008 10:53 PM:

Reil slipped Luis the blaster he had discarded earlier as Luis bent over pretending to help him up.

"You gotta plan?" Reil whispered.

Luis nodded.

"So what's the plan?"

"We come up and we blast them."

"THAT'S THE PLAN!?" Reil hissed.

Luis nodded again.

Reil was silent for a moment. Then he shoved his last powerpack into his blaster and grinned.

"I like this plan."

The Twi'lek was getting impatient.

"How much time does it take to help him up? Hurry up, or the pretty one gets it."

Reil assumed the Twi'lek was talking about Fi, because he could hear Cali's indignant, "HEY!", in the background.

"A'ight, we're coming up, don't shoot!"

Luis gave a rather overdone performance of lifting Reil up and propping him up on his shoulder. As soon as they were both

standing Reil could almost feel the weapons being pointed at him and Luis. Just then, the Luis's droid reactivated, and let out a piercing shriek. Their aggressor's turned for a moment, and Luis and Reil pushed off each other, Luis rolling left while Reil going right, all the while firing at their assailants.

Posted by Ubiqtorate on 3 September 2008 11:19 PM:

He awoke.

Where was he?

What was his name?

How could he possibly be in so much pain?

The memories flooded back to him. On this ship, he was still Kenlan As-Buka, no matter what he may call himself on the outside.

"Master?" asked Tam.

"Tam!" replied Kenlan. "Tam, what happened? Did we rescue Mir'isha?"

"Er... no, Master. The stormtroopers captured her. I had to do what I could just to get us out alive."

"What?" asked Kenlan. "We have to go back for her! We have to..." he tried to sit up, but the searing pain in his chest sent him howling back to the bed.

Tam gave him a moment to collect himself, then continued. "I'm... I'm sorry, Master. I did what I felt I had to do."

"No, Tam, you were right," Kenlan wheezed. "I'm obviously in no condition to mount a rescue. We'd all have been captured, and now where would we be?"

Tam nodded vigorously. "Exactly, Master," he agreed.

Kenlan returned the nod, albeit much more weakly. "Still no word from Damon or Thel?"

"No, Master."

"I'm afraid it's safe to assume that they've also been captured," concluded Kenlan. "It appears we'll have to mount a rescue for three."

"We'll get them back, Master."

"Yes, we'll go after them. Just as soon..." A wracking, painful cough interrupted him. "Just as soon as I can walk."

Posted by Vash Knives on 5 September 2008 07:10 PM:

Koro awoke from his short nap. He had been in a light sleep for only a couple of minutes. There was no sign of the others yet, and really, until they came he and Tarynn had nothing to do.

Posted by Xaturuk on 6 September 2008 12:30 PM:

Docking Ramp/Landing Pad/Farlander Outpost

As the docking ramp lowered onto the ground, a strong burst of steam curtained around it. From the ground it completely obscured the inside of the ship. The commander next to Ralss issued a few curt orders, and the Rebel security column moved quickly into a defensive formation around the ramp. Two up close and to either side, a group of four spread directly in front, and several on point from long distance positions. Their weapons were trained on whatever would emerge.

Zed came first, blaster rifle gripped solidly across his chest. He walked to the end of the ramp and planted himself, casting his eyes about the area, counting soldiers, running hypothetical combat responses. The Captain appeared just as the steam was dissipating. His boots thwumping steadily as he walked past Zed. The droid followed as he went. The front group of soliders, at a wave from the commander, lowered their weapons and

approached Tholme. The soldiers from the ramp departed to join the column and the distant point shooters did also. The Captain put his hands up submitting to their search, which they uneasily did under Zed's suspicious glare.

"Is this how you treat all traders?" Tholme spoke sardonically, as a trooper waved an electronic sensor across his midsection.

The commander remained expressionless, but a gleam played in his eye, "This is military protocol, Captain So." His voice was dry and firm, unmoved by Tholme's provocation.

"Protocol? Seems an awful like the kind of greeting I get at Imperial Garrisons." Tholme muttered.

The commander bristled, but was otherwise still, "The Rebellion is at war, sir, and necessary preventions must be taken to avoid enemy infiltration."

"I see," Thome replied. The man was placating him. The commander didn't have to answer any of Tholme's qualms, and he didn't seem like the kind who would when given the choice. They want something from me. I better play this carefully, or I'll find myself an enemy of both camps. He just had to play it naïve, and he'd be let off the hook.

The rebel soldiers finished their scan and motioned a thumbs up to the commander, who waved them off to continue on some other business. It left Tholme with a close Zed standing there with Ralss and the Commander. "Tholme! So good of you to finally present yourself in person! I was beginning to think that after all our transactions you were only a computer simulation."

The corners of Tholme's mouth dropped as he faced the Sullustan, "Ralss. Still making friends in high places, I see."

The sullustan's smile wavered, but he laughed and patted Tholme on the back. The look the Captain gave him convinced him that it wasn't a good idea, and he stopped to awkwardly stare at the ground. Tholme watched him closely, narrowing his eyes, "Don't waste my time, Ralss. The cargo's here, and I've got things to do. Pay me and I'll leave."

Ralss, stepped uneasily in place, glancing up at the commander. The calm officer gave nothing away, however, and eventually spoke to Tholme, "You will be payed, of course, Captain. However, the Rebellion would like to make you a proposal before you're allowed to leave."

Ah, the Rebellion, not I or we. Big difference. This guy is all protocol. "Somehow, I knew that there would be a catch." He eyed Ralss with derision, then nodded agreement, "Well, I haven't got all day. Let's hear the offer."

Together, the four started walking towards the base HQ, the largest building on the outpost.

Cargo Lift/Landing Pad/Farlander Outpost

The *Rogue Circuit's* cargo lift hissed and descended onto the pad. Immediately, the pit crew started hauling crates and boxes out, their little bodies tilted backwards to support the weight. Several small hover droids were floating over materials, attaching cables, and hovering out to drop them with the others. Billee, himself, was standing next to the lift as a troupe of rebel workmen approached the it. He held his hand out to stop them, "I'm sorry, but I'm under orders to disallow any sentient from boarding the ship for any reason."

A front standing female frowned and looked to her coworkers for support. They had a large crate carried between them with sensor and communication scanning equipment. It was their task to trace all previous message relays and current electronics for suspicious operations. She turned back to Billee, "We've been ordered to scan and search the ship."

Billee shook his head, "I'm sorry, ma'am, but I cannot allow you aboard the ship."

The rebel woman stared at him for a moment, then laughed. "C'mon, guys. This BLX just missed too many memory wipes. Ignore it." She started to walk past him with her crew following.

A dense thump echoed, as Billee back-handed the crew leader in the gut. She immediately doubled over and fell to her knees. The large metallic sensor container clanged to the pad, as the other mechanics went for their blaster pistols. The rest happened within a matter of seconds. The pit droids, somehow in anticipation of just this situation, dropped their cargo and immediately sprang onto the rebels. Two of the droids toppled surprised mechanics to the ground, wrestling pistols away from them and throwing them out of reach. The pit lead was met by a rebel face to face. He managed to duck a blow from the mechanic's kick and dove into his midsection, taking him to the ground also. A fourth mechanic, however, was unaccounted for and raised his pistol to Billee before the first mate could reach him. The rebel fired off a shot.

The blast plowed into the labor droid's torso, sending sparkling ripples of electricity across his chassis. Billee felt a stab of alien fright race through his circuits, and his vision faded to black as he fell to the pad on his back. He could still hear voices. It was Zed's. He must have raced over. The security droid bellowed a command and he heard a distinct cocking noise. Shouts, sentient and droid alike, resumed and the sound of blasters began again. Then Billee's audio cut out, and he was alone.

Posted by Corr Terek on 6 September 2008 11:41 PM:

"You're certainly very confident," Damon commented, warily placing the box on the ground. He wouldn't be able to do anything with it in his hands. Kolos didn't seem to be armed, but anything could be concealed in those robes. The Imperial smiled again, as if he somehow knew what Damon was thinking and found it amusing.

"Damon Aligeri, I have made many formidable enemies in my career. You don't even begin to compare to them."

Damon laughed shortly. "If I recall correctly, that's what your friend thought too." He smiled grimly. "Right before my dad killed him."

Kolos shrugged. "He was no friend of mine." His eyes gleamed in the semi-darkness of the cavern. "But I wonder, how do you know how he died?"

"I don't owe you any answers," Damon said tensely. Kolos grinned, a strangely chilling expression.

"You'll tell me everything I want to know, in time."

"You're just so all-fired sure of yourself, aren't you?" Damon said. In a flash, he drew both blasters and covered the Imperial. "Suppose I take you down a peg?"

Kolos' grin widened. "Try me."

Mir grimaced in pain. It was a wonder she was conscious at all -- the fall from the speeder had knocked the wind out of her, and she knew that it wouldn't take long for the injuries she'd sustained to assert themselves. In the meantime, she needed to find cover.

She could hear the whining of the speeder bike as it drew close. Too late to hide, then. She lay still, hoping the trooper would think she was unconscious. Through half-closed eyes, Mir watched the trooper dismount from his bike and walk towards her. He stood over her for a second, as if suspicious. Then he

kicked her hard in the ribs.

The sudden blow hurt, and Mir nearly cried out. But this wasn't the first time she'd taken a blow like that, and she fought to keep up the ruse of unconsciousness. The trooper studied her for a moment and then, apparently satisfied, turned back to his speeder. He opened a compartment hatch and Mir saw him remove a set of binders. If she was to act, it would have to be now.

Her blaster was lost, but the vibroblade she always carried was not. Forcing herself to her feet in a sudden rush of energy, Mir lunged at the scout trooper. He heard her move, and turned, his blaster swinging about to cover her. But it was far too late.

She jammed the blade into his neck, the one vulnerable point in his armor. He spasmed and fell backwards over his speeder, his last breath a horrifying gurgle that Mir had heard far too often. She suppressed a shudder as she collected his blaster and shoved his body off the speeder.

Mir scanned the horizon. Kenlan and Tam were long gone, as were the two speeder bikes that had been chasing them. For a brief moment she considered following them. But then she remembered Damon. He might need her help more than they did. Grimacing in pain, she eased onto the speeder bike and took a quick glance around before gunning the throttle and speeding toward the caves.

I'm coming, Damon, she thought worriedly. A pain shot through her side from where the trooper had kicked her. *Though I don't know how much help I'll be.*

Posted by Thaycon Devoid on 7 September 2008 09:55 AM:

Commander Moridt was surprised at how things were playing out; Melroek's response to the missing pendant had been far stronger than he had anticipated. Not only that, but from what he could tell from listening to the bug now on Luis, he and his friend were in a blaster fight.

"Batan, I need you to calm him down or you two are going to run right into a fire fight." Moridt spoke into his mic.

From his labored breathing, Moridt could tell they were still running at full speed.

"I will try, Commander, but I do not know if I can succeed; Melroek is far more vulnerable to his emotions than you said." Batran replied.

That was the problem: Moridt had been able to sense absolutely nothing about Melroek. It had been as though he were a void, and Moridt had been quick to assume it was a psychological thing. But now he was beginning to think differently as Melroek's reaction betrayed his weaknesses. But if that was the case, why couldn't he sense anything about him?

Mordit's head suddenly shot up as realization hit him; "Batan, I need you to calm him now. You must recover that pendant, but not in his condition. A direct confrontation will probably kill you both as there are more than just two. Follow them if you can; befriend them even, just do so carefully."

"Yes sir." Batran replied before the communications were cut.

Posted by Xaturuk on 8 September 2008 11:20 AM:

Landing Pad/Farlander Outpost

The shouts of surprise made all Tholme and the commander whip around. Zed was already bounding over to the wrestling match under the ship. The large droid was pushing passing rebels roughly out of the way, and he arrived just as Billee took a shot

of blasterfire in the chest. Tholme's stomach dropped as the droid wobbled and fell onto his back.

Zed, however, raced right through the fray and connected a solid punch to the rebel's chest, sending him sprawling. In a steady motion, he drew his blaster and fired stun bolts. The two guards wrestling with the pit droids went still, each one targeted and shot with the precision of calm, cold, battle programming. The third, in a rolling brawl with the pit lead managed to scamper behind one of the crates before Zed's bolts burnt black tracks in the pad's surface. He yelled frantically for help to the rebel column already rushing to see what the problem was.

Tholme threw his head towards the commander, "Stop this immediately!"

The commander, not registering the directive, was already snarling orders at the group. "Cease fire! Cease fire!" He flung his arms in a stopping motion. He and Tholme both began running to the scene.

The pit droids gathered behind crates, around Zed, holding onto each other and shivering in fear. The blast bolts from the newly arrived column were ripping into the chemical crates, popping and sparking off pad, ship, and cargo. Zed stood, returned a round of quick fire, and crouched again. This repeated a few times before a steady aimed bolt caught Zed's shoulder and spun him around onto his back. A slowly spiraling smoke-stream rose from the little hole in his armor.

"I said cease fire!" the Commander's voice was finally heard over the firefight, and the rebel soldiers stopped instantly.

The rebel officer was visibly out of sorts, breathing deeply from the sprint, and pulling back a tuft of hair that had fallen out of place. His eyes blazed fire at the soldier group. "Get these soldiers to the Med Bay for treatment. They're lucky this droid didn't set his blasters to lethal. When they are healed, I want them each to spend three nights in the brig and go half rations for a week."

The rebel column stood straight and the closest to the scene moved to pick up their unconscious comrades, including the mechanic team. Their faces were stretched thin and pale as they went silently about their task. When all were accounted for the column marched off towards the squat medical structure.

Tholme kneeled next to Billee and Zed. Zed was moving around, although without the use of his right arm where his shoulder had been shot. The repair would only be a minor work. The sight of Billee, however, made Tholme's stomach twist. That was a serious wound. He'd have to look at that personally before they lifted off. Cringing, he placed his hands gently on the torn metal. It was still hot to the touch and the smell of fried electronics stung acridly. The pit droids quietly shimmied up beside him and stared down at Billee's unmoving form. One of them brappled something lowly. It turned to its comrades and they put their arms on each others shoulders, nodding and talking together in hushed slow tones.

Tholme talked over his shoulder to the pit droids, "Help me carry him."

They gathered around as he picked Billee's body up and walked it gently onto the cargo lift. Zed's form shifted, and he got to his feet. Standing with a slight droop to his right side, he tried his best to straighten. Tholme, however, approached him and clasped his good shoulder, supporting him. "Easy, Zed. You've done just fine. That's just a little blast puncture. The pit droids will have you back together in no time."

"I...couldn't get there in time, sir." Zed replied.

The Captain helped the security droid to sit onto one of the crates remaining on the cargo lift. He looked into the droids optical, "You did the best you could under the circumstances,

and I won't ever ask for more than that."

Zed turned his head to look off at the receding rebel column. He was silent. After a moment, Tholme nodded to the pit crew, "Boys, I need you to carefully move Billee to a safe place and fix up Zed, here. Stay on the ship, and close it up tight. No-one gets on but me." He engaged the lift and stepped back. The square gate ascended back up onto the ship, only about half its cargo emptied. The droids were cradling their fallen crewmates and watching Tholme as they slowly receded from sight.

"I am most ashamed, Captain So." The commander said from a distance away. He was standing at strict attention, his face red. His tone was sincere. Ralss was nowhere to be seen, most likely had ignored the trouble and continued to the command center.

Tholme was at a loss for words. He hadn't considered how much his crew meant to him until moments ago when that red jet of laserfire lanced into his First Mate. Billee was more than an automated component, and Zed, too. It wasn't merely a matter of repairing them. It wasn't something that any amount of tools or mechanical aptitude could fix. It was something deeper that resided inside Tholme and was connected to each one of those droids that was injured.

"Keep your crews off my ship, sir." Tholme replied through gritted teeth.

The commander nodded. Tholme walked past him silently towards the command center. He wasn't interested in maintaining any semblance of naiveté or neutrality. The inefficiency and ineptitude of this semi-military outfit may have just cost him a dear friend. The Rebellion could only ever be a hazard. He would hear the commander's offer, decline it, and leave never to deal with them again.

Posted by ij thompson on 8 September 2008 06:58 PM:

Fi dropped, hitting the sand like a stone, as blaster bolts lit up the gathering dawn. The combatants distracted, she had a relatively easy time of crawling through the sand to Cali, who crouched against the wall of a nearby building.

"You okay?"

"On a regular day I'd still be in bed right now, but I'll live."

"Know these guys?"

"Nope."

"Got any weapons other than that little blade?"

"Uh-uh. You?"

Fi considered. In the Twi'lek's clutches, she'd been reaching for a small perfume spritz she kept in her right front pocket, thinking it might give the villain's eyes a sting. But things had passed that point now.

"Nah," she reported, "just my crazy combat skills!"

Cali ducked a brilliant green blaster bolt, grinned at the older girl ferociously. "Then, what are we waiting for?"

Fi returned her grin, a gleam in her eye. "Cali, I like your style."

With an excited *whoop!*, the pair leaped at the distracted Twi'lek, each grabbing one of his legs. Wrestling him to the ground was easy between the two of them, and the pair clambered up over his body, kicking and punching all the while. Though they couldn't be sure if they were doing any real damage, they both were certain of one thing:

It felt *great*.

Posted by Corr Terek on 8 September 2008 11:21 PM:

The cavern lit up with blasterfire. "Stand still, you freak!" Damon yelled in frustration. Kolos was impossible to hit -- he

melted in and out of the shadows, mocking laughter his only sound. It was as if he always knew where Damon would shoot. Even his Gift -- the Force, rather -- couldn't help Damon now.

"You're wondering how I can avoid every shot?" Kolos' voice came from somewhere behind Damon. He whipped around, training his blasters toward the sound. "It's simple," the voice came again, now right at his shoulder. Damon started and turned again, panicking at letting the Imperial get so close. Kolos stood a mere foot and a half from him. Damon snarled and pointed the blasters at Kolos.

Just as he pulled the triggers Kolos' hands snaked in, tapping both pistols away in an instant. The shots went wide, and Kolos gestured as if in boredom. Damon was hurled bodily several yards, landing hard against the rock wall of the cavern. "Every man has his 'tell', Aligeri. Yours is patently obvious -- every time, right before you fire, your thumb automatically checks the safety lock on your pistol." Kolos laughed. "I don't even need the Force, Damon Aligeri -- you tell me everything I need to know."

Damon growled in anger, his hand automatically seeking the blaster that had been knocked from his grip on impact. Finding nothing, he rose painfully from the ground and lunged at the Imperial, swinging wildly. Kolos sidestepped. "Resorting to your fists, I see. So very primitive."

Damon swung again, and Kolos blocked the punch this time. "You always lead with your right, you know. It makes you...predictable." His left hook snapped Damon around and for a brief second Damon saw stars. "If only you knew, Aligeri..."

"Knew what?" Damon spat blood from his mouth. "That you're nothing but an Imperial goon?"

"Very funny coming from you," Kolos commented. "No, my station within the Empire's hierarchy has little to do with this."

"Then what?" Damon snapped as he swung his fist again. Kolos stepped neatly out of range.

"I've been *watching* you, Aligeri," he said. "I've spent hours -- at your home, in this cave, with your friends -- as the Force showed me everything about you. The way you fight, the way you think, the way you move...*I've seen it all*." He slammed a fist hard into Damon's gut. "There's nothing you can do that I haven't seen a thousand times."

Damon sank to his knees, gasping for air. "It's sad, really," Kolos commented. "Lord Tremayne actually took an interest in you, and this is all you can do. Pathetic." He shrugged. "No matter, though. You're coming with me."

"Never," Damon said through clenched teeth. "Your kind killed my family."

"Sadly, you have no choice in the matter," Kolos commented, raising his hand in what seemed to be a fond farewell. Then blue lightning burst from his fingertips, and Damon's world went white.

Mir picked her way through the dark tunnels. The blasterfire had stopped, and she feared the worst. As she came into the open cavern, her eyes took a few seconds to adjust to the somewhat brighter light provided by Damon's discarded glowrod. But once they did, she only saw one thing.

"Damon!" She half-ran, half-stumbled toward the still form on the ground. He was unconscious, barely breathing, with a nasty burn on his cheek and more burns on his neck and body. His clothing was scorched, and his skin was deathly pale. "Damon, what have they done to you?"

"Interesting," a voice commented from the shadows. "You must be Mir'isha." Before Mir could react, a strong hand grabbed her arms and twisted them behind her back. "Let's see what's in

your head."

To Mir'isha, it seemed as if a dozen knives pierced her mind at once. She howled, and through the pain she was dimly aware of many memories flashing through her mind unbidden, memories she'd never wanted to relive. She had the sense of *someone* watching the memories, viewing them along with her, and the thought filled her with anger. "Get *out* of my head!"

Abruptly she broke free. Still reeling from the pain, she looked around for her enemy. A low chuckle drew her attention, and she saw the robed Imperial standing a few feet away. "Very impressive," he said, almost approving. "You've a very strong will."

"You did this to him," Mir said through clenched teeth. The Imperial shrugged.

"He wouldn't come willingly."

"Hutt slime!" Mir snarled, snatching her vibroblade and lunging toward him. He watched her come, and just as she came within reach, he spoke.

"He'll never return what you feel for him, you know."

Mir faltered. "What?"

The Imperial smiled condescendingly. "Come now, no need to be coy. I've peeked inside your head, remember?" He appraised her. "You're not bad-looking, for an alien of course. But think about it -- would a man like him really want a woman like you? With your past?"

Mir looked away, guilt evident on her face. Kolos smiled. "You haven't told him, have you? He doesn't know what you really are, why Ghull wants you back so badly." He laughed loudly. "What an excellent joke!"

"Shut up!" Mir cried. "You don't know anything! I didn't have a choice!"

"He won't believe you," Kolos replied. "He'll finally realize that you're trash, and you've always been trash. And he'll leave you behind like he should have done long ago."

"Damon would never do that!" Mir protested. Her voice faltered again. "He wouldn't..."

"For someone with such a checkered past, you're incredibly naive," Kolos commented. He produced a metal cylinder from his robes. "Perhaps I should simply put you out of your misery."

Suddenly a mighty crash echoed through the caverns, and Kolos glanced back up the passageway. "So. He's free, then."

Posted by Ice Hawk on 12 September 2008 04:21 PM:

As Fi and Cali brought down the Twi'lek, Luis and Reil were free to focus on the trandoshan. Realizing it was in trouble, the lizard dropped its weapon.

"Good. Okay, now back away from our friend."

The trandoshan obeyed.

Reil kept his blaster trained on it as Luis moved to free Tey from his binders.

Posted by Fingon on 14 September 2008 12:48 AM:

Keeping his blaster warily trained on the large reptilian, Luis made his way over to Tey's prostrate body. His nostrils were filled with dust and the stench of burned hair; the last volley the Trandoshan fired off had nearly singed the hair over his left ear clean off, but miraculously he had no serious injuries. Yet.

Tey didn't look quite as lucky. Ugly purple bruises blossomed around his binders and on his face, one particularly spectacular contusion framing his now-crooked nose. As Luis helped his up gingerly, Tey twisted his face into what was supposed to be a smile, exposing his blood-flecked teeth. "How

'bout you get pummeled next time, okay Doc?"

"I'll see what I can do," mumbled Luis working on the binders. "Keys!" he snapped at the Trandoshan. The creature merely looked at him, its eyes unreadable behind its mask. Anger boiled up in Luis's stomach. "Now!"

Behind him the Twi'Lek snickered. Glancing over his shoulder, Luis got a good look at him for the first time; a short, thin sentient, though too muscular to be wiry, who's vivid red eyes contrasted sharply with his pale green skin. He was lying on his belly, Fi was happily perched in his back, her knee jabbed into his spine and had one of his arms wrenched up to a painful angle behind his back. Cali was quickly sifting through his pockets, forming a pile of cred chips, gadgets and small weapons by her side.

"Got something to say?" Luis asked dryly.

The alien smiled smugly, somehow managing to look dignified despite his position. "First of all, Bishk can't speak basic, and second those binders are encrypted with a 64-character cipher, a cipher which I have no intention of giving you," he said, tapping his forehead with his free hand.

"I don't have time for this," said Tey, rolling his eyes. "Tonto!" The droid, its polished skin now scored with black blast marks, wheeled over and took the binders into its massive hands, snapping them with ease. Rubbing his wrists, he rose, waving away Luis's helping hands, and staggered over the Twi'Lek. "Who was your target?" he demanded.

The Twi'Lek snorted. "You, *of course*" he replied flippantly, "Tey Spires, former member of CorSec, terrorist and bomber of the Braxton Towers, Rebel, escaped prisoner..." Reil shifted uncomfortably, glancing between the alien and Tey; Cali just stared, her eyebrows knotted. "Shall I go on? You have quite the list of crimes." He winced as Fiola gave his arm another twist.

"Only me?"

"Yes, yes, only you..." the alien paused, his eyes narrowing. "Why?" he asked quickly, his eyes flicking between Tey, Luis, Reil, and straining to see Fi or Cali behind him, "don't tell me that the rest of you... oh dear," he said, an ugly smile creeping on his face.

"Hold on now, *you* bombed the Braxton Towers?" asked Reil, incredulous.

"No! It was..." Tey and Luis both began in unison. Luis glanced at his friend and shut his mouth.

"I had nothing to do with it," Tey continued, "besides being blamed for the entire thing."

Reil raised his eyebrows. "Uh-huh..."

Tey stood there in silence for a moment, looking away from Fi's horrified gaze. He took in a deep breath. "Look, I don't have time to explain right now, but I swear, I had no hand in what happened there."

"He's telling the truth," added Luis. *Good one! That'll sure convince them... c'mon, think!*

Still on the ground, the Twi'Lek began to laugh, a small chuckle at first which grew into a wheezy cackle. "Is that what he told you?" he rasped. "Have you even *seen* the evidence? They have it all! Communiqués with known Rebels, money stashed in his room," Tey's jaw began to grind and his battered hand curled into a tight fist, "even a tape of him planning the bombing! Believe me, human, he's guilty."

Luis was speechless, and so was everyone else it seemed. Only the Twi'Lek's grating laughs broke the early morning quiet. "Evidence can be rigged," called out a hissing voice, breaking the silence. Luis looked around to see who had spoken and stared; it was the trandoshan!

The Twi'Lek scoffed. "Bah, don't give me that, do you know

how many times... wait, what?" he asked, also looking for the source of the voice.

"If the Impsss wanted the tower gone, they would have frelling done it without a cover," the reptilian said disdainfully in rasping, but perfectly understandable, basic.

"B-Bisk!" the green-skinned sentient stuttered, his eyes bulging. "But, you said... you could only..."

"I tell you a lot of thingsss, Liam," the trandoshan countered dismissively. The alien began to remove his helmet, exposing a viscous scar which ran the length of his face down to his collarbone. "Spiress, I want to discuss something."

"*Are you out of your mind!*" the twi'lek Liam croaked. "Do you know how many credits are on his head?"

Bisk simply replied "Yesss."

Then Luis heard something. An enraged voice carrying down the alley, followed by thumping footsteps.

"Anyone else hear that?" asked Reil, his blaster still raised.

Luis edged to the corner of the alley and peeked into the main street. "Oh yeah," he replied, "It's our friend from a little bit ago... looks like he still wants to tell me something."

Posted by Thaycon Devoid on 14 September 2008 10:33 AM:

"Melroek!" Batran yelled at his companion, "Hold on you idiot!"

Melroek ignored him, his pace never slowing. Suddenly, he felt a hand grab his shoulder, and he was thrown forcefully to the ground.

"Listen you dimwit," Batran said, pinning Melroek to the ground, "if you just go charging up to them, you're likely to get us both killed."

Melroek's eyes remained unfocused, his breathing ragged and forced, "Taken...who...why...?"

Batran could feel his patience literally draining from him, and he fought for composure; "You are letting your emotions get away from you, Melroek. Take a deep breath and find your inner peace; you don't need a stupid luck charm for that."

Melroek's breathing finally started slowing, his mind seemed to be coming back to him, "It's... it's close."

Melroek's body stiffened, and he slowly but steadily lifted the twi'lek off of him. He stood a set the shocked twi'lek on his feet beside him, steadying him as he started to buckle.

"The objective remains the same." Melroek said simply and calmly, turning to follow their targets once more.

Batran watched him a moment, amazed at how suddenly he'd changed; he was walking calmly and surely, not a hint of either alcohol or emotion to his steps.

"Melroek," he finally managed.

"I know," Melroek replied, still walking "danger must be dealt with cautiously, and I intend-"

Suddenly Melroek stopped, spotting a large group of people ahead of him, sensing his pendant among them; "Why that son of a sarlacc!"

Batran stood a moment longer before following as Melroek approached the group.

"Schizophrenic..." Batran muttered to himself.

"There's a lot more to him than either of us thought." Moridt's voice crackled through his ear piece, "I'm putting him on Security Level A, his life is paramount right now, do not let him get killed. If you can arrange for him to travel with these people, a bonus would not be out of the question."

"Yes sir." Batran replied, hurrying eagerly after Melroek.

Posted by Ice Hawk on 14 September 2008 09:13 PM:

"Why me. . ?"

Reil glared up at the sky, as if accusing the powers that be of his lot in life. The powers that be seemed rather non-plussed about this whole misadventure.

The drunk from earlier was making an alarming amount of progress towards the group, and it looked like he had brought a friend this time. Who ever these guys were, Luis seemed spooked of them, and there was probably a good reason for that.

"Uh. . . Just throwing this out there, but how 'bout we do all this discussin' somewhere else? Like say maybe on a ship, entering hyperspace, far away from, oh well: the scene of a murder, bounty hunters, and enraged drunks?"

Posted by Corr Terek on 14 September 2008 10:57 PM:

"I'll have to make this quick," Kolos observed, igniting the lightsaber. "Stay still, won't you kindly?"

Mir felt as if she was frozen in place. Dimly she realized that she was probably going to die. As she looked at the man that lay at her feet, she felt regret...and guilt. She'd never told him the truth. And now...she never would get the chance.

Kolos raised his lightsaber. As he did so, Damon's eyes fluttered open. He seemed to take in everything at once -- Mir, Kolos, his lightsaber poised to strike. "Mir! Watch out!"

In desperation he reached out vainly for a blaster that was no longer within his reach. Or rather, that was how it seemed at first. But as Mir watched, caught between the two men, one of Damon's discarded blasters skittered across the floor. It came to rest in his hand and he fired.

Kolos reacted almost instantly, his lightsaber stopping in mid-swing as his head snapped back to avoid the shot. The bolt creased his cheek, and the Imperial cried out in rage and pain.

"Enough!" he snarled. "Orders or no orders, it's time for you to die!" He raised his hand again, the all-too-familiar white lightning blazing in his hands.

"Don't try it!" That was a new voice, one that Mir immediately recognized.

"Thel!"

Their friend was standing nearby, his lightsaber out and pointed towards Kolos. "If you're looking to fight someone, why not fight someone who's fully trained?"

Kolos hissed. "Who are you? Aligeri doesn't know any Jedi."

Thel smiled grimly. "He knows me." He lunged forward, flicking his blade out. The Imperial leaped backward out of range. "Mir, take Damon and get out of here!"

Mir was galvanized into action by Thel's sharp tone. As she hefted the semi-conscious Damon to his feet, he weakly gestured toward an item on the ground. "Box...gotta take the box." Mir scooped the box up, tucking it under her arm.

Kolos growled in anger. "I'm not done with you!" He reached out towards them, but before he could do anything a powerful force seemed to strike him and sent him head over heels.

"Pay attention, Imperial!" Thel said sharply. "I'm the one you're fighting now."

As Mir half-dragged Damon through the tunnels, her thoughts turned to their discussion from the day before. The shopkeeper had said there were *two* robed men. Where was the other one?

Posted by Xaturuk on 18 September 2008 06:08 PM:

Engineering Hold/Rogue Circuit/Farlander Outpost

"Fuse torch," Captain So held out his hand.

One of the pit droids pulled it off the nearby engineering bench and lateralled it between the droid trio into Tholme's hands. The Captain, eyes locked onto the disabled droid's chassis, took the tool in hand. He pressed the tip lightly against the bundle of servos. Writhing lines of electric blue wrapped outwards as the fusion melded the parts back together. Then he carefully coiled them into their sleeve, and closed up the front plating. "Welder," He intoned, offhandedly returning the torch. The droids were ready with the welder, and Captain So tediously seamed up the front plate. He leaned back to look at his work.

Billee looked very much the same as ever except for a deep black gash across his chest. As meticulous a mechanic as Tholme was, he could not completely erase the metal scoring without risk of thinning out the frame. The scarring, though, didn't concern him as much as the circuit replacements. He'd find out soon if he'd made a mistake in the repairs -- even a small one could permanently effect Billee's personality. Tholme didn't want to think about how he'd respond if his first mate powered up as a whole new droid. He gulped and looked at his crew.

The pit droids were leering close by, anxiously shuffling their feet and pacing. The lead pit kept his head cast towards the deckplates, muttering electronic chatter to himself. The other two tried now and then to comfort him only to run into his frustrated retorts. Zed, having been fixed easily by the trio, was now sitting on a nearby crate, watching the operation from the other side of the engineering bay. 2-1B and GH-7 were far off in the medical bay, keeping up with their regular duties as Tholme had asked them.

V6 had disengaged from the pilot's station when Billee's power signal went dark. He had been waiting frantically at the side of the cargo lift as they'd brought the injured droid onboard. Now, he sat dwooning and whirring. His dome rotated back and forth across the droid's body, offering suggestions and comments.

The droid chirped as Tholme hesitated over the power-on switch. "Well, we're about to find out." Tholme replied.

The minute switch tapped into position, and Billee's motors whirled to life. The steady thrum of power leveled and his optical illuminated. "Give him some space," Tholme said, motioning everyone to back up.

As the surrounding droids retreated a step, Billee stood up and cocked his head. They all waited. He surveyed them and focused on Captain So. Tholme held his breath.

"Thank goodness, sir. I feared that I was scrapped."

Captain So released a great breath of relief and smiled. "Well, we'd better get you a basic combat program if you're going to be clumsily swinging at armed troopers. Good to have you safe and sound."

V6 bleeted, fluting an array of sounds, and trekked back and forth. "There was no worry, V6. I knew that the Captain had things under control."

The droid's response was muffled by the honking brapps of the pit droids. They tumbled into Billee, wrapping their metal appendages around his thighs and waist. The lead pit, stood a few steps off, holding his hands together in front of him and twisting his head oddly. Billee, after thanking and extricating the two droids attached to him, looked up. The lead pit made a jumble of rushed beeps. Billee seemed surprised. He looked at the Captain with wide optical then back at the lead pit, "I...I don't quite know what to say. I feel that you are a family to me as well, and I'm flattered to be held in such high esteem by you."

The lead pit nodded once, then trudged off towards the far end of the bay. He awkwardly started fiddling with stray

components, working on the airspeeder again. After a few minutes of the other droids communicating and Tholme watching in good humor, they started to break up and go about their duties. Billee remained standing with the Captain alone.

"But what of the Rebel Outpost, sir?" He asked.

Tholme's face went hard and unreadable, "I heard them out. It's what I expected. They want help, and they need recruits. Same story with any revolution – too many malcontents but not enough soldiers." He turned to the side and stared at the lift, now still and locked shut.

"This galaxy is a tough place for any man, alien, or droid. What makes the Rebellion better than the Empire? Sure, things are black, now. The Emperor has disbanded the Senate, and the oppression of the outer rim worlds is at its' worst. But...would things be any different if a new galactic body were installed?" He walked towards the small contraptions that Billee worked on in his spare time, picking a few up and admiring them.

Suddenly his eyebrows dropped into a frown. His eyes went glazed, and his hand gripped tightly into a fist. The Captain tried to hide it, but Billee was used to hearing the slight inflection in his voice that betrayed his anger, "I remember a time when I was tricked by the politic. We thought it was good, and true, and represented freedom. We fought for it," He circled, keeping his eyes towards the floor, "Eventually, it...changed. Destroyed from within. It tried to take us with it. I had no choice...I had to-"

Tholme stopped pacing. He looked up at Billee who was listening patiently, and then gazed around the cargo bay as if seeing it for the first time. Shaking his head, he laughed half-heartedly, "What am I lecturing for?" He clapped his First Mate around the shoulder and together they walked towards the cockpit.

"Let's get this ship ready for liftoff."

Posted by Fingon on 24 September 2008 12:45 AM:

"You know, I think you're right," said the doctor, eyeing the approaching figure. No, pair of figures. Even better. It was getting lighter by the minute, but if they acted fast they might be able to evade their pursuers. "Shall we?"

The group began to shamble down an abandoned street roughly perpendicular to the one where they had fought just minutes before. Reil led to way, obviously eager to escape what further trouble they might stumble on. Fi and the Twi'lek came next, one arm still twisted behind his back and the end of one of his sensitive lekku casually held between Fi's thumb and forefinger. The trandoshan came next, strolling casually as if nothing were amiss and occasionally letting out hisses of what Luis thought laughter. Tey walked directly behind, the lizard's enormous weapon strung at his hip, though it caused him to favor his left leg. Luis, Cali and the droid help up the rear, the humans casting nervous glances behind their shoulders.

"I really don't think this restraint is necessary, little miss," whined the Twi'lek in his thin, arrogant voice. "Besides, a little thing as pretty as you shouldn-"

"Don't even try it, boiler brain," Fi warned.

"SHH!" hissed Cali, straining to hear the muffled voices still audible from around the corner.

Tey cocked his head. "What are they saying?" he asked.

"Can't make it out," she said, her brow furrowed and tongue peeking out of the corner of her mouth. "They don't sound happy though."

Tonto made a noise, the mechanical equivalent of clearing one's throat. "Yes Tonto?"

"The one we encountered earlier is arguing that he 'can't let them get away,' and that he 'needs it.' The other is attempting to console the first, saying that they can't afford 'rash action.' Both are losing their tempers and the first just shouted that he's going to 'find him, the one who stole his charm, grind him up and feed him to the Jawas.' He's running this way right now. Sir, what's a Jawa?" the Droid asked.

Luis's face drained of color. "I know what he wants," he muttered.

"You mean that thing you took off of him?" asked Reil. The doctor nodded.

"Well, there's an easy way to fix this. You guys keep going, I'll just give it back and meet up with you."

Cali shot him a hard look. "Did you not hear what he just said, honey? He's going to *tear you to little pieces*. I'm thinking that facing him is a *bad* idea."

"Besides, there are just two of them," offered Tey. The Twi'lek snickered. "How's this, we wait while you try and give it back, and if things go ugly, well..." he patted his new weapon.

The doctor shook his head. "You can't, you can't let him have a chance to see you. And we can't kill him. He's... he's with Imperial Intelligence. You guys get out of here, I'll be fine."

"Luis," Fi began, an exasperated look on her face.

"I'll be fine," the doctor repeated. "Look, I'll just throw it at him and run, okay? Trust me." A simple enough plan, but as he said it, Luis knew it would not work. Not because he doubted his speed or ability to hide, but because he was suddenly overcome by an overwhelming, irrational terror of parting with the small medallion he now held in his fingers. Throw it away? How could he? It could be worth thousands, an ancient artifact or priceless piece of art. No, he needed to kill that Inquisitor, he *needed* this-

What in the galaxy's gotten into you, Santiago? You're talking like a bloody Ugnaught. IT's just a stupid little trinket

Still, he somehow felt that this was the best plan. Giving his friends a forced smile, he took a deep breath and stepped back into the street, to see the large human lumbering towards him.

Back in the alley, Fi dragged her captive over to Tey. "So, we're just going to let him to this?"

The ex-CorSec agent rolled his eyes irritably. "He'll learn sooner or later. Hopefully sooner, because he's going to wind up dead if it takes much longer."

Posted by ij thompson on 24 September 2008 05:28 PM:

Fi watched Luis go, her face a mix of emotions. The doctor seemed pretty confident that things would work out with his pursuer, but he (and each of them) had made *that* mistake before. Should she go after him? Should she demand that they all wait here? Undecided, she elected instead to give her Twi'lek captive a sound kick in the rear, sending him marching down the alley, softly struggling in her grasp.

With Zealos and Tey ably covering the Twi'lek's Trandoshan cohort, and Tonto trailing along thinking droid thoughts of his own, young Cali found herself with nothing to do. Speeding up her pace, she caught up with Fi and muttered sideways to the older girl.

"You're okay with just leaving him there like that?"

Fiola regarded the younger girl uncertainly. "Well, you see..." she began, "my husband is..."

"Oh, can it," Cali retorted with a grin. "You think I bought that Worrtwash story of yours? I know who you are, I've seen you in the holos. You're that singer."

Fi thought of protesting, but just couldn't allow herself to let the old brand get by. "*Musician*," she corrected.

"Yeah, well," Cali allowed, giving the older girl an affectionate punch on the arm, "when it comes to your acting, I'd say don't quit your day job."

Fi stuck her tongue out at the girl, and by way of reply, gave her Twi'lek prisoner another kick in the pants.

"Keep it moving," Tey cut in. "Hangar's just up here..."

Posted by naboo_princess on 24 September 2008 06:40 PM:

"I'm really tired of waiting around," Tarynn said, mostly to herself. She was still in the main hold of the ship, had no idea when they were to take off, and growing paranoid by the second as a result. She moved to the cockpit.

"I'm heading out for a bit," she said to Koro. It wasn't permission. She was just tired of playing the waiting game. She smirked at his expression before turning on her heel. A few seconds later, she was back out into the arid Tatooine air.

By the Queen, she was really beginning to hate this planet. She stepped out of the hangar bay and back into the not-so-crowded streets. She wandered and weaved down the street, past the cantina where she had previously stopped for a drink. Tarynn folded her arms across her chest as she stood near an empty vendor's stand.

"Well, Tarynn. Imagine you turning up on Tatooine," a voice said from a short ways off.

Tarynn spun around, her hand already reaching for her hidden blaster before she had even turned around completely. She scanned the lingering shadows for a sign of who had followed her. Her question was answered as a lithe woman, slightly taller than Tarynn and sporting the insignia of the house of Ta'a Chume, stepped from the dark into the sunlight.

"Aerith," Tarynn said, though not surprised, "I should have known she would send you."

The black haired woman shook her head, "Ta'a Chume is so disappointed in you, Tarynn. *Nobody* escapes the Queen Mother's justice."

"What has she promised you for bringing me in?" Tarynn demanded, "I know that she gives rewards for *loyal* service." Her eyes narrowed. The hidden weapon cleared her waist holster, but she did not point it at Aerith just yet. Aerith shrugged nonchalantly, "Why does it matter to you? Sooner or later, you *will* be brought down." She took two more steps out onto the street. Aerith now only stood four paces away from Tarynn.

"Stop me from putting a blaster bolt through your skull," Tarynn growled.

"You would have done it already," Aerith responded, "And that's why, in the name of Ta'Chume, Queen Mother of the Hapes Consortium, I execute the Queen Mother's Justice."

Tarynn scanned the area, eyes flitting from side to side, looking for something, anything she could use against her enemy. She gripped her blaster. She knew Aerith was good. That was why it was her who had tracked her down. Amazingly enough, the street seemed to have cleared of any passers-by. Tarynn crouched, readying herself. Aerith moved closer, then sprung into a full leap. She was quick, and Tarynn felt the wind leave her lungs when the other woman slammed into her, following through the a head bunt to Tarynn's jaw. The sudden force carried both women into the empty vendor's stand, effectively knocking it over. The blaster landed a few feet away as the two engaged in a full out brawl.

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 25 September 2008 06:56 PM:

Tam's head hurt. He couldn't figure out why. It was like a

spike was pressing on his forehead— no, *two* spikes. One on each temple, and they were grinding in hard. Tam pulled away from the pain, and realized as the pain dissipated and his head cleared that the two spikes were his knees, hunched up close and held fast by his clasped arms. He'd fallen asleep again...

Rubbing his sore skull, Tam got to his feet and walked into his master's quarters aboard the *Nova Viper*. Kenlan was still asleep, which was good. He'd woken up several times and screamed for a medpac. Tam was afraid to give him any more, or they would be dealing with a chemical overload. Kenlan could only rely on his Jedi skills, and the providence of the Force. Tam could only rely on the passage of time, and hope that the Force was with his friends, Damon, Mir, and that man Thel. He was worried about them, and had a feeling that they would need it...

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 26 September 2008 07:30 AM:

Athelias faced the robed man, the tips of their lightsabers inches apart, the only other time he'd fought someone else with a lightsaber had been his master who very seldom beat him. This man was different, he used the dark side, he was evil. Athelias lunged forward, the man deflected his blow and swung in from the side, Athelias blocked the probed saber. The two men stared into each other's eyes for what seemed an eternity, weighing, measuring, summing up everything about one another, trying to see an opening in the other's defense. Fast as a lightning strike the man attacked, Athelias blocked and parried, then lunged and sliced, first one man was attacking then the other, anyone watching could have mistaken it for a well choreographed dance, but if either of them made one mistake the dance would end. Athelias reached out for more of the Force, and felt it flow into him, felt it flow through him; it guided his hands, showed what his opponent would do next. The pair started moving so fast that their blades became blurs moving almost too fast for the eye to follow, then it happened Athelias lost the rhythm and the man flew into the opening, slicing Athelias's handle in half right above his hand. Athelias pulled back out of the man's range and, after taking one look at it, tossed his lightsaber away. The man started toward Athelias with a triumphant smile, without his lightsaber Athelias would be an easy target, but before he reached him Athelias reached behind him and pulled another lightsaber from his belt with a solemn expression, he hadn't used his master's lightsaber since he had made his own, it seemed fitting that he would use it against someone who stood for everything his master had warned him against. The man charged again with a snarl but Athelias ignited and brought up his master's brilliant silver beam with more than enough time to spare, their dance continued but now Athelias felt as if his master was with him. The last thing Athelias saw before he closed his eyes was the man's astonished expression, before the man could move however Athelias could see the cavern on his eyelids, but instead of rocks and his opponent he saw flows of energy. The rocks were a constant flow of grey energy, any energy passing through them would be neutral without light or dark tendencies, his opponent was a flow of dark energy, almost black, his own energy he knew would be bright white. When the man struck again Athelias was waiting for it, he easily knocked it out of the way, took a step forward, grabbing his saber arm and spinning his own blade so that he held it upside down, then he spun 90 degrees and lodged his blade in the other man's chest. He opened his eyes in time to see the man's jaw drop and the rest of his body follow, then he switched off his lightsaber, replaced on his belt and sank to the ground trying to fill his lungs with enough air. After what seemed an eternity he pushed himself to his feet,

searched the man's body for anything of interest and staggered to the entrance of the cave. One thing was definitely clear; they had to leave this planet before any more of these guys showed up.

Posted by Ice Hawk on 26 September 2008 12:16 PM:

"Almost to the hanger now- wait!"
Just in front of the hanger a brawl broke out. The group halted their progress and watched the fight from afar.
Reil sighed.
"This is getting ridiculous, even for a slum like Tatooine."
Fi grinned.
"If you're traveling with us, you'd better get used to danger."
"I thought I was already used to it. . . Anyway, what do we do now, just wait for them to finish?"
Tey leaned against a wall, watching the fight.
"That's right. Until they finish or move away from then entrance to the hanger. It's not worth the trouble of getting involved."
Reil checked his chrono. The suns would be up soon.
"We could just blast them. . ."
Tey turned to Reil.
"Is there ever a point when you aren't willing to kill someone?"
"Is there ever a time when you are?"
"I don't enjoy killing-"
Reil felt his anger rising.
"Neither do I, but that doesn't mean I give every frelling scumbag the benefit of the doubt!"
"So you just blast whoever you feel like!"
"You didn't complain when Bartok had his hands around your throat! Or when these two were about to collect on your bounty!"
"That was different! It was life or death then."
"And unless we want to be put in another life or death situtaion, we need to get off this rock tonight!"

Posted by Corr Terek on 26 September 2008 04:26 PM:

Mir was having trouble lugging Damon through the cavern. She'd seen an Imperial landspeeder near the cave entrance on her way in, but it was proving difficult to get there. Damon was still barely conscious, his brief moment of lucidity earlier being overshadowed by the pain from the burns on his body.
She heard footsteps behind her. Half turning and trying to draw her blaster, she was relieved to see it was only Thel. He looked pretty rough, and whatever had happened seemed to have taken its toll on him.
"What about the Imperial?" she asked. Thel sighed heavily.
"Got him," he replied. "But we need to move fast -- there's another one out there." He took Damon from Mir, easily hefting the other man's dead weight. "You gonna be okay?"
"I'll be fine," Mir said. She looked anxiously at Damon.
"He's the one we need to worry about now."

Posted by Vash Knives on 27 September 2008 07:40 PM:

Koro watched Tarynn leave and began to think to himself that it would be inconvenient for the others to return while she was out. Removing Mr. Mace from his lap, he got up and put the fabool on his now vacant seat. The gambler reached into a pocket and pulled out a pack of cigarras. He exited the ship and locked it down using a simple code-11100110-an Idiot's Array reversed, then put into binary as a single number. Koro took out a cigarra

and began to smoke it. One thing he never did was smoke on a ship. As he exited the hanger he looked around and noticed the two women brawling. The one woman was unfamiliar to him, but the other was Tarynn. He wondered if the other had anything to do with the person that was after Tarynn-Her Majesty as she had referred to them. Koro took no chances and walked over to the fight. The gambler picked up the other woman by the back of her outfit with one hand and lifted her off of Tarynn. Holding the woman so that her face was in front of his, he removed the cigarra from his mouth and spoke calmy.

"May I ask what business you have with Miss Tarynn Gray?"

Posted by Fingon on 28 September 2008 12:32 AM:

Luis ran. He didn't know where he was running, and to be honest he no longer cared. Anywhere but back there in that alley, when he had-

He cut off the thought. No time for that now. The only thing that mattered was putting as much distance between himself and the Inquisitor. The doctor was no match for that man, and both of them knew it. And after what had ocured, he was sure to stop at nothing to hunt Luis down.

His legs burned and his lungs ached. His throat felt like it was coated with sand and grated with every shuddering breath. Years of practice allowed Luis to put all that out of his mind, but he couldn't run forever. Even if he some how would have physically been able, he was too tired to do this for much longer. Tired of hiding, or living in fear.

I'm not a hero! I just want to live in peace... to live. Especially if it's with-

He cut that thought off too. No time for that, not now, maybe not ever. Moreover, could he even trust himself now? After...

The safety was on. It's ALWAYS on; I check it every time I pull it out. Right above the trigger, in the 2nd position to allow stun fire. That's how I've ALWAYS done it. I checked as I pulled it out, before-

Luis's steps slowed as he neared a suitably dingy cantina. *But that doesn't bloody matter now, does it?* he thought, shaking his head as he dipped into the musky dark of the building. Ordering something which smelled faintly of rose hips, he melted into a secluded booth, sweat still pouring off his face. *He might not even be dead, as far as Imp Intel will be concerned, that doesn't matter. That man- he ran awful fast for how much he must've drunk- won't be settled until I'm dead. And the others-*

A fresh wave of fear and guilt washed over him. He hadn't even have thought about what this would mean for them. Why couldn't he ever just do the smart thing? For someone who insisted he wasn't a hero, he sure tried to act like one.

While he was brooding, the doctor found himself rubbing the old medallion between his fingers. That token had been in his hand, now that he thought about it, when he had-
Cut.

He wasn't sure why he still had it, to be honest. It would have been easy to have just thrown it aside, even to leave it here. But it was still a bargaining chip, probably the only one he still had. *No* he amended, retrieving a small code cylinder from a deep pocket. *I still have this, and the droid has all the files duplicated in his memory. Still encoded, but they have them. There had to be a way...*

Yes, yes there was. It was something he said he'd never do... said he'd never get into a position where he had too. *Well, that was before... this. All of this,* he thought with a sigh. *This may not even work, but this is the best shot. For all of us.*

With a new determination, the doctor slipped to the back

wall where a few old and battered telebooths stood. The Inquisitor didn't know anyone but Luis; the rest were safe for now.

First the doctor waved Tonto. The droid had to understand what was going on, to explain to them what he had to do after he was gone, and most importantly to make sure they got off world and didn't look back.

"It'll be in a valley a few clicks east of the city, understand?"

"Yes sir."

"And you are not to tell them until after you get them off world."

There was a pause. "Yes sir." The mechanical voice sounded almost regretful.

"Good. Goodbye, friend."

Luis sat back with a heavy sigh. Three more calls to go. First, to someone he didn't entirely trust. Then to a good friend. Last to the very man who sought to kill him.

Slipping two more cred chips into the machine, the screen went into a holding pattern before being replaced by an unexpected face. It was beaten, beardless, and somehow just *different*, but it could just be...

"You?" the face asked, incredulous, confirming the identity. "What... what's happened?"

"Listen," Luis replied, talking in a low, rapid voice. "I don't have much time left. I need to start a new life, and I figured you would be the one to ask."

Posted by Ubiqtorate on 28 September 2008 02:02 AM:

Kenlan sat up tentatively, grimacing as he did so. He gently peeled back the thick bandage covering his chest, hoping for something positive but fearing the worst.

Hm. It wasn't really that bad. Most of the burn damage had healed, thanks no doubt to the ever-present watchful eye of his apprentice-turned-nurse, Tam. New, delicate pink skin was filling in the gap left by the blaster bolt, and even the scarring was being soaked away by the regenerative bacta salve.

Kenlan shook his head. "What won't technology do next?" he muttered under his breath. He swung his legs around the spartan recovery bed that had been his whole world since the attack. As he hopped off the pad, his bare feet hit the floor with a thud, eliciting a dull groan as the brand new nerve endings in his chest decided to make their presence known.

"Master Kenlan?" came a voice from outside the medbay in the corridor. Kenlan winced. Surely the boy would try to get him back into bed, and tell him it wasn't safe for him to be up, or...

"Master Kenlan, are you all right?" asked Tam as he rounded the corner into the medbay entryway.

"I'm fine, Tam," replied Kenlan, forcing a smile. "I'm actually doing much better now, thank you. I was just going to have myself a bit of fresh air."

"But... but Master, you can't be about yet!" insisted the boy. "The medical manual said you should rest for at least..."

"Medical manual," interrupted Kenlan with a tone of impatience that was not the least bit feigned, "were not written for Jedi Masters. Or do you doubt the healing influence of the Force?"

Tam's eyes went wide as dinner plates. "I... uh, but no!" he stammered. "Of course not. I mean, well, it's just that... never mind."

Kenlan frowned. "Tam?" he asked. "Is something bothering you?"

"No," replied Tam. "It's fine, Master."

"Tam," prompted Kenlan, "one need not be a Jedi Master to

tell that something's bothering you." That was true, at least.

"It's... well, I guess it's just that you look so different now," explained Tam. "And you act so different. I mean, I guess when we're here, and it's just you and me... but other times, I almost forget that you're a Jedi Master."

"A Jedi is more than a robe, a beard, and a lightsaber, Tam," admonished Kenlan sternly. "Jedi adapt the trappings with which they surround themselves. They are not defined by them."

"Oh! I didn't mean that!" insisted Tam. "I mean, of course, Master."

"Tam, no matter where we go or what we may seem to become, remember that I am and must always be Kenlan As-Buka, Jedi Master, at least to you," advised Kenlan. "What we may be or how we may appear to others will be as the will of the Force dictates. These are dangerous times for us, Tam, when we must be cautious of everybody and everything around us. Do you understand?"

"I... I understand, Master."

"Good," replied Kenlan. "Then that's settled. As it is we have no more time to waste. Have you heard from Damon or Thel yet?"

"No, Master," said Tam glumly. "I'm afraid they must have been captured."

Kenlan nodded, pursing his lips. "Then it is as I feared. And Mir'isha?"

"Captured as well," reported Tam, tears welling up in his eyes. "I... I should have gone back for her, Master. I shouldn't have just left her there like that."

"You did what you had to do," reassured Kenlan. "I am confident that you did what the Force guided you to do. I obviously was no help to you, and had you gone back we should all have been captured."

Tam was silent, but nodded.

"But now we have to find them," added Kenlan resolutely. "We've rested long enough, and it's time for action. Damon and Thel are two of the most resourceful people I've ever met. It's entirely possible that they're deep into their escape plan by now."

From the cockpit, deep in the fore of the ship, the com signal chimed.

"See?" said Kenlan. "That might even be them now."

Kenlan strode confidently into the cockpit and activated the com system. The face that materialized was familiar to Kenlan from their recent travels, but was not at all the one he expected to see. "You?" Kenlan asked, incredulous. "What... what's happened?"

"Listen," the face on the other end replied, talking in a low, rapid voice. "I don't have much time left. I need to start a new life, and I figured you would be the one to ask."

Posted by Fingon on 28 September 2008 09:04 PM:

The suns loomed high in the sky as Luis dismounted his 'borrowed' speeder. A hot breeze blew in his face, stinging his eyes with specks of dust and playing at the edges of his long thermal coat.

Melroek. That's the man who wants to kill me. The one I'm meeting here. He pulled up the coat's hood and found some manner of shelter in a patch of shade under a rock outcropping.

This was the place. All he needed to do was wait.

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 29 September 2008 03:38 AM:

Athelias gently put Damon down in the back seat of the speeder.

"Take us back to the ship Mir'isha."

He reached out to the Force and bent over Damon lightly running his hands over the burned skin from the lightning, then he brought his hands up to Damon's head and after a minute Damon's eyes fluttered open.

"Welcome back, I'm glad you didn't decide to die selfishly and leave us with everybody on our tail." Athelias said with a smile. Damon tried to sit up but Athelias pushed him back down gently, "Uh-uh, not yet, give it some time. The man you fought was a Dark Jedi and he was good, almost too good, but he's gone now, we have the box and we're heading back to the ship. Now, I know that I'm not the captain but it is my humble opinion that upon returning to the ship we leave this planet with all speed, I don't know about you but I don't really want to fight another of those guys." Athelias turned to Mir'isha, "Why don't you call the ship, see if Tam and As-Buka made it back."

Posted by ij thompson on 29 September 2008 10:20 AM:

From the alley on the other side of the street, Fi had actually been admiring the grace and skill of the two women as they fought. Though the red-haired woman's blaster had been knocked from her grasp, the weapon appeared to be largely forgotten as she and the black-haired woman spun, kicked, punched, and grappled with one another.

As the red-haired woman nearly completed an attempted headlock on her opponent, the brunette managed to thread one of her legs between the other woman's, tripping her to the ground and landing on top of her. What the brunette didn't realize, however, was that she'd caused the woman to fall right next to her dropped blaster.

"Now, Tarynn, the time has come for you."

As she taunted her seemingly helpless opponent, Tarynn imperceptibly picked up the blaster, slipping a finger through the trigger. Seeing all from across the street, Fi almost wanted to jump up and applaud the exciting display. Then another figure entered the scene.

Koro.

True to form, the young man sauntered up and lifted the black-haired woman off of Tarynn, taking full opportunity to play the hero. Tarynn wasted no time in hiding the blaster she'd just retrieved, secreting it away and rising to speak heatedly with the others.

"Should've known he'd show up," Fi moaned.

"We should go at once," Tonto told them in an odd tone, "aboard that decrepit ship, if we must."

"No argument here," Zealos replied. "But what are we gonna do with these guys?" he motioned toward their captives.

Fi looked back at him, a gleam in her eye. "Set for stun." She pushed her Twi'lek captive away from herself, kicking him further back down the alley they'd come from. Not missing a beat, Reil caught him square in the chest with a brilliant blue stun beam. The Twi'lek dropped, and was soon joined by his Trandoshan counterpart.

"With that unpleasantness behind us," Tonto went on, "we *really* need to leave."

"What about Luis?" Tey demanded.

"Yeah," Fi agreed. "He said he'd be right behind us!"

Wordlessly, Tonto opened one of his small cargo compartments, ejecting two datapads, one labelled 'Tey', the other, 'Fi'.

"Tonto," Fi demanded, eyes narrowing, "what do you know?"

"I'm sorry masters," the droid apologized sadly. "Master

Santiago won't be joining us. And we need to leave. *Now...*"

Posted by Ubiqtorate on 29 September 2008 08:34 PM:

The transmission complete, Kenlan stepped out of the cockpit. He barely heard the hatch close behind him.

"Master?" asked Tam. "What is it, Master?"

"An old friend," replied Kenlan distractedly. "An old friend who wants very much to become a new friend."

"You mean remake your acquaintance?" asked Tam.

"No, not quite," countered Kenlan. "Very different from that, I fear. If I do what I must do, I'm afraid we will never see him again."

"Master?"

"It's terrible, Tam," continued Kenlan. "Terrible. But there are many things we must do in this life that we don't want to do. And sometimes circumstances leave us no choice but to go in directions we don't want to go."

"I... I still don't understand, Master."

"Perhaps it's for the best," stated Kenlan. "Come, Tam. We must act quickly if we're to help him. And it will require the help of some other old friends of ours..."

Tam followed his master's guiding hand as it brushed him out of the ship. "But... but where are we going?"

Neither heard the chime of Mir'isha's com as they left the ship.

Posted by Fingon on 29 September 2008 08:40 PM:

First it was a pain. A kind of ache, rising and swelling out of the blackness. It seemed for a time to simply be, located at nowhere in particular, nor originating from any definite point. Then it began to spread. First it snaked its way down his left arm- he had arms, he'd forgotten- then up into his neck. Then it was joined by several other aches, growing and blending until the entire sensation become nearly unbearable. Then he found that he could open his eyes. They hurt too.

He found himself lying on his side, his legs and arm already partly buried by the hungry sand. His face, wrists, and the rest of his exposed skin was split and blistered, apparently having bore the suns' full wrath for several hours.

Stupid, I should have thought of that.

He didn't look down at his chest, but knew what he'd find there. The blast vest had absorbed most of the heat, but little of the actual impact. Even with the vest, the flesh would be viscerously burned around the wound. Fortunately, this tended to minimize bleeding. He couldn't feel the blast wound yet, but he knew that would come shortly. As soon as the effects wore off.

He spat out the bitter remains of a hollow pill, the kind that you chew before swallowing. It was the same drug he had given Adriav, the one which would stop your lungs from breathing and heart from beating, depending on the dose.

Wrenching his arm free, Luis found his bag and extracted a large syringe. Hands shaking from the effort, he turned the needle on himself and plunged it into his chest.

Pain, much worse than the ache which had woken him, shot through him like a second shot, searing his ruined veins as pure bacta flooded his system, forcing his wounds closed, rebuilding his tattered organs and knitting together bones. Luis thought he screamed, but couldn't be sure.

Maybe I should have just stayed dead, he thought when he could think again.

What seemed like an eternity later, he could stand up. Limping to the crest of the dune, he surveyed the blank

landscape. What is the message didn't get through? What if-
[I'm here, Luis].

"I knew you'd come, Adriav," he whispered.

The ship gently touched down. The ramp lowered, and two figures rushed out to help the doctor.

"Welcome home, m'boy," the old captain Halod muttered, practically carrying Luis.

"Did Kenlan come through?" breathed the doctor.

[Yes. He was wonderful, Luis; he's gotten everything set up. We'll head over to Nar Shadda once you've recovered for the retinal chances, everything else he's sending directly.]

Luis smiled wryly. At least you could trust a con man with his trade.

[Where to now? The crew and I don't have any orders for the next week almost. It's your call.]

Now on the ramp, Luis gazed into the horizon. The suns were beginning to set, lighting the sky on fire. They were up there, somewhere. Hopefully far from here. And they could never know.

"Anywhere. Anywhere but here."

Posted by Vash Knives on 30 September 2008 07:28 PM:

"Koro, you have no need to interfere in Hapan matters. This does not concern you!"

Koro developed a rather confused look on his face after hearing these words from Tarynn. The dark-haired woman he was holding looked at him with contempt and began to speak.

"For your information, Tarynn Gray is wanted by the Queen Mother of Hapes, and I, as one of her agents, intend to take her back to face justice. If that is not possible, the Queen Mother will understand, I'm sure. Although it seems she has found a faithful consort-"

"He is not my-"

"Anyway, whoever this Queen Mother is, she and any of her agents will have to fill out the proper forms under Imperial law for the hunting, and collection of criminals. Failure to do so is frowned upon severely."

"Imperial law?"

"Yes. The Galactic Empire rules the Galaxy. Their laws are enforced even on this backwater world. If you have a problem with that, you can take it up with the local garrison."

Pulling herself out of Koro's grip, the dark-haired woman stormed off. As she walked away, the gambler relaxed. He was glad that he did not have to hurt the unknown woman. That was something he promised himself he would never do. Hurting a woman was one of the worst things a man could do in his opinion. He turned and walked back into the hanger.

"Let's go."

He wondered where the ship would take him next as he tossed his finished cigarra into the sand.

Posted by Ice Hawk on 2 October 2008 12:08 AM:

Reil looked out, across the street. The dark haired woman went one way, and the other two headed back into the hanger. The brawl was over, for now atleast.

"Looks like the fights broken up. . . if we're going to leave we'd better do it now, before more trouble comes our way."

Posted by Corr Terek on 10 October 2008 04:11 PM:

"They're not answering," Mir said anxiously. Thel grimaced. "Not good."

Damon tentatively reached up and felt his face. The pain had faded somewhat, but his cheek still felt raw to the touch. Thel noticed his bewilderment.

"I've done what I can, though I think you're always going to have a scar."

"Fine by me," Damon replied, shifting in his seat. He still felt weak, and he knew Thel was right -- fighting any more of the Empire's troops today could be disastrous. He didn't like to think that As-Buka and Tam were in trouble, but given the ease with which the Imperial had dealt with him and Mir...well, it didn't look good.

"Try again," he said. "We've got to find them and get out of here as fast as we can."

"And what if they've been captured?" Mir asked, her eyes still on the terrain in front of them. She seemed to be trying very hard not to look at him, and her voice was curiously flat. "What then?"

Damon and Thel exchanged glances, and Damon suddenly felt very old, very weary. "I don't know, Mir. I don't know."

Posted by naboo_princess on 11 October 2008 02:00 AM:

Tarynn cursed under her breath at the audacity of the man. *Although*, she admitted silently to herself, *he was actually proving to be useful.*

As she followed him back into the hangar, she pressed a hand delicately to her full lips, now bruised and split thanks to that backstabbing sithspawn Aerith.

"Koro, wait." It wasn't a question, it was a command, "If Aerith followed me, then she has your ship marked with a homing device. Run a check on the hull. Please." She added as she realized men weren't as subservient in the rest of the Galaxy as they were in Hapes and therefore might take a simple command the wrong way.

She turned from the ship, and scanned the area, looking for more unseen threats. Where ever Aerith was, there was bound be more of the kath hounds she called spies.

"Perhaps I should make myself clear," she said after a few second pause, "The Hapes Consortium consists of sixty-three worlds, and is the largest independant government in the galaxy. I read some of the recent events on this 'Holonet' when I fled Hapes. I know of your Empire. It isn't much different than how Hapes is controlled. If there are dissidents, they are silenced. I know of techniques to silence someone without so much of a sound....And I've already told you too much."

She felt her face again, she could already imagine how it must look. She really needed some bacta. *Take away a woman's beauty and you take away her power*, she added as an afterthought.

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 11 October 2008 03:38 AM:

It was surprising how easily Tam was able to do what his master needed of him. Not the stuff about changing names and some sort of procedure on Nar Shadda. That was the province of Kenlan's experience, and he managed his part of the careful planning handily. It was likely that they'd never recognize Luis if they saw him again.

If they saw him again... A weight fell on Tam's heart at the realization that "if" so easily entered his thoughts. Of course he'd see Luis again, just like he'd see Tey again.

And Fi...

And Adriav. Once again, Tam marveled at how close she seemed to be. Not physically, of course. Tam didn't know exactly

where she had been, but all he had to do was say, [Adriav]

[Yes Tam?] she responded so simply.

[Luis needs help. Pick him up at—] “Hey Master, where’s he at again? Okay.” [Still on Tatooine, I guess.]

A pause as she searched with her own augmented awareness. [Compliance. En route now.]

[Good luck. I mean, may the Force be with you.]

Adriav had known what he meant, for more was expressed in that strange mode of communication than the crude delineations of basic vocabulary. When he was done, Kenlan had smiled at him and led him back towards the *Nova Viper*.

“Please,” croaked a voice as they walked down a cold, empty street. A man stepped forward, old and hunched and swaddled in thick but ragged clothes. “Please, spare a few creds so an ol’ spacer can get him some whiskey?”

Kenlan sniffed loudly. “Looks like you’ve already had enough for the evening, pops.”

“Then perhaps you could hand over your lightsabers,” the bum said, and before either of them could fully register their words, the man stood tall and straight, and gestured a squadron of stormtroopers out of their hidden positions. He pulled his tattered hood back to reveal ice-white hair and light skin. Age was apparent on him, but still had a ways to go before it ruined his robust countenance. His eyes, in contrast to the rest of him, were dark and hot, as if they were black holes that sucked the very thoughts for your mind. Tam involuntarily shrunk behind his master.

The ice-man smiled coolly. “We don’t want to wake up the neighborhood.”

Posted by Vash Knives on 11 October 2008 08:08 PM:

Koro looked at Tarynn and sighed.

"This ship doesn't have the equipment to check the hull for things like homing beacons. Any checking would have to be done by hand, which we don't have time for. Our only options are to let Aerith follow us, or go someone she can't follow us, ditch this ship, get another one and go from there. Personally, I'd get another ship anyway."

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 12 October 2008 12:05 AM:

Athelias took a deep breath, "If they have been captured they must be rescued, the boy is special, he *must* not be held by the Empire. You two should take the ship and wait in orbit and I'll try to save them, if I don't make it you must find some way to save them."

Posted by naboo_princess on 12 October 2008 07:54 PM:

"Of course," she said, "I understand completely. The sooner the better. Are we still waiting for your friends?"

She was itching to get started, to get away from the dusty planet. But she wouldn't make the same mistake of taking another walk. She would have to wait for now.

Posted by ij thompson on 12 October 2008 10:20 PM:

"You won't have to wait much longer."

Tarynn and Koro turned sharply at the sound of the voice. There stood Fiola Shaku in the hangar's doorway, flanked by Zealos Reil, Tey Spires, Cali, and Tonto.

"Ah," Koro remarked, "so you've come to your senses."

Fi sighed. "We all need a way off this world."

"And although that ship has a seventy percent chance of cracking up around us," Zealos added, "that beats a one hundred percent chance of getting shot."

Tonto lifted a digit, quietly correcting. "Seventy-two."

"So what do you say, Koro?" asked Tey, his eyes darting between the Ranger and the woman at his side. "Can we make this happen?"

Koro smirked slightly, turned, and boarded the *Long Shot*, Tarynn and the others following behind...

Posted by Drendar Morevo on 13 October 2008 11:38 PM:

A compiled post by Ris and Drendar Morevo

Aboard the Puddlejumper

Drendar Morevo liked hyperspace, it was quiet, it was bright, it was almost kinda cheery, he found the pinwheel of light beyond his window kinda mesmerizing even. He found that after a few months of flying around he could even sleep while in hyperspace, right there in the pilot seat. But right now his mind wasn't on the beauty of hyperspace beyond, "Sithspit I'm late, I'm going to get such an earful for this." He shifted in his seat, and the computer started counting down to reversion, And this part always makes me sick. Today it turned his head as well as his stomach. He emerged into what looked like a junkyard. Bits a pieces of fighters spun in space, the remains of a light fighter carrier nearby.

TIEs he noted first from the hunks of hexagonal solar array wings, but then he started noticing those Incom engines, and his stomach turned cold. He tried to slow down but it was too late, a dead body, one wearing an imperial uniform rolled up on his cockpit, he was dead, most of his helmet was gone, melted, the mans face in a state of utter shock. Drend muttered a string of curses, and then started to hear it--a light pinging noise. He checked the IFF, someone was still alive, or at the very least, someone was transmitting. He activated the search light and began navigating the junk. Drend saw bodies, some had ejected, some had simply died in their cockpits, while others...

Finally he came to the beacon, a single pilot in an orange jumpsuit. He breathed finally. It was a rebel pilot, one he was supposed to meet. He beamed the light on the pilot, and then spotted a smaller signature, an R2 unit. He activated the controls on the bay doors and flew over the pair, and activated the light tractor, slowly dragging them into the bay. Once he was sure they were in, he closed the doors and repressurized the bay, unlocking his harness and getting up from the chair. "I hope you're still alive."

In space

After some indeterminate time, Cinowyn Antilles woke up, floating, she thought, in bacta. Besides weightlessness, the only other things she felt were cold and pain. That didn't make any sense. *Oh, yes, it does--they use cold bacta sometimes, and I'm probably due for more meds...* She wasn't thinking clearly enough to realize any doctor would have kept her knocked out and that she was still wearing her flight gear...Nor did Cinowyn recall what had put her in the hospital. Just routine comms suddenly turning frantic and surprised, the screams of an astromech. Someone--her!--yelling orders. Trying to. Like some nightmares she'd had, she could get out nothing more than some half-strangled moans...She heard the chirping of an astromech, but before her brain could make sense of the Binary, she lapsed back into complete unconsciousness...

Puddlejumper

As he rushed into the bay, he found them, the pilot and the

astro. Her skin was a scary shade of blue, and cold to the touch. She was scarily beautiful, almost serene, like something he saw in an art class back at Coronet University. The droid was chirping madly, it was on its back and could not right itself, it wouldn't be able to stand either way, its legs were gone. He looked at the R2 "Quit it, do you want me to help your pilot or not?"

The droid turned his domed head and chirped something along the lines of "Do something for her already!"

He felt for a pulse, it was barely there, thready, and erratic. Drend hauled the woman up, into his arms, she wasn't heavy, but her gear made it awkward. He got her from the bay to his room, and his bed, putting her down in it, wrapping her in blankets he kept around, space was cold after all. The slightest bit of color was returning to her skin, she was warming.

He grabbed the medkit out of the nearby cupboard and checked her temperature. It was increasing, very slowly. He got out the scanner, it indicated she had a broken arm, but he couldn't set it on top of her flight suit. Once her temperature was up a little more, he started taking off her gear, and started to remove her flight suit. As her rescuer carefully removed the helmet, he noted the knot on her head and the crazing of the goggles. The warmer temperature and the man's ministrations brought Cinowyn around again. She rolled her head and cried out weakly.

"Only doing this to help, gotta get you out of this suit if I'm going to set your arm."

"Hurts! Frell, Kev, aren't gonna put me out first--" Her eyes focused enough to realize the young man wasn't the *Tantive IV*'s medic. She remembered that it couldn't be, Kevlen Janus and the rest of her old crewmates were dead. "Where am I? Who're you?" she demanded, trying to sit up. Her face turned white and she gasped, the movement jarring her injured arm.

"Watch yourself!" he shouted and placed both hands on her shoulders, trying to push her back down to the bed. "You've got a broken arm, and you're only making it worse"

"Yeah," she agreed, laying back. "So who are you--besides not being a doctor--and where are we?" She looked wary but not hostile. "And what in all the hells am I doing here?"

"I'm just the guy who plucked you from the black, and you're on my ship." he tried to work off her jumpsuit, "jeez you've got this thing on tight, I've never seen so many zippers and straps, you pilots sure pack it in." He paused to consider that last question "You want the Metaphysical answer, or the Literal one?" His Bedside manner sucked, but he wasn't a doctor, that wasn't his job, this wasn't either, this was more his debt.

She almost laughed at that question, but it made her head hurt worse than her arm. "Thanks--now hold off on the suit a nanosec. You got a medical kit at least? Good. Look." She pointed out the injection port. "There's gotta be some decent painkiller in the kit--shoot me up with a dose and I'll tell you how to get the gear off easy."

"Jeez if I could just get every pretty redhead to tell me that," he chuckles and activates the Morpha injection and sticks it to her neck.

With her headache, Cinowyn couldn't think of a retort. The shot stung for a moment. As she waited for the Morpha to work, Cinowyn explained how to remove the flak vest and life support gear. "Now that's off, we can work on the suit..." She added, "While you're getting it off, you can answer me in more detail."

"My name, or why you are here?" He wasn't about to just give out any information regardless. He was working off her jumpsuit, just getting it down to her waist, being careful around her arm. "Well, I figure you at least deserve my name. Drend, my name, is Drend."

"Why I'm here? I don't know..." With the concussion, she had misunderstood the question. Cinowyn shifted a little, sat up again, the only help she could give him getting out of her suit. Like most pilots, she wore a tank top underneath, this one with some sort of emblem, probably a squadron patch. Pale from the exertion and additional pain, she lay back immediately, cradling her arm against her chest. "Cinowyn. And thanks again, Drend." Something nagged her about the name, but thinking was too much effort.

"Cinowyn?" He mulled "Pretty name, you're Alderaanian aren't you?"

"Yeah. Was..." The bitter grief was clear. "You going to deal with the arm or what? And, my droid? I know I heard him."

"Your droid!" he blurts, setting the arm fast, and rushing back down the gangway to the cargo bay. Its battery was failing fast, since the two primary power cells were attached to the legs. He got it to the nearest computer port, plugged it in, activated a partition and punched the "Upload" key. He breathed a sigh of relief as he saw the upload progress swiftly. Of course that's when he realized he left his other patient in his bed.

He rushed back to his room. "Ah, your droid is... busted... kinda..." Drend told her, ash he finished putting a brace on her arm.

"Busted? Frell! Waht's wrong? " The words were rough but the look was that of a child told her pet was ill.

"Oh, um, his body shell is screwed up, I had to dump his core matrix into the ship."

"You did what? You're stuck with me now then. That droid is mine!"

"Never said it wasn't, but if you want that droid to have a gigawatt of life left to it, you're gonna have to let me repair it."

"I know & I'd be grateful...he's an old playmate."

Cinowyn smiled back. The drug was starting to affect her. Even as Drend thought about it, the smile turned into a yawn. "You hit me with Morpha, right? I'll be out in a few. You have a co-pilot seat in the cockpit? Want to settle me there so you can keep a closer eye on me--you'll need to wake me for checks every so often--I'm pretty sure I've been concussed."

"I'm pretty sure your concussed too, yeah, there is a co-pilot seat, next to mine." He scooped up the pilot, as he had noted before, she wasn't heavy, and without the gear she was easier to carry. before she could object to being picked up "Don't even try it, with that Morpha in you, you probably can't stand, let alone walk, you just let me be chivalrous, and get comfy, ok?"

She was too drowsy to protest, even if she had wanted to. Cinowyn allowed her head to loll against his shoulder and was totally asleep by the time he settled her in the seat and leaned it back.

He patted the sides of her face as he put her down in the chair "Oh, Cinowyn wake up, can't have you falling asleep." Realizing she probably needs her rest he sets in a course for the nearest planet, Telos.

And the drive decides not to start... again."Sith. Spit. Stupid drive," he gets out a spanner among other tools and begins working on the drive. The computer next to him bleeps. Drend cocks his head to the side "What the?"

The ship's computer, being inhabited by Razzle, bleeps at him again.

"I thought I set you up with a partition?"

A status screen came "live" with script. "I can't help from there. Running diagnostics."

"Not that I'm not happy for help, but, how did you hack my ships network? Well, if you're about to tell me that the drive is malfunctioning due to a faulty synch with the power supply, I

already know. Could you at least tell me how to fix it?"

"Certainly. I've worked around synch glitches before. Never with a hyperdrive. Very fast one--no wonder you got such an escort. First, isolate the ion-flux capacitors. Then adjust the Triranium surge coils 15% down."

"Ok, got those set, then I just plug it in and restart, right?"

"Yes, if you allow me to modulate the power flows, that will work. At least for the next jump. Possibly 2 or 3 before more adjustments are needed. Do I use the coordinates in the navicom cache?"

"I suppose... err, just ignore those short hops to the Expansion Region... we're heading to Telos."

"Copy, Captain. We can jump as soon as you finish."

"I'll do that bit myself, if you don't mind." He heads back up to the cockpit and sits down. He spares a look for his new companion and activates the hyperdrive.

"As you wish." After Drend makes the jump, he sees that the R2's CPU has appropriated a screen at the copilot station, probably so that his snubjock will be able to see it easily when she wakes. It is located so that Drend can see it as well if he turns his head. "I am R2-Z11, named Razzle. How is my lady?"

"Your lady," he looks over at Cinowyn, "is going to be fine."

"She was unconscious most of the time were were EVA. I cannot monitor her vitals in this ship."

Telos, a sprawling world, being slowly corrupted by industry and commercialism, after several years of being a world without, it was a world with perhaps too much. Citadel Station, a relic of the Telosian Restoration Project of four thousand years earlier was remarkably still in operation, though reduced to one tenth its original size.

starlancerace (10/7/2008 9:18:57 PM): Drend turned to Cinowyn, "Wakey, wakey."

The R2 added a trill, and Cinowyn roused at their calls, smiling. "Razzle! You're okay! Where's he stowed?" she asked Drend, trying to get out of the seat. She fell back, dizzy. "Frell," she moaned, putting her hand over her eyes. Her head clearly was not recovered. "Can you help me to wherever you've got Razzle stowed?" The droid tweeted and trilled. "Where? I'm sorry, but you're not making sense, Razzle, are your circuits half-fried like mine?" She turned to her rescuer, "Can I have another dose yet--head's kriffin' killing me?"

"Nothing that strong, what you need is some caf, luckily I started some when I took the ship into hyperspace. Razzle is currently resting in a small heap next to my work bench in the cargo hold."

"I heard him! He can't be! Then no one but me..."

"Cool your thrusters, Razzle is fine... but his body is not. So, aside from some dizziness, how are you feeling?"

"Oh, yeah..forgot. I'm still dizzy--head hurts like several dozen hangovers at once," she groaned. "Can't I sleep more of it off?" She finally noticed the screen's messages. "I'm Razzle! Rest more!"

"Actually, if you can stand staying awake for a while, we're about to descend for landing at Citadel."

"OK, sure. What do we need here?" Cinowyn asked. "Besides trying to contact my bosses. I hate telling them about the guys but at least we have you--or whatever you were bringing in?"

Just some cargo," he deflected the question. "Well for one, we need to refuel, and two, you need some proper medical care, and as much as taking care of you for these few hours has been a blast, I get the feeling that you're more fun when you can actually stand."

Now wasn't the time, however much she needed it, to start mourning the other other pilots. So Cinowyn distracted herself by responding to his last remark as a flirt. "You want to find out?" she asked in as coy a tone as her head would allow. She didn't intend to go to an emergency room. "I'm not about to go to anyone who is going to ask questions about how I got into this shape. I'm sure any med-school dropout can tell these aren't the kind of breaks & bangs you get tripping over a toolkit. And ejecting can do specific damage too. I'll wait until I get to a contact or cell."

He smiled as he fiddled with some controls "I'm not much of a partier, but I would definitely be willing to make an exception." Her words about cells and contacts, "Tell you what, I know a guy, we were in school together, he's currently a medic on the station, he won't ask questions, that sound ok?" He breathed heavily for a moment "No offense but I'm not really up for the cloak and dagger, and meeting up with a contact or a cell isn't exactly my cup of caf."

"Plus, the sooner we get you healed, the sooner I can try to sweep you off your feet myself rather than you doing it accidentally" he winked.

Her droid also objected to her plans to avoid doctors, & not as pleasantly as their host. "Okay, okay," she sighed. "Sounds like you'd roll me up in blankets again & carry me to him if I didn't. Musta been solo for quite awhile to enjoy it that much...I'm not much of a wild partier either. As for cloak & dagger, getting me back needn't involve that, if you're my ride. And it might even be good clean fun."

"If you mean alone out here, just a few months actually," he sat back in the seat heavily. "But if you're asking about my life, I've pretty much flown solo the entire time, about the only people in my life have been a few friends at University and my Grandfather." He perked up when she mentioned getting her back. "Well, I'm gonna be your ride as long as you need one, and as for 'good clean fun' does it have to be 'clean'? Not much I do in this life is very 'clean.'" He indicates a small grease spot from some machinery on his face.

"No, it doesn't have to be sparkingly clean fun. But speaking of clean, can I trouble you for some semi-clean clothes that might fit me til I can pick up something on the station? Wouldn't be a good idea to wear either the flight suit or the tank & shots on station. I think I've got enough to cover my expenses in one of these pockets--or Razzle."

"Err, you didn't have anything stored in his legs, did you?" he thinks about it for a moment. "I have a garage coverall, but it might be a little big, and no where near flattering."

"No, he keeps my treasures in the main body. Why, what's with his legs?" she asked, alarmed. Before Drend could reply, a few words appeared on the screen. "No legs now."

"Poor guy," Cinowyn crooned. "I'll see you're all fixed up."

"I think they must've gotten torn off when you two ejected. Actually, if he doesn't mind non-matching parts, I could have him patched together in a day or two."

"That would be wonderful. And so would the coverall. As for flattering--the only thing flattering around here is your tongue Drend. The flightsuit makes me look fat."

"Well, Now that you're halfway out of it..." he trails "So, ever been to telos before?" He unclics his harness and goes back to a small locker next to the hatch to the cockpit and digs around.

She manages to get the flightsuit all the way off. "No, I haven't. What do you know about this station--and are you sure that Your Pal the Doctor will not tell tales as well as not ask questions?"

He grabs out the garage coverall and turns to the now mostly

undressed Cinowyn, stands speechless and remembers himself shaking his head "This station is old, like four thousand years, old, and he won't tell anyone, he owes me. Ah, somewhere around here," he turns to the symmetrically placed locker and digs in it "Citadel is a kinda cool place, lots of history, it was one of my study assignments back at University."

"Sounds neat." When he finds a tee, she takes it & the coverall to the cabin to change. Cinowyn now seems steadier on her feet, as long as she has something to hold onto. She can't help wondering if the captain will oblige her in that. She returns in the coverall, which is no looser & not nearly as warm as the flightsuit. She hasn't zipped it all the way up. "Are we ready & should I hide my suit?"

"Well, we're about 500 kilometers from landing, while you were changing I got ahold of port control" he fiddles with some landing controls "just stow it under a console, most of them have hidden compartments built in..." he starts to mutter under his breath, "Jeez granddad what were you planning for this thing? So, how are you feeling, the dizziness subsiding?"

"Yeah, I can stay upright for a few minutes, but I guess you still want your pal to check me over. Maybe he can give me something for the headache, and probably isn't smart to use Morpha too often. Think we can get a good meal while we're there?" She bends over to find one of the storage compartments, and finds it hard to stand back up.

"Oh, I'm sure, you like Twi'lek cuisine?" He notices her having trouble and goes over to her and helps her back upright.

"Right now I'd like just about any cuisine--but Hutt."

starlancerace (10/8/2008 8:26:22 PM): "I'm not sure Hutt cuisine is palatable by humanoids."He helps her into the co-pilot seat.

The ship lands in a small bay, 42, and the ship's main bay door opens. Drend is supporting Cinowyn, but not much, just crossed arms holding her steady. "Welcome to Citadel Station, population one thousand five hundred and three."

She laughs softly at that, glad of his steadying arms as well. Cinowyn waits close to him while Drend arranges for the docking and fuel.

"Ok, fine, seventy five, but only because I know there won't be any questions later." He finishes negotiating with the dock master and heads back over to where she is standing close and holds out his arm "Ready?"

Cinowyn placed a hand on his arm with a mischievous wink. "Lead on to your friend's abode, Captain."

"It's not his abode, it's his practice," and the term strikes him. "Captain?... that tickles me a bit." He leads her on down a few corridors and to a lift.

"Who else is there to claim the title?" Even the short trek was enough to show Cinowyn that while she was recovering, she was far from healed. When they arrived at Dino's practice, the pilot was so tired that she was actually glad to let him check her over, since it meant she could lie down for a while.

"So, Dino, she's gonna be all right, right?" Dino's full name was Din'olussevi, and yes, he's a Twi'lek "I'd hate to think I had done something wrong."

"No, she's going to be fine, the concussion just needs time, but this arm, you splinted it correctly, and with some bacta patches she should be fine." He gets a cast-like bacta wrap and rolls it around her arm "You should feel better in a few days."

"Thanks, doc," Cinowyn smiled at him as she slips her arm back into the sling. "Anything you can do for the headaches til they get better?"

"Fraid not" his braintails twitch "nothing strong enough I mean."

"I was afraid of that." To Drend, "I think you might have to carry me to dinner."

"Well, as long as you don't mind riding piggy back." he chuckles and Dino produces a crutch "you know, after this, we're even."

"Yes, I know, and thanks."

Lin Cheshire (10/8/2008 9:23:56 PM): Cinowyn just laughs at the crutch. "My legs are fine, but thanks. I think I can keep to my feet--but I intend to make an early night of it. Just dinner, no dancing, even if I do have 2 possible partners."

starlancerace (10/8/2008 9:25:34 PM): The Twi'lek's brain tails twitch. "No dancing for me either, but thanks for the thought," he turns to Drend. "She's cute, but I'm not gonna ask where you picked her up."

Drend shoots him a look and softens it to speak to Cinowyn "So, dinner?" He helps her off the examination table and onto her feet, steadying her again.

Cinowyn gives Dino a bright smile as thank you for the compliment. Once she is standing she tells Drend, "I really do think I'll be all right, it's mainly when I change position now that I have trouble. I just hope that restaurant is close."

"Fairly close. Come on." he leads her just a short ways away to the nearby bistro called "Chelk'aks." Its clientele was on the higher end of the spectrum. Cinowyn was not expecting that. And she had to wonder if they would fit the dress code. Drend said a few words to the head waiter, in Huttese, and they were seated, remarkably quickly.

It had been another lifetime since she had been in a place that was at all classy, but she hadn't forgotten how to act in even the best places. She was impressed by the speed they got a table, but said nothing. No properly brought up person noticed their host's arrangements. But she did need to clarify something related. "So which of my expenses tonight do I cover? Dinner, clothes. Don't look at me that way. Wearing my flightsuit will get us in trouble fast."

"Umm, how about you forget about the food, and you can pay for the clothes, unless there is something I specifically would like you to have."

Cinowyn shot him a surprised look, finding his offer both flattering & a little forward. "I couldn't allow you to do that. If there's some item I don't think of--tell me so I can get it," she told him.

"I'll be sure to." a waiter comes over and offers a pair of menus.

"How about you order and surprise me? Just noting with cardara seed, but I don't think that's used in Twi'lek recipes."

"Ok, but that means you agree to let me pay for dinner." He looks over the menu and orders two things and drinks... again in Huttese.

Cinowyn wonders what kind of clothing Drend was thinking he might want her to wear. He seemed too gentlemanly to have anything inappropriate in mind, but...

Drend looks across the table at his 'date' and is thinking to himself, "So, I'm wondering, is there something shorter I can call you? something perhaps a little more personal?"

"I've always been called Cinowyn." She doesn't seem offended by the question. If anything, she is pleased he seems to like her that much.

"Have you ever gone by Cin? I just ask because everytime we talk I feel like Cinowyn seems so formal, and I think while we're together we should be able to be a little more informal with each other, when appropriate."

"No. If anything, I got addressed more formally than 'Cinowyn' lots of times. But I think I like it, Drend."

"You know, for the longest time I didn't let anyone call me anything but Drendar, but when I was at uni they started calling me Drend, and honestly, I learned to love it." After they had finished their meal Drend asked "So, how was yours?"

"Delicious. So let's get a few clothes for me & head back to the ship." They spent the next hour in a couple different shops, where Cinowyn selected a few changes of practical items--but all showing off her figure to advantage. She glanced at several dresses but couldn't think that she might need them right now.

He picks out something of an emerald green shape fitting number and holds it out to her "What do you think of this?"

"What would I do with it?" She whispers a second question, "wear it under my flight suit? Or on our second date?"

He blushes slightly "Ah, perhaps" he stammers "the third one?" He sees someone he thinks he recognizes out of the corner of his eye and turns to Cin, "So, ready to pay and head back to the ship?"

She adds it to her purchases, grinning, her blush mirroring his. "I'll surprise you." Wrapped up in their flirtations, neither notices that the shopkeeper had been watching them with interest. As they approach the counter, he changes his expression to the expected fake smile-over-boredom and makes the usual rote "How are you and did you find everything you needed" remarks as they pay.

"Yes, thank you." On the return trip to the ship, Cin is fatigued enough to be unsteady again and leans on Drend. "I think I need to be tucked in when we get back--do you have a second cabin?"

"Er, no." As he is holding her close as they walk, when they arrive at the boarding ramp he cranes his neck around to kiss her. She stiffens for a moment, then returns the kiss, holding him tightly. She takes as much comfort as pleasure from it. The gentle affection he's been showing her all along has eased the grief and sense of failure from the attack on her flight. Eventually, she breaks the kiss, but doesn't let go. The dizziness she now feels is not just from the concussion.

"That was... intense." he doesn't break the embrace but realizes that they might want some more privacy and starts to remember himself "just one bunk."

At the same time Cin reminds herself where this could lead, but doesn't really want to end the embrace. "Uh, I guess we better go in. I'm so tired." She is sure even that sounds like an invitation. They make their way up the ramp to the bay and then towards the front of the ship. He stops in front of the cabin. "Err, I guess I'll be in the cockpit." He can't look at her suddenly, he doesn't know why, but he's embarrassed. She is also. After a long moment he finally just says "Oh, frell it," slips his arms around her waist and kisses her again.

Cinowyn had been about to slip into the cabin and end the awkwardness when Drend kissed her again. This one was even better. Instead of pulling away, she pressed closer against him, and didn't move away when they ended this one. After a long silence, "I wish--" she started, then changed to, "Well, guess it's time I get tucked in..." Her voice trails off, uncertain what she really wants to tell him.

"Well, I can probably stick around for a little while, you need your rest."

She smiles at him. "So are you tucking me in here or the copilot chair again?" He sits on the bunk with her, holding her close until she falls asleep, then he quietly tucks her in, and goes to the pilot's seat and settles in. *She needs her rest*, he thinks to himself, *and perhaps she'll rethink all this in the morning.*

Posted by Ice Hawk on 14 October 2008 12:29 AM:

Reil settled himself into the pilot's seat and began the preflight checklist. Koro coughed gently behind him. Zealos turned to face him.

"Yes, Mr. Bolera?"

"You're in the pilot's seat."

"Yes I am."

"This is my ship. I'll fly."

Reil sighed.

"Look, this thing is more than likely to break apart on us. It's going to take one helava pilot to pull this off. I am an experienced pilot, and probably the best shot we have of making it out of this alive. I'm going to need you to trust me on this."

Koro sat down in the co-pilot seat.

"So, you're sure you can fly this?"

"Nope. But, here's hopin'."

Reil brought it up with the repulsorlifts and angled it out of the hanger, then punched the throttle. They streaked towards the sky. . . then one of the repulsors gave out and there was a terrible screeching noise as the bottom hull scraped the edge of the hanger's opening. Koro turned to Reil.

"An experienced pilot, eh?"

"Shadup."

Reil compensated by giving it more thrust and pulling hard on the yoke.

"Our best shot of getting out of this alive, eh?"

"Shut. Up."

The *Long Shot* began to gain altitude again.

"I think I'll fl--"

"Shut up and make sure I didn't break anything important!"

Suddenly the comm unit crackled to life. A woman's voice came over the comm.

"Freighter *Long Shot* this is imperial ground control. Respond immediately!"

Reil pushed the throttle a little more and flicked the switch to respond.

"This is the freighter *Long Shot*. What can I do for you?"

"You are in violation of Imperial protocol, we have not received a flight plan from you or cleared you for departure."

"Well you see, we were in a bit of a rush, but, as I'm sure you can attest to, we can't be blamed for wanting to get off this cesspool in a hurry. Thanks for telling us though, I'll keep it in mind in the future."

"Freighter *Long Shot*, you are violation of Imperial protocol, cease your flight and return to your hanger at once!"

"Ma'am, do you think I'm stupid or drunk? 'Cause I'd have to be one of the two to obey that order."

Koro rolled his eyes.

"You certainly fly like you're one of the two. . ."

"SHADUP!"

"Freighter *Long Shot*, be advised, if you do not return to port, we will dispatch fighters to intercept you."

"You do that then."

Reil shut off the comm system.

The *Long Shot* broke the atmosphere.

"So, do we have any idea of where we'd like to be going, or should I just input co-ordinates at random?"

Posted by Drendar Morevo on 14 October 2008 12:24 PM:

Another Collaborative effort by Ris and Drendar Morevo

Drend awakens in the pilots chair, he had checked twice in the night to make sure she was alright, but he had let her sleep

till ten-hundred hours standard, hopefully she was up for breakfast. He walked into the cabin and sat next to her on the bed, and tried to shift her with his hand slightly. "Wakey wakey."

Cinowyn smiles up at him. "Thanks for sitting with me, Drend." She was a little surprised he hadn't stayed the night, but pleased to find he was that honorable. Maybe in the future they might... "Got breakfast ready or is that my job?"

"Ah, I thought we would go get some, Dino invited us for some breakfast." He sits back a little "You get dressed and we can head out."

"Great--or does he want to do more scans or something, too?" She sat up. "I'll be ready in a couple minutes." She sounded a lot more perky today, to Drend. As Drend gets up to leave, she can't resist teasing him. "Does this count as a second date? For wearing that green jumpsuit?"

"No, he might do a quick scan of your arm to see the progression," he was happy to hear her in a happier mood "sounds good, I'll wait right outside, unless you *want* to change your clothes in front of me," he offers with a wry grin. "Second date? ah, no, I want you to save that for something a little more special than breakfast with Dino. Not that just being with you isn't special."

"Out Captain!" She picks up the pillow in her good hand and throws it awkwardly at him--but there is a smile on her face at the compliment.

He ducks the soft projectile and makes his way in the corridor and waits near the tapcaf already running with his morning batch.

Cin dresses quickly, smiling to herself. Drend was sweet she thought, then told herself, *Off the throttle, girlfriend!* *[i] A few minutes later and she and Drend were on their way to meet Dino.*

Drend extended his arm again, as a courtesy, he had figured out last night at dinner that she has some bearing about her, and he thought he should go with it. As they approached Dino's apartment on the station Drend looked over and said "Just, don't be surprised if its a total mess," and hit the door tone. Dino called through the Door "Just come in." So instead Drend opened the door to a, remarkably, clean apartment.

"Won't bother me--most of my squadronmates are messy guys," she grinned. Cinowyn thought he couldn't be worse than Kev, the [i]Tantive medic, a few years older than her, who kept a sparkling medbay--and quarters that looked like the aftermath of a "Storm of the Century." She greeted the Twi'lek doctor warmly. "Good morning, and thanks again. I feel a lot better today." Dino smiled and gestured her to take a seat on the couch. She sat a bit quickly and felt a slight dizziness, put a hand to her forehead. What I get for saying I feel great.

"You alright?" Drend sits down next to her on the couch. Dino comes over and seems to have prepared some breakfast of ronto hash and some kind of eggs. "Caf?" he offers.

Cin takes a cup of caf. It's not her favorite drink, but she has gotten used to it since joining the Alliance. She takes a small sip before answering Drend. "I'm fine. Still get a little dizzy if I change positions fast, is all." She takes a larger sip of the caf. "My this is good caf."

Dino smiles, "Special Blend, plenty of sugar."

Drend begins to dig into his breakfast, skipping caf for now "So, Dino, is that droid repair shop still open?"

Cin eats daintily, letting the guys talk shop.

"Should be, but the owner changed rather recently," Dino noted.

"How recently?"

"Last Night actually," he muses.

"Now that *is* odd, is it because of the planetary economic

trouble?" he munches some hash.

"Could be, never know though."

Drend finishes his breakfast in due time and looks over at Cin to see how close she is to finishing.

"Almost ready to go?" he asks

"Appetite's not quite back to normal, huh?" Dino asked kindly.

"Just eating slow, listening to you two," Cinowyn replied, as she finished the last few bites quickly, then took another sip of the caf. "But yes, I'm done, Drend." She starts to stand up but, Dino gestures her to stay where she is, as he opens a medical bag.

"Let me check a couple things again." He takes out a scanner and runs it over her arm "Should be fully healed by the end of the day, but it will be tender for another day after that." Dino then scans her head, and gently runs his hands over the tender areas. "Head's about healed up too, just take it a little easy for another day or so." Dino then asks Drend, "Oh, before you two head off, could you join me in the kitchen?"

Drend looks somewhat confused "Uh, sure Dino." Cin takes another cup of the caf while Drend goes with Dino.

As he brings Drend into the small apartments kitchenette "So, how long have you two been together?"

Drend looks at him. "Why?"

Dino gestures with his hands and his brain tails twitch. "Drend, I knew you at Uni, you had never even had a girlfriend."

Drend gives him a "you are not about to tell me what I think you're gonna tell me" look. "Before you get ahead of yourself, I've only known her for a short while."

"I gotta ask, Drend, have you ever *been* with a woman?"

Drend looks shocked for a moment "I don't see how that's relevant at all! She's a nice girl, she's just been through something crazy, and she doesn't need me complicating her life like that. And the answer to your question, quite frankly, is none of your business."

Dino holds up his hands defensively "Whoa, watch it kid. I'm not suggesting anything, just making sure you know what you could be getting into. You should see yourself the way you look at her. Honestly kid, I'd swear you're smitten."

Drend's face flushes at this "Errrr... yeah. I do like her, alot, and I really don't want her to realize that she doesn't like me, or something awful like possibly screwing this up. She's the first girl I've met in a long time I even felt I could connect with, and I really don't want to mess it up, y'know?" he stands there, hands in the pockets of his jacket.

"Drend, you're 20 years old, and for all I know the longest relationship you ever had was that one date with Marget where she told you she just 'didn't like you that way.' I remember how you were man, you understood but you were crushed. I just don't need to see that again."

"I told you that was in the past and I wanted to forget it." He grits his teeth.

"Y'know, with as strong as you feel about her, why haven't you told her yet?" Dino asks, pointedly.

"I..." his words trail off "I don't want to scare her off."

"Wait, wait, wait, something happened last night between you two didn't it?" Dino seems to have gotten to the core of the matter. "Yes." Drend replies. "And its one hundred percent, none of your business."

"You kissed her didn't you." Dino smiles wide showing off his pointed teeth.

Drend immediately gets flustered and his entire face goes from white to red. "Twice," he breathes.

Dino quits his smiling and clasps his friend around the

shoulders "Drend, what are you worrying for! She's kissed you twice, she wouldn't have been willing to do that if she didn't like you!" Finally he releases his friend and says "Come on, lets go back out, she might be getting bored, and you two," he smiles again, "need to get going." They come out of the kitchenette and Drend walks over to where Cin is sitting on the couch and holds out his hand. "Ready to go?"

Cinowyn takes his hand to help herself up, and turns to Dino. "Thank you for breakfast & taking care of me, Dino. You must have been giving Drend detailed orders on taking care of me so I don't have a relapse?" She keeps her hand in Drend's as they leave

"More than you know," Dino smiles and Drend shoots him a little look.

Once they are out of the apartment Drend holds Cin a little closer. "The droid shop is two levels down, should be some parts for Razzle in there. So, Dino was telling me a few things, things he thinks I should do," he kids a little.

"Like what? Make sure I drink more milk than fizzades & brush my teeth twice a day?" she kids back, enjoying the closeness.

"And to make sure you took your vitamins," he chuckles and smiles at her, "Actually his suggestions were of a rather more personal nature."

"Oh? Like whether I need several more formfitting jumpsuits?"

"Ah," he blushes, "not exactly." The two of you arrive at the store, parts litter the walls, derelict droids sit in the center at the back of the store is a desk and an attendant.

As they look around in the shop a while Drend notes that there is, remarkably, little in the way of astromech parts so he goes up to the person at the desk to ask him if they have anything else in stock, he leaves Cin alone looking at some parts for a minute.

"So, do you actually have any parts for an R2 astromech, like leg servos or replacement parts or anything?" The man behind the counter simply replies no, but he makes casual conversation wanting to know where they are planning on heading next. Drend doesn't say anything specific, but says that they should be leaving fairly soon. Then Drend gets a nasty sensation in his gut, but he puts it aside when he goes back over to Cin. She somehow makes him feel better.

"Lets go, I don't think they have anything we can use here, odd isn't it?"

"Yes, and it's not so," she whispered, under guise of a quick nuzzle. "When his assistant opened the stockroom door, I saw a crate of motivator inducers. Made for agri-droids, & not a good company, but would have worked." Just because Cinowyn preferred to let others do maintenance didn't mean she knew nothing about it.

This was not good at all. As a girl Cinowyn had seen enough vapid noblewomen and celebs to do a decent imitation. She leaned on Drendar as if suddenly faint. "Darling, I feel so famished--I do need my breakfast, you know what the nurse said. We can let you have fun with hardware later."

"So either, he didn't know, or he was being purposeful?"

Drend has a moment of fuzz pass his brain *breakfast? but we just ate?* then it clicks, he straightened up and curled his arm around Cin, taking the cue as if an actor in a class "Ah, quite right dear, we should be going." He turns to wave to the man behind the desk. "Fast, or slow?" he mutters to her.

"Slow--and careful."

"This is bad," Damon muttered. They'd ditched the Imperial speeder just outside of town, and had moved through the back alleyways back towards their ship. Trouble was, by the time they'd gotten to the spaceport it was painfully obvious the Empire had finally figured out their little ruse. Black-armored stormtroopers were patrolling the streets, clearly on the lookout for anyone suspicious.

"Looks like they've noticed that their buddies haven't called to check in yet," Thel murmured, smiling grimly. Damon shook his head wearily.

"How are we going to get to the ship?" he asked. "There's an awful lot of them."

"We'll think of something," Thel said confidently. He cocked his head. "Better hide, I think another patrol's coming."

The Imperial troopers turned the corner just as Damon and the others ducked into a side alley. They kept completely silent, hardly daring to breathe for fear that the troopers would find them. The thud of the armored boots came closer and closer.

Mir shifted nervously, and in doing so scraped her boot against a discarded metal can. The footsteps stopped. "What was that?"

The footsteps abruptly turned and began coming directly toward their hiding place. Thel tensed, his hand on his lightsaber. Damon weakly gripped his blaster, determined not to go down without a fight--

"I know a young lady from Corulag," a voice abruptly burst into drunken song not twenty feet from them. The singer continued singing a ribald old drinking song as he stumbled into the alley, apparently passing within a few feet of the nonplussed stormtroopers.

"Just an old drunk," the captain said in disgust. "Move along."

The armored footsteps slowly faded in the distance as the unseen drunk continued his song. He sang in a tremulous voice for a few more bars before abruptly stopping. A series of quick, shuffling footsteps heralded the appearance of a wizened old man, who looked at them with a mixture of curiosity and amusement.

"How did ye like me song, buckos? Comes in handy for driving the pests away, eh?"

Now it was Thel's turn to be nonplussed. Damon, however, squinted through the dusk in astonishment -- the voice sounded somewhat familiar to him. "Old man Grince?"

The old man started. "Eh? Who's that?" He peered into the dark alley.

"It's me, Grince. It's Damon."

Grince gaped in astonishment. "Why, so it is! Almost didn't recognize ye, boy!" He chuckled in a self-satisfied manner. "Good thing I scared those buzzards off after all, eh?"

"Why'd you do that?"

Grince glanced around conspiratorially. "Empire's not very popular in these parts. 'Specially after what they did to your ma and pa." His eyes gleamed. "You here for revenge? Say the word, an ol' Grince will do his best to help ye."

"Actually," Thel interposed, "We're looking for two friends of ours -- a boy and an older man. Have you heard anything about them?"

Grince frowned thoughtfully. "Can't say as I have," he said. "But I know someone who might've." He glanced out into the street again. "Best hurry. Those patrols'll be back soon."

Posted by ij thompson on 15 October 2008 06:24 PM:

Posted by Corr Terek on 14 October 2008 11:26 PM:

Now that the *Long Shot* had leveled out (and ceased its agonized, metallic groaning), the passengers in the crew lounge were able to unstrap themselves, and stretch their legs.

"That was tense," Fi remarked, twisting her ribcage and wincing slightly as she remembered her healing ribs. "Search me, though, I'm actually happy to be off the ground."

"Yeah," Cali agreed, "outta the frying pan, into the fire!"

Tarynn eyed the young slave girl curiously. "My, you're an optimist."

"Ah, you know," Cali grinned, "prep for the worst, get surprised by the best. Hey, where'd you learn to fight like that?"

Tarynn's expression chilled slightly. "Correspondence course."

"Uh-huh..." Cali replied, eyebrows raised in disbelief.

"Hey," Fi interjected, sparing their redheaded friend an interrogation. "Where are Zealos and Koro taking us, anyway?"

Tey stood up. "If this ship is as prone to failure as Tonto says it is--"

To this, the droid buzzed indignantly.

"No offense," Tey apologized. "But if so, I can't see them taking any chances. One of Tatooine's closer neighbours would be our best bet..."

Posted by Ris on 16 October 2008 10:36 AM:

Another collaboration

Drend slowly, but deliberately ambled with her out the door of the part shop. As they exited Drend notices out of the corner of his eye that the clerk has dissappeared. Cinowyn continued her little act, pretending to be oblivious and also more hurt than she was. She wanted anyone who might follow them to completely dismiss her as a threat. Once they were a good five meters out from the shop, the security gate closed on the door, preventing any re-entry. "Now that's not a good sign." He said a little louder, but not obnoxiously, "Honey, do you think we should go to that little bistro for breakfast," hoping that anyone tailing them might try to head them off there.

"You are so sweet--what a great idea," she giggled. Cin added in a whisper, "What next?"

Drend held her close as to pretend to be making a personal comment. "We take the most obtuse route back to the landing bay and hope to avoid tails." He continued to lead her down hallways and junctions that had nothing to do with the bistro or the landing bay, past an old Ithorian Embassy, and near the old TSF offices that were now quite empty. They had moved into a smaller office more towards the docking bays several years ago.

Cinowyn got impatient to return to the ship--and her droid. "Can you warn Razzle? They might choose to wait for us at the docking bay."

"I can ping my ship, which will give Razzle the same signal, what do you want me to say?"

"At least he might get us a visual of whoever's after us. Since he got out of your partition, maybe he's interfaced well enough with your ship that he can do something to keep them away--electrify the ramp, lock out the repulsors. What do you think?"

"I think I'll have him drop the waste disposal, that will cause any humanoid to veer away."

"I like that," Cin said with a wicked smile. "It won't do any droids or remotes they might have any good either."

He reached into his pocket, and without removing it, and hoping he's hitting the right keys, signaled the ship, and Razzle by extension, to perform the prescribed command. Just then the corridor ahead becomes blocked by a small cargo droid that has

stopped dead in the hallway. "Not good, only way around is to double back about 50 meters."

"Bet the family fortune that's exactly where they are, if this isn't a bunch of coincidences--and right now, I **do not** believe in those."

Drend reached in his jacket for his blaster "I hate this part." But he didn't take it out, he just made sure it was there. "So, do we pretend to not be the people they are looking for and hope we throw them off or do we wait for them to come to us and take them guns blazing?"

"I'm a snubjock--not much for subtlety. 'Sides, I'm sure they know exactly who we are. Well what we look like anyways."

Drend seeing that *this* was as good a time as any also took the opportunity to remove his blaster, it was a heavy blaster that had been modified to look like a standard pistol, but it was much more powerful than the one in Cin's boot holster... he checked the power cell and got to the side of the corridor attempting to find cover. He got behind a refuse bin and ducked low. "Set for stun?"

"Yeah," Cin told him reluctantly. She would just as soon vape them, but realized it would be a bad idea. Cin removed her holdout from her boot. It didn't look very impressive next to Drend's--but, like most Alderaanians, she was a very good shot. *Once we're out of this, I'm getting something bigger, to replace the target blaster that got vaped in my snub.*

Soon enough two thugs made their way down the corridor, Drend was careful, he waited. And silently, he prayed. He noticed one of them was in fact the shop keeper of the Droid Parts store they had left just earlier. Cin also held her little weapon at the ready. She also recognized the guy.

He indicated silently he would take the guy on the right, and hoped she got the message, and prepared to fire. Cin took aim at the one on the left. The holdout did have one advantage for her, it could be fired easily with just one hand. Nevertheless, she supported her blaster forearm on a small crate.

For what felt like an infinitesimal second Drend pulled the trigger releasing the blue bolt at his target, now a bare 2 meters away, he wanted to make sure not to miss, he wanted to make sure they would be caught totally by surprise. He noticed nothing for the time, he heard a second shot right after his own, and both adversaries were twitching on the decking of the corridor, both pistols in hand, both totally unprepared for having been shot so quickly or easily. He waited a solid minute for reinforcements to come bounding down the corridor, blasters going off like on Scovilla Founders Day, but no one came.

He came up from his crouch behind the can and approached the two prone figures, gun at the ready, and tapped one with his boot. He didn't shift. Drend didn't holster his blaster, but he did turn back to Cin, "here's hoping there's only two of them."

"Yeah. Shall we take the blasters? I can use something bigger when my arm's healed up. Or can we make it look likethey were doing something stupid like a duel?"

"Take their blasters, but I've got a better Idea." He holstered his blaster back in his jacket and then went about moving the two men, intertwining them into a sort of sitting embrace. He then proceeded to take the laces out of their boots and used them to tie their hands around each others backs and to tie their ankles. "Now when they wake up they'll be sore, and in an awkward position." He looked and found a wallet in one of their back pockets, it included an ident-card, a starport visa, and about 1000 credits in cold hard cash. "I don't know about you, but I don't walk around with a thousand credits in my back pocket."

Cin took the weapons and then kept watch as Drendar arranged their pursuers. She surveyed his handiwork. "Just for

the record, I am not into those kind of fantasies."

Drend laughed at her comment as he rummaged through the rest of their clothing that he could actually access.

He looked into the other thug's pocket and found something a little more problematic, a comm code, one Drend knew could only be for a communications channel back to the Scovilla System. "Sith. Spit." Drend uttered. "These guys must work for my cousin. This is, decidedly, not good."

"So I noticed. Perhaps you'd better tell me all about it. While we're in hyperspace. And I don't think we should waste any time getting there."

He then immediately turned to Cin. "Right, we need to get to the ship, now." He took her by the hand, not forcefully mind you, and led her down the nearest side corridor, and they found themselves at a janitorial office, the door was open and he shoved past several crates of cleaning solvent. Making sure Cin was still with him he finally found what he was looking for, a maintenance corridor.

Rushing down it he found that while Cin was not at 100 percent she was keeping a steady pace with him. He got to the end of the maintenance corridor and then to a ladder. "Why don't you give me those" and took the blasters from Cin, tucked them into his jacket and had her start to climb the ladder ahead of him.

When they reached the landing above he knew it was only 50 meters to the landing bay, he could make it there in a minute or so at a dead run, but he was already laden, and the adrenaline from their little battle was already starting to wear off. They instead skulked down the corridor leading to the landing bays, taking twice as long as simply walking.

They narrowly avoided being spotted by a large Chagarian, who while Drend didn't know if he worked for his cousin, he thought it was best if few people saw them. When they finally reached the bay they knew it was the right one by the sheer noxious smell coming from it. There was now a vile looking puddle of chemicals sitting next to the ship. It stank worse than a fresh fish market on Talasea could ever smell. He hit the button on his controller indicating for the ship to lower the ramp and he made sure Cin got aboard first, but he wasn't far behind. He closed the ramp right behind them and called while inside the ship "Ok, Razzle, can you start the preflight sequence?"

The Ship obligingly hummed to life, and he looked over to Cin, "You can handle being my co-pilot, right?" He said it with a smile indicating he had no doubt of her skill and they headed to the cockpit. He took the pilot's seat and locked himself in and noted that Cin had done the same.

He tapped the comm "Citadel Station Control, this is *Puddlejumper* making an early exit, please advise."

Citadel Control responded quickly, "*Puddlejumper*, pattern is empty, you are cleared for launch."

Drend mostly neglected the repulsors barely getting off the ground before he kicked in the thrusters and pulled out of the bay, once they were clear he gunned the engines and made for space and plotted a quick, simple, jump, just to the other end of the system where they could stop and try to come up with a plan. He ignored all conversation, concerned only with getting away as fast as possible. Once they were in hyperspace he finally breathed.

Cinowyn was not too happy they had to leave so quickly, although that was nothing unusual to a Rebel. But she had wanted time to try to inform her superiors the little she knew of what happened and arrange to get back. But it was just as well she hadn't done so. She was not about to bring trouble on them--and Drendar's family sounded like trouble. Fortunately there was little to do until they reverted. Rubbing her still-splinted and

bandaged arm idly, she turned to Drendar. "So care to tell me all about the family skeletons now before we make plans on our next move?"

Drend sat back in the seat, his head hanging heavy on his shoulders. "I hate to sound like a cliché, but it's a long story."

"All the good ones are. But we've got 2 days before we drop to make the second jump."

He checked his chrono. "But we have plenty of time." He started slow and began to explain, "First thing you need to know is that my family is, well, right awful. The only person in my entire family who has even remotely nice to me was my grandfather, he always insisted that I had more potential than the rest of the family saw, he trained me in tech and mechanical and I even managed to learn most of his idiosyncratic design style, but when I went away to Coronet, he died suddenly, so when I got back home I had found I had inherited his entire property by will, which included, among other things, this ship." He started to get a little frustrated at this point. "The Family went nuts, I had inherited the ship he designed, his parts yard, and his design library. Which meant, somewhat literally, that the rest of the family got nothing. I knew the family would come after me, so I loaded up this sucker with what parts I could, jury rigged the engines and hyperdrive as best as I could, and jetted away.

"What I didn't count on was my cousin." He shifted uncomfortably. "See, my cousin actually managed to make a bit of a name for himself, becoming the prime shipping magnate for the entire planet, he even owned a space station in orbit. When I was leaving I had to dock there temporarily, my cousin greeted me warmly, fed me, introduced me to his wife, and then promptly told me if I didn't hand over the ship, he would take my life, then my ship. So, I shot him, escaped the station, and wrecked the main docking bay in the process. Since then, he's kinda held a bit of a grudge."

"I can't see why," Cin commented.

"I'm sorry."

"Nothing for you to feel sorry about." Actually, she felt sorry for him. Cinowyn had had a wonderful family. *Well at least Trevor was offworld at college. Maybe I'll see him again...*

"So, you've heard my story, what's yours." He went back to fiddling with controls, but listened intently.

"But I need to get in contact with the Rebels, sometime. Arrange a rendezvous."

"Ok, but how 'bout for now we find somewhere to lay low?"

"I agree. It'll take time for me to find a contact anyways. But I have a duty to return. And I'd like to return with you." She gave Drend a smile, a hint that it wasn't just duty to carry out that mission to escort this tech to whatever business he and the Alliance had. "You wanted to know about my life?"

He took the hint with a smile "Of course," and he sat back in the seat, leaving the controls alone, giving her his full attention.

"Promise you won't laugh or anything? I grew up in Aldera and I wanted to command a royal starship. I trained at the Royal Merchant Space Academy, and at 16 was the most junior navigator on my father's corvette, *Tantive*. Midship Cinowyn Antilles.

"But I got restless. I wanted to **really fight** the Empire, not help our rulers work behind the scenes. So I begged my Dad to let me train as a fighter pilot." She sighs sadly. "What a fool idealist. I'd be a big heroine and once the Empire was defeated, I'd return to my post on *Tantive*. Pick up right where I left, work my way up and be ready to take command when Dad was ready to retire. As if everyone I loved was immortal. What a fool, huh?"

"But my father and mother let me go anyways, and heard me make those vows, as they'd heard me sworn into royal service.

And my Dad sent me off with his love--and Razzle. And so I wasn't aboard when the ship was captured. And here I am. Not much older than that silly girl--but a lot sadder & wiser."

He doesn't laugh at all, but he does ask a question "Alderaan?"

"Yeah." She looked down. "And now I lost my entire flight, too."

He unstrapped himself from his seat and swiveled towards her. "I don't know if this makes up for anything, but you've gained something."

She looked up, a faint smile on her face. "Besides the mission objective and an R2 the size of a small transport?"

He smiled. "Cheeky."

"So what else did I gain? Oh yeah, a broke arm."

"Geez, you know how to cut to the quick don't you?" He gave her a tiny bit of a spiteful grin.

"I'm sorry. You're much nicer than the arm. Which still hurts like hell. I think I banged it during our run. Maybe we should check, and put on that other bacta bandage Dino gave you?"

"Yeah," he got up and held out his hand. "Come on, lets see if I can get you patched up a little more."

Cinowyn sat at the tiny lounge table, her arm lying on it's surface. Her hand was posed in what Dino had called the "take a mug of ale" position. Drend gently removed the old bacta wrap, then applied the new one.

"How does it feel?" He flexed it back and forth "A little better?"

"Yes, thanks. You could be a doctor."

"Ah, no, Play Doctor maybe, but be a Doctor? I'll leave that to Dino."

"He's a good doctor. Bet he's popular with the female patients," she added for Drendar's benefit.

"Now, don't you start, I had to hear enough about him at Uni, I don't need it from you too. Plus," he added, "he taught me everything I know, whether I wanted to know it or not."

"I could tell how close of friends you are. And I like having you doctor me, too." Her voice was warm.

"You're a great patient." he smiled, ever so slightly.

Posted by Drendar Morevo on 17 October 2008 09:05 AM:

Cinowyn and Drendar discussed what they intended to do on Bepin. "No, I don't know much about Scholar. I think that is the point," she laughed. "Just that she provides some of the intel we have on what's going on in the area. I doubt she can do anything for us other than pass on that I survived and you are with me. As far as I know, she isn't in a cell. There might be one there or in a nearby system."

"That sounds like a good idea, plus, meeting a rebel spy sounds like it might be exciting," he smiles then a thought crosses his eyes "Oh, hey, I just remembered, my granddad had an old co-worker who lives on Bepin now, we could look him up and see if he can help with our hyperdrive problem."

"Didn't you tell me you weren't into cloak & vibrodagger? And maybe this guy will have parts for Razzle." Cinowyn noticed how easy it was to talk to Drend. And he had good ideas too. "So you still think a couple out to make a killing at the casino will work? I guess we need that to pay for the parts?"

"Cloak and vibrodagger, no, but spies? they sound like interesting people. He might have parts for Razzle, or know someone who does." Cin was cute, easy to talk to and always up for some casual flirting, why hadn't Drend just gotten up the courage to say something to her yet?

"Real spies aren't like the ones in action holos--obvious from

50 clicks in pitch darkness," she reminded Drend. "I met a couple getting from *Tantive* to Yavin for pilot training."

"So, speaking of posing as a couple."

"What about posing as a couple--you've got another plan, then?" Cin tried to keep from sounding disappointed. What mattered was that they contacted the Alliance and got the parts they needed, with no one the wiser. Not how they did it or that she wanted something like that.

"No, no, no, don't misunderstand me, that sounds like it would be great! Its just that, the... oh nevermind." He gets up from where he is sitting, "I'm gonna go work on Razzle for a few minutes."

Cinowyn starts to call him back, or offer to help. But she can't figure out which one. *Did I just mess up a nice friendship?* Cin wondered. *Or is this really only one of those "2 beings stuck in the same place" things, so there wasn't anything to mess up?* Unfortunately, the only remedy she ever heard of was to wait and see.

I am so stupid Drend thought to himself. He sat down at the work table and began working on Razzle's domed head, attempting to replace the motivator.

(some hours later). Cinowyn woke up a couple hours after going to bed. She felt bad about using the one bunk, but Drend insisted. She'd been badly hurt, the pilot chair was about as comfortable as thin as the bunk mattress was, and so on. Like always, he'd said good night and left her to rest. Maybe if she hadn't been so ditzzy earlier, tonight might have been different.

She got up, pulled on her coverall and slipped back to the cockpit. "Drend?" she calls softly.

Drend was in the cockpit, not quite asleep when he heard Cin's voice, something like a ghost in his drowsiness.

"Drend, why don't you go lie down, I've stood watches you know, when I was a jr. navigator. And I'm all better. Arm's just a little sore sometimes."

He shifts to a more awakened state "Huh? Oh, no, thats alright, but if you want to just sit and talk for a minute, thats alright."

She wasn't sure that she wanted to talk, didn't end so well earlier. She just wanted company. From what Drend had told her of how he'd rescued her, she was the only survivor of her flight. And she hadn't really gotten over Alderaan or the *Tantive's* loss. She had insisted to the minders that she was okay & they'd taken her at her word. They were too busy with those who were clearly traumatized to worry about someone who could cope.

Drend sat there in silence for a long time, he didn't speak to her at first because of how things had ended earlier, but then he made a simple, casual, remark "Its so quiet out there."

"Yeah. I just couldn't get back to sleep. So I thought you could use the bunk. Since you've been letting me borrow it while I was recovering. Maybe we should see if we can't get in a cot or something I can use."

"Well, I probably couldn't sleep in it if I wanted to tonight."

"Why not? And you need a good night's sleep. You haven't been getting a lot." She wondered what was keeping him awake. Worries over his cousin?

"Because of you..." before it sounds like something bad is going to happen again, "Its just not something I'm used to." He stammered a little "Its just that, the bed, it'll smell like you, feel like you, that kind of thing. "I don't think I could sleep in it without wanting to never get out."

Cinowyn just looks at him. He's half-asleep, voice dreamy. It sounded a lot like what she's wanted, a guy who wants her. Not since Kev. But they'd never done much. The young doctor was too honorable to fool around with a girl several years younger,

even if her parents approved of him as an escort. Even if Cinowyn had been older, he would not have risked getting involved with the captain's daughter. But he'd promised her that when she returned to the ship, he would ask permission to court her.

That was all in the past. Kev was dead, either killed when *Tantive IV* was boarded, or executed shortly after. So here she was in the present with another guy she liked. But how much of what Drend has just said was really about her, or was it only that she was the only woman around? She was pretty sure that she really liked Drend, that her interest wasn't only that he had rescued her and taken care of her.

"Hmmm..." he drifted somewhat in his speech "Cin."

"What, Drend?" Her voice was also dreamy, as she has been thinking about Kev, whom she'd cared a great deal for, even if it hadn't gotten to the point of love, and now wondering how attracted Drendar was.

"I don't want to pretend to be a couple."

This caught her off guard. "So we need a new plan then? What kind of cover can we come up with then?" *Oh, not again, that conversation is when everything went sour earlier.*

"I mean I don't want to pretend."

"You mean you want to--well be a couple or something?" Cinowyn was sure she sounded ditz.

"That would be nice." he smiled in a stupor. He'd fallen asleep with a smile. That didn't happen in the holos she'd seen, Cinowyn thought as she drifted off at the copilot station.

Drend shifted a tiny bit in his seat to look at the timer for the hyperdrive, 30 seconds to reversion, nice. He looked at Cin who was still asleep and a naughty grin crossed his face. He thought better of it, she didn't need him yelling out "STAR DESTROYER" and scaring her half to death. Finally he thought to himself, *perhaps if I got Razzle to give me a hint.* He tapped a few keys on the nearby console "Hey Razzle, its Drend, mind helping me real quick?"

What Do You Need?

"I need something to wake up Cin in an amusing way, any suggestions?"

You Could Tickle Her

Drend kinda shifted a little "Tickle? how ticklish is she?"

I Do Not Know. Have Seen Others Tickle Her. She Laughs.

He smiled, "Thanks for the advice, Razzle." He got up from the seat and slowly moved towards her seat, and made sure to avoid a noisy deck plate. He drifted a hand down next to her neck and tickled her lightly.

Cinowyn walked in the moonlight, down to the crystalline stream, her green silk skirts twining around her legs in the light breeze. A dark-haired man in long robes stepped out of the shadows to take her in his arms. He lifted her up, laughing as she looked down and kissed him lightly. The moonlight made his pale blue eyes glow. As he set her back on her feet, she embraced him. He returned the embrace, kissing her. She felt a hand slip toward the gown's fastenings. He kissed her, the stubble on his cheek tickled her cheek and neck as they--

It was someone's fingers at her neck, Cinowyn realized as she woke. She reached for the attacker's hands, pushing herself up. She got a grip, but overreached, and both of them landed in the narrow space between their stations. Cinowyn managing to get on top of the "Attacker" before she realized it was Drendar.

He grunted out a laugh, "You know, if you wanted to get on top of me, you should've just asked." It was not his normal way of talking, but the sudden activity had gotten him in a playful mood.

Cinowyn was redfaced from embarrassment--especially after Drend's remark. "Sheesh, Drend? What were you thinking of?"

He shifted under her a little. "Err, Razzle suggested that I could tickle you awake and that you would enjoy it."

"And now I'm going to finish the job!" he said with a rush as he immediately started to tickle her sides. But just as things were getting fun the Hyperdrive indicator flashed red and the ship came out into realspace. Noticing that she was still on top of him, "Just when things were getting interesting... I guess I better jump on that, get us ready to land." He attempted to shift out from under her, but found he couldn't, either because he subconsciously didn't want to, or because Cin had her legs in a vice grip on his sides.

She was laughing, too. The girl was enjoying herself. It had been a while since she had engaged in any horseplay like this. So rather than attempt to get up, Drend decided instead to tickle more hoping her giggling would cause her legs to relax and let him up.

While the 2 pilots tussled, Razzle did some docking preps, contacting the droid controller, even downloading the guides to Besper for the pair.

"Are you always this lithe?" he asked with a smile on his face. "Wouldn't you like to find out--yourself?" she gasped between giggles. "Oh, no, not there!" Cin gasped as he ran fingers over ribs. "Please--I'll let you up!"

He didn't know whether to be spurred by her sudden protest, or see how she reacted to what he could do. He finally stopped when he was afraid she was about to hyperventillate, realizing he was gasping for breath himself, he propped himself up on his arms. Grateful for the respite, Cin laid her head on his chest, hearing both their gasps and her friend's heartbeat. He found that he liked where she was, not for any physical reason mind you, but he just found her closeness reassuring. *Maybe things will work out between us.*

Cinowyn took similar comfort from him. However, they did need to get busy if they were going to find anyone on this city. "I guess I should let you up, we do need to dock and find Zefram and Scholar." Reluctantly she got up and gave a hand to Drend. He got up and as he did he found himself in a sort of embrace with her again. He smiled and sat back down in the pilots seat and set up for their landing "Zephram shouldn't be hard to find, but if Scholar is as elusive as you say she is, she's probably hiding rather well, or in plain sight."

"Looks like Razzle got us the tourist maps and stuff. Thanks, sweetie. Hmm, got a big casino--must be trying to keep as much of the wages local as possible. Could be a good place to start. Are you a gambling man?" She continued to scroll through the entertainment and shopping info. "Razzle! You didn't!"

"Ah, I'm fair at Pazaak, decent at Dejarik, horrible at sabaac." he heard her protestation to Razzle "What did he do?"

"Made a hotel reservation..."

"Oh, don't tell me," he said in a sarcastic tone.

There Are 2 Beds. Customary Here. Sleeping Aboard Would Raise Questions.

Drend's mind came out of the gutter when he saw 2 beds on the reservation. "So, Casinos, fancy people, sounds like a good place for a second date."

"Razz, I think your out-of-body experience is making you quirky," she told her droid. "We need to dress then--do we move up the green jumpsuit? Or did you want to look up your grandfather's pal first?"

"Lets try him first, like I said, he should be easier to find, so we get that stuff done, then we can see what we can dig up on Scholar." As the ship landed Drend and Cin got dressed for their

parts, Cin and Drend would be acting the loving newlyweds who, thanks to their parents having recently gotten them a room on Cloud City, were about to have a lovely honeymoon. Of course being old fashioned their parents had reserved a pair of beds rather than just one.

Drend looks at the map and finds the area where Zephram most likely would be, they got off the ship and made their way via tram system to that area of the city. Drend looked through the directory that had been loaded to his datapad. "Well, this looks promising 'Z's Droids, Ships, and Anything That Goes Boom,' what do you think?"

"Sounds fun to me, I'm ready to get some more gear myself."

"Anything that goes boom!" he quoted the name of the store with a wink.

"I'm a snubjock-ette. Love to make things go boom, handsome!"

They arrived in front of the store. It was gaudy--raucous colors, pictures of famous ship explosions, even a few pictures from the Clone Wars. Drend didn't know whether to be shocked or amused, but he was definitely interested. "This has to be Zephram, granddad always said he had a thing for explosions, he said it had something to do with getting things right the first time."

"Spectacular. So you want to talk to the guy while I browse for thermal dets?"

"Ah, sure, and could you find me a new plasma torch if he has it?" As Cin begins to browse, Drend makes his way to the back of the store. Droids ramble around, rearranging things, a pit droid runs past holding an oversized roll of engine tape.

"Yeah. I'm getting me a decent blaster if he has one." She wonders of Drend thought she was serious about the dets.

Drend was preoccupied, he hadn't seen Zephram since he was very small, so he wasn't sure if the man would remember him. He found himself at the counter, but it was unmanned, so he made his way past the counter, a major no-no, but he felt he had a reason.

Cinowyn, two different torches, cradled in her arms, headed towards Drend and the counter. "Drend, do you prefer--" she started.

He found himself surrounded by parts, lining the walls of this back room. A work station in the center signaled that repairs were almost constantly being made. He looked over and saw a light in a close by office. A man, very old looking, came out and gave the relative youth a look over.

Cin saw that he was headed to the office and followed him, stopping to drop the torches on the counter.

Drend found his voice finally "ah, you probably don't remember me, but, you and my grandfather used to work together."

"My eyes haven't gone bad yet, kid, if your grandfather had told me you were coming I might have cleaned up a bit." Apparently he hadn't been told the news.

"Umm, my grandfather is dead, he died just over a year ago." Drend really didn't like talking about his grandfather's death, it was not a pleasant topic of conversation.

Zephram looked kinda confused then said "So the old man beat me... its a wonder. So, did he get that old hyperdrive working?"

Drend suddenly had a moment of *hey wait a minute*. "How did you know about that?"

Zephram smiled. "Let me guess, the old man left you everything, including his ship and the prototype hyperdrive he had developed... with my help I might add. And now you're here to see if I can help you fix it."

Drend was floored. "Well... yeah, can you?"

"Not without a G-9x7r Hyperdrive Regulator, and frankly, I don't have one, but I know someone who does."

"Why do I feel like this is going to cost me?" Drend settled himself into the nearest chair.

"The guy who owns it is a high stakes gambler, lives here on Cloud City, hes a decent guy, but he knows what things are worth, and you're either going to have to pay some exorbitant amount for it, or try to win it from him."

He turned to Cin who was now behind him. "Cin, I hope you're a better gambler than I am."

She didn't answer aloud, treating it as a rhetorical question. *Only the kind who gambles her life in a snub. I'm a pilot, not a cardshark.* She did know how to play sabacc and pazaak. You had to do something in downtime, and so there was always a small stakes or even "chips-only" game to be found.

However, she didn't care for the idea of gambling to win a costly, needed part. This "decent guy" might ask them to put up a stake, rather than jsut keeping his regulator if he won--and all they had was *Puddlejumper*. With Razzle now part of its computer core! Or this man might ask them to do some task, which was no better an option than losing transport and her beloved droid. At best, a task would delay them further; at worst it would be something both nasty and illegal.

Far better to buy the thing. But she didn't have the credits. Like most pilots, in addition to traditional survival kit items, she had a couple credit sticks plus some hard credits, if she were stuck in an area where those could be used. They weren't nearly enough to buy the regulator, though.

He turned back to Zephram, "So, how do I find him?"

"Just go to the casino, he'll be there, drawing a crowd, he plays the Baron Administrator once a week, hundred thousand credit games. Now you two, go ahead, what do you need? I saw those two plasma torches you," he points at Cin, "put on the counter."

"Well, Cin said something about needing a blaster."

Zephram starts to dig around in an exceptionally large bin...full of blasters. Finally he pulls out a brilliant looking matte black blaster. It seems worn, but in good working order and hands it to her along with a matching holster. "This should do you fine."

Cinowyn takes the weapon, makes sure the safety is on and examines it. She likes what she sees. "How much for this and whichever torch he likes?"

"I'll consider it as part of the debt I owe your grandfather" Zephram smiled, "I never did get to pay him back for some of the times he bailed me out."

Once they were done in the shop Cin and Drend Made their way back out into the small shopping center.

Posted by naboo_princess on 17 October 2008 02:35 PM:

Once Tarynn released her straps, she stood, as she had fully intended to find the medbay and get some bacta salve. She dismissed herself from the main hold with barely a nod, and left down the corridor. When she had went to the refresher before, she had seen a somewhat derelict medbay. Just her luck if it wasn't stocked. Or worse, if everything was *old*.

When she stepped through the door, she took a quick glance before she located a plasteel container. It was quite a while before Tarynn straightened and came up with a small container of the coveted bacta salve.

She moved to a mirror and at first winced as she rubbed it onto the several cuts and bruises on her face. *A few hours* she

reminded her reflection. *A few hours and it will be back to normal.* Tarynn put the salve back where she had found it, relieved that she could already feel the bacta as it worked.

Upon her return to the main hold, and to the others gathered there, "We're a fine looking bunch now aren't we."

Posted by Vash Knives on 17 October 2008 07:36 PM:

Koro looked at the man in the pilot's seat and considered his options.

"Considering the condition of the ship, it probably won't get us far. The closest places I can think of would be Geonosis and Ryloth. Ryloth would be a better choice for replacing this ship, though there is just one problem, minor though it is."

As Koro put in the co-ordinates and made the jump, Reil wondered just one thing.

"What problem would that be?"

"You can't handle the landing. Not in this ship anyway. I will be landing this ship."

Koro's response was firm. There would be no arguing with him.

Posted by Ice Hawk on 17 October 2008 07:56 PM:

Reil shrugged.

"Fine, but if we die in a horrible and firey explosion, just remember : It's all your fault."

They escaped the gravity shadow of the planet with incident. Reil was somewhat peeved about that. The port authority had clearly been wasting his time with idle threats. They made the jump to hyperspace without the ship factruing under the stress.

After that, Reil left Koro in the cockpit to inform the others of their destination.

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 18 October 2008 02:16 AM:

When Tam awoke everything was dark. He sat up, feeling the cold, metallic floor around him. Inching forward on his knees, Tam found a smooth, vertical rod. And another, and another. He was surrounded. Gripping the bars of his cell, Tam peered into the darkness beyond.

Trapped.

"Master Kenlan!" The only answer was from the echo of his voice. "*Master!*"

Trapped and alone. No good at all. Clearing his mind, Tam reached out into the Force to contact his master-- and screamed in a spasm of pure agony. His world went from pitch darkness to blinding brightness as arcs of searing lightning coursed through his body.

He tried again. *Master Kenlan, help!*

Another wave of spectacular energy tore through his body, and it took longer for the stars to fade from his vision.

"I wouldn't do that again," said the darkness. "The next shock may kill you."

Tam moved toward the sound of the voice and shielded his eyes when a bank of lights flickered to life. "Who are you?"

"Who I am will become apparent soon enough," the man said. It was the man who had confronted them on the street. While his dark jumpsuit had no snags or rips in it, it was just as nondescript as the vagabond disguise he had first appeared in. In the glaring light, his snow white hair seemed to pulse with its own light, but as he walked forward, and Tam's vision began to focus, his dark eyes once again seemed to pierce to the very soul. "All that matters at this point is who *you* are."

Tam's lip curled with a sardonic sneer. "I think I've got that part down."

"Do you indeed?" The ice-man's black hole eyes seemed to darken even further. Tam hadn't thought that possible. "We'll see..."

Posted by Corr Terek on 19 October 2008 10:33 PM:

"Get in here, an' be quick about it," Grince muttered, shoving them through the back door of a building that looked familiar to Damon.

"Where are we?" he asked, only to see Grince disappear down the hallway. "Grince?"

He started to follow, but the stabbing pains in his legs prevented him from going far. He heard voices down the hallway, then hurried footsteps. He wasn't prepared for what came next, however.

"Damon?" Jace Damak's eyes were wide with surprise. "Stars above, what happened to you man?"

"Hiya, Jace," Damon grinned painfully. "How's business?"

Posted by ij thompson on 20 October 2008 06:53 PM:

"We're a fine looking bunch, now aren't we?"

Fi, Cali and Tey looked up to find the red-haired woman had rejoined them in the crew lounge. Fi was amazed. Even though their new friend had clearly excused herself to apply some sort of salve to her injuries, she still managed to look glamorous. In Fiola's time as a semi-famous musician, she'd been briefly acquainted with numerous holo-stars and celebrities, but none who managed to dazzle so effortlessly. And from what she could tell, this woman was some sort of warrior-type. Odd.

"Join us!" Fi invited, waving a hand.

While the woman had been away seeing to her appearance, Fi had ransacked the vessel's galley and discovered some basic rations; nutrient bars, pure water, and some sort of unrecognizable dried fruit. She and her friends were now tearing into the booty, munching contentedly and dropping foil wrappers on the deck plating. Their new friend joined them, though she didn't reach for any of the food just yet.

"Ick," Cali complained good-naturedly. "I could make us something better than this!"

"You'll get your chance," Zealos Reil announced, having just returned from the *Long Shot's* bridge. "We're bound for Ryloth, and I don't much like Twi-lek food." Plopping into a seat, he appropriated a good-sized portion of the edibles, and began chewing hungrily.

"Ooh, Ryloth," Fi chirped excitedly, "I always meant to go there. Do you think they have a more happening nightlife than Tatooine?"

"Guess we'll find out," Tey offered, all his attention on the food.

Fi was silent a moment. Though she desperately wanted to get everyone talking, she was all-too-aware of the datapad she carried in her jacket pocket - the datapad Luis had left her before he'd run off. It likely held not only an explanation for his surprising actions, but possibly, his final words. She realized she could contain herself no longer. Rising, she waved feebly at the others.

"Hey guys, I, uh... I'll be back in a bit."

Cali watched Fi exit, noting the tension in the older girl's body as she left. Seeing the red-haired woman watching Fi leave as well, she tossed one of her dried fruits into the woman's lap, and smiled at her.

"I'm Cali. What do they call you?"

Posted by naboo_princess on 20 October 2008 08:07 PM:

Tarynn tilted her head sideways as she studied the girl who had dropped a piece of dried fruit into her lap. She was certainly good-natured, different than the attitude of most women she had grown up with in the Hapes Consortium. There ambition reigned supreme as most women of Hapan nobility vied for the Queen Mother's favor. She was once a subject of that benefactress, second only to Isolder. She was untouchable...or so she had thought. Although it had been a month or so since she had fled the comfort of Hapes, she dearly missed it. And that was something she would never have again, and so would not confess her weakness to anyone. It was a ragtag bunch she ended up with, but, she decided, it would be much better than alone on Tatooine. *That* was how Aerith found her, she just knew it.

"I am Tarynn Gray," she replied as she delicately picked up the fruit. She studied it for a few minutes, then noticed Cali was studying her.

"I am from the Hapes Consortium," she added bitterly, "The largest independent government in the galaxy. It is also where you had to watch what you ate...or you would end up in the morgue full of poison. " She took a bite. It wasn't like the rich food on Hapes, but it was food nonetheless and so it would have to do.

"Thank-you," Tarynn added after somewhat of a struggle. She still did not know how women outside of the Consortium acted, but after the kindness of Cali, she had decided that they were different. And she still wanted to know about this 'Empire' she heard about, and the 'Rebellion.'

Posted by Ice Hawk on 21 October 2008 01:27 AM:

Reil sat down and began reflect on what had happened to him, consuming his portion of the rations without really tasting them, which was probably for the best. The past 24 hours had been the single greatest disaster in Reil's career. His wingman was dead and the shuttle they had been escorting was most likely floating debris as well; or it had been captured, which was probably worse. He was cut off from the rest of the fleet, and his starfighter had been destroyed. Not even killing Bartok would make up for all of that. As it stood, even if he did get back to the fleet, he was most likely not in for a happy reception.

I'm never getting promoted. . .

Fi's sudden departure shook Reil out of his reprove and forced him to take stock of his new companions. She looked like she was holding together pretty well for a woman who just lost her Fiancee', but Reil wasn't very good at reading people, so he decided to keep his distance, just in case. Tey was also fairly unresponsive. Reil had no way of knowing if that was about the doc or exhaustion. The only bright spot in their group was Cali, who on the whole, seemed pretty happy despite everything, and she had good right to be. If the ship didn't fall apart, or Koro didn't botch the landing, she'd be free. He turned his attention to the red haired woman sitting beside Cali. There was definatly something foregin about her.

"Miss Gray, was it?"

"It was."

'Hapes Consortium, eh?"

Taryn nodded.

"Never heard of it."

"Well, I've heard very little of your Galatic Empire, so I guess that makes us even."

Reil considered this.

"You have a point there."

"And you are?"

"Zealos Reil. Pilot, and lightening rod for bad fortune."

Taryn looked Reil over.

"And an exhibitor of bad taste."

Cali let out an indignant "Hey!", and Reil had turn his laughter into a cough to avoid being decked in the head. At her place they had found Reil some better fitting clothes, but they weren't exactly what you could call fashionable. They were however a definat improvement over what he had been wearing and Reil did not want to seem ungrateful.

"Well, my usual wardrobe consists of bright orange, so say what you want, this is actually an improvement."

Cali raised an eyebrow.

"Why bright orange."

Reil shrugged.

"That's the way they designed the uniform. I've actually been questioning that decsion myself lately."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 25 October 2008 01:16 AM:

Tam learned fast that any time he opened himself to the Force his cage would punish him, especially when his captor, the Ice-man, was present. He'd almost welcome the company, except that the mysterious man always brought those droids with him. Tam would be injected, and then he'd only be partially aware of the rest of their session. That was a blessing, he supposed. When he was drugged a part of him would go to a comfortable place, far from the pain and the torture.

His mind would be filled with Master Kenlan, and assume that the old man was still alive. Or he'd find shelter in the memories of other friends. Damon and Mir, who he hoped were okay. Luis, Adriav, and the others.

Fi...

It was in the comfort of friends that he retreated when the Ice-man came and demanded things. They were simple enough questions, and easy enough not to answer. Mostly about where he had come from, what he knew about the Force, and who knew about him and his abilities. The man would leave soon enough, and Tam would once again be alone. In the meantime he would think of his friends just like the man told him to.

Oh no!

"The boy has responded remarkably well," the man said to the holographic being before him. "It only takes a few moments of induced hypnosis before he begins talking." He walked over to a terminal displaying Tam in his small cage. "It will only be a matter of time before he's broken. In the meantime, we've learned enough about any contacts he's made to track them down and... contain this."

"Excellent," said the hologram. "Report back when you're ready for transit. Tremayne out."

Posted by ij thompson on 25 October 2008 08:44 PM:

The corridor was dark and cold, and empty.

Fi stopped and looked back up the passage, making sure she was alone. Satisfied, she withdrew an object, a datapad, from her jacket pocket, and studied it. An adhesive strip was stuck to the object's face, two letters hastily scrawled on its fabric surface:

Fi.

Fiola sank to her knees, exhaling deeply. She took yet

another glance up the corridor, then lay prone on the cold metal grill, propping herself up on her elbows and placing the datapad on the deck in front of her. She powered up the device, its small display lighting up her face in the darkness with blue light.

One file was contained therein. After another deep breath, she punched it up.

Dear Fiola,

If you're reading this, it'll mean you're safe, and that my gambit has succeeded. I apologize for not telling you what I'm going to do, but time is tight, and I'm not certain that (for now, at least), you'll see the sense in what I'm doing.

The 'drunk' who has been tailing us around Mos Eisley is not what he appears to be. He is an Imperial Inquisitor, which is a fancy title for a person charged with rooting out users of 'The Force'. I'm not going to name names, but you know who we're talking about : not just one person, but several we've travelled with recently. The fact that we're now separated from them makes no difference; if this Inquisitor found out that you and Tey had a connection with them, you'd probably be imprisoned just for having known them. Not to mention, the two of you are already wanted for other reasons.

It is imperative that the two of you get away, with no connection to me. I can be tracked. Your and Tey's safety is what matters most to me.

I'm sorry it has to be like this, but there really is no easier way. Believe me, I'd have taken any reason to stay with you. Because, I have to tell you, I love you, Fi. I have for some time now. Spending last night pretending to be your 'fiance' really drove it home for me. If anything, my biggest regret is never having the courage to tell you in person. But I also know that there is someone else in your heart, someone you can't have, and you'll need to come to terms with that. I only ask that you let me go, and find happiness in your life. That is why I'm doing this, after all.

I've run out of time. I have to go now.

I love you, Fi

Luis

Fiola turned off the datapad, its blue light winking out, darkening the corridor. Lying prone on the grilled plating, Fi lay her head down, and cried.

Posted by Corr Terek on 25 October 2008 09:55 PM:

"When Grince said he'd brought an old friend, I never thought it'd be you," Jace said, quickly moving to support Damon as his knees buckled. He began to lead them down the hallway. "What are you *doing* here? Don't you know they're after you?"

Damon coughed. "Yeah, we kinda figured that out."

Jace looked him up and down. "Looks like it. We don't have much here, but I'll see what we can do for those burns. You have a ship?"

"It's probably been impounded by now," Mir said darkly. Jace shook his head.

"I'll ask around, but it's going to be difficult getting you out of here without the Empire finding you." He brought them to what appeared to be a spare room, and eased Damon down onto a rough cot.

"We can't leave yet," Damon insisted. "We've got two more friends out there. Have you heard anything about an old man and a boy?"

"The man who burst in here looking for your dad?" Jace

asked, looking at him sharply. Damon shrugged sheepishly. "I wondered about him."

He thought. "Come to think of it, there *was* a lot of Imperial troop activity earlier. But I haven't heard what happened."

Thel, Mir and Damon looked at each other grimly. "That was probably them," Thel said. Jace shook his head.

"I'm sorry. If your friends have been captured they'll be under heavy guard by now, and I wouldn't want to take chances with that bunch."

"We have to try," Damon insisted. "We can't leave them here."

"You're not going to be doing anything right now," Jace replied. He tilted his head toward the door. "Liira! Come quickly, I need your help."

Damon started. "Liira?" Jace grinned lopsidedly, but his reply was cut short as the dark haired young woman entered the room.

"What happened, Jace? What's wrong?" she asked anxiously, for a moment not seeming to see the others in the room. Then she noticed them. "Oh my goodness!"

"This is a friend of mine, Liira," Jace said stiffly. "He's been in a bit of a scrap and needs patching up."

The young woman's nurturing instinct took over, and she surveyed Damon critically. "He certainly looks like it." Then she frowned. "But Jace, I don't remember meeting him before."

Damon opened his mouth, the question on his lips, but Jace cut him off. "He used to live here when we were younger, but his family moved away a long time ago."

"I see," Liira said, smiling brightly. "Wait just a minute -- I'll go get a medpac and we'll see what we can do for you, mister."

She bustled out the door, leaving Damon dumbfounded. "What did she mean, she never met me?" He looked at his friend. "Jace?"

"She's one of the ones who lost her memory, isn't she?" Thel asked gently. Jace nodded his head slowly.

"To look at her, she's fine," he replied. "But she's missing whole portions of her life, Damon." He glanced at the other man. "Especially anything to do with the Aligeris."

"Jace, I'm sorry--" Damon began to apologize. Jace shook his head and placed a finger to his lips.

Footsteps could be heard coming back down the hallway, and a moment later Liira reentered the room. "All right," she said confidently. "Let's see what we can do for you."

"So anyway," Jace said, "we'll patch you up and once things have cooled down we can get you offworld."

Thel coughed. "Before that, though, I'll need you to point me in the direction of the Imperial garrison."

"Don't try it," Jace warned. "You'll be slaughtered."

"Better to take that chance than to leave our friends to a fate far worse." Thel replied shortly. "Now, where are they?"

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 26 October 2008 12:18 PM:

"There is no way that either of you could make it into the garrison, save the boy and As-Buka and get back out, chances are I won't be able to either but I must try, even if it means my death, the boy must be saved. However if the two of you can manage to create a significant diversion I might just be able to do it. But it will need very big." Athelias had waited until Liira had tended Damon and left before speaking, a smile split his face, "And yet, if anyone can do it, it will be you two. You could just invite Tarvos Ghull, or your rebel friends, but whatever you do, it will have to draw the attention of the majority of the troopers, especially if there is another of those force-sensitives in there."

We should go our separate ways for the time being, we don't know what they have gotten out of the boy already, there is no way to know how much they know about us, they won't expect us to split up right outside their door if we think they are trying to find us. They will expect us to try to stay together and find strength in numbers. We can stay in contact via comlinks, but that's it." Then he left.

The Imperial garrison was not hard to find, a set of oppressive buildings surrounded by a big, overly lit wall. Naturally there were stormtroopers everywhere, Athelias had expected them, there were also the troopers in the dark armor, they were also expected, what Athelias hadn't expected was the force presence he felt in the garrison. It was strong. If Athelias hadn't been hiding his presence in the force he was sure that whoever the presence was it would have found him by now. There were suddenly a few too many people strong in the force for comfort, first that man in the cave, now someone else. At least the cave-man was dead, no human could survive that blow. Athelias sighed, one down, one to go. But he would have to wait, if he was anywhere near as strong as the last one there was no way Athelias would be able to get back out by himself, much less with the boy and As-Buka, after fighting him. Still, he could at least scope the place out, as much as possible without using the force anyway, if he so much as nudged a rock with the force the person inside would know he was there and the whole garrison would be on him before he could blink.

He made sure that everything he carried was secured so that it wouldn't make any noise then he pulled his dark cloak around himself and ran up to the wall when the troopers turned around, the wall was about one and a half stories tall, constantly guarded by troopers. He laid his hand against it, smooth, cool, hard to climb, he could do it with his climbing claws, but they would leave obvious marks, he could only use them as a last resort. He slipped back to the buildings just before the troopers turned to face each other. A garrison of Imperial troops, a group of the dark armored troops, and a strong force-sensitive, well, Athelias had always loved a challenge. And he had yet to be beaten by one. Athelias circled the garrison trying to find a weak spot, somewhere he could slip through, the thing was as tight as a Twi'lek's money pouch, there was one way in, and one way out. He walked back to the main part of the city, day was coming and he needed some sleep. Since he had parted ways with Damon and Mir'isha he had gone back to his old habits, sleeping in alleys, spending time in seedy cantinas. He settled down in the back of a dark alley with his cloak wrapped around him, he closed his eyes and felt a presence enter the system, he groaned, another force-sensitive, this was getting out of hand. Just as he was accepting the new presence it disappeared, he groaned again, not only another force-sensitive, one who could hide their presence, perfect. He closed his eyes again and sank into a meditative sleep that left enough of his conscious alert to warn him if something happened.

Athelias opened his eyes, daylight, he stood up and stretched a bit, waking himself up, then he set off. Before going to the garrison the day before he had found a cantina, a particularly seedy one, it reminded him of Tatooine. He arrived at the cantina in short order, it was like the ones he had been in, except this one had good lighting, well, it couldn't be perfect. He sidled up to the bar, sat down, and ordered a drink. It had the usual clientele, there was sure to be someone here who knew something about

the garrison, some way in, he saw a likely candidate, a thin man winding his way through tables not seeming to pay attention, but smiling every now and then when he passed a table. Athelias was about to get up and approach him when a beautiful woman sat down beside him. She was his height, slender, with long brown hair, and dark brown eyes.

"Hey there, wanna buy me a drink?" She asked.

"Sure, but I'm afraid I can't stay to drink one with you, you see I'm meeting someone," Athelias turned his attention back to the room but he didn't see the man, he scanned the whole cantina but the man was gone. He turned to the woman who was watching him with an arched eyebrow, "Well, it seems he left." He pulled some credits out of his cloak, "Let's have a drink for the lady." The bartender took the cred chip and placed a drink in front of the woman.

"So, what are doing here?" She asked while she swirled the drink around gently, "Are you here for business, or pleasure." She smiled from behind her glass as she lifted it to take a drink.

Athelias smiled back, "Business, in fact maybe you can help me, I have a friend, this friend has to get into the Imperial garrison."

"And just why does this friend want to get in?"

Athelias pulled some cred chips out of his cloak, "He brother is in the garrison, he needs to see him, about a family matter."

She plucked the chips out of his hands, "A, family matter. Well, I might be able to help you, er, your friend, but it will take a little time. Meet me tonight, outside of town and I'll get your friend in and out."

Athelias smiled, "No offense, but how do I know that you can get my friend out again? And if you can, why should I assume that you intend to?"

She gave a short laugh, "All right, then what do you want me to do?"

"Why don't you tell me how you intend to get him in and out?"

"I'll tell you what, how about we meet tonight, you bring your friend, and I'll explain it then, if you don't like it we go our separate ways, deal?"

"Deal. Tonight, outside town." Athelias left the cantina, made a couple of turns, then turned around and scaled a wall, when he got to the roof he scanned the streets to make sure nobody was behind him. He was going to need a plan.

The woman watched Athelias exit the cantina, then the smile melted from her face. A man walked up to her, but before he could say anything she drove her fist into his belly, when he dropped to his knees she brought her knee around and drove it into his temple, he collapsed. She calmly stood up and left the cantina, he was the Jedi, she would return to Couruscant soon, she had been on this planet for less than twelve hours and she already couldn't wait to get off.

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 27 October 2008 12:48 AM:

The setting sun cast its last rays upon Athelias' back as he made his way to the outside of town. His plan was simple, assuming that the woman was trying to capture him he would remote activate a speeder he had bought after their meeting, it would home in on him and he could make his getaway. If she was planning to kill him he activate the speeder, grab her, and make his getaway, the cave he and Damon had gone to wasn't the only one there, he'd be able to hide there for awhile, even if they knew he was in the caves. If she was actually planning to help

him get in and back out again, he would pay her. As he left the last of the houses behind he saw a lone figure ahead, either it was her and he continued with his plan, or it wasn't and he would probably have to kill someone, he checked the blasters that he always carried in case he had to fight without revealing what he was. Even in the rapidly disappearing light he could tell it was her.

She waited until he came close then said, "So you came, where's your friend?"

"He's waiting until I give him the go-ahead, a man in his position can't be too carefull."

She smiled, "I see. Well in that case we should get going. Here's the plan, these garrisons always have extra stormtrooper armor, I can get you a set of it and all the codes you'll need to get in and back out. All for a modest fee."

"Sounds good, where is it?"

"You didn't think I would bring it did you?"

Athelias smiled, "Of course you did, just as I brought a, erm, modest fee." He pulled some chips out of his cloak, almost the last of what he had.

She smiled again, "I have them in my speeder, follow me."

She set off toward the town and Athelias followed her. She led him to an abandond building, he rested his hands on his blasters when he followed her in. The moment he stepped inside he got a familiar tingling feeling in the back of his neck, he drop to a knee, rolled forward and came up facing the doorway with both blasters drawn. The woman was spinning toward him, a violet lightsaber flying towards his head. He flipped back away from the lightsaber, returned his blasters to their holsters, drew and ignited his own lightsaber and stood facing her, holding his lightsaber by his leg pointed at the ground. A scowl contorted the woman's face and she lunged at him, he parried her saber and brought his own around lightning fast and stopped it an inch from her neck. She snarled, knocked his blade away and slashed at right shoulder, he dodged it easily, then he stepped forward, bent his knees and brought his saber right up to her stomach and stopped it. She jumped away and flung her hand out, he felt a brick wall hit him first from in front, then from behind as her presence strengthened in the force to that of a force-sensitive. He got to his feet as she charged him again, she pulled her arm back, then launched it forward at his left shoulder, trying to split him from shoulder to hip, he leaned back slightly, jumped and kicked her wrist. She gave an involuntary yelp and grabbed her wrist, Athelias had already landed, he dropped down on the ball of one foot, spun in a circle throwing his other leg out and swept her legs out from under her, she landed with a thud on her back and he stood over her with his blade at her throat.

"Who are you? Where did you get this lightsaber?" He used the force to bring her lightsaber to his hand, "Who trained you? Speak!"

She glared up at him, "You want to know? I am Elayne," she spat, "I made that lightsaber, and," she smiled up at him, "I was trained by the Emperor. I am one of the Emperor's hands. He knows of you Jedi. He sent me to kill you, and when you kill me he will send another, and another, and another, it will not end while you live."

"I am not going to kill you."

She scoffed, "Then you are a fool, kill me now or I will kill you."

Athelias chuckled, "You'll kill me? I don't think so. First of all, you don't know the first thing about lightsaber fighting, if you knew anything significant about the force, other than the ability to hide yourself, you would have used force-lightning, or force-choke, but you didn't which means that you weren't trained

for very long. The only way he could know of me is news of one of my fights, and if that is how he knows about me then he knew very well that you couldn't possibly beat. You know what that tells me? That tells me that if you really were sent by the Emperor, he sent you to fail, I have been well trained, but even if I hadn't been, you wouldn't have stood a chance, which means that he wanted you to fail, I'm guessing that he'll use you as an example, he will know soon enough what has happened here, that I'm still alive, that you failed. The Emperor does not take well to failure. So you have two choices, either you report to the Emperor, telling him that you failed and hoping that he kills you instead of endless torture to, inspire, his troops, or you can leave the Emperor and hide for the rest of your life. Personally, I'd go with the second one." Athelias turned around to leave the building and stopped, a disturbance. He spun around to find Elayne staring at him, pale-faced, mouthing a word, 'Troopers.' Athelias ran back to her, scooped her up in his arm, gathered the force around him and ran to the other end of the building, he reached the back door as the stormtroopers knocked down the front one, he kicked open the door and ran outside, he saw a flash of white out of the corner of his eye when he turned down an alley and knew that they were following him. He turned down alleys and ran between buildings with Elayne over his shoulder, he was expecting her to either complain or try to kill him, but she did neither, which meant that she didn't want to get caught by the stromtroopers any more than he did. Eventually he ran into a wall, without pausing he ran at it, gathered himself, and jumped over it, landing heavily on the other side. Exhausted, he gathered himself one more time and jumped onto the roof of the house to his left, he put Elayne down, lay down and watched to make sure that no troopers had followed them. Elayne was lying on her back, shivering.

"The first day of training, he used force-lightning on me, he said that if I ever disobeyed him or failed a mission I would remember that day happily. I can never go back to him now." She turned her head to face Athelias, "Why did you save me? I tried to kill you."

"Because you are not evil, you were used, and you have been used again, but you never actually wanted to kill me. You may have made yourself believe that you did, but you didn't really, I felt conflict, a part of you didn't want anything to do with what you were doing."

"I didn't volunteer for this, I was taken from my family. He said the first mission was a test, and easy mission. He knew how I felt didn't he? He just wanted to get rid of me."

"Probably, but he has shown you the first step of the force, so you should be able to avoid him and his troopers." Athelias stood up, pulled her lightsaber out of his cloak and laid it down beside her, "Good luck, and may the force be with you."

"Teach me." she said it quietly, almost inaudible.

"What?"

"Teach me. You are much better than I am, teach me to use the force, to fight with a lightsaber, please."

Athelias turned back to face her, she was standing up, looking him in the eyes, "Why do you want me to teach you?" Suddenly Ysmine's voice came back to him, warning him.

"The Emperor told me that if I use the force when I'm angry I'll be stronger, but you weren't angry at all, and you were much stronger than me. I want to learn to use the force the right way."

Athelias knew she was telling the truth, the force assured him it was so. Even so he heaved a sigh, "Very well, but you must swear to do exactly as I say, if you disobey me even once, I'll not teach you any more, do you swear?"

She nodded, "I swear."

"Good, we'll start as soon as we get off this planet. But before we do I still need to get inside that garrison."

"Why do you need to get in anyway?"

"There is a boy, stronger in the force than any I've ever seen, but he is untrained, and he was captured along with an old man, I must rescue them. Can you still get me inside?"

Her shoulders sagged, "Doubtful, they'll probably block me from the system as soon as the stormtroopers get back."

Athelias nodded, "Then I'll need to find another way in. Come on, let's get out of here."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 27 October 2008 04:29 PM:

When he awoke, Tam felt strangely refreshed. The Ice-man must have let him get a full night's sleep. Somehow, the Ice-man letting him rest up didn't seem like a good sign.

"So," the man said when he finally arrived that morning, "it seems your friend is looking for you back on Temen III."

They weren't on Temen III any more. Tam was happy to learn that, not because he'd been kidnapped, but because he was able to learn things from the man so intent on learning things from him. "Master Kenlan?"

Ice-man laughed. "No, decidedly not."

"Damon, then?" Tam had no compunctions listing the possibilities. This man had already squeezed Damon's, Kenlan's, and everyone else's names from him.

"No, we would have seen that amateur coming sooner than this. You seem to be forgetting Thel, who has contacted one of my..." he favored the boy in the cage with an ironic smile, "my friends. She'll keep him plenty busy."

Thel. Tam *had* forgotten about him. The man had been with Damon, last he knew. Apparently, for whatever reason, now they were apart. "That's a lie," he said. Why else would the Ice-man tell him all this.

"It's all too true. I have no reason to lie to you, Dawncaller. They will not free you, not before it's too late, at least. And knowledge of their activities only furthers your progress."

"My progress? And what of my master?"

"In time, boy." Ice-man inhaled deeply. For a moment his flinty eyes were mercifully closed, but all too soon they were open, once again spearing into his soul. He hissed, "Yes... There it is. You are progressing nicely."

Tam had no idea what the old man was talking about. All he knew was his friends were looking for him, and this man as arrogant enough to think that he could stop them. If Tam was outside this damn cage, he'd be able to kill the Ice-man as fast as thought.

"Step out, then," the Ice-man said, swinging the bars open and folding his arms over his chest. "Show me what you can do."

Tam did so, and as soon as he hit the ground, released his will on the man's sanctimonious face. The Ice-man flipped backward from the impact, landing lightly on all fours. His bottomless eyes focused on him and a smile crossed his lips.

"Yes," he said, and as he spoke, Tam found that he could no longer breathe. The periphery of his vision melted into a red pulsing blur, and before the man's dark gaze completely enveloped him, Tam heard him say, "You are progressing nicely..."

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 27 October 2008 11:43 PM:

Athelias stood with Elayne on a rooftop looking out at the Imperial garrison, he took a deep breath and revealed his presence in the force. He nodded to her and she dropped from the

roof, jumped into the speeder Athelias had bought and started her route that would take her in a semi-circle out of visual range of anybody that was going from the garrison to Athelias, and eventually to the garrison itself. The was simple, (most of his were) yet very dangerous, he was going to lure the force-sensitive out of the garrison so Elayne could get in and rescue the boy and As-Buka. Elayne knew how to confuse people with the force and without the force sensitive there she didn't have to worry about being discovered. He waited five minutes, then ten, then twenty, nothing.

He activated his com, "Elayne, nothing is happening, nobody has left the garrison. Whoever it is must have felt me, do not go in, wait for me to get there."

He dropped from the roof, gathered the force around him and shot out to where Elayne was supposed to wait for his go-ahead, with the strengthening his movements he flew along, the world a blur around him. He reached her in less than a minute and came to a stop beside the speeder, not even breathing hard.

She goggled at him, "How did you get here so fast?"

"The force is a powerful ally. Have you seen anybody leave?"

"Nope, nothing."

Athelias stroked his chin, "Something is not right." He gathered the force around himself and threw upward, anything above him would have shot away into the sky. He didn't feel so much as a shiver from the force sensitive inside. "All right, I'm going in, you stay here, keep the speeder ready."

He ran up to the wall, fuddled the minds of the stormtroopers on patrol, used the force to jump up and down the other side, then he ran around the nearest building and released the troopers. He scanned the buildings until he found the one that was the most heavily guarded, then he entered the building to its left, an administrations building by the looks of it. There were two stormtroopers inside the door, they stopped him.

"What is your business here?" One asked him.

Athelias used the force, "You will tell me what I want to know."

The trooper stared at him a second, "I will tell you what you want to know."

"How do I get to the top floor?"

The trooper pointed with his blaster to a set of turbolifts at the other side of the entrance hall, "Take those lifts to get to the top floor."

"Do I need identification, or a password?"

"Yes."

"What do I need?"

"A password."

Athelias rolled his eyes, "What *is* the password?"

"The password is 'Aligeri'."

"Thank you. As soon as the doors to the lift close you will completely forget ever seeing me." Athelias walked over to the turbolifts, activated one and stepped inside.

There was a tone, "Which floor?"

"Top floor."

"Password?"

"Aligeri."

"Password accepted."

The doors closed and Athelias felt himself going up. A few minutes later the turbolift came to a stop and the doors opened.

"Top floor." The voice said.

Athelias stepped out, walked over to the wall that was closest to the heavily guarded building and looked out a window. There were stormtroopers all over by the door, but none on the roof, Athelias ignited his lightsaber, cut a hole in the window and used

the force to pull it in. He placed it on the ground, moved back to get a running start and leapt out the window flying through the air before landing and rolling on the roof of the heavily guarded building. There were no doors to get into the building so Athelias walked around until he was directly above the force sensitive, then he activated his lightsaber again, cut a hole in the roof and dropped through. He was alone in a big room, the force sensitive was still below him, looking around he saw a number of empty cells, he was in the detention block, perfect. He walked over to a computer that was set into the far wall and activated it, a screen came up showing the cells, showing which ones were one, which ones were off and who was inside them, all the ones in the block were empty and off. He typed in a command and the screen switched to a full list of prisoners, there were a few petty criminals, nobody else, he typed in another command and it started searching, a minute later he found what he was looking for.

"Sithspawn."

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 29 October 2008 12:59 AM:

Athelias switched off the computer and walked around the room until he was, once more, standing over the force-sensitive, then he ignited his lightsaber and cut a hole in the floor. He dropped through the floor into a dark room that was lit only by the glow from a crystal as tall as him sitting in the middle of the room, it pulsed an eerie violet. Athelias stared at the crystal, then he reached out with the force and touched it, instantly he felt waves of the force flow through him, each wave brought with it a memory.

A large cavern lit by the throbbing, pulsating light of a dozen crystals of all colors. A woman came around a bend in the cave, as soon as she came into view the kinrath attacked her, she ignited a lightsaber and fought them off, they ran deeper into the caves. She approached the crystal and touched it with the force, her eyes widened then she used her lightsaber to cut a smaller crystal from the base and left.

He was in the same cavern, but it was larger now, with more crystals and fewer kinrath. A man entered the cavern and scared the kinrath off, then he came to the crystal touched it with the force and took a step back. He looked around at the other crystals and Athelias could feel him touching them as well. After he had touched each of them he came back to Athelias and took a small crystal from the base.

There were dozens of memories, in each one a man or a woman came into the cavern, scared of the kinrath and took a crystal from the base. Except for the last one.

The cavern was much bigger, A tall man came into the cavern, when he saw the kinrath he shot lightning at them, slaughtering them as they fled, then he walked over to Athelias and touched him with the force, a smile spread across his face. He ignited his lightsaber and cut the main crystal off at the base--

As soon as the man's lightsaber made contact Athelias' mind was severed from the crystal, he ignited his lightsaber like so many before him and carved a small crystal off from the base, then he walked back to the hole in the roof, gathered the force and jumped, landing on the roof. He ran to the edge and jumped to the building he had come from, when he was inside he replaced the glass, went back to the turbolift and entered.

"Which floor?" The voice asked.

"Ground floor"

"Password?"

"Aligeri."

The turbolift took him all the way down and the doors opened. Immediately the stormtroopers by the doors leveled their guns at him and ran toward him. When they reached him the one who had questioned him when he came in addressed him.

"Who are you? How did you get in here?"

Athelias stared into the trooper's faceplate, "You *will* answer my questions."

The trooper stared back, "I will answer your questions."

"My ship was impounded, where is it?"

"In the impound lot."

"Where is the impound lot?"

"In the Imperial garrison."

"Where in the Imperial garrison?"

"At the Imperial impound lot."

"And where, pray tell, is the Imperial impound lot?"

"In the Imperial garrison."

Athelias' hand shot out and he was barely able to keep himself from strangling the trooper. "By the Emperor's black bones! *Where* inside the Imperial garrison?"

The trooper pointed with his blaster, "That way."

Athelias let out his breath feeling his anger follow, "Finally! When I step out the door you will have no recollection of me, you have never seen me before." Athelias walked to the doors and stepped out leaving the remains of his anger inside with the trooper from hell. Taking a deep breath he set out in the direction the trooper had indicated, hiding behind buildings until he stood in front of a large building with no roof. He snuck around to the back of the building, pulled out his lightsaber, cut a hole in wall and climbed through. He replaced the piece of wall he'd cut out, hid behind some crates and scanned the impound yard, there were few enough ships, and lots of stormtroopers. Finally he found the *Nova Viper*, he came out from behind the crate and walked boldly toward the ship, two steps later ten troopers had their guns trained on him, one of them stepped forward.

"What are you doing here? What's your identification code?"

Athelias drew himself up and glared imperiously at the trooper, "How *dare* you? Do you have any idea who I am? When my master returns from capturing Aligeri he will have you thrown out of the Imperial army, and imprisoned for this outrage! Now get out of my way!"

The trooper didn't move, "Your master? You mean the wizard? If he is your master than you must be able to use the force, why don't you prove it?"

Athelias leaned toward the trooper with a smirk on his face, "So if I can, for instance throw you across this yard, will that be sufficient?"

Athelias could almost hear the trooper smile, "Sure, that'll do it."

Athelias gathered the force and used it to throw the man across the yard, he stopped him right before he rammed into the far wall at a speed that would have crushed most of the bones in his body, but made it look like he didn't. Then he turned to the rest of the troopers and his voice went ice-cold, "Anyone else want to contest my authority?" The rest of the troopers separated making a path between them for him, he walked between them until he got to the last trooper, "You, what is the code for that ship's ramp?" He asked pointing first at the trooper beside him then at the *Nova Viper*.

The trooper practically shook where he stood, "I-I don't know sir."

Athelias turned to face him and leaned in, "Then find out, I'm going to search the ship myself."

The trooper didn't reply for a minute then, "Sir, the techies haven't found the code yet." Even through the helmet Athelias

could hear the fear in the man's voice.

He drew himself up again, using the force to make it seem like he was towering over him, "Then I shall find it." He walked over to the ship, held his hand over the pad for show then punched in the number, when the ramp lowered he entered the ship and raised it again. He went straight to the cockpit, dropped down to the panels below the pilots seat, pulled them off and attached a device to the piloting controls. Then he got up, walked around the ship for a few minutes and left the ship, all the troopers had gone back to patrolling, he beckoned one over and after a slight hesitation the trooper came to him.

"Yes sir?"

"Listen to me very carefully, and repeat what I say. Nobody is allowed in that ship, if anyone so much as opens the ramp I will personally kill every trooper in this yard. Do you understand?" The trooper nodded, "Good, now repeat it to me, I want to be sure."

"Nobody enters the ship, if the ramp is opened we all die."

Athelias smiled, "Very good, now continue on your patrol and spread the word." As the trooper ran off Athelias left the impound yard, he expected the troopers at the entrance to stop him but they didn't move, word spreads fast in the army.

The men at the main gate hadn't even stopped him, he could probably have told them to strip and run through the garrison and they would have done it, he sighed as the speeder came in sight. Elayne was sitting in the pilot's seat waiting for him.

He jumped into the passenger seat, "Go, take us to the edge of town, there's something I need to do then we must leave this planet."

When they reached the edge of town Athelias got out, "You wait here, I have to go contact my friends, I hope we'll be able to leave soon, here." He tossed her remoter, "When I give you the signal you activate that, it will bring our ship to you, then I'll give you coordinates and you have to come pick us up, okay?" She nodded, "Okay, good. By the way, here." He handed her the crystal he had taken from the room, "You can use that in a lightsaber if you want."

He jumped out of the speeder and went to the cantina where he had left Damon and Mir. He went to the back door where Grince had taken them and knocked on the door, when Jace came he let him, "I need to talk to Damon, we have to go the Maw."

Posted by Ubiquitorate on 29 October 2008 11:58 PM:

"Look, I'm telling you, you've got the wrong guy," panted Kenlan. Another charge of electricity through his temples answered. "Ahhhh... grife, I'm serious! What have I got to do to convince you?"

"That's enough," came an icy voice from the darkness. The man with the matching icy face stepped into the narrow cone of light shining down on Kenlan's immobilized head. "There's no point to this charade, As-Buka," he stated patronizingly. "We know exactly who you are."

"Ha! That's a good one. If you know that much, you must know there's no such person. And if you're that smart, why not just call me by my real name?"

The ice-man shrugged. "Kenlan As-Buka is the name you have chosen. Fitting that it should be the name that condemns you."

"Bantha pudu," countered Kenlan. "You know what I think is more likely? I think you looked through my file, and you know what I think happened? You came to a dead end."

The ice-man raised his hand, and another jolt shot through Kenlan's temples. Kenlan screamed, then forced the scream into a deep, chilling laugh. "That's what happened, isn't it? Frying me is all you can do because you realize there's nothing left. Hey, you're some kind of big-wig, right?"

The ice-man said nothing.

Kenlan continued. "Anyway, I'm sure with the bulletins that must be out lately, you know at least *some* of the story. You've heard of Kenlan As-Buka, which means you've probably heard of Leeman Harku. You can zap me if I'm right."

Kenlan waited for the jolt of electricity, but nothing came. "Or not," he said. "But you aren't saying anything, either, so I'm pretty sure I'm right anyway. And I'll bet credits to caf beans that's where you run into your dead end."

"Your status as an Imperial inspector has been revoked," snapped the ice-man.

"Not likely," replied Kenlan. "You really have no idea what's going on here, do you? Do you really think it's possible that I didn't exist before I was Leeman Harku? Somebody sealed those records, and sealed them so completely that it looks like they aren't even there. That must have been someone with a much higher security clearance than you have, friend." Kenlan paused a few moments. "I'd hate to make somebody like that angry."

"What did you have in mind?" grumbled the ice-man.

"You tell me," replied Kenlan. "What did you even bring us in here for?"

"You know it's about the boy," snapped the ice-man. "Inquisitor Tremayne has plans for him."

Kenlan found the strength to roll his eyes. "You don't think that's what I've been doing all along here?" he asked. "This is much, much bigger than the boy. If it had just been about him, I'd have taken him in a long time ago. That boy has connections. You'd settle for one untrained Jedi boy? You're so obtuse."

"Remember I'm the one who has *you* captive, As-Buka."

"That might change when Tremayne gets here," threatened Kenlan. "But if you want to take that chance, by all means, let's stay here." He folded his arms, looked at the ice-man, and waited.

Posted by Corr Terek on 30 October 2008 07:00 AM:

Damon flexed his arm experimentally. Between Thel's healing powers and Liira's ministrations, he was feeling much better. Granted that could be because he was under the influence of a considerable dose of painkiller, but Damon preferred to think he'd be up to combat spec in no time.

"How's that?" Liira asked brightly as she worked on Mir.

"Much better, thank you." It was hard to believe she'd completely forgotten him, but perhaps it was for the best. Ever since the fight when they were kids, she'd always seemed slightly afraid of him. It was...nice not to be feared.

Jace had been in and out of the room, having to serve customers throughout the day. The town was strangely quiet -- Damon couldn't help but feel that something was wrong. Something was...missing.

Liira finally finished tending to Mir's injuries. "That should do it for right now," she pronounced. "I would see a doctor as soon as you can, though."

Mir mumbled her thanks. Liira stood, glancing back and forth between the two of them. "I'm going to go help my husband now, but if either of you need anything, just let us know."

Damon grinned. "Thank you, we'll be sure to do that."

Once she was gone, Damon turned his attention to Mir. The Farghul had seemed strangely withdrawn since their experience

in the cavern. Even now, she seemed to be trying desperately to look anywhere but at him. "Mir."

She started. "Yes?"

"You're really spacing out over there. What's wrong?"

Mir looked away. "Nothing."

"That's awfully hard to believe," Damon said quietly.

"You've been acting differently ever since the cave."

"Since we were almost killed, you mean?"

Damon conceded the point, nodding his head. "Yeah, that was pretty tense. I can't help but feel, though, that there's something else."

A flash of fire burned in Mir's eyes for a moment, a bit of defiance that just as quickly died out. "It's nothing...Captain. It won't prevent me from doing my job."

"Your job?" Damon was perplexed. "I'm not asking about that. I'm asking you, as a friend, what's wrong?"

She did look at him then, a strange, almost wistful look in her eyes. "We're friends, then?"

"Of course. I'd trust you with my life" Damon said truthfully. It'd been a rocky road at the start, sure, but Mir had proven herself to him time and time again. She smiled briefly, and for a moment it seemed as if some of the tension left her. She seemed to be gathering her strength.

"Damon, do you remember asking me how I became a member of Ghull's crew?" Mir's voice was suddenly hesitant again, strangely vulnerable. Damon looked at her curiously.

"Yeah, I was wondering if you were ever going to tell me."

"Well," she began, but before she could finish speaking the door hissed open again and Thel walked in with Jace.

"They're not at the Imperial compound anymore."

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 31 October 2008 04:57 AM:

Athelias entered the room, Damon was sitting in a chair on the other side of the room, Mir was sitting next to him, he thought he was interrupting something and wanted to just go back out the door, but he couldn't.

"They're not at the Imperial compound anymore."

Damon got up and Mir caught him when he teetered, "Then where are they?"

"They're on their way to the Maw."

Damon collapsed back into his chair, "The Maw. How do you know?"

Athelias took a seat near the door, "I snuck into the garrison and found a computer in the detention block, it said that they were captured and they were en route to the Maw." Mir helped Damon back to his feet, "I also managed to 'liberate' your ship, however if you're not well enough yet you can stay here for the time being, and I'll get another ship. Be honest Damon, I can't see anybody without serious force training capturing the boy and As-Buka, he could be as strong as the one we faced in the cave." Athelias paused, "And yet, I feel as if we should stay together if possible." He leaned back in the chair and scrubbed his face with his hands, "Something is different, something is wrong, I believe our fates are linked and being seperated would lead to trouble, on the other hand we cannot let the Imperials keep the boy, but you don't seem to be in any shape to fight. I'm lost, I don't know what to do."

Posted by Ice Hawk on 1 November 2008 10:36 PM:

Koro came in from the cockpit.

"We're in hyperspace, we'll be landing on Ryloth in a couple of hours."

He turned to Reil.

"You really don't have time to be lounging around stuffing your face."

Reil looked up at Koro.

"Why's that?"

"Because you need to fix the repulsor. I don't fancy landing without it."

Reil bristled at that.

"Why me? You're the one that demanded to be allowed to land the ship, you should have to fix it."

"I'm not the one who broke it. You insisted on taking off, and we lost a repulsor because of you."

Reil jumped to his feet.

"Because of me? If it wasn't for me we would have lost a whole lot more than one repulsor! I took off without it, if you're so much better than me, why don't you land without it?"

Koro shrugged.

"Fine, don't fix it. Just remember: if we all die in a horrible and fiery explosion, it's all your fault."

All eyes turned on to Reil. Zealos exhaled heavily.

"Fine. . . I'm going. I don't know why, but I'm going."

Tey stood up.

"I'll go to."

"I don't need any help."

"Do you know where the repulsor coils are?"

"... ah."

Tey led the way to the back of the ship.

Posted by Ris on 2 November 2008 10:08 PM:

Arrival at Bespin

Cin settled into a seat away from other passengers. As Drendar joined her, she whispered, "I didn't think Bespin locals were so naive--or is it straight-laced? Did you see those gate agents? When I said we had to have a wedding & trip, their eyes dropped right to my middle!"

He whispered right back "I think straight laced is more appropriate, I guess they figure if a young couple is escaping after marriage they must have gotten married for a reason."

"Maybe I shouldn't have done it, but I just couldn't resist. And they were too busy looking for a baby under my jumpsuit to think of any more documentation they could ask for," she grinned. She shifted a little closer to Drend--the car was a bit chilly to her. *Must be from nearly freezing while EV.*

Drend wrapped his arm around her shoulders "I think perhaps their gaze might've been elsewhere..." he looked at the head dress she was wearing "Was that to make you *less* noticable, or noticable for a different reason instead?"

Cin smiled at the compliment. "It's just a simple wrap. I may decide to splurge on a temp dye job." She lowered her voice a little more, "The streaks are a bit unusual you know. Or do you really think this is too far off Dan's radar?"

"Well, frankly I like your hair the color it is," he shifted a little at the mention of Dan. "Bespin is an independent operation, Dan wouldn't like not being able to corner the market in some way, and the station's security force is pretty good at rooting out outsiders who don't belong."

"Well, maybe we can take our time looking up our pals, then. Less chance of making a misstep."

"True, but I don't think we should stay more than a few days at most, I've found its usually better to stay on the move regardless. How long do honeymooners spend on their vacations anyway?"

"I dunno, I think it varies by budget."

The tram slowed and opened its doors, they were about 20 meters from the theater. "Well then, perhaps we should try for four days." He got up from his seat and aided her to get up and held his arm out so they could look the part. "Four sounds good. Plenty of time to get things done, and still have enough fun that people will think that is all we are here for."

Once in the room, Cin tossed her things down and flopped on one of the beds. "Sleeping space--and all mine!"

"All yours," he smiled and flopped onto the other bed. "How come you get the one next to the window?"

"You want this one?"

"Well, I like being able to enjoy the view is all."

"I like the view too. You want it?" she repeated. "I've got it. What can you do?" She added, "You're a gentleman, right?" There was a hint of tease in her voice.

"I'm considering revising my behavior," he said with a wry grin, "perhaps I can worm you out of it."

"Worm! Worm? That is so uncouth..."

"Is it?" he gets up from the bed and stalks somewhat towards Cin, stops and places his finger to his lips "I do wonder though." *I wonder other things as well.*

"Wonder what? Whether you have a snowball's chance on Mustafar of me giving up this bed?"

"No, I wonder," he turned, "if I can tickle you out of it!" He pounced on her and promptly started tickling madly.

"Hey!" she shrieked, close to his ear, attempting to roll out of his way. She almost made it and ended up curled on her side, facing away from him. Cin did not stay that way. Giggling, she tried getting hands and knees under her, but Drend was a little faster, but she ended up on her back, trying to push him way. Drend, trying to reach Cin's ribs with his finders, touched another part of her torso, and she gasped. "You--hey!"

Drend was absentminded, he didn't know where he was tickling, just that he was, he didn't stop. "What was that?" He had noticed that she was quite lithe and nearly escaped him a few times. "You're not gonna get away!"

Half indignant, half pleased, "You know exactly what you're doing!" she spluttered, slipping her hands to get hold of his, taking advantage of the question to try and evade once more.

The next day

Several hours into the morning, still not having left the room, Cin and Drend enjoyed room service. Cin, wrapped in a plush robe, had already put away a sizeable breakfast and was still nibbling as she scrolled through the retail directory. She looked up at Drend with a smile. "This place has a good inventory. Good thing the third leg was intact--they want a small fortune for one of those. The 2 primaries are barely half the price together. I'd like to find a set though. Less work to get adjusted."

"Too true, I can't imagine being a droid, its hard enough being human and getting used to two legs." He placed his hands on her shoulders and looked over her at the screen, "That much for a new motivator?!"

"Yeah." She turned her head, kissing his fingers. "It'd almost be cheaper to download him into a new chassis."

"Yeah... but it wouldn't be the same, for you Razzle is family, he deserves to be rebuilt, not just downloaded into a new body."

Cin leaned back against him. That was something she really loved in Drendar. He really understood things. "Yes, he is family. Maybe we can find a scrapped chassis. I heard that they do a lot of scrap and recycling here. Then we take out what we need for Razzle and still have a few spare parts, that I hope he'll never

need. What do you think?"

"Sounds like a good idea, but we should watch out for these Ugnaught dealers, I hear they really know how to haggle over scrap."

"There is that. So maybe we try haggling for just the parts we need at the these regular shops first?"

"Sure. Lets just work on getting the parts we need, if we manage to get anything else, thats bonus, right?"

"Sure. Too bad there's no place we can walk in to get the drive parts for *Puddlejumper*. I really do not look forward to negotiating with that guy old Zephram told us about. He's an honest worthy man--but he's an honest worthy who's not going to do or say anything for us that won't put the max credits in his pocket. That I *will* bet on."

"I don't doubt it, this got delivered with breakfast." He held up a Flimsi-post of the Cloud City Gazette, it showed the man they were looking for. "Man Beats Administrator, Wins 5,000,000 Credit Grand Sabaac Prize."

"Hmm, if we play him, let's ask for Pazaak & hope he isn't good with it."

"I haven't played Pazaak since university, and even then we played single digit stakes," he laughs. "I can still remember staying up till the morning playing sometimes."

"It's fun."

"So, shall we get dressed and head out?" Drend inquired, then took another look at the map of where the stores were clustered, on one of the lower levels. "Probably be good to dress a little on the cooler side, all the steam vents on the lower levels tend to make the midlevels a bit humid."

Cin just grabbed up pants, a tank top, and a loose shirt before heading into the 'fresher. She stuck her head back out the door. "Joining me?"

"In a minute," he said while absentmindedly still looking at the screen... then the 'don't be a moron' switch clicked. "Scratch that, right now."

Some time later, the couple were strolling down an aisle of hardware and supply shops.

"So, which shop do you want to head into first?"

She took the opportunity to snuggle against Drend. "Let's try that one, I know we don't need software, but I don't want to target what we really need right away. Still paranoid a bit."

When she snuggled, he held her closer, "I think I know what you mean." The store was called "Ugmak's House of Bits and Bytes" sounded almost more like a weird techie restaurant.

"Think there'll be some kind of chic-geek bar & grill in here, off in a corner?" Oddly, the idea made Cin recall a clothing store in Aldera. Her younger sister was always buying wnting to go there & buy new "recital clothes." Cin had hated being chaperone to D'Nelle and her silly friends--until they'd all discovered that what looked like a very detailed decorative display of a sweet shop was very real.

"If they sell food in there," he can smell the servo-oil coming from inside and makes a face "I wouldn't eat it."

"Neither would I." Her nose wrinkled. "We **don't** use any of their lubes for Razzle. I think they're rancid."

He holds the door open for her and follows her into the store.

"Well, let's see what they have in the way of software." She gravitated to a display labeled New Releases, none of which seemed recent. The store seemed to have a very limited inventory of computers and datapads as well. After a few minutes browsing, during which the droid clerk took no notice of them, she turned to Drend. "Let's go, nothing here. I thought we might come across something useful."

"Well then lets continue down the street and check out the

next one."

The sign said "Toffels Bros, Ltd." No indication of what it offered.

"Toffels Bros? Limited? sounds kinda pretentious." Drend wondered aloud.

There was a window display of a holiday scene, Cin thought, done in holograms, done with outdated technology, by the amount of flicker and off-colors. "Yeah, it is. Doesn't exactly fit here."

Drend again follows her into the store. Inside it is a fun little shop, a white haired humanoid sits behind a counter, scattered around are genuine books, datapads, and lo and behold, a few parts bins. "Jackpot." After a few minutes of rummaging through the bins he finds a set of servomotors, perfect for reconditioning an astromech.

Cin let's Drend check out the parts bins, while she sets about charming the proprietor. She answers his exaggerated compliments with a pert smile.

A little more rummaging nets him a complete set of leg-mount power cells, and some of the internal component bits (fold out arms, etc.)

"Are you one of the brothers?" "No, little miss, but I am a genuine Toffels." As he stands up to come around the counter, she sees that the "little miss" is accurate. He is at least a half-meter taller than she is. "I'm the great-great nephew. Or is that 3 greats? No matter now. They were the black-nerfs of their generation and I am the eccentric of this generation."

He drops the parts into a carry bin and walks over next to Cin and finds himself dwarfed by the man "Well, hello."

Cin looks at all the parts. "Drend you shoulda called me to help. All I've been doing is chatting with Master Toffels." "Now, its just Toffels, little miss. And remember, a man likes to do things for himself, no matter how much easier it would be with a pretty lady's help. It's just the way we are," Toffels told her.

Drend smiled "What, did I do something wrong?" he was confused "I found what looks like some good parts."

Drend began negotiating with the man about the price of what he had picked up. "Ok, that seems fair on the motivators, so how about the price on these cells?" Toffels considered it "I can go a little lower." "Deal, how about these grasper arms, the fine and coarse, can't I get them for a set price?" Toffels was somewhat unwilling to go any lower "You know, I really shouldn't give you any more money off, I am trying to run a business you know." Drend understood, then suddenly something caught his eye, a HoloStill book, 'Stills of Alderaan,' chillingly fitting title.

He picked it up off the shelf display, and looked at the picture on the front, a beatiful vista was displayed "What if I get this too?"

Toffels nodded his head "Sure, you get that, I'll throw in the grasper arms for half-price. Not many people into picture books these days, most people want Holoprojected images."

He took another look at the picture on the cover, the beauty of the vista reminded him of the beauty of Cin, he had a visible smile. Noting that Cin was off looking at something Toffels whispered "Its for her isn't it?"

Drends face flushed a little "Yeah, I don't know why, but this book suddenly pointed itself out to me, I don't imagine she has many pictures of home."

While Drend bargained, Cin was wandering through the aisles, looking at the wide variety of items.

Cinowyn finished her circuit around the shop. This was a neat place. She wished they were staying here so she could visit again. There was such a variety of things.

"Do you have a collection of Classical Literature?"

"Yeah, in fact someone was buying some of it the other day."

Cin headed back to the counter, something sparkling in her hand, when she heard the end of the conversation. Was Drend using one of the recognitions she'd told him? Cin joined the conversation. "I bet you don't sell much of that, or do you have people taking extension courses like Honors Literature, Toffels?"

"I don't know about anyone taking courses, but there is this gal who comes in here, browses through the section, maybe picks something out. Shes pretty nice."

"You get a lot of traffic here? We came in by accident--thought it was a hardware store." Cin wsn't sure how to pump for more about this girl. By all accounts, "Scholar" had come by her codename honestly. Then it came to her. "If she comes in a lot, then she must have a great collection? May be we can trade. I had a School Chum like that. You know how I could get with her?"

"She comes in about once a week, she should come in tomorrow, I haven't seen her for a little over a week." Toffels didn't mind telling them

"Might do that, I like this place." She put what she had in her hands down on the counter, a set of jewelry with pale blue stones--necklace earrings and bangle-bracelets. "How much for these?"

"Hmm, twelve credits should suffice for those."

Cin decided not to bargain over these. From what little she'd overheard, Drend had gotten him down pretty low on the parts and she doubted he was making a good living here. Especially in an area where beings wouldn't go if they were shopping for antiques, curiosities or gifts. Toffels was probably here because he couldn't afford to move to a "fashionable retail" area of the City, once the nature of this location changed.

"Done. So what's our total?"

"ninety eight, and your names, so if I see her before you I can tell her who you are."

She glanced at Drend, before givng the names they had used at the hotel. Toffels tapped a little on his aged datapad, before producing a receipt in exchange for several of the credit pieces they had taken from Dan's thugs. He gave her a small coin in change, then slipped the jewelry into a septsilk bag. "Do you want these parts sent to your ship or will you be taking them with you? Might be awkward on the trams, sir."

Drend too felt a little uneasy about having to lie to the guy who was so nice to them, but they were working with a cover. "Ah, yeah, go ahead, docking bay 42, the ships called *Puddlejumper*."

Cin also felt bad, even though the only lie was their names, so she offered, "Let us cover the delivery charge?"

Toffels wasn't too humble to not accept that small kindness.

Drend proffered a few more cred-coins and they made their way out, Drend held the book under his arm. He didn't know wether to give it to her now, or wait till later.

Drend decided against giving to her now and he left it in the plasticine bag.

After leaving Toffels, Cin and Drend decided to go directly to a parts store, the least expensive they had found, to get new legs for Razzle. By that time, they were ready for lunch. They decided to stop at a sandwich shop to eat, it was a nice joint, not too pricey, and they had tasty desserts too.

Posted by Corr Terek on 2 November 2008 11:51 PM:

Damon was quiet for a few moments. "You're right," he said, finally. "We can't let the Empire have Tam. Or Kenlan. We'll

have to go after them."

Thel looked at him skeptically. "But you're in no condition to fight anyone right now," he repeated. "And we're almost definitely walking into a fight."

"And it could be a trap," Mir added hesitantly. "It sounds like something the Empire would do -- they've *got* to know we're going to come after them."

Damon sighed in frustration. "I know, all right? I get it." He shook his head. "But we have to do something."

Jace leaned quietly against the doorway, seemingly oblivious to their conversation. "I have to ask," he said abruptly. "What's so special about this kid? Why's the Empire want him so bad?"

Mir and Thel glanced at each other cautiously, and Jace chuckled quietly. "I'm trustworthy -- ask Damon, he grew up with me."

"Tam is...special," Damon said, choosing his words carefully. "He can do things you've probably never even imagined were possible."

"Like blanking people's memory?"

"If he was taught how to, yes," Thel replied. "Among other things."

Jace gritted his teeth. "I think I understand. They want him for his power."

Thel nodded. "They'll use him up and then destroy him."

Jace growled. "It's not right." A thought seemed to strike him. "That's why they were looking for you and Verik, wasn't it?"

"Well..." Damon hedged. "I wouldn't compare myself to Tam..."

"But you've got powers too," Jace finished. He shook his head. "It makes sense now -- all the stunts you and your brother pulled when we were kids." He laughed softly. "I feel kinda stupid, just now figuring it out."

"Jace, I would've told you, but Dad wanted it kept quiet," Damon explained. Jace shook his head.

"Don't worry about it. I always figured you were meant for greater things, and besides," he added, "I might be able to help you."

They looked at him curiously. "How?" Mir asked.

"Temen's gotten a reputation as a planet to unwind on when you've spent to long in space," Jace replied. "I hear all kinds of interesting stories from the spacers who pass through, and I remember one of 'em -- an old smuggler, I think -- mentioning the Maw."

He scratched his chin thoughtfully. "Can't recall everything he mentioned, but he told me that the ships who kept Kessel supplied always refueled at one particular space station before heading out toward the Maw." He frowned. "What was it now?" He remained silent for a few moments, until his face cleared in satisfaction. "Dranc Station, that's it!"

He looked at them significantly. "Now, I can't claim to know a lot about underhanded dealings, but I know a free ride when I see one."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 3 November 2008 06:20 PM:

Tam expected to be back in his cage when he awoke, but instead he found himself on the floor of a brightly lit room, surrounded by stormtroopers. He didn't bother to get up. "This my new bedroom, Ice-man?"

"Ice-man?" The Ice-man said, stepping over to stand above his quarry. "That's one I haven't heard before. It suits me well enough, I suppose." He ran a hand through his white hair and motioned at the soldiers. They reached under Tam's arms and

hoisted the boy to his feet.

From this new vantage point, Tam saw that the large, well-lit room was in fact a docking bay. "Time for a field trip, huh teach?"

As he led Tam and their 'honor guard' toward a prepped Imperial shuttle, Ice-man said. "In a manner of speaking. Board, if you please."

Tam tried to make a defiant stand, but at a glance from the Ice-man, the stormtroopers dug the tips of their blasters into is back. Tam marched onto the shuttle...

Posted by ij thompson on 3 November 2008 07:25 PM:

Tam!

Fi jerked awake, surprised to find herself still lying face-down in one of the *Long Shot's* empty corridors. She lifted her face from her forearm, both of which were now moistened by a small puddle of saliva. Annoyed, she wiped the fluid off with her sleeve.

Classy.

Wearily, Fiola dragged her aching body to the corridor wall, lay against it, and shivered. It was cold here, and dark. Apart from some weak service lights, the only real illumination was provided by the datapad Luis had given her, whose screen provided a meek blue glow. Still, Fi was thankful for it.

But, Fi thought suddenly, *I thought I'd turned that off.*

Looking at the innocent device, she saw that Luis's words were no longer displayed there. Its screen was empty, but for one simple word:

HELP.

Fi inhaled sharply, chilled to her bones. Her nightmare... Tam had been in it, but what had happened? She could remember nothing. And could she have typed that simple word into the datapad? In her sleep?

Yes, she admitted. *But how... and why?*

Fi glanced up and down the corridor. She could hear voices further off, and noises that sounded like ship repairs being made. If anyone was playing a joke on her, they clearly weren't hanging around to laugh.

Fi picked up the datapad and held it against her chest, squeezing her eyes shut.

Tam, she thought, hoping a thought could travel like this ship now travelled, *Tam, I'm coming...*

Posted by Ubiqtorate on 3 November 2008 09:30 PM:

Kenlan came to as the shackles were released from his wrists. "Ah, finally decided to listen to reason, I see," he quipped.

"There is no reason to listen to," the voice of the Ice Man replied. "Your services are simply no longer needed. You have been a great help to the Empire today."

"No doubt," agreed Kenlan. His mind raced, trying to sort through the memories of his torture. Had he talked? What had he said? Had they even asked him any questions? Quickly, he tried to force himself into character. "We'll need to get back to work right away, though. Take me to the boy."

The Ice Man chuckled chillingly. "Sadly, for you, I couldn't do that even if I wanted to. The boy has already been transferred from this vessel."

"What?" cried Kenlan. "You can't do that! I demand to know where he is. You get me Tremayne! Why, I'll..."

"Tremayne has already been made aware of this," the Ice Man interrupted. "I'm acting under his direction and with his

blessing. You will be transferred to a secure location, where you will be tried and sentenced for your crimes."

"No chance of getting a fair shake here, then, huh?" smirked Kenlan. "Well, all right, then. I guess I'm yours to command." He extended his wrists, which a guard promptly manacled. Three more guards took up position around Kenlan and escorted him from the room.

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 3 November 2008 09:52 PM:

Athelias led Damon and Mir away from Jace's place so the Imperials couldn't connect them, then pulled out his comm link and muttered into it, "Now Elayne, I'm sending the coordinates." They were standing in an open square.

Damon looked around, "Where's the ship?"

Athelias kept his eyes on the sky, "It's coming." Two minutes later, when Athelias was starting to get anxious he saw something approaching from the edge of town, he pointed it out when it came closer. The *Nova Viper* didn't waste any time, as soon as it made it to the clearing it dropped the ramp and got low enough for them to get in, and Athelias saw why, coming in behind it were four TIEs. "All aboard." He said inviting Damon and Mir to go first. They did and he followed right behind closing the ramp. As soon as he did he sent two clicks with his comm link and felt the ship accelerate and gain altitude, Athelias, Damon, and Mir went up to the cockpit.

Damon entered first, "Who are you?"

Athelias came in behind him and saw that his hand was on his blaster, "Do you want formal introductions, she could stand up and shake your hand, or she could get us out of here before the Imperial TIE fighters that are fast approaching vaporize us. Personally I vote to wait until we're safe." As if to emphasize his point the ship rocked from a hit, "Ah, there, you see? They agree with me, would you mind pointing me to the gun turret Damon?"

Damon showed him where it was and he climbed in. He settled into the chair got himself comfortable, grabbed the controls and got down to business. It was a typical TIE formation so he aimed carefully and took a shot, because TIEs have no shielding the single shot had no trouble shearing off it's left wing throwing it into a spin which took out it's wingmate. Athelias chuckled to himself, such a stupid formation. The other two closed in shooting at the *Nova Viper*, Athelias raked a line of fire at the bottom of their craft forcing them to go up, then a single shot took out wingleader, the last TIE flew off, back to the base. Athelias went back up to the cockpit, Elayne was flying and Damon and Mir, were sitting on the other side of the cockpit, they looked up when he came in.

"How close are we to hyperspace?"

Elayne turned to look at him, "Do we even know where we are going?"

"Yes we do, in fact, so does the computer." Athelias walked over to the navigational computer, pushed a few buttons and a set of coordinates popped up, Athelias smiled with satisfaction, "Now, are we ready to jump?"

"Just about, warming up the hyperdrive now." Elayne pulled a lever and they saw the stars stretch out around them, then the cockpit was filled with a blue light.

Athelias pointed to Damon, "Elayne this is Damon, Damon this is Elayne." Then he pointed to Mir, "This is Mir'isha, Mir this is Elayne. I found her planetside and I thought she'd be a good contribution to the team. Well, I don't know about you guys, but I'm hungry, so if you'll excuse me I'm going to grab a bite to eat, anybody want to join me?"

Elayne got up from the pilot's chair, "Sure, I'm a bit hungry

myself."

Damon smiled, "After visiting Jace? I won't be able to eat for a few days, I think."

Mir looked like she was going to go, but after Damon said that she settled down, "No thanks, I'm fine."

"Very well." Athelias and Elayne left the cockpit and got something to eat. After they were done eating they found a quite room and Athelias taught her a good way to meditate and they sat down to pass the hours until they arrived at Dranc station.

Posted by Corr Terek on 5 November 2008 11:26 PM:

Damon eased himself carefully onto the bunk. The ship was almost unnaturally quiet -- Thel had spent the last several hours with their new companion, meditating. Damon was somewhat surprised that she, too, could use the Force, though he supposed he shouldn't have been. If there was one thing he was learning very quickly, the Force could not be underestimated. The battle with Kolos had taught him that.

The door to his cabin hissed open. Mir stood in the doorway, the precious box in her hands. "Hey," she said. "I thought you might want this."

"Thanks," he said, taking the box from her. He set it on the bunk and looked it over. There was a simple bioscan latch -- he pressed his thumb to the box and a second later the latch released. He gripped the lid tightly, his heart pounding in his chest.

"Should I leave?" Mir asked cautiously. She was obviously curious, but didn't want to intrude.

"No," Damon said, surprised by the sudden lump in his throat. He realized that he was...afraid...of what was in the box. He didn't know why, but somehow he desperately didn't want to be alone when he saw what was inside. "Please...stay."

Mir hesitated for a moment, then sat down on the bunk next to him. "All right."

With a deep breath, Damon opened the box. Inside were several stacks of datapads, and a hastily wrapped bundle of some kind. He took the bundle first, taking it out of the box and setting it aside. Underneath the bundle he found a simple holocube. Gingerly he picked it up.

Mir shifted uneasily, but didn't say anything. After a moment's hesitation, Damon activated the holocube. Static filled the air for a moment before resolving itself into the image of Spar and Ehyva Algeri.

"Hello, son," Spar said. "If you're seeing this, then I guess your mother and I aren't around anymore." He shifted, placing an arm around his wife. "I know it ain't right, leaving you without a way to say goodbye, but this is the best we can do."

"We love you, Damon," Ehyva said. "We always have and always will."

"Yeah," Spar said, gruffly. "You've done your old man proud, boy. Can't ask any more of you than that." He snorted. "This business with the Empire? Not your fault. They were bound to come after us eventually."

There was a long pause, as if they were gathering strength for something. Then Spar spoke again. "Truth is, son, there's a lot we haven't told you. And it's time you heard it."

Posted by Corr Terek on 6 November 2008 06:16 PM:

"It's a long story, really," Spar continued. "And it started back before the Clone Wars." He glanced at his wife.

"In your travels, Damon, you've probably heard of the Jedi Knights," Ehyva said. "They were an order of warrior monks,

guardians of peace and justice in the Old Republic."

"Damn good in a fight, too," Spar interjected. Ehyva smiled at him before continuing.

"The Jedi were able to tap into an energy field known as 'the Force', and could do incredible things," Ehyva explained. "They were always on the lookout for children who possessed this ability, and would take them to live in the Jedi Temple, where these children would have the opportunity to be trained in the Jedi arts." She paused. "I was one such child."

"They took children from their families?" Mir murmured. Damon merely shrugged, his attention fixed on the holo.

"I received basic instruction from Grand Master Yoda as a child, and I was sure I would one day become a great Jedi. But among the Jedi Order, in order to become a Jedi Knight one must first apprentice under a Jedi Master."

"Like Tam and Kenlan," Damon said, nodding in understanding. "I get it."

"The Master serves as both parent and teacher for the apprentice, teaching him the ways of the Force while traveling on missions throughout the galaxy."

"Unfortunately," Ehyva looked down, "It is the Master who chooses his apprentice. And if a child has not found a Master by the time she is thirteen, she must leave the Order."

"Of course," Spar said, "The Order doesn't want any of their former students running loose, not with that kind of power."

"So those of us who must leave the Order are offered a place in one of the Order's auxiliary Corps," Ehyva finished. "I chose the Agricultural Corps."

"Which is where I met her," Spar added. "But I guess I've got some explaining of my own to do." He grinned. "You already know about *my* childhood, so let's pick things up in the Clone Wars."

"The leader of the Separatists, Count Dooku, was a Jedi once. He was a pretty fancy talker, and quite a few Jedi decided he was the guy to side with during the war," Spar said. "Not only that, but he had a knack for finding anyone with even a smidgen of Force talent and turning them into a major pain in the Republic's backside -- Dark Jedi, we called 'em."

"Palpatine wasn't happy with that, and he ordered the formation of special commando squads who had standing orders to take down any rogue Jedi or Dooku's pet Force users. I was on one of those squads. We worked with ARCs and clone commandos, generally, maybe a Null or two. Sometimes a Jedi would come along for the ride, but Palpatine didn't like it when they did."

"When we weren't out hunting Dark Jedi," Spar continued, "we'd get sent on other missions. One of these missions sent us in to recover an Agricultural Corps team that had strayed too far into Separatist space."

Ehyva smiled. "He and his team were like holovid heroes. I'd never seen anything like them before in my life -- we were awfully sheltered in the Corps."

"Another failing of the Jedi system," Spar grumbled. Ehyva grinned.

"We fell for each other immediately," she said. "Spar came to visit me whenever he had a free time, and called when he couldn't visit."

Spar shrugged. "Your mother is the most beautiful woman I've ever known. I couldn't let a chance like that go by, could I?"

"The Jedi Order frowned on emotional attachments," Ehyva explained, "so we had to keep things quiet. But when your father proposed, I couldn't say no. We were married in secret, and soon after I became pregnant with you."

Damon was fascinated. He'd never really been told how his

parents met, and he listened raptly as the story unfolded. Mir, too, listened with interest, forgetting, for a moment, her own troubles.

"I still had a few friends among the Order," Ehyva continued, "and they were able to have me assigned to the Jedi Enclave on Telos. I spent the rest of the war there after you were born, and your father visited me when he could."

"Those were good times," Spar grinned. Then his grin turned into a snarl. "Then everything went bad."

His voice went low, as if in pain. "We'd been partnered with a Jedi, one of the Masters. Great old guy, always ready with a joke or a story to keep our spirits up when things went bad."

"The Jedi was telling us some story about a drinking contest he'd had when one of the clones suddenly stood up. Before I could stop him he'd drawn his sidearm and pumped three shots into the Jedi's head and chest." Spar took a deep breath. "They told me that the Jedi had tried to overthrow the Republic, and that the Chancellor had given orders that they be shot on sight."

"All I could think of was your mother," he continued. "I couldn't leave the team right away -- the commandos were watching me, and I didn't dare do anything suspicious. So I waited until we got back to base and went AWOL first chance I got."

"There weren't many Jedi on Telos," Ehyva picked up the story. "But the ones who were outside the compound were slaughtered almost immediately. Those of us who were still inside the Enclave would have been killed as well, if it hadn't been for Zal."

"An ARC clone, a friend of mine," Spar explained. Ehyva nodded.

"Zal was on Telos at the time, and saw the Jedi being slaughtered. He made it to the Enclave in time to warn us, and we scattered into the forests to hide. The clone commanders burned the Enclave once they realized no one was there. I guess they didn't want anyone coming back."

"I managed to get in touch with Zal, and he led me to where you and Ehyva were hidden," Spar picked up the story. "The three of us stole a ship and headed for the Outer Rim. Zel dropped us off at Tatooine before heading back -- said the rest of the Jedi would need help. We never saw him again." He paused. "Soon after we heard about Temen III and thought it'd be a good place to hide and raise you. You know the rest."

For a moment, silence reigned in the cabin. Damon was lost in his own thoughts, trying to absorb the import of his parents' story. Then his father spoke again.

"I know it's a lot to take in, Damon, but time is short and we've had to work fast. Once you told us the Empire was after you, we took steps to ensure that you and Verik would both be well taken care of once we were gone." He gestured off screen. "The box should have enough credit sticks to last you for quite awhile -- maybe even help you change your identity, if you want."

"When we fled the Enclave, many of the Jedi and Corps members took sections of our library with us," Ehyva interjected. "The datapads contain as much Jedi teaching as I was able to carry -- it should be helpful for you."

"And I took the liberty of jotting down a few notes on our work during the war," Spar added. "Take 'em to heart -- you'll live longer." He grinned. "But you were never one for learning, so I've included something special for you."

Damon glanced at the bundle he'd set aside. He grabbed it and unwrapped it curiously, giving a gasp of surprise as the wrapping fell away to reveal a gleaming pair of slugthrower pistols. "Custom-made semi-automatics," Spar continued

speaking. "Had the frames made out of an alloy we stole from the Holowan labs -- they'll take quite a beating as long as you take care of 'em. Standard caliber ammunition's easy to find, so you should be set." He paused. "They served me well throughout the war, and I know they'll be in good hands."

The twin pistols fit Damon's hands as if they'd been designed specifically for him. He twirled them around his fingers, delighted at the perfect balance they possessed. After a moment, however, he set them aside and turned his attention to the holo again.

"Your brother should be out there somewhere," Spar said sternly. "You find him and stick with him, you hear? He's all the family you've got now." He glanced outward, as if looking for someone else. "And thank that girl of yours for looking after you for us. I'm sorry we never got a chance to meet her."

Mir looked away, embarrassed by the recognition.

"I wish we could have seen you one last time," Ehyva said. "I love you, Damon."

"We both do," Spar said gruffly. "Now and forever."

The holocube winked out, and the cabin was silent. Damon didn't move, except for his hands, which were absentmindedly fingering the pistols again. Mir looked closer, and was surprised to see tears glistening in his eyes. She gently reached out and touched his shoulder. "Damon..."

Then the tears came.

Posted by Ice Hawk on 7 November 2008 01:11 AM:

Reil crawled out from behind the repulsor coil, covered in sweat and grease, and grabbed the mesh tape out of the tool box lying beside him. Tey sat against the wall on the far side, holding a fire extinguisher.

"So how exactly are you helping again?"

Tey shrugged.

"I showed you where the repulsor was, then I showed you where to tools were, and now I'm supervising to make sure you don't set anything important on fire. Besides, I thought you didn't want help."

Reil grunted and went back behind the repulsor.

"I've changed my mind, I need help."

Tey grinned.

"Well too bad, I'm busy supervising."

Reil got up from behind the repulsor, and threw the tape at Tey.

"I don't need supervising, I need help!"

Tey sighed, got up, and picked up the mesh tape.

"Fine, you've been at this for an hour, do you at least know what's wrong with it?"

"Yeah, it's old, and it's a piece of junk."

Tey whipped the tape back at Reil, who caught it and ducked back behind the repulsor.

Tey made his way over to the repulsor coil.

"Anything more specific?"

"The power coupling exploded when we took off."

"So..."

"So I'm making a new one out of wire and mesh tape."

"And you need me to...?"

"Explain to me why I'm the one stuck behind this frelling thing, instead of Koro, or better yet Tonto."

Reil's hand shot out from behind the repulsor.

"And to pass me the hydrosponder."

Tey picked up the hydrosponder and handed it to Reil's

outstretched hand.

"And you're sure this will work?"

Reil's hand reappeared with the Hydrosponder.

"Not at all. Electroshock probe."

Tey exchanged the hydrosponder for the Electroshock probe.

Reil worked silently for several minutes. Then his hand reappeared with the Electroshock probe.

"Hydrosponder again. . . Listen, I don't mean to pry, but. . ."

Tey exchanged the probe with the hydrosponder.

"But what?"

"But I need answers. Especially since it seems that whatever you guys are hiding killed the doc. Who are you people really?"

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 8 November 2008 02:28 AM:

The slightest movement, the merest indication that Tam was interested in leaving his seat aboard the Imperial shuttle, and the handful of stormtroopers around him tensed and retrained their blaster rifles. Tam was allowed to breathe, maybe look around some, and not much else.

In time, the doors to the shuttle's cockpit opened, and a man in an Imperial uniform stepped out. "Keep us on course, Mister Doule," he said over his shoulder. "I don't have to tell you what will happen if you don't."

"What will happen?" Tam asked, with exaggerated nonchalance. He ignored the stormtroopers' renewed resolve to blast him.

"I don't have to tell *you* either, nipper," the officer said with a sneer. "You've probably never even heard of the Maw."

Tam hadn't. "Maw, huh? Sounds spooky."

"I honestly don't understand why you haven't been shot yet."

Tam said, "Somehow I don't think your boss would like that..."

"My boss." The Imp's sneer deepened. "You'll wish you were back with my 'boss' when we reach our destination." A stormtrooper complied with his silent command, whipping his rifle around and applying its butt sharply into Tam's jaw. "Now mind your tongue, whelp, or you may not make it into the Maw."

Tam kept his face clenched shut, braced for another shock of pain, but never getting it. He dared not even open his eyes, and instead reached out with his Force awareness. He didn't relax until he was sure his new friends had simmered down.

He had reached out with the Force...

Tam had grown so used to conditions in his Force cage that he'd stopped tapping into his unusual sensitivities. He allowed the Force into him again, slowly at first, should he be treated to a shock from some other source. When nothing came, he opened himself fully, and the trickle turned into a flood. Tam had begun to forget the cleansing fortitude it could give him, and welcomed the refreshing influx of mystical power.

"Honestly," the Imperial said to himself, "why we waste our time with some boy is beyond me. Temen III is on the verge of insurrection, and we should be there to quash them. *I* should be there."

"Uh, yes sir," a stormtrooper offered, if for no other reason than to fill the awkward silence.

"My talents are wasted on a babysitting job," the man continued. Tam ignored the rest of his tirade, and instead tried to get a bearing on his surroundings. Ahead of the ship was an immense-- well, 'maw' really was the best word for it, after all. And they were heading right for it. Tam didn't want to know what was inside this place, whatever it was.

The Imperial was still talking. "...And this 'Force' that these Inquisitors seem to espouse? Do they really think their

superstitions can change the course of this war? The only force I see is the might of the Imperial Fleet. Anything else is a waste of time."

Tam realized he was laughing out loud.

The officer spun around to face the boy, and let loose a backhand before demanding, "What's so funny!?"

"Nothing," Tam admitted, wiping the drawn blood from his mouth. "I was just thinking how much fun it's gonna be to— how did you put it— 'waste a little time.'" As he held the Imperial's gaze, a hydrosponder began floating behind his head, then another loose object— this one a small chest— slowly began twirling around the room. A stormtrooper then gave an involuntary shout as his feet suddenly left the ground.

The Imperial barked orders for the other guards to open fire on the boy, but none of them complied, instead joining the first floating stormtrooper in the air. Some of them grasped at panels and bulkheads in vain, but none of them touched the young boy seated in mid-air, a look of intense, sweating effort dominating his features.

The Imperial officer had a sudden and inexplicably bad feeling about this. He managed to take two involuntary steps backward before he too left the ground. It was only a desperate grip on a panel edge that kept him from joining the miniature maelstrom.

"Captain Krieg," the pilot said, "get up here quick!"

The Imperial pulled himself along the bulkhead and punched the door controls. "Why are the gravity plates malfunctioning?"

"The plates are fine, sir!" Doule shouted, for the entire shuttle had begun to vibrate with a low rumble. "It's the Maw!"

The Imperial captain pulled himself into the cockpit. "What is it? Are we being pulled in? I told you not to—" The ship bucked violently, mashing him against the aft of the cockpit. Outside the viewport was a dazzling spray of stars. "What's going on here?" the captain demanded. "What happened to the Maw?"

"The Maw is... Empy's blones, it's gone!" His copilot nodded in shocked agreement.

"Watch your tongue, Officer, and how is that possible?"

Doule glanced past his superior to see Tam, lying prone amidst stormtroopers gathering themselves from the floor.

Krieg shook his head. "Impossible. Find the Maw and get us on course."

Beyond the viewport, they did manage to find an endless field of black, but as they cruised closer they saw a halo of light surrounding it. "Captain," said the pilot, "that's a planet!"

"Pull away, Doule!"

After wrestling with the controls, Doule said, "Afraid I can't, Sir! Something's wrong with the flight computer. It's trying to home in on our location..."

"Just level us off before we hit!" Krieg pointed out the viewport at the golden edge of the planetary terminator...

Doule didn't. When the shuttle hit the ground the wings absorbed a majority of the impact, crumpling and tearing into strips of twisted durasteel. After several nauseating cartwheels, the remaining fuselage skidded to a merciful halt in the twilight...

Posted by Ubiquitorate on 8 November 2008 09:17 AM:

"I'm going to take exceptional pleasure from this," gloated the Ice Man. "I'll receive the reward for capturing your apprentice, and you will soon be in the spice mines of Kessel."

"Kessel, huh?" asked Kenlan. "So that's where we're going. Well, I do hope for your sake that we get there soon."

The Ice Man snorted. "If I were you, I'd hope to delay that as

long as possible. Do you know what they do to you in the mines?"

"Probably better than you do," replied Kenlan. "I've seen it, and believe me, I'm not looking forward to going back there. But that's not what I said. I said for *your* sake, you ought to make all haste. Again, I'd hate to think what would happen if your boss gets to hear my side of the story."

The Ice Man actually smiled. "Which is exactly why that isn't going to happen."

As the two rounded the corner with the guards, a wide-eyed ensign raced toward them. "Sir!" he called. "The *Interrogator* has just emerged from hyperspace. Inquisitor Tremayne demands that you make contact with him at once!"

"What?" shrieked the Ice Man. "Tremayne, here, now?" He turned to the four guards surrounding Kenlan. "Take him to the hangar, double time. If he makes any attempt to resist or escape, shoot him."

The guards barked their acknowledgment as the Ice Man and the ensign raced back up the corridor.

"Well," muttered Kenlan to nobody in particular, "Don't say I didn't warn you."

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 8 November 2008 11:59 PM:

Athelias opened his eyes to see Elayne breaking her meditation with a confused look on her face.

"Something's wrong." He jumped up and ran to the cockpit, then he thumbed the internal comm, "Damon I need you in the cockpit." Two minutes later Damon and Mir came running in, Damon had two old fashioned pistols at his hips.

"What was that?" He asked.

Athelias cocked his head, "You felt it?" Damon shifted his eyes, "That was a ripple in the force, someone use a great deal, and what is really strange is that is seemed to be moving, very quickly. I suggest that we continue to Dranc station, but before we board a ship we should ask around and make sure that Tam got there and went to the Maw. It might not have been Tam at all, but whoever it was is extremely strong in the force." Athelias closed his eyes for a second, "Damon, has Tam ever done anything truly spectacular, I mean bordering on impossible?"

Posted by Ubiquitorate on 9 November 2008 10:48 AM:

"What do you mean, you've 'lost' him?" asked the new man, the red light from his artificial boring into the cowering Ice Man.

"J-just that, my lord," stammered the Ice Man. "He was loaded onto the shuttle to take him to the Maw, the shuttle was underway, and then the shuttle was simply no longer there."

"And you believe it was destroyed?" asked the new man.

"Yes sir," replied the Ice Man.

A strong left backhand struck the Ice Man across the jaw, sending him sprawling backward onto the deck. "You would do well not to compound your failure by lying to your superior officer," warned the cyborg. "I know from your vessel's own sensor logs that no debris was found, nor any record of any explosion. The sensor focus on the shuttle showed that it was structurally sound until the moment it disappeared. The distortion at the end of the record is consistent with that of a ship jumping to hyperspace. So I will ask you one last time: where is Tam Dawncaller?"

"I... I do not know, my lord," admitted the Ice Man.

The cyborg sat down in the chair behind him. He nodded resolutely, scratching his chin. "And what of his master?" he asked.

"His master?"

"Yes, you moron," snapped the cyborg. "The one traveling with the boy and calling himself Kenlan As-Buka."

"I didn't think..."

"Obviously!" interrupted the cyborg. "Not thinking seems to be something that comes to you quite naturally of late. You captured him with the boy, I presume?"

"I... yes, my lord," the Ice Man replied, deciding finally that deception in this case was hopeless.

"And you still have him here aboard the ship?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Bring him to me."

"My lord?"

"You heard me, Merat," replied the cyborg, again fixing his artificial eye on the Ice Man, "bring 'Kenlan As-Buka' to me."

"Yes, my lord," acknowledged the Ice Man. He sighed deeply as he turned to the exit.

All of his worst nightmares were finally coming true.

Posted by Corr Terek on 9 November 2008 10:03 PM:

It didn't take a genius to figure out what could have sent such a strong pulse rippling across the galaxy. The feeling was so strong, Damon marveled that he'd never noticed it before. "He must have jumped again."

"Jumped?" Thel repeated. "What do you mean, 'jumped'?"

"I don't know how he does it," Mir said, "but he's transported us halfway across the galaxy -- twice. All I know is, things start floating, and then BAM! We're floating above Toprawa, or in the Unknown Regions, or whatever."

"Impossible..." Elayne said, her face a mixture of awe and disbelief. "And he's only a boy."

"An incredibly powerful boy," Thel replied. "Do you have an idea where he could be?"

Damon and Mir shook their heads, the latter smiling ruefully. "I don't think Tam himself fully knows where he wants to go when he jumps."

"We might not ever find him, unless he wants us to." Damon added. He glanced at Thel. "You're better at this than I am -- did he feel like he was in danger?"

Posted by Ubiqtorate on 10 November 2008 11:12 PM:

Kenlan sat patiently in what could really only be described as another cell. It was a converted cargo bay in a modified *Martial*-class shuttle, but it was still a cell. It would be a short trip to Kessel... if the trip would ever be made.

It couldn't be long now. Kenlan could imagine the conversation between Tremayne and the Ice Man that must have been going on right now somewhere far over his head. If he was right, the door would be opening right about...

A pneumatic hiss interrupted Kenlan's train of thought. He smiled smugly as the Ice Man stretched his head into the cell.

"I didn't think you'd come yourself," Kenlan quipped.

"You need to come with me," replied the Ice Man.

"I know," said Kenlan. He extended his wrists, now manacled, as he had done before. "You might want to take these off before we go, though."

Posted by Drendar Morevo on 12 November 2008 09:49 AM:

They boarded the ship and were in the cargo bay, Drend crossed over to the mostly busted up droid chassis. "Poor Razzle, his ejection system really tore his body frame up."

"Yeah, but those aren't standard, you know. Had to have it made special." Cinowyn looked sheepish. "Rigged really. I guess the charge wasn't placed right or something."

"Well, better get to work." he grabbed the parts purchases that had been delivered to the ship and began working all of Razzles damaged parts off.

An indignant feedback squall came from the bay speaker. "He says to take it easy, and that bolt has reversed threads per factory specs," Cin translated.

"I never could understand Droidspeak" he removes one of the heavily damaged legs and hands it to Cin "Would you look at that... almost looks like the charge was placed right next to this leg.

"Maybe I should have got a SpecOps demolitionist to help the Incom guy. Sorry Razz."

Drend poked at something "Thats odd, this says that the motivator fluid is full... yet theres nothing coming out." He poked a valve with a spanner.

"That's bad isn't it?"

He poked it one last time... "ACK!" and then suddenly motivator fluid, black and ichorous, begins to squirt everywhere, all over Drend and all over Cin when Drend attempted to plug it with his finger.

"Just protect your eyes til it stops!" Cin yelled, ducking her head down and covering hers as well. The fluid was only mildly irritating to skin, if you were sensitive. However, it could badly damage eyes.

Fortunately the motivator drained fast. Still keeping her eyes shut, and warning Drend to do the same, she groped for rag-towels so they could clean their faces. In response to Razzle's abashed cheeps, Cin said, "We're fine--just messy."

They cleaned up the mess in the bay, then Cin insisted they shower and change. "It's not too bad for skin, but we still don't want to leave it on."

Drend smiled when she said 'we need to get cleaned up,' and said "right behind you."

He got no answer except a wicked giggle.

Both now cleaned and happy, Cin and Drend return the cargo hold to resume repairs on Razzle. It doesn't take too long, but soon enough razzle is nearly rebuilt.

"Hmm, we forgot to get paint. You don't have any gold paint, do you? From the feed backing, I don't think he likes patchwork chic."

He rummaged through a pile of junk and appears with a Spray Canister "Umm, the only paint I have is in Peridot."

But Cin was pleased to see the droid's chassis in one, complete piece. But it didn't look alive. She knew that didn't make sense--but without Razzle's programming and quirks it seemed more an object than it ever had.

Cin had her doubts about the color, she'd never seen a droid that color. She was about to say something when Razzle gave a pleasant trill of agreement, followed by the bleet-blat for "Hurry up!"

"Seems like he wants Peridot." Drend got out some engine tape to establish lines and went about painting the chassis.

As he finished he heard a Rapping against the bay door followed by a loud voice "Station Security, Please Open the door to your vessel."

Cin, who had been admiring her inorganic friend, stood up, alarmed. "Security? Oh, hells..." She quickly got control of herself. "I guess you better comply. Time to win acting awards, huh?"

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 15 November 2008 12:36 AM:

The shuttle was a flaming hulk. It would never fly again. Tam sat on the bare rock holding his head. He'd had enough of crashes for a while...

The Imperial pilot, Doule, was leaning over him. His uniform jacket had been discarded in favor of a black shirt. His pants were scorched and torn in places. He placed a gentle but firm hand on Tam's shoulder. "Take it easy, kid. We thought we lost you for a while back there."

"You... you saved me from the crash?"

"You're a valued Imperial asset," the man said with a twinkle in his eye. "Letting you die would be... hazardous to our health." He echoed Tam's shy chuckle, then got to his feet and turned to his copilot. "Sara! report."

The other man turned and limped toward Doule. He looked as haggard as his superior. "She'll never fly again. I managed to get Krieg and one of the stormtroopers out alive before the fusion containment ruptured. We've all had a bit of exposure but we should be fine." The younger pilot eyed Tam. "How's the cargo?"

"He'll be fine. I'll need you to figure out exactly where we are. If these old eyes are working right, I'd say we aren't far from the Rishi Maze."

"Aye, sir. I'll do my best." Sara turned and stared at the stars. He pulled a small device from a pocket in his torn jacket and gazed through it as Doule returned to his patient.

"So, young one, feeling any better?"

Tam said, "I think so. I guess Krieg will get to keep me for his plans after all."

With a snort, Officer Doule said, "That man is a posturing buffoon. He may have had some wise idea of milking you for as much promotion as he could get, but he had no more custody of you than—" he laughed again, "than I do."

"No, our orders were to rendezvous with High Inquisitor Tremayne in the Maw. Now, since I've been so open with where we were taking you, and to whom, you mind telling me where we are and how you got us here?"

Tam shrugged. "I don't have a lot of control over it, to be honest. Some call it a gift, others say it's the Force." With mock sympathy he added, "Hope I didn't inconvenience you too much."

When Doule's eyebrow raised, and he walked over to his copilot, Tam knew that the conversation had ended in his favor. "Anything?" the senior pilot said.

Sara's face was stretched with confused frustration. "I must have done some of the math wrong. We could never have crossed Hutt Space in the blink of an eye, and without hitting any hazards along the way."

"At this point I'll believe anything," Doule said. After looking over his shoulder at Tam he lowered his voice. "Were you able to narrow it down to a planet or sector?"

Sara responded grimly, then both Imperials gaped at Tam and the blank impossibility of his actions. "You! Trooper!" Doule said at length. "Get the captain's litter ready to go. We need to find shelter while we still can."

After the stormtrooper barked his compliance, Doule returned to Tam. "Well, young prodigy, can you walk?"

Tam was almost afraid why the pilot was curious, but he got to his feet.

"Good. You get to carry your share of our survival gear. Welcome to Ryloth, kid..."

Posted by Ice Hawk on 15 November 2008 03:07 AM:

Reil pulled himself up to face Tey. Tey stood silent for a long while, and then exhaled loudly. All the strain he had to have been under this past night was finally showing. It was if the ravages of time were working before Reil's very eyes, and for the first time Tey seemed fragile. It was disconcerting, almost frightening.

"Look, if this is about the Braxton towers bombing, you're just gonna have to take my word for it. I'm innocent."

Reil gently waved his hand as if he was physically brushing the thought away.

"That's not it. I believe you about that. It's hard enough getting you to shoot when you're in immediate danger, there's just no way you'd do something that..."

Reil paused as he searched for the right word. *Imperial* came immediately to mind, but that would probably expose Reil as a rebel and that would lead to uncomfortable questions. Tey might object to opening up to a man who, albeit inadvertently, dropped an X-Wing on top of him.

"Abominable...?" Tey supplied.

"I was going to say callous and methodical, but that works. Anyway, there's something more going on than I'm not being told, and it seems pretty important. Luis said something about Imperial Intelligence, and they don't usually get involved for 5 cred crime..."

Tey's eyes angled towards the floor, and he didn't say anything so Reil pressed on.

"Look, it's obvious you guys are in deep poodoo, and now I'm in it to. I have a right to know, but more importantly, if you don't tell me what's going on I can't help you get out of it."

Tey laughed at that, but it contained no humor. He seemed to be boring a hole in the deck with his stare, as his eyes were fixed to the ground.

"I appreciate the offer, but you can't help me... Not even if you wanted to, and trust me, you don't. You're being sincere obviously, but that's because you don't have even half the facts. If you knew what we've been through already, and the kind of trouble that is chasing us, you'd do the smart thing and ditch us as soon as we hit planetside."

Reil shrugged.

"With the way things are, we may be hitting planet side quite literally, so the trouble ahead part is moot. There's a good chance neither of us will live to see whatever spectre is chasing you. Tell me the story, give me the facts, and let me be the judge, hey?"

If at all possible, Tey seemed to get even wearier.

"Fine, but planet side. I'll tell you when we get planet side."

Reil was tired of waiting.

"Why? What good does it do to delay?"

Tey looked up at Reil, and for a moment, he seemed like he might smile, but the moment passed.

"Just giving you some extra motivation to make sure we arrive alive."

Tey turned, and headed back towards the common room where everybody else was staying, leaving Reil to his work.

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 16 November 2008 10:49 PM:

Athelias closed his eyes for a minute and started mumbling to himself, "Anywhere in the galaxy, maybe there's a way to trace it, or maybe we don't have to." He opened his eyes and turned to Damon, "If you were an Imperial officer carrying precious cargo for somebody very important and suddenly you found yourself halfway across the galaxy, what's the first thing you'd do?"

Damon shrugged his shoulders, "Well, I'd probably make sure the cargo was safe, then tell my superior what happened, where I was, and when I'd be able to get there."

"Exactly, and since their superior is in the Maw, the call will have to go through Dranc station, so if we get there before the message does we'll find out where they are. I say we stay on course and go to Dranc station, what do you think, captain?" He said with a smile.

Posted by Ubiqtorate on 17 November 2008 12:08 AM:

Kenlan stood on the right, the Ice Man stood on the left. In front of them both, in a high-backed, high-armed, Corellian leather swivel chair behind an ornate Greel wood desk, sat the cyborg High Inquisitor Tremayne. He sat in silence as he regarded the pair, his hands folded, index fingers pressed against his lips. The only sound came from the mechanical aperture in the Inquisitor's cyborg eye focusing and refocusing subtly.

Neither Kenlan nor the Ice Man dared break the silence. Kenlan stood in a confident, relaxed stance, the expression on his face nearly smug, while the Ice Man stood rigid, hands clasped behind his back, beads of sweat forming on his brow.

"You both have a lot of explaining to do," said the Inquisitor, finally breaking the silence. "Extensive scans of the area of revealed no sign whatsoever of the missing shuttle."

"Missing shuttle?" Kenlan squeezed in, careful not to interrupt the Inquisitor's cadence.

"Yes, the missing shuttle carrying the boy you were supposed to capture," hissed Tremayne. "The shuttle carrying him to the Maw, which disappeared so completely that our sensors have not been able to find any trace of it anywhere."

"My lord," interjected the Ice Man, "if they jumped to hyperspace, allow me to deploy a scout team to find them. They couldn't possibly have gone far enough to..."

"We have deployed a scout team!" thundered the Inquisitor, rising to his feet. "We have appropriated the resources of every Imperial outpost in the sector. We have employed every piece of long-range scanning technology the Emperor's navy has at its disposal! We have sent ships, probes, long-range beams, mass shadow detectors, Interdictors, even a crystal gravfield trap. We have combed this sector so thoroughly that we can count every micromite from here to Kubindi. We have found no ship, no debris, and most importantly, no missing boy."

Kenlan exhaled a subtle sigh of relief. Tam had escaped, then. Probably he had used his ability to jump to hyperspace - if that was the case, he could be anywhere in the galaxy by now.

"Missing?" Kenlan shouted at the Ice Man, masking his relief with vitriol. "You let them escape? How could you possibly have..."

"If you had brought the boy in yourself as you were supposed to, Merat would never have had the opportunity to lose him," barked Tremayne.

"Brought him in yourself?" asked the Ice Man in soft confusion.

"My lord," replied Kenlan, ignoring the Ice Man's question, "there's so much more at stake here than a simple boy. He has potential, true, but he can't possibly have developed such abilities on his own. Somebody has been training him."

"That's no excuse for abandoning your mission," insisted Tremayne, jabbing an accusing finger in Kenlan's direction. "You should have brought us the boy as soon as you had detected his abilities."

"And ignore an opportunity to track down a fully-trained Jedi?" replied Kenlan, his own voice raised. "Perhaps even one

of the missing masters? My lord, my jurisdiction grants me broad discretion in such matters. My primary charge is to seek out the remnants of the Jedi Knights, not to waste my time fetching barely-trained neophytes."

"I'm well aware of your charge, Harku!" snapped Tremayne. "I gave it to you."

"Then surely you'll understand that this was an opportunity I couldn't ignore!"

"You certainly managed to ignore it long enough," retorted Tremayne. "How many months did you travel with the boy before Merat tracked you both down on his own?"

"I had to earn the boy's trust, my lord," explained Kenlan. "I needed to use the boy to draw out his master..."

"By posing as his master yourself?"

"My lord... with all due respect, why do you question my methods? Do you also question my past results?"

Tremayne paused before nodding slowly. "Go on," he prompted.

Kenlan nodded in acknowledgment. "When I met the boy, it was obvious he was alone, confused, and afraid," he continued. "I suspect that when I arrived, his master had somehow learned I was coming and had abandoned the boy. It became clear very quickly that even the boy had no idea what had become of his master, but I was confident that if I could befriend the boy, I could draw out the master, or at least learn enough about him to track him down myself."

"And what did you learn?" asked Tremayne.

Kenlan shook his head. "Tam believed his master's name to be Sanlat Hedron, but I know of no Jedi by that name, and certainly not among the names of those still unaccounted for. I suspect he must have been using a false name..."

"As were you," interjected Tremayne.

"Of course," replied Kenlan. "It would be a foolish risk to give one's own name while wanted by so many people. In any case, however, I've been on the trail of this Sanlat Hedron ever since. Had your lackey here not interfered, I may have found him by now."

"I'm no one's lackey," replied the Ice Man. "I'm a servant of the Empire, not a two-credit con artist like yourself."

"I'll not have this," warned Tremayne. "Name-calling won't help us capture the boy... or his master."

"My lord, you can't seriously believe the web of lies this man is spinning!" cried the Ice Man. "He's nothing but a common criminal."

"And an inspector of the Inquisitorius, as are you," clarified Tremayne. "In terms of seniority, he technically outranks you. And besides, I'll need both of your services. Inspector Merat, you're being assigned to continue the search for young Dawncaller. Inspector Harku, since you're already well on the trail of 'Sanlat Hedron,' you'll be tasked with finishing that pursuit."

Kenlan shook his head. "My lord, the boy is still my only link to finding Hedron. It's critical we find him first."

"Very well, then," conceded Tremayne. "You'll *both* be given the task of finding Dawncaller."

"Both?" the two men responded in unison.

"Yes. You'll both be given a crewed ship and resources, and whichever of you finds the boy first will continue with the task of searching for the master." Tremayne glared at the two with his cyborg eye. "The other will not be given the opportunity to fail me again."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 17 November 2008 05:52 PM:

The scoured rock underfoot seemed at odds against their progress. No matter which direction they chose, or how slowly they handled the terrain, belligerent teeth of stone snatched at their ankles. It was all Tam could do to keep from spraining an ankle or two.

He stopped and gazed at the dim sky. "What's the hurry, Doule? Are we trying to beat sunrise or something?"

Ahead of him, the Imperial pilot laughed. "No, young one. On this planet the sun doesn't come to you; you go to it. And I wouldn't recommend that. What we need to find..." Doule paused as he climbed a short plinth. "...is a cave."

"But we've passed several in the last hour," Tam protested.

Saral spoke up from behind Tam. "We want to make sure whichever cave we choose is safe."

Tam opened his mouth, but before his next question could come out, the stormtrooper dragging a burdened litter came over the ridge. "Sirs," he said after a brief, declarative crackle from his speakers, "I think Captain Krieg is coming to."

Officer Doule immediately went to the injured man, taking a medpac from his belt. He wanted Krieg to be as comfortable as possible until they found somewhere that could better help him. "We'll need to hurry. That was the last of our painkiller. Saral," he said, standing, "is that distress transmitter still working?"

The copilot thumbed at the yellow flashing light extended on a pole from his survival pack. "Sienar has facilities on Ryloth. If they pick up our signal I'm sure they'll help."

"But I don't understand," Tam said, finally able to get his question out. "If the caves aren't safe, why are we seeking one for shelter?"

"Because the dangers in the caves can be scared off with a blaster," Doule said. He gestured at the sky, where clouds began to swirl with mounting ire. "The ones out here can't."

Posted by Corr Terek on 17 November 2008 10:52 PM:

Damon scratched his chin thoughtfully. "It's our best shot. I suppose in the meantime we'll just have to trust Kenlan and Tam to look after themselves."

Mir shrugged. "I'm sure As-Buka will find a way to land on his feet. But Tam..."

"Tam will be fine," Damon said, with a confidence he wasn't sure he felt. "He's a smart kid."

"Then I guess it's settled," Thel said. "We've still got some time before we arrive at Dranc Station -- we'd probably better get some rest."

"Actually," Damon said, "I was wondering if you'd be able to help me with something."

Thel sorted through the stack of datapads, a look of disbelief on his face. "There's practically an entire library's worth of stuff in here," he said incredulously. "You said your mom collected all of this?"

"Before the Empire could trash it," Damon confirmed. "I couldn't even begin to sort it all."

Elayne sifted through another set of datapads. "Defending yourself from telepathy," she read aloud, giving Damon a quizzical glance.

"That'd be one of dad's contributions," he grinned.

"What do you plan to do with all of this?" Thel asked.

Damon had been thinking about that. "I want to learn as much about the Force as I can." He looked Thel in the eye. "But I'll need a teacher."

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 20 November 2008 08:47 AM:

Athelias put the stack of datapads down and leaned against the bulkhead, "Aye, that you will." He rested his head back, closed his eyes and muttered something about listening to a crazy woman. He chuckled, "If my master saw me now, I'm not sure whether he'd smack me for hesitating or laugh at the thought of it." He sat up, "Damon, you are force sensitive and you need a teacher, since there are no others who can teach you the task falls to me, I am already teaching Elayne and it would be good for both of you to learn with someone else, plus these datapads should give me a great deal of help. Damon Aligeri, I will teach you the ways of the force and help you become a Jedi, as I suspect your mother was, however I retain the right to stop teaching you at any time if I so desire, do not misunderstand me, I only retain this right because of the current state of the Jedi. The first thing you need to learn is meditation, it can help clear your mind to increase your focus, it can calm you if you are under some kind of influence, and the act of meditation lowers certain body functions, if you go deep enough people can mistake you for dead. Sit with your legs crossed, like so, close your eyes, focus on taking slow, deep breaths, feel the air coming in, and going out, try to focus completely on your breathing, to block out everything else." While Damon was meditating Athelias started the long process of sorting the datapads.

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 20 November 2008 04:25 PM:

It was the next day, as they once again set off after avoiding another impending heat storm, that Tam realized he didn't *want* them to be found by Sienar, whatever that was. It sounded... untrustworthy. It sounded *Imperial*.

Yet the Imperials he was now with had acted dependably. Ever since the shuttle crash they had treated him as one of the crew, a junior companion and fellow survivor of an appalling calamity. Chief Warrant Officer Todrin Doule had been keen and wise in his weather predictions, a skill he explained had been learned on his windblown homeworld of Eraydia. Officer Seeley Saral had been Doule's copilot in their ill-fated flight, and had acted swiftly and faithfully on his superior's commands. He reserved his preferred state of off-color joviality for time free of his duty, filling safe moments seated around warming portable furnaces with cheeky stories and disarming laughter.

The shuttle's *official* commander, Captain Angel Krieg, had barely survived the crash, and had spent their journey on a makeshift litter dragged behind a Stormtrooper, the flight's final survivor. Since administration of the medpac's last measure of pain killer, Captain Krieg had spent the travels moaning with dull, throbbing agony. Often, Saral would lead the conscious survivors in inventive strings of blasphemies, something that irritated the injured Krieg enough to prompt a threatening croak. Somehow, Tam felt that Saral would avoid any retribution for pressing the captain's most sensitive of buttons.

It was then that Tam had a realization. It wasn't that he didn't want to be found by Sienar, it's that he didn't want to be found *yet*. Here, alone in the brutal wilderness, he could almost convince himself that he was nothing more than a normal Human boy. Here, his fellow travelers never demanded anything of him beyond carrying his own weight and working with them in collective survival. Here, though nature threatened, beasts hunted, and supplies were dwindling, they were dwarfed in comparison to the galactic monsters who hunted him for their own dark purposes.

Here, he was free...

Posted by Corr Terek on 20 November 2008 10:42 PM:

"The usual?" The Twi'lek waitress smiled at Verik as he took his seat. Verik nodded.

"Yes, thank you."

With a flirtatious toss of her lekku, the girl was off. Evidently the girls here weren't used to clientele who spoke politely, tipped nicely and didn't try to take advantage of them. They showed their gratitude by making sure that Verik was always given a good table (such as there were) and the best food and service the seedy tapcafe was capable of.

Six months ago Verik would have enjoyed the feminine attention. Now, though, he was more interested in finding his brother. He'd lost Damon's trail a few weeks back, only to stumble fortuitously upon a news clipping from Praesitlyn regarding gambler Koro Bolera, who'd mysteriously come back from the dead.

Verik didn't much care for gambling and had been about to discard the newsfile, but the two figures in the accompanying holo caught his eye. He was dressed differently, it's true, but Verik didn't doubt for a moment that Damon had been with Koro Bolera when the holo was taken.

So here he was on Praesitlyn. He'd spent the better part of a week here, browsing the newsnets for any information that could lead him to Damon. So far he hadn't had much luck, aside from discovering the name of the ship they'd arrived in. The *Ravenstar* was a distinctive name, though, and Verik felt he'd be able to track it down eventually.

"Ha! Mesa got da Idiot's Array! Beats dat, ya scumbucket!"

The loud voice drew Verik's attention to one of the Sabacc tables. An orange-skinned Gungan was pointing at his cards triumphantly, while the Herglic across the table scowled. "You've had awfully good luck lately, Kelp."

Seemingly oblivious to the other's threatening tone, the Gungan cheerfully scooped his winnings into a small sack. "Yep, mesa always been pretty lucky. Born under good star, mesa was."

He turned to leave, only to find his way blocked by the Herglic and several thugs. "I don't like cheaters, Kelp. 'Specially not two-bit ones such as yourself."

"Thassa lie!" Kelp protested. "Mesa never cheat! Mesa just lucky!"

"Too lucky for my taste," the Herglic growled. "Give me back my money, or my boys'll take it back."

"A sore loser, aren't you?" Verik commented, leaving his table and walking over casually. "And brave, too. Picking on one measly Gungan when there's four of you."

"This doesn't concern you," the Herglic snapped. The Gungan merely watched him curiously. Verik shrugged.

"I'm not going to just sit here and watch you beat up someone just because you lost a game," Verik retorted. The Herglic sneered.

"Looks like this pup needs to be taught a lesson, boys."

That was all the permission the thugs needed. A Rodian lunged at Verik, slashing wildly with a shiv. Verik sidestepped and drew his sword in one swift motion, and in a twinkling the Rodian was minus one hand. Ignoring his cry of pain Verik stepped forward quickly, cracking another thug's face with the pommel of the sword and stopping him mid-rush. Turning, he slashed at the third thug, shearing through his blaster's trigger housing and taking two fingers with it.

It had all happened in a matter of seconds. The Herglic gaped in astonishment as Verik casually wiped the blade off on his sleeve. "Now there's just you. Care to try your luck, or would

you rather just take your men and move along?"

The Herglic needed no urging, and in a few moments he and his thugs were gone -- no doubt to seek urgent medical attention, or, in the Herglic's case, a new change of clothes. Verik fished out a credit stick and handed it to the now-queasy waitress who'd taken his order earlier. "Sorry about the mess -- this should cover it."

The Gungan was grinning at him. "Yousa save my neck for sure. Where yousa learn ta fight like that?"

"My dad taught me," Verik replied. The Gungan bobbed his head.

"Musta been bombad, that one. Yousa needin' a job?"

Verik considered. He still had a decent sum of credits, but it wouldn't last forever. And the Empire was still looking for him. "Perhaps. What would I be doing?"

The Gungan grinned widely. "Perhaps wesa let the captain talk to you, yeah?"

Posted by Corr Terek on 23 November 2008 11:17 PM:

"Kelp!" The shout came from farther down the street. "Kriffing idiot, where have you been?" The speaker was a tall, harshly beautiful Falleen woman. "The captain wanted us back an hour ago!"

"Yousa find the ship, den?" Kelp said brightly. The Falleen scowled at him.

"No, the *Ravenstar* isn't here anymore," she snapped. Then she took stock of Verik. "Who's this?"

"Hesa wants to join da crew!" Kelp explained. "Him a bombad fighter!"

The Falleen studied him. "Doesn't look like much."

Verik hadn't missed their earlier reference to the *Ravenstar*, and he wasn't going to pass up this opportunity. "Feel free to try me."

They locked eyes. The Falleen couldn't match the fire that was in Verik's eyes, and quickly looked away. "Alright, fine. But it's not my fault if the captain kills you on sight."

This crew was a rough-looking lot, Verik couldn't help but notice. He'd begun suspecting their true profession when he'd caught sight of their ships -- a ragged yet dangerous looking collection of freighters and a few assorted starfighters. Strangely, though, he didn't care who they were or what they did.

He was ushered before the captain, a massive man clothed in full body armor and carrying an impressive assortment of weapons on his person. His bodyguards stood near him, a Wookiee and a Gamorrean who glowered furiously at Verik. He met their stares impassively, determined not to show any weakness.

"Well, Navarra," the captain growled. "Did you find out anything?"

The Falleen stepped forward smoothly. "The *Ravenstar* was in the possession of a gambler named Koro Bolera, but it left Praesitlynn at least a month and a half ago."

"I've heard of Bolera," the captain muttered. "He wasn't the one who took the *Ravenstar*. He wasn't with Mir'isha on Corellia." Verik recognized the name of his brother's traveling companion, though he didn't understand the tone of the captain's voice when he said it. Either way, he felt it was time to say his piece.

"I know who took your ship."

The captain's eyes flicked towards him. "Navarra, who is this?"

"A stray that Kelp picked up," Navarra said, jerking a thumb toward the Gungan who was nervously trying to fade into the background. "Says he's a good fighter."

"Interesting," the captain commented. He glanced at Verik again. "So. Who took my ship, then?"

"Damon Aligeri," Verik said. "My brother."

There was a moment of silence as the captain mulled over this information. "Aligeri, hmm? Sounds familiar." Verik suddenly realized giving out his family name might not have been a good idea.

"Oh yes," the captain continued. "Seems to me there's a reward being offered for the capture of Damon or Verik Aligeri." He grinned wolfishly at the boy. "My stock with the Empire's not so good right now -- you might be just what I need to even things out."

He gestured to his bodyguards. "Take him down."

Time seemed to slow for Verik as he reached out with his senses and drew his sword. The Wookiee lunged at him, Ryyk blade slashing toward him widely. Behind him, the Gamorrean brandished his axe as he closed in for the kill.

Verik closed his eyes, centered himself, and followed the flow. Drawing his blade, he slashed upward and across, barely hearing a howl of rage. He spun on his heel and whipped the blade out, feeling a slight resistance before hearing a dull thud. He breathed a slow sigh, opening his eyes to see both the Wookiee and the Gamorrean dead on the ground, and his blade resting at the captain's neck.

For a few moments, there was dead silence as the captain contemplated the blade at his neck. Navarra hadn't moved, her eyes fastened on her captain. Kelp remained far out of sword range, his eyes huge at what had just happened.

Then the captain laughed. His laughter was loud and hearty, certainly not the laughter of a man with a blade at his neck. "Impressive, Verik Aligeri. I'm *very* impressed."

He casually pushed Verik's blade away from his neck. "Alright, so I'm listening. You come to me, you tell me that your brother stole my ship and my crew. What's in it for you?"

"I want to join your crew," Verik said, thinking quickly.

"Why?"

"Because we're both after the same person -- my brother."

"What did he do to you?" The captain's voice was merely curious.

"He killed my family," Verik spat. "I hate him."

"And you think you'll get your vengeance by coming with me, is that it?" The captain seemed amused. "I'm not in the business of revenge, boy."

"You want your ship back, don't you? You want the thief punished," Verik said. "I can help you with that."

"Really," the captain said, suddenly interested. "How?"

Verik concentrated, and the ryyk blade jumped from the ground to land in his outstretched hand. Navarra blanched, and Kelp gulped nervously. "I have...gifts of my own."

The captain's eyes gleamed. "You're a strange one, Verik Aligeri. Assuming I agree to this, what happens once we find your brother?"

"You leave him to me," Verik growled. "I don't care what you do with your ship or your runaway crew, but he's *mine*."

The captain considered the offer. "Alright, then. But if you fail me, boy, I'll turn you over to the Empire in a heartbeat."

"I won't fail you."

Posted by Ice Hawk on 24 November 2008 07:48 AM:

Reil had just finished the repairs when Koro entered the room.

"We're about to drop out of hyperspace, is the repulsor working?"

Reil shrugged. He had only done basic maintenance on his X-Wing, this was beyond his scope of mechanical expertise.

"More or less. Probably less, so don't push it too hard."

Koro nodded.

"Good enough, I suppose. We'd better get back to the cockpit. . ."

"We?"

Koro shrugged.

"Yeah, I figure if you're good enough to get this thing airborne without repulsors, you might make a good co-pilot."

Reil grinned.

"I'd make an even better pilot."

"Then get your own ship."

Reil pushed past him and made his way towards the cockpit.

"I'll get on that as soon as we hit planetside." Reil called from over his shoulder.

"You mean that figuratively, right?"

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 24 November 2008 10:24 PM:

By the time they reached Dranc station Damon had no trouble meditating and Athelias had sorted a good number of the datapads. Landing had been surprisingly easy for an Imperial station Athelias guessed that they had a large number of civilian or merchant ships come through. Getting a pass that allowed him constant access to the comm tower was a little harder, although not much. The first thing he had done was check recent communications looking for Tam, so far they hadn't called in, they would probably do so soon. Athelias had left strict instructions that he be notified immediately if there were any messages of import, and was exploring the station in case their ship was impounded and they had to hide out for a while. The upper decks of the station were reserved for Imperials but Athelias had found out that had been right when he went to the lower decks, it was like a completely different station, like a merchant's station, there were cantinas, casinos, and other seedy places mixed with decent looking establishments everywhere. Athelias was about to go back to the ship when he saw the last person he had expected to find walking into a cantina down the street. He followed her into the cantina, when he entered he spotted her sitting down at a table on the other side, he walked over to her table with his hood pulled low to cover his face, as he approached the man sitting opposite her shifted, pulling out a blaster Athelias knew.

He stopped right behind her and made his voice deeper, "This is my table."

"I don't think so." She calmly replied, "We always sit here."

"Well, in that case," He threw back his hood and sat down between them, "I guess I'll just have to join you. Hello Solleen."

Her eyes went wide and her grin nearly split her face, "Athelias? What are you doing here?"

"I'm here waiting for news on a friend, I thought I'd take a look around while I was here, what are you doing here?"

"We're here getting information for our next strike." She takes his hand in hers, "I'm sorry about what happened, how are you doing?"

He squeezes her hand reassuringly, "It had to happen, it was the best solution. As for how I'm doing," he chuckles, "well, I'm now training two people to use the force, and looking for a boy

that has unheard of potential, all in the middle of an Imperial space station, and now I'm catching up with a friend I haven't seen for a while, I'm fine." When the waitress comes over Athelias orders a drink, "Say Solleen, did your father happen to come here with you?"

She tilted her head slightly, "No, why do you ask?"

"I'm looking for some information, I thought maybe he knows about it."

"Why don't you come back to our ship when we're done here, we have a secure line with him in case anything happens."

"Alright, I will." The waitress returns with his drink and he settles down.

Posted by Ubiquitorate on 25 November 2008 12:39 AM:

"Captain on the bridge!" barked the green bosun as he snapped to attention. The equally green bridge crew stumbled eagerly to their feet at their announcement.

"At ease, at ease," insisted Kenlan, his hands spread outward with his palms down, gesturing for the crew to be seated.

Practically in unison, the crew sat at their stations, their attention still rapt on their new commander. They sat silently, waiting for further instructions.

"I, uh..." stammered Kenlan, "uh, you there, at the comm station. What's your name?"

"Chief Warrant Officer Pramm, sir," replied the comm officer.

"All right, Pramm. Patch me through to all decks, please."

Pramm nodded quickly and flipped a switch on his console. A brief whistle sounded over the vessel's comm system. "All decks, sir," Pramm announced.

"All hands, this is your captain speaking," began Kenlan slowly. "We are... about to embark on a mission of utmost significance to the Empire. We have a new ship, and a new crew, but most importantly we have a new opportunity to prove ourselves worthy servants to His Majesty the Emperor."

Kenlan scanned the wide-eyed bridge crew as they eagerly awaited the next announcement. "Now, I understand many of you may be concerned about the lack of experience among the crew. All of you are young. For many of you, this is your first voyage aboard a vessel of His Majesty's navy. I say so much the better. You have been well trained, but more importantly you bring with you a fire and passion that can come only with youth.

"This is a unique mission, which is why you have been chosen for it. In order to accomplish our mission, some of our methods will seem somewhat... unorthodox, relative to what you have been trained. I ask you to call upon your ingenuity to rise above the habits and traditions that might hold back a more experienced crew. The Rebellion we fight has proven devious, but clever and resourceful. We must be more clever, more resourceful. And we will be. Our mission will stretch you to your limits. I will ask much of you, and I expect your complete devotion. Our Emperor expects your complete devotion. That is all."

Pramm flipped the switch again, signaling to Kenlan that the connection had been terminated.

Kenlan turned to the helm station. "Take us out," he ordered.

"Aye, sir," squeaked the helmsman. "Heading, sir?"

Kenlan paused for a moment. The crew were so young. The helmsman scarcely seemed older than Tam, and yet these were trained servants of the Empire. And what of their mission? The crew had been told little of the details - only that it was a mission of vital importance to the Empire. And what were the details? Kenlan himself had no more idea than Tremayne where Tam had

gone. The galaxy was immense, and Tam had shown remarkable skill in crossing it at once. Where would they go?

Kenlan needed information. He had to have some idea where Tam might have gone. But where would he go? Where would he find such a center of information?

"Praesitlyn," ordered Kenlan finally. "Set course for Praesitlyn."

"Aye, sir," replied the helmsman, keying in the coordinates.

"Course laid in, sir."

"Take us there," said Kenlan, sitting in the command seat at the center of the bridge.

What in the galaxy was he doing there?

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 25 November 2008 03:31 PM:

When he saw the Imperial shuttle skirt the space between a pair of bickering clouds, Saral whooped with relief. "I knew it! I knew they'd spot our signal!"

Tam's stomach turned. As soon as that ship landed, he would be locked into a tiny cell. They'd probably drug him too, so he couldn't try anything. He wanted to run, but while Doule and Saral had betrayed no tendencies contrary to Imperial doctrine, they had grown to become something like friends. He knew that to escape them he'd have to prevent them from following. And that stormtrooper could probably pick him off before he got over the nearest rocky hill. His chances for indefinite escape from the clutches of the Empire were fading fast. He squeezed his eyes shut and prayed that the Force would fill his mind with what he needed to do.

Krieg got carefully to his feet. Though the Imperial captain was still sporting a constellation of wounds, and winced in pain with every breath, his condition had improved. His right arm in a sling, Krieg was confined to a single limb to emphasize his words. "Gentlemen, it seems that time is of the essence. I have a proposal for you all, and before the shuttle lands I wanted to hear your responses.

"We have among us a resource of unlimited potential. A resource that, if we harness it, will unlock routes of power that none of us have imagined. If you will promise yourselves to me, and join with me in this secret, then I promise you grandeur beyond your dreams."

Along with everyone else, Tam stared at the man with confusion. Had Krieg spent so much time in pain that he was now a victim of his own delusion?

"Sir, I don't understand. What resource could we find in the middle of this heat-scoured desert that could do that?"

Though it was Doule who had spoken, Captain Krieg stared straight at Tam when he responded. "A power none of us can fully understand, but one that we can control, and if what I've heard is true, augment to nearly unlimited ranges. Plans are already in place to study and utilize this ability, and I believe we can wrest those plans to our own will. We've witnessed only a taste of this power, but we— you, and I— can change the shape of the galaxy with this... this special young man."

As he had spoken, Krieg had hobbled closer to Tam. Ignorant of the pain of movement, his attention had remained fixed on the boy, and he placed a hand on Tam's head with such a slow grace, as if he was daring to touch the Beatified Bones of Breadon. Tam let him, transfixed with the distorted horror the man countenanced. Captain Angel Krieg had that look in his eyes: the one that made Tam feel as if he were an object; a tool. The look of the Ququor. The look of Koro.

Abruptly, Krieg spun around. "What say you? Doule, you are a brilliant man, and destined for greater things than to spend your

waning years at the controls of another man's starship. Saral, you are an expert pilot, and a beacon of what every man serving in the New Order should be. Trooper, with your martial skills we could overthrow the Emperor himself!"

His discourse was punctuated by the report of a blaster rifle. Instantly, Krieg doubled over and crumpled lifelessly before the stormtrooper's leveled rifle. The soldier's helmet speakers crackled to life. "Warrant Officer Doule, I hereby relieve Captain Krieg of his duties as per Order 65: 'In the event that an Imperial Officer plans for treasonous or sedit--"

"I'm aware of the order, trooper. Thank you for your obedience."

"I remind you, sirs," the stormtrooper continued, "that I expressed my suspicions back at the ship, and offered put the man out of his misery."

"You did, trooper."

"And if I may speak freely, sirs, it would have lightened our load. Well, at least *mine*."

Tam saw the smile on Doule's and Saral's faces, but he couldn't see the humor. The stormtrooper had just coldly gunned down a man whose only guilt was his sick mind. Stormtroopers filled his mind, recalling the devastation of the Aligeri homestead. His own home. His parents.

Tam was in the company of *monsters*.

As the three Imperials were huddled over the captains body, removing code cylinders and Imperial rank insignia like humanoid vultures, Tam backed away slowly. When he turned to run he heard Doule shout for him, and felt the chewing heat of the stormtrooper's rifle searching for his back. Before any blaster fire could find its mark, however, Tam reached the edge of the cliff on which they had stood and jumped...

Posted by ij thompson on 26 November 2008 07:29 PM:

"Ta-da!", Cali sang, "isn't it *gorgeous*?"

Fi appraised the young girl as she danced around the shop, enjoying not only Cali's exuberance, but her appearance as well. The teenager had wrapped herself in a length of shimmering gold fabric, holding it in place rather than fastening its confusing ties and snaps. Beneath the dazzling garment she still wore her dusty, Tatooine slave-attire, a fact not lost on the Twi-lek shopkeeper, who scowled at the girl disapprovingly.

His was but one of many shops the pair had stampeded through this afternoon, here in the subterranean spaceport city of Kala'uun, Ryloth, where the *Long Shot* had landed three hours earlier. It had been a harrowing landing, as predicted by Koro Bolera, but he and Zealos Reil had managed to bring them in in one piece. Penniless (Tarynn may have had some money, but she hadn't offered, and they hadn't asked), the group had managed to secure a landing space when the dockmaster had recognized Fi, and had bought her story of an imminent concert in Kala'uun; once her manager arrived in-system, she'd assured the man, he'd pay their docking fees.

That would buy them a day or two, tops, and though they were all supposed to be looking for ways to make money, Fi intended to enjoy that day or two as much as she could.

"*Very* glamorous," she applauded, beaming. "The core worlds won't know what hit 'em!"

Cali blew her a kiss, spun around again, and without ceremony, tore the expensive garment off and threw it on top of a rack, already reaching for the next thing to catch her eye.

"Look!" the girl squealed, "this one has little *Star Dragons* on it!"

Fi nodded, grinning, and moved deeper into the shop,

exploring. *Gods*, she thought, *I feel like a girl again... not a fugitive, or some kind of half-baked freedom fighter, but a regular girl!*

It was wonderful.

"It's perfect for you!"

"Huh?" Fi turned, not realizing that Cali had caught up with her. The girl was examining what she herself had been examining, without even realizing it. A necklace, wrought of silver metal, holding a breathtaking blue jewel in its elegant grasp. The necklace hung on a simple peg among many similar baubles, and for all Fi knew, had been here for years.

"Wow," she breathed, "it's beautiful." She'd never been a big jewelry wearer, but something about this...

"What kind of gemstone is that?"

From across the store, the shopkeep peered at the necklace in irritation for a moment, then, sensing a possible sale, raised his eyes in excitement and explained, "Ah, very valuable... that is called *luxum*!"

Fi stared dreamily into the gem. Then she reached out to grab the little tag, which was facing the wrong way, as tags always seemed to when they really mattered.

3100 credits.

"Ffffff..." Fi muttered nonsensibly, letting go of the tag, as if to hold it too long would commit her to a purchase. "Let's get outta here. The others are probably wondering how we're doing."

She strode out into the cavernous bazaar, feeling strangely sad, and angry at herself for feeling so. What did she need with some stupid trinket, anyway? After all she'd been through, *that* was what she cared about? What about the people that mattered to her? Shouldn't she be looking after *them*?

Yeah, she thought. *Like you looked after Luis. Like you looked after Tam.*

She stalked off into the crowd while Cali, who had just emerged from the shop, struggled to catch up with her. "Why so glum, chum?" the girl asked. "Is it the money?"

"I don't wanna talk about it."

"Blast it, you're a famous musician! You could make that in one night, right?"

"That's not the point," Fi explained, leading them down a deserted sidestreet and away from the bazaar. "3100 credits... do you know how many hot dinners that would buy our little surrogate family?"

Cali considered. "I guess you're right," she agreed, "friendship is more important. And I just wanna say..." she was slowing them to a stop now, grinning mischievously. "Thank you for being my Best Friend Ever."

In her hand, she held the necklace.

Fi gasped in shock, taking an involuntary step back. "Are you crazy?" she demanded. "Everyone who's after us in the galaxy, and you go and steal jewelry?"

"You should have it," Cali insisted, pushing the necklace into Fi's hands. "You think I'd risk that for just anybody?"

Fi pushed Cali's hands - and the necklace - back into the girl's jacket. "You think I'd want that?" she demanded, speaking in a harsh whisper. "It was a stupid thing to do!"

"I wanted to find a way to thank you for rescuing me from Bartok!" Cali pouted. "Plus, I feel bad that you had to lose your fake husband."

"You just never mind my fake husband!" Fiola snapped, suddenly furious with the girl. Taking a deep breath, she tried to calm herself. "Look, Cali," she explained, "you're a free young woman now, and you've gotta start taking responsibility for yourself."

"Yes, *Master*," Cali shot back, rolling her eyes.

"Oh, for..." Fi growled, searching the ground for a rock to kick. Finding none, she turned back toward the teenager. "Well then, Smarty, what do *you* think we should do?"

Cali looked crestfallen. "You want me to return it?"

"I'm not sure," Fi replied, looking back in the direction of the shop. "I don't know how forgiving they are around here. And we don't want to attract any 'official' attention..."

Cali's eyes lit up. "We'll sell it!"

"No!"

Stumped, the girl leaned her back against the wall, and looked at her shoes. A short moment later, she was animated again.

"Okay, here's what:" she began, "we go back to the shop. You distract the guy with some chit-chat, and I put the necklace back where it belongs. It'll be a piece of Duros flake-cake!"

Fi considered, but found she was already following the girl back toward the bazaar. "You'd better be right about this..."

Posted by Ris on 26 November 2008 11:34 PM:

Aboard *Puddlejumper*

(From last time: As he finished he heard a Rapping against the bay door followed by a loud voice "Station Security, Please Open the door to your vessel.")

Cin, who had been admiring her inorganic friend, stood up, alarmed. "Security? Oh, hells..." She quickly got control of herself. "I guess you better comply. Time to win acting awards, huh?")

Drend gave her an odd smile, "I used to love acting, lets hope it loves me back." He went to the door and opened it, allowing two very surly looking Bepin Security Force officers to enter the vessel. "Good afternoon Officers, how can I help you?"

"Captain Lymors? Crew roster and cargo manifest," the shorter asked curtly. Meanwhile the other stared at Cinowyn.

"Yes, thats me, and this is my wife, Mornaay Lymors, this is our ship *Serenity*." He scrounged for a datapad In his jacket that had a *semi* accurate cargo manifest.

The taller officer looked at him "Wife? You two newlyweds or something?" he looked at Cin for an answer.

Cin's face flushed, but it was not from bridely embarrassment although the men took it for that. It was out of indignation at the way the man was looking at her. It was practically a leer. "Wife." Cin did manage to keep her expression shy rather than angry.

"Yes, we're newlyweds" Drend interjected. The shorter one looked over the manifest and Drend asked "is there anything or anyone you're looking for in particular?"

"No cargo beyond consumables, Captain?" The Security man sounded skeptical. Cin replied, "It's our--honeymoon. We want to, well...Not work..." she trailed off, hoping she sounded shy. Neither Aldera Palace nor the Rebellion were full of role models for timid, easily embarrassed brides.

The shorter one seemed to be satisfied with her performance, and Drend's. The taller one, however seemed a little stingy. "You two sure don't act like a married couple."

Before Cinowyn or Drendar could reply to the comment, the shorter man, who was clearly "in charge," told the other security man, "We're on Customs detail--not doing a relationship survey for a Minders' journal. We've got how many ships to visit by end of shift? You gonna ask about love lives on every one?" He turned to Drendar. "Now, Capt. Lymors, just a couple more quick questions. This is the actual cargo tonnage, no recent conversions? Are you planning to take on cargo when you leave?"

"No recent conversions, and no, this is a pleasure cruise, we weren't planning on taking on cargo."

"Well, then, I'm logging this as Pleasure/Private. Captain, madam, I wish you a lovely stay. I suggest Lost in the Clouds if you fancy a classy night out. Tell the maitre d' that Edwy sent you. Oh, and if you do decide to take a consignment on your way out, just file Form 27Besh-61, with a copy of the Bill Of Lading."

At this, the taller agent asked his partner, "Hey we haven't seen his Captain's License and Ship's Registration."

The officer laughed. "Wow, only 2 hours into the shift and you're finally on task. OK, he's right folks, let's have a look, sir."

Drend fumbled around his pockets for a second... he didn't have either on him. He leaned to Cin "Umm, I don't have them on me... diversion?"

"Probably in your other jacket, honey, if they aren't int he files where they belong. Go get them," she replied aloud. Cinowyn hoped he could find them, she hadn't thought about this.

"Right, my other jacket." he went over to the locker in the bay and dug around a few pairs of coveralls, and found his jacket... sifting through the pockets he did find what he was looking for... kind of. They were the actual papers for the *Puddlejumper* and his captain's license but they were so soaked with caf stains and lubes they might as well have been a fishing license for Mon Calamari. Figuring that this was virtually his only choice he brought them over. "Here they are... sorry about the stains, had a nasty incident with a pot of caf, among other things."

The tall guy actually found this amusing as he gave them a cursory glance. "Seen worse, haven't we, Ed? Proves your missus didn't just have 'em printed along with the wedding invites."

Edwy took a look at the papers himself, and as he handed them back to Drendar, whispered to the couple, "Don't mind Jos--he may be slow but he does get things eventually, which puts him way ahead of a lotta beings. Well, folks, everything's shipshape. We've gotta get to the next one."

"Thanks a lot officers, and good luck with your search." As soon as they were off the ship Drend breathed out "Well... thats done with."

Cin burst into laughter out of relief.

"I don't quite see the humor in the situation."

"Me neither," she gasped. "Just so glad, everything was okay." She got control of herself, then asked. "Lost in the Clouds? That's where the article you showed me said the gambler won against the Baron Administrator, wasn't it?"

Off for an evening in the Lost in the Clouds Casino

After uploading Razzle and giving him a clean bill, Drend and Cin redressed in some finer clothes when they got back to their room at the hotel. They arrived at the Casino suggested by the port security officer, Lost in the Clouds, it wasn't a riot of colors, neozine lighting, and loud music, this building was built in an Old Republic Style to promote a sense of elegance... Drend didn't recognize the architectural style, but Cin might. Inside it was as elegant as any palace Drend had ever seen in a Galactic History book, were it not for the bell hops and casino majordomos he might've thought he was in some kind of royal house.

The "pits," where all the games were played, as they were referred to in the lingo of casinos, were well away from the hotel setting. "Well, I'll be the son of a nerf-herder." He looked around "How are we gonna find this guy in a place like this?"

Cinowyn pulled herself back to the present, away from the old memories of Alderaan brought up by the decor. "I have no

idea. Maybe we should have dinner, talk to the guy the Customs man mentioned. He might be able to introduce us. Or introduce us to someone who can."

"Sounds like a good idea, I wonder who we talk to? Or even how to recognize him."

"Easy. He's the *maitre d'*, Drenn," Cin pointed out.

"The Devaronian in the suit?" Drend was somewhat confused, he wasn't all that familiar with this part of society.

"Yes, that would be him," Cin said after a moment, observing the Devaronian's interactions with "lesser" staff.

"Approach directly?"

"Yes. He'll seat us. I'm lead," she added.

It was a good thing Lost was similar to a palace. It made it a little easier for Cinowyn to carry off. Being a real lady was more attitude than anything else--it was how her mother, dressed in simple elegance, had outshone those in showier clothing and jewelry. Lady Cinowyn-Danae placed her hand on Drendar's arm and nudged him toward the Devaronian. Drend attempted to match her bearing, calling acting skills up once again.

The Devaronian noted them in short turn. "Good evening Sir and Madam, and how may I be of service to you this evening?"

Cinowyn favored him with a smile. "And good evening to you, sir. Lieutenant Edwy recommended your fine establishment for an intimate dinner for a newly married couple. Would there be a quiet table for two?" As she asked, Cin remembered that he would expect a generous tip for what they would be asking. She had the credits in her bag, ready to pass over at the proper time. She just hoped the tipping scale here was close to what she vaguely recalled was usual on Alderaan.

"Ah, of course, Edwy always sends me the very best clientele." He leads them over to a very nice table, not too close to the band, it even had a window to the city beyond.

As they followed the Devaronian, Cin discreetly pulled a few credit coins from her bag, an amount that, on Alderaan, would have assured very attentive service. As the *maitre d'* seated her, she slipped them to him. He took them with the most invisible of nods at the custom, they literally seemed to disappear from his hands. "Your waiter will be with you in a moment, but before that shall I have the sommelier send over a bottle of the Emerald?"

Cin gave an equally subtle nod to Drendar, to allow him to order for them if he wished. Drend nodded his head to the Maitre d' and the sommelier came over and proffered a bottle of Fine emerald and a pair of glasses, pouring enough for a taste of each, Drend mimicked what he had seen countless nobles do in film, and checked the wine like any connoisseur. Finding it to his liking, he nodded and allowed for a full pour to his and Cin's glasses.

The waiter came to their table and proffered menus. The dishes were from all over the place, yet Drend found something he thought they might like, a seafood dish from Mon Calamari. It was somewhat salty, and seved in a nice cream sauce. Some pleasant light conversation, and half a bottle of wine later, they had finished their meal. As they prepared to leave the restaurant the Maitre'd returned and offered the check. "I do hope you enjoyed your meal, and if there is anything else you require this evening, just ask."

Cin had already discreetly told Drendar how much to give for a generous tip--it was coming out of the pockets of a couple thugs who had tried to kidnap them or worse, after all. Drend seemed surprised at the amount, but she told him, "It's not just for one being--the *maitre d'* will divide it with the sommelier, the waiter, host, and all the others who stopped by here with some little duty. Of course, the *maitre d'* will get the largest portion." When the elegant Devaronian returned, Cin replied to his

question with, "It was lovely--thank you so much," accompanied by a gracious smile, and an additional nice tip from her purse. "We were going to try our luck with the games," she confided. "And we've heard so much about the gentleman who won so much from your Baron. Do you think he might be at the tables tonight? I would dearly love to meet him."

"I'm sure it could be arranged, he can be found at the high stakes tables, if you wish I can arrange with the bosses that you get a seat at the table."

Cin glanced at Drendar, looking for a nod or someother sign of agreement. She hoped that it appeared to be a "May we please, honey?" look. He gave her that look.

She was a bit excited by the prospect of even being at those tables. Cin's family had been close friends with a well-known Alderaan doctor who loved sabaac and other games of chance and belonged to a couple of the classiest clubs. Lord Janus had often hosted her family at his favorite. While Cin had been too young to be allowed in the gaming areas, she had loved his stories about some of his gaming escapades.

Cin had one reservation about this opportunity--one or two minimum bets would be all they could spare. If they could have afforded lots of high stakes play, they could have purchased the part outright no matter its cost.

"Lets hope our luck keeps going." Drend gave a hopeful smile

"I feel very lucky," she told Drendar before smiling again at the *maitre d'*. "Yes, we'd be grateful if you did so."

When the Devaronian left them, Cin added to Drendar, "Feel lucky to have met you, anyways. But can we really pull this off? Play a game, chat up this man & arrange somehow to get our part?"

"Well, it won't be cheap, unless we play this smart."

"I know how to play--but not how to be a great player. How good are you? So how do we play smart?" she asked, snuggling against him a little.

Well, Sabaac is a very complicated game, based equally on luck and skill. I'm fair to decent, we played 1 credit sabaac, and it was pretty cutthroat."

"What about Pizaak? Is that more luck?" They strolled around the gaming area for a little while, deciding what to play, keeping their voices hushed so that others would assume it was just endearments

"Much more luck." he gave a quick run-down. "Due to how the cards get dealt, you can either be totally screwed by the deck, or made victorious by it. "Plus, your hand cards are randomized."

"Neither sounds like my idea of good odds...Do you think we could a play a hand & then chat with him a bit--ask the cost or if we could barter for it. Rather than use it as stakes?"

"Perhaps, I just suppose it all depends on what kind of man he is... lets just hope he isn't one for..." he made a face "physical payments." He continued, "I've heard stories about some people, not really worthy of being called people, mind you, bad things." He dropped the subject after that.

Cin understood. But they had to have those parts. "Shall we check out him and those high-stakes games? It'll give us the chance to make a judgment about him. We'll be able to return tomorrow and play the game out if necessary. And if he's a decent guy, we can make a barter offer."

They made their way to the table that the Devaronian had discreetly pointed out and slipped in off to one side to watch the group already seated. The croupier eyed them for a moment, but at a nod from a pit boss, dealt the next hand. It was several furious bets and changes of cards later that once again, the man they had been looking for won a rather large pot against a

diminutive gand and a pair of Gotals.

Cin studied the High Roller, as they privately thought of him. He didn't seem too bad a gentleman; jolly in fact, which surprised her. He was rather portly, with peppered hair and well-trimmed beard, and dressed in an elegant maroon suit that Cin knew was custom-made. He reminded Cinowyn a bit of Lord Leto, her family's friend.

Cin knew that at least one of them was going to have to play, or they would have to leave, but the current players worried her a bit. Gotal were empathic and she had heard some pretty odd stories about Gand. But either common sense or something odder apparently told the Gand it was time to cut the losses for the night and he moved on. The Gotals remained, and a human man sat down. He was young, and dressed in clothing that was expensive but showed lack of taste. Something about his eyes and the way he moved made Cin suspect he had indulged in something stronger than wine or spirits. If so, he hadn't had enough to make it obvious.

The High Stakes man looked over at her & Drend with mild interest. She smiled slightly and then looked up at Drendar. "Might be our best chance," she whispered.

Drend sat at the seat that was still empty, next to the man, and across from the young, tasteless fellow in the Flowing Lavender and Gold Cape and inserted his credit chip. It indicated he had a five thousand credit limit, but only he and the dealer could see that.

Cinowyn moved behind Drend's seat, placing her hands on the back. She leaned over Drend's shoulder to give him a kiss, murmuring, "For luck."

The hand was a five hundred credit minimum bid, which meant that unless he won this hand, Drend would already lose one tenth of what he brought with him. It was a good game, the harsh young man across from him played brashly, constantly trying to up the bid, but the table wasn't willing to play that way. The Gotals seemed to be keeping the bids low and regarding the High Roller with a bit of caution, as if they were having trouble reading him. Drend had two good cards in his hand, the Two of Swords, and the Three of Cups; the other, the Lady, was worth 10. He could only put one card into the interference field, and put the three in.

The bid did indeed increase now to well over 2000 credits in the pot. Drend was forced to put up another thousand, his cards changed, he had a pair of Ladies now, 23, Sabaac, a winning hand. Only an Idiot's Array could beat him. He made a decidedly gutsy, and stupid, move. He decided to go "All In" on the hand. With that, the interference field was frozen, and the cards set in place.

The High Roller Called him, as well as one of the Gotals and the brash guy who was now rubbing his cards in his hand as if they were going to fly away if he didn't hold on. Drend had Positive 23, he had a very good chance at winning, and since he was the first to bet, he was the last to show.

The young man showed his cards first, Negative 22, a very good hand. A Gotal was next, he had a Positive 19, and the other, a Positive 16.

The man to his right gave Drend an honest look, and produced his cards, Positive 23. When Drend finally revealed his cards the High Roller gave him an odd look, the Gotals seemed surprised, and the Brash Young Man who had just lost to all three of them... he sputtered.

Cin cut off her delighted exclamation at the indignant gambler's shocking reaction. She hoped he would just leave, but he was too wired on something to have that much sense.

"Cheaters!" he yelled across the table, but the croupier was

not going to have any of that, two very large Togorians were called over and removed the Man, post haste, but before they pulled him they emptied his pockets, he had two vials of glitterstim, and a pair of skifters in his pockets.

Drend looked relieved, he hadn't cheated, but as this was his best chance at speaking to the man, he didn't want to be removed for the suspicion. He had split the pot, he now had somewhere in the region of twelve thousand credits available to him now.

The maroon-clad man looked at Drendar and his "Lady Luck," Cinowyn.

Posted by Ice Hawk on 26 November 2008 11:38 PM:

"Alright, we're alive and dirt side so I've lived up to my end of the bargain; now I believe you owe me one helava story, Mr. Spires."

They were sitting in the back of a small but clean diner, not far from the ship. It seemed to service a lot of travelers, so Reil and Tey didn't stick out too badly. Tey gathered his thoughts before explaining his recent tribulations.

Tey kept his voice low as he related his past to Reil.

"Well, you know I was framed for the Braxton Towers bombing. . ."

Reil nodded.

"Well I've been looking for information to clear my name. I was on my way to Mimbos, working aboard a transport, our transport actually, when the crew discovered who I was and tried to capture me. . . Long story short, I wound up getting shot, they wound up getting killed. I landed on Boz Pity to get patched up, where Luis approached me. He was actually in trouble with the Imperials as well, and offered to treat my blaster wound for a ride off planet."

At this Reil interrupted. "What was troubling the Doc?"

"Are you familiar with the Star Queen incident?"

Reil shrugged.

"Not really."

"It was a luxury liner with an Imperial Moff onboard. It was supposedly destroyed by pirates, but Luis found a data cylinder with evidence that the ISB really destroyed it to get rid of the Moff."

Reil's eyes got very big at that point.

"Do you still have the data cylinder?"

Tey shook his head.

"Luis had it with him."

Reil was visibly disappointed.

That little cylinder would have made up for this whole frelling fiasco of a mission. . . Frak doc, why'd you have to play the hero?

Tey didn't seem to notice as he continued with his story.

"I took Luis with me to Mimbos, where I tracked down my lead, and we met Fi, briefly, and then we ran into some trouble with Imperials, so we decided to flee the planet."

Reil grinned.

"I'm starting to sense a pattern here. . ."

Tey ignored the barb.

"Anyhow, on Mimbos I heard rumors that an officer on an Imperial outpost orbiting Burista might have the evidence I was looking for, so we made our way there."

"Did he?"

Tey shrugged.

"I never got the chance to find out. We were attacked by the SDE as soon as we dropped out of hyperspace. They had already captured the station and killed most of the inhabitants."

Reil had to force himself not to cringe. He had his issues

with some of the naive bleeding hearts the rebellion tended to collect, but he'd take them over that bunch of psycho's in a second. They were real terrorists.

"We fought them off, but then we landed on the planet, which turned out to be a mistake."

"Why?"

"Some sort of pheromone or something the local fauna gives off. It drives people crazy, makes them attack each other. Apparently the Imps were conducting tests there, to try and turn it into a weapon against the Rebels. Called it 'Darkseed'."

Reil had to restrain himself again. This time to keep from jumping for joy. Imperials' killing each other was good, but this news could actually save the Rebellion. . . and Reil's career. Tey's story was well worth the wait.

"So we were all captured."

"We?"

"Oh. . . yeah we met up with this pilot named Damon, and his copilot Mir. They helped us fight off the SDE. We also met up with Fi again, and her companions, a kid named Tam and his 'Jedi' Master, Kenlan. Oh, and Koro showed up. . ."

"That, is a bizarre coincidence. What the frell were you all doing on Burista?"

Tey shrugged.

"Fi and her party were fleeing some trouble on Mimbos. . ."

Reil sighed and shook his head.

"Yeah. . . defiantly a pattern. Tell me more about Tam and his master, is Kenlan a real Jedi?"

"I doubt it, but Tam is the real deal. Koro was apparently following them because of Tam's powers, but I don't really know much about it except a lot of people want Tam for their own purposes."

"I'll bet. So who are Damon and Mir?"

"He was doing freelance work for the Rebellion. He was sent to investigate the research station."

"And you were all captured?"

"Yeah, an Imperial Star Destroyer jumped in and dispatched troops to the surface. Everyone except Luis and Tam were put into detention cells."

"Why not Luis and Tam?"

"Luis is actually and Imperial doctor- but he isn't loyal to the empire."

Tey quickly added when he saw Reil's reaction.

"And Tam?"

"Tam disappeared just before we were captured. He snuck aboard the station, stole the cure the Imperials had made to counteract Darkseed, and helped rescue us."

"Impressive."

"I told you, Tam is a real force user."

"Where is he now?"

"I don't know, after we escaped from the Imperials we eventually made our way to Tatooine, where we all went our separate ways. Fi came with me and Luis; while Damon, Mir, Kenlan and Tam all went to sell a copy of the cure to Damon's rebel contacts."

Frell. . . so much for both of those idea's. . . No jedi, and the Alliance already had the cure. . .

"Me, Luis and Fi were in a cantina planing our next move, when we were almost killed by the X-Wing that crashed into Mos Eisley. And, then we met up with you. . . So now you know the whole story."

Reil mulled it over in silence for a bit, and then came to a decision.

"You've been honest and straight forward with me, so I guess it's time I came clean with you. I'm a pilot with the

Alliance. Flight Officer Zealos Reil, and it was my X-Wing that almost killed you guys."

"Wait- That was you?"

"It was totally not my fault!"

Posted by Vash Knives on 27 November 2008 08:00 PM:

Koro knew he had some work ahead of him. The *Long Shot* was in no condition to fly, so they needed another ship. Koro only had two thousand credits and that would not get a useful ship. He even doubted that would be enough for a useless ship. The gambler went out with Tarynn to see what money they could get. The simplest way would be for Koro to play Sabaac, but that came with two problems. Either he would be recognized and nobody would play him, or he would be recognized and everybody would want to play him, to test their skills against a pro. Whichever it was, being recognized would get him attention he didn't need at the moment. Then a thought struck him. Officially, he was supposed to be dead. Being dead could possibly work to his advantage.

Posted by Corr Terek on 27 November 2008 09:02 PM:

"Well, that wasn't too bad," Damon observed, cheerfully slinging his pack over his shoulder. "I didn't think a station like this would stock the ammo I need."

"Slugthrowers have their uses," Mir replied. "Ammo isn't *too* hard to find out here."

"If you get desperate, you can always make your own," Elayne added.

"Sure, but that's a lot more work than I'm inclined to do," Damon said, grinning easily. They'd taken Elayne's presence on Thel's recommendation, and so far she hadn't caused any trouble. "Especially since I've got money to spare for the time being."

"Better lose that attitude," Mir warned. "Money doesn't last forever, you know."

"Fair enough," Damon said. "Once we rescue Tam and Kenlan, we'll have to get back to work."

"What is it the two of you do?" Elayne asked quizzically. Damon shrugged.

"Freelance work whenever we can find it, mostly. Pretty much anything that pays well."

"And how often have we *found* anything that pays well?" Mir asked lightly. "Lady luck never seems to be on our side."

Elayne shook her head. "I have to admit, I can't imagine living a life without rules like that."

"Well," Damon mused, "it's a rough life, but--" He stopped abruptly as he noticed something out of the corner of his eye. "Uh-oh."

"What?" Elayne asked, turning her head in time to see a squad of Imperial stormtroopers moving purposefully down the hallway.

"The Empire wasn't supposed to have troops here," Damon said under his breath. The troopers didn't seem to be looking for them specifically, but *something* had them riled up.

"Whatever it is, it can't be good," Mir muttered. "Come on, let's get out of sight."

Posted by ij thompson on 1 December 2008 08:38 PM:

The Kala'uun business day was winding to a close as Fi and Cali made their way back into the fashion shop. Going about his closing duties, the burly Twi'lek proprietor was the only being present. Noticing their return, he smiled warmly at the pair.

"Ah, you have returned. Possibly you've changed your mind about some of my items?"

Fi walked directly toward the shopkeep, matching his smile and keeping herself between him and Cali, who was making her way back toward the jewelry display.

"Indeed, we may have. If you could just tell me a little more about some of these fabrics..." she went on, leading the being toward the clothing racks. The pair talked at length about the origin and qualities of the various garments, and Fi was amazed just how smoothly she was able to carry out the charade. The conversation was not the hard part; after all, she had a genuine interest in clothing of all types. But the fact that she was covering for (and helping reverse) a recent theft by her teenaged friend Cali should have made things much more difficult. It didn't. And even now, Cali had returned from the nether-regions of the shop, and was nodding at Fi meaningfully.

"Well," Fi concluded, "I can see that there are many exquisite bargains to be had, here. But," she added, glancing at her chrono for emphasis, "my friend and I have gone and made ourselves late for our dinner appointment!" Ushering Cali toward the shop's entrance, she called back over her shoulder, "We'll be back first thing in the morning, to make a purchase!"

Without warning, a solid, heavy blast door slid out of the ceiling and slammed into the floor, sealing off the entrance to the shop. Their Twi-lek host grinned at them from where he stood by his counter, a gleam in his eye.

"What's the rush, little ones?"

Fi feigned outrage. "What is the meaning of this?"

The being pointed a clawed digit at the pair. "You have stolen from me, and you'll not go unpunished."

"It's right there," Cali pointed at the exotic necklace, hanging on its hook, "right where it was!" Noticing the expression on Fi's face, Cali realized she'd said maybe a little bit too much.

"Oops."

From a pocket the Twi'lek produced a comlink, and switched it on. "Churk," he called, "looks like I've bagged a couple of assets. Real beauties, too. Fresh as Arnden lilies, by the look."

A clearly non-human voice gargled back, "I'm on my way."

Hitting another button on his console, a portion of the shop floor slid away, revealing a shallow, dim tunnel. The Twi'lek motioned inside.

"Get in the hole."

With a screech of fury, Cali launched herself at the being, who overcame her easily, wrapping one of his beefy arms around her neck. Fiola could only stand frozen, not believing this was happening. "Just let us go!" she reasoned. "We've given you your property back. We didn't have to do that!"

With Cali struggling futilely in his grip, the Twi'lek smiled at the older girl. "I'll be sure to mention to Churk how honest and conscientious you are. It may raise your price somewhat. Get you sold to a nice, Imperial officer, maybe?"

Now it was Fi's turn to attack, throwing herself at the shopkeeper with mindless fury. The being sidestepped her easily, however, hoisting the prisoner in the crook of his arm painfully into the air.

"Whoah now, missy," he laughed. "Don't get excited! Wouldn't want me to trip and fall, and accidentally break your little friend's neck, would you?"

The little friend, however, had other plans. In a flash, Cali raised one hand to the Twi'lek's throat, driving something into the soft flesh there and unleashing a stream of blood. The shopkeeper made a disturbing *hurk!* sound, and a face that would have been comical under any other circumstances. He slid to the floor, dead.

Cali stood gasping for air, regarding her handiwork. "I didn't escape from Bartok to get sold again by slime like you," she told the bleeding corpse. "Not in *this* galaxy."

Fi remained frozen in place, shocked by the girl's ferocity. Unable to talk about the act, she motioned instead toward the instrument Cali had used to carry it out. "Where did you get that?"

"This?" Cali asked, holding up the smallish kitchen vibroblade in her hand. "I've been carrying this around since Mos Eisley. I meant to stick it into Bartok, but I never got the opportunity."

"You've got a pretty cavalier attitude about this sort of stuff, Cali."

"I'll take that to mean, 'thank you for saving my hiney'."

Fi considered. "What now?"

"I just need..." Cali began, glancing around the shop. Settling upon a meter-tall metal sculpture of a stylized Ronto, she lifted it into the air.

"Here we are..."

Turning, she smashed the metal sculpture into the Twi'lek's cash machine again and again, until the unit was reduced to a pile of shattered plastic and metal, its contents revealed.

"Stars, there must be ten thousand credits in here!"

Fi looked at the money, and thought about the implications of taking it. She didn't have to think for very long. "Get it all," she ordered, grabbing an expensive handbag off the wall and holding it open for the girl. "Every decidered."

Having cleaned out the cash machine, Cali set about replacing her blood-soaked tunic with one of the cleaner (and infinitely more stylish) garments in the shop, while Fi got to work on trying to reverse the blast door. "No good," she reported. "It's code-locked. We'd be here forever trying to figure it out."

Cali motioned to the small tunnel in the floor. "Our best bet?"

"Our *only* bet," Fi conceded. "Though you can be sure that this 'Churk' is gonna be down there somewhere."

"Well," Cali shrugged, "it beats waiting around here to get arrested!" Without fanfare, she plopped into the hole and scurried off into the dimness.

Fi moved to follow her, then stopped. Running back to the jewelry display, she grabbed the intoxicating necklace and its luxum jewel. Hanging it around her neck, she returned to the hole, and hopped in.

Posted by Ice Hawk on 2 December 2008 12:09 AM:

Things in the restaurant had quickly become uncomfortable after Reil's outburst, and they were politely asked to either order something to go, or just leave. Short on credits, Reil and Tey chose to simply vacate the premises. They walked back to the ship, all the while Reil filled Tey in on the details of his ill fated mission. They eventually fell into silence for a bit as the conversation lulled. Reil finally struck it back up as they were making their way up the entrance ramp to the *Long Shot*.

"So what now?"

Tey looked puzzled for a second.

"What do you mean?"

"What do we do now? It sounds like you're out of leads on clearing your name, I've got no idea how to get back to the rebels, Luis took his information with him when he confronted the ISB, so what's our next move?"

Tey kicked back in one of the seats.

"We find a real ship and we get off this rock. After that, who

knows. We're all still wanted criminals, so maybe we should try and find your rebel friends."

Reil sat down opposite to him.

"Easier said than done, it's not like they'll have signs posted for us to follow."

Tey shrugged.

"Well then let's hope Fi has a plan, 'cause I've got nothing."

They sat idle for a while, relaxing for the first time since Tatooine. Reil had even fallen asleep until they were interrupted by Tonto.

"Are you masters the only ones who have returned?"

Reil stretched before answering.

"Yeah, why, is something up?"

"No master Reil, however regular business hours for the city have ended and it is getting quite late. I expected everyone to have returned by now."

Reil had to admit it had felt like a considerable amount of time had passed since they had landed, but it was hard to tell with no physical indicators to go by.

"How can ya tell, we're in a cave on a planet where all the populated centers are in perpetual twilight?"

"I synchronized with the local time while I've been searching the planetary databases in my spare time."

That caught Reil off guard. He didn't know droids would have a concept of spare time, however he didn't give it much thought.

"Nifty. Alright, I guess we should check in with them then. Uh. . ."

Reil searched his pockets for a second and then turned to Tey.

"Do you have a comlink by any chance?"

Tey tossed his comlink to Reil.

"Fi's frequency is already programmed into it."

"Thanks."

It rang for a moment, and then a breathless Fiola answered.

"Tey?"

"Reil. Look it's getting late, where are you guys?"

"We've run into a bit of a problem."

"What's wrong?"

"We were in this shop when the owner tried to kidnap us and sell us for slaves."

"You guys just make friends where ever you go, don't ya?"

"Shut up, we're in real trouble here! He sealed the shop with a blast door and tried to force us down this secret tunnel to his buyer. He's dead now, but we couldn't find a way out of the shop so we're making our way through the tunnel."

"Alright, me and Tey are on our way. Where's the shop that you guys were trapped in? Maybe we can bust in from the outside."

Reil quickly grabbed a pen and a flimsy and jotted down the address Fi gave him.

"Alright, we'll be there ASAP."

"Hurry, I really don't want to run into-"

There was distinctly female scream and then the sounds of a struggle before the comlink eventually cut out.

Reil made a mad dash to retrieve his side arm as soon as he heard the scream.

"Grab your blaster, we've gotta go!"

Tey jumped up to follow Reil, having his blaster handy already.

"What's wrong?"

"Fi's in trouble - I'll explain on the way - Bring the droid!"

Reil shouted as he grabbed a spare power pack for his weapon.

In a total of thirty seconds all three of them were down the ramp and heading towards the fashion boutique.

Posted by ij thompson on 2 December 2008 01:01 PM:

Cali's startled scream surprised Fi, causing her to drop the comlink. The younger girl was being pushed backward in the tunnel and shoving into Fi, causing both of them to fall in the darkness.

"What's wrong?"

"Something ran into me," Cali explained.

Two of the tunnel's lights had burned out in their location, and Fi was forced to squint in the dark. Some sort of shape loomed in their path, rectangular and solid. It stood hip high, making it the perfect height for the tunnel, which the girls had to stoop over in. Adjusting to the darkness, Fi was able to make out what appeared to be a large, metal box, supported by tough treads. From the front of the box two robotic arms protruded, and between these appendages was a tiny, feeble red light.

"Some kind of vehicle," Fi supposed.

Unexpectedly, the vehicle honked at them, sounding clearly irritated. It came toward them again, though its arms made no move to clutch at them. Fi and Cali pressed themselves against the tunnel wall, and the automaton beeped in thanks, motoring back up the corridor and leaving the pair unmolested.

"Cargo droid," Cali concluded. "But what's the cargo?"

"Don't you smell it?" Fi asked, wrinkling her nose at the sour smell coming from up the corridor. "Garbage. These tunnels are probably how all the shops dispose of their waste. Let's keep moving." Picking up the comlink, she pressed on.

As they walked onward, hunched over, they met with even more tunnels, all feeding into the same channel. The main tunnel widened somewhat, making room for more of the garbage droids, who went about their business contentedly.

"Think we should stop, and wait for Zealos and Tey?"

"Not a chance," Cali retorted. "I wanna meet this 'Churk'."

Fi didn't necessarily disagree, but she'd have felt much better if she were carrying some sort of weapon...

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 2 December 2008 06:59 PM:

The dim Ryloth skies teemed with oncoming storm, and the dust it kicked up kept Tam from seeing any nearby caves for shelter. While he may have escaped the Imperials, the unthinking whim of Nature may prove his undoing.

Instinctively, Tam leaned into the warm winds billowing around him, holding an arm up before his face to will it all away. To his astonishment, the Force made his wish a reality. As the storm scorched and sand bit at the rocks, Tam stood untouched. Wherever they were, he was sure that Doule, Saral, and that stormtrooper were hunkering down to wait for the storm to pass. Even with help from their Sienar friends on this planet they would wait for the storm to pass to continue their search. Tam pressed forward, taking this chance to gain some distance.

A movement caught Tam's eye in the swirling grit, and he squinted for a better look. It was humanoid, and standing in the middle of the storm just like he was. "Hello! Hello over there!"

There was no response. No movement at all. Tam stepped closer, fully prepared to discover that he'd just greeted a human-shaped boulder. But as he made his way through the concealment, the figure's features became more humanoid, and not less so. The being's face was indeed human, and all too familiar. "Master Kenlan?"

It was Kenlan As-Buka, only where Tam's Jedi Master was



disheveled both of hair and dress, this man was well groomed and wearing the impeccable uniform of an Imperial officer. "All hands, this is your captain speaking," Kenlan said, oblivious to the boy staring at him through the heat storm. "We are... about to embark on a mission of utmost significance to the Empire."

Tam stepped back in horror. He looked around, and saw a scene bleed out around Kenlan. It was the bridge of a starship, with Imperial navy men surrounding him at their respective stations. "We have a new ship, and a new crew, but most importantly we have a new opportunity to prove ourselves worthy servants to His Majesty the Emperor."

Shocked and confused, Tam turned away, and found himself once again in the onslaught of fire and grit. Had what he seen even been real? Was it a glimpse of his master's dark past? Or a grim, possible future? Tam pondered these possibilities as he trudged through the searing cyclones, but stopped when he ran into another scene. Damon Aligeri walked with a woman he'd never seen before, sneaking through metallic corridors. He heard the words of the Ice-Man. "...One of my friends. She'll keep him plenty busy."

Tam shouted involuntarily when he saw the woman pull out a lightsaber and stab Damon clean through his chest. The fires of the heat storm washed this scene away, and threatened to burn Tam to the ground until he steeled his concentration and steadied his footing.

What was he seeing? Was this the Force at work?

Finally, Tam decided he'd better continue. This constant attention to keep the wind from reaching his person was beginning to be a strain, and he wanted to find shelter before he couldn't protect himself any more.

Then he saw Fi. She was speaking with a Twi'lek in such a

casual way that they could *not* have been standing in the middle of a heat storm, like he was. A girl was with them, close to his own age, and they were quickly involved in an altercation. In instants, the Twi'lek man was on the ground, and Fi and the girl were running away with hands full of credits. He saw Fi stop to take a necklace then disappear into a tunnel.

Fi!

What was happening?

Posted by Ubiqtorate on 4 December 2008 11:20 PM:

Kenlan was bored as he sat in his command chair, waiting for the characteristic lurch that would bring the ship back out of hyperspace. Finally it came, subdued by the ship's brand new inertial dampers, and starlines squeezed back into distant points of light. The largest, a pale brown-green crescent reflecting the light from the more distant star behind it, grew quickly in the viewscreen as the ship approached the planet.

"Approaching Planet Praesitlyn, sir," announced Kint, the pale-faced helmsman with baby-fine, straw-colored hair.

Kenlan snorted imperceptibly. What was your first hint, kid? "Very well," he said. "Begin standard approach and de-orbit procedures."

"Aye, sir," replied Kint. "Course laid in."

"Captain," interrupted Pramm from the communications console, "a vessel from the Praesitlyn garrison is hailing us."

"Hailing us?" repeated Kenlan. "That's not standard Imperial procedure."

"No, sir," confirmed Pramm.

Kenlan sighed in relief. During his earlier stint with the Empire, that hadn't been standard Imperial procedure, but that

had been some time ago, and for all he knew procedure had changed. "Patch them in," he ordered.

"This is Praesitlyn patrol craft Molot hailing Imperial patrol frigate Hunter," the voice over the intercom crackled. "We are in urgent need of your assistance. Please respond."

"This is Captain Leeman Harku of the Hunter," Kenlan replied. "What do you need?"

"Captain Harku, we are urgently pursuing a pirate vessel along your vector zero-one-six mark three-four-nine. The pirate vessel is nearing the edge of the planet's gravity envelope and will be clear to jump to hyperspace before we are able to overtake. Request that you adjust your course to intercept."

Shocked, Kenlan actually rolled his eyes. "Do you have any idea what ship this is, Captain?" he sneered. "We don't have time to divert from our mission to capture a bunch of dirty local pirates."

"Captain, you'll practically ram them even if you continue on your present course!" replied the exasperated patrol captain. "Our navigator has plotted an intercept vector that will allow you..."

"This is a ship of the Imperial Navy on a priority black mission, Captain," snapped Kenlan. "Do you have any idea what that means?"

There was a brief pause from the intercom. "Captain, may I speak with you privately on a secure channel?" asked the other captain.

Kenlan frowned, glancing at the sensor readout. The ship hailing them was a Sienar IPV-1 - fast enough on its own, but with no hyperdrive, it would have no chance of pursuing the pirates if they were able to jump to lightspeed. "Anything you can say to me, Captain, you can say to my whole crew," insisted Kenlan.

"All right, then," replied the other captain. "We have reason to believe that among the crew of this pirate ship is a high-value target, certainly worthy of your black-level clearance."

"I'm listening, Captain," prompted Kenlan, still sounding all but interested. "Give me a name."

"Aligeri," the captain said. "The target's name is Verik Aligeri."

Kenlan sat bolt upright in his chair. "Kint, are you receiving the intercept vector from the Molot's navigator?" he asked.

"Aye, sir," confirmed a puzzled Kint.

"Lay in and execute, maximum speed," ordered Kenlan.

"Aye, sir!" exclaimed Kint. "Full speed now, sir."

Kenlan nodded. Aligeri! Here! Perhaps the Force was guiding his journey after all.

Posted by Ice Hawk on 5 December 2008 02:35 AM:

Reil had to restrain himself from running to the boutique. He and Tey already stood out like sore thumbs, and drawing more attention to themselves would only make things harder. The market district was virtually empty, and all of the shops had closed for the day. They found the shop that Fi and Cali had been attacked in, and just like Fi said, it was locked down tight with blast doors. It was also blissfully free of any police or storm troopers investigating the shopkeepers demise. Tey and Reil examined the shop, but couldn't find a single way to circumvent the blast door. Tey turned to Reil.

"So how do we get in?"

Reil scratched his head for a moment.

"Uhhh. . . Tonto, is there anywhere you can plug into and slice open the door?"

"Certainly master Reil."

"Well do it then."

The droid hesitated for a moment, and Reil was worried that it might have ethics programming that he'd have to work around, but then it immediately plugged itself in to the door and set about the task of slicing open the door. Or at least that was what Reil hoped it was doing, though it didn't seem to be making a lot of progress.

"Well?"

"The command to open the blast door is encoded, master Reil."

"Can you break it?"

"Yes, however it will take me several minutes."

Unfortunately, it was painfully obvious to even a casual observer what they were doing, so Reil and Tey tried to find something to hide Tonto from plain sight while he sliced the code. Unfortunately they couldn't find anything so they simply stood in front of Tonto and tried to screen him from anyone who might pass by.

"Wow, are we stealthy or what? There's no way this could arouse anyone's suspicion." Tey's voice dripped with sarcasm, but Reil was too preoccupied to notice.

Across the narrow street, in the window of a home entertainment shop, a large viewscreen was on display. It was still on, and it was showing breaking news from Imperial Holovision. Reil couldn't hear it, but there were subtitles in Basic running across the bottom that he could read.

Three weeks to the day it was launched, task force Rocking Horse has scored a major military victory over the Rebel Terrorists it was sent to combat.

n screen it showed a relatively small Imperial Naval group, consisting of 3 corvettes, two Carrack cruisers, an Escort Carrier, and an Interdictor, all grouped around what appeared to be some new design of Nebulon frigate, apparently as they left port three weeks ago.

Under the command of Commodore Archer Weathers, task force Rocking Horse tracked down the bandits that raided the Goodrich supply depot, and devastated their forces.

The name of the station struck Reil like a physical blow and he began to go white. He had been part of the group that raided Goodrich three weeks ago. The colour continued to be drained from Reil's face as he watched the footage of the battle. He watched as the fleet he had been assigned to was pincered by the Imperials, and almost completely destroyed. It was mostly made up of freighters of varying types, and they were all reduced to slag from the awesome firepower of the misshapen frigate.

Although none of the cargo was able to be recovered, and the Rebel flagship plus one other vessel did escape, Moff Lesarl Denvar says the destruction of so many rebels means the mission is to be considered an overwhelming success.

It cut to a close up of the strange looking warship that was taking on a make of starfighters Reil had never seen before, but were clearly not a model of Ties.

This mission was made all the more successful by the fact that it was the first live fire demonstration of the flagship of task force Rocking Horse; the experimental Kuat Drive Yards warship, the Nebulon B-2 frigate, the Red Whirlwind. This new frigate is a prototype successor to the original Nebulon-B, and as such it has been given two full squadrons of the new Cygnus Spaceworks multi role bomber, the Alpha-class Xg-1 Star Wing to keep it out of harms way.

It cut back to the news desk.

Commodore Weathers has ordered the fleet back to port to re-arm and re-supply before pursuing the Rebel dreadnaught that escaped. In other news. . .

Reil stood there shocked for what felt like an eternity. He didn't even notice when Tonto cracked the code and opened the blast door.

"Reil, you coming?"

Zealos was snapped out of his stupor by Tey, and quickly banished all distractions from his mind. His first priority was to rescue Fi and Cali, anything else would have to wait.

"Yeah, I'm right behind you."

Tey noticed Reil's ghostly colour.

"You ok?"

"Yeah, comon, times a wastin. . ."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 5 December 2008 03:12 PM:

The last blasts of fire died away, and Ryloth once again fell silent. The creatures comprising the planet's lean and hardy ecology poke their heads from shelters and resume their business. Naw Arame took comfort in this continuation of the dance of life, and emerged from his own cave to participate. He hungered, and thus searched for some creature who could relieve him of this condition. The sundry lizards were far too quick for Naw's feeble responses, and he found none who had been roasted in the heat storm. He continued his search.

In the distance, a mazer called with the discovery of its own meal. Naw swirled to face the source of the cry, and hobbled toward it with the help of his walking stick. When a mazer called, there was food enough for others, and if Naw wished for some of it he would have to arrive before other predators.

From the lip of a small basin, Naw found the small predator. It paced around a dark body, yipping and scenting the air. No other animals were present—or at least visible—and that brought a smile to Naw. He had arrived in time.

Standing to his full, tottering height, Naw let forth a string of dusty bark and shook his walking stick. The mazer jerked to a halt, and seeing the old Twi'lek barreling down into the basin on his rickety legs, darted away to a safer distance.

It was then that Naw realized that the potential meal was no animal. It was a boy; a *Human* boy. His clothing was tattered and singed, and his skin had been scathed with relentless sands. And he was alive.

Naw slowed his approach, gathering his *lekku* in close around his neck and leaning on his stick for support. "Youth of fortune," he croaked, reverting to the subservience that was his hallmark when he lived in the cities. "Boy, though I came to eat you, I now mean you no harm. Rise up, boy, and thank the storm for sparing you."

The boy stirred, but did not rise.

"Rise, fortunate youth, or the storm may change its mind!"

A groan was the Human child's only response.

"Curse you, fortunate youth, for grasping me with your luck. May I drag you to safety before the storms claim us both..."

Posted by ij thompson on 5 December 2008 08:09 PM:

"Would you look at that..."

Fi and Cali had followed the junk droids further down the tunnel as it continued widening, until it finally terminated at a very wide blast door. Peeking around the edge of the portal, they observed the garbage droids trundling down a long ramp, which extended in a zig-zag fashion ten meters downward into the chamber. There, the automatons reached into the boxes on their backs, grabbing the refuse collected there and hurling it into a gigantic steel bin, which was clearly intended to be carted away by a common garbage scow.

But there was no scow in this hangar. Instead, a *Kazellis*-class light freighter rested here, crescent-shaped, sleek, and deadly. Beneath it, ruffians of numerous species hung about - eating, gambling, fighting, or in some cases, a combination of all three. One thing was clear, however; *none* of them was aware that they were being observed.

"Slavers," Cali hissed. "Can't you just smell 'em?"

"I thought that was the garbage," Fi offered.

"Same thing, give or take a chromosome," Cali replied. "Real shame, scum like that havin' a ship so pretty."

"Now, slow down, honey," Fi soothed the girl, gripping her shoulder. "No offense, but you and your little kitchen knife might not be a match for those guys."

"Indeed," a reptilian voice croaked from behind them. Turning, the pair were greeted by the terrifying sight of a Trandoshan, grinning in the darkness. In a flash, the being grabbed them both and pulled them close.

"You are not even a match for Churk by himself..."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 6 December 2008 02:01 AM:

Tam sat bolt upright, taking in his surroundings. It was a small cave, but the accumulated piles of junk and clutter told him it was lived in. He was, in fact, on a small stack of blankets and inflated packing sheets put together to make a rudimentary bed.

Something moved in the corner of his eye, and Tam darted around to face it. "Who are you?"

The creature stepped into the dim glowdome light. It was a Twi'lek, Tam noted, or at least it had been once. Now, it was an animated array of wrinkled, leathery limbs, supported on a withered staff of wood. The old alien stopped and bowed before Tam, presenting a nearly toothless grin and chattering in some language he didn't understand.

"Did you bring me here?" In the fore of Tam's mind rose a memory of the old alien dragging him over rocks and dirt, mumbling the whole way as if it was *Tam's* fault he had to save his life. "I didn't ask you to, but thanks for saving me."

The Twi'lek stopped, cocked his head. "Basic. Very small." He pointed out his mouth and shook his head. "Very small Basic."

Tam shook his head too. "Yeah, well, 'very small' ...whatever... from me. Thanks any way..."

The old worm-head kept gabbing on, as if Tam had just said he completely understood. And he kept repeating the same word: *Inun*.

"*Inun*. What's *Inun*?"

"*Inun*?" said the old hermit. "*Inun* is..." he searched for the words, "...Fortunate Boy. Old tale. Blind youngling walks bright side. Lives. Sees much."

"Me? *Inun*?" When he saw the Twi'lek nod, Tam snorted. "Well, I guess so. And I saw plenty out there." He explained the strange visions he saw in the heat storm, and how he came to be on Ryloth. He held nothing back, for he was sure the shriveled hermit didn't understand a word. It was just nice to talk to someone again. Before he realized it, Tam was explaining everything about his life. The death of his parents. Those who hunted him. Those he hoped he could still call friends.

"You safe with me, Naw."

"Right, old timer. I'm Tam, by the way."

"Naw."

"Always have been. Now, before, and after."

The alien shook his head. "No. *Naw*." Pointing at himself, he said, "Naw Arame."

"Oh," Tam said, finally understanding. He pointed at

himself. "Tam Dawncaller."

Naw shook his head and laughed. "Inun funny!"

"Right. Well, I don't imagine you're gonna have a ship in some cave nearby. See, I *really* need to get off-planet..."

"Wind ghost."

Tam was taken aback. "I'm sorry?"

"Wind ghost. Vision in storm. You see others. Friends, but not friends. Signs of danger." Then old Naw trailed off into strings of his native tongue.

"What are you talking about?"

"Watch friends close. Some good, maybe. Others..." He trailed off again, then gave up on communicating his thoughts with any more clarity. "Hungry?"

Tam had lost his supply pack long ago. "Uh, yeah. I am."

Naw beckoned with a gnarled hand and led Tam out of the cave...

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 6 December 2008 02:42 AM:

"Pleasure doing business with you." Solleen smiled at the man getting up from the table.

"Let's hope that we can continue to do business, as it is very profitable, for both of us." He tucked the last of the credit chips into his belt purse and left the cantina.

Athelias was about to get up when an alarm went off in the back of his head, he reached for his lightsaber but thought better of it and grabbed a blaster instead, he kept it low so nobody that wasn't at their table could see it, Solleen and her companion quickly drew their blaster as well and looked around.

"What-" Solleen started, but Athelias held up his hand.

He looked around, two men talking by the door, another by the rear door, and three more at the bar, there was nothing different about them, three separate groups of men out for drinks. They appeared completely at ease, unless you knew what to look for.

Athelias swore, "What is it?" Solleen asked.

"Those men at the door, that one at the rear, and those three at the bar, they're here for us."

"How do you know?"

"Because we are the only ones here that would warrant a six man echani-trained kill squad. It looks like you were ratted out."

"That slimy piece of hutt drool, I'm gonna kill him."

"Only if we get out of here alive."

As Athelias was coming up with a plan to escape two squads of stormtroopers came into the cantina and walked over to the table beside theirs. "You, stand up." The officer pointed the men sitting across from Athelias, they stood up and stormtroopers patted them down, when the troopers didn't find anything the men looked relieved, until the officer reached under the table and pulled out a bag that had been taped to the top, "Glitterstim, arrest them!"

Athelias stood up while the troopers were arresting the men and motioned for the other two to stay sitting, he stepped over to the officer and whispered to him, "Let these men go."

The officer turned to him, "On whose authority?"

Athelias reached inside his cloak and pulled the ID card he's used to get into the Imperial comm tower, "On mine. I'm working undercover and I have reason to believe to those groups of men are here to kill my contact when he arrives, they were sent by someone who wants to silence him. If he is killed, months of work will go down the drain and I'll have to start over, and you'll be demoted to a janitor so fast you'll have to clean the floor in here before you leave, I want you to call for back-up and arrest them. No matter what happens, do not let them leave this

cantina, understood?"

The officer looked at him for a minute then pressed a button signaling for reinforcements, "Understood, sir. trooper, let those men go, we have the wrong men." Then he quietly issued orders to them while pretending to inspect the men as they hurried out of the cantina. They broke up and each group walked over to a different group of men, they patted down the members of each group, apparently finding nothing illegal the officer shot a glare of molten ice at Athelias and was about to come back to him so Athelias used the force to pull the trigger of the blaster of the last man being searched shooting the trooper searching him in the gut. Instantly the entire scene changed, the men pulled their blasters, the troopers levelled their rifles and more than half the patrons pulled blasters of their own and everybody started shooting. Athelias threw the table on its side blocking the three of them from the blaster fire, drew his lightsaber and cut a hole in the wall behind them.

Athelias motioned, "After you." Solleen went first, then her companion, then Athelias followed.

"That was close." Solleen breathed.

"Too close. Come on, let's get to your ship, if they knew you were here, they might have already struck there."

"This way." Solleen led the way through the streets to the hangar.

Posted by Ice Hawk on 8 December 2008 02:17 AM:

Reil Tey and Tonto entered the shop. Reil made some quick observations. There was a large pool of blood, which was mostly located around the gaping hole in a very dead Twi'lek's throat. Reil also noticed that the cash register had been smashed open, and the outfit Cali had been wearing before was thrown on the ground, it was also covered in blood, so presumably Cali switched it for one of the shops many dresses. Reil whistled.

"Well atleast they did the sensible thing. . ."

Tey cocked an eyebrow.

"Killed a shop keeper and then ran down a creepy tunnel that leads to the force only knows where?"

"They killed a shopkeeper, *then stole all his money*, and then ran down a creepy tunnel that leads to the force only knows where."

"Ah. You're right, that makes it much better when you put it like that", Tey said as he rolled his eyes, "Tonto, seal the blast door behind us."

Reil looked at Tey quizzically.

"Why?"

"Because people tend to notice dead shopkeepers and broken cash registers. This may be our only way back out, and we don't want it crawling with cops and stormtroopers."

"Point taken."

Tonto sealed the blast door again, and the three of them descended through the tunnel. They walked for over an hour, amidst the traffic of garbage droids until they discovered the slaver camp. Tey, who had been leading signaled for them to hold up.

"Slavers. . . what are they doing down here?" Tey said, puzzled.

"Whadya mean? Hiding out from the law obviously."

"Slavery is one of the major exports on Ryloth. It's hardly illegal."

Reil shrugged. Solving mysteries wasn't his thing.

"Well maybe they're slavers and smugglers, smuggling twi'leks off world without paying any dues. . ."

Suddenly Reil noticed something. There were no humans

among the crowd, they were all Alien, some of them Twi'lek themselves.

"That's why they're down here. They're not dealing in Twi'leks, they probably deal exclusively in offworld humans like us. The local Imperials wouldn't like it very much but they probably get paid by other Imperials more for human girls than Twi'leks, seeing as how the empire hates aliens. They probably have tons of merchants who are only too happy to get back at humans by selling them into slavery."

Tey grimaced.

"Peachy. I count about five of them, maybe one or two more back on the ship. . . How're we gonna do this?"

"I guess an old fashion shoot out is out of the question?"

"Against those odds? We'd be toast. Besides they have hostages."

Reil watched as the garbage droids went right past the slavers without raising suspicion, and dumped their loads into the steel bin on the far side of the hanger.

"I got an idea. . ."

Posted by ij thompson on 8 December 2008 06:14 PM:

Fi acted without thinking, which, as usual, was the right thing to do. Swinging the fancy handbag full of credits she carried, she slammed the heavy metal into Churk's left temple, causing the Trandoshan to stagger backward, stunned. Cali, kitchen knife in hand, was on him in an instant. Wincing in the dark, Fi was again shocked and unnerved by the girl's ferocity, but chose not to comment for the time being.

"Nice shot," Cali complimented her. "Though I'm real glad that bag didn't break open."

"It's *Trada*," Fi explained distractedly. "They make good bags. Come, help me search this guy."

From the corpse they recovered a blaster pistol, which Fi appropriated, as well as a mean-looking vibroblade that Cali hung onto, in addition to her smaller blade. "What now, Sis?"

"Well," Fi breathed, sizing up the situation, "if those guys are hiding out here in this garbage hangar, that should mean nobody else knows they're here."

"This matters why?"

"I want that ship."

"Now you're talking. Can you fly it?"

"Yeah, but a pro like Reil would be better."

"Aren't he and Tey and that droid on their way?"

"I think so, but I've turned the comlink off. Don't want it going off at the wrong moment."

"Sensible. So, we charge in there and waste everybody?"

Fi giggled despite herself, not sure if the teen was kidding or not. "I think something a little more subtle would be better. Like, if we can sneak onto the ship, we could ambush them in close quarters after they board."

"I like it," Cali agreed. "I'm not really equipped for a shootout, anyway. Meantime, what do we do with Churk, here?"

Fi looked at the body. "If those guys have patrols wandering around, they'll raise the alarm if they find him." She rose, stepping into the path of one of the garbage droids, who regarded her in irritation.

"You," Fi commanded the droid, "dispose of him."

The garbage droid buzzed at Fi in indignation, sounding offended by the suggestion.

"That worked nicely," Cali commented, rolling her eyes.

Fi scowled at the girl, turning her attention back to the robot. "Well," she reasoned with it, "you can't just *leave* him here, can you?"

The droid considered this a for a few moments. The Trandoshan may have been a living sentient once, but now he was so much garbage, blocking up part of the corridor and forcing the other garbage droids to go around. Its basic programming finally overriding any ethical concerns, the droid lifted the reptilian corpse into his box, and rolled off down the ramp.

"We're on," Fi breathed.

Each choosing their own droid, the pair crept down the ramp, covered from view by the rolling mechanicals. Passing by a stand of cargo crates, the pair abandoned the droids in favour of the new cover, ten meters from the freighter's boarding ramp.

"Hey," Fi whispered, "look up there."

Cali followed the older girl's gaze back up the ramp to the open blast door, noticing the shadowy pair hiding there. "It's Zealos and Tey!" she whispered back. "Do you think they've seen us?"

"Doesn't look like it," Fi replied, looking Cali square in the eye. "Get ready to think on your feet. And whatever they do, stay close to me..."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 8 December 2008 07:15 PM:

"This is disgusting," Tam groaned, looking at the pile of rotting refuse. "I thought you said we were going to find some food."

The old Twi'lek had led him through a dark labyrinth of squat tunnels, promising something to eat the whole way. Now, he rummaged through the garbage like it was the exclusive menu at the Dancing Dawn. "Food here. Most garbage, yes. Here food." He held up a plastic container half full of blue milk. "Here food."

Tam turned up his nose. Hungry as he may be, the fetid pile before him was doing a good job of driving away his appetite. When another garbage droid dumped its load, and the discarded contents avalanched down the garbage pile, Tam actually covered his nose. He almost lost what lunch he didn't have when, among the sacks of litter and stray Munchies wrappers, he could plainly see the lifeless body of a large, scaled reptilian humanoid.

"Naw!" he gasped. "There's a body! Look!"

Naw raised his head from a discovery of half-eaten self-contained dinners to see what Tam was talking about. "Not food, Inun."

"I know that," Tam snapped, "I was just— Wait, did you hear something?"

Beyond the train of garbage droids, Tam could hear the echoes of laughter. Were there others in this cave? Throwing away any caution (as well as the carton Naw was thrusting into his hands), Tam climbed the garbage pile and followed the train of garbage droids through the dark tunnel.

Before long, the tunnel had opened up into a sizable cavern, big enough to hold starship, which it in fact did. Below it stood a group of rough looking aliens. They were shouting and laughing, and throwing sabacc cards at each other. Making sure he kept a trundling garbage droid between the thugs and himself, Tam smiled back at Naw. "Looks like you helped me find a ship after all, old timer. Thanks for your help."

Naw didn't respond, except to point over the boy's shoulder. Tam fully expected to turn around and have the barrel of a blaster be the last thing he'd ever see. But instead, he almost ran directly into a girl, about his age, who was swiftly and silently drawing a knife from its hiding place...

Posted by Ice Hawk on 9 December 2008 04:02 AM:

"This is your worst idea ever!" Tey hissed in hushed tones.

To be fair the idea was pretty bad, a reality driven home by the cramped, smelly, filthy, and bleakly dark garbage container Reil and Tey had stowed aboard. Tonto wasn't a combat droid, so they felt it best to leave him by the blast doors. Reil however, was already on edge and impatient, and the trash wasn't doing much for his mood either, so he spoke rashly without thinking.

"How would you know if this was my worst idea? I've had a lot of idea's and plenty of them were worse than this!"

Tey started grinning like an idiot, even in the darkness it was palpable. "I can only imagine. . ."

"Shut up. That's not what I meant. . ."

You could almost hear the grin as it spread across Tey's face.

"No, no. Tell me about these worse ideas. They must have been pretty bad to top this."

"I can think of one. . ."

"What was it?"

"When I saved your ass from Bartok. It's been nothing but a constant whine from you since."

"Alright fine. Atleast tell me when we'll know it's safe to get out."

"Oh, don't worry, we'll know."

"Why's that?"

"Because the droid will hurl us and the rest of the trash into the giant steel bin."

Tey was silent for a good long moment.

"Remember what I said about this being your worst idea ever?"

Suddenly the droid halted, and Reil and Tey were both bodily hurled into another large pile of refuse. They managed to climb over the side of the bin, and jump down, but Reil slipped and landed heavily on his side. Luckily the noise the slavers were making, and the sounds of other droids dumping their garbage masked their ungraceful infiltration. Reil wound up on his right side looking up at a very stylish looking Cali who appeared to be drawing her knife on some kid. Somehow the fact that she was holding a deadly weapon did not detract from the way she looked in the new dress.

"Wow. . . You look good. . ."

Both Cali and the kid stared at Reil, who was laying there on his side, slightly slackjawed, frozen in time. Suddenly Reil's brain caught up with him and told him he was oggling a teenage girl, which was inappropriate for a grown man to be doing at the best of times.

"I mean, you always look good. . . I mean not that I'd be looking at you. . . I mean. . . we're here to rescue you. . ."

Posted by ij thompson on 9 December 2008 12:03 PM:

Blast it! Fi cursed silently, as Cali disappeared around the corner of the wall of cargo crates. *Why does she have to run off like that? I'm the one with the gun!*

Frustrated, she pursued the girl around the corner, discovering not only Cali, but Zealos, Tey, an aging Twi'lek, and one other. Someone she'd never expected to see again. Despite herself, Fi shouted in surprise.

"Tam!"

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 9 December 2008 07:35 PM:

Tam had a blank second to act before the girl stuck him with a knife. He used the first half of that second to reach for his

lightsaber, then wasted the rest of it wondering where in the Seven Corellian Hells it had gone! He barely had enough time to remember that he hadn't seen it since the Ice-man had captured him before the girl was on top of him.

They grappled for what seemed like another blank second when one of the garbage droids passing by dumped its cargo, tossing another body to the floor. This one, unlike the Trandoshan, spoke. "Wow. . . You look good. . ."

Thankfully, this distracted the girl, and gave Tam time to regard the man as he lay on the ground, stammering at the girl and removing a fruit peel from his head. He distracted the girl enough that he back was turned to Tam...

"Tam!" He heard someone shout. He spun around and saw Fi step out from behind a garbage droid. She said his name again, but quieter, and made a furtive glance to the raucous fringers before running to him.

It hadn't even been two weeks since they'd parted on Tatooine, but it felt like a lot longer. He ran to her too. "Fi!" he cried, and when they met, their embrace was strong enough that a black hole couldn't tear them apart.

"Well," the man said as he stood up, "are we going to get a proper introduction, or do we go back to the knife fight?"

Posted by Corr Terek on 9 December 2008 09:41 PM:

Damon's commlink chimed and he flicked it on. "Yeah?"

"Damon," Thel's voice came over the comm. "We've got trouble."

"What kind of trouble?" Damon said, his voice on edge. He and Mir weren't ready for a fight with the Empire again.

"My contact was sold out," Thel said tersely. "I don't know if the Empire's got an ID on me yet, but we've got to assume it's just a matter of time."

"Great," Damon said grimly. Mir and Elayne were both looking around nervously. "We'll get back to the ship and get it primed if the Empire doesn't stop us first."

He clicked off the commlink. "Well, girls, it's time to get packing."

Posted by Vash Knives on 10 December 2008 07:44 AM:

"Some people are just sore losers."

Koro wasn't concerned with where he was going, he just wanted to get away from the thugs that were chasing him and Tarynn. The gambler had done well at the sabaac table and managed to grab his 20,000 credits in winnings before leaving the cantina with Tarynn in his arms and some thugs with disrupter rifles at his back. Their boss had lost fairly to Koro, but had not seen it that way.

Dodging a couple of disrupter shots, Koro noticed the shots hitting a blast door at the front of a store, leaving a small hole from the combined firepower. It would be a tight fit but Koro knew it might well be his best shot at getting away. Adjusting his grip on Tarynn, he aimed for the door and jumped, twisting as to be as thin as possible and to take the brunt of the landing himself. Koro did not expect to land on a clothes rack, knocking it over. Pain shot through his back, as he, Tarynn, and the rack skidded across the floor, toward the tunnel. They came to a stop just before the tunnel. Koro winced as he got up, helping Tarynn to her feet as well. Looking back at the blast door, he figured it wouldn't hold long.

Noticing the tunnel entrance, he came to a conclusion. It would be their only chance to escape. Grabbing Tarynn, he jumped into the tunnel, closing the door behind them. Continuing

to wince, Koro lead Tarynn through the tunnels, hoping the thugs would not follow.

Posted by ij thompson on 10 December 2008 09:29 AM:

Fi and Tam held each other tightly, only dimly aware of the firefight that had broken out all around them. Fi looked fondly up at Tam, who returned her gaze, passing laser bolts lighting up their faces.

"I missed you."

"Same."

All around them were the sounds of gunfire, and someone shouting something about cover. The pair reluctantly let go of one another and turned toward their opposition, Fi raising her blaster pistol.

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 10 December 2008 04:15 PM:

"I don't know about you guys," Tam shouted over the blasterfire, "but I say we make a run for the ship."

"In case you didn't notice, kid," the man who had fallen from the garbage droid shouted back, "there's a wall of slavers between us and that ship." He popped up from behind his cover—a crumpled durasteel crate—and actually fired at several of those slavers.

"My name is *Tam*, not 'kid'."

"Well, *Tam*, it's a pleasure! If you wouldn't mind shooting a few yourself, or getting the ship open for us—" He blasted another slaver, who dropped to the ground and writhed in pain, headtails and all. "—or *something*!"

Tam didn't have a blaster, but he was sure that he could use the man's sarcasm for ammunition. He didn't think he could make it to the ship without serious injury at the least, and he didn't know what else to do.

So he asked the Force.

"Concentrate fire on that bruiser with the repeater!" He shouted, putting every ounce of the Force into his words. He felt the aims of both Fi and the man hone in on the large Houk, and he nudged their aims just a little to make sure they targeted the alien's vital points. They pulled their respective triggers at just the right time that their blaster bolts hit at precisely the same moment, chewing through the hulking slaver's bony skull. The goons around him stopped long enough to look at their fallen comrade, then returned fire at the Houk's killers.

It wasn't as easy to guide their actions as the kinrath had been back on Dantooine, Tam realized, but much easier than pointing all the guns of those Mimbos gangsters at Koro Bolera. He didn't have a gun himself, but there was obviously something he could do to help...

Posted by Ice Hawk on 11 December 2008 03:03 AM:

The Houk went down from two amazingly precise shots by Reil and Fi, and Tey clipped a Rodian in the shoulder. The odds were slowly shifting in their favour, when the access ramp to the ship came down and two more thugs came rushing out. Unfortunately for them, they blundered right into the middle of the firefight. Fi caught one in the chest with a single shot, and Tey blasted the other one with a shot to the stomach. Reil had tried to blast one but his powerpack died. Reil crouched behind the crate and switched power packs, chucking the dead one across the room in disgust.

"I'm almost out of ammo, any bright ideas?"

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 11 December 2008 03:56 PM:

The man looked around imploringly, but all Tam could do was shrug. They were fighting at their peak, and Tam had done his part to extend that limit. He'd even been heartened when Tey Spires appeared out of wherever he was hiding and took down a Rodian. But their advantage was a short-lived illusion. There were still a dozen slavers pinning them to their dwindling positions of safety.

Above the traded blaster fire Tey shouted, "Incoming!" And he dove deep into the flanking piles of trash. Moments later a tiny sphere landed in their midst, causing everyone to run, leap, or even crawl as fast as they could. What little cover they had was blasted to smithereens.

Tam was behind an overturned garbage droid now, peering through the upset of smoke and dust and raining shreds of refuse. Fi was behind him, her gun pointed into the settling obscurity. "Last I saw, the ship's hatch was open," she whispered into his ear. "We could make a run for it before it's clear enough to see."

It was a good idea, but before Tam could act on it the slavers' blasters erupted from the clouds, forcing the two of them to duck reflexively behind the garbage droid. Now they were *really* out of ideas.

The slavers began shouting then, holding their fire once more. Peeking around from the droid's large durasteel bucket, Tam could make out a tall, bony silhouette across the domed cave. The being shouted something in a language he didn't understand, but found strikingly familiar. "It's Naw!"

The rickety old Twi'lek had perched himself atop one of the taller trash heaps and waved his walking stick precariously in the air. All he said in Basic was, "Run, Inun, run!"

"They've got us surrounded!" one of the Twi'lek slavers shouted, and gestured at the others. "Take the old exile down!"

When a path was cleared to the starship's loading ramp, Fi pushed on Tam's shoulder. "Now's our chance, go!" They ran for it, and out of the corner of his eye Tam saw the old Twi'lek who had saved him from the ravages of Ryloth's desert shot to rags where he stood. Tey and the other two members of their ad-hoc group rose from their hiding places also, but they all stopped short when the ground began to shake.

From the very pile where Naw Arame had died emerged a great, horned mass. A pair of glowing red eyes pierced the darkness of the cave, and zeroed in on the tiny creatures moving about the floodlit ground beneath the starship.

Fi grumbled, "I have a bad feeling about this..."

Posted by ij thompson on 11 December 2008 10:47 PM:

The enormous monster roared angrily, the chilling sound pushing back friend and foe alike. By virtue of the fact that the slavers had all been shooting in the direction the beast had appeared from, they now found themselves to be its most convenient targets. The Doashim creature lunged forward, grabbing a terrified slaver in one of its forelimbs, lifting him to its maw, and biting down. The hapless victim shrieked as he was pierced by countless razor-sharp teeth.

"Run!" Fi screamed.

She and her fellows being closer to the freighter, they were able to scurry aboard ahead of the ship's owners. Pursued by the terrified slavers, Tey, Zealos and Fi turned and fired back down the boarding ramp, while Tam and Cali scrambled for the ramp's retraction controls. The ramp raised as the slavers clutched at it, pleading in terror.

"For pity's sake, let us on! You can't leave us here with that

thing!"

Pulling themselves out of the threshold before being crushed by the closing ramp, the slavers returned to fighting for their lives while those aboard the vessel rushed madly for the cockpit.

"What about Tonto?" somebody asked.

"What *about* him?" someone else shot back, implying the case was closed. Nobody argued.

Reaching the cockpit, the group braved a glance out the viewport and found the blaster-scorched Doashim chewing up the last of the visible slavers. Unsatisfied, the beast raised its fearsome head, sniffing the air.

"What's it doing?" Cali asked.

"Who cares." Tey said. "Zealos, power us up, buddy."

"Yup."

The Doashim snarled, eyes widening as it turned its head in their direction. It roared again, claws screeching on the hangar floor as it ran directly at them, jaws snapping and horns thrust out.

"Oh god oh god oh god," Cali repeated, panicked.

Tam shouted. "Grab onto something!"

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 13 December 2008 12:53 AM:

Following his own advice, Tam planted himself in a chair and secured the safety straps. Just in time too, for the hulking monster swung its large black horns into the hovering freighter's hull. Fi shrieked involuntarily. "Anybody see a button labeled 'all weapons fire'?"

"Hold your water, singer-girl," Tey shouted. "I've got them coming up now." As soon as the operational light blinked from red to green, Tey trained the transport's turrets on the Rylothian beast and smashed down the trigger. Showers of syncopated laser bursts chewed into leathery black armor, and the monster's long claws released their grip, leaving long trails of damage along the slaver ship's reinforced hull.

"Gun it, Reil!" the well-dressed girl shouted.

"As you wish," the pilot squeezed through his teeth. Fingers danced over controls, and the crescent-shaped craft whirled smoothly around and blasted for the narrow cave entrance. Fi let out a whoop of joy when they burst from the dark tunnels of Ryloth into the dusty skies. Tam rested his head on his seat back. They would soon be off Ryloth, and far from the Imperials hot on his trail. Given time, Tam knew that this trail would grow cold, and he could finally slow down. Maybe he and Fi could find another place to work and live, like they had back on Mimbos. Maybe this time their pursuers won't find them, and the two of them can live normal lives.

Tam looked at the woman he wanted to spend his life with. She was smiling, and talking with the well dressed girl. Side by side, it was easy to see that Fi was older. She was more mature; more developed, psychologically. When she spoke to the young girl, it was with the wisdom of a big sister who's seen the galaxy. When she laughed, it was salted with her life's traumatic experiences.

Tam could sense that same salt in his own thoughts. They had shared many of those experiences, and shared their feelings about the ones they'd had to go through alone. Tam felt unaccountably lucky that she had chosen to open herself up to him like that. He was much younger than she, and could remember spending much of his life struggling under the thumb of his elders. But none of that mattered to Fi. She was a coquette, to be sure, and that raised Tam's hackles from time to time, but he knew that when she spoke that way to *him*, it meant so much more.

But in the short time they had been apart, Tam could sense a... Oh, he didn't know. Like a void, or something. She looked over to him now, and there was that love they had cultivated together, but something seemed tentative now. Guarded. He noticed the necklace around her neck, too. It was the one from his vision in the heat storm.

"What?" Fi said, and Tam realized he was staring.

"That's some necklace," he said. No point in dancing around the sinkhole. "Where'd you get it?"

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 13 December 2008 06:30 AM:

As Athelias and Solleen were running through the station Athelias' commlink beeped, he pulled it out, "Yes?"

"Sir this is private Darek, you wanted me to tell you if we got any communications from the shuttle that disappeared here." Athelias recognized the voice as the young man he had charged with letting him know about Tam, "Well sir, we just got a transmission from them, but, this can't be right."

Athelias dodged someone who didn't move fast enough, "What does it say private?"

"Sir, it says that they're on Ryloth."

Athelias almost tripped, "Ryloth?"

"Yes sir."

"Thank you private." Athelias disconnected the signal, "They really weren't kidding about halfway across the universe." He said to himself as they entered the hanger just in time to see stormtroopers enter from the other side, "Where's your ship?" Solleen pointed to the nearest one. "Perfect, unfortunately I won't be able to join you this time, I have to go. Take care of yourself Solleen."

"You too."

Athelias took off toward their ship and was wondering whether or not Damon had beat him to it when the loading ramp lowered, Athelias gathered the Force and jumped landing at the top right beside Elayne, he could feel the floor reverberating from the engines and as soon as the ramp was up they took off. When Athelias and Elayne entered the cockpit Damon and Mir'isha were waiting.

"Do we know where Tam is?" Damon asked.

"Ryloth, you weren't kidding when you said he could go anywhere."

Posted by ij thompson on 13 December 2008 06:37 PM:

"Oh, this...?" Fi replied nervously, one hand rising reflexively to her collar, where the exotic blue crystal hung on its silver chain.

"She swiped it," Cali cut in, nodding at the older girl admiringly. "You shoulda seen it! This slaver scum tried to capture us, but I stuck him with my vibroblade, then we robbed all his cash, then Fi grabbed that rock, then we snuck down these tunnels, then we gutted that guy's Trandosha friend. It was *totally* wizard!"

Fi smiled weakly at Tam, suddenly embarrassed to be wearing such a glamorous accessory. Who did she think she was, anyway?

"I don't know how you found us on Ryloth," the teenager continued, ignoring Fi and extending a hand to Tam, which he took. "but your timing was perfect. I'm Cali, by the way. I guess you know all these guys, already."

"Not everyone," Tam replied shyly, looking at the ship's pilot, who'd placed the vessel on automatic and was studying him coolly.

"Reil," the man said.

Tam tried a smile, only half-succeeding. "Tam."

"Well, Tam, you're not gonna be digging for your dinner in the trash no more," Cali boasted. "Me n' Fi here musta swiped ten thousand credits offa that guy!"

Tam turned his gaze back to Fi, who almost appeared to be shrinking in her seat. "That's... good," he replied, his expression unreadable.

Posted by Ice Hawk on 14 December 2008 02:58 AM:

Tey sighed.

"You know Cali, you don't have to be *quite* so happy about comiting murder and robbery in one go. I realize he had it coming, but it's not something you should brag about."

Reil snorted in disbelief.

"So we should be upset when we kill some scum who's about to attack us? How in the galaxies did you ever become cor-sec with that attitude?"

Tey shook his head.

"I'm not saying that we shouldn't defend ourselves, but if we take pride in killing everyone in the galaxy we don't agree with, we're no better than the Empire!"

"We haven't killed everyone we disagreed with."

Tey looked at Reil skeptically.

"Name me one person that's crossed us that we haven't killed."

Reil grinned.

"Koro."

"Smartass, name two."

"I can name three. Koro, Smiles, and Scales." Reil pronounced smugly.

Tey looked puzzled.

"Who?"

"Those two bountry hunters on Tatooine. The Twi'lek that was all smiles and grease, and the Trandoshan. We only stunned them."

"I'm not sure that counts as *naming* them. . ."

"Alright, aside from Bartok, name me all the people we've killed."

"Ah. . . I concede the point. I'm just saying that we need to be careful *not* to become as bad as the people who're hunting us."

Suddenly the comm crackled alive.

"*This is Imperial Port Authority to freighter Emigrant please respond. Repeat, this is Imperial Port Authority to frighter Emigrant please respond.*"

"Speak of the sith. *Emigrant* huh, is that us?"

Reil groaned. They were well above the surface of Ryloth, he had been really hopping he wouldn't have to go through with this again.

"Must be us. Aww sith. . . this is Tatooine all over again." Reil quickly activated the com.

"This is frieghter . . uhh. . . *Emigrant*. . . I think. . . to Imperial Port Authority. Look, we've been through this before already. I know we don't have clearance and haven't submitted a flight plan, and frankly, we don't intend to; so spare me the speech."

"*Negative. That's not what we have recorded here Emigrant. You are cleared to launch, and you have submitted a flightplan and manifest, however you are deviating from your set course. We're dispatching fighters to escort you and your cargo back to your authorized destination. You will comply or be fired upon. Imperial Port Authority out.*"

"Yeah yeah, you don't scare us. Bring on the big bad Tie

fighters." Reil taunted, just before he switched off the comm.

The rear scopes immediatly started filling with red dots, as Ties started to launch from the city spaceport. Reil brought them up on the targeting computer. They were definatly not Tie Fighters.

"Squints. . . six of 'em."

"I think you made them mad. . ." Tam began.

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 14 December 2008 12:01 PM:

The trip to Ryloth was uneventful, Athelias finished sorting datapads about everything from simple things like mind tricks and basic levitation to things that no Jedi had been able to do for thousands of years like battle meditation and controlling solar flares. Most of it wasn't quite so impressive as that but enough of them were, and the sheer number of the others was impressive by itself. Damon and Elayne had meditated while Athelias was sorting, and when he wasn't sorting he was meditating so he didn't know what they were doing. The five minute warning went off through out the ship before the ship came out of hyperspace, Athelias met the others in the cockpit Mir'isha was, or course, in the pilot's seat Damon was in the co-pilot's seat and Elayne was sitting behind him, Athelias sat down behind Mir'isha.

"Now it might be hard finding him here, the Imperials may or may not still have him, if they do we shouldn't have much trouble getting help from the Twi'leks, they have no love for the Empire. The potential problem is if he has managed to escape the Imperials, if he has it could take us a long time to find him, plus the Imperials are now after us." Damon raised an eyebrow and opened his mouth, "Which I would just like to say is not my fault, they weren't originally after me but I had no choice." Damon closed his mouth and grinned.

"We're exiting hyperspace now." Mir'isha said.

The stars stretched into lines then snapped back to dots and the planet came into view, along with a freighter heading out followed by six TIE interceptors. Athelias and Damon jumped up and ran to the gun turrets as Mir'isha changed their course to intercept the TIEs and Elayne activated the comm, "Unidentified freighter this it the *Nova Viper*, if you require assistance we can help."

"*Nova Viper*, this is the... uh, the *Emigrant*, help would be nice."

"We copy *Emigrant*, we're on our way."

Posted by ij thompson on 14 December 2008 07:30 PM:

Aboard the Kazellis light freighter *Emigrant*, Tey sprinted for the gun well. "Zealos, get us out of here!"

"Destination?"

"Anywhere!" Tey replied, his voice receding down the corridor. "We'll decide when we're out of this mess!"

Zealos Reil called up the navicomputer's recent history, hoping to not have to perform a calculation on the fly. "Let's see where these guys have been lately..."

"Hey, I don't get it," Fi interjected. "Our 'authorized destination'? Just where were we supposed to be going, anyway?"

Looking out the viewport, Tam's eyes grew suddenly wide. "Over there, maybe?"

Fi, Cali and Zealos followed his gaze, taking in the Imperial *Interdictor* cruiser that was bearing down on them, head-on.

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 15 December 2008 05:28 PM:

This was ridiculous. For a while, Tam thought it might be a good idea to just follow the *Emigrant's* proscribed flight path, but after seeing the *Interdictor* squarely in that direction, he decided any course but that was a good one. As everyone else scrambled around the *Emigrant* in panicked confusion, Tam remained in the cockpit. "Listen," he said tightly to the pilot, Reil, "I've tried too hard to get away from the Empire. Now we've got interceptors on our tail! Get us out of here now!"

Reil spoke through gritted teeth, not taking his eyes from his controls. "What do you think I'm doing here? Gardening?"

"Hey, is that the *Nova Viper* out there? Tell them I'm on board, will you?"

"Can't you see I'm a little busy, kid?"

"I'm telling you they can help us! They're friends of mine!"

Reil actually spun around in his seat. "Am I in your seat? Would you like to fly, is that it?"

Visions of the *Destiny's Light* crashing into Burista with him at the helm. "Uh, no," he stammered. "That's probably not a good idea."

"All right, I give up." He turned back to his crucial work in the pilot's seat. "Why don't you go have a seat in the airlock for me."

"Why?"

"So I have the option to jettison you when I hear your voice again!"

Tam scowled, spun on his heels, and left the cockpit. He did *not* go to the airlock. Instead he found Fi, who was sitting in the ship's lounge area, wringing her hands. He sat across from her.

"Don't worry. I'm sure we'll make it. Damon's out there..." But when their eyes met, Tam could tell she wasn't worried about that. "What's wrong?"

Posted by ij thompson on 15 December 2008 06:36 PM:

Fiola took Tam's hand. "I'm so happy we're together again," she began, "I never should have left you in the first place. And I don't know how you found us, but..."

"But what?"

"Well, we've been together all of twenty minutes, and here's the Empire! It's like I'm a danger magnet, and all the danger is coming after *you*!" She looked at him imploringly.

Tam considered this a moment. Then he threw his head back and laughed, the first honest laugh he remembered having in some time.

Fi looked at him in puzzlement, the boy's jocular taking her by surprise and making her laugh, as well. They sat there, in the lounge, laughing like fools until Fi tried half-heartedly to compose herself, realizing that a high-speed chase was hardly the time for a case of the giggles.

"What?" she demanded, through tears of laughter.

Tam wiped a sleeve over his eyes, at last getting a grip on himself. "Now listen here, Danger Magnet," he laughed, "I don't want to steal your thunder, but it hasn't all been tea and biscuits while you've been away, you know."

"Tam," Fi scolded him mockingly, "have you gone and gotten yourself in danger again?"

"Honey," Tam smirked, sliding over to Fi's side of the table and surprising her with a long, slow kiss on the lips. "Danger's my middle name..."

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 15 December 2008 09:28 PM:

Three of the interceptors broke off their pursuit of the *Emigrant* and headed toward the *Nova Viper*, they didn't get very

close, without shields they were easy targets for Athelias' and Damon's force sensitive reflexes, when they had taken out the other three interceptors Athelias' comm crackled to life.

"Uh, you guys are gonna wanna come down here." It was Elayne.

Damon and Athelias met in the cockpit, "Sithspawn." Athelias breathed, Damon looked like he agreed, "An interdictor, who are these people? Who on Ryloth would the Empire send an interdictor after? There's nobody on Ryloth. Nobody except Tam." He ran over to the comm, "Elayne, what was the name of that ship?"

"The *Emigrant*."

Athelias activated the comm, "*Emigrant* this is the *Nova Viper*, do you have a boy onboard? A boy named Tam?"

Posted by Ice Hawk on 16 December 2008 03:13 AM:

"How did you . . . ? You know what, nevermind, I don't want to know how. Yeah we've got him. You can have him on the condition that you get us out of this mess."

"*Afirmative* *Emigrant*, we've got you covered."

Just then the ship rocked as laser fire pepered it's rear sheilds. Three Interceptors were alive and kicking, and chewing a path through the *Emigrant's* shields. Reil was jinking very hard to shake them, but they were obviously very good. None of the return fire seemed to deter them either, and the *Nova Viper* was still too far to assist.

Reil switched on the intercom.

"Tey, what the frell are you doing up there!?"

"Shut up! They're flying level with us, I can't get a proper shot at them."

That was the problem with this design of freighter. It had had a small but manageable blindspot right behind the engines when enemies flew dead level with them. The ship rocked from another laser blast, and the shields went from green to yellow.

"Alright, I got an idea."

"I hate your ideas"

"Shut up, this only gona work once, so pay attention. Aim straight ahead of you, I'm gona bring them right into your sights. Don't screw this up. On three. One. . . Two. . . Three!"

Reil banked hard to starboard, and rotated the ship 90 degrees clokwise, making an exaggerated turn around the Ties, and presenting Tey with a clear shot at them. There was a bright explosion over head and two red dots fell of the scope. Reil could hear Tey's jubilant whoop over the intercom.

"Nice shooitng, just don't get all sore slapping yourself on the back just yet, you still missed one."

The *Nova Viper* pulled into range, and the lone Interceptor broke off, clearly outgunned, it headed toward the Interdictor, as the cruiser moved to intercept them at the point when they cleared the planets gravity. Reil would've bet all 10k in credits that Fi had that more Imps were on their way.

Suddenly the comm crackled to life again.

"*This is the Imperial interdictor class cruiser Disrupter to Emigrant, you cannot escape, cease your resistance and prepare to be boarded.*"

Reil immediatly replied.

"Words to the effect of no. . . What the frell do you even want on this bucket anyway?"

"*Do not insult my intelligence slaver, you are in enough trouble as it is. We are willing to overlook your transgressions provided you handover the cargo immediatly and without further complication!*"

Posted by Calhexas on 16 December 2008 12:50 PM:

Mak awoke suddenly from his slumber. "What in the frell was that?"

He rose up and strolled into the main training center, where Renlan was waiting.

"Another nightmare huh?"

"Don't know what yer talkin about."

"How long have I been training you, and you suddenly think one day I won't be able to read your mind anymore? There's been something disturbing you this past month. Your thoughts reek of it." Renlan exclaimed.

"Same damn thing over-n-over again. Buncha dead bodies wit me standin over em, and den dis dark figure...and the same words get wisphad...*Bewah Dawncallah*."

"Dawncaller hmm? A friend of yours?"

"Nah...don't really gots many friends. And da ones I gots ain't named no Dawncallah."

"What's this list you're after? And who's Kort?"

"C'mon Renlan! How many times I said keeps outta my toughts? Why you needs ta know?"

"You want to know what these ridiculous nightmares are about? Then tell me."

"Meh...you gonna get it outta me soonah or lata anyways."

Renlan grinned.

"Right before I gots inta all dat trouble wit da jedi, I was runnin round wit dis riff-raff named Kort. A true artist at what dey did...thievery. Anyways...we was holdin up dis bunch outsidah Corellia...some buncha scientists er sumpin. Dey had dis list wit em dat Kort found. I could sense da tension in da poor bums as Kort read over it, and after passin over dier toughts a few times, realized what it was we had. Dey were some sorta biological fellas."

"And the list?"

"Reely it was two lists. One was a lista stuff that could be found to create some sorta biological weapon."

"How severe?"

"Catastrophic."

"The other list?"

"Items fer da antidote."

"Biological warfare huh? And what happend to this Kort individual?"

"We gots split up...lost em not too long afta dat. Last I heard he was scurryin round Dantooine. But that was before the pirate attack and all dat junk ya did to me, and all dis trainin. Ain't no tellin where he's at now."

"Get up...get ready."

"Fer what?"

"Training. We're going to find this Kort figure, and obtain those lists."

"What?!? Whatif he don't even gots da list anymores. He coulda stashed it, solds it...thrown da damn thing aways."

"You said he ran off before you were incarcerated. That was over fifty years ago. He's old, feeble, and won't travel a lot. And you got the information from a friend yes? Well it sounds like the few friends you have wouldn't steer you wrong. Especially if you intimidated it out of them like I think you did. Nobody gets rid of a recipe to destroy the galaxy. Nobody. If he had sold it, he wouldn't be on Dantooine...he'd be high rolling in a big city somewhere, and we'd know exactly where that is. Instead he's tucked away on podunky Dantooine, with the list, dying of old age."

"Oh. Didn't think of it dat ways. Well why we gonna train if we just rippin it off some poor old geezah?"

"You're not training for this dung heap Kort. You're training for Dawncaller. If you're precogging him this much, and it's a warning...then you're going to meet with him sometime in the future. You told me yourself you're precogs are never wrong. You'll meet him or her...and when you do...you're going to kill him."

"Oh yeah huh?"

"Yeah...with this."

There was an unmistakable hum that sounded from a slender metallic cylinder, just the right size for Mak's oversized hand. Crimson red energy cackled and ripped from the hilt.

"You lied. Yous said you aint no jedi."

"I didn't lie...and I'm not."

Mak looked puzzled at the small Renlan, who deactivated the weapon and tossed it to Mak. As Mak examined the piece, a large sinister grin grew across his face.

"What'r we waitin fer?"

The doors shut as energy hummed to life, and the faint but distinguishing sound of energy ripping against itself echoed throughout the complex.

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 16 December 2008 05:17 PM:

For a long time, Tam wondered if Fi was going to say anything. When he leaned back from the kiss he saw the woman's face was slack and expressionless. He'd done it now. *Smart, Tam. You know that cheesy spy stuff never works...*

For an eternity they were frozen in place, the sounds of starfighter dogfights distantly punctuating the air. Then Fi's relaxed mouth stretched until they reached her dimples. "That was bad, Tam," she chuckled. "Come here then, 'Danger' Dawncaller." She wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him in tight. Tam gave himself to the kiss, letting his relief boil out from wherever it had been hiding. They really *were* together again. The vilest avatars of evil could hunt them from one end of the galaxy to the other, but as long as he had her and she had him, nobody could hurt them.

"Ahem." Cali stood in the corridor that connected the freighter's lounge to the engineering section. He arms were crossed and a foot tapped on the deck plates. "In case you're interested, the shields took a beating, and Reil wants me to see if I can get them up to speed. I could use some help," she said, and her eyebrow grew a telling arch, "that is, if you two can concentrate on anything else."

Slowly, sheepishly, Tam and Fi rose from the couch, self-consciously smoothed the wrinkles from their clothing, and followed the girl down the corridor.

Posted by ij thompson on 16 December 2008 10:49 PM:

"That oughta do it," Fi surmised as Cali snapped the last panel back into place. "Shields are topped up, hopefully we can get outta here before that changes."

"I'll go tell Reil," Tam offered, sprinting up the corridor.

Fi leaned against the corridor wall, wiping her greasy hands off on her pants. Looking up, she found Cali smirking back at her.

"What?"

The teenager chuckled. "Kinda robbin' the cradle a little there, ain'tcha?"

Fi sighed. "Look, Cali. Tam and I have been through a lot together. You... wouldn't understand."

"Course I understand... he's *cute*! Funny taste, though. Still, it makes sense - young fella like that probably wants someone

more experienced to break him in."

Fi stood rigid. "And what the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing!" Cali protested, then grinned. "I just think that, once he's gotten what he wants from you, he'll probably get some sense and come back to someone who isn't old enough to be his mo-"

Fi smacked the girl across the face. Hard. Cali recovered quickly, pulling her vibroblade from her belt and holding it menacingly between the two of them.

"You just try that again sometime, singer," Cali warned. "You just *try* it..."

Fi stared daggers at the girl, taking a few slow steps backward before turning, and hurrying back up the corridor.

Knife in hand, Cali watched her go, spit on the deck plating, and smiled.

Posted by Ubiquitorate on 17 December 2008 12:11 AM:

"Target their hyperdrive," barked Kenlan as the *Hunter* bore down on its prey. "I want precision fire *only* - we need to disable their ship, not destroy it."

"Aye, sir!" squeaked Brates from the weapon command station before turning to relay the order to the gunners in their turrets. Rutting inefficient way to run a battle, Kenlan thought, but military efficiency was something the Empire had apparently learned from its predecessor, and one person should never be used for a job that could be botched just as well by twenty.

"This is what you were trained for, boys," Kenlan urged his crew. "Keep the engines at maximum - we can't let them escape."

"Target nearing gravity well horizon," announced Grivna from the sensor console.

"Time to horizon," spat Kenlan.

"Fifteen seconds," replied Grivna.

Chort, they were cutting it close. "Stay on them, Kint," ordered Kenlan. "Give the gunners the clearest line of sight to their engines."

"Ten seconds!"

"Range to target?" asked Kenlan.

"Three-twenty-five and closing, Captain," replied Brates. "Firing range in three... two... one..."

"*Fire!*" screamed Kenlan, loudly enough that the order could be heard by the gunners over Brates' intercom. The ships laser batteries flared to life, and the distant enemy ship appeared as a flash of light in the viewport.

"Status?" asked Kenlan.

"Target is still in realspace," said Brates. "Damage appears to be limited to hyperspace engines only... she's trying to make a break for it on sublight!"

"Well done, men," seethed Kenlan through clenched teeth, his gloved right hand clenched in a victory fist. "They're no match for us with sublight engines only. Kint, stay with them. Close range to one-two-five and then match speed and course. Brates, target their sublight engines next. I don't want them going anywhere. Hold fire until my command."

A chorus of "Aye, sir"s was interrupted by Grivna's announcement from the sensor station. "Sir, the pirates are launching escape pods! Three pods on course back to the planet."

"Ion cannons, target the pods," ordered Kenlan. "Once the pods are disabled, use the tractor beam to steer them away from the planet. We'll pick them up later. Right now our focus is on the mother ship, but I don't want anyone escaping. Pramm, hail the pirate ship."

"Hailing, sir."

"Pirate captain, this is Captain Leeman Harku of the Imperial

Patrol Frigate *Hunter*," began Kenlan menacingly. "We've disabled your hyperdrive, and your sublight engines are next. You've already seen that my gunners are capable of unleashing a coordinated strike on a single system, so you should not doubt my ability to pick your ship to pieces, system by system. If you do not immediately strike your colors and prepare to be boarded, we will target each system individually, leaving your life support until last."

Kenlan sat back in his chair, allowing the threat a moment to sink in. "Captain, you and your crew are of no consequence to me," he continued. "Only the traitor you are carrying among your crew, Verik Aligeri, concerns me. Turn over Aligeri, and I will let you and the rest of your crew go freely. Fail to deliver him, or launch any additional escape pods, and we will dissect your ship until not one atom remains." Another pause as the pirate ship poured all of its available energy into the sublight engines, but was matched stroke for stroke by the *Hunter*. Kenlan left the hailing frequency open as he issued his next order. "Gunnery command, you may fire when ready."

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 17 December 2008 12:12 AM:

Athelias spoke into the comm, "Alright, put Tam on the comm."

"*Hold on, I'll call him into th-*" there was some background talking on the comm, then "*He's here.*"

"Tam, can you hear me, this is Athelias."

Tam's voice came over, tentative, cautious, "*Yeah, I hear ya.*"

"Alright, Tam I need you to listen to me and do exactly as I say, will you do that?" There was a pause, "Tam you are the only one who can get rid of that Interdictor, if you don't follow my instructions we're all toast, will you listen to me?"

"Okay, tell me what to do."

"I need you to do what you usually do when you jump across the galaxy, but focus all that you can on the Interdictor, see them in space halfway across the galaxy."

"Okay, I'll try." Tam's voice was tense with concentration.

"The Interdictor will have the *Emigrant* in its gravitational field in ten seconds." Elayne said. "Five, four, three, two, o- by the emperor's black bones, where did it go?"

Athelias activated the comm, "Good job Tam, you just saved us all. I'm sending some coordinates where we can go and be free of Imperials, at least for a little while."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 17 December 2008 06:33 PM:

Tam didn't hear the praise over the comlink. He didn't hear much, or even see much for that matter. The only thing that had any focus in his perspective was Reil, who gave his cheek a desperate but gentle slap. Then the pilot crouched over him brought his hand back with horror. It looked like there was blood on his fingers, but he didn't react as if it was his *own* blood. Instead, he was shouting out of the cockpit, his voice was nothing but a dull ringing.

Who's blood could that be?

The next thing he knew, he saw Fi and Cali's faces next to Reil's. They looked at him like his eyes had fallen out of his sockets or something. He tried to ask them what was wrong, but they only looked at him with renewed revulsion.

What was wrong? Why were they looking at him like that? Had something happened?

Tam searched his mind, but instead of memories that might

clue him into whatever may have happened, he found the Imperial *Interdictor*-class *Disruptor*. Every weld and panel, every onboard atmosphere scrubber, and every panicked crew member were now squarely in orbit around a star which reached for it with scouring arms of eruptive flares. He'd put there because he'd been told to.

A memory splashed into his mind. One of tightly clenching his teeth and trying to say *But it's too big! I can't jump anything like that!* but failing miserably, instead saying he'd try. Thel seemed pleased then, hopeful and expectant.

Thel! The errant Jedi knight had used him! *Used* him, like a weapon. A *tool*! No different than what the Empire wanted from him, or the Ququor, or Koro Bolera. And he was a *Jedi*! "A Jedi!" he shouted, and by the way Fi and Cali jumped, he must have done it out loud. They spoke at him, and he tried to understand, but there was nothing but the unintelligible ring of their voices and the burning pulse of anger in his ears...

Posted by Vash Knives on 17 December 2008 09:01 PM:

As Koro limped out of the tunnel with Tarynn, they came across a shocking scene. The bodies of a number of different beings lay scattered around. Among the bodies was that of a rather large creature Koro didn't recognize, possibly due to the massive damage the creature had taken before death. The one reassuring sight was a lone droid.

"Tonto, what happened here?"

"The others from our group came here individually, and encountered each other and a young boy. They then began shooting at the slavers here, and the creature emerged from an old Twi'lek when he was shot by the slavers. The group escaped with the slavers' ship along with some of the slavers, killing the creature in the process, after it killed everyone not on the ship."

With a confused look on his face, Koro inquired further.

"Two questions, one, who was the young boy, and two, have you got spice in your servos or something?"

"Master Bolera, I did not recognize the boy, but Fi seemed happy to see him. As for whether I have spice in my servos, I don't believe so."

Koro took this information in and considered it all.

"The boy was probably Tam. As for all of them, chances are they are long gone, or more likely considering that hotshot rebel *cough* pilot, dead, smashed into a cliff."

Posted by Corr Terek on 17 December 2008 09:49 PM:

"Emperor's black bones," Damon gulped. "Where did it go?"

"More importantly, how is Tam?" Mir said grimly. "You know how those jumps affect him."

"What are you talking about?" Thel said, looking back at them in concern.

"The last time Tam jumped us anywhere, he was out of it for almost a day," Mir explained. "We don't know how he does it, but it takes a lot out of him."

"And he's never jumped a ship that large," Damon added. He frowned suddenly as a thought occurred to him. "Or where they went."

"As long as he didn't jump them to a base full of reinforcements, I don't really care," Mir said brusquely. "I say we hook up with Tam and company and sort this out later."

Thel frowned, for the first time seeming to consider the implications of what he'd asked Tam to do. "I guess you're right."

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 17 December 2008 11:28 PM:

Athelias swore and jumped on the comm, "*Emigrant*, this is the *Nova Viper*, come in."

An angry woman responded, "*Who the frell are you? Do you have any idea what you've done? What gives you the right-*"

Athelias cut her off, "I just learned how these jumps affect him, I swear to you I didn't know, but I am a Jedi, I can heal him if I can get aboard. We can't do that here though, not now, we have to leave before they send any more Imperials. Jump to these coordinates and tell Tam that I will heal him as soon as we get there."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 18 December 2008 05:27 PM:

The unfamiliar cockpit ceiling came into focus, and the ringing in his ears slowly faded into Fi's voice. Then he heard another voice on the intercom. It was the Jedi Athelias. What was he saying?

And why was he laying on the floor of the cockpit.

Tam sat up and wiped his nose. His eyebrows knitted when he brought his hand away red and wet. "What happened?"

Fi spun around from the ship's comlink and rushed to the boy's side. "Tam, are you all right?"

"I'm not sure. My head kind of hurts. What happened, Fi?" He looked around at the concerned and disturbed faces. "Where are we?"

Posted by ij thompson on 18 December 2008 06:06 PM:

Fi shushed him gently, laying him back down on the deck. "We're still in the Ryloth system."

"Not for long," Reil clarified, before hailing the other ship. "*Nova Viper*, this is the *Emigrant*. Course laid in - we'll see you there shortly."

As the freighter launched into hyperspace, Fi removed her jacket and tucked it around the boy. Cali and Tey standing by, Fi knelt beside Tam, gently holding his cheek in her palm.

"You saved us," she whispered.

In a daze, Tam smiled weakly. "Three cheers for me."

Fi smiled back, looking deep into his eyes. [There'll always be someone willing to kill you, just to benefit from your power.]

"I know," Tam replied faintly. "It's one of those... whatchacallem's... paradoxes."

Fi looked confused, even startled, as did the others. "What was that?"

Tam nodded patiently. "Sorry. Was that my outside voice?" he laughed faintly. "I think I need to sleep..."

"I think so too, love," Fi agreed, kissing him on the forehead. "I'll be here."

Before Fi's lips left his brow, Tam was fast asleep...

Posted by Ris on 18 December 2008 10:52 PM:

(Another joint post)

Lost in the Clouds Casino, Bospin

Cin impulsively hugged & kissed Drend at his win. As she looked back up she met the man's eyes. Blushing slightly, she gave him a smile. The man, now smiling, looked at the couple. "That was quite a hand, never seen someone come into a game and score that quickly."

Drend tugged at his clothes and slipped his arm around Cin. "Just luck I guess," he beamed.

The man nodded, "You seem to have more than enough luck--good cards, beautiful girl. What more could a guy like you need?" Drend was indeed fortunate, he looked up at Cin and smiled.

Cin returned Drend's smile, and took the opening. "Just a replacement part, so we can get on with our, um, wedding trip."

"What kind of part?" The older man now seemed rather interested in their slight plight.

"A Hyperdrive Power Regulator, but it's a specialty kind. Shall we get a drink at the bar?" Drend tried to subtly shift the subject so that they didn't seem too eager about the part itself. Cin was content to let Drendar do the talking. He would know more about what was needed for his own ship.

The man indicated that they should instead sit at a table near the bar, and he ordered them drinks, including Cin. He knew what they would like, *before* they ordered.

Cin wondered at that, but limited herself to saying, "Thank you, how perceptive," graciously.

The man looked between them. "Something about you two tells me you're honest folk, but you're here for other purposes, and something tells me you kids are on no honeymoon."

Drend wondered if it was best to 'fess up now, or ride their act as long as he didn't press too hard. "Really, what we do need is the part, but we're having trouble finding one calibrated for the engine on our ship."

"Uh huh," the man looked hard at them, but didn't question. "I happen to have a part that might work for you. But if you want it, you'll have to pay, and it won't be cheap." Drend looked mournful; they didn't have the kind of money he was sure to want. "Or," the man paused, "you can do me a favor."

Drend wasn't sure he liked the sound of that. Cin realized they shouldn't have been surprised the man could figure the honeymoon was just a story--no matter how much she might want it to be true. Her late friend Lord Leto, the royal doctor, had maintained that the ability to read beings was even more important than luck in winning at any game that wasn't pure chance or versus an AI.

She still just listened as the two men negotiated. Cin didn't like the idea of doing an errand either. She needed to get back to the Rebels. They needed her even more with the whole flight gone, and they needed whatever Drendar was bringing. She exchanged looks with Drendar. "What's the price?" she asked softly.

"Ten thousand."

Cin didn't think they had much choice about taking the task. They didn't have the credits outright. The local Rebel agent--if they even managed to find her--would have access to some funds for the cause, but not nearly that amount. And Cin had given up on the idea of using the part as stakes now that they had met the gentleman. They were way outclassed. For Drend to have split a pot with him was luck, even Lord Leto would have agreed on that. "So ten thousand, or what, sir?"

"This is a matter not for public ears. Meet me in my penthouse, both of you, tonight, at twenty-one hundred." He slipped a card across the table. It had the number on it, and it said "Knock Once."

Cin slipped the card into her bag as quickly as the *maitre d'* had earlier taken her tips. After being raised by courtiers and serving on a royal Senator's ship, she knew a dismissal when she heard one. "Thank you, of course we'll come. Until then," she smiled, holding out her hand to let him clasp or kiss it if he wished, just as if the three of them had hit it off and he had invited them for a social engagement. He took her hand and slipped something else inside, a piece of flimsi with what could

easily be understood as comm codes. He then bid them goodnight and left the pair.

Shortly, Cin and Drend left Lost in the Clouds Casino, returning to their room, arm in arm, like any pair of young lovers. Once inside, Cin asked, "What have we gotten ourselves into, Drendar?"

Drend smiled and crashed backwards onto the bed. "Something neither of us expected, I'd wager."

"Is this how it usually works in your business?" she asked, joining him. This was a helluva lot different from mixing it up with a swarm of eyeballs or squints--and she thought it might be even more dangerous. "He seems pretty up & up, but...Do we go armed or something?" Cin curled up next to him, clearly concerned.

"My business?" he chuckled "I wouldn't know, I've only been doing *this*," he motioned out with his hands, "for a few months. I don't think we need to go in armed, necessarily, vibrodaggers at most."

"About as long as I've been doing my job, then," she told him. "I guess that will work. I hope our good luck holds up..."

"As long as we have each other, we should have plenty of luck," he smiled and held her close.

"This is the most good luck I've had--you rescuing me," Cin said, before kissing him.

He kissed back. "Best luck I had was finding you." he smiled.

"But will you feel that way when I'm back to being a hotshot flygirl?" Cin hoped so. Drend was clever and fun and upbeat.

He kissed her again. "Ah, but then I'll get to be proud as well as lucky."

"Sounds like a plan to me. But don't we need to get to our appointment?"

Posted by Ice Hawk on 19 December 2008 02:41 AM:

Reil took another swig of the Dodbri Whiskey as he sprawled across the lounge seats. Tam was out cold in the medbay, under Fi's care; and Tey was tearing apart the cargo bay looking for something, so Reil had nothing to do and no one to talk to until they exited hyperspace.

That was the problem with hyperspace, in Reil's opinion, it was boring. Flying was supposed to be exciting and dangerous and hyperspace was the polar opposite of that. To compensate, Reil had raided the galley, which was well stocked with a number of potent poisons. Reil had simply picked the one he was most familiar with.

Just as the whiskey was starting to get its grip on Reil, Cali came down, and glared at him accusingly.

"Tam's in medbay, unconscious, and you're out here getting sloshed. He almost died from saving our skins, don't you have any shame?"

"Not really, no. Don't you have something else you should be doing?"

"Like what?"

"I dunno. . . cooking, cleaning, looking after Tam, y'know," Reil grinned, "Women's work."

Cali didn't take the bait, which disappointed Reil immensely.

"You're a pig."

"I'm a pilot, we have to drink and make sexist remarks, it's in our contract."

Reil took another swing, and then set the bottle in the center of the table, and made room on the lounge seat.

"C'mon, I was kidding, here have some."

Cali's expression softened.

"I'm underage, and besides, we shouldn't be drinking when Fi and Tey are so busy, and Tam's in medbay."

Reil cocked an eyebrow.

"Not twenty standard minutes ago, you were bragging about how you knifed a shopkeeper, and now you're worried about the legal drinking age? Look, Tam's out cold, and neither you or I are doctors, and we'd have to stun Fi to get her away from Tam's side, so there's nothing we can do. Same thing with Tey, he won't even tell me what he's looking for, so c'mon, have a drink."

Cali hesitated.

"I promise I won't let Tey arrest you."

Cali gave in, sat beside Reil and took a tentative sip of the whiskey. She grimaced as she forced it down.

"Augh, how do you drink that swill", she said as she pushed the bottle toward Reil. Reil shrugged. *More for me then.*

"I guess you really are too young to appreciate something this refined."

"Yeah, well if refined means I have to drink that bantha urine, I'll just stay a kid."

Reil laughed at that. When he was first introduced to booze, he'd said something along the same lines. Now it was being a very good friend to him and helping blur the memories of an interdictor vanishing in front of his eyes, and Tam's nose becoming a fountain of blood. That had been seriously freaky. Cali tried the whiskey again, and found it slightly more to her liking.

"You remember what you said in the tunnel."

Reil's gut began to squirm with trepidation. He grinned nervously and began inching towards the other end of the seat. Suddenly it didn't feel like he'd had nearly enough to drink.

"Ummm. . . Not really, I mean it was very hectic, and it probably didn't mean anything anyway."

"You said I looked good. Did you mean that?"

"Ummm. . . Yeah, the dress really suits you."

Cali smiled. Reil got up from the lounge very quickly.

"You know, I'm pretty tired, I think I'm gonna go sleep. Somewhere else."

Reil was making his way to the cabin when he heard Tey shouting about finding something.

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 19 December 2008 03:58 PM:

His fingers steepled, and leaning back in a tall chair, Inquisitor Tremayne's remaining Human eyebrow arched perceptibly. "He's moved again."

Captain Nolaan straightened. "My lord?"

"The boy," he explained, unmoving. "It was a large ship he moved. He's alive, and he's escaped the task force on Ryloth."

Nolaan fought to suppress his sudden stammer. "But the *Disrupter* is in orbit, and apprised of the groundside search. She wouldn't have let anything escape the system." Tremayne was speaking of the Force again, the province of mystics and occultists; Nolaan had no use for it. Chasing this boy was a waste of time in the first place, and Tremayne had sent *two* cruisers to search for it.

"Dawncaller escaped," the High Inquisitor insisted, "but he's leaving a trail of crumbs. Based on what I've felt, it's possible that he moved the *Disruptor* itself."

"Impossible," Nolaan scoffed.

Tremayne rose to his feet and stepped toward the captain of his flagship, the *Interrogator*. "If it is true," he said, his voice thin and cold, suggesting that Nolaan should never underestimate what he cannot understand, "then Dawncaller is more powerful than we'd estimated. Contact both the *Hunter* and the *Oxonic*.

Merat and Harku must be well informed of every sliver of data relevant to their hunt." Spinning on a heel, he gazed out the large viewport of his spacious private office.

"As you wish, my lord, but..." Nolaan paused, knowing the insubordinate danger of his hesitation, "but did you not command them to search for the boy separately?"

"I did," the High Inquisitor's remained calm.

"And did you not intimate that the ship to return with the boy would be spared from execution?"

"I did," Tremayne repeated.

"Then why inform them of your discovery?"

"Do you know what a dawncaller is?" asked Tremayne, seeming to change the subject.

"A domesticated fowl," said Nolaan. "Common in farmlands and rural homesteads, as I recall."

"It is a herald of the new day," Tremayne corrected. "I can see you need further education regarding our current mission. The boy— Dawncaller— is the herald of *our* new day. Once we harness his abilities, then no power in the galaxy will be able to stop the might of—" he paused, glancing over his shoulder at the captain, "the Empire."

"I care not if Merat finds the boy, or Harku, or *neither*, so long as he is found. My plans at Kuat have already begun. All will be completed soon, but I need Dawncaller!"

Nolaan bowed in compliance and left the High Inquisitor's private chambers...

Posted by ij thompson on 19 December 2008 10:05 PM:

People look so different when they're asleep.

Tam lay supine on a gurney in the *Emigrant's* meager medbay, his features lit by a single nearby fluorescent. He looked younger somehow, peaceful, as though he'd spent the day learning lessons and doing chores, not fighting for his life and exhibiting powers unfathomable to mere mortals. Fi admired him, trying to keep her recent altercation with Cali from running through her head.

Old enough to be his mother, the younger girl had been about to say.

Of course that was absurd. At twenty-two, Fi was barely a woman herself. A girl. A girl with enough experience to trust her instincts, and to know when an attraction *meant* something, something more than a passing fancy.

And Tam was fourteen.

Fi frowned in the dimness, leaned against the gurney. Yes, Tam was young. But he was also *alone*. Orphaned by the indiscriminate wrath of the Empire. Fi was his only family in the galaxy, with the possible exception of Kenlan As-Buka, whom Tam hadn't spoken of, leading Fi to believe that the aging 'Jedi' might no longer be a fixture in the boy's life. No, she was all the boy had, and for the first time, she felt ready to accept such a responsibility.

Fourteen.

Fi bit her lip anxiously, struggling with the simple mathematics. It was possibly looked upon as a crime, on some worlds. True, there were many kinds of crimes in the galaxy - between herself and the other passengers aboard the *Emigrant*, they were probably guilty of *all* of them. But this was *love*, not theft, murder, or treason. Still, it bothered her.

So young.

This was why she'd left him in the first place, on Tatooine. And yet somehow, in cold, infinite space, he'd found her again. Surely that was fate? Destiny? And all of the beings scattered around the cosmos, who desired to use his power, for whatever

end? Surely she needed to remain at his side, as the one person who truly cared about him?

Fi would have liked to believe that her interest was so altruistic. But the simple truth was that she loved him. She loved him with all her heart.

Climbing onto the gurney in the cold, blue light, Fi snuggled up against Tam. Draping a protective arm around him, she found one of his hands with her own, held it, and fell immediately to sleep.

Posted by Ice Hawk on 23 December 2008 12:18 AM:

Tey could smell alcohol as soon as Reil entered the makeshift holding cell.

"You've been drinking."

"Yeah, so sue me. What are you shouting about anyway?"

Tey gestured behind himself.

"Look."

Behind him, there was a man tied to a chair. He and the chair were laying on their side, and the man's face looked like it had pummeled by a Gamorean. *Actually* Reil conceded, *it probably was pummeled by a Gamorean, or something just like it.* . . The man was awfully still, and Reil moved past Tey to check for a pulse.

"Don't bother, he's dead." Tey said, just as Reil knelt down beside the body.

Reil turned around to face Tey.

"Well what's the big deal then?"

"Aside from having a corpse on our hands?"

"Yeah, I mean, we can just toss him out of the airlock when we exit hyperspace."

Tey shook his head.

"And I was worried that you'd do something rash and ill considered. Look at the insignia on his shoulder."

On the man's shoulder there was a black circle, and inside of it was a white triangle, and inside of that was a black inverted triangle. A spiky and erratic black line surrounded all these. It was one of the most recognizable symbols in the Galaxy.

"Kuat?"

"Yeah. I think we found what the Imperials wanted."

"A dead Kuati agent?"

Tey rolled his eyes.

"I think they would have preferred him alive; but there's a box in the cargo hold with the same insignia, so it probably has something to do with that."

Reil looked at Tey in surprise.

"There is?"

"Yeah, it was hidden behind a bunch of crates, but I found it."

"I would have mentioned that, instead of the corpse."

"Well I didn't think it was important until I found the dead Kuati agent."

"So what's in the box?"

"It's locked, I can't open it."

"Fingerprint or Retinal scan required?"

"No, it's just a really strong lock."

"So why can't I throw the corpse out of the airlock?"

Tey sighed.

"That really isn't the point y'know. . ."

"Can I, or can I not, throw this corpse out of the airlock?"

"YES!! Fine, throw it out of the airlock! The *point* is that we've got a strongbox full of Kuati secrets that the Imperials sent an Interdictor to get back."

"Sweet. . ."

Tey rubbed his temples.

"You really are hopeless aren't you?"

"I just don't want him stinking up my new ship. . ."

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 23 December 2008 09:49 PM:

The *Nova Viper* and the *Emigrant* dropped out of hyperspace in front of a large green and blue planet.

Athelias immediately got onto the comm., "This is Athelias, I'm sending you the landing coordinates."

A voice came back, "*This looks like a perfectly fine planet, what makes you think the Empires not gonna be here?*"

"The only thing anywhere near sentience on this rock is the Gamorreans."

"*Gamorreans, lovely.*"

"Don't worry, we're on the other side of the planet, they shouldn't bother us here."

"*Copy that. We'll see you on the ground.*"

When the *Nova Viper* touched down Athelias, Damon, and Mir went down the loading ramp as a young girl, probably still in her teens and two men, definitely past their teens.

Damon walked straight to the man on the girl's left with a smile, "Tey, how ya doing?"

The man smiled back, "Same ol' same ol'."

Damon's grin grew, "Well, I'm sorry to hear that." Then he grew sober, "Where's Tam?"

Tey's smile disappeared as well, "He's in the medbay, follow me."

Tey led their group onto the *Emigrant* and into the medbay where they found Tam lying on gurney and a young woman Athelias vaguely recognized sitting beside him, when they entered she turned to face them, catching sight of Athelias her face turned stormy and she opened her mouth. Athelias forestalled her, "Yes, I know this is my fault, and that I'm going to hear more than that, but I would ask that you let me heal Tam first." She glared at him with her mouth open for a minute then closed it, but didn't stop glaring. Athelias moved Tam to one side of the gurney and sat on it beside him, he placed his hands on Tam's head and belly and started focusing the force into the boy.

The damage had been worse than Athelias feared, the boy had been in serious danger, it took more than half an hour before Tam's eyes fluttered open. When he turned his head to see Athelias sitting over him, his hardened and an invisible hand slammed Athelias in the chest sending him flying past the woman, who hadn't moved an inch since Athelias had began, and into the wall on the opposite side of the medbay. Athelias slowly got to his feet and walked back over to Tam, "I know I deserved that, and please feel free to do it again, but first know that I had no idea what effect these jumps had on you until after the Interdictor was gone, if I'd known I would have rather faced it myself in a snub fighter than ask you to do what you did." He stopped by the side of the bed, "When I learned you were taken by Imperials I broke into the most heavily guarded base on Temen III to find out where they were keeping you, I learned that they were taking you to the Maw, so Damon, Mir'isha, and I immediately left to save you, when we found out that you'd jumped the shuttle you were on we landed on an imperial station and waited there until we could intercept a message that would tell us where you were. Tam, you are the strongest force-sensitive that I've ever even heard of and as a Jedi, possibly the last Jedi, it is my duty to protect you, I would never knowingly ask you to do something that would put you in danger." Athelias looked into Tam's eyes for a minute, and when Tam didn't throw him across the room again he turned to the woman and spread

his arms out exposing his body, "Okay, your turn, just keep it above the belt please."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 3 January 2009 12:56 AM:

After hearing the Jedi out, Tam sat up, eager to hear what Fi had to say, but she was as silent as everyone else.

"You made a bad mistake, Jedi," Tey finally said, "but you made up for it." He held out his hand and gave the newcomers gracious handshakes. "So, Gamorr?"

"Gamorr," Athelias repeated. "And the natives are in the middle of their yearly Slushtime Battles, so they've all traveled to a centralized location. We're alone out here."

"Alone," said Fi. "Lovely. So why did we come here, exactly, except to be 'alone'?"

"Because here," Athelias said, returning the woman's gaze, "the Empire won't be able to sense us."

"Sense us?" Reil scoffed. "Sensors are sensors. Sure, we can close down everything on the ships but rudimentary systems, but last I heard, the Empire had a presence here. No doubt they saw us descend, and it's only a matter of time before they track us down."

"When I say, 'sense', my friend, I'm not talking about technological means."

The pilot's face purpled. "Listen here, 'my friend'--"

"He's right," Tam said, his eyes defocused. "There's something evil here."

"Evil?" groaned Fi. "You're helping us by bringing us to some evil place? How does that even make sense?"

Damon stepped forward. "It'll be fine, Fi. Think of it like this: the Force is kind of like a subspace signal, and when we use it we kind of give off a transponder signal."

Athelias nodded at his apprentice. "It's how we knew that Tam had jumped his shuttle. When someone sensitive to the Force causes such a disturbance, others nearby can sense it. And Tam sets off a very powerful disturbance when he does what he does."

Mir'isha chimed in. "Easy, fellas. You're just confusing them. Get to the part about the evil."

"So the dark side sends out a 'subspace signal' too, and it acts as sort of a counteracting wave. Any Force-sensitive in the area won't be able to pick us out of the interference."

"Okay," said Fi, "I still don't get it, but whatever."

Tam stood up. "I get it, but what happened on this planet to leave such a..." he finally found an appropriate word, "...stain?"

"According to what I've learned," Athelias explained, "it's the ruins of a thousand-year-old Sith Academy..."

Posted by ij thompson on 3 January 2009 12:18 PM:

"Sith Academy?" Fi questioned, eyebrows knitted. "So what's that, like, some sorta evil, stuck-up private school?"

The others turned to Fi, their faces a mixture of amusement and exasperation.

"Hey," she apologized, hands in the air, "I'm in the dark here, you know? This is all pretty new to me!"

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 3 January 2009 01:01 PM:

Athelias sat down on the side of the bed faces Fi and starts talking in a patient tone, "The Force is an energy field that is all around us, in us. It is the Force of life, it comes from all living creatures, it comes from me, from Damon, even from you, though you cannot sense it. Think of it like air, you can't see air,

but you breath it, it's all around you, except the Force isn't stopped by mere walls, or space. There are those of us who can feel it's presence, can wield it, and be wielded by it, it is something that we are born with, it is quite literally in our blood, but even if you can't feel it you create it, like I said, it is the Force of life, without it you're dead."

He pulls his legs up onto the bed and continues, "As I said, we wield, but it also wields us. If you wield it defensively, to protect, for justice then you are said to follow the light, those who use the Force for peace and justice are of the light side, and are most often Jedi. But as in all things in life there must be harmony, there must be balance and the light side is balanced by the dark side. Where, if you follow the light, you use the Force for peace and justice, if you follow the dark side of the Force, if you let yourself be ruled by your emotions, especially your anger, fear, and hate, then it will become more and more easy to give in to temptations, you will start to use the Force more and more for personal gain, sometimes to the loss of others. The dark side is very tempting, partially because it's easier, *not* stronger," he looks first to Tam, then to Damon, then he looks back to Fi, "but easier, and once you start down the path to the dark side it is very difficult to come back. And the dark side does not just affect your actions, it often goes as far as affecting your physical appearance, if you give in to the dark side it can change the way you look. It is a very vicious cycle, and very hard to escape."

"Where the light side has the Jedi, the dark side have the Sith, not much has been known of the Sith for quite some time, but I have recently come into a great wealth of knowledge," he looks again to Damon and back to Fi, "some of it is about the Sith. The Sith have had multiple academies over thousands of years, and most of them had such a congregation of evil and treachery that they made a Force impression, some people believe that these Force impressions can be strong enough to affect people even hundreds or thousands of years after the Sith have left, which is why we shouldn't stay here too long, and they can certainly still be felt, which is why we'll be safe from the Empire here until we do leave."

Athelias jumped to his feet and his voice becomes more lively, "Well, I hope that answers your question. Now, I think it's time for some introductions, my name is Athelias, and since there seem to be new people here I'll introduce Damon," he held his hand out indicating Damon, "and Mir'isha," now he indicated Mir, "and Elayne is waiting in our ship in case there's some unexpected trouble."

Posted by Corr Terek on 3 January 2009 08:58 PM:

"So..." Damon said thoughtfully, "What exactly are we dealing with?" Seeing Thel's confused look, he continued. "I mean, there's nobody at this Academy, right? So we should be in the clear for awhile."

"I'm not sure," Thel admitted. "I've heard some pretty wild stories about the Sith, and I haven't even begun to read through the data you've found." He seemed troubled. "I think it's best to assume that we won't be alone here."

Reil scratched his head. "Sounds like prime material for a horror holovid!" he joked. "Nobody go wandering off alone."

"I think that would be wise," Thel said, the somber tone of his voice giving the pilot pause. "And," he continued, glancing around the room before his gaze rested on Damon and Tam "don't touch *anything*."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 3 January 2009 11:11 PM:

The surrounding jungle buzzed with the colorful calls of wildlife. "This is paradise," Cali said. "How can you call this evil?"

As she stood at the top of the *Emigrant's* loading ramp, Fi glared at the girl with an arch to both her mouth and her eyebrow. "Ever heard of Burista?"

"The whole planet isn't bad, just this academy," Tam added, "wherever it is..." He looked at Athelias and Damon across the clearing, setting up survival tents underneath the *Nova Viper*. When they'd captured the *Viper* back on Tatooine, they had all been friends and colleagues. While that hadn't really changed, Tam thought, he had learned quite a bit about those who surrounded him. When Tam was young he had always been taught that the Jedi were defenders of peace and freedom, and he'd been surprised and astonished to meet three in the last few months. The rumors of their extinction had been greatly exaggerated.

But something bothered Tam about these Jedi. Athelias seemed to know quite a bit about the Force, and had even healed him, but only because he had caused the damage in the first place. He'd been adamant that Tam remain nearby him at all times, but hadn't given any particular reason beyond wanting to ensure the boy's safety. Tam couldn't shake the idea that Thel was after something more. Why couldn't more Jedi be like Master Kenlan?

Kenlan. There had been no sign of his master since their capture on Temen III. Tam had seen him in a vision, commanding an Imperial cruiser. Was there any truth to that? Had the Jedi master been turned? Was this the dark side that Athelias had talked about? And what dark side would they find on the same planet as a Sith Academy?

After they'd set up the tents, Damon ordered the unloading droids to get back into their alcoves and power down, but the machines began whining about being locked up all the time, and wished just for some fresh air. Sounded like it was time for a . The Temenite gunslinger seemed to be taking his cues from Athelias now, and that worried Tam. He was learning a great deal about the Force, no doubt, but what path did that put him on? Tam couldn't get the image of a lightsaber going through Damon's chest out of his mind. The pain in his eyes, the dark satisfaction in that woman's, whoever she was.

A woman stepped out of the *Nova Viper*. She passed Damon as he argued with the balky cargo droids and walked up to Thel. It was hard to tell exactly what she said from this distance, but a thumb at the completely dark *Nova Viper* hinted that she'd just been shutting down the stolen cruiser. *That must be Elayne...*

A woman stepped out of the *Emigrant*, too. But even at a mile away, Tam would have been able to recognize Fiola Shaku. She sat next to him on the large stone he had found to sulk. "So," she said, "that Athelias... What do you think of him?"

"I'm trying not to," Tam replied.

"Good."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 5 January 2009 05:52 PM:

The pilot, Reil, sauntered down the *Emigrant's* ramp. "Well, folks, the ship's shut down, and we're officially sitting ducks."

Cali looked up at the man, her nose scrunched with confusion. "What's a duck?"

Reil ignored the question, glancing over at the people gathered under the *Nova Viper*. "Hey, who's she?"

"That's Elayne, I'm guessing," Tam said. "She just came out herself."

"Is that so..." The pilot stared for a little too long. Then,

clapping his hands, he turned back to those gathered by his own ship. Well, in a manner of speaking. Both the *Nova Viper* and the *Emigrant* had been procured by means of theft, but Tam was growing used to the universal sentiment that a traditional consideration of ownership was somewhat mutable. Reil was still talking, so Tam decided to pay attention. "So, if what Mister Force Master over there says is true, then there are some old ruins somewhere around here. Who's up for a little fun?"

"It's a Sith Temple," Tam pointed out. "It's dangerous."

"What ruins aren't?" He really did have a point. "And look, we'll just go have a look. It's not like we'll go inside or anything. Who's with me?"

Tam wanted to say yes, but Athelias had made it clear that the Academy had been a place of the dark side, and Tam could feel that too. He and Fi had found enough darkness in jungles, but still, his curiosity was piqued. What could be there that would scare even a Jedi?

Posted by ij thompson on 5 January 2009 07:51 PM:

"Hang on a second!" Fi blurted at Zealos Reil, just as the man was about to thumb the *Emigrant's* boarding ramp closed. Hoisting the fancy handbag that contained the not-inconsiderable wealth she and Cali had stolen from the Twi'lek slaver on Ryloth, she trotted up the ramp.

"Wait for me," Cali insisted, following the older girl inside.

The teen caught up to Fi in the transport's galley, where the musician was emptying a good-sized plastic container of nutribars into the galley sink.

"I'm sorry about what I said before."

Fi stopped, fixing the girl with an expression that anyone who didn't know her might have called a 'smile'.

"No, you're not."

Cali considered, returned the non-smile, and laughed. "You're right... I'm not. It's funny the things people say to each other, isn't it?"

"Hilarious," Fi returned, dumping the ten-thousand some-odd credits from her handbag into the plastic container and returning it to the cupboard where she'd found it.

"Hey," Cali demanded sharply, "we never talked about how we're splittin' that."

Fi closed the cupboard, fixed the girl with a flat stare. "You have something special in mind?"

"I killed that slaver scum!" Cali hissed through clenched teeth. "And his Trandoshan pal, Churk. What did *you* do, other than grab the credits, and that fancy necklace?"

Fi was confused a moment, before she remembered the intoxicating blue crystal on its silver chain that had so captivated her. Reflexively, she reached a hand up to her collar, touched it. "Yes, and *we*," she replied, with a wave of her hand to remind the girl that there might be more than two people involved in this little transaction, "rescued your hide from slavery back in Mos Eisley." Thinking she was finished, she was surprised to find that more words came out.

"I'm starting to wonder why..."

Cali blocked Fi's path to the boarding ramp, her young face turning red with fury. "What do you mean?"

Fi studied the girl, thought about lying, but couldn't. "I'm worried about what's happening to you."

Cali stood firm. "Well, don't you worry your pretty little head about it," she retorted, shaking angrily. "I'm free, you understand? *Free...*"

Seeing the look in Fiola's eyes, Cali collected herself. Stepping out of the woman's path, she gestured in mock courtesy.

"After you."

Fi stood still, her eyes on the girl's face, but her mind on the girl's knife. She returned Cali's gesture with one of her own.

"I insist."

Cali grinned a frightening grin, and strutted down the boarding ramp. Fi followed her into the daylight, passing Reil, who locked the vessel, past Tey Spires and the other warriors, and resumed her seat on the rock beside Tam. Impulsively, she fixed the boy's cheek with a loud lipsmack, embarrassing him.

"Come on, killer," she invited. "Let's go have an adventure!"

Posted by Ice Hawk on 6 January 2009 01:21 AM:

Reil inhaled the fresh air on Gamorr as he waited for Fi and Cali to get off the ship. It's lush fauna and explosive amounts of life were rejuvenating and magnificently foreign to someone who grew up on a farm world, latter spending most of his adult life in space. Cali had hit the nail on the head when she called this place paradise. It was a far cry from his recent groundside adventures, and it was absolutely flawless for it. Or at least it would be, if brutish, sub-human pigs didn't overrun it, but they were busy killing each other far away from here, so for now, Reil could just relax and enjoy the scenery.

Reil's eyes wandered back toward Athelias' camp, and the mysterious Elayne inhabiting it. *It's not just the jungle that beautiful.* Reil was careful not to leer, but he did watch her from afar. His observations were interrupted by Tey.

"I'm sorry, wha'd you say?" Reil said as he turned to his companion.

Tey looked pensive.

"I said, I'm a little worried because I wasn't able to make any progress with the strongbox. It must contain something valuable to be sealed so tightly."

Reil shrugged.

"Well, there's not much we can do on our own, so it's just as well to leave it until later."

Tey mumbled an, "I guess. . ." though it didn't sound like he believed it.

Just then Cali came bounding down the ramp, with Fi behind her. Reil had just sealed the ramp when Fi plomped down beside Tam and kissed him on the cheek. Tam turned bright red, but Fi was unabashed.

"Come on, killer," she invited. "Let's go have an adventure!"

Well. . . at least she's got the right attitude about this thing.

"Alright, now that we're all set, let's go."

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 20 January 2009 09:30 PM:

Athelias saw Reil leading a group away from the camp and wanted to smack his head on a rock, why did he even bother warning them? He got up and ran in front of Reil stopping him in his tracks, "I won't even pretend to not know where you all are going, now, I know that I have no authority over any of you--"

"Good." Reil cut in, "Then you won't mind if we're on our way." He started to push past Athelias.

Athelias put his hand on Reil's chest, stopping him, "But I thought I'd tell you what to expect." He started walking around him in slow circles, "What to expect from one of the most evil places in the galaxy." Reil scoffed quietly and Athelias smiled, "First, I'll give you an idea of how evil the Sith themselves were, you see I've been doing some reading, let's imagine for a minute that you're a Sith lord living a thousand years ago, the master of this academy. You want to stretch your legs in the morning, you go for a walk, during your walk you find a woman and her child

being attacked by thugs, how fortuitous, for you. The first thing you do is use the Force to crush the thugs' bodies and revel in their screams as they feel their bodies being crunched into a small cube, next you turn to the woman, whose look of pure horror you could eat for breakfast, what to do? Well, with the thugs gone it's time for some more fun; you kill her child, probably in some brutal and bloody way, preferably while he's still in her protective arms, nothing like snapping her mind before her body, right? Seeing as how she's your last source of entertainment you should probably spread it out as long as possible, torture, perfect. You torture her with Force for as long as you can keep her alive knowing that her screams will be heard by no-one and if someone actually does hear them and come to help it'll just mean more fun for you." Athelias' face is completely blank, his eyes are hard as rocks, "Then a wondrous thing happens, the academy is wiped out, either by the Jedi, or by warring factions inside the Sith, but are you gone? Of course not, you see the Sith of old had an annoying ability, one that the Jedi have only recently re-acquired, they can separate themselves from their bodies when they die and become what are known as Force-ghosts, so your body is broken and bloodied but you're still in the academy, you can still interact with the living. In fact the thing that you find most fun now is turning groups of people stupid enough to enter the academy, usually for treasure or just for kicks, against each other and watch them kill themselves, one by one, that is if you can beat the other, older, more blood-thirsty Force-ghosts to them, you see places as strong in the dark side as Sith academies attract dark side followers, chances are this academy has been used multiple times. Now, skip ahead a thousand years, what you can expect, the moment you enter the academy you'll be overcome with a sense of unease, if you haven't felt it before you enter. This is where the smart people leave, if you keep going the evil of the place will sink into your very bones, you'll become more aggravated and snappish, one of you will want to leave, you'll tell him that none of you are stopping him and send him off alone to try to find his way out and the rest of you will continue. After a little while of wandering the dark hallways that have been home to evil untold for thousands of years you'll get more and more angry and hateful, just looking for a place to vent it, eventually, if you're lucky another of you will want to leave, this time instead of sending him off you'll feel an inexplicable sudden rage and just shoot him, you'll enjoy it immensely, feeling his life in your hands. About this time the first person you sent off has been found by a Force-ghost and has either been killed or turned so far to the dark side, whether or not he can use the Force, and his only thought will be, you sent out to die and he will come back to kill you, and he might well succeed. And if Tam were to go with you he would have fallen to the dark side by now due to his inexperience facing it and he *will* kill you all, whether or not he likes you, the history of the Force is filled with Sith who've committed unthinkable acts to those they love for very little to no reason, then he'll either destroy or take over the galaxy and rule it for years to come with an iron fist, the recent destruction of Alderaan will be nothing compared to his wrath. But let's assume that Tam is not Force-sensitive, let's also assume that the man you sent off is killed instead of turned to the dark side and let's further assume that the Force-ghost that finds the rest of you, and one will, rest assured, decides to turn you to the dark side instead of outright killing you, if he does he will eventually convince you to attack us, simply because we follow the light side, now this will pit three non-Force-sensitives against one fully trained and two partially trained Jedi, you will be beaten." Athelias stops in front of Reil and looks into his eyes, "Easily. So, go, have fun,

try not to die or kill each other, and make sure that Tam doesn't fall to the dark side and take out the entire galaxy in a fit of rage." Athelias walks over to where Damon, Mir and Elayne are staring at him, sits down and starts eating a bar of food, he looks over at Reil, "Go on, don't let me stop you. Oh, one last piece of advice, whatever you do, don't touch anything."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 26 January 2009 03:36 PM:

"Thanks!" said Reil, his face brightening. "That's just the mood I was hoping to set!" He shoved Athelias' hand out of his way and marched forward into the jungles of Gamorr. "Well, c'mon slowpokes," he said to the others, "you scared or something?"

Tam looked at Athelias. The man gazed back at him, and his flinty eyes pleaded that the boy would see reason. The others had dismissed his warning as spooky stories to tell around the campfire, but Tam knew better. He knew of the dark side, and had even *met* one of those Force ghosts Thel had talked about. Were they truly the province of the Sith, as Athelias had claimed? If so, many of his suspicions about Koro Bolera and his 'pet' ghost must have been true. He'd wanted nothing more than to enthrall Tam into joining his cause, whatever it may have been.

The look in Athelias' eyes told Tam that he didn't care what happened to the others, just as he said. His only concern was to protect Tam.

But he had done so by telling tales of unspeakable crime and grisly torture. He said that if Tam went to these ruins he would either turn evil and take over the galaxy, or he would die. That he would hurt his loved ones, something he would never do, and if they didn't die, and came back with the dark side (whatever that meant), that he, Elayne, and Damon would kill them on the spot.

In short, Tam thought, Athelias had threatened to kill him if he didn't do what he said. He glared into the Jedi's eyes to show that he had seen *plenty* of reason.

"Come on, Tam!" cried Fi. She had stopped following the others long enough to extend a hand. "Let's go see this haunted temple!"

Tam returned his gaze to Athelias, and didn't remove it as he walked slowly around the man. Once he'd circled around to the other side he opened his mouth to speak, but nothing came out. He had nothing to say to the man who had claimed to know so much about the Force by virtue of his title, had won over his friend Damon, and had nearly killed Tam himself. Then he ran after Fi's outstretched hand.

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 26 January 2009 11:27 PM:

When Tam walked around Athelias he sighed deeply and turned to Reil, "If you are going to go then I have no choice but to go with you, after all, what's a haunted academy without someone who can tell you what each room was used for, what creatures of the night they kept as their pets. You wouldn't want to get bored, would you?"

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 26 January 2009 11:30 PM:

When Tam walked around Athelias he sighed deeply and turned to Reil, "If you are going to go then I have no choice but to go with you, after all, what's a haunted academy without someone who can tell you what each room was used for, what creatures of the night they kept as their pets. You wouldn't want to get bored, would you?"

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 27 January 2009 05:43 PM:

"Hey, come to give us more of a lecture?" said Cami, once everyone else had caught up with her in Gamorr's underbrush.

"He just offered to be our tour guide," Tam said, grinning.

Fi skipped along as she walked, swinging Tam's hand she held back and forth. "Quite the attitude adjustment, if you ask me."

"I'm coming along for your safety, for *everyone's* safety."

"Loosely translated," said Tam, "He'll kill us the second any of us are possessed by a Force ghost."

"Oh yeah," said Reil, "I remember now. You believe in all that hokey Smith stuff."

As he kept up, Athelias shrugged. "Hey, I'm just here to point out all the torture rooms and dark side receptacles so you guys don't unlock them. And it's *Sith*, not Smith. I now know I made the right decision to follow and protect you."

Tam let out an exasperated sigh. "In other words, he's here to stick his nose in our fun and make sure that I do 'what's best for us.' Honestly, he's got about all the grace of a bantha." His eyes locked on Athelias, "Like every Jedi I've *ever* met."

The two held their stare until Reil spoke up. "Seriously, all this mumbo jumbo makes a good story, but it's a bunch of old ruins, even if there were Sith ghosts here, I'm sure you can scare them away with your boring spee--EEEEEE!!!!"

Reil dropped straight down, disappearing from sight.

Tam cursed under his breath. Was the kriffing Jedi already going to be proven right? He ran forward with the others to see what had befallen poor Reil.

"I'm all right," Reil said from the bottom of a steep slope. "The ground fell out from under me. I think we found the ruins, though."

Tam looked to where the man gestured, and found a shallow but wide pool of murky water. In the middle of which rose a small, ornate island construct. He pointed at a door built into the island. "Where does that door go?"

"It goes in," Thel said, "obviously. In, and down. The whole temple is subterranean..."

Posted by ij thompson on 27 January 2009 08:57 PM:

"Perfect," Fi responded. "It's too muggy up here, anyway!"

Letting go of Tam's hand, the musician plopped down onto the wet grass, quickly sliding down the slope, coming to a rest not far from Zealos Reil. Then she rose, surveying the wide pond.

"Nice!"

Lifting one leg, Fi clumsily removed her boot, balancing in the muck, then removed the other. Pulling her pantlegs up to her knees, she waded out into the murky water, holding both boots in one hand. The pond's warmth and wetness was soothing, and she enjoyed the feeling of the water and muck between her toes, punctuated by the occasional twig. Turning, she waved back at the others.

"Come on in, the water's fine!"

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 28 January 2009 07:59 AM:

Athelias slowly walked to the edge of the wet grass, then he jumped to the bottom of the slope, landing on one knee. He rose gracefully to his feet, slipped in the grass and fell backwards.

"Stupid wet grass." He muttered

He started across the pond to the Sith academy rubbing a

bruise.

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 28 January 2009 02:30 PM:

After making sure the coast was clear below, Tam worked his way down the slope. It *was* slick, as evidenced by the large wet stain on Athelias' pant leg. He was careful to make sure every step and handhold was solid before he applied his full weight. In effect, he was the last one down, but he had no bruises to show for it, which made him smile inwardly.

Fi was in the water up to her knees, splashing around with a satisfied grin on her face. "Come on, Tam. Kick off those boots and get in here. The water feels great!"

Tam tried to smile back, but the water made him nervous for some reason. It clearly wasn't very deep, and Fi could have practically jumped back to shore in a few short hops.

"Tam," Fi teased. Her tone was playful but insistent. "You scared or something? It's not like there's anything out here."

"I know, it's just--"

The boy was interrupted by a blood curdling scream from Fi, which had permeated the air with a shock of sudden alarm. After a large splash, she was nowhere to be seen.

"Fi! Fi!"

Tam leapt high and far, landing less than a meter from where his girlfriend had disappeared and searched frantically through the water. He wasn't surprised to see Athelias close at his side, searching through the pond's murk. But whether he was there to help Fi, or to make sure Tam saw he was right in his admonitions-- or both-- Tam couldn't say.

The search hadn't gone on for more than a second or two before the water exploded once more in a fountain of slime and seaweed. Instantly, Athelias had his lightsaber at the ready, but stayed his blow when he saw the side-splitting laughter boiling from the soaked Fiola Shaku. "Man, you really are easy mark. You gonna cut me up now, Jedi? 'Cause after seeing that look on your face, I'll die happy." She flopped her soggy arms, flicking sprays of water back into the pond. "And you," she said, turning to Tam and putting her hand on her hips, "I thought I told you to take off your boots."

At first Tam began to stammer, but the idea of explaining himself to the Soaked Mud Monster seemed so ridiculous that his words collapsed into a case of the giggles. Before long, everyone had joined in, and the clearing rang with mirth.

It was Cali who finally managed to speak something intelligible. "So are we all going to have to wade across this pond? I don't see any bridges."

Athelias peered deeply into the water. "It's shallow right here, but there's no telling how deep it gets before it reaches the island, or if there really *is* some danger in here. Probably best just to enjoy the temple from the shore."

It was clear to Tam that the Jedi was examining the pond with his inner eye; with the Force. It was also clear to Tam, when he did the same himself, that the pond indeed harbored little danger, and in fact had an area of its floor where a row of large, flat, square stones lay gathering moss. He raised his eyebrow at the lying Jedi, then lifted his arm toward the stones. One by one, they rose to the surface, water pouring off of them in tiny rivulets. The stones formed a clear path to the island temple entrance. Fi smiled at him and put a damp arm around his shoulders. Athelias' face was unreadable, an expression he'd seen on many Jedi that showed they were trying to suppress annoyance.

What astonished everyone, Tam included, was when the last stone of the pathway rose into place, the temple's carved stone

door slid out of the way, revealing a dark spiraling staircase down.

Reil marched across Tam's bridge and said, "Well, let's take a look inside!"

Posted by Ice Hawk on 16 March 2009 03:31 AM:

Reil led the group down the spiral staircase deeper into the sith academy. It wasn't wide enough for more than one person to go down at a time, so they descended in single file, with Reil leading, Athelias next, Fi, Tam making up the middle and Cali bringing up the rear.

It was pitch black as they made their way down the stairs, and more than once Reil stumbled in the darkness, almost falling. His muttered curses echoed into the darkness each time it happened.

Athelias finally voiced what they were all thinking.

"This is probably a stupid question, but did any of you would be adventurers think to take a glow rod with you when you marched out to explore this place?"

There was no reply. Athelias continued chiding them.

"I thought as much. I suppose I shouldn't expect better from people who think roaming around a sith temple is a fun time."

Reil stopped turned around and glared at the patch of darkness he figured was Athelias.

"You know, the whole smug Jedi thing is really getting on my nerves. No, we don't have a glow rod, but neither do you, and you're the omniscient force user! Why don't you lead, since you offered to be our guide anyway?"

"Sure thing, just don't fall on me."

Reil had to turn side ways to let Athelias past, but as soon as Athelias was clear, there was a snap hiss, and a bright glow, as the Jedi activated his lightsaber to illuminate the way.

Reil felt himself going red in the face.

"You know, if you had that the entire time, why'd you wait until now to use it!?"

Athelias shrugged.

"Well, I know how much you hate us smug, omniscient Jedi, so I thought stumbling in the darkness would be more preferable to you."

"Just. . .", Reil struggled to contain his anger, ". . . shut up and keep going."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 16 March 2009 03:02 PM:

"I hope we don't run into whatever made these cobwebs," said Cali, as she pushed her way through sheets of gossamer thread. She led the way down the steep, ancient, dusty stone steps.

As they went lower, Tam noticed there were etchings in the walls. "Hey Thel, what does this writing say?"

"I'm afraid I don't speak Sith, Tam." He ran his fingers along the carved letters. His fingers came away wet. "I think this complex is leaking. We could have a pond come in on us at any moment."

Fi ran her fingers through her soggy hair. "Won't bother me none. I'm still soaked through."

Athelias shrugged. "I hope that's all the pond does to us."

"Well, it still looks dry enough to me," said Reil, "and this room looks big enough to hold *two* ponds."

The stairs brought them into a large, wide room, empty except for a dozen double-sized statues arranged in a circle. The walls, floor, and statues themselves were crisscrossed with scorch marks and discolorations.

Cali turned to Athelias. "So tell us, tour guide, what was this room?"

It was Tam who answered. "It was a practice room." He stepped into the open space and rested his fingers on a gash in one of the statues. His fingers came away as if they'd been shocked. But it was his mind that had been shocked. "They culled out the weak students, and left only the strongest alive. Sometimes," he said, swallowing, "they'd only give them a single lightsaber among them"

"That's horrific," said Fi.

"That's survival of the fittest," corrected Cali.

"That's enough," said Athelias. "Have you all seen enough? Can we return to the surface now?"

Reil laughed. "Afraid?"

"Not for myself," the Jedi replied...

Posted by Corr Terek on 16 March 2009 07:31 PM:

Mir picked her way through the campsite. Damon's argument with the loader droids had resolved itself some time earlier, and she hadn't seen him since. At first she thought he'd gone after Thel and the others, but Tey finally pointed her in the right direction -- Damon sat atop a small tree stump, still as a statue, his eyes closed and his breathing peaceful.

As she approached him, his eyes opened and he grinned. "Hey! It worked!"

Mir was obviously taken aback by his sudden outburst. "Um...what worked?"

"I was meditating," Damon explained, still flush with his success. "I didn't know if it would work, but it did!"

"Damon," Mir said patiently, "What did?"

"I *felt* you," Damon replied, grinning. "I was meditating, trying to sense things with the Force, and I sensed you!"

"Oh," Mir said. "That's...good, right?"

"Well, yeah," Damon said, picking up the hesitant note in her voice. "It means I'm getting better. Between the datapads Mom and Dad left me and Thel's advice, I think I might actually get the hang of this."

"I'm glad," Mir said, sitting on the ground beside him. "Is this what you've been doing all this time?"

"Yeah," Damon said. "I guess the others must have gone to explore the Sith ruins, huh?"

"Yeah," Mir replied, her tone flat. Damon glanced at her, confused.

"What's wrong?"

"Damon..." Mir looked at him intently, "What are you planning to do? With your powers, I mean."

The question caught Damon off guard. "I'm...not sure."

"You gonna be a Jedi, like Thel? Fighting for truth, justice and the Galactic Way?" Mir's voice was slightly playful, as if she were teasing him, but her eyes were questioning and solemn.

Damon shook his head in amusement. "I don't think so. That kind of life isn't for me." He paused. "The truth is, Mir, we had a pretty bad scrape. If Thel hadn't been there, I'd be an Imperial prisoner and you'd be dead."

He grimaced. "They're not going to stop coming after us. And the only way for us to stay alive and free is for us to be stronger. For *me* to be stronger." He gestured toward the datapad lying on the ground beside him. "If studying that is going to make me stronger, then I'll study it. I can't afford to fail again."

"We all made it out okay," Mir pointed out. She paused. "Except Kenlan, but I doubt he's gone for good."

A half-smile crossed Damon's face. "You're probably right. He'll be back, for Tam if for nothing else."

"Speaking of Tam," Mir said cautiously, "You might want to speak to Thel about the way he's been dealing with Tam."

"Why?" Damon asked. "What's he been doing?"

"I...don't think he knows how to handle children," Mir said delicately. "He tried to *scare* Tam into staying away from the ruins -- told him he'd be corrupted, turn against us."

"Tam would never do that," Damon said sharply. "Thel just doesn't know him like we do."

"If you think about it," Mir said thoughtfully, "Not many people do. He lost his family, and he's been on the run ever since. And almost everyone he's met has tried to use him or control him in some way." She glanced at Damon. "Thel means well, but he's going about it the wrong way. Tam doesn't need that."

"I'll talk to him," Damon said. "Soon as they get back."

Posted by ij thompson on 16 March 2009 08:10 PM:

Fi shivered in the darkness. Athelias's lightsaber was able to illuminate the twelve statues that surrounded the group, but beyond these, there was only blackness. A faint sense of vertigo nagged at her, making her feel as though she were floating in a starless void. Widening her stance, she swallowed drily.

"See, *this* is why I never went to private school."

Reil smirked in her direction, nodded. "Makes you wonder where the faculty went... not to mention all the esteemed graduates."

"Who says they're gone?" Cali volunteered, raising her hands to wave her fingers menacingly in Tam's face. "Woo-OOO-oooooh!"

"Knock it off!" Tam scolded her, sounding annoyed and more than a little nervous. "This is no place for fooling around."

"This is no place for *anything*," Athelias admonished them. "Tamander, I don't know what you're hoping to find here, and I can't force you to leave... but you need to know that you're putting your friends at risk."

Tam studied the Jedi for a moment. Then he shrugged casually and turned, marching off into the darkness.

"Just a few more minutes..."

Posted by Ris on 17 March 2009 11:12 AM:

Cin didn't think they had much choice about taking the task..."So ten thousand, or what, sir?"

"This is a matter not for public ears. Meet me in my penthouse, both of you, tonight, at twenty-one hundred." He slipped a card across the table. It had the number on it, and it said "Knock Once."...

Shortly, Cin and Drend left Lost in the Clouds Casino, returning to their room, arm in arm, like any pair of young lovers. Once inside, Cin asked, "What have we gotten ourselves into, Drendar?"

Drend smiled and crashed backwards onto the bed. "Something neither of us expected, I'd wager."...

Drendar & Cinowyn's hotel room, continuing their conversation about this "task."

"No, we don't have to leave," he looked at his chrono, "for at least another 2 hours, maybe a little more."

"So what do you think he has in mind, Dren? Smuggling?"

"I sincerely doubt its smuggling, a man with his kind of

money could hire real smugglers, ones with reputations. We on the otherhand, have none as such."

"Then what do you think?" She paused. "Could he be an agent? And for who?"

"Maybe he sees us as confidants, maybe he has information he wants certain people to have, and he needs a no-history in-between to keep attention away?"

"For all we know, he could be a Handler for the Alliance or Empire. Did you try any of the phrases on him?" Drend asked, wondering if she had been using them all along and he just hadn't noticed.

"No--oo...maybe I should have..." Cin sounded as if she thought she had let him down, or maybe let the Alliance down. "I was enjoying myself too much," she admitted, blushing a bit. "Guess I should when we pay our little visit?" Cinowyn was annoyed at herself. Now that Alderaan was no more, her first duty was to the Rebels. *And the first time I'm on my own on a mission, what do I do? Play around with a guy. Didn't I have enough crushes on palace guards when I was 13 or 14?*

"Maybe, how good are you at the whole "Agent" thing anyway? I mean I get that the Rebels have been doing this for a while, but I've never understood it, cloak and vibrodagger has never been my thing, I'm a little too surface I'm afraid." He had let on about that from the beginning, down to his initial shyness towards any physical contact with Cin. Keeping things under wraps made him seem like he was constantly tripping over his own tongue, in fact it hadn't been until he had met her that he could keep himself from slipping up on a lie.

"I'm no agent. I'm a fighter pilot. Trainee, cadet. If you want to be technical." Cinowyn had been given an open slot in an active squadron because the Alliance was desperate for pilots, and she knew the basics, having been the most junior navigator on the *Tantive*. "Shoving lasers and proton torps down someone's throat isn't very subtle."

"Guess we'll both have to work to keep each other on the up and up then" he smiled

"I guess so. I just never expected to have to do this kind of work for the Alliance. I guess I throw in the recognition codes & see if he gives me the counters." Cin snuggled a bit closer to Drendar, hoping the physical contact would ease the case of nerves. She'd never been this uneasy before a mission--and no one--she hoped--was going to be shooting at her tonight.

"Sounds like a plan." Drend held her closer, also feeling calmed by their proximity. "You know," he looked at his chrono again, "we still have over an hour before we have to go."

"You have any ideas on how to pass the time?"

"A few." He kissed her.

Nicolas Santee's suite

Quite some time later, Cin and Drend were ready for their appointment with Nicolas Santee, as they had learned his name was from the card. Cin smiled at Drend as she watched him pull on his jacket. "Do we need a kiss for luck, or would that make us late?" she asked, trying to hide that she was still worried.

"Depends on the kiss" he grinned, "I can only imagine exactly what he wants us to do

"Your guess would be better than mine. I don't know anything about this kind of ops," she told him, before kissing him. "But I'm glad you'll have my Six, whatever the job is." She bent down to check the small vibrodagger in her boot.

Drend slipped a small stun only hold-out into the inner pocket of his jacket. "I do hope we won't need weapons tonight."

"I wish we had a second of those, I'm better with blasters than knives, but I don't want to take my personal blaster, not quite small enough & too distinctive." That was an

understatement, since her weapon was one of the old style golden blasters that used to be issued to Alderaanian nobles & retainers. Right now she was ready to find out what they had to do and do it, an attitude that was Snubjock all the way.

"Shall we get going?" Drend moved to the door and opened it. "By the way, do you think we should bring Razzle?"

"Too conspicuous," she replied after a few moments' thought. Beings don't usually bring their droids to little social visits."

The pair left straightaway from their hotel room and headed back to "Lost in the Clouds" and made their way up to Nicholas Santee's Suite. They found themselves at the door and Drend was about to knock. "Knock once, right?"

Cin slipped out the card once more, double checked it. "Yes."

She schooled her face into one of the expressions she had been taught was appropriate for a retainer. Meanwhile Drend took on the appearance of a laborer from a backwater, and knocked once. After a few seconds--long enough, Cin thought, for the security measures to be run through--they heard "Come," over the intercom.

Drend, being the consummate gentleman opened the door for Cin. "After you."

She entered cautiously. They were in a tasteful foyer, which led to a sitting room. The furnishings were expensive, but not ostentatious, and suggested a well-to-do bachelor. Santee rose to greet them, as they walked on in. Nicholas Santee was a portly man, of average height and bulky build, he had a close trimmed graying beard and seemed to enjoy wearing shades of red. "Ah, Mister and Missus Lymors, how good it is to see you again. Please shut the door behind you, Mr Lymors, wouldn't want a draft.

Cin said, "Thank you, sir," and waited for Drendar to comply, knowing it wouldn't be wise to talk with an open door, or even to linger in it long. Drend quickly complied.

"Now if you would sit down, I think I have a proposal to make."

Cin took a seat on the loveseat, and faced their host, still waiting. She gave Drendar one glance as he joined her.

"I've studied people for a long time, watching their intentions, and I've learned things." Santee began. "And I think I've come to understand people... rather well." He held a drink between his hands "Tell me, what are your politics?"

Cin was taken aback by the question, but hid it--she hoped. "I haven't thought about, really," she said. It wasn't a lie. Raised by parents who served a Viceroy who only pretended to support the Empire, and bereft by that Empire's recent actions, she didn't have to think about her politics at all.

Drend made a surprising statement, considering his prior history. "The Empire is no good for the galaxy, therefore it's no good for me."

Cin shot her "husband" a look of surprise mingled with gratitude. She wasn't surprised he felt that way, just that he would say it so openly.

Nicholas clasped his hands together. "Excellent, now since I'm assuming you likely *both* feel this way, or Mrs. Lymors just got herself a rather nasty shock, you both know of the Rebellion to restore the Republic?"

"Yes. To both," Cinowyn answered.

"Good, now for several months now I've been trying to get in contact with people who have connections to Alliance leadership, to no avail. It seems that shortly after the destruction of the Emperor's 'Planetary Ore Extractor' many of the Rebel cells have gone more underground than usual."

"Yeah, no surprise there," the girl said bitterly. Cin almost answered that she could, but...She settled for using one of the

recognition codes at first. "Well, I've never searched for anyone, other than a college chum or two. Someone in Honors Literature with me."

"Honors Literature? why does that sound familiar..." Santee seemed to suddenly go deep into thought.

Drend leaned close to Cin, "Was that a recognition phrase?"

"Yeah," she breathed.

"Ah, now I remember, my secretary was a Literary Major at university! She's constantly mentioning her Honors Literature Courses."

Cin shook her head. "I hated Honors Lit. Liked math better." She hoped Drend interpreted the head-shake as "No counter."

"Oh, well, she's quite the bookworm." He seemed kinda of down. "Either way, how would either of you be interested in helping me get in contact with the Alliance?"

Cin couldn't conceal her surprise. In spite of Drendar dismissal of the idea, she was still expecting a request to smuggle illicit drugs, or maybe stolen gems hidden in carbonite, like the plot of some action-holo.

Drend exchanged a significant glance with Cin then turned back to Santee "Well, the thing about that is...Sure, as a matter of fact that's the other thing we were looking for."

Santee simply looked at the pair of them for a minute. "Oh. I do suppose you wouldn't care to tell me as to why?"

Cin and Drendar exchanged glances. She thought the man could be trusted. After a pause she gave Drendar a nod. "Yes."

Drend shifted in his seat a little. "Well, you see..." and he began, a rather long tale by now, with mutual pitfalls, and now they were here, trying to find a Rebel cell and get both of them to the Alliance. At the end of the story Santee just sat there in amazement. "And you say you've come all this way to Cloud City to get in touch with a Rebel cell, find a new part for your hyperdrive, and repair your droid... That's... quite a story."

"It's true--we've got my gear and droid in the ship."

"And you're," he pointed at Cin, "You're a Rebel pilot trying to get back to the Alliance, and at the same time escorting him," he pointed at Drend, "to the Alliance so that they can take a look at his hyperdrive."

Cin looked straight at Santee. "That's the mission I was given. Me and my flight. I'm all that's left & I intend to see it through." At the knowing look in Santee's eye, she replied, "It's not wrong to enjoy the mission."

"So, that's what we're calling me now? The mission?" Drendar smiled.

Santee looked over at the pair. "So, then I take it the pair of you will have no problem doing this for me then?"

"No, not that we have had any luck so far," Cin admitted.

"Well, I'm sure with all three of us looking, it might be a tad easier." Drend noted.

"So why do you want to find the Rebels? Sir. More Rebels, that is?"

"So that I can pass on some very sensitive information."

Cin settled back again and told Santee, "Okay. This lady is not easy to find. Not only haven't we been able to find her so far, but you haven't. And you are pretty familiar with this place. We've got our work cut out for us."

"Well, there was that lead from that curio owner, Toffels." Drend reminded.

"Oh, yeah. The girl who liked books."

"Yeah, her."

"He didn't give a name, though. Should we go back?" Cin asked Drendar.

"Maybe by now he'll have a name?" Drendar suggested.

"Yes, we should go back," Cin decided. "And maybe Razzle

can do some 'net searching for us."

Drend turned to Nicholas, "Well, I do believe we now have a plan." Santee seemed pleased. "Excellent. Now," he checked his chrono, "it is getting late, and Security likely saw you enter, so it might be best if you leave before anyone catches on to what might be going on here tonight."

"Just a social visit, if anyone asks," Cin commented.

"Quite, now if we have our stories straight, let us part ways until we have what we need." Santee rose from his seat.

Cin rose and waited for Drendar to get up so she could take his arm. "How do you prefer we contact you? Just show up for another night of sabaac?"

Drend rose, while Santee agreed, "Yes, that would raise the least suspicion."

Puddlejumper

It was morning on Cloud City, and the would-be agents of the Rebellion found themselves returning to the ship to check in with Cin's droid Razzle, in person. The R2 greeted her, whistling excitedly, and she hugged him as if he were a pet. "What have you got for us?" she asked eagerly.

The droid started spitting out the usual babble of beeps and whistles indicating that he had indeed run across some of the counters in recorded conversations and logs.

Drend simply looked at the droid. "Did you catch any of that? I still don't understand Droid."

"Uh, no, it was too fast. He was speaking it at droid speed--not the Slow-for-organics version. Oh! Thanks, Razzle," she added as she heard the tone indicating data being added to her pad.

"Well, what did he find?"

"Hmm, looks from Raz's initial analysis that most is proly coincidence, but--"

"Should we go back to the curio shop?"

She stopped as Drend asked about the shop. "Which do you want to do first? See if there's anything good on here?" She tapped the pad. "Or go shopping again?"

"Let's go visit Toffels again." Razzle gave a sad little trill. "Do you want to come along?" Drend offered.

The droid tweeted merrily and even Cin looked happier.

"You want to be shown off, huh?"

"Has to show off his new paintjob," Drend noted.

"That's what I just said--or close enough," Cin grinned, giving Drendar a peck on the cheek.

"Well, then, we should get going" he linked arms with Cin and patted Razzle on the dome. Cin was lighthearted as they headed to the odd little store. Drend was as much friend as lover and she liked that. She hoped he would agree to stay on with the Rebellion, so that they could continue to be together. Cin was not going to leave her fellow Rebels, not even for him.

"So I was thinking about what I said earlier, about the Rebellion." Drend just kinda said, non-chalantly. "You think you could put in a good word for me when we get there?"

Cin's smile brightened even more, if that was possible. "How many good words do you want me to put in?"

Drend looked kinda surprised and smiled "All I asked for was one, but if you want to give them a full spiel that'd be at the very least, interesting to watch."

"I probably won't have to, actually." She was serious now. "They do appreciate new recruits, especially beings with their own ships. And you were still going to let them go over *Puddlejumper's* engines & hyperdrive, right? They'll probably have some of the Incom guys on it. Plus you did rescue me & get

me patched up."

Drend smiled "Yep, planned on it, don't think I'd be able to be a snubjock though, maybe a cargo runner, or they could help me retrofit her into a transport shuttle."

"You wouldn't want to be my wingman?"

"I'm your wingman regardless of whether its in a cockpit."

Drend pointed out.

She held him back from going on into the corridor leading to the shuttle-tram, and gave him a long kiss, before whispering softly. "We need to continue this conversation, later, in private. We don't need the whole station to know we're Rebels. Just one woman."

"Good Point," Drend noted. "Let's get to the shop." They boarded the shuttle, which fortunately had a ramp & a couple droid docks, and the 2 humans settled into a seat near the dock Razzle selected. "So, do you think Toffels will be happy to see us, Cin?"

"I'm sure he will, he seemed lonely."

"Maybe there will be another customer there today?"

"I thought that was why we were going by again so soon? From what he said, it had been longer than usual since that girl he told us about had come in. I'm thinking she might be Scholar. So I'm hoping it means she will be making her visit soon--like today--rather than she moved on without telling him good-bye."

"We shall soon find out, in the meantime we have a short shuttle ride to that side of the city."

"And," he looked around the remarkably nearly empty compartment, "it looks like we're nearly alone. Anything you want to talk about semi-privately for oh, five minutes?"

"Sounds like you want to talk, Dren. Continue our conversation about my colleagues, maybe?"

Mischievously, she added, "Or do you want to discuss our future?" She really, really wanted to have a heart-to-heart on that--but didn't know how to begin one. And Cin was afraid it might be too soon.

Drend suddenly blinked... in rapid succession. "Actually, I hadn't even thought of that second one."

I guess it is too soon--for even a light, joking mention. Be patient, girlfriend! She retreated to the first topic she suggested. "So I have recruited you?"

"I wouldn't say recruited so much as convinced."

"What convinced you?"

"Just how sure you were of this whole thing, how sure you were that the Rebellion was right... I don't know, it was inspiring, and I knew, just knew, that if you were behind it, it was a cause worth being behind."

That made her feel good. It also eased the worry, which had kept her awake long after Drendar had drifted to sleep the night before, that she was giving her romance higher priority than the Rebellion. Cin didn't know what to reply, so she settled for hugging and kissing him.

He accepted the hug and kissed back. "Well, were almost there, any last things to say before we are suddenly back in public?"

"I'm glad you're coming back to base with me."

"Of my own free will no less." Drend smiled. The shuttle shifted and landed at the concourse for the merchant sector. "Well, we're here."

"Lead on, my sweet Captain," she giggled. He led off the shuttle their little trio--Cin in the middle, Razzle bringing up the rear.

Posted by Drendar Morevo on 17 March 2009 11:23 AM:

Toffels Bros. Curio Shoppe

They made their way back to the curio shop they had visited on their first day in Cloud City. From the outside it looked the same, but when they entered, there was no one at the counter.

"Mr. Toffels?" Drend called out.

Cin shivered a little. She thought the name echoed eerily, but told herself it was her imagination.

Suddenly Toffels appeared out of the back room carrying a very large box.

"Oh, kids, you're back, how has your visit the city gone so far?"

Cin greeted Toffels warmly. "It's been wonderful. I wore the jewelry last night when we went out partying--the stones are so lovely. Oh, let me give you a hand with that, it's much too big for one person."

"No, its alright I have some help," and a second face popped out from the other side of the box, this one female. Cin hoped the Force was with them & they wouldn't have to look any further. But she thought they should try to "Fly casual." "We didn't realize you were busy with a big order, or we wouldn't have come by to browse right now."

"Oh, that's fine, we'll just be setting this down, by the way, this is Sascha." Sascha tried to wave but was too busy trying to carry the box.

"Nice to meet you," Cin said, as she and Drendar moved out of the way. "Why don't we look around over here while you two finish up your business?"

Drend and Cin moved toward the shelves. "Shall we peruse a little?" Then Drend whispered into her ear, "is that her?"

Cin pointed to some more jewelry. As they peered into the display, she whispered, "I don't know, I've never met her or even seen a holo. If I had I could have told you what she looked like."

"Well, should you try a code on her when they're done?"

"Yes, I plan on it. But let's not crowd them."

Soon enough Toffels and his helper set down the case. Toffels turned to his return customers right away. "Well that's done, thanks for helping me carry that Sascha." She only smiled, "Oh its the least I could do. After all, its not everyday that you can get a shipment of authentic manuscripts."

Soon after Toffels and this mystery woman were done looking through the shipment, Toffels called over, "Oh, you two, come here real quick."

Cin turned at his cry, and walked over, curious. "What is it?"

Toffels looked at the pair of them, then at the woman who had been helping him. "This is the woman I was telling you about, my most regular customer." He smiled at this fact, and the woman seemed to blush at the statement, which was odd.

Very odd, Cin thought, but she had seen odder romances, and knew firsthand that crushes could be even odder. And she had something more important on her mind right now. "So you are the book-loving woman he talks about." Cin glanced at the topmost title and grimaced. It might be tiresome, but it offered a good excuse to use the code phrases. "Sud Pe Dodry's 'Youthful Self-Portrait.' Brings back memories of Honors Literature."

The woman looked at Cin, seemingly searching her eyes for something and said, "I remember taking that class, I failed the final exam."

Toffels looked shocked "Failed? you? I never."

"If half the questions were on Dodry's babbling, like in my class, I'm not surprised," Cinowyn said. Actually Cinowyn had never read it; she had seen a comedy-holo about cheating college students where it merited a few lines of dialogue. Toffels' young friend seemed really embarrassed that the old shopkeeper now

knew about a bad grade.. But Cin didn't really notice. The girl had said "failed the final exam!" The right counter for "Honors Lit"! Was this shy, pretty girl Scholar? Cin tried a second code. "Fortunately, it was an elective for me. Still, I would've done better if I hadn't been dating the gravball team captain."

Toffels looked at his friend. "Now Sascha, you never told me you failed a class, and here I thought you had been a model student." He looked amusedly abashed.

She grinned and gritted her teeth, "Now come on Uncle, you know I was having troubles balancing my studies and trying out for the school's Lancer Squad."

"Gravball" and "Lancer"! This **was** Scholar. Cin touched Drendar's arm, nodded. Toffels hadn't mentioned he was related to the girl when he'd told them about her. But it would explain her odd reactions. And now they had part of a name. Cin wriggled her fingers at Razzle, nodding at the other girl. The R2 would look her up as soon as he could get to an S-comp with out being obvious. Meanwhile, he would re-analyse the earlier hits still in his memory, to see if the name Sascha was connected with any of them.

After they arranged a clandestine meeting with Scholar later back at their hotel room, Drend looked over to Cin as they left the curio shop. "You've never met this girl right?"

"No.. Of course not. Why?"

"I don't know, for some reason I feel like we've met." Drend sat there in silence for a moment "When did she say she was coming here?"

Cin glanced at the chrono. "Another couple hours, when she gets off her job. So why do you think you've met her? She look like someone from your uni? One of Dino's dates?"

"Strangely enough, that last one sounds most likely, maybe after this I should send him a holo of her and see if her remembers her."

"It'll take a lot of time, though, stuff from Rebels often goes the very longest route." She was silent then, staring out the window they had jokingly "fought" over a couple days ago.

"I'm always going to remember this view." Drend looked out as well.

Cin rested her head on his shoulder, "Me too--and this little bit of time together...but I really feel that I need to be back. My squadron needs me--what's left of it. At least Sascha can send word ahead."

"Yeah." Drend sat there for a long moment, somewhat concerned. Her mention of getting back to her squadron was bothering him suddenly. "So, a few hours, hey Razzle, did you find anything cross checked with 'Sascha'?"

The droid hummed as it went over the data. That was not one of the original parameters. As Razzle resorted, Cin noticed the slightly preoccupied or worried look on Drendar's face. She sensed it wasn't about the possible agent. "What's wrong, Dren? Are you worried about Dino? For helping us? You know, if we do it through the normal channels, under our assumed names, it'd be okay to send a 'wish you were here' message."

"No, its not Dino, its... its you." Drend found the words sticking in his throat "I'm worried about how things are going to change once we get back to the Alliance."

"What do you mean, they aren't going to keep us from having a relationship. I don't think there are non-fraternization rules or anything."

"I just... I don't know how I'm going to be able to deal with how you'll be going out on dangerous missions all the time, the idea of the possibility of losing you so quickly... I just don't think I would be able to live with it."

Cin didn't know how to answer. She'd never thought of being

a snubjock that way. Was that why the guys just ignored that she was a woman, just seemed to hook up with whatever other females were able & willing? So she fell back on the "pilot attitude." "I'm too good for that to happen." She fell silent, thinking about it after the bravado line.

"Good enough to escape pure dumb chance?" Drendar wasn't convinced, regardless of how much he wanted to believe she would be able to keep herself safe.

"No...but who is? Well, I guess this is just going to be the most fun I'll ever have on a mission, if it's...if you don't want anything longterm." Cinowyn got up and stared sadly out the window, wondering if it would have hurt less if they had just broken up that first evening, gone their separate ways, instead of...She'd thought, no hoped, it was because they both wanted more than a hook-up. *But that what's girls always think. I was warned.*

Drend gave her a look. "Hey now, wait a minute, did I ever say 'I'm done?' I don't think so, regardless of the end of this I'm still going to be there. I'm not ready to give you up to Starfighter Command just yet." He couldn't tell if she'd heard him. But he did hear the soft sobs she tried to muffle. He got up from where he was sitting on the bed and wrapped his arms around her and whispered in her ear, "Remember what I told you before? Through thick or thin, I'm your wing."

She turned so that she could rest her head on his shoulder. "But it's part of what I do, what I love. Do you want me to do something else? It just sounds like you are asking me to give it up. You'd be in just as much danger, running stuff for us. You'd probably be asked to go along if we raided a convoy or depot, to get the goods back.. Imps sometimes target our transports over the snubs in those kinds of jobs, to recover the cargo, or at least deprive us of it."

"You've got a point, so how about we agree to this, I won't get myself killed... if you wont, Sound fair?" he smiled.

"Yeah. Sounds like a deal. Now we just need to make sure the Force is with us both." As she held him tighter, Cin whispered, "I don't want to lose you either, Dren--so now I have another reason to stay alive. 'Cause I would lose you if I got killed." She almost asked him how permanent he wanted to make things.

"In that case," he kissed her "You've got no chance of losing me."

"Does that mean I get to keep you?"

"You, keep me? I'm the one who found you, remember?" he smiled, "But yes, you can have me as long as you want me."

"Well, yes you did find me, so I guess I should have asked if you are going to keep me."

"Now, why would I want to give up the best thing I've ever found?" He held her close and kissed her, and stopped to look into her eyes, "and if its necessary, I'll make it permanent."

"Do you really mean that?"

"With every fiber of my being."

"Will that make me salvage?" she joked, then kissed him deeply.

Cin and Drendar finally settled onto the couch to see what Razzle, who had been waiting patiently, had for them. The droid gave a soft satisfied bleep when they did. And Cin wondered, not for the first time, how much the droid understood...

The R2 tweeted happily that it had indeed found certain things, then tweedled sadly that the things it had found... were not that great.

"Well show us, sweetie."

First of all he revealed that Sascha had been using the codes and counters that Cin had supplied to determine who were

contacts on the station and who were not, but then he found several other, repeated, nonsensical phrases, to other people, on other frequencies. Razzle had also determined that Sascha was indeed Mr. Santee's personal secretary.

"Wow, she's the gambler's secretary! But didn't he say she was always bringing up Honors Lit? Still, do you believe that coincidence--the girl Mr. Santee hired us to find is his assistant?" Cin sure wasn't sure she believed it. And the other phrases worried her a little, until she reminded herself that she had only a few codes.

"Well, that is interesting." Drend thought over the data, "I guess we won't be so much as introducing her to Santee as much as we'll be telling Santee the truth about his assistant."

"Yeah. I hope this works easily."

"So do I, was there anything else Razzle?" The droid chirped out a negative tone. "Hopefully, we'll soon be back to base," Cin smiled up at Drendar, snuggling a little closer. Drend let her and wrapped his arms around her. "Guess we just wait 'til time for her visit, then," Cin sighed and tilted her head for a kiss. Drend obliged, taking in the fully sensory experience of her kiss.

"I think I love you--lots," she murmured, stroking his hair, pressing against him.

"I know I love you, lots." Drend gave her a knowing wink.

"You do love me a lot," she gave him a wicked grin. "This has almost been like a real honeymoon."

He leaned against her and pushed her down against the bed. "Yeah, aside from the fake names and the cloak and dagger, this has been a real nice vacation," he smiled.

But Cin turned glum. "Yeah, and losing the rest of my flight. I wonder if any of them could have escaped somehow..."

Drend looked at her. "It's in the past. You have to concentrate on the present."

"I know, but they were way more experienced than me, how did I make it..."

"Call it whatever you want, the Force, pure luck, all I know is that it brought you to me, and for that I am eternally grateful."

"Thanks, Dren, you are so sweet, when it really counts." For now at least, Cin felt at peace. She relaxed, letting Drendar's kisses ease the survivor's guilt. Just as things between the two were starting to get a little hot, there was a knock at the door. Drend swore under his breath. "You gotta be kidding me."

"Yeah, gee...oh, my, it's later than we thought I guess," Cin mumbled as she straightened her clothing and noted the chrono display. "I bet it's Scholar."

Drend looked from the door back to Cin. "Would it be rude to ignore that for a few minutes?" he jokingly said.

"Yes, it probably is rude & it would surely attract attention to leave whoever it is standing there continually pressing the chime. Unfortunately," she sighed.

Drend cursed under his breath and went to open the door but stopped and asked, "Who is it?"

Cin meanwhile was smoothing down her hair. She hoped it was Scholar/Sascha, she couldn't think of anyone else who would be visiting.

A voice came from the door. "An old schoolmate," the codephrase they had agreed upon, came floating through. Drend opened the door. She entered looking around the room. She seemed to look behind a wall picture then turned towards them. "So, what do you need?"

Cin gestured her toward the small table, which had a light lunch for 3, set out, courtesy of Room Service. "Flight Officer Cinowyn Antilles, and Capt. Drendar Morevo. We need to get back to my unit. My ship was destroy while awaiting rendezvous with Drendar. Due to damage, my R2 doesn't have the

coordinates for the return trip any more."

Drend shook the woman's proffered hand. "Yeah, what she said."

Sascha looked at the two "Might I ask why you were meeting with him?" She seemed unimpressed with Drend's demeanor.

"My flight was to escort him to a meeting with Alliance personnel. I wasn't privy to more than that. I am not...was not... the mission leader."

"Oh," Sascha almost seemed disappointed with the lack of details as she turned to Drend. "You must know more about it, it's your ship." Drend caught on to what Cin was doing and kept mum "Honestly I don't know, they wanted to speak to me about something important having to do with my ship."

She seemed satisfied with that answer, oddly. "Fine. So you say you need to get in contact with the Alliance and get back to the nearest base. I'm sure I can set something up, was there anything else?"

"Yes. There is a local who claims to has information for the Alliance. He has given us some aid, but we don't know him well. He engaged us to locate a Rebel agent he could speak with," Cin explained.

"Oh? Information for the Alliance? What is this informant's name?" She suddenly seemed very interested.

Drend caught on, but thought this just might be excitement "We think you know him already, Nicholas Santee."

Cin belatedly recalled what Santee had said about his aide. "She's always talking about her Honors Lit courses." She watched Sascha's reactions.

Sascha twitched, just barely, near her eye. "Why yes, I'm his secretary, and to think neither he or I ever noticed."

"He didn't have any codes," Cin pointed out, as she opened a fizzade.

Drend munched on something crispy, he thought it was fowl, but wasn't sure "Yeah, he has no idea about the Rebels, or even how they operate it seems."

"No reason for him to--we don't advertise," Cin pointed out with a grin.

Sascha finished her lunch rather hurriedly. "How about we meet at Santee's apartment tonight around eight--we should both meet you two there. I'll wait for you if I get there first."

Cin wondered about Sascha's haste. To the agent, she added, "All right, the sooner the better. We will notify Mr. Santee of the appointment. Til then."

"Til then," and almost as quickly as she had eaten, the other girl bolted out the door.

Drend looked over at Cin. "You're kidding me? Are all Alliance agents like that?"

Cin was just as confused, but had been covering it up. You learned to do that when you were at royal events, or served on a diplomatic vessel. "I don't know, never dealt with one before. What I do is very straightforward--go here, zap that with enough laser voltage to return it to its component atoms, return."

"How descriptive," Drend noted. "So, yeah, what do we do till eight?"

She only smiled at Drendar's comment, before replying. "Well, we do need to let Mr. Santee know we've earned that part. Hmm, Razzle, any way you can track her through the systems on the station?"

TheDroid tweetled a somber tone. Station Security let him run through logs, but the soonest he could get to the data was five hours after it was logged, which meant any data they had would be on a significant delay.

"Oh well, was worth a try. If you want to see if there's anything already available to us, go ahead--might be useful," Cin

told her droid pal. "As for what else to do...Do you need to start getting *Puddlejumper* ready so we can leave as soon as the hyperdrive is online? Other than that, there's just what you were doing earlier."

"So, Razzle is going to go check out the ship and make sure everything is ready for tonight, what do we do for the next three hours?"

"You think we'll be able to leave that fast? I doubt it," Cin told him. "But we also need use that contact number for Mr. Santee, let him know we found his contact. I wonder if he really didn't know?"

"So we contact Mr. Santee then." Drend got out his comlink and began pressing the code in, finally getting it set. "Mr Santee, are you there?" While he commed their employer, Cin was working with her datapad and droid, going over what Razzle needed to do.

Santee didn't comm back immediately, there was a bit of a lag. "Yes, is this the lucky young man I met the other day?"

Drend looked at Cin, something wasn't right. "Yes, its me, Mister Santee, I have good news for you, we've found the Alliance Agent, and you probably know her, she's your secretary."

Santee's response was again after a noticeable lag. "You don't say, well, I think it would be best for us to all meet fairly soon, did she give you a time when all of us could meet?"

Drend looked back at Cin again. "Yes, seven o'clock, your apartment, that will be ok, correct?"

Santee's response this time was almost immediate. "Of course, but don't come armed tonight, security will be tighter as a high profile guest is coming into the casino."

"I wonder who he had in his office?" Cin asked. "Coulda been anyone from the Baron Administrator to the Station Chief from Imp Intel."

"That seems like a highly negative outlook," Drend noted. "For all we know it was her already, or perhaps he was doing something else."

"Well, this kind of thing sounded a whole lot easier when I was being told what to do if I got downed or something. Evade any Imps, use the codes, which would tell any cell members I was a Rebel pilot needing help. Shoulda known it wasn't so simple." She took a deep breath.

"Things like this never are, I imagine."

"Cloak & vibroblade's a lot more fun in holos, you know that?"

"Yeah, but the romance is a lot better in real-life." Drend smiled..

Cin smiled back. "Just what I was thinking. But we do need to have everything ready, in case we have to move fast." Cin had been raised to keep useless complaints and "drama" to a minimum--a couple genteel profanities if you must, then get back to doing what needed to be done. "Do you want to send a message to the good doc and what is it going to be?" she asked Drendar. "I think it would be good to find out who this VIP guest is too. Might tell us something about what to expect. And we won't have to dig much I bet. It should be all over the social news or maybe the casino's holo-page. 'Lookit who we've got visiting.'"

Drend looked over at his datapad "Well, lets see," he tapped off a quick message to Dino and relayed it to Razzle and asked him to insert a picture of the woman, then went back to checking the local 'Net. "Hmm, appears that Chief of Imperial Security for this sector of space is coming to this hotel tonight, and reportedly has famed Holo-Actress Selinia Cowall on his arm this evening."

"Razzle, route that message so it doesn't scream 'we are here,'

please," Cin told the droid who responded with a short series of electronic noises that sounded remarkably like "Already did." Cin glared at the datapad connecting her with her droid, then groaned as what Drendar was reading penetrated & resolved itself into meaning. "Why did I haveta say it coulda been the Station Chief? Now it is."

"Sector Chief," Drend seemed a bit frazzled, "of Imperial Security." He wanted to curl up in a ball real bad, that meant one thing, stormies... lots of stormies.

Cin wished she felt as overconfident right now, as everyone said snubjocks were. "Well, if our luck holds, all the Imp & station security will be around the casino. So they may have to lighten the security in other areas. So as long as we can rearrange plans so we won't be near those areas we may have a chance. Or we can lay low for the duration of the visit. How long are our celebs supposed to stay?"

"It says here its a one night only engagement, they are meeting a few well-to-dos, like the baron administrator, and the Sector Head is expected to try his hand at the Sabaac Tables."

Cinowyn snorted.. "Gee, Imperial Intel needs more leadership like that--if they're busy partying, us Rebels can do pretty much as we please. From here all the way to Palpy's Palace."

"Umm, so, do we avoid them like we've got no choice, or do we try to do it under the radar?"

"That's what I just asked you," she retorted with a half-hearted laugh. "I've been enjoying this, but I do have a duty to the Alliance, so I'd like to get on our way. Still, once Scholar tells the Rebels we're okay, they may decide we should stay put 'til afterwards. So it may not matter what we decide."

"Well, I vote for doing it right under their noses, think of the story we could tell when we get to the Alliance."

"If we survive & get away," she reminded him. "But I like that best." It was a challenge and Cin did like a good, tough challenge. "Besides, if the Imps realize the local chief's people lost us while he was on R&R, he'll end up on Kessel & that can only be good for our side," she grinned.

"Quite." Drend smiled, sometimes this cloak and dagger stuff actually was fun, and that sinking feeling in his gut finally went away.

Sometime later, they dressed up and left their hotel room. After they commed last minute plans with Razzle, Drend and Cin made their way back to the Casino. It was a big media event, holocams, sludgenews, and "admirers" were everywhere. A few stormtroopers were also in attendance.

The doorman allowed them in with something of a wink, Drend thought it was odd, unless Santee had already paid the doorman to "not see them." Cin slipped the doorman a tip as they entered. He had to make a living, and it never hurt to make a good impression. Especially when you might need another favor. With Cin on his arm, Drend made his way to the casino floor, making sure that while they were seen, they were just as easily forgotten among the throngs of people.

"Where to?" she asked. "Do you want to play tonight?"

"This is risky enough, I don't want to add credits to this situation, we had better head up to Santee's apartment."

Cin was just a little disappointed. She recalled the fun of the sabacc game--and she was enjoying the admiring glances she had gotten from a few men. But there was risk-taking and there was foolish risk-taking. "Okay, and the tables don't seem to be popular, anyways, tonight. Bet everyone just wants to be able to say they were in the same room with the Famous Actress." Cin sipped a little of the drink she had taken for show.

"And some want to say they were able to speak to the

Imperial Security Chief without being in an interrogation.."

As soon as Cin thought "socially acceptable," they made their way to the lifts and headed up to Santee's floor. Drend gave Cin a quick kiss in the remarkably empty elevator. "For luck." Cin embraced him, a good thing as the lift moved faster than she recalled. The doors to the lift opened to the floor. The hallway was unusually dim, or at least noticeably so after their last visit.

"I think we will need all that luck," Cin whispered, not liking the dimness. Nonetheless, they walked to Santee's door; you attracted less attention when you acted as if you belonged somewhere.

The door was oddly ajar "You didn't come armed did you?" Drend figured he knew the answer. Cin's dress didn't leave much room for concealed weapons.

"No, we decided against that, with all the security. I'm not so bad at unarmed--but..." One of Cin earliest lessons was that not even a master martial artist, not even of Teras Kasi, was going to be able to go up against an armed opponent without being bloodied. "Maybe he's just waiting for us?"

"I don't know..." Drend looked around the corridor and spotted something, a bottle of wine sitting in a chiller. "This should work." Drend grabbed it and held it like a club in his right hand, if anything they could say it was a gift.

"Odd place for that?" Cin commented. She knew how things were done in palaces and manors, although not public accommodations, no matter how opulent. Cinowyn strained to hear anything out of the ordinary. She whispered to Drend, "Stay off to one side of the door, as much as you can while looking natural--we don't want a blaster aimed at us."

Drend shifted the door open and made his way along the side of the door into the room. All the lights were off. "I know this sounds like a cliché, but I've got a bad feeling about this. Cin didn't answer aloud, just nodded and followed.

Cin shivered. This was giving her the creeps. She grabbed Drend's arm. "Let's go--now!" she whispered. "We should call Security. Mr. Santee wouldn't deny he agreed to see us. We could even just say we saw it as we were passing by. There are other places here we could be going." She started moving back towards the door.

"Remember how I said I had a bad feeling about this? I think its gotten worse..." He looks around the darkened room. "Let's just back out... slowly." Drend looked behind them, "Ok, best to get going while the going's good."

Cin only nodded and they began to slip back. Her face, paler than usual, gave the only hint that she thought the going wasn't good--& hadn't been since they had entered. That and the way she moved--cautiously, ready to defend herself--she had paid **some** attention in her mother's hand-to-hand classes. Drend turned around as they got close to the door. "I wonder what happened? someone must've found out."

"Only someone who overheard--It's gotta be her!" Cin hissed, realizing who it was too late.

"Sach-ughh!"

Drend fell facefirst into the carpet, the bottle dropping and rolling off, unnoticed. Behind him Sascha stood with a small hold-out in her right hand. In spite of the sense of imminent danger, Cin was shocked at her companion's collapse. But, like all fighter pilots, she was accustomed to reacting aggressively to threats. At least the blaster was set to stun, it gave Cin a chance. She turned slowly towards the being she sensed there. She first noted the blaster, then looked into Sascha's eyes which were hard now, as the other woman spoke. "Very smart, girlfriend, I was wondering when you and your boyfriend were going to figure it out."

Cin hoped her expression was terrified, fooling Sascha about her feelings might be her best hope. Cinowyn moved a little away from both Sacha and Drendar, deliberately not using a proper sidestep. It would be better if the double agent--that had to be what Scholar was--thought she knew little about fighting or was awkward in the evening slippers on her feet. Sascha looked at Drend's crumpled form, then at the inexperienced combatant across from her. She waved the blaster. "Alright, do you want to do this the easy way or the hard way?"

The blaster seemed to be the biggest danger. At Sascha's question, she took another step back and to the side, where she thought she'd have a little more room. Cin felt the adrenalin in her blood, and allowed herself to tremble just a little from the effect. She looked down at Drendar, avoiding looking at the blaster, just keeping track with her peripheral vision. Gulping again, Cin held out both hands. "I guess you want to cuff me, right?"

Sascha reached out for Cin's hands, after she holstered the blaster. "Good, we're doing this the easy way, now cooperate and you shouldn't suffer... much."

Not before I meet the IT droids anyways. Cin kept the thought to herself. She tried to slip into her "zone" as she did in flight. In her zone she saw her opening as Sascha reached for her arms. She feinted, grabbed Sascha's wrist, and tried to throw her off balance. Sascha instead dropped to a knee, the blaster knocked out of her holster. She locked with Cin, bringing her other knee up into Cin's stomach, but Cin rolls back and delivers a kick to Sascha's chest. Knocked back, Sascha scrambled to her feet, as did Cin, just a little slower.

Too busy to catch the falling blaster, she struck out at Cin, caught her shoulder and slung her into the nearest wall. Cin turned with the throw but still landed hard against the wall. Cin kicked out and caught Sascha behind her left leg, crashing her to the floor. The agent scrambled for her holdout, but Cin kicked it away. Then Sascha remembered the other item she was carrying, and unclipped it as she rose and went once more for Cin. The rod grazed Cin in the chest. Cin did not even have time to realize it was a stun baton before the maximum zap knocked her to the floor, unconscious.

Drend looked around the room and saw Santee, and called out to him, but it appeared that he was still out, perhaps he had woken up an Sascha had restunned him, he noticed Cin was behind him because he could just tell... that and his head hit hers when he awoke. He started whispering "Cin... Cin... CIN!"

The next thing Cinowyn realized, someone had cracked her in the head and was screaming her name. "Yeah, hear you, not so loud. Oooo...Ow!" She moaned. The pain from the blow sent fire through her already aching head. "What's wrong?"

"Well," Drend sounded miffed at the obvious nature of the question, "where shall I start? with the fact that we're tied up with massive hangovers? or that Sascha appears to be a double agent?"

His words helped her recall, in spite of the horrid "hangover." Her first words were a not-very-ladylike curse. Something about a madam who personally serviced Hutts or was a Hutt. Cin then looked up and around their "cell," each motion of her head making it pound more. "That you behind me, Dren? All the 9, or is it 12, Corellian hells! How could we have been so brainless?" She studied Nicholas, at least he appeared to be breathing. "Is it me or is this something out of a Tetran Cowall holo-adventure?"

"I was thinking Face Lorrán, but this works too." Drend bent his head back and to the side "Right now we appear to be all kinds of screwed, care to guess how we escape?"

"No, Face does the Imps' propaganda holos. Tetran gets stuck starring in their spy-training materials."

"I thought that 'the Face' was dead anyway?"

"Yeah, and we're gonna be that way soon if we don't do something."

"Good point." Drend tried moving against his bonds, and instead found them cutting into him as he tried.

"You're just gonna hurt yourself doing that," Cin warned him, her voice dull. "ZypRs." It was a brand of plastic loop ties. Leaning forward, she could see them around her bare ankles, as well as the bruising they caused.

Drend shifted in his seat "Well, how the hell do we get out of them?"

"Dunno," she replied in that dull voice. Cin wasn't even thinking about that. She was thinking about what was going to happen later. Right now, Sascha was probably telling the Intel Sector Chief all about the lovely Early Life Day presents she had for him. So it wouldn't be long before she, Drendar and Mr. Santee were being questioned...

"We're not tied to the chairs themselves." Drend kicked out with his feet. They were bound, yes, but not to their seats. They were, however tied to each other at the wrists. "She can't possibly be that stupid."

In spite of her deepest fears, that revelation was enough to rouse some hope. "Yes she can. She's got all 3 of us in the same room. Even I know you don't do...pro...processing that way. So she's not in the running for Spy of the Year."

"How do you feel about smashing furniture?"

"My mother forbade it in her hand-to-hand classes--said it was more show-off than useful--but I feel disobedient tonight!" Cin spoke with more bravado than she felt. She was still very frightened.

"This is going to make such a racket." He turned sideways in the chair but tried to keep his wrists close to hers.

"Yeah. So what's next after breaking the furniture? I don't think she's gonna stay stupid for long."

"Huh?"

Cin explained, "Sascha probably planned on having us arrested later, so we messed her up by going to Santee's place early. So she had to improvise to keep us. If so, we have a little time before she starts thinking again & gets things back under control."

"Alright, here, turn the same way I did, we need to smash this, I think this is going to hurt."

"Okay."

With the chairs now smashed, Drend took a shard of plastic and cut the bonds around their wrists, then their ankles. Drendar gestured to the closet, fingers on lips, to indicate silence. Cin got to her feet, rubbing her wrists, her expression grim. One had a few scratches from the plastoid shards. Cin hoped Sascha had not been near enough to hear the clatter. Inside the closet was some outer clothing of various sorts, including a pair of heavy synthleather gloves. She put them on and carefully picked up a long, dagger-shaped piece of the plastoid, examining the edge. "This should do for now."

"Oh, fun," he noticed her pick up the shard. "I do hope you don't have to use that." He didn't like gruesomeness. "Well, time to see if we can't rouse Santee, hand me that bottle of Aldebran."

Drend cut down Santee's bonds "So, what's the plan? Just wait for her to get back?"

"You seem to have watched the most spy-thrillers," Cin told him as she opened the half-full bottle. "Hope it's strong enough, you're supposed to finish this once it's opened." She walked over

to the men.

"Well, ok, I think we should set a trap for her... in a place she won't expect it, if we wait for her to come back she'll probably come back with stormies, however if we leave her here to find us gone, she'll be discredited."

"Let 's get moving then. If you have some way to get him loose, I can support his weight so he doesn't hit the floor."

"Sure." He cut the ZypRs holding Santee in place, and helped Cin get him down.

The man was heavy, and it was hard for Cin to hold him. Once, they had him on the floor, Cin checked his pulse and breathing. "I don't like him being out so long," she muttered. She frowned at his wrists, cut and bruised worse than theirs, since he had been hanging in the ties. It was a wonder the ZypRs hadn't cut off the circulation. "Nasty. What'd he do to her? No paid holidays or yearly bonus? Look, see how we can get outta here while I take care of this." She tore some strips from his shirt and quickly washed the cuts with the Aldebran, then bandaged them with a two more strips. Santee started to rouse as she finished. "Shh, we're not safe."

"Sascha? What?"

"Her fault we're in this mess. Your sweet secretary is an Imp.."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 17 March 2009 05:21 PM:

Tam increased his pace. He wanted to be as far from their Jedi guide as possible. Thankfully, he didn't do so obviously, so nobody would realize his reaction to the irksome Athelias.

But as he thought about it, it occurred to Tam that Thel would know. He had Jedi abilities, and that meant he had the power to invade Tam's mind. Too bad he didn't have the scruples that Tam once thought was a standard for Jedi. He stepped into the shadow behind one of the crumbling statues and thought, *Sense this, Jedi...*

"Hey." It was Fi. She joined him in the shadows behind the stone Sith. "Why so glum, chum?"

"That obvious, huh?"

"I'm no Jedi, but even I could feel your 'hate-pulsar'. Stompin' around like that..."

Despite himself, Tam was laughing. "I'm sorry, Fi." He hoisted himself up onto the statue's granite pedestal, and was about to continue talking with the girl, but he was interrupted by an ominous rumble.

Before anything else can happen, the statue that Tam had chosen for a seat began to crumble and collapse on top of them. Tam spun around to catch it with his mind, but he was too slow, and he only had enough time to throw himself on top of Fi before the statue buried them. A blank second later, the floor underneath Tam, Fi, and the statue gave way, dropping into a fathomless void...

Posted by ij thompson on 17 March 2009 06:13 PM:

Fi clutched Tam and winced, bracing herself for the impact that would mark the end of their fall, and the end of their lives.

It didn't come.

They fell... and fell. Bits of statue, plummeting down with them, bounced harmlessly off the pair and continued downward beside them in the blackness.

We're dead, Fi thought. The impact killed us. This is what it's like to be dead.

She felt the boy clutching her, but had to know.

"Tam?"

His voice came back, frightened, but alive. "Yes?"

It was all she needed. They were alive. For now. Clutching the boy and squeezing her eyes shut, Fi prepared for the inevitable.

The inevitable revealed itself to be a tremendous splash, flaring out around them like a giant corona, though none could have seen it in the lightless cavern. They plummeted down, down into the water, pieces of the statue that had caused their small cave-in sinking beside them.

Down, they went, toward a bottom that never rose up to meet them. Having dropped as far as they could, Tam and Fi began to rise, their lungs begging for a breath, Just one breath.

Up, up.

We're not gonna make it, Fi thought, resigned. *Wanna breathe... I know it's water, but... gotta breathe...*

The splash as they surfaced was barely audible compared to the one they'd made on the way down, but to Fi, it was the most beautiful sound she'd ever heard. She gulped in the air greedily, and inches away, she could hear Tam do the same.

They held each other, treading water, and Fi wished that she could find his eyes in the dark. Thankfully, the boy's voice was unimpeded.

"Oops."

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 17 March 2009 09:37 PM:

Athelias had been looking around the room, when he heard the rumble he spun around to find Tam and Fi out of the lightsaber's radius, he ran toward the sound to find a statue and part of the floor collapsing through the ground. He ran to the newly-formed hole in the floor but couldn't see very far with his lightsaber, eventually he heard a splash.

"Tam? Fi? Are you guys here?" He looked around the room, they weren't.

He ran to the other side of the sizable hole and extinguished his lightsaber, "I realize that you don't see this place as dangerous and that you want to have a good time exploring it, but please, go back outside until we can find a way out from down there." He said quickly to Reil, then he dropped through the hole without waiting for an answer.

He could feel himself gaining speed as he plummeted toward what he hoped was a large pool or underground lake and not just a foot of water. When he had been falling almost as long as Tam and Fi had, he pulled an aqua breather from his belt and put it in his mouth. He should have brought more than two. The impact with the water was painful and almost knocked the breather out of his mouth, he spread himself out and waited to stop descending, when he stopped he started pulling himself towards the surface. He broke the surface to rhythmic sounds a few feet off, "Tam, Fi, is that you?"

"Thel?" He heard Fi's voice come back.

"Are you guys okay?"

"Yeah, we're okay."

Athelias swam over to them, "Good. Just a second." He pulled his lightsaber from his belt and ignited it above the water, the light spread out into the cavern they were, but touched neither the ceiling nor any land. Athelias looked around a bit, "Okay, I think that way is the direction of the stairs and the door, do either of you mind if we head to the door? At the very least we should get dried off and back to the main floor if you still want to explore." He reached into his belt, pulled out the other breather and gave one to each of them, "Here, take these, I'm starting to get a really bad feeling about this place."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 18 March 2009 03:57 PM:

They finally reached the edge of the water, but there was no platform, and no shore. Only a tall, black wall, unaccountably smooth given the age of the ruins. Tam ran his fingers along the vertical surface, and his mirror image did the same. "I guess we chose the wrong way to swim."

"Is everybody okay?" Athelias asked, but when neither Tam nor Fi responded he continued. "I didn't feel the floor at all as we swam along. Here Tam, hold my lightsaber while I take a look below." After handing the Jedi weapon over, he disappeared under the water.

Tam held their light source high, while using the rest of his limbs to tread water. Thel was taking a long time under water, and he hadn't taken one of his little water-breather things. Tam wondered what they would do if he never came back...

... or if they just swam off without him...

"I've seen that look before, Tam," said Fi, who was just starting to dry out before they had fallen through the flimsy floor and landed in these catacombs. "How about we just wait for him to get back, eh?"

Somewhere beyond the reach of the lightsaber's glow, the two of them heard the spouting and splashing of something breaching the surface of the water.

Tam tried to hold the saber higher. "Thel? Is that you?"

A gurgling hiss echoed through the darkness. Moments later, slashing, slime-covered fins darted toward the beleaguered swimmers. Fi shrieked and got behind Tam, who swiped at the spiny flippers with Thel's Jedi blade. With yet another ineffectual swipe, he slammed the blade flat against the water. After a brief flash of yellow steam, they were plunged into darkness...

Posted by ij thompson on 18 March 2009 06:36 PM:

No sooner had Athelias's lightsaber been disabled than Fi felt a pair of great jaws close around her legs. There was no sensation of tearing flesh, however, no piercing teeth. Just a crushing grip around her legs, bearing her back out into the underground lake. Arms wrapped around Tam, Fi dragged the boy along as well. It wasn't voluntary; she simply couldn't make herself let go of him.

The aquatic beast dragged the pair speedily through the all-encompassing darkness, occasionally dipping their heads beneath the water, making Tam and Fi thankful for the breathing apparatuses Athelias had provided.

Boy, girl, and monster sped along through the water for several minutes, then began to slow. Soon their outstretched limbs were met with a stone beach beneath them, rapidly rising up toward water level and, presumably, beyond. The water beast released its grip on Fi's legs, hissed again, and, with a great splash, retreated back the way it had come.

Fi and Tam lay sputtering on the incline, gasping for breath, grasping for an explanation.

"It didn't eat us..." Fi croaked, coughing stagnant water from her lungs. "Why didn't... it eat us?"

Tam pulled himself from the water, seating himself on the mossy slope. "Must have another... food source... living down here all these years..." From the lack of echo his voice produced, Fi could tell they were in a much smaller chamber than the one they'd left.

"But why take us here?" Fi wondered, dragging herself to the boy's side. "Why leave us? Unless it was *trained* to..." she squinted in the darkness.

"Tam... I can sort of see you."

Tam looked back at the girl, and was surprised to find that she was partially visible, as well. "Hey, you're right! But where's the light coming from?" Turning, the pair looked back up the slope.

"Whoah."

Posted by Ice Hawk on 19 March 2009 03:43 AM:

Without any warning at all, Athelias jumped down the hole. Without the Jedi's lightsaber for illumination, the darkness around Reil and Cali was complete. There was a lengthy pause, and the pitch black seemed to close in on them. The silence was finally broken by an exasperated sigh from Reil.

"Stupid farking Jedi. . . How are we supposed to go back to the surface without light?"

Cali's voice came from somewhere off to his left.

"So what do we do now?"

Zealos shrugged, and then belatedly realized Cali couldn't see him.

"I dunno. Wandering around in the dark doesn't seem like the best of ideas. . ."

Cali's voice came back, a bit subdued.

"Yeah. . . but we can't just wait here the whole time."

Reil grinned.

"What's the matter, afraid of the dark?"

"NO! Definitely not!" Cali's voice wavered a bit, "It's just. . . creepy, now with everybody all split up and whatnot. This was what Thel warned us about."

Reil's smile faltered.

"No, he warned us about magic ghosts, and unspeakable evils possessing Tam. The issue of falling down large holes in the floor was never raised. If he was really so prophetic, he would have brought a glow lamp and a climbing harness. Frankly he rates pretty low as a tour guide as well."

"I guess. . . Podoo, this is stupid. Where are you so I'm not just talking into the dark?"

"Well on my left, I'm shrouded in darkness, ditto on my right, I can't see anything in front of me, and I've got my back to a large hole in the floor. Which appears to be quite deep. And black, keeping with the general décor of the place. . . Are those landmarks good enough, or should I give more specific nav coordinates?"

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 19 March 2009 04:10 PM:

The statues in the Sith temple's practice room had been gigantic. Double-sized avatars of the hulking warriors they represented. But the pair of statues Tam and Fi were staring at were easily six meters tall, and carved into imposing, feminine curves. The two stone women seemed to shine with their own dim, violet light, and each had an arm extended to the other.

"Beautiful," said Fi.

Tam pointed between the glowing statues. "Look, under their arms. It's a doorway." The tall, narrow opening led into the obsidian wall. Tam took an involuntary step forward.

"Where are you going?" Fi asked, but her eyes were fixed on the two Sith ladies. She too stepped forward.

"I'm just taking a closer look," the boy insisted, "that's all."

As the two of them approached, the light of the twin statues began to pulse and grow. Awash in bright, pounding, amethyst light, the boy and the girl stepped through the black doorway.

Thick blocks of stone dropped in place behind them, sealing the doorway...

Posted by Corr Terek on 19 March 2009 08:06 PM:

A frown creased Damon's forehead and he stopped abruptly in mid-sentence. "Hmmm." Mir looked at him quizzically.

"What?"

"I just had the strangest thing happen," he murmured. "I could swear I just heard Tam's voice."

Mir shrugged. "Probably your imagination. We were talking about him, after all."

Damon shook his head. "No, I don't think so." He stood, stretching as he did so. He was a little bit stiff from sitting in one place so long. "I've got a bad feeling about this."

"What, you think that stuff Thel was saying about the temple is true?" Mir asked skeptically. Damon grimaced.

"Tell you what, Mir," he said. "Next time you feel like losing an entire night's sleep, I've got a datapad on Sith practices you can read."

He jerked his head towards the camp. "In the meantime, let's round up some glowrods and medkits and grab Elayne."

"Elayne?" Mir's expression soured.

"We might need her help," Damon replied. "Now come on, let's go."

Posted by ij thompson on 20 March 2009 07:10 PM:

The stone partition sealed the entrance with a resounding basso *thud*, shaking the chamber slightly and pleasing Fi with its sound and sensation.

Fi took in their environment, inhaling sharply in surprise. The chamber was not nearly as large as the training room above, perhaps ten meters on a side, and its floor was covered wall-to-wall in elegant throw-pillows of the finest fabrics of the galaxy. From among these cushions, four large, stone columns thrust upward to meet the unseeable ceiling above. The whole room was lit by dozens of candelabras, illuminating the room with soft, purple flames, while shadows danced mischievously among the columns and pillows.

Fi breathed in the essence of the room, and heard music. Faintly at first, like a passing melody from a neighbouring street, then increasing in presence and volume.

"Tam," she said, instinctively taking the boy's hand. "Do you hear that?"

Tam's reply was immediate. "Yes."

Fi's face lit up in wonder, and she squeezed Tam's hand. "So complex, but so... effortless... I've never heard... I've never dreamed of anything like it..."

"It's beautiful," Tam agreed, though he heard no music. "I've never heard anything like it, either."

It was a lie, but that didn't concern Tam. It had suddenly occurred to the boy that a lie, if told to make the people one loved happy, was perfectly acceptable. Was, in fact, preferable to the truth, which could only cause grief and misery. Tam wanted very much to make Fi happy, and was bowled over by the empowerment of his simple realization.

Every good thing that I say is true... because she wants it to be...

He smiled at Fi in the purple light, testing a theory.

"Come and hold me. Dance with me."

Fi came to him immediately, slipping her arms around his neck and holding him close. They swayed together in the purple candlelight, their ankles brushing luxurious pillows gently aside.

"I love this," Fi whispered, her breath hot in Tam's ear. "I love you."

Tam smiled at her in the shimmering, purple light, and pulled

her closer.
"Good."

Posted by Corr Terek on 21 March 2009 09:39 AM:

"I've got a bad feeling about this," Elayne muttered as they made their way down the spiral staircase. Tey snorted in amusement. The other man had elected to join them when he heard Tam and the others might be in trouble.

"Getting jumpy at shadows?" he asked, though Damon noticed his voice wasn't quite as confident as it could have been. Elayne frowned at him.

"This whole place feels familiar," she murmured. "And I wish it didn't."

Mir held her glowrod close to the walls. "I think I've seen writing like this before," she said. Elayne and Damon joined her.

"It's Sith," Elayne said. Damon glanced at the two of them.

"Can either of you read it?"

Elayne shook her head, and Mir shrugged. "It just looks familiar to me, that's all." Mir said.

"I wasn't taught Sith -- much of it, anyway," Elayne added.

"Look, I thought you said we had friends in trouble down here," Tey said. "Can we stop studying the walls and get a move on?"

"Quiet," Damon said. There was a faint noise grinding at the edges of his consciousness. "Do you guys hear that?"

There was a moment of tomblike silence as they all strained their ears. "I got nothing," Tey reported. Mir likewise shook her head. But Elayne seemed troubled.

"You hear it too?" she said uneasily. "I thought it was just me."

"Hear what?" Tey looked back and forth at them. "What do you hear?"

Elayne shivered. "Voices. I hear voices."

There was no time for any of them to react to her statement, however. With a sudden grinding noise, the staircase shifted beneath their feet. Tey yelped and grabbed onto a carved scone on the wall for support. Elayne wasn't so lucky, and with a cry of alarm vanished into the darkness. Damon felt himself falling and flailed about for support. Mir lunged out and grabbed his hand, her other hand firmly gripping another scone. For half a second, Damon teetered over the darkness that had swallowed up Elayne.

Then the scone snapped, and Mir and Damon tumbled into the darkness.

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 21 March 2009 11:10 AM:

When Athelias had resurfaced to find Tam and Fi missing, he had cast out with his mind to find them, he found a dim trail leading through the water away from the wall. He had followed the trail to land, emerging from the water he found wet footprints leading to a wall of recently collapsed stone. "They never listen," He grumbled to himself, "I said we shouldn't go into the sith building, but noooooo, they wanted to check it out." He started shifting rocks and boulders with the Force, clearing a way through the debris, "I said we should stay close together, but noooooo, they wanted to look alllll around the room, never mind that my lightsaber, which is now with Tam so I had to swim in complete darkness, only illuminated a small circle. 'Don't touch anything' I said, what's the first thing they did, touch stuff!" He threw his hands up in exasperation. "What did I say? I said this place is dangerous, so what do they do? They leave me under water and go off and find land, but that's not enough, oh no, they just *had* to go somewhere and leave a wall of debris behind

them, good thing these statues give off light." He stopped for a second, "Never mind, it's probably a very bad thing. But it's okay, with any luck they're just on the other side of these rocks, I'll clear them away and we can lea-" The last words never came out as he cleared the last of the debris to find Tam and Fi dancing around a room filled with cushions, and pillows and delicate clothes hanging all over.

"This is why you left me out there in the dark?" He asked, "So you can dance? Have you forgotten where you are?"

Posted by Ice Hawk on 22 March 2009 01:00 AM:

Cali was less than impressed with that answer.

"You're not nearly as clever as you think you are."

Reil laughed.

"Maybe I am, you just lack the sophistication to appreciate how brilliant I really am."

"Yeah, that *must* be it. After all, nothing says sophisticated like an idiot in the dark, laughing at his own jokes."

"Could be worse."

"How?"

"It could be raining."

There was a rumbling overhead, and belatedly Reil remembered the Jedi mentioning something about the lake above them flooding the chamber. *I just had to be a smartass didn't I?*

The rumbling ended as suddenly as it began however, and it was replaced with a sound that seemed to increase in volume. Suddenly a light began to emanate from the stairwell they came down. Reil had just drawn his blaster, when a familiar figure came rolling out of the stairwell towards them, at an alarming rate.

"AAAAAAAHHHHHH--- " The figure finally came to a rest after crashing into one of the statues littered around the place, "...ugh..."

The glowrod he had been carrying rolled beside him, illuminating his face.

Zealos lowered his blaster.

"Tey?"

Tey got to his feet.

"Reil?"

"What are you doing here?"

Tey ignored the question.

"Where's everybody else?"

Reil shrugged.

"I dunno know."

"*AHEM*"

"Oh, well Cali's here."

"Where?"

"You're the one with the glowrod, you tell me."

Tey's light found Cali several feet to Reil's left.

"Where's Athelias?"

"He jumped down the hole."

"What hole?"

Reil gestured back.

"The one behind me."

"Why'd he jump down a hole?"

"To follow Fi and Tam."

"So you do know where they are?"

"I know they fell down the hole."

Cali finally lost her temper.

"WILL YOU BOTH STOP IGNORING ME!"

Posted by Corr Terek on 22 March 2009 01:52 PM:

His head hurt. That was the first thing Damon was immediately aware of. He sat up slowly, trying to ignore the dizzying ache. He remembered sliding and tumbling down a steep slope for what had seemed like hours. After that...here was nothing. *Must have hit my head*, he thought. He fumbled for his glowrod, only to find it missing. *Typical*.

"Mir? Elayne?" he called out.

"Damon?" That was Mir, her relief evident in her voice. "I lost my glowrod, where are you?"

"Just follow my voice," he replied. After a few seconds of fumbling, she found him and they clasped hands. "Any sign of Elayne?"

"No," Mir replied. "I couldn't find her anywhere."

"Not good," Damon muttered. "Force, what I wouldn't give for a glowrod." He glanced around, purely out of habit -- of course there wasn't anything to see. "Well, since we can't go back, I guess we'll have to go forward."

"*Carefully*," Mir said. There was a pause. "Do you...still hear voices?" Her voice was full of dread. Damon shook his head, then remembered that she couldn't see him.

"Not right now, but I don't think they're gonna stay quiet for long." She gripped his hand tightly. They were both silent for a moment, and then--

"Stay away from me! I don't serve you anymore!"

The cry came from much farther ahead of them. "*There's a voice I know*," Damon said grimly. "And I think she's in trouble. Come on!"

At first they didn't notice the steadily growing illumination around them, and when Damon finally noticed, he was too worried about Elayne to care much. They moved as quickly as they could, until finally they reached an open room illuminated by blood red crystalline growths on the walls. Strange stone pillars and obelisks rose out of the ground seemingly at random.

"Elayne!" Damon called out. "Where are you?" There was no reply for a moment, but the grinding noise in the back of his mind had returned. Mir knelt to the ground.

"She was here," she said. "I can see her footprints in the dust."

[She is ours now.]

Damon spun around. "Who said that?"

Mir looked at him oddly. "I didn't hear anything."

[We have taken her and pulled her back into the darkness, where she belongs.]

"Who are you?" Damon asked cautiously. "Why do you want her?" Mir stood close behind Damon, her eyes wide with undisguised fear.

[There are many uses for one such as her,] the voice -- or was it voices? -- replied. [She can be trained. Taught. She can help us achieve our former glory.]

"I don't like that idea," Damon said. "Give her back."

[You could be of use to us as well,] the voice replied, ignoring Damon's command. [We can give you the power to destroy all who oppose you, if you will only reach out your hand and take it.]

And they could. Damon *knew* they could. Visions of power filled his mind, images of burning death and destruction -- Star Destroyers crashing to the earth with a wave of his hand, lightning incinerating stormtroopers, Inquisitors- even Darth Vader himself. All at the tip of his fingertips, if he would only do what the voices said. It was simple, really -- first, kill the girl at his side. Once she was gone, Elayne would join him and together

they would hunt down the others one by one. Then there would be no one to stop them, no one to know.

[Yes,] the voices said, urging him. [Kill her quickly, and then destroy the others. The power will be yours if only you are strong enough to claim it.] Damon was trembling. So much power, so much...if only...

Then he felt a pair of claws digging into his side. "Hey, snap out of it!"

[Kill her!]

No!

He straightened. "I don't play those games," he said, hoping his voice sounded more confident than he felt. "I don't betray my friends for my own benefit, and I don't leave them behind."

Mir squeezed his hand. "You okay?"

Damon flashed her a grin. "I am now. Thanks."

"That's what I'm here for," Mir said, peering through the dim chamber. "I don't know what they were saying, but you told them no. I don't think they'll be happy."

Damon's mouth twisted. "They're not." He could see them now, shadowy figures surrounding them on all sides.

[We offered you power and you refused. So be it. You shall not leave this place.]

"You're a bunch of ghosts," Damon taunted. "I'm going to take my friends and get out of here, and there's nothing you can do to stop me."

[You are forgetting,] the voice replied. [She is ours now.] His statement was punctuated by the now-familiar snap-hiss of a lightsaber. Damon grimaced.

"Sithspit!"

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 23 March 2009 04:01 PM:

Everything was perfect. *Beyond* perfect. Tam and Fi were in a bubble of serenity, and nothing else mattered.

"This is why you left me out there in the dark?" a voice said. "So you can dance? Have you forgotten where you are?"

The bubble popped.

Tam spun around, and saw the dripping wet, purple-reflecting silhouette of Athelias standing in the hole he had torn through the stone doorway. "You!" he seethed.

"Come on out, you two," said Athelias. He didn't take a step into the soft, purple room. The only part of himself he allowed in the room was an extended arm. "It isn't safe in there."

Tam took a step toward the Jedi. "*You!*"

"That's it," beckoned the Jedi. He kept his voice calm and unfronting. "Come on, Fi. You too."

With a sharp gesture, Tam caused a long strip of smooth, heavy fabric to tear away from a far wall. It deftly wrapped itself around Thel's arm and cinched itself tight.

As his bound wrist began to be twisted behind his back, the Jedi extended his free arm, summoning his lightsaber. He thumbed the ignition plate, but nothing happened. The only thing he could before the vast, dark sheet of fabric obscured his vision was see the boiling hatred in Tam's eyes.

The Jedi was cocooned, and another gesture from Tam caused the cloth to drag the man, who ineffectually punched at his suffocating prison, toward the dark expanse of water.

"You're all alike!" shouted Tam. "You Jedi!" He followed the sliding hulk of human and fabric to the water's edge. "You come and you preach and you *tell me what to do!* Well, you don't *know* what I need to do! *I know!*"

As she watched Tam deal with the interloping Thel, Fi felt that something must be wrong. She looked around at the glittering pastel colors, and the soft velvets, and the shifting

purples running over every pillowy surface, and it all became so obvious! "Tam!" she shouted, "make sure he won't bother us any more!"

"I am," said the boy through gritted teeth, his arm outstretched. Athelias screamed inside his cloth coffin as it slipped into its watery tomb...

In moments, the dark water was once more calm and undisturbed. Tam took Fi by the hand and led her back into their dark sanctum...

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 24 March 2009 05:44 PM:

They fell into each other's arms, letting the Sweet Purple envelop them. Tam looked deep into Fi's eyes, and she into his. She'd often heard that a being's eyes were windows into their deepest self, and if that was so, Tam's eyes showed infinite vistas of promise and prosperity.

She saw the potential for greatness in his eyes, power and glory, unlike anything she'd ever dreamed of. She saw that, if she gave all to Tam, mind and soul— and body— she would have a share of that glory. An empress of interplanetary nations. The mother of a race of valiant warriors! She saw...

She saw the hunger in Tam's eyes. The unabashed power of his will. No, not his will. This wasn't Tam. Not *her* Tam, any way. This was something else. *Someone* else...

She saw, in those eyes, the very thing she and Tam had been running from since the moment they had met. This was the stubborn insistence of that man Koro Bolera, who had pushed and pressured Tam to follow him for his own good, but in the end turned out to be a brutish lout. This was the clench-jawed Ququor, who were willing to tear everything apart so they could turn Tam into some cyber-brained starship to further their fantastic ends. This was Burista...

Fi saw that Buristan hunger in Tam's eyes!

She pushed him away. "*NO!* Tam, this isn't you! Or me!"

When Tam hit the far wall, his impact was softened by the room's decorative trappings. "I don't understand, Fi. It's all so perfect. It *was*..."

"Exactly." She helped the boy to his feet. "*Too* perfect."

"But I love you, Fi."

The words swelled in the woman's heart. She felt the need to apologize, to let go...

She knew she had to hold on tight!

"Look, Tam, it's got to be this place. Come on. Let's get out of here." She grabbed the boy's hand and dragged him outside the soft, purple room.

Tam couldn't help but feel that something was missing. There was something they still needed to do here. But no, Fi was with him, her hand reassuringly in his own. And she was right. They had nothing further to do in these ruins. It was a dangerous place, and they needed to leave. Just like Thel said.

Thel!

A brief spume of bubbles burst on the surface of the dark water...

Posted by ij thompson on 24 March 2009 07:26 PM:

As one, Tam and Fi leapt into the dark, murky water, grappling blindly in its warm depths. As the lake was artificial, finding the Jedi's shroud was not difficult, given the lack of aquatic plant life in the area. They gripped the heavy tapestry that had enshrouded the man, hauling it back up the slope to the shore.

They surfaced, dragging not only the man, but the water-

heavy weaving up onto the incline. Although the sound of Athelias sputtering within the constricting fabric was reassuring, the pair wasted no time in unraveling the tapestry and freeing the Jedi, who lay coughing on the ancient rocks.

Exhausted, Fi dragged herself around the man to Tam, who lay supine on the smooth stones, gasping for breath. She smoothed the boy's soaked hair from his face, looking deep into his eyes, and smiled.

"I love you, Tam," she said, holding his face in her hands. "And we could have had it all back there..." She paused, kissing him hungrily and drinking in his gaze.

"But if we're gonna do this, we're gonna do it *our* way..."

Posted by Corr Terek on 24 March 2009 08:01 PM:

Damon shoved Mir to one side and dove for the floor as the lightsaber spun through the air just inches above them. "Watch it!"

The blade curved around in an arc, digging a groove in the wall before shutting off and disappearing into the shadows once again. Mir looked back at Damon. "Any ideas?"

"We're never going to find her like this," Damon replied. "She's using the shadows." The blade spun out of the darkness again, and Damon rolled to the side as it embedded itself in the floor where he'd been. Mir lunged for the blade, but it wrenched itself free of the ground and disappeared before she could grab it. Mir swore angrily.

"Come out and fight," she yelled into the dimly lit shadows. "You scared of us?"

"Don't antagonize her," Damon said sharply. "And don't yell like that." He shuddered. The shadows *liked* it when they were angry. It made them *stronger*.

"I'm not afraid of you," Elayne's voice came from the shadows. It was her voice, yet oddly *not* her voice. It was as if she were merely the mouthpiece for...something else. "You refused our offer of power, and so you must pay."

A darkly playful tone entered her voice. "I'm just having a little fun before I finish you, that's all."

"I'm not anybody's plaything," Mir spat. She drew her blaster and fired into the shadows. As the blaster bolts lit up the cavern, Damon saw a shadow flit behind a pillar.

"Got her!"

Mir angled her shots in the direction Damon indicated, the blaster bolts chewing away at the pillar. The shadow moved to the left and Damon's pistolfire followed. He didn't *necessarily* want to kill Elayne, but she was certainly trying to *kill them*. That warranted a lethal response, in Damon's estimation.

Abruptly the shadow vanished in a swirl of dust. "Sithspit!" Damon swore. "Lost her."

"Did you, now?" Elayne's voice was a playful whisper in his ear. Damon started to spin, started to leap back, started to do *something* to put him out of danger, but the sudden, burning pain in his chest eclipsed his thoughts. He stared dumbly at the lightsaber blade protruding from his chest, dimly hearing Mir scream his name. His vision began to fade as he slipped into unconsciousness.

Once again, I just wasn't...strong enough...

"Damon!"

It wasn't possible. It wasn't. Mir wasn't going to lose him. Not now. Not like this. It wasn't *fair*. His body was on the floor -- maybe he was still alive, maybe she could save him. But...*Elayne* wouldn't let her. She wasn't even bothering to hide

now. She was practically gloating over Damon. That made Mir angry. So very angry.

Elayne would have to pay for what she'd done. And after that, Mir would take out her anger and sorrow on everyone she met. Because without Damon, there was no point in trying anymore. Just the welcome serenity of seeing the galaxy as a dark, heartless void and stepping willingly into that void.

Vaguely, Mir realized that there was something *wrong* with her, that these thoughts and emotions weren't entirely hers. But that thought was immediately pushed aside in favor of vengeance.

She locked eyes with Elayne and drew her vibroblade. "I'm gonna *kill* you."

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 24 March 2009 10:05 PM:

When Athelias felt the water starting to soak the tapestry he knew where Tam was sending him, he turned inside himself and started recycling the air in his lungs, he'd be able to last more than long enough, soon the emotions given to Tam by the dark side would make him forget about Athelias in favor of Fi, then all Athelias had to do was use the Force to unwrap himself and swim to the surface.

When Tam did stop focusing on him Athelias felt the tapestry loosen itself, he opened his eyes and started to use the Force to unwrap himself, he had started to get somewhere when something hit him underwater, he lost his focus and with it his breath. Without that air he wouldn't have enough time to unwrap the tapestry, he was about to start thrashing the tapestry with the Force when he felt something pulling him up.

Athelias felt the difference when they broke the water's surface but the tapestry was still soaked, there was no air, then he felt something tearing at the fabric and it parted in front of his eyes to Fi and Tam sitting over him, he coughed up the water that had entered his lungs and gulped in deep breaths as Fi dragged herself around him to Tam's side.

"I love you Tam," He heard her say, "and we could have had it all back there..." He heard her pause, then, "But if we're gonna do this, we're gonna do it *our* way..."

Athelias waited until he was sure they were done then he turned to them, "Thank you both. I suggest we take a minute, then focus on getting out of this place."

Posted by Ice Hawk on 25 March 2009 06:33 AM:

Reil turned to Cali.

"Is there something you would like to say?"

Cali began to grow a little sheepish.

"Ummm, not specifically. . ."

"Is there anything specific that you want us to say to you?"

"No."

"Right.", Reil turned back to Tey, "So what are you doing here?"

"Damon thought he heard Tam cry out to him, thought you were in trouble, so we all came down to bring you guys back."

"Wait, Damon starts hearing voices, and we're the one's in trouble?"

Tey cocked an eyebrow.

"You think Fi, Tam, and Athelias falling down a whole leaving you two stranded in the darkness isn't trouble?"

Reil shrugged.

"I concede the point. So where is the rest of the rescue squad?"

Tey grew rather sheepish.

"Well. . . The stairs shifted, and we all got seperated. . ."

"They fell down another hole didn't they?"

"Yeah."

"Yeah. I have loads of confidence in this rescue. That's me, Mr. Confident."

Cali found her voice again.

"So what do we do now?"

Tey sighed.

"We find everybody, and then get the hell out of this place."

Cali sounded apprehensive.

"Didn't the Jedi tell us to go back to the surface and wait for him?"

Reil shook his head.

"Yeah, and then he dived into a hole. Seeing as how we're the lucky 33% of this little expedition that seems to be immune to falling into holes, I guess it's up to us to find everybody."

After some searching, they found a stairwell that led downwards, and began moving deeper into the sith temple.

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 25 March 2009 02:01 PM:

When the Jedi suggested they get out of the Sith temple, Tam couldn't disagree. He could finally feel the 'Sweet Purple' clearing out of his mind, and thus he could finally agree with Fi that giving in to some arcane influence wasn't all that romantic. Athelias didn't seem like such a sore thumb any more, either. But he couldn't shake that I-told-you-so vibe he got from the man. "We'll get out of here," said the boy. He glanced over his shoulder at Fi. "But we'll do it *our* way."

Athelias looked up, still a little breathless from his little swim. "What?"

Tam shrugged, then walked as far along the artificial shore as he could. "So, anybody have any idea how we get out of here?"

"Besides riding the sea monster?" offered Fi. She didn't look like she wanted to do that either.

"Seriously," said Athelias, "what are you two talking about?"

Fi gestured at the water. "The big scary sea monster that snagged us in its mouth and dropped us off on this shore. You didn't get here that way?"

The Jedi's brows beetled. "Um, no. I don't remember seeing anything down here. Nothing living, at least."

"Then how did you get here?" Tam asked. "What happened to the sea monster?"

Posted by Corr Terek on 25 March 2009 09:33 PM:

Mir charged towards Elayne, snarling and angry. Elayne smiled contemptuously and flicked her hand out in a dismissive gesture. No doubt she expected to knock Mir off her feet. It would then be a simple matter to finish her while she was on the ground.

But Damon wasn't the only one who'd been studying.

She braced herself just before the shock hit her. It threw her off balance, but she didn't lose her momentum and kept coming. Perturbed, Elayne threw her lightsaber at Mir. The Farghul attempted to dodge and was only partially successful -- the blade cut a groove in her shoulder, but Mir didn't slow down. Elayne tried to recall the lightsaber, but the panic in her face showed that it wasn't going to come back in time. She'd gotten overconfident and realized too late that Mir was beyond stopping at this point.

Mir plowed into Elayne, knocking her to the ground and bearing down on her with the vibroblade. The other woman wasn't going to go down without a fight, however -- she wrenched the vibroblade from Mir's hand and flung it away. That

was fine with Mir -- stabbing was too slow, anyway. She slugged Elayne hard across the jaw. Then she hit her again. And again. She was going to beat Elayne senseless for what she'd done to Damon, and then when she was done she'd get the knife and--
Wait, what am I thinking?

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 26 March 2009 03:52 PM:

As if in answer, a massive flurry of fins and spines burst from the water. Fi stepped forward. "Oh, good. Here's our ride." Athelias held an open palm in front of the girl. "Wait!"
 "Listen, that big fish is how we got here."
 "No, Fi, wait." Tam yanked on her arm. "He seems... different this time."
 "Different?"
 "Yeah. Hungrier."

All three of them shrank back from the water's edge. The water beast lunged and slashed, splashing vast sheets of water on them, but it did not advance. Instead it floated ominously with its toothy maw hinged wide open.

"I don't get it," said Tam. "Why isn't it jumping after us?"

"It's waiting," said Athelias, "but for what, I don't know."

Fi looked over her shoulder, back at the Purple Room, then back at the slaving sea monster. "Guys, I think I just had a morbid, morbid idea..."

"Seems fitting," the Jedi said, "giving the setting. Mind sharing it with us?"

"Well," she said, her voice shaking with the awkward fact she was bringing up, "I think we all know what that room is for..."

"Right... And?"

"So, what if whoever ran this temple, way back when, brought, um... *friends*... down here, and when he was done with them..."

Fi was right. This was a morbid idea. Fi was also right in that it was a plausible explanation, given everything they had seen in this madhouse. "Fido got a snack," murmured Tam.

"When I swam in here," Athelias said, "I didn't see that creature. I *did*, however, come through a hole in that far wall." He pointed into the darkness beyond the beast.

So it was in their way. Tam really wished he hadn't gotten Thel's lightsaber wet...

Posted by ij thompson on 29 March 2009 06:04 PM:

Fi looked sideways at Tam, who appeared thoughtful and despondent. Without thinking, she reached out and gave him a playful punch on the arm.

"I'm glad," she pointed out, indicating the slaving water-serpent in front of them, "that you're open to a more non-traditional ceremony!"

The boy looked down, cheeks reddening. *Good one, Fi, she scolded herself mentally. That might've been funny if he weren't, oh... eight years younger than you. You're a laugh-riot.*

She cleared her throat in embarrassment, trying to think of a practical solution. Athelias's lightsaber had been disabled by water damage, so that was out. The blaster she'd stolen on Ryloth, on the other hand, was in fine shape. Sadly, it was resting back on the *Emigrant* where she'd left it.

"Okay," she said sharply, desperate for a solution. She took another look back at the Sith 'meditation chamber', then turned back toward the threatening sea creature. "We've got some broken rock, a lot of woven fabric, and enough fancy pillows to fill a space cruiser. What are we gonna do with 'em?"

Posted by Corr Terek on 29 March 2009 08:18 PM:

Mir scrambled back from Elayne's prone figure, practically terrified by her own thoughts. Maybe Elayne *did* deserve to die for what she'd done, but...Mir shivered. She'd been tortured before, and would never want to do that to anyone else. Except that, only a second ago, that's exactly what she'd been planning to do to Elayne. *What is happening to me?*

She bumped up against something in the gloom, and nearly shrieked. It was Damon. His eyes were glassed over and he was deathly pale, but he was breathing -- barely. "Damon?" Of course, there was no response, but the mere fact that he was still alive galvanized her to action. She fumbled for the medkit they'd had the foresight to bring along. She'd had occasion to play medic before, but now Damon's life depended on her meager skill.

She wished Dr. Santiago were still with them...

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 29 March 2009 10:16 PM:

Athelias snapped his fingers, "That's it." He looked at the doorway to the room, then at the sea-creature. "Move out of the way you guys."

Fi and Tam edged along the bank away from him and the creature. "What are you going to do?" asked Tam

"What was the one thing you didn't want to do when you were in that room?"

They looked at each other and Fi smiled, "Leave."

"Exactly." Thel faced the creature and started focusing, he'd never lifted anything this big before, but size wasn't supposed to matter. He reached his hand out and the creature began to rise from the water, it was big. Very big. He floated it, flailing, into the room, when it entered the room it calmed down. Athelias smiled, "Perfect, now let's get out of here."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 30 March 2009 03:46 PM:

After tossing Thel's damp lightsaber to him, Tam didn't hesitate to dive into the water. The pair of muffled splashes in the water behind him indicated that Fi and Thel were right behind him.

He had to admit, the Jedi had a good idea.

He swam with all his strength, but aside from the occasional visits to Bascle Lake Lake, Tam was something of a nautical novice. In moments, Thel and Fi had caught up to him. The Jedi pointed to his lips and pointed at Fi. *What?* Then he understood: Fi had her little underwater breather in her mouth. *Oh...* He awkwardly fished for his own, and withdrew it from his pocket. Once it was in his mouth the filter bulbs quietly cycled into life, and Tam took in a deep, rejuvenating breath.

The going was still slow, but eventually the three of them found a stone wall under the water, and after a brief search, Thel found the hole he had swam through earlier. He gestured silently for Tam and Fi to pass through first, and once they had passed through they rose immediately to the surface.

Fi took out her mouthpiece and said, "Well, this looks familiar."

When Tam looked around he saw nothing but endless water extending into eternal black. "Where to now?"

A spurt of water signaled Athelias' own rise to the surface. "We should be pretty close to where we first fell through the floor."

In the gloom far above, a faint star came into being, then

twinkled from existence just as quickly.

"I wasn't the only one to see that," Fi stammered, "right?"

"I saw it too," said Tam. "Look! There it is again!" The light passed in and out of existence far overhead. "Any idea what it is?"

"It's a glowrod," said Thel. "I think they're looking for us overhead..."

Posted by ij thompson on 30 March 2009 09:20 PM:

"Hey!" Fi shouted upward into the darkness as loudly as she could while still treading water. "Hey, up there... watch your step!"

Her voice echoed upward for several moments, and was followed by silence. Then, bouncing off the chamber's walls, another voice found its way back down.

"Fi?"

"None other," the girl replied, spitting stagnant water from her mouth. "Tam and Thel are here, too. Who am I talking to?"

Posted by ij thompson on 1 April 2009 07:09 PM:

They waited, but no reply came.

"That's odd," Tam commented.

"Probably hard to understand us," Fi supposed, "with all the echo in between." Splashing slightly, she turned toward the Jedi. "Athelias... could you lift one of us up there? You know, with your power? The one you used on that big snake-thing?"

"I'm not sure." Though the Jedi's face was nearly invisible in the darkness, he sounded like he was frowning. "I could *lift* you, but I can't see where to *put* you."

"And you could easily end up scraping either one of us along the rock wall all the way up," Tam pointed out.

"Your insight serves you well," the Jedi praised the boy while trying to keep himself afloat. "Unfortunately, in this case."

"Well," Fi commented, sounding resigned, "whoever it was that called down to us, I hope they've got a *long* rope..."

Posted by Ris on 3 April 2009 08:14 PM:

Drend wrung his wrists they still hurt from the ZypRs. He turned to Cin and Santee. "Well, we need a plan to get out of here, any ideas?"

"A quick one!" Cin replied. "And if it involves that--that--going headfirst into a carbon-freezer, even better." She looked around. "Where's my datapad?"

Santee handed it to her and passed his hand over a remote in the process, activating a nearby display that connected to the Holonet News Network. Drend suddenly became slightly miffed. "That slag burned my jacket with that little stun baton of hers, this was my second favorite jacket!"

Santee however was not amused. "That probably was your second jacket, but quit your whining, we'll just get you another at some point." He then looked over at the display, it was recaps of the 2134th annual HoloAwards. Drend turned to look at the screen as well.

"O--Kaay, at least our capture isn't Breaking News--yet," Cin said tartly, then stared at the image. She had met the presenter, Zaine Kaibal, at some ball when she was a kid. He was a supporter of a charity where her mother was on the board. "Hmm...he looks a lot like you, Drend. Well, if we had time to civilize your hair," she added judiciously.

Drend thought for a moment, "What about a hat?" Even with a hat Drend didn't think he looked particularly like the guy on the

holo, but he thought with enough charisma he might pull it off

"If we get the right evening clothes for your lady, no one will look at you or me, son," Santee replied, recovering some of his aplomb, although he was still shocked by the revelation of his secretary's second job.

Drend quickly got redressed, as did Santee, and they somehow found very nice evening clothes for Cin that made her look quite the stunner, though Drend remarked that she always looked stunning. After resetting her hair into something a little different than usual, and getting Drend's hair under control, it looked like they were a pair of celebs, with Santee as their mutual agent.

Posted by Corr Terek on 4 April 2009 09:16 PM:

Mir worked quickly. The medkit was barely suited for the task, but she knew if she could just keep Damon stable long enough to get him back to the ship they'd be able to patch him up properly. *Please don't let him die*, she begged whatever unseen powers might watch over them. She didn't know much about the Force, but Thel talked about it like it had a mind of its own. If that was true, she hoped it valued Damon's life as much as she did.

She was so engrossed in her work that she almost didn't hear the faint stirring behind her. When Elayne moaned, however, Mir tensed, ready to fight again. *But I'm not losing myself to the rage this time*, she thought.

The other woman sat up, looking about her in confusion. Mir winced -- she'd really done a number on Elayne. Nothing bacta wouldn't cure, but in a less civilized society...well, it wouldn't have done Elayne's looks any favors. Elayne's gaze finally rested on Mir, and her puzzled look gave way to horror as she saw Damon on the ground.

"Oh, *Force*," she whispered, all the breath leaving her body. "What have I *done*?"

"You don't remember?" Mir said curtly, keeping a wary eye on her. Elayne couldn't seem to tear her eyes away from Damon. "You stabbed him in the back."

"I couldn't fight them," Elayne whispered. "They're so much stronger than I am." She shuddered. "I can still hear them whispering."

Mir's fur stood on edge and her tail lashed back and forth nervously. "You gonna go psychotic on me again?"

Elayne shook her head. "They're angry now. They don't think I'm strong enough to use." She looked at Mir, anguish in her eyes. "Mir'isha, I'm *sorry*."

Mir growled. "He's not dead yet. And if you give me a hand over here, we might be able to keep him that way."

Hesitantly Elayne joined Mir at Damon's side, and for a few minutes they worked silently together. Then the stillness was broken by a rumbling noise deeper in the cavern, and something that Mir thought sounded a *lot* like the squeal of metal on metal.

Elayne swallowed nervously. "What was that?"

"I don't know, but I think we're running out of time."

Posted by Calhexas on 5 April 2009 08:21 PM:

The cantina was sparsely populated, the music, like the air, was stale. It was like everyone was in their own world, and in a state of autopilot. Only the bartender raised a brow as the door opened, yet little light shown in. The massive figure of a man stood in the doorway, blocking the sun. His appearance wasn't able to be made out at first, it was dark, contrasted by the sunlight behind him. As he walked in, Mak cast a glance in each

direction of the establishment and finally settled his gaze on the bartender.

"What'll it be stranger?"

"I need information." Mak said with a sturdy and almost lifeless voice.

"Um...what kinda information you seekin? I'm not incredibly sharp, but I'll do muh best." the bartender said with a polite grin.

"Lookin for someone."

"Well that narrows it down a whole bunch doesn't it?" the tender said sarcastically.

"You're humor is unappreciated...and ill advised." Mak said as his expression became even more disgusted. With an expression that had grown increasingly uncomfortable and disturbed, the bartender responded, "look I'll be happy to help you out. But don't go causin no trouble ya hear? There's a decent Imperial presence on this here rock, an I got no problem callin em in here to deal with an unruly customer who's got an attitude problem. Now can ya be more specific?"

"Hmph...Imperials." Mak said with a slight half-grin. It was the first "cheerful" expression he'd made since entering the bar. "Tall, thin, probably older looking. Usually goes by Kort." Mak said annoyed.

"Doesn't ring any bells. You sure they're here?"

"Positive."

"My guess is they're livin on the outskirts then. I know pretty much evry one in town, an that name or description doesn't remind me of anyone. Check the outskirts. But be careful. Lotsa thugs preyin on people out there."

"I'll take my chances." Mak said with a grin.

"Hey tough guy..." a voice called out from behind Mak and the bartender. Make turned his head to see a bulky human sitting across from a lean-built twi'lek. Mak turned back uninterested. "How bout you get the helloutta here buddy." Obviously offended by Mak's disrespect, they two of them lumbered to their feet. As they approached him, Mak muttered to the bartender, "may wanna call them Imperials now."

"He's talkin to you..." the Twi'lek said as he put his hand on Mak's shoulder. Mak quickly gripped the aliens hand, spun around and tossed the foe over the bar as if gravity wasn't an issue. As the larger man lunged forward Mak lifted his boot and swiftly planted it on the big guy's face. In the same movement Mak rapidly pressed his foot forward sending the hulking fool reeling back into one of the booths.

The twi'lek, having come to, jumped on top of the bar and leaped at Mak who had his back turned. As if expecting it, Mak whipped around and to the rest of the establishment's astonishment, the twi'lek froze in mid-air. Mak smiled.

"He's...he's a jedi!" the twi'lek squealed.

Mak let out a gusto "haa!" With a wide grin, he raised his hand to the twi'lek's cheek, and slapped it gently a couple times. "If I was a jedi, would I do this?"

Suddenly let out a high pitch squeal and gripped at his chest ferociously. He tore at his clothes and grabbed his chest with both hand as if trying to tear through his own skin. As his eyes began to roll into the back of his head, blood began to trickle from the twi'lek's nose and ears. In mere moments, the alien grew motionless, and suddenly dropped to the floor.

Mak turned to the twi'lek's brute partner, who was thoroughly unconscious from the kick to the face Mak had delivered. Mak turned to the bartender and flipped him some credits.

"For your troubles." he muttered as he walked out the door.

Posted by Ris on 8 April 2009 01:10 AM:

Drend held his arm out so they could link arms. The more they looked the part, the less they would be noticed as anything else. Santee followed close behind, typing on a datapad and speaking to them haphazardly, just like a real agent would. Holographers turned and noticed them when one reporter said "Isn't that?" Drend quietly grunted, "The more we are noticed as those people, the less we will be remembered as the people we are."

Cin didn't even nod, she was posing for the holocams, making sure, though, that there were no clear face shots. At one point she adjusted her wayward slit skirt so that for a moment it looked like the holographers might score one of those "TMI shots" that got prominent play in gossip holozines. Drend hadn't noticed and they continued, posing somewhat, but mostly walking as fast as they could to get out of the hotel.

But thegossipbyters were disappointed--their jockeying to find proof she'd had too much Abrax to remember all the clothing layers, allowed the three of them to make it around the corner and into a service lift.

The service lift left them in the kitchens, where they were far overdressed. But this was a hotel used to famous guests, so this was regarded as a usual event among the staff. Even so, Santee made sure to pass a few credits into the hands of staff they passed, as did Cin.

Santee at length led them to, of all places, a small medical suite used by staff. When they were inside, he locked the door. Cin immediately asked Drend for her datapad back, and started typing urgently to Razzle.

Razzle responded ARE YOU OK?

She tapped the confirm key.

Razzle responded yet again I WAS WORRIED, I FOUND DATA TELLING WHAT HAPPENED, APPARENTLY SHE IS ALREADY BRAGGING IN HER LOG

"Oh, no!" Cin exclaimed. She told the men even as she typed back, CAN U GRAB HER FILES WITHOUT HER KNOWING?

YES

was the response she got, along with DO YOU WANT ME TO GET THE CURRENT LOCATION OF THE REBEL BASE? YES, EVERYTHING U CAN TOO.

Cin told Drend and Santee, "Good thing the ditz was so busy trying to look good for The Boss that she forgot to keep an eye on us. Do we need a diversion or do we make a run for it?"

Santee spoke up "I do believe we are covered, the staff never saw us. If we make a run for a hovercab, we can likely get to your ship and get off this station."

Cin asked, "Do you think the holo-jocks will find us again--they could slow us down badly." She thought of something. "Maybe Razzle can glitch traffic control in our favor?"

As she typed in the request Razzle commed in I'M GOING TO FIX TRAFFIC SO NO-ONE GETS IN YOUR WAY

"Thank you Razz," she said aloud as she hit confirm. "He'll do it for us--thought of it himself!" Cin grinned.

Drend grinned, "That droid of yours is just full of surprises."

"Isn't he? Do we need anything from here? If not let's make this jump ASAP."

After a short, fast, well funded cab ride to the docks, Drend, Cin and Santee approached the bay where *Puddlejumper* was docked.

(OOC: Just using all-caps for text Cinowyn types into her pad & the replies Razzle transmits back to it. Cin's are purple & Razzle's green.)

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 9 April 2009 04:12 PM:

The shouting had gotten old a long time ago. Tam was hoarse, and from the sound of her voice, Fi's was too. "I know I heard them earlier," she croaked. "You heard it too, right?"

Tam nodded. "They're either busy or--"

"Or they're *really* busy," Athelias interrupted. "Did you hear that rumble a minute ago?"

"Rumble?"

The Jedi nodded his head toward one of the watery chamber's distant, invisible walls. "I heard it coming from that direction." He silently began swimming toward the wall he indicated.

Tam didn't want to follow, exhausted from the constant shouting and the fight to keep his head above the water. The water was cold, and he wasn't sure if his limbs were still moving. But swimming in a direction carried more chance of leaving this place-- more *hope*-- than swimming in place.

"I'm not going," Fi gasped. Her arms feebly swayed under the water. "I can't make it. You go with him."

Tam looked at her sternly in the darkness. "If you're not going, I'm not."

"Follow Thel to the top, and toss me a rope down." Tam knew she would do no such thing. She was so weak that, even if she *didn't* give up she would never see that length of synthrope.

"We'll get out of here," he said, putting a hand on her shoulder. He willed a resurgence of strength and resolve into the woman, and felt her proverbial jaw clench with the determination to face the effort with him.

Because he surely couldn't do it without her...

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 10 April 2009 01:25 PM:

Eventually they caught up with Athelias, much colder and more exhausted than before. The Jedi addressed them, but paid them no other heed. "I sense a void on the other side of this wall."

"A void?" asked Fi between shivers. "A void, like space?"

"Not in the celestial sense. No, this is just a..." He placed his hand on the cold, smooth wall. "...a tunnel, a conduit; shaft, like for a turbolift."

"You found us a turbolift out of here?"

"Maybe." He produced his lightsaber from his belt, and vigorously shook the water from it. Then he pressed the activation plate, and a blade of yellow light flashed into life.

Tam scowled. "If I'd known you just had to shake the thing to get it to work again..."

Athelias plunged his lightsaber deep into the wall of smooth stone. "Actually, the short came because the lightsaber was submerged when activated. The *handle* was submerged, to be more precise."

"I didn't do it on purpose," said the boy sullenly.

Thel's lightsaber carved a slow, wide circle through the obsidian wall. "It spent some time outside of the water, and was deactivated when I took it into the water again. Shake it dry, and it'll fly." He looked away from his work and met Tam's gaze. "When you make your own lightsaber, maybe you should look into waterproofing techniques."

What makes you think I'll make a lightsaber? Tam's bitter disdain was interrupted by the stone circle falling from its position and sliding into the water before them. An overflow of water poured into the empty space beyond.

Athelias poked his head in the dark hole. "It goes up..."

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 10 April 2009 01:46 PM:

Athelias pulled his head back, "Alright, I'll try to lift both of you up the shaft at the same time. Now that my lightsaber is working you guys can use it to illuminate the shaft and tell me if you're going to run into anything and where to put you down. Here, climb through this hole."

Tam and Fi looked at each other, then climbed into the hole and stood on the rock.

"Okay, take this," Athelias gave the lightsaber to Tam, "and yell down which direction I should move you. I'll be sitting where you're standing now and facing the opposite wall, so left will be that way," Athelias pointed to his left, "When you get up take a look around the room and see if there's some panel or something that might activate the turbolift. Good luck." Athelias closed his eyes and focused, Tam and Fi slowly lifted off the rock and floated out into the void, when they left the rock Athelias took their place and started lifting them up the shaft.

They went straight up, after a while Athelias heard Tam call down, "Okay, move us to the..." Athelias waited while Tam aligned himself so he faced the same way as Athelias, "left and forward and put us down. Gently."

Athelias smiled and moved as Tam had instructed.

Tam felt Athelias release him with the Force when his feet touched the ground and saw Fi with the lightsaber's light.

"Do you see any panels?" He heard the Jedi's voice.

"Yeah, I just landed but I already know everything in the room." He muttered. Jedi! "Not yet, give us a second. They started looking around the room, it was made from the same obsidian as the rest of the academy, it was yet another big empty room. As they walked along the wall they came to a door and a panel. "I found it." Tam yelled back. He waited for Athelias to say something, but only silence answered. He looked at Fi, and they walked back to the hole they had come up together, "Thel? I found the panel." His only reply was the sound of his own echos. "Thel, are you there?" Tam and Fi looked at each other.

"Frack." They both said it at the same time. It was all there was to say.

Posted by Corr Terek on 10 April 2009 06:52 PM:

The metallic noise was growing louder. Given everything that had already happened, Mir couldn't help but feel that they didn't want to run into whatever was making that noise. "I think we've done all we can do," she said, finishing the last of the bacta applications. "Help me lift him, and let's get out of here."

Elayne complied, and the two woman supported their unconscious friend and slowly made their way back to the place where they'd fallen, Elayne's lightsaber lighting the way. The noise was getting closer and closer, and it was all they could do to keep going at a steady pace -- Damon was heavier than he looked.

Soon the glow from Elayne's lightsaber revealed one of the lost glowrods, and Mir picked it up and tucked it away for later use. *If there is a "later,"* she thought grimly.

Her heart sank as she looked up -- the wall of rubble from the collapsed stairway towered above them until it was lost in the darkness. "I don't think we're going to be able to climb that," Elayne said. She gestured. "Not with him, anyway."

"You saying we should leave him?" Mir's eyes blazed. Elayne shook her head and raised her hands placatingly.

"No, I'm just saying we need to find another way out," she

replied. Her next words were cut off by a loud crash as the passageway they'd just come from was forcibly widened. A huge droid, the likes of which Mir had never seen before, burst into the chamber. On its rusted shoulders were two very capable-looking blaster cannons, and each arm had a spinning blade attached. It scanned the room for a few moments before noticing the bright glow of Elayne's lightsaber.

"Target acquired."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 13 April 2009 01:52 PM:

As Fi examined the panel they had found, Tam stared down the empty shaft. "He's down there somewhere," he said. "I can feel him."

"I'm trying to cue the turbolift, but nothing's happening."

"It's a thousand year old temple," snapped the boy. "Should anything in this place work?"

She shot him a dark look, but he ignored it and continued shouting into the narrow abyss until his voice was once again hoarse.

"Y'know Tam, it wasn't that long ago that you tied him up in a big purple bag and tossed him in the water."

"That wasn't me."

"I know. I know it was the room, but it can't make something out of nothing. Nothing can."

"It wasn't me."

"Remember Burista?" she said, giving up on getting anything from the operating panel. "Do you remember what that felt like?"

Tam didn't say that he remembered. He didn't have to.

"Where did that come from?"

"From the planet."

"The planet brought it out of us, and the scientists were trying to turn that into a weapon." She paused, considering her next words. "But even the weapon couldn't put stuff where it didn't already exist..."

Tam turned away from the abyss. The implications of Fi's words struck him hard. If the source of that inhuman rage and strength was indeed Fi and not Project Darkseed, then that meant somewhere deep in Fi was the ability to tear through Imperial officers with nothing more than her fingers. If Tam's experience below had been anything like Fi's with Darkseed, then that meant something dark and dangerous was deep inside Tam, and this place was bent on bringing it out of him.

A distant crash brought Tam from his reverie.

"You heard that too," whispered Fi, looking over her shoulder.

Tam peered down the shaft. "Was that Thel?"

Fi yanked on his shoulder and pulled him away from the pit. She pointed at a door across the room. The sounds of crashing metal and the telltale hum of a lightsaber echoed from the corridor beyond...

Posted by Corr Terek on 15 April 2009 05:46 PM:

"Look out!" Elayne yelled, and Mir felt an invisible force lift her and Damon and shove them roughly to one side. Blaster bolts tore through the ground they'd been standing on. Elayne came out of her awkward roll and assumed a guard stance, her lightsaber blazing. She gestured towards a dark recess off to the side. "I think I saw a door back that way -- run for it!"

"What about you?" Mir said, even as she began dragging Damon towards the doorway. Elayne laughed grimly.

"I'm going to play hero," she said, deflecting a volley of blaster bolts back towards the droid. "Now get a move on!"

The droid's attention was fully on Elayne now, so Mir wasted no time in heading towards the doorway. The door looked ancient and Mir worried that it might not be active. Nervously, she reached for the decrepit control panel.

She needn't have worried. Abruptly the door slid open to reveal Tam and Fi, both looking drenched and more than a little exhausted. Tam gaped in surprise. "Mir?" Then he saw Damon, and a look of horror -- and, strangely enough, *recognition* -- crossed his face. Fi gasped and covered her mouth with both hands.

"What happened to him?" Tam asked. Then he hesitated. "He's not--"

"Dead? No," Mir said brusquely. "We've got to get him out of here and back to the ship." She glanced around. "Where are the others?"

Posted by ij thompson on 15 April 2009 10:30 PM:

"Athelias is down this shaft," Fi replied breathlessly. "We just came up it."

"We're going back down it," Mir stated flatly.

"We can't," Tam rebutted. "It was our only way up from below."

"We'll find another one."

"No good," Fi informed her tensely. "It's a straight vertical drop... no handholds, nothing."

"Then how did you--" Mir'isha began, then shook her head. "Forget it, I don't want to know."

Tam nodded in the direction Mir had come from. "What's all the noise in that chamber?"

"That," the Farghul informed them, "is about ten tons of bad news on fresh batteries. Elayne is dealing with it now, but... I don't know..." She looked back up the corridor nervously.

"We have to help her!" Tam cried, once again sparking Athelias's lightsaber to life.

Mir put a hand on his shoulder. "Kid, that thing's as big as a rancor. Easily."

"I don't care," the boy replied. "And anyway, it's our only way out. Fi," he commanded, surprising both the women and himself with the authority in his tone, "keep Damon safe. It can't... it shouldn't be able to get in here. Mir?"

"Yeah?"

"You're armed?"

"Yeah."

"Let's go."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 16 April 2009 04:21 PM:

While Fi stayed behind to take care of Damon with everyone else, Tam led the way back through the sliding doorway. He was relieved to know that Damon had survived the seemingly fatal moment he had envisioned back on Ryloth, and relieved to file another chapter of that disturbing revelation into the 'already happened and not as bad as it had seemed' category.

'Course, Damon might disagree...

Tam found himself back in the wide training room, with Mir close behind. In the center of the remaining statues flashed the wild blade of a lightsaber behind the hulking silhouette of a massive mechanized monster.

"Okay," said the Human boy to the Farghul woman, "you stay here. When I give the signal, aim for its vulnerable points."

"And how do you know it even has vulnerable points?"

Tam peered at Mir'isha in the darkness. He touched his fingers gently to the confused woman's forehead. "Trust me, Mir.

You'll see them when you need to."

She watched the boy step into the darkness toward the lightning-fast brawl in the center of the room. Tam was scary sometimes. When he took control of the situation like this, it was like he was a different person. She hoped he knew what he was doing.

He certainly seemed to. The boy took a mighty forward leap that would have been difficult even for a Farghul, with no running preamble to build the necessary momentum. He landed on the back of the mighty droid and flipped his lightsaber around to plunge it deep in the droid's back. When he shoved downward, however, the dark armor deflected the energy blade with nothing more than a glittering scrape. Clearly, that was not a vulnerable spot.

The droid whipped around, swiping Tam from his back. The boy landed and recovered shakily. "Target Beta designated. Commence multiple target protocol." With a shriek of millennia-old servos, the droid drove a humanoid arm into the ground where the boy used to be, then swung an improbably deft leg in the direction of Elayne. Both saber-swingers chopped at the swiftly stabbing limbs and dodged the training, firing shoulder cannons.

Despite the droid's redoubled efforts, Tam and Elayne were doing a good job of keeping it at bay. Elayne drew the indola's share of the droid's blaster fire, deflecting them back at it ineffectually. Tam kept the machine-guard's limbs busy, swiping at them with the unexpected power of a lumber droid. Mir'isha wondered if she and her one blaster could do anything that was impervious to lightsabers.

A thought entered Mir's mind. The droid knows how to defend itself against lightsabers-- even *two*-- but it can't defend itself against a surprise attack from a non-designated target.

Tam made a long, wide swipe, not at the Sith droid, but at one of the large statues encircling the training room floor. The carved obsidian slid from its base, and crashed into the ancient stone floor. Much as had happened before, the floor gave way to an inky expanse below. Tam had been sure to stay well clear of the new hole to the catacombs below, but his attention turned him away from the droid for a second too long.

The great war machine lifted the boy above its armored bulk, wrenching and twisting the limbs in its massive arms. Tam screamed silently as the forces imposed on his body threatened to tear him in half.

And as the droid stood in its extended posture, Mir'isha saw, between the plates of lightsaber-proof armor, the faint glow of delicate circuitry commanding the actions of the Sith killer-bot. She trained her blaster on that glint of internal components and pulled the trigger.

And Mir swore as her attack ricocheted off the droid's protective plates. The droid reeled around to pinpoint the source of the attack, but one of its feet came down on the empty space made by the statue Tam had felled. It teetered in a precarious balance, losing its grip on the young boy, then disappeared into the blackness below.

Elayne and Mir approached the lip of the hole, and heard the distant splash of the Sith droid below. Had Tam gone down with the machine again?

"Does somebody want to help me up?" They saw the hand of a small boy clutching at the crumbling edge of the floor.

Mir gasped with relief and, with Elayne's help, hoisted Tam back to his own feet.

Elayne's face went ashen. "That's Athelias' lightsaber. Where is he?"

Tam didn't know what to tell her. Instead, he handed Mir'isha

one of the stray glowrods rolling around on the training room. "Mir, go back and get the others. Elayne and I are going ahead to make sure the way is clear.

"We have to move fast. There's no telling how long it will be before that droid finds its way back up here. Oh and Mir..." He turned a wry grin to the Farghul. "Tell them to step carefully. I don't think this floor is as sturdy as it looks..."

Posted by ij thompson on 16 April 2009 11:01 PM:

Fi sat on the stone floor of the pitch-black chamber, cradling the unconscious Damon in her lap and listening to the fevered sounds of battle nearby. Moments ago, she, Tam, Mir, and Damon had been here together, before Tam had called Mir'isha away, telling Fi to remain behind with 'everyone else'.

Who had he meant?

Damon? Well that went without saying. But the word 'everyone' kind of implied multiple persons.

Athelias?

That was a possibility. The Jedi was no doubt somewhere behind her, at the bottom of the shaft. But his sudden silence after saving her and Tam left little hope.

Who, then? Zealos? Cali? Tey?

She hadn't seen the three of them since the training chamber above. But still, Tam had seemed convinced that Fi was in the company of several people.

Or he's still a little crazy, she supposed, crazy from that 'seduction chamber' downstairs...

Without warning, the startling sound of stones grinding above her interrupted Fi's thoughts, followed by the sound of three large-ish, organic lumps hitting the chamber floor.

"OW!" Zealos cried. "You know, I'm startin' to wonder if I shouldn't have ejected."

"One day," Cali replied, coughing ancient dust into a palm, "I'll have to remember to ask you what that means."

Tey sat beside them in the dirt, dusting off his pants and squinting in the darkness.

"Fi?"

"Tey?"

Before he could reply, Mir'isha appeared from the corridor, shining her glowrod over the disheveled quintet.

"Well, I'll be..."

Posted by Ice Hawk on 17 April 2009 12:22 AM:

"I know what I heard! I'm telling you, Fi was down there, we have to go back."

Tey stood glowrod in hand, blocking Reil from continuing down the hallway. Reil sighed and shook his head; they had been over this at least six times. Reil turned to Cali who was behind him.

"Did you hear anything coming from the hole?"

Cali looked a little uncomfortable.

"Well, no. . . But Tey -"

Reil cut her off.

"I didn't hear anything either, and none of us saw anything, even after shining the light down that hole."

Tey remained defiant.

"I know I heard something."

"Well maybe you did, but there's no way to be sure. Besides, even if it was Fi, it's not like we could have helped her."

Tey's eyes narrowed, which made his face look very eerie in the glowrod's pale green glow.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I don't see a climbing harness with you."

"No, Damon had it. . ."

"And we can't find Damon, so how would we get down there to help them?"

Tey was silent.

"We're better off exploring, to see if we can't find Damon and the others, or another way into that pit. There's no sense standing at the edge of the hole shouting at each other, which is exactly what will happen if they're down there, and we go back now."

"I don't like the idea of just leaving them there. It feels like we're abandoning them."

"Well we're not. We're going to hook up with Damon, and then, if we haven't found Fi, Tam, and the Jedi by then, we'll go back and explore your hole. Deal?"

"Fine, but I still don't like it."

Tey turned around and resumed his role of illuminating their path down the ancient hallway. As they made their way through the twisting, turning passages, deeper into the heart of the Sith Academy, Reil noted a marked change in the condition of the architecture. The stairway and adjoining passages had all been very worn and decayed, as rubble often cluttered the hallways, and large gaps in the floor, like the one Tey thought Fi was in were not uncommon.

This all changed as they moved deeper into the academy, and it's condition steadily improved, as if there was something at the heart of the academy, preserving it's aging structure by pure force of will. The patterns on the wall began to change as well. Instead of the haunting patterns of the Sith language carved all across the walls, large tapestries, carved into the very rock of wall, depicted terrible scenes of savagery and evil, made all the more disturbing by the eerie light of the glowrod. Reil began resting his hand on his blaster. He didn't believe in all the hokey ghost stuff, but he still couldn't shake his feeling of unease, and the blaster was familiar and comforting.

They finally reached a larger antechamber, different from the first one they found, one level up. There were no scorch marked statues of brutal initiation ceremonies, but one central pillar in the circular room, that led off into several other directions. They all fanned out to explore the room. As he got closer, Reil saw that there was writing in Sith on the pillar, and then just beneath, was the basic translation.

"Hey guys! Come 'ere a sec. I found something."

Tey and Cali grouped behind Reil.

"What is it?"

Reil pointed to the basic translation.

"Some sorta motto. . . it's the only basic I've seen since we've been in this frelling place."

"Let me see!"

Cali tried to jockey Reil out of the way to look at it. Unable to do so, she became impatient.

"Well, what's it say!"

"Not much, just like a creed or something:

Peace is a lie, there is only passion.

Through passion, I gain strength.

Through strength, I gain power

Power to victory, yadda yadda, chains broken, the force sets me free."

Tey got closer and looked it over.

"Weird. . ."

Reil nodded his head in agreement.

"Yeah, it's a bit strange, but it's not exactly evil. Freeing yourself, being powerful, these aren't bad things, and from what I've seen so far, these Sith guys were bad people. I still don't

believe in any ghosts, but I can at least admit that damn Jedi was right about all that evil stuff."

Cali was still unable to look at it with both Tey and Zealos blocking her now. Fed up with being ignored, she pushed Zealos.

"LET ME SEE!"

Reil was knocked off balance, and had to grab the pillar for support. The pillar seemed to shift under the weight for a second, and then there was a terrible grinding sound, and then Zealos felt the floor disappear from beneath him. He, Tey, and Cali fell into darkness, only to be suddenly greeted by the very hard ground.

"OW!" Zealos cried. "You know, I'm startin' to wonder if I shouldn't have ejected."

"One day," Cali replied, coughing ancient dust into a palm, "I'll have to remember to ask you what that means."

Tey sat beside them in the dirt, dusting off his pants and squinting in the darkness.

"Fi?"

"Tey?"

Before he could reply, Mir'isha appeared from the corridor, shining her glowrod over the disheveled quintet.

"Well, I'll be..."

Reil shook his head and looked around and took stock of his injuries. He spotted Fi in the process.

"HA! Found her."

He turned to Tey with a look of smug superiority.

"I told you she wasn't in the pit!"

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 17 April 2009 05:50 PM:

"And he just disappeared?" Elayne said to the boy as he carefully examined the crumbled remains of the staircase they had all used to enter the temple. "He's still down there somewhere?"

"As far as I can tell."

"But he's not dead," she insisted. "If he were dead I would have felt it."

"I suppose that's right," Tam said. He hung his head as a flurry of thoughts assaulted his mind. Athelias had insisted on coming with them to this Sith training center, and Tam had come within a hair's breadth of killing the man. Now it seemed he'd met that fate any way. Tam was now standing next to a woman-- Athelias' apprentice-- who had apparently succumbed to some Sith poltergeist and dealt Damon a nearly fatal wound before helping him defeat an ancient Sith sentinel droid.

They were only a few down meters from the exit, and Tam was having a hard time shaking the bad feeling he had about this place...

"What is it?"

Tam turned around, looking at the Jedi woman. He wanted to demand she explain what she had done to his friend, and how she justified it. "Nothing, just trying to figure out how to get out of here."

"No you're not."

"What?"

"You were thinking something else. What was it?"

Fine. "You tried to kill Damon."

"I already told you, that wasn't me. That was the Sith spirits."

"They might have pushed you over the edge, but that darkness had to come from somewhere."

"And what makes you so sure?"

"I've had my own experiences in this place. And I know that what I did, or *tried* to do, was something that came from me. Deep down, at least."

"Well, that just wasn't the case with me, Tam. I'm sorry if

you can't see it that way."

Tam couldn't, but he didn't know what else to say. "So... Now can we figure out a way to get back out of here?"

Posted by Corr Terek on 20 April 2009 11:58 AM:

Mir was a little ahead of the others as they came to rejoin Elayne and Tam, and so managed to catch the tail end of their conversation. *So, he doesn't trust her either*, she thought to herself. It was nice to know that at least one of the resident Force-users had the good sense to use his abilities properly. *Maybe* Elayne was on the level, but it was going to be awhile before Mir trusted her.

Maybe never, if Damon didn't make it.

Of course he's going to make it, she chided herself. She shook her head and turned back to the others -- Reil had been saying something. "I'm sorry, what did you say?"

"I said, what's our best way out from here?"

She jerked her head back towards the wall of rubble. "That's how we came down." She looked around. "There's enough of us here now -- we can get Damon out pretty easily."

"Now we've just got to worry about Thel," Tey said. "Never thought the *Jedi* would be the one to get in trouble."

Posted by Ice Hawk on 23 April 2009 03:10 AM:

Reil had to agree with Tey, it was odd that the Jedi was the only one still missing. Out of all of them, he was supposed to be the most capable amongst them. Which hopefully meant he could hold on for a bit longer. Long enough for them to help Damon first.

"Damon's looking pretty bad, we should probably take him to the ships first and come back for Thel. . ."

Reil almost winced as he said it, and everybody else looked uncomfortable as well. It was dangerously close to suggesting they leave Thel to die, deep in the catacombs of the Temple. It was Tam who spoke up against the idea.

"We just barely survived an encounter with one of the sentry droids here, and that was with two lightsabers and a blaster. Thel's all alone and unarmed, and the droid fell through the floor down to where we last saw him. I don't like his chance's if we leave him now. What if we split up; one group taking Damon back to the ship, and the rest of us start looking for Thel?"

Cali pointed out the problem with that plan.

"Splitting up is what got us all lost and spread across the Sith temple in the first place. You said it yourself, it took two Jedi and Mir to deal with that droid, and what if there are more of them? Just look what happened to Damon after we all split up. . ."

Mir, Tam, and Elayne all exchanged serious looks with each other. There was a tension in the air that hadn't been there a moment ago.

"Wait. . . What did happen to Damon? Was it the droid or. . ."

Reil let his sentence trail off, as all eyes turned to Elyane.

Posted by Corr Terek on 24 April 2009 02:42 PM:

"I did it," Elayne said, looking down at the ground. "If Mir hadn't snapped me out of it, I would've killed them both."

There was a heavy silence for almost a minute. Elayne's admission of guilt had stunned those who didn't already know what had happened. It was Reil who finally cleared his throat and spoke again.

"Why?"

"This place is full of darkness," Elayne replied, not meeting

his or anyone else's gaze. "Those of us who can feel it are always in danger of being lost to it."

"You're saying the Sith made you do it?" Tey said, his skepticism evident. "Maybe that works for Jedi, but that kind of excuse would never fly at CorSec."

Elayne's eyes flashed. "You weren't there!" She looked down. "You didn't see what I saw."

"What did you see?" Tam was studying her intently, as if to read the truth in her eyes. Elayne shook her head.

"I can't tell you."

"I'm guessing it's the same person whose voice Damon heard," Mir said curtly. The others looked at her oddly.

"Voices?" Cali asked. "You're saying there's spooks here?"

"There's *something*," Mir replied. "Whatever it was spoke to Damon, and I'm guessing it tried to make him snap like it did her." Her eyes bored into Elayne's. "When he wouldn't, it must have decided to send its little puppet to finish the job."

Elayne started to protest but stopped and merely looked downward again, her face flushed. It was obvious Mir's words had hit close to the mark.

"So here's what we're going to do," Mir said, ignoring the other woman and taking charge. "Fi, you, Cali and Tey take Damon back up the wall of rubble until you reach the staircase we entered through. The *Viper* has a functioning medical bay, so once you get Damon there you should be able to patch him up properly."

"But what about--" Cali started to ask. Mir cut her off with a glare.

"Anything that comes after you will have to pass this way first, or cross the hole that was created when the stairs collapsed. Get to the ship, get inside, and lock down. You'll be fine." She looked at Fi and Tey. "I'm counting on both of you. Don't let him die."

Tey nodded, apparently accepting the ease with which Mir had taken charge. Fi must have caught something in Mir's tone, for she looked searchingly at the Farghul and then at Damon's still form on the floor. A look of understanding came into her eyes, and she caught Mir's gaze. "He'll be okay, Mir. We'll take care of him."

"Good," Mir said. "Here's your climbing harnesses." She handed them the equipment and they began sorting the gear. Reil cleared his throat, and when Mir looked up at him he motioned for her to come closer.

"Maybe you know something that I don't," he said quietly, "But wouldn't it be better to get Elayne out of the temple?"

"Where we can't watch her?" Mir replied. "You know as well as I do that Fi and Cali couldn't even slow her down, and I wouldn't put any money on Tey either." She glanced over at the other woman, who seemed oblivious to them. "Besides, we're going to need Tam and Elayne if we run into one of those droids again. Or worse."

She stepped over to Tam, who had been talking quietly with Fi. "You ready to go?"

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 24 April 2009 06:23 PM:

Swallowing hard, Tam looked over at Fi, who paused from helping the others maneuver Damon toward the doorway to return his gaze. "Yeah," he said. "I'm ready."

"Good," said Mir. She looked at the pulverized staircase. "You don't happen to have any Force thing that could fix these stairs or anything, do you? I mean, I've seen crazier things since I've gotten involved with you people..."

Tam looked over at Elayne, who said. "My master lifted you

out of that chamber below, and I believe I could do the same, with a little help."

'My master?' Tam had a hard time seeing Athelias as a master of anything, but he was skilled in the ways of the Force. So was Darth Vader. He felt yet another step removed from Athelias, Elayne, the Ice-Man, and all their ilk.

But he nodded to the woman, and the two of them walked over to Damon. "Tey, can you help Fi to the top of the hole, then we'll, um, 'hand' Damon up to you."

After Tey scrambled up the rockslide and helped Fi do the same, they called out that they were in position. Tam glanced at Elayne, and the two of them opened themselves up to the unlimited potential of the Force. Slowly, carefully, Damon's unconscious body levitated through the stone doorway, up the rockslide, and into the waiting hands of Tey and Fi.

"Okay, we've got him!" shouted the Corsec agent. "Take his legs, Fi. Easy now..."

It wasn't until Tam heard their careful communications fade away above that he relaxed fully. He realized his brow was dripping and, wiping the sweat away, he turned to Mir.

"So? Now what?"

Posted by Ris on 25 April 2009 07:37 PM:

Drend punched the keycode that lowed the *Jumper's* boarding ramp and Razzle was standing on the deck twiteringly greeting them.

"Is it too much to hope that you can get this thing to jump before anybody comes after us? And we've still gotta get clearance--can you help with that, Mr. Santee?" Cin asked as they trotted up the ramp.

Santee looked at her. "I do hope so miss or else we might find ourselves grounded."

Drend was amused by his comment "Grounded? nothing keeps *Puddlejumper* grounded," but he still thought to himself *Except engine trouble!*

Drend had the ramp close up behind him after they were all aboard and he crawled into the engineering section, the drive was...Green. All the lights were green, and the indicators looked like someone had come in and retooled the works. Drend saw that the motivator that Santee was going to provide for them was even installed. He rushed back out, flabbergasted, but Santee interrupted him.

"I had it delivered when you told me of the meeting with the Rebel agent. Payment tendered." Meanwhile, Razzle seemed to twitter his statement of having been the one who installed it, making a remark along the lines of, "Well, you three took long enough that I had time to install it."

Cin laughed at the droid's comment as she entered the cockpit. "Yes, we're lucky to have you."

Drend ran back up to the cockpit where Cin was already waiting. He asked her, "I realize this might be a stupid question, but are you a good gunner?"

"The best! Please tell me that's rhetorical!"

"Right, then you get to control the guns...umm, I've never used them before."

"Mr. Santee, you better get strapped in--somewhere! Razzle, you too!" she called back. Cin slid into the co-pilot position, strapping in.

Drend strapped in and hit the All Systems key, calling back, "Razzle, can you position yourself so that you can monitor the engines?" Razzle tweetled an affirmative. Drend went through his second fastest abbreviated checklist ever, calling into Control, "This is *Puddlejumper* looking to depart, Control,

please advise." Control was lazy to respond. "*Puddlejumper*, Control, you are cleared for departure."

Cin found the gunnery controls, not much compared to an X-wing. One hand gripping the fire-controls, she brought the weapons suite online. Or tried to. The first thing that happened was one of those happy-go-lucky intro screens popped up.

"WELCOME TO YOU FROM TAIM & BAK WEAPONS MANUFACTURING. YOU HAVE RECENTLY PURCHASED AND INSTALLED THE T&B T-500 SERIES LIGHT LASER CANNONS FOR YOU OWN PERSONAL USE. ONCE THIS MESSAGE COMPLETES, FEEL FREE TO CALIBRATE THE WEAPONS AND OCCULATE THEIR TARGETING DATA FOR THE BEST RESULTS."

"What the--" Cin muttered. "Doesn't anybody check stuff they buy?" She looked for a Skip Welcome icon, but it continued to scroll. "Grr." Cin tapped the OK button to calibrate. She knew the procedure, but chafed at the time it would take. "Live fire. Full power." Occulation would be next, and she thought 100m would be about right, since an X was usually set at 200m. Instead an orange warning popped up.

"ARE YOU SURE? FIRING UNTESTED WEAPONRY IN LIVE MODE CAN RESULT IN DAMAGE TO PROPERTY AND BEINGS."

"That's what I want and lots of it," she said aloud. Cin found the small Confirm icon, tapped it. No Occulation screen! A yellow warning screen.

"YOU HAVE CONFIRMED LIVE FIRE MODE. PLEASE SELECT 'CONFIRMATION CONFIRM' BELOW, THEN 'CONFIRM SETTINGS' ON THE NEXT SCREEN TO CONFIRM. IF YOU FEEL YOU HAVE REACHED THIS SCREEN IN ERROR, PLEASE SELECT 'ABORT AND RETURN' ICON BELOW."

"Do weapons engineers think no one's gonna ever use 'em?" Then to Drend, "Don't just sit there & look good--get us moving, OK?"

Drend smiled at her comment and set the ship into motion and just as they were clearing the landing pad, "*Puddlejumper* this is Control, do not leave, we have orders to detain you." Drend swore and kicked the engines up to full.

Cin's fingers were busy. She had just typed in the occulation and "READY TO CALIBRATE TAIM & BAK T-500 SERIES LIGHT LASER CANNONS" had finally come up, when Control ordered them to stay put.

"Sorry, got a previous engagement!" Drend looked down at the sensors and saw two very bright blips coming at them, according to the sensor profile they were a pair of Twin-Pod Airspeeders. Then the screen resolved four more blips... these resolved into...Drend's heart sank. TIE Fighters.

As soon as the TIEs were on them it was like Cin was a different person, her gaze steeled at the sensor and visual data in front of her. Both turrets had sensor and visual guidance, and were powerful enough at least to heavily damage a TIE in a single shot. Three of them came high, one low, she lined up the dorsal turret sights on the center of the high formation and opened up. Scarlet lasers lanced from the turret and spread across the cloudy sky and sheared off the wing of the center TIE.

The damaged snub careened into its neighbor. "Love it!" she crowed at the resultant fireball, already tracking the third. At that point the low TIE was coming up on them and poured acrid lasers into the ventral surface of the ship's shielding. It cooked the shields and Drend was forced to maneuver hard, messing up Cin's aim on the third high TIE, her fire going wide of the TIE by several meters.

Cin cursed shrilly, even as she squeezed the firing stud for

the ventral cannon. "C'mon, Drend, I need you to fly this right!"

Drend was somewhat indignant. "Meaning what? Present them a target? The shields on this thing aren't exactly cap-ship grade." The TIEs had outstripped the cloud cars by this point and the cloud cars were chasing the TIEs by a few hundred meters.

"Nine hells, no! Evade 'em! Lemme worry about the guns!" Cin finally got a better lock on the ventral TIE and fired a second time, but the pilot jukeed and was only grazed. He returned fire, even as Cin was firing at the higher TIE with the other gun. Her shots went wide, but managed to force it back. The TIEs winged up, slowing as they did. Now, the cloud cars closed on the group, and did something surprising--they opened fire on the TIEs.

Cin's shrill complaint turned to a laugh. She and the lead cloud car hit the ventral TIE at the same time. "Up, Drend!" she warned, even as the cloud car veered farther "down" and away--just in time, as the crippled TIE's ion engines went.

Just then Drend heard a voice over the comm, "This is Stormstrike Leader to *Puddlejumper*, tell Mr. Santee we're even." Drend vectored towards space, hard, gunning the engines. The last TIE peeled off to furlball with the two atmospheric fighters.

"Now, you're mine," Cin hissed eagerly as she tried to lock onto the final TIE, difficult with the ship vectoring away and gaining speed. "Drend--" she started.

"No." Drend almost scolded like one of his old schoolmasters. The ship was close to clearing the planet's mass shadow. Just to make sure he didn't sound mean he continued, "There are a million TIEs in the Galaxy, that means there are plenty of others you'll get to shoot down."

"No! Mine! And the cloud-jocks'll get killed without help!"

As if to prove her wrong, the cloud car pilots pulled off a remarkable bait and switch maneuver, vamping the last TIE.

"Copy, and good shooting, Stormstrike!" Cin commed, her voice almost merry. "Wow, that was great!" she told Drend and Santee. "Two and a half gunnery kills to me, and they better not end up on Wedge's record!"

Drend laughed while Santee only smiled. "Excellent show, Ms. Antilles."

She blew to kisses to each man. Soon enough the ship was outside the mass shadow, and once Razzle had the nav coordinates plugged in they were in hyperspace, on their way to the first waypoint to the Rebel Base.

Cin, at first giddy, soon sobered a little. "I hope your pals in the cloud-cars don't end up owing a heavier debt than they did to you."

"They know what they did, and wouldn't have done it otherwise, but that won't matter. Cloud City isn't under Imperial jurisdiction, so if they begin belligerence, the Baron-Administrator can react."

Drend turned in the chair and looked at her, "You are incredible."

Cin unbuckled and stood up, grinning at him. "Aren't I just?" she asked--then kissed him thoroughly. Drend smiled as she kissed him and kissed back. Santee, meanwhile, seemed unfazed by their public affection. Cin continued the kiss until they heard Santee clearing his throat. She broke it--they needed O2 anyways--a vivid blush on her cheeks.

Drend composed himself, he was surprised by Cin, but in a good way, and noticed why she broke the kiss. "Oh, hey, Mr. Santee, how do you like the ship?"

Santee glanced out the window, "Quite an impressive vessel for a custom." He then looked back at them. "Are you sure you two aren't newlyweds?"

Cin, still blushing, mumbled something about having told Santee that because it was the first cover they thought of.

"Quite." Santee mused.

Cin then asked if anyone else was hungry, as she was starving. "Those couple of appetizers at the reception were hours ago. Good thing we arranged for provisioning right away."

Drend smiled. "Food does sound good."

"So, how about fixing the hotshot and our guest a nice breakfast while she gets acquainted with your ship, handsome?" Cin nudged him hard, as she would have done her brother or a squadronmate.

"Well, *hotshot*," he grinned, "You're kinda on top of me."

Cin giggled, "Oh. Yeah," and let him up, tugging. "Feed me!"

Drend got up and headed over to the storage lockers where Razzle had stowed some foodstuffs. He took out three thermal heater packs of food, and made his way out to the cockpit again. "It's not the Paradise City Grill, but it's food."

Cin, who had taken over the pilot chair, and was exploring the set-up of the boards, graciously gestured Santee to the co-pilot station. He started to demur, but she added, "This one is plenty big enough for the two of us." Cin took two packets from Drend and handed one over to the gambler, as he seated himself. She patted the pilot seat, activated the packet. "Thanks, Drend, join me?"

Cin carefully uncovered the meal, then groaned. "Anyone like gorak bird in dark sauce? Please? Does spy training warn about the risks of being spoiled by undercover work in fancy venues?"

Drend switched meals with her, his was some kind of undercooked flatbread with meat, cheese and some kind of vegetable compote on top.

Cin made the trade eagerly. "Looks like a fagita but with extra toppings, love those." She ate quickly but neatly. After "breakfast," she spent a little time fussing over Razzle, cleaning him up and praising him for his help. When the R2's finish shone, she returned to the pilot chair, to snuggle close to Drend and drowse happily.

The ship made the second jump into hyperspace when Santee asked, "There wouldn't happen to be a proper bed on this ship, would there?"

Drend indicated there was one in the quarters a few steps down the ladder from the cockpit and Santee made his way out and closed the hatch to the small quarters.

Drend held her close and whispered into her ear "He's gone."

She smiled, and shifted a little. "Hmm?"

He cuddled with her for a while. "Oh, nothing," he smiled, this was nice enough for now. Plus the swirling of hyperspace set for a nice romantic mood, he thought to himself.

"You're wonderful," she murmured in his ear, nuzzling. "I like, just being with you. I've been so lonely, sometimes..." she confessed.

"Well you don't have to worry about that anymore." Drend smiled.

"That's good...wingman." She looked into his eyes, then kissed him as she had earlier.

He just looked at her, so happy he had her at this very moment.

Posted by Ice Hawk on 30 April 2009 03:53 AM:

Reil watched as Damon's body levitated up to Tey and Fi. He found it disconcerting and more than a little scary, even though he knew this was small potatoes to Tam sending ships across the galaxy with his mind. Reil mentally shook himself from his train of thought. These were all just distractions from the real objective: to find Thel.

As the last echo's of Fi and Tey faded, Tam turned to Mir and cut right to the heart of the matter.

"So? Now what?"

Mir grimaced a bit.

"We find Thel."

Tam exhaled loudly.

"I was kinda hoping for something more detailed."

"Something to do with how we go about finding him."

Reil chimed in helpfully.

Mir growled.

"I'm working on it! It's not like we have alot to go on."

Reil turned to Tam.

"So fill me in on what happened, Thel ditched us to go find you and Fi. How'd you lose him?"

Tam gestured over to the turbolift shaft.

"We were all down there together down there, when Thel sensed a shaft leading upwards. He cut a hole in the wall for us to get through, then levitated us up here. We lost contact after that."

Elyane, who had been silent for a while now, finally spoke up.

"What's down there anyway?"

Tam shrugged.

"Water mostly. We had a run in with some sort of giant fish creature, but Thel dealt with it using the force."

Elyane pressed further.

"Anything else?"

"Well, it was pretty dark, so we couldn't see much, but there was this room, it glowed purple and was decorated with all sorts of pillows and silks."

This piqued Mir's interest.

"Any chance Thel might have taken refuge in there?"

Tam shook his head.

"Defiantly not. That place was very strong in the dark side, me and Fi went in there. . . it awoke. . . a sort of dark. . . passion."

Reil remembered Fi kissing Tam earlier, and grinned slyly.

"Awoke a dark passion eh? That sounds more like puberty than the dark side Tam."

Mir frowned, and Tam's face grew very serious.

"It's not something to joke about. The darkness is very real; and very dangerous."

Reil shrugged apologetically. Mir took charge again.

"Could you and Elayne levitate us down the shaft, like you levitated Damon up?"

Elayne looked excited, but Tam shook his head.

"I wouldn't want to try it. There are alot more of us than when me and Elyane lifted Damon, or even when Thell lifted me and Tam. This distance is greater and it's harder to see as well."

Elayne frowned.

"We have to try! We have to find him and get out of this place as quickly as possible."

Reil shook his head.

"I'm with Tam. I'm more than a little uncomfortable with the idea of being levitated down a shaft in the first place, and if Tam isn't one hundred percent confident about it, then we should find another way."

Elayne didn't accept that.

"What other way? Tam said it himself, all that was down there was that room of the dark side!"

Reil's temper flared.

"We won't be much good to Thel if we die falling down a turbolift shaft! Now is not the time for taking stupid risks."

"So we let Thel die rather than risk our own skins?"

Mir finally had enough of the bickering.

"Enough!"

Reil and Elayne fell silent.

"No one said anything about letting Thel die. Reil's got a good point. We won't do Thel any good if we injure ourselves doing something stupid. Now Tam, are you sure the shaft is the only way to where Thell is?"

Tam shrugged.

"You mean where Thel was. We lost touch with him after he levitated us up. It was dark, and we didn't get to explore too much. If there is another way out, Thel might have found it already and be on the move."

Mir nodded.

"Then we might meet him halfway. Reil's plan is a good one, we should try and find a passage down to the lower level. Agreed?"

Tam and Reil nodded in agreement. Elayne said nothing, but she did nod her head to signal her consent.

Mir took the lead with her glowrod.

"Alright, let's move out."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 1 May 2009 05:14 PM:

With only the light from two lightsabers and a glowrod to lead their way, the searchers continued looking for another path down to the catacombs below.

"I just don't see how we're going to know whether we're even in the right place," said Tam. "Maybe one of you has been keeping track of where we are, or where we last saw Thel, but I sure don't."

Mir rolled her head, a Farghul expression of exasperation. "Listen Tam, if you were stuck down here somewhere, do you think we'd just forget you and go back to the ship?"

"If my master was dead," Elayne added, "I would have felt it." She pointed at a wall in the darkness and added further, "And the turbolift shaft is right over there. I can sense it through the Force."

Reil snickered. "I know it's over there too, but it doesn't take any Force to see." He shined his glowrod in the direction Elayne had pointed. "See?"

The light fell on a small doorway, framed with a glowing blue light. It was a turbolift all right, and it looked like it was functional.

Mir balked. "I'm not the only one who thinks that's really weird, am I?"

Now Tam snickered. "After all we've been through, I don't know the meaning of 'weird'..."

Posted by Corr Terek on 4 May 2009 08:20 PM:

"I don't like this," Reil muttered, as they stepped into the turbolift. "Feels like we're being led somewhere."

"Hopefully towards Thel," Mir replied, triggering the lift's controls.

"You *do* realize that we're going to drop like a rock if this thing loses power," the pilot continued.

Tam ran his hands along the wall. "I don't think that's going to happen."

"The turbolift systems seem stable enough," Elayne agreed. "And if we *are* being led somewhere, I'm sure we'll get there in one piece."

Reil grumbled. "I just don't like it, that's all."

Mir shook her head. "Me neither, but we can't leave Thel, and this is our best way down."

The turbolift hissed slowly to a stop. Mir drew her blaster. She wished she hadn't left Damon's pistols with him -- Mir's personal philosophy was that more firepower was always a *good* thing. "Weapons ready, people, we don't know what to expect."

They spent the next half hour picking through the rubble and decaying corridors of the temple. The place was silent aside from the occasional call for Thel, who had so far been non-responsive. Mir finally called for a halt at a branching corridor.

"Elayne, Tam, do either of you sense anything?" she asked wearily. Both of them shook their heads.

"I can't sense him," Elayne said. "He's not dead, but that's all I know."

"I don't sense anything either," Tam said. Then he frowned. "Do you guys smell something?"

Mir sniffed the air. "Eugh, what *is* that?" she exclaimed in disgust. "Smells like a Wookiee that hasn't showered in months."

Reil coughed. "Or a backed-up sewage system with a year's supply of dianoga."

"Why didn't we smell it before?" Elayne wondered. She glanced back at Tam, who stood completely still, his eyes wide and looking down the larger of the two corridors. "Tam? What's wrong?"

She was answered by an angry roar that shook the cavern. Tam drew his lightsaber and pointed it towards the creature that they could all see moving down the cavern towards them.

"*Stang!*" Mir swore. "What is *that!*?"

The creature was a scaly reptilian monstrosity with two heads and large membranous wings. It looked like the dragons one saw in cheesy old holovids, only live and much, much more real. It was easily fifteen meters tall, if not much larger. As it saw them, its twin heads slavered hungrily.

"Run or shoot?" Reil asked, his blaster wavering indecisively between heads. "*Run or shoot?*"

"Both!" Mir yelled, opening fire and sprinting backwards as she did so, Reil and Tam hot on her heels. Elayne wavered.

"We can't leave Thel!"

"There's more coming," Tam yelled. "Can't you sense them?"

Elayne shook her head, her lightsaber defiantly leveled at the beast. "I won't leave without my master!"

Run for the ships! Suddenly Thel's voice sounded in their heads. *None of you stand a chance against these things! Now run!*

"Thel!" Elayne cried. Reil grabbed her shoulder.

"C'mon! We've gotta move!"

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 5 May 2009 04:47 PM:

The darkness of the Sith temple blurred around them as they kept ahead of the Sith creature. Tam was leading the way, and when he reached the turbolift doors he pounded the summoning button repeatedly, as if doing so would make it come any faster. Mir, Elayne, and Reil watched the darkness behind them.

A pleasant ding heralded the turbolift's arrival, and they all piled in. None too soon, for the monstrous beast slammed against the wall outside.

"Up up up!!!" shouted Reil.

"I'm pushing it!" Tam shouted back. "It's not moving!"

"What do we do?"

In answer, the turbolift hummed as its energy cells hiccuped to life and lifted them through the shaft.

"Anybody know what that was about?" said Mir, keeping the frantic tone out of her voice.

"I'm not sure," said Elayne, "but it couldn't have come at a better time." She pointed at some point beyond and below their pod. "That hydra is right behind us."

"And it'll fit in the lift tube?"

"I think it's going to keep pushing until it *does* fit."

Below, the shaft echoed with the rumbles of crashing reptilian claws. The impacts echoed up the stone walls with destructive force.

"We're gonna make it," Tam said, more to convince himself than to reassure anyone else in the pod. He frantically pressed the up button some more.

Elayne continued staring at the floor. "If I remember correctly, Sith battle hydras are rather mindless, and rarely attack unless prompted to do so by the dark side of the Force."

"So, what," Reil asked, "should we start singing 'Happy Starbright' together?"

Tam felt a cold dread crystallize throughout his body. "What are you getting at, Elayne?"

"I'm saying that, if this beast is trying to attack us, somebody told it to..."

Thankfully, the turbolift doors opened, and everyone quickly rushed out of it. Elayne led the way, guiding everyone else through the labyrinthine corridors. In the distance behind, they heard the hydra shred through the turbolift door.

"I don't want us to slow down at all to think about this," Reil panted, keeping up, "but aren't we still trapped down here? I mean, the stairway did kind of collapse, didn't it?"

This did prompt Tam to slow down. Scaling the staircase-turned-rockslide would take time, and in that time the Sith monster would certainly catch up to them. "Hey," he said, rushing to catch up, "I've got an idea..."

Posted by ij thompson on 5 May 2009 05:35 PM:

It wasn't really a proper bed. Just a mattress on the *Emigran's* cold decking, but Fi, Tey and Cali had felt it was best to get Damon in a resting position as quickly as possible.

"Is he gonna live?"

Fi turned to Cali, annoyed by the younger girl's callous question. "His breathing and pulse seem pretty regular, and his temperature's okay. I'm no doctor..." She paused, remembering Luis, lost somewhere behind them in the sands of Tatooine. "But yeah, I'd say he's gonna live."

This seemed to satisfy the teen, who crossed the mess area and plopped down into one of the lounge chairs, her frilly dress bowing outward comically. "Righty-o."

Fi thought for a second. "Tey," she began, fighting off a bad feeling and trying not to show it. "Maybe you should warm up the engines."

The Corellian nodded but didn't leave his place, leaning on a bulkhead. "Could do. Although if anybody's looking for us around here, the engine signature'll be quite the beacon."

"That's okay. If all goes according to plan, we'll be off this mudball shortly."

Tey grinned at her, unspokenly telegraphing the odds of things going 'according to plan'. Then he raised his hand in a friendly salute.

"Aye aye, skip."

Fi watched Tey retreat up the corridor, trying to sort out her thoughts and worries. Tam and the others were potentially fighting for their lives right now, and here she was, warming up the ship. It was the sensible thing, of course, but-

"He's nice."

"What?"

"Tey," Cali replied. "Nice guy. Took care of Bartok in a hurry, that's for sure. So did Reil. I'd have given him a cut."

Fi shook her head, bewildered. "A cut?"

Then she remembered. The money she and Cali had stolen on Ryloth, ten thousand or so, and quite possibly all the group had. Fi frowned, annoyed at being asked to think about such things. "We'll figure that out later."

"Then why are we lifting off?"

"We're not lifting off. We're warming up."

"Fi," Cali explained, as if to a child. "There are four people on this ship." Pausing, she looked down at Damon's unconscious form. "Three if you look at it. If we hang around here, that could turn into *nine*. And what does that leave you?"

Fi crossed the mess swiftly, stopping before the girl and pointing a finger into her face. "Cali, after all we've done for you, you'd better not be saying what I thi-

"Mir!"

The shout came from Damon, who had risen to a sitting position on the *Emigrant's* deck plating. "Damon," he shouted, "we're in trouble! Mir's in trouble!"

Fi studied the man, her blood turning to ice. "Damon... are you okay?"

Damon leapt upward, seizing Fi's arm in a painful grip. "We have to lift off... right now!"

"The other's aren't aboard!"

"They won't be, there's no way out, unless we *make* one."

Fi looked in Damon's eyes, trusted what she saw there. "Tey," she shouted up the corridor, "Take off!"

A pause. "You're sure?"

"Yes," she hollered back, as Damon somehow sprinted toward the gunwell. "Bring us over the temple!"

Posted by Corr Terek on 5 May 2009 09:49 PM:

It hurt to move. *Stars*, but it hurt. Not that that mattered right now. Mir and the others were in trouble, and Damon needed to help them. He ignored the pain and climbed into the gun turret, trying to clear his mind. This was going to require some precision shooting.

The *Emigrant* hummed to life and slowly rose from the ground. As the temple came into view, Damon carefully trained his sights on it. Then he calmed himself as best he could, ignoring the pain, ignoring Cali's shrill voice demanding to know what was going on, ignoring *everything*...except the Force.

The hydra wasn't too far behind them now. Mir had to hope that whatever Tam had in mind was going to work. The boy had always come through before, but still...

They reached the collapsed stairway, and Mir and Reil both leaped for the climbing pylons that the others had left behind for them. "Wait!" Tam yelled. "I think we should take cover." He gestured towards a nearby alcove.

"Are you crazy?" Reil yelled. "That thing's going to be here any minute!"

"I know," Tam said, "But so will they!"

Elayne looked up at the stone ceiling above them. "What are you--" Then she paused, as if realizing something. "Ah. Very clever." She glanced at the others. "I think we'd better listen to him."

Mir looked at Reil and shrugged. They wouldn't make it to the top before the hydra caught them anyway. Might as well spend her last moments following a boy's crazy plan. She ran over to the alcove and after a moment's hesitation Reil did the

same, cursing under his breath.

The hydra was nearly on top of them, and in the depths of the caverns Mir thought she could hear more of its' kind coming to join it. *Not good*. The ground was beginning to shake from the hydra's approach. "Tam?!"

The boy grinned at her. "It's okay! They made it!"

She was about to ask him what he was talking about when suddenly the ceiling above them fell apart in a blinding flash. She heard the heavy thump of a quad-turret as it chewed away at the rock between them and the sky, then suddenly the *Emigrant* dropped in through the starship-sized hole in the ceiling. It hovered a few feet above the ground, its boarding ramp open. Fi stood at the top of the ramp, gesturing them on. "Get aboard! Quickly!"

They sprinted across the rubble, leaping aboard the ship one by one. The hydra came bursting into the far side of the room and roared angrily upon seeing that its prey was escaping. The quad-turret trained on the beast and spat blaster bolts at it, but the attack only seemed to anger the monster.

Mir was the last to board. "Get us back to the *Viper*!" she yelled. "We don't have much time, and two ships are better than one!"

Damon sank weakly back in the turret as the *Emigrant* rose swiftly from the temple. Mir and the others were safe for the moment, and that was all that mattered. Suddenly, he felt very tired...

Mir and Elayne gently pulled Damon from the cockpit. "Is he alright?" Tam asked anxiously.

Mir checked him over. "He shouldn't have been up and moving, but he doesn't seem any worse." She glanced at him. "Elayne and I will take the *Viper* -- we don't have time to move Damon over there. We'll meet up with you guys once we're clear of this place, alright?"

Tam nodded. "I'll tell the others."

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 5 May 2009 10:06 PM:

Mir and Elayne rushed aboard the *Nova Viper* as the *Emigrant* hovered nearby. Mir dropped into the pilot's seat and powered up the ship, Elayne watching out the viewport for the first dragon.

"Two minutes to lift-off." Mir said briefly while her hands flew over the controls, "I hope these things can't follow us into space."

After what seemed like an eternity the ship shuddered and Elayne could feel it leaving the surface, they'd made it. She checked the ship's sensors, the *Emigrant* had left the ground as well. As they started rising up, approaching space the ship shuddered violently and stopped moving.

Mir checked the sensors, "There's one on us and more closing in, take over the controls while I try to shoot it off!" She lifted herself out of the chair and ran for the nearer of the *Viper's* turrets. Elayne took the pilot's seat as the ship shook again and some of the consoles shot out sparks and went blank.

"Right, I'm dressed in." Mir's voice came over the speaker. Before she was done talking the ship started rising smoothly again.

"That was fast." Elayne commented.

"That wasn't me." Mir replied.

Elayne frowned. "*Emigrant*, was that you?"
 "Nope." Came Reil's voice, "We were coming to shoot it and it just stopped, it's just sitting there."
 A chill ran over Elayne as she realized what that meant. "It's Thel, he's down on the planet! We have to go back!"

Athelias could feel his companion's anxiety, but his main focus was holding the creature, or rather holding the Sith spirit inside the creature. It was so old, so strong, he wouldn't be able to hold it much longer. Why were they staying there? The creature wasn't attacking them and more were coming, so why didn't they leave. They were trying to save him, the realization hitting Athelias was almost enough to make him lose control of the spirit, the creatures were coming to kill all of them and they were waiting to try and save him. For a long time after his master had been killed he had wondered why his master had told him to leave, he could have helped, could have saved him. Now he understood, he was a Jedi, he could not allow anyone to risk their lives in a futile attempt to save his. *Run, run for your lives*, he sent it out to them desperately, to all of them, to Damon, to Elayne, to Tam, to whoever could hear him, the other creatures were almost there, there was no time left. Right before he felt himself losing control of the spirit the *Nova Viper* turned and shot off into space. The spirit broke free and with a fierce cry the creature dove at him. Thel stood his ground and locked eyes with the creature, as its claws dug into him and its tail lashed him he thought he heard a voice. "I'm coming master." He replied.

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 6 May 2009 03:45 PM:

Tam watched out the viewport as Gamorr shrank into a pale green disc. Athelias may have been a Jedi, and thus he may have thought he knew what was best for Tam, but he'd sacrificed himself so everyone else could escape. Tam's father always used to say that anybody who would do that was worth knowing.

And Tam had tried to kill him...

"Hey." It was Tey, walking towards him. The Corellian clutched a datapad in his hand. "I realize things might be a little sensitive, what with Thel being left behind and all, but I was up front talking with Reil, and we were trying to decide where we should head next."

Tam smiled wanly, stepped away from the viewport and glanced at Fi. The woman was seated by Damon, and returned Tam's gaze with a shrug.

"As long as it's away from Gamorr, or anything Sithy, I'm happy."

"The reason I ask," said Tey, "was that I was reading over this datapad we got from that Kuati spy. I wanted to follow some leads, and I think the first place to look is Rothana."

"What's on Rothana?"

"Rothana Heavy Engineering is a subsidiary of KDY, plus it's close by."

"KDY," said Tam, "that's Imperial, isn't it?"

"Yeah, so maybe you'll just want to drop me off there and continue on to wherever you'd like. But I've got a feeling about this," he held up the datapad, "and I want to follow it up."

Fi shrugged again, and Tam did as well. "What do Mir and Elayne have to say about it?"

Posted by Ice Hawk on 6 May 2009 06:49 PM:

Reil sat alone in the cockpit, as the **Emigrant** broke through the atmosphere, and the view changed from the blue sky's of

Gamorr, to the darkness of space, and the light of a thousand burning stars. Reil was grateful for this temporary solitude; it gave him time to ponder the implications of the trail of wreckage piling up behind him.

Athelias was simply the latest victim in a long line of people who had been left behind to die fighting so Reil could save his own skin. Tohle, and the crew of the **Mercy**; Luis, back on Tatooine; Tonto, Taryn, and Koro on Ryloth; and now the Jedi. *I'm only alive because other's have been willing to die for me. What happens when I've got nothing left to sacrifice?*

Reil was saved from continuing down this line of inquiry by the sounding of the comm. For one awful moment Reil was worried that he'd have to deal with yet another angry flight control center, and was greatly relieved when it was Mir's voice instead.

"We'll be clear of gravity well in a couple of minutes. It doesn't look like anything's following us. Where do we go from here?"

Reil keyed the comm to reply.

"Tey want's us to head to Rothana."

"Rothana? Isn't that an Imperial world? Why does Tey want to go there?"

"We found some Kuat stuff on board before we got to Gamorr, a datapad. Can't access the files though. Tey want's to investigate further."

"So Tey want's us to go into the lion's den just to satisfy his curiosity?"

"I suppose. . . We should really discuss this as a group. I'm plotting a short jump away from the planet, we'll talk more once we're safely away from this rock."

Posted by Corr Terek on 7 May 2009 02:43 PM:

"I'm fine with dropping Tey and whoever else off at Rothana," Mir said. "But we can't stay long. The Empire almost definitely has people looking for us."

"I'm not asking for backup," Tey replied, shrugging. "If any of you want to come along, that's fine. If not, that's fine too." He smirked. "The galaxy's a small place -- I'm sure we'll run into each other again."

They were seated around the central table in the *Emigrant's* crew lounge. Athelias's death was still fresh on everyone's minds -- Elayne and Tam had both felt him die, with the former taking it especially hard. Evidently she'd grown very attached to Thel during her brief apprenticeship.

"We'll accompany you as far as Rothana," Mir replied. "After that, I'm not sure where we're headed. Damon will probably have a better idea."

"Speaking of Damon, how is he?" Reil asked. Fi looked at Mir.

"He's still unconscious, but we think he's going to be okay," she said. "Would you like to see him?"

Fi led her back to the makeshift infirmary they'd created for Damon. "It's not much, but it's the best we have. Tam tells me there's a better medical bay aboard the *Viper*."

"Yes," Mir murmured absently. "We'll move him over there as soon as we can." She moved to Damon's side, gently touching his hand. "I'm sorry we couldn't get you there sooner."

Fi watched her. "You really care for him, don't you?"

Mir's tail twitched. "What do you mean?"

Fi shrugged. "Just, the way you act around him, the way you look at him when you don't think anyone will notice..."

"You're imagining things," Mir told her, trying to keep her surprise from showing. "I'm just concerned about him. He's my captain, after all."

"It's nothing to be ashamed of," Fi pointed out.

Mir growled. "I'm *not* ashamed of it! If anything, he's more likely to be ashamed of me!" She winced. *Didn't mean to say that out loud.* "Guess there's no point in pretending anymore, huh?"

"You've fallen for him, haven't you?"

"Don't tell him," Mir begged. "Please?" Fi blinked.

"Your secret's safe with me, but...why not?" Fi shrugged. "I don't care what the Empire says -- if you love him and he loves you, why shouldn't you both be happy?"

"It's not that," Mir sighed. "There's a lot Damon doesn't know about me, and..." she hesitated.

"You're afraid of what he'll think if he finds out," Fi finished. She looked at Damon. "Look, I don't know him as well as you do. But Damon's a good guy -- that much is obvious. Give him a chance and he might surprise you."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 8 May 2009 11:04 PM:

"What are you ladies talking about?"

Fi and Mir turned to look at Tam. "Nothing."

He came up with something to fill the silence. "We went into hyperspace a minute ago."

"We know," said Fi, a smile of mischief gracing her lips. "Remember when Reil announced it over the intercom?"

Tam chagrined. "Yeah."

"Look," Mir said, "I don't think we're going to be staying on Rothana. It just doesn't seem safe."

"I think that's the general consensus," said the boy. "None of us are interested in going anywhere inside the Empire's jurisdiction."

Mir made a noise somewhere between a snort and a snarl. *"Everything's* inside their jurisdiction."

"Well, somewhere they won't try to look for us."

Fi offered, "What about Hutt space? It might be rough, but I may be able to drum up some work for us. *Good* work," she added, at the glare from Mir.

"We're going the wrong way for Hutt space."

"So what's in the other direction?"

Staring at the ceiling, Mir considered the options. "Let's see... Roon? Ryloth..."

"We're not going back to Ryloth."

"Tatooine?"

"We're not going back there, either."

"Wait," said Tam, "so we're backtracking?"

"Pretty much, yeah."

Just great. Here they were, on the run from the Empire, and after camping out in the Haunted Ruins of Doom they were headed back the way they had come. But as he thought about it, it was probably the last thing anybody tracking them would expect. "So what's past that?"

"Past the Corellian Run? Not much. Socorro's not too far off, or we could swing around to the Ando system..."

Tam looked at his girlfriend. "Any of those sound promising to you?"

Aboard the ISD Interrogator

A fist slammed against a console, and Nolaan jumped perceptibly.

"We've heard nothing from the *Hunter*, nor the *Oxonic*. And

now my operative from Kuat has gone silent as well."

"Yes, my lord."

Tremayne examined the panel he had just dented, brushing it with a light finger as if it was merely sullied with a trace of dust. "If things continue in this direction I will have to take matters into my own hands."

Nolaan had no idea what to say, and for just such emergencies he had an appropriate response: "Yes, my lord."

"Alert communications of my imminent arrival. I have a message to send."

Posted by Ris on 9 May 2009 05:22 PM:

Arrival at Rebel Base, Derra IV

"Well, at least your clearance codes still worked." Drend noted as their ship cleared the last marker, landing in an enclosed courtyard at this secret rebel base in a temperate forest. Derra IV wasn't exactly a Vacation spot, but it was livable.

Cin was wearing her flightsuit, and cradled her damaged helmet. "Yeah. Here's the welcoming committee," she said, gazing at the armed troopers. "Let's go." She thought she recognized 1 or 2 of the officers beyond them. As she headed for the ramp, Cin shifted her helmet, hoping someone recognized the unique markings.

There were four rebel troopers, not exactly at combat attention, but they were alert. Two officers stood behind them, one looked very stiff, the other just looked kind of annoyed. Cin swallowed, uneasy, but she had learned as a girl how to conceal any reaction beneath a pleasant veneer.

As Drend, Cin, Santee, and Razzle came down from the ramp, the very stiff man approached first. "I am Captain Robeau and this is Major Leears, welcome to Derra IV." His voice was clipped, precise, almost Imperial.

The Major spoke up at this point, "Flight Officer Cinowyn Antilles... you were reported dead. As were you Mr. Morevo." He looked back at Santee "I have no idea who you are." His voice was softer, yet, more authoritative. Santee looked abashed.

Cin responded in an almost regal tone, "Thank you, Captain, Major. May I make known Master Nicholas Santee, administrator of Santee Holdings LLC, late of Cloud City. Both Master Santee and Capt. Morevo have aided me greatly."

Drend gave Cin a quizzical look, wondering where that tone came from. Santee looked almost mollified at his introduction, if not humbled. Razzle tweetled something along the lines of "What about me!?"

"And of course, my droid, Razzle."

"Luckily, your existence was provided to us by a new recruit who can corroborate your stories up to a certain point."

Cin barely managed to keep her expression under control. *Not her!* she thought before realizing there was no way Sascha could have gotten to Derra. But she had no idea who else it might be. She looked from Drendar to Santee, very briefly, before turning her eyes back to the two officers.

Posted by Ice Hawk on 11 May 2009 02:37 AM:

Cali found Reil sitting in the hyperspace illuminated cockpit, alone, hunched over a console, eating something. . . incredibly unappetizing out of the pot he cooked it in.

"So you're taking your meals in here now?"

Reil looked up from the screen he had been viewing.

"Oh. It's you. . ."

"You were expecting someone else?"

Reil shrugged and turned back to his console.
"I wasn't expecting anybody. I figured everyone would be with Damon."
"Then why aren't you? It's not like the ship needs to be piloted through hyperspace."
Reil took another big spoonful of his meal before answering.
"I don't really know Damon that well, he's Tey's friend, I think."
Cali sat in the co-pilot seat beside Reil.
"Tey's not there either."
"Yeah well, he's prolly got important stuff to do, getting ready for Rothana and whatnot. Its gona be dangerous down there."
Reil waved the spoon a bit as if signaling a close to the subject.
Cali sat silent for a moment, watching the swirling blue of the hyperspace around them.
"It's pretty."
Reil grunted.
"You get used to it."
Cali shook her head.
"I don't think I could ever get used to this after seeing only sand all my life. This is so much better than Tatooine."
Reil grinned.
"Having spent a full 24 hours on Tatooine, I can tell you without a shred of doubt, that short of the inside of an imperial detention block, everything in the galaxy is better than Tatooine."
Cali grinned, and hesitated, then sheepishly spoke up again.
"About Tatooine. . . Thanks. . ."
Reil turned and looked at Cali quizzically.
"What for?"
"Well. . . for Bartok. . . You and Tey set me free."
Reil suddenly became very interested in his food.
"Yeah well, I had my own reasons for wanting Bartok dead, 'Sides, you did me one helava favour first, takin' me in with Luis and Fi."
Atleast I think you did. . . Fate's doing it's best to prove me wrong. Reil thought to himself silently.
"So what are you doing up here all alone?"
Reil gestured to the screen.
"Looking at the nav map, figuring out where to go next."
Cali turned to get a better look.
"The other's were talking about that around Damon. Where did you have in mind?"
Reil pointed to the large swirl of stars on the edge of the Galaxy.
"We take the Rishi Maze all the way to Rishi, and hide out there for a while. No one would find us there, and it's not far from Rothana, should we need to pick Tey up or something."
Cali leaned over to get a better look, and Reil had to move his food from his lap as Cali took up all the space in front of him.
"Oh. . . What's it like?"
Reil wanted to shrug, but he was pinned to his chair by the young girl.
"Dunno. I've never been out this far."
Cali moved back into her seat.
"Hmph. And I thought you knew everything. Least that's the impression I got from the way you talk."
Reil laughed, and returned to his meal.
"Galaxy's a big place. Even one so knowledgeable as myself has gaps in my learning. You'll learn that soon 'nough."
Cali eyed what Reil was eating and shuddered.
"What is that mess anyway?"
Reil looked down at his meal.

"Ready-Ration soup."
"So you're eating wet Ready-Rations, basically?"
Reil took another spoonful of the disgusting medley.
"Yeah, that's it, essentially."
"That's disgusting. I could have made you something better."
Reil grinned.
"So you've said, I've yet to sample any of your fine wares however, and so I've been forced to rely on my own crude interpretations."
Cali took the pot from Reil.
"Well, fine, I'll see what I can do. First I'm gona go jettison this before a dianoga forms inside it."
Cali and Reil made their way back towards the galley.

Posted by Ris on 11 May 2009 12:51 PM:

Cinowyn is Debriefed (pt. 1)

Major Lears looked to the young woman, then to a security officer "Take her gear." Then to Cin, "You're with me, you'll be debriefed by Colonel Cracken."
Captain Robeau looked to Drend and Santee. "You two are with me."
The major looked to Cin again after seeing Drend and Santee being led off and said, "Now come along, milady." This was still within earshot of Drend.
Col. Cracken was Intel, that was all Cin knew about him. The higher-ups were certainly interested in this. Cin handed the security man her helmet and the old duffel she had found to stow her life support gear and other accessories. Razzle tweeted a question and Cin told him to follow the security man. The droid hooted softly, but Cin shook her head. Beneath his helmet the trooper hid a smile, then tapped Cin's arm as Leears called to her. "My Lady? The Major is waiting, ma'am."
"It'll be fine, Raz. I'll be fine too. See ya later." She patted the R2's dome, then turned back to Major Leears, giving Drend and Santee a wave.
Leears added to the security man, "Take the droid to the Colonel's techs, then take the gear to Life Support. Leears, although clearly getting impatient with her, did not reprimand Cin, just gestured for her to walk beside him. "This, way, Lady. I'm sorry to hear about what happened to the rest of your flight," he noted as they walked the corridor.
"Thank you, Major," Cin replied quietly. Hearing that she had been reported KIA and now Leear's condolence confirmed her belief that she was the only survivor of Nightfall's Three Flight. Cin said nothing more, just walked beside the older officer.
At the end of the next corridor, they took a lift downward, exited and stopped outside a double door, the kind that usually led to a conference room. Leears palmed the pad next to it.
Inside was a man with rather blazing red hair, in a uniform identifying him as Intelligence, his rank was that of a Colonel. "My name is Colonel Cracken, and you must be the late Lady Cinowyn Antilles of Alderaan."
"Yessir, ah...no, sir. I mean..." Cin's face flushed before she got her composure back. "Ah, Flight Officer Antilles reporting, Colonel."
"Yes, please take a seat." He moved around the room. "Please relate the events that led from your arrival at the RZ to you arriving here at Derra, I will stop you to ask questions as you relate." The man's manner put Cin at ease and she took the nearest seat. She wished, she wasn't wearing the flightsuit; even unzipped halfway, it was very warm. But it was the only

"uniform" she had and Cin had felt civvies were out of the question, under the circumstances.

"I remember reversion--but the time seemed off. We were outside system W471, the RZ. I don't think the ship--*Puddlejumper*--was there. I think...we were in some kind of furball. I'm sorry...it's all real foggy, like recalling a dream. Nothing's real clear between reversion and when I found myself on Drendar's ship."

"Drendar?" Cracken shifted in his seat. "I take it you've gotten to know the young shipmaster?" He then waved it away.

"Yessir, well, we worked real closely..." Cin started, then stopped at Cracken's handwave. She had meant to call Drendar, "Captain Moreveo" and wished she had.

"So as far as you know you were immediately pounced upon by the enemy, no warning, correct?"

"As far as I know, sir." Cin took a deep breath, concentrated, trying to recall anything else. Nine, he had said something. What? Just one more detail came to her, finally. "I told Lieutenant Tango, our Flight Leader, we had dropped out too early--we weren't in hyperspace as long as that leg of the jump should have taken. I was a navigator, I **knew** what I was talking about. And we didn't drop out quite as close to the system as we planned. He--didn't have time to reply, a ship approached then. Lt. Tango said it had to be *Puddlejumper*. Then that it wasn't...I'm sorry, don't recall seeing what the interloper really was. I think that's when the fighting started. Then I woke up on *Puddlejumper*."

"We analyzed Captain Moreveo's ship very closely with sensors as it approached, is it everything we understand it to be, or is there more to its technological specifications than we know?"

Lin Cheshire: Cin wasn't too surprised at the topic jump. While the original briefing had been vague, she knew from what Drendar had said that the Alliance was interested in his ship specifically, and she suspected it was the hyperdrive. "I don't know that much about it, except it's faster than most vessels of that type. And it seemed pretty temperamental. Razzle, my R2, worked on it a lot. You'll get better answers downloaded from him than I can give you."

"Indeed, we are doing a memory dump right now." Cin had expected that. He looked over a datapad. "After Captain Moreveo rescued you from EVA, where did you three go?"

The way he phrased it, implying that Razzle was part of the group, not just her equipment, made Cin like Cracken better.

"Dren--Captain Moreveo--and I agreed he would help me get back to the Alliance and he suggested Citadel Station as a first stop because he was worried about my concussion. He knew someone there who could treat me & wouldn't ask what happened--and would keep quiet about it afterwards."

"Yes--one Doctor Dino'slussevi, a Twi'lek, formerly of Citadel Station's medlab facility." He held up the datapad showing Dino's face and some raw biographical data. "And what happened while you were on the station?"

We do have some good Intel people, Cin thought.

She answered, "Yes, that's him. I was going to try to contact a cell on Citadel--but we had to leave in a hurry. The Captain's cousin, Danel Morevo, recognized him and sent his agents after us. So we headed for Cloud City. I knew there was supposed to be one of our agents there. It took some time, and at the same time, Capt. Morevo was trying to find parts for the ship. Mr. Santee offered them in exchange for helping him contact the Rebels--he didn't know who I was at the time."

Cin didn't like what she had to tell Cracken next--it was sounding bad enough that they had confided in Nicholas Santee,

she thought. "I made contact with Scholar. She was Santee's secretary, as her cover." She looked at Cracken, to see if he reacted at all. "She said she could let her handler know I was there with my 'mission objective.' I also informed Mr. Santee and arranged a meeting of all of us--except Razzle who was guarding the ship. So that meeting was our part of the deal for the parts. Only...it didn't go as we expected. When the two of us arrived, Scholar had taken down Mr. Santee. We fought but she...took us prisoner. Double agent." His voice was bitter, angry. "Razzle's got the proof too." She recounted the whole fight and escape. "Stupid bantha-cow," she concluded. Cin wished she had left that last unsaid.

Cracken's eyes shifted for a moment when she mentioned Scholar. "Scholar has been dead for three weeks, we didn't find out until today. Who you met was someone using her identity. Apparently she is quite the skilled torturer." He let that last bit kind of roll off the tongue as if they were lucky to escape. "So, you, Captain Moreveo, Mr. Santee, and your droid, managed to make it here based on information your R2 unit gleaned from the Imperial agent's computers, interesting."

Cin's face went pale at Cracken's news about Scholar. Her hands gripped the table. She stared at Cracken for long moments. "Damn her..." she muttered.

"Indeed."

"The Imps know about Derra, then," Cin whispered. She felt chilled all of a sudden.

"As far as we know, the Imperials have made no use of this information. They likely think it's just a staging point, or a rendezvous, but not the main base."

Somehow, that didn't make Cin feel much better, but she kept silent, waiting for Cracken to continue with the debrief.

"Did anything else happen while you were on Cloud City?"

Posted by ij thompson on 12 May 2009 04:51 PM:

*"He'll grab for your credchip,
and let slip your indiscretions
to your favourite gal,
That's My Pal!"*

The group sang raucously, if mostly tunelessly. Fi, on borrowed mandoviol, was currently leading the group through a bawdy rendition of *That's My Pal!*, aimed squarely at the man of the hour, Tey Spires.

Fi wasn't sure when this had turned into a party. The *Emigrant* and *Nova Viper* had touched down in a small, isolated logging town on Rothana, on what had turned out to be an absolutely splendid early spring afternoon. A quick scout around had yielded a charming tavern of old-style stone and wood and, fancying a send-off meal for their Corellian friend, the group had piled in.

And then the drinks had started flowing. It was perhaps a little early in the day for decent folks to be drinking, but they'd hit the dead spot between the inn's lunch and dinner crowds, and had the place to themselves. Now, they were swinging mugs in the air, picking at leftovers, and bellowing half-remembered lyrics at their friend.

Tey, for his part, endured the attention with good humour, not even bothered by the cloth napkin that someone had fashioned into a crown, and placed atop his head. Fi laughed as she sang, and brought the group around to the tune's final verse.

*"He's a dog, he's a dunce,
and he's orn'rier than a one-horned Gotal,*

but That's My Pal!"

Fi bowed amid cheers and laughter, motioning to Tey, who did the same, makeshift crown falling from his head. The man swiped a mug from the table, held it in the air, and cleared his throat. "Having now heard you all sing," he announced, "I hope this is the last I'll be seeing of any of you." Dodging friendly jeers and thrown objects, he downed the mug's contents.

Fi stood the inn's mandoviol against a wall, and resumed her place beside Tam. She cast her eyes fondly around the room, wondering how a couple of drinks could sometimes make a person see others more clearly than they normally could. There was Damon, trading words with Tey and trying not to laugh too much, pain and pleasure fighting across his face. Next to him sat Mir, keeping a respectable distance away, but smiling fondly at her companion.

And there was Zealos Reil, deftly sneaking bites of food off of other peoples plates and talking sideways with Cali, in that ridiculous dress of hers, who sat much too near the pilot, pressing against him as he fought not to notice. *There's trouble brewing there*, Fi thought, *but if Reil can show Cali that there's some good in this galaxy, I'm all for it.*

And then there was Tam. Tam, with a pleased and slightly-dazed smile on his face. He wasn't old enough to be served any of the liquors, but everyone at the table had been sneaking him sips of this and that, and he'd done his best to look like he enjoyed their flavour. Now, he held Fi's hand under the table, and rested his forehead clumsily against hers. "I love this place!"

Fi did, too. The inn, the town, the whole countryside was just so charming, so *decent*, it really did make one never want to leave. *So we'll stay!* Fi thought sarcastically to herself, *Me and Tam! I can work here at the inn until I'm old and grey, and I'm sure there must be a great school for Tam around!*

She shook the unpleasant thought from her mind. *Can't I just enjoy something for one minute?*

She lifted Tam's face toward hers, looked into his beautiful eyes, and mouthed three words silently. Tam mouthed them back. She kissed him warmly, ignoring the applause and catcalls of the others.

"Alright, break it up," Tey commanded. "This is my party, and I've gotta get outta here before I get so drunk I forget why I came!"

There was murmured assent, and everyone rose. Fi plonked down enough of the stolen Ryloth booty to more than pay for the meal, and surprisingly, Cali didn't seem to mind. The group shambled out into the blinding daylight, pleased to see that the afternoon was still gorgeous. Sunlight bounced off of giant, white-capped mountains, and the air around them was filled with the sounds and scent of melting snow.

"Sure we can't bring you to the city, Tey?" Reil offered.

"And get arrested? No thanks," Tey declined. "There's a rail station nearby - I should be able to slip into town pretty easily."

Damon stepped forward and shook the man's hand. "If you need anything... I mean *anything*, I know you'll find a way to contact us."

"Careful what you wish for," Tey joked, and waved at the man's companion. "Bye, Mir."

Suddenly Cali threw herself at Tey, gripping him in a fierce hug. "Thank you for everything!"

"Hey no sweat," Tey replied, graciously disconnecting himself from the girl. "Just make sure you do something with that freedom of yours."

Tam stepped forward, straightened. "May the Force be with you."

Tey looked back at the boy, his expression strange. "Likewise."

With a fond wave, the Corellian turned and sauntered down the quiet street, disappearing behind a building. The others marched back up the road toward the ships, visible in the distance on their landing pad.

"Oh, blast!" Fi said, looking back toward the inn. "I forgot my pick!"

"For that instrument?" Cali asked. "Who cares? Get another one."

"You don't understand," Fi explained. "That's the pick I used when me and the band played at The Valorum!"

"I'll come with you," Tam announced dutifully.

"No, you should get that take-out back to Elayne," she explained, indicating the bag of hot food the boy carried, and its intended recipient aboard the *Nova Viper*. "I'll be right behind you guys!" She trotted back down the street, the others heading for the ships.

Fi entered the inn, walking stiffly past the small bandstand, past the table which was now being cleaned up by the inn's elderly owners. Past the other tables, past the kitchen and into the refresher. It was empty, and slightly cold, as one of the windows was wide open. Fi had known it would be.

Crying, Fi climbed up to the window and pulled herself through. Vision blurry with tears magnified by blinding daylight, she missed a handhold and fell out of the window, landing painfully in a puddle of freezing spring melt. She sat there, sobbing uncontrollably, until a hand grabbed her by the wrist and pulled her up to half-standing.

"I'm terrible!" Fi bawled, lost to misery. "I'm... I..."

"I don't have an opinion on that," Tey said. "Though I don't necessarily think you're doing the wrong thing, here. But if you don't get yourself together," he told her sternly, "you're not gonna last very long on your own."

Turning, the pair ran down the snowy hill toward the rail station.

"Tam," Elayne said. "there's a note for you in here."

Tam came forward and took the folded paper that Elayne had pulled from the food container. As he unfolded it, he already knew what it said.

I'm sorry.

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 12 May 2009 05:53 PM:

Blankly, Tam watched as Elayne opened the box of food. He didn't respond when she paused, a forkful of noodles hanging from her mouth, and asked what it said.

Instead he got to his feet and walked for the boarding ramp.

"Tam," Elayne said, "what happened?"

The boy paused at the hatch. "You're a Jedi, aren't you?"

"*Tam!*" she shouted, and followed him out of the ship. "Tam, wait!"

Mir was helping Damon walk up to the ramp when Tam exited the *Nova Viper*. The gunslinger straightened carefully. "What's going on?"

"I gave him this note from Fi, and he turned completely different, in the Force I mean. It's like a hurricane started up inside him."

Mir's face went slack with recognition. "She took off!"

"Do you think she went with Tey?" Elayne posited. "Do you think they had a... you know, a thing?"

At that Tam spun around, and everyone present could swear

that actual lightning sparked from his eyes. "You will *not* say that again!"

Damon put a hand up to forestall anything more from the boy. "Okay, Tam, take it easy. We'll go find her. Together."

"Uh," said Elayne, "no we won't."

"What?" Many people said the word, but it was Tam's voice who carried the promise of poison.

"Tey was right. Rothana is not a safe place. We landed here, on the outskirts, so we could avoid the mainstream Imperial eye. We've said goodbye to Tey, and apparently to Fi as well-- "

"*Schutta!!!*" bellowed Tam, and he pushed past Damon and Mir to begin his search. But he paused, trying to catch his breath. His throat had tightened inexplicably, as if some invisible hand was slowly squeezing the life out of him.

He spun around, and as his vision began to tunnel he saw Elayne's hand raised toward him. He extended his own sensibilities, drawing on the Force to throw all of his hatred at the Jedi woman. How *dare* she!!! But when he pushed out the fountain of anger nothing happened.

"Elayne!" shouted Damon. "Stop it!" Mir added her voice to the protest as well.

But Tam heard none of it. As Elayne dismissed their arguments and ordered them to round up Reil and Cali so they could all leave Rothana, the only thing Tam did was collapse to the ground.

An hour ago, there was laughter, and camaraderie. An hour ago, he and Fi had been holding hands. An hour ago, Tam was thinking about their future together, and he had the impression that she was as well. But now?

Now...

Now...

Posted by Corr Terek on 12 May 2009 11:57 PM:

"Dammit!" Mir swore, her eyes blazing. "He's just a kid!"

"And if I had let him run free, he'd have gotten us all caught by the Empire," Elayne shot back. "I don't know about you, but I'm not going back. Not ever."

"Tam is an ally, and more importantly he's our friend," Damon said, his voice low. "You had no right to do that to him."

"I didn't want to," Elayne replied. "But it was the only way."

"Was it?" Mir asked. "Did you even *try* to come up with a better idea than 'choke him into unconsciousness'?" She snorted. "Just like Vader."

She stepped back. "We're wasting time. Elayne, get Tam inside." She caught Damon's eye. "You can handle getting the ship ready to go, right?"

Damon nodded, but Elayne's face was perplexed. "Where are *you* going?"

"I'm gonna go find Fi," Mir growled. "She and I need to talk."

As the Farghul stalked off, Damon looked at Elayne. "In the meantime, you and I are going to have a talk of our own."

Posted by ij thompson on 13 May 2009 09:13 AM:

Clean break.

The railcar ran soundlessly across the forested terrain, virtually motionless to the passengers inside. Fi rested her head against the window, weary from grief and strained nerves.

Clean break.

It wasn't how she would have liked to handle it, but there was really no other option. She loved Tam. Tam loved her. Tam was also a kid. And, potentially, a Jedi.

All this was nothing new to Fi. She'd wrestled with these very issues almost since she'd known the boy. First, she'd wanted to protect him, shelter him. It had soon become clear how little protection he needed. She'd wanted to be his friend, but that was a farce. Calling it 'friends' was a gross over-simplification. She and Damon, she and Reil were friends. And Tey, who rode along somewhere in one of the train's other cars. *No sense in both of us getting nabbed, if the heat comes down*, he'd said.

Clean break.

Tam needed to grow up. And he couldn't, or wouldn't, if he always had her distracting him, never looked beyond her to see what wonders the galaxy had to offer. At least, that's what she thought. Fi was no mind-reader, but even if her worries were false, her guilt was very, very real.

He'll have to hate me now, she supposed, *they all will*. She looked morosely out at the passing trees. *I guess I can live with that*.

As her eyes became heavy, a single tear travelled down Fi's cheek, to land on the base of the window.

Clean break. Clean...

"...Break. Terminate ex-urban link N-19," the soothing, automated woman's voice intoned. "Jynton. This tram departs in thirty minutes."

Fi snapped awake, looked blearily around at the smattering of passengers leaving the car. With two thousand stolen credits, one hidden blaster, and the clothes on her back, Fiola Shaku leaped from the car.

Posted by Ice Hawk on 13 May 2009 03:48 PM:

"Now what in the hell is going on here?"

Reil and Cali made it back to the ships in time to nearly be run off the path by Mir as she stormed back towards the tavern, and to find Damon and Elyane carrying an unconscious Tam towards the Nova Viper. Nobody spoke for a while, then finally Elayne tried to take charge.

"Tam is unconscious, we're putting him onboard the *Nova Viper*. It has the best med-bay."

"What happened to him? And where's Mir going? We need to get out of here. . ."

Damon lowered his eyes, and spoke.

"Mir's gone to get Fi."

Cali spoke up.

"She's not back yet?"

Elayne, anxious to be offworld, threw caution to the wind.

"She's not coming back. She left a note, she ditched us."

Reil stood there stunned for a moment.

"Wait, what?"

"She's gone. There's no point in dancing around the subject. She left us, so we should forget about her and get moving to somewhere safe."

Reil stood there for a moment, taking it all in. Then he cleared his throat and began to speak slowly.

"So then, what happened to Tam?"

Elayne looked at Reil coolly.

"He reacted badly. He had to be restrained."

"Is that a fact?"

Reil's hand dropped to rest on his blaster.

"Did he start foaming at the mouth? Was he waving his lightsword all over the place? Did he have a blaster?"

Elayne's eyes narrowed.

"He was dangerously emotional, and acting irrational. He

wanted to put us all in danger by going back for Fi."

Reil blinked in disbelief.

"He was emotional?," Reil paused for a moment, then he exploded, "OF COURSE HE WAS FRELLING EMOTIONAL! Our friend, his girlfriend, has taken off on her own, and he wanted to after her, so you beat him into a coma!?"

Elayne said nothing, so Reil continued.

"And now Mir's gone to do exactly what Tam wanted, and you didn't even try to stop her, did you? I guess you're limited to restraining emotional children. . ."

Reil drew his blaster now, but he didn't point it at anyone.

"I think you guys should leave Tam with me. Your med-bay is probably real fancy, but I think Tam would be better off with the people who didn't put him there. . ."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 13 May 2009 04:47 PM:

Damon held up his hands. "Listen, this was all Elayne's doing. She acted unilaterally."

"And you *let* her," Reil said. "Look, I don't want to kick up a nest of viper-wasps, but we've really gotta get our act together here. Put Tam on the *Emigrant*, and I'll put away my blaster, and we can talk all this out..."

Slowly, the world came back into focus for Tam. Fi sat over him, looking worried. She'd come back!!!

"I thought I'd lost you." His words were slurred, but his joy and relief was evident.

"Me?" she said. "We thought maybe we'd lost *you*."

What happened? Elayne. Elayne had stopped him with the Force; *choked* him. Tam's mind spun anew with the ramifications of the Jedi's actions. Why had she stopped him? Was she really that afraid of the Imperial presence on Rothana? Or was there something else? Was there something that she and Fi had agreed upon?

But no, if she had known what Fi was going to do she wouldn't have acted so surprised at his response to her note. Her note of *two karking words*...

But Fi had returned, hadn't she? Perhaps she truly was sorry. Tam let a sarcastic smile shape his words. "I guess you just couldn't resist me..."

Fi's face crinkled. "Uhh... what?"

Tam sat up, the better to gaze on his beloved. But she was gone, replaced instantaneously by Cali. "Oh..."

So she *was* gone. Tam was no expert on such things, but as he looked at the chrono on the terminal of the room he now recognized as the *Emigrant*, he surmised that Fi could potentially be on a passenger ship and not even on Rothana any more.

Cali fidgeted in her chair. "Look, everyone's outside. Now that you're up I'll go tell them."

"I'll come with you..."

Posted by Corr Terek on 13 May 2009 09:46 PM:

"All I'm saying is that we should let Tam decide who he wants to be with," Damon was saying. "If he wants to be with any of us at all."

Mir was silent. She had managed to track Fi to a local railcar station, but by the time she'd reached the station Fi had already left. And Mir knew all too well that she couldn't follow her into the city without risking discovery for all of them. *I'm sorry, Tam*, she thought. *I tried*.

There was a low cough from the infirmary. They looked up to see Cali standing in the doorway. "Hey, you guys, he's awake."

Damon and Reil both stood uncomfortably. Elayne shifted nervously, obviously bothered by the reaction she had provoked. Mir went over to Tam, who had followed Cali into the room.

"Tam," she said in relief. "We thought we might lose you."

"Where's Fi?"

Mir closed her eyes. "I'm sorry, Tam. I tried to find her, but she was already gone."

Tam seemed to take the news well, but Damon was watching the boy closely and saw the pain in his eyes. But Tam merely nodded. "I understand."

Of course he didn't, though. Damon could hardly blame him. *He* didn't understand it either. How could Fi do this? How could she have done this to Tam? To the rest of them?

Grunting, he pushed the questions aside. "Tam," he said slowly, cautiously, "We need to decide what we're going to do now. Mir tracked Fi to a railcar station, but we have no way of knowing where she was headed. And," he sighed, "if we try to find her we risk drawing the attention of the Empire to her and *Tey*."

"And we can't stay here on Rothana much longer," Reil added. "It's not safe for any of us."

"What do you have in mind?" Tam asked, sounding much more in control of himself than one would think. It was obvious he was shaken, and the way he kept glancing at Elayne -- who studiously avoided his eyes -- showed he hadn't forgotten what she'd done.

"I don't know what the others are thinking," Damon replied, "But Kenlan and Verik are still out there. Mir and I will try to find them if we can, and," he hesitated, "I would like for you to come with us."

Posted by Ris on 14 May 2009 12:05 AM:

Cinowyn is Debriefed (pt. 2)

"The Imps know about Derra, then," Cin whispered. She felt chilled all of a sudden. "As far as we know, the Imperials have made no use of this information. They likely think it's just a staging point, or a rendezvous, but not the main base." Somehow, that didn't make Cin feel much better, but she kept silent, waiting for Cracken to continue with the debrief. "Did anything else happen while you were on Cloud City?"

"Yes! The Imp's Station Chief was there. Taking a vacation. That's what saved us--from what happened to the real Scholar--I think. Sascha was so eager to show him what a good job she'd done that she just left us tied up while she reported. Love to have seen her face when she showed him an empty room."

"Our counterintelligence indicates that she has been let go from imperial intelligence."

"Let go off one of those landing platforms, I hope. Sorry, sir."

Cracken cracked the slightest smile. "While that is an amusing thought, I'm fairly certain that she'll show up again, her dossier indicates she is a rather capable agent. Did anything else happen while on the station?"

Cin looked down for a few moments. She had to tell Col. Cracken, it would come out at some point, and it would not be good if she hadn't leveled with him, she was sure. And it wasn't like she was ashamed of anything. Nonetheless, when she looked up, meeting his eyes, her cheeks flamed brighter than her hair. "We...our cover. We, Capt. Morevo & I, that is, agreed that we'd tell everyone we were on a honeymoon...Well, it got...pretty real."

"No details are necessary, you did what you needed to to survive, and now you're back to us, alive, with fresh intel, and interesting new technology. I must ask however, why did you choose to bring him to this base? He has sworn no oaths to us, merely made a business deal. We do not have our suppliers meet us at our major bases, unless they have proved themselves."

Cracken was right, Cin knew. "My flight's orders were to escort him back to the *Rakashandra* to meet with Alliance representatives, Colonel," Cin told him, hoping he couldn't see how nervous she was. *Rakashandra* was the frigate where Nightfall Squadron was based. "I was the only pilot left, so I carried out the mission to the best of my abilities. The damage to Razzle erased all the astrogation coordinates in his memory, so we couldn't program the *Rakashandra's* coordinates into *Puddlejumper's* navcomp, and in any case, it was well past the time window for us to make the return."

"After leaving Bespin, you could have used the same tactic--jumping to another world and locating Rebel agents to contact us to arrange a rendezvous," Cracken pointed out.

"And risk the same kind of trouble we got into at Cloud City, sir? Also, there was the matter of that fresh intel. I felt it was urgent the Alliance know that one of its most trusted operatives in the sector was a double agent. Before that highly 'capable agent' vaped all our sector operations."

Cracken gave no indication of how satisfied he was with her answers. He did change direction slightly, giving her some information. "Here's what we've learned about young Morevo. He is one of two children among scores of cousins. Of his immediate family, mother and father are dead, his sister is somewhere on his home planet and his grandfather died a few years ago.

"The grandfather was a starship engineer who designed new hyperdrives, ways to make them more powerful, faster, better integrated with the navigational computer. Drendar stands alone in his family, a reject, a failure.

"He was drummed out of Coronet University, citing lack of focus, and found a busted ship on his grandfather's junk lot. He repaired it to spaceworthy status and came to understand that it had a prototype hyperdrive. He realized that there were two roads available to him--find an underground tech or find a company that would steal it out from under him. He chose to tell the Rebellion, believing we had the best chance of finding a tech that could help him. Quite a remarkable young man." He looked for a sign of emotion on her face.

There was a little surprise at the details, but Cin showed no signs of being shocked by what she was told. She did not reply aloud, only nodded, and Cracken took it as a sign to go on.

"So you trust him then?" Cracken asked, his tone serious. "You trust him with Rebel secrets, including the location of this base, the complement of its personnel, our movements, so on and so forth?"

That was the big question. Cin sat silent for a few moments. She did trust Drendar, but how to say this to Cracken? "Yes. Yes I do. My life was in his hands, he took care of me, he agreed to fulfill the deal to talk with our techs, even though what he'd found at the RZ showed how dangerous it was. We talked about him joining, while we were on Cloud City. He's a very good pilot and tech and he's clever. We can use those skills, Colonel. Even if he didn't have the *Jumper*."

"Quite, well, we'll see. In the meantime, what about this Mr. Nicholas Santee?"

"We had kept our first inquiries on Cloud City to a source for the replacement part Drendar needed and were pointed toward Mr. Santee as someone who could obtain things for a high price.

Because we didn't have enough to cover the costs, he offered to provide it in exchange for us trying to locate a local Rebel agent to whom he could pass on information. He was too prominent, an intimate of the Baron, for him to do so unnoticed.

"I took the risk of admitting what I was and that I was also needing to contact the agent, since the two of us were the only ones I was endangering. Mr. Santee kept his side of the bargain. When we escaped Sascha, Drend and I were the ones who broke us all out, but it was Santee, along with Razzle, who helped ensure we got offstation. He knew his way around, helped us with our disguises as well as providing some bribes. His presence even helped us escape from the TIEs. One of the local squadrons helped get them off our tails because of his presence.

"I have no idea if that means the Baron Administrator is leaning more towards the Alliance or just that either the local government or even just the patrollers 'owed' Santee as they said."

"Local squadrons? do you believe they are Rebel sympathizers? Or just paying back a debt to Mister Santee?"

"I've no idea, sir. I doubt they would have known who he was with. Once the three of us decided to leave after escaping custody, Mr. Santee didn't have time or opportunity to inform anyone what our plans were. He wasn't out of my sight or hearing either. I was a little busy, but he seemed as surprised by the pursuit and our allies both. Just as Drendar and I were," she replied. "To be honest, I didn't think to ask him about it on the trip here."

"Indeed," He looked over a datapad. "Well, I do believe that concludes things, You'll be confined to base for the next 72 Hours, but with limited access, and you will be escorted through sensitive areas."

"Thank you, sir. Will we be allowed contact with each other?"

"I don't see why not." He didn't raise an eyebrow at that.

"What about gear? All I have besides my flight suit, is some civvies that really aren't suitable for duty." Cin paused, starting to flush. "And umm, our quarters..." she trailed off.

"New gear and supplies can be provided, now what about quarters?" He thought for a moment and smiled the tiniest crack of a smile. "Ah yes, the cover that became real. I take it you want either very close quarters, or the same quarters then?"

Cin blushed even more. "Yeah...that would be good. Thank you." She hoped that Princess Leia would be far too busy to read Intel reports when this one made it to her. Her cousin would never even think about kissing--or anything else--either a rumpled boy from a backwater planet or the captain of a dubious smuggler's vessel. "That will be fine, sir. I guess I meet my escorts now?" She felt better about things. Col. Cracken didn't have serious doubts about Drendar or he wouldn't okay such arrangements.

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 14 May 2009 05:33 PM:

Memories of the images seen in Ryloth sand swirled through Tam's mind. Two of the three he saw had already come true. He had a difficult time deciding whether he wanted to see the third--that of Kenlan As-Buka at the helm of an Imperial warship--confirmed.

But on the other hand, Damon wanted to find his brother, and Tam knew that he was a good man who only wanted to help. He and Mir had never steered Tam wrong.

"I'll go with you," he said. He looked around at the others. Elayne met his gaze, but not for long. Reil raised his hand to call

attention.

"There's something I'm not so sure about," he said. "We have two ships, both stolen as far as I know."

Everyone looked at him, but none understood.

"So," he continued, letting his irritation enter his voice, "why fly around in *two* stolen ships when we can fly around in one?"

Damon nodded. "I see what you're saying, but what do we do with the one we don't take?"

The pilot shrugged. "Rig it to blow, point it at a star, sell it, whatever. We get rid of it and off we go."

Elayne stepped forward. "That's all well and good, but Rothana is crawling with Imperials. It's a miracle we haven't already been spotted. Why don't we just take off and decide how to consolidate resources later?"

Tam tried unsuccessfully to hide his sneer. All the Jedi woman could think of was saving her own hide. It didn't matter to Tam if they left in one ship, two ships, or twenty, but to take a stance contradicting the self-serving Jedi was an irresistible opportunity. In addition, taking their time leaving might give Fi a chance to change her mind and return to those she *should* consider family. "No. We decide now. It comes down to taking the *Emigrant*, the *Nova Viper*, or finding some other ship..."

Posted by ij thompson on 15 May 2009 07:12 PM:

Jynton was impressive. Towering monuments of steel and glass loomed over Fi. Piercing, reflected sunlight sliced open tall shadows like lightsabers vivisectioning Sith phantoms in some ancient myth. Or that's how it looked to Fi. And this wasn't even a major city on Rothana. Or at least, its name hadn't come up as a point of interest when they'd landed.

They.

Had they taken off?

Fi wondered.

Major center or not, there were a lot of people here. All human, as far as she could tell. A sure sign of a population entirely in sway with the Emperor's doctrine. Fi wasn't necessarily *glad* she was human, but at this moment, she was certainly thankful that she wasn't, say, a Snivvian... or a Wookiee.

There were stormtroopers, oh, yes. No roadblocks though, thankfully. They probably saved that for emergencies. Scanners? Maybe. If so, the blaster in her jacket would end her little side-trip soon enough.

Would that be so bad? A nice, comfy cell?

No. Fi had other plans.

I wonder how Tey's making out, she thought. She'd seen him, on the platform after disembarking. He'd walked right by her, in fact. His face had betrayed absolutely no recognition of the girl, and in fact, his act was so good that for a moment, Fi had wondered if she'd been looking at his twin brother.

Make a hell of an actor, that one.

There.

The cantina, 'Spirits', was just right. Tacky enough to not be patronized by the local law enforcement, yet classy enough to avoid being surveilled by same. It was her best shot.

Dodging a passing speeder, Fi made her way to the entrance.

Posted by Corr Terek on 15 May 2009 08:37 PM:

"The *Viper* is better-armed," Mir pointed out. "All we need to do is alter the transponder codes -- give us a new identity."

"And you can do that?" Cali asked.

"Easily," Mir assured her. "The ship's previous owner kept

several false identities around for situations like this."

"And how do we handle the *Emigrant*?" Reil asked. Damon considered.

"If we had more time, I'd say sell it. But we don't have time." He paused. "I like your suggestion -- we point it at a star and wash our hands of it forever."

The pilot nodded. "That way it can't be traced back to us later."

"That's it, then," Damon said. "Move everything to the *Viper*. Then we'll find a nice little unoccupied star system and say goodbye to the *Emigrant*."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 16 May 2009 12:39 AM:

In a matter of hours, the *Emigrant* had been gutted and anything valuable or useful was safely within the much larger *Nova Viper*. Tam wiped his forehead and looked upon the vast, vertical landscape. Fi hadn't returned.

Damon came down the ramp and stood between Mir and Elayne. The two women gazed at Tam from behind with a mixture of rushed anxiety and anguished sympathy.

"We really *do* need to go now," Elayne said, turning to look at Damon. Her eyes were sensitive, and even a little tearful. "I didn't mean to make things worse."

"One of the things I've learned about Tam," said the gunslinger, "is that sometimes a lighter touch is more effective." He nodded to Mir, who then walked up to Tam.

She put a claw on the boy's shoulder. "We've waited as long as we can, kid. It's time to take off."

"I can still feel her out there," the boy said, "somewhere. She's still on Rothana. I don't know, I feel like if we leave it's like *we're* the ones abandoning *her*."

"I know what you mean, kid." Simultaneously, the two embraced each other, searching one another for some level of comfort.

Damon spoke up. "Reil says he has the *Emigrant* ready for take off. We'll rendezvous with him once we're outside Rothana's lunar orbit."

Mir followed Elayne, Tam, and Damon onto the *Nova Viper*, and punched the keypad to close the ramp...

Posted by Ice Hawk on 17 May 2009 07:03 AM:

Alone in the gutted ship, Reil powered up the *Emigrant* and prepared to take off. Next to it, the *Nova Viper* was following suit. He absentmindedly went through the preflight checklist, even though they were planning to scuttle the ship soon after they broke atmosphere. It was more a reflex than anything, as his mind was elsewhere.

When the hell did I become 'one of them'?

It was a fair question. Last night they had talked, and decided what to do, as a group. No one had asked Reil to be part of the group, and he didn't ask for permission to join it; it had just been assumed. It had been the first time Reil had been in a position to strike out on his own since Tatooine, and it was only now, many hours later, that it crossed his mind. A sarcastic voice in the back of Reil's mind viciously attacked the idea.

A fine time to come to that conclusion, now eh? Now that the ship's been gutted of supplies, sitting on an Imperial world, with everyone anxious to be gone far from here. Yeah, I'm sure it would go over really well with everybody, me taking off on my own. I'll just have them put back everything we just spent hours taking out, and then we'll go our separate ways. Besides, what would I do if I struck out on my own?

The obvious answer was that Reil would find his way back to the fleet, but that was easier said than done. Besides, there were other complications.

And what about Cali then? Do I just leave her with them and hope for the best? Damon and Mir are alright, but Elayne's been known to stab her friends and choke children. This most definitely isn't the responsible place to leave a teenage girl on her own.

Frankly Reil was at a loss for what to do with the girl, stay or leave. On Tatooine, they had all taken responsibility for the girl, and now, he was the only one left. Luis was off the hook, since he was dead, but now that he thought about it, Tey and Fi had just dumped her into his lap to look after. . .

So what? Am I going to take her with me to the Rebellion? What would she do? Is she to stay on the ship, prep the meal, and clean your quarters while you go out and fight a war? She'll just stay at home and do the women's work while you try and topple the government?

Reil tried to picture what that would even look like:

In his mind a blue and white holo played, reminding him of those old, cheesy, family comedies that were so popular when he was growing up. There was a typical suburban homestead on a typical planet, except there was a landing pad beside it, and instead of a speeder pulling up to the driveway, an X-Wing landed beside it. A blue and white version of himself jumped out of the X-Wing in a cheap suit, with a briefcase in hand, and he entered the homestead, where Cali was, still in her maid uniform, tidying up the place while dinner cooked. Then they ate together, and Reil talked about his problems at the Alliance, while Cali filled him in on neighbourhood gossip.

Yeaaaaah. I'm sure that's exactly how it would go. . . And maybe after dinner, Vader will give up his evil ways and go give presents to all the orphans in the galaxy, and Palpatine will open up his own line of skin care products. . .

Reil sighed. His hands were tied, whether he liked it or not. The funny thing was though, as he gunned the repulsors and the *Emigrant* started to lift off, he didn't feel trapped. He liked being 'one of them'. It felt as natural to be with these people, who he'd known for just a few weeks, as it did to be back at the fleet with the pilot's he'd trained with for almost a year. Eventually, he'd have to make a choice.

I guess I'll just cross that hyperlane when I come to it.

Posted by Ris on 19 May 2009 11:06 AM:

Drendar's Debrief

*Meanwhile...*Drend and Santee were led down a dark corridor in the middle of Derra Base. It was damp, and the trees above were so much more inviting. Drend caught something familiar when they passed by the Medical Bay, a voice; but the SFs near him pushed him further down the hall, while a pair of them turned off with Nicholas Santee.

Captain Robeau had so far said nothing to either man. After continuing down the corridor, they entered a small office, where Robeau took a seat behind the desk. One of the guards indicated the chair in front to Drendar, then took a position at the door with her partner.

"So," Drend asked as if he had no idea what was going on, "what's going on now?"

"You **don't** get to ask the questions, Morevo. I do, and you better damn well answer 'em!" Robeau didn't waste any more time before firing his first questions at the young man. "Okay, boy. What's your angle? You're late for a rendezvous, where were you? Then you turn up with a KIA pilot. How'd you get hold of

the Lady?"

Drendar looked up at Captain Robeau, settled himself into the pose he took on whenever he was caught by customs agents, it had only happened three times, but after the first he had figured out an angle. "My angle? Lets not get so hostile, friend." He looked the man dead in the eye, but inside he was about to collapse, this kind of act didn't hold up well. "I guess you're not familiar with how light freight works, or you wouldn't ask a question like that. See, in this business it's about the cargo, not the time. As long as I'm there within a few minutes, usually my contacts aren't too angry. I was running late, outunning an IPV--you know, the bad guys." He then thought about giving the agent a snide answer that was even worse. "How did I get ahold of her? There is a multitude of answers I could come up with for you, but I'm gonna pick the easy one. I picked her up out of the void, along with her droid, saved her life, saved her droid, went through heavens and hells and found myself here. Now is that a full enough answer or do I have to draw you a bright little picture?"

"Smart one, eh? So you just happened to be late, found the Lady and decided to bring her home? What did you do after you got her aboard? What did you tell her?"

The things we did would make your cheeks red. "Yes, I JUST happened to be late, happened to be in perfect time to save your pilot from a cold dark, scary death, and I told her exactly what happened, how, how I came to be here, and how I feel about her now." Before he could pull those last few words back, they were already out. "Ok, I've told you everything you need to know, because I've told you everything you've asked, now, if we can get past this bureaucratic BS, I'd like to sign up."

"We're not through with the BS yet. You might be able to snow Her Ladyship, we don't pick snubjocks for their brainpower. But it's me you've got to deal with now. How about first you tell me about your little ship with the fancy engines, then where you got this Santee guy. Then we can decide what to do with you."

Drend felt the heat in his face rise when the agent implied that Cin wasn't intelligent. "Listen here buddy, that Lady has more brains in her pinky than you have in your entire cerebellum! Now I tell ya what, and I'm gonna run this by you super fast so you better keep up. My ship runs what is called a super capacitation hypermagneto reacceleration core--which to you means squat, to me means it goes very fast in a very short period of time. It also happens to have a hacked, military grade, prototype navicomputer with a bit of a temper, the systems are all custom made with the finest parts a company could steal or make, and if that isn't fast for you, here-s the better one--it makes .75 past lightspeed, and you could reproduce it stock if you wanted to." He hoped all that technical data stunned the man for a few seconds, then finished. "As for Santee? He's a gambler, gentleman, and humanitarian. He helped us escape the station, get my ship fixed up and get us here."

If Robeau was taken aback by Drendar's lecture, he didn't show it. He had started typing while Drendar ranted at him, and when Drendar stopped, replied, "Now we are getting somewhere. The ship, *Puddlejumper*," he seemed to sniff just a bit at the name, "would be very useful. And as a matter of a fact, I do understand the jargon. Better than you understand what's at stake here for you. But I'll leave the Colonel the task of enlightening you. If he desires to.

"As to Nicholas Santee, you say he helped you and the Lady Cinowyn to escape Bepin. How? Funds, IDs? Did he call out the patrol flight?"

"Bite me," He spat--then realized this was exactly what

Robeau wanted, an emotional response. He dialed down his motivators and sat back again. "He had access to a supplier who could bring us a necessary part, and he is partially responsible for that patrol flight, they did it to pay back a debt. Oh, and I do believe Miss Antilles wants her kills credited for that little action."

Captain Robeau raised his eyebrow at the last. "I'm sure Starfighter Command will grant the Lady her kills, but that is not my affair--and should not be yours, young man."

"Yeah, one more thing--where are you guys gonna park me while I wait for your higher ups to decide my fate?"

Robeau did not answer for a few moments. He seemed to be studying the terminal display again. He typed a little more, waited, with steepled fingers. Then he must have got some sort of message, since he stood up. "Colonel Cracken would like to meet you. Come along, Mr. Morevo."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 19 May 2009 06:03 PM:

The two starships maneuvered around each other like skillful dancers in a cosmic ballet, and as the airlocks aligned with each other Tam watched through the viewport. He extended his senses into the void outside, taking in the details of the *Emigrant's* hull. It was a sensation somewhere between touch and taste, giving him impressions of texture based on materials and metallurgical processes; experiences were splashed across her like flavors. It was as if each laser bolt on her bow, every inch of carbon scoring, each stellar cloud the ship had passed through since its production had left a different kind of topping from Aehan fruit sauces to thick bantha gravy. She was old, and had lots of stories to tell. He listened to each one of them in the time she had before she was pointed at Rothana's parent star.

Contact with the *Emigrant* brought up a swell of memories, many of which he'd apparently blocked out. The Imperial ship, the *Disrupter*: he'd touched/tasted every part of it too. Every panel, every bolt, every single one of the 1,580 people aboard. The standing orders from the captain, the fluid transfer of instruction throughout the hierarchy of the crew, the loving attention the chief engineer gave the gravity well generators; the entirety of their beings had passed through his mind.

Simply remembering the enormous weight of such feelings made Tam's head hurt, and he pushed the thoughts away. But something lingered. It was nothing certain, but Tam had the impression that his feat with moving the *Disrupter* had something to do with their time on Gamorr. *Something*. He'd almost been as much familiar with the Sith temple as with the Imperial ship. *Almost*. It was the strangest case of *deja vu* he'd ever experienced.

But what did those two thoughts have to do with each other? Or were the connections in Tam's mind simple random associations based on an overstressed mind? He felt like confiding all this in Fi, but...

"I don't know what it is," a voice said, causing Tam to turn around and see Damon standing in the port, "but you're thinking about something deep."

Tam shrugged. "Oh, nothing really. Just all the stuff we've been going through..."

The gunslinger nodded. "I get it. Things have been rough. That's kind of why I want to go find my brother. After what we've been through, you start to realize what's important."

"But I don't want to make this about me," he continued, "you're in this too, and Mir, Elayne, Cali, Reil..." He left an empty space in the sentence, one where Tam could easily have inserted 'and Fi' if it had been true. "Any way, tell me what's on

your mind. We're here to clear up all of this mess and maybe get our lives somewhere back to normal."

Tam inhaled sharply, but emptied his lungs with a slow, measured cadence. "Okay, do you remember the *Disrupter*...?"

Posted by ij thompson on 19 May 2009 07:08 PM:

The cantina, 'Spirits', was larger than it looked on the outside, and colourfully lit. Booths and tables were about half-full, and the taps were flowing. Although it was only about dinner time on this side of Rothana, Jynton was a port town - and its entertainment establishments had to be ready for a rush anytime, around the clock.

Fi claimed a stool at the bar, not too close to anyone else, and was approached by the bartender in short order.

"What'll it be?"

"Lum," Fi replied. After the day's events, the last thing Fi wanted was another drink, but ordering nothing wouldn't exactly score her any points with the barkeep. "And a glass of water."

As the server shuffled off, Fiola took in the room. The whirling smoke and dazzling green and purple lights were the polar opposite of the inn that had so charmed her this afternoon, but Fi couldn't deny that she felt more in her element in a place like this. The barkeep returned with her two glasses, and Fi selected the one containing clear water, sipping slowly.

There was a stage at the far end of the place, hidden behind a shimmering gold curtain. As Fi studied it, the curtain was lit by a follow-spot, and began to draw open. Fog breathed out of the opening and into the room, and shapes could be seen moving in the dimness.

"Gentlebeings," an amplified voice announced, "'Spirits' invites you to feast your eyes, and other senses, upon the most beautiful jewels of the cosmos, The Luminous Three!"

Amid enthusiastic applause, three shapes stepped forward and into the light, accompanied by pulsing, rhythmic music. There was no band accompanying the dancers onstage, however - this music was a recording. A recording Fi knew very well.

It was 'Darling Reprobate', by *Moonbeam Levels*.

Fi quickly set her water glass down, and tried not to make a show of nonchalantly covering her face with her hands.

"Oh, no..."

Posted by Corr Terek on 19 May 2009 11:28 PM:

Damon listened intently as Tam tried to explain. "I don't know how, but it felt so...familiar. Like my power is connected in some way with everything on Gamorr."

Damon frowned in thought. "I gotta admit, I've been doing some reading, and I can't find anything like what you've been able to do." He shrugged. "You've got me stumped."

"What do you mean, you've been doing some reading?" Tam asked, a confused look on his face. "I don't understand."

Damon smiled. "I think it's time I showed you something. C'mon."

Tam's eyes grew wide. "Your parents left you all this?"

Damon brushed aside a stack of datapads. "Yeah. I haven't gone through a quarter of the information that's here, so I can't say for sure that these hold the answers to your questions. But it's our best bet for understanding the power we both have."

"But what if I don't want the power?" Tam asked. "What if--what if the power scares me?"

Damon sighed. "When the Empire caught up with us, back

on Temen III, it taught me something -- without training, I can't stand against the Empire. They'll come after me, and if they can't get *me*, they'll hurt the people I care about. The people I--"

"The people you love," Tam finished softly.

"Yeah," Damon said. "I just want to protect them. And if the only way to do that is by developing my gift, then that's what I'll do." He shook his head. "I won't lie -- it scares me sometimes too. Back at Burista, I nearly choked an Imperial officer to death." Recognition flashed in Tam's eyes. "You felt that, didn't you? That was my first taste of what I could really do, my first brush with the darkness, and it *terrified* me."

Damon held up a datapad. "But this -- this is teaching me how to control the Force. How to harness it without losing myself in the dark." He shrugged. "And...my mother gave this to me. Seems like I should be putting it to good use." He grinned. "And sharing it with others in need."

Tam smiled back. Abruptly the ship's comms chirped. "Hey," Mir called. "Reil's aboard. We're getting ready to send off the *Emigrant*. Wanna say goodbye?"

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 20 May 2009 05:33 PM:

In the vast expanses, the *Emigrant* rocketed along a course sending it directly into the blinding orb of the Rothana system.

"Y'know," said Tam, watching out the viewport as the starship slowly shrank from view, "I'm kind of glad to see a ship get destroyed, and have it not be an accident."

A quiet laughter filled the room, to be replaced by a bittersweet cheer from all watching as the *Emigrant* exploded into an incandescent ball of particles.

"So," said Tam, turning around to look at Damon. "Where to now?"

Posted by ij thompson on 20 May 2009 07:35 PM:

"You don't like the music?"

Fi dropped her hands and looked up sharply, surprised that someone could have taken the stool beside her without her noticing. A near-Human being sat there, his hairless, shiny skin as black as deepest space. The being's sharp features, framed between two pointed ears, smiled at her mischievously.

"Oh, it's not that," Fi answered. "I just have a bit of a headache," she lied, rubbing at her temples for emphasis. "The music's fine."

"Good," the being nodded. "I selected it myself. The perfect accompaniment for my girls."

"Your...?" Fi began, then looked back at the stage, where the dancers, The Luminous Three, moved to the music. *Her* music. Fi didn't need to rely on the expressions on the faces of the males in the room to know that these three were impressive. Tall, statuesque, and crowned with flowing, golden hair, the three dancers undulated gracefully about the stage. Though their attire was revealing, none of the men present catcalled, or even whistled. They didn't dare. All sat in rapt attention, transfixed by the three women who, Fi now realized, all looked *exactly* alike.

"Of course," the being beside her went on, leaning close to Fi to avoid raising his voice over the music and disturbing the other patrons, "using a recording is a tad *declassé*. How nice it would be, don't you think, to have a musician of that calibre to tour and perform with the girls, in a live setting?"

Fi looked the alien square in the eye, saying nothing, her expression impenetrable. The alien returned her stare, unflinching.

"Of course," he whispered, "I have heard, here and there, that

the vocalist we are now listening to might be having trouble traveling these days." He smiled at Fi, revealing a mouth full of sharp teeth. "Pity, that."

Fi turned her attention back to the two glasses on the bar in front of her, one of them full of lum, the other containing what was left of the water she'd been drinking. Reaching out a finger, she slid the glassful of lum along the bar to rest in front of the ebon-skinned being beside her...

Posted by Ice Hawk on 21 May 2009 06:54 AM:

Tam, and everyone else had turned to Damon expectantly, so Reil cleared his throat loudly to get their attention.

"I don't know if you have somewhere else in mind, but I was thinking that we could take the maze and hide out on Rishi for a couple of days. It's nearby, and well beyond the reach of the Empire. Smugglers and the like tend to use it for a base. Could be a good place to safely start your search. . ."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 21 May 2009 05:55 PM:

"It's not a bad idea," said Elayne, entering from the corridor leading to the *Nova Viper's* bridge. "The Rishi Maze has been used as a hideout by smugglers for years."

Reil gestured at the woman as if to say 'see?' and folded his arms.

Damon scratched his chin. "Smugglers always know the scuttlebutt going on around the galaxy. Maybe we'll start to find a trail for my brother..."

"That's what I just said," said Reil.

"As long as it keeps us off the Imperial radar, I'm happy," added Mir'isha.

Everyone else in the room nodded agreement, settling the matter, and departed for the bridge. Tam lingered behind, looking out the viewport. As the sleek cruiser reached light speed, Tam watched the planet Rothana disappear behind them.

He watched *Fi* disappear behind them...

Posted by ij thompson on 22 May 2009 06:38 PM:

"Who is it, please?"

"It is I," the black-skinned alien replied, smiling at Fi reassuringly. "Inex Jonn."

The dressing room door opened, and there stood one of The Luminous Three; tall, exquisite, and clearly delighted to see Fi's companion.

"Inex!" the woman replied, "it's nice to see you!"

Inex entered the dressing room, allowing Fi to enter as well, and closed the door. "Your performance was exquisite as always, ladies."

"Thank you so much," one of the other girls replied. "And look! You've brought a friend!"

"Indeed," Inex Jonn replied. "This is..." he invited, raising a hand toward Fi.

Fi gave a start. She hadn't thought of an alias!

"Jean," she replied, blurting out her middle name and instantly regretting it. "Jean Ar... ter... jen... son."

The woman who'd answered the door took one of Fi's hands and shook it warmly. "It is a pleasure to meet you, Ms. Arterjenson," she smiled, without missing a beat.

"But of course," Inex cut in, "introductions. 'Jean'," he said, grinning slyly at Fi, "this is Veah, Amra, and Celeste. The Luminous Three."

The three identical women greeted Fi warmly, their eyes

showing not even a glimmer of the jadedness that Fi usually associated with people in their profession. Even in this unflattering backstage light the three were breathtaking, and Fi actually found herself to be slightly nervous in their company. She could only imagine how Tam and the others were going to react when she introduced-

Oh.

Right.

Shaking the painful thought away, Fi fought to keep things light. "You guys are really good!" she gushed, and meant it.

"Thank you so much!" one of the women -Amra?- replied sincerely. Fi had to wonder how anyone, even the girls themselves, could tell the three apart. Though they had changed into less revealing (but still stunning) attire, there didn't seem to be a single difference between them.

Except...

There.

Assuming Inex had introduced the three from left to right, the middle woman (Amra?) wore a delicate, jewel earring in her left ear. The girl on the left, who'd opened the door (Veah?) wore the same earring, but in her right earlobe. The third woman (Celeste, presumably), wore no earring at all.

"Veah," Inex spoke, interrupting Fi's thoughts. "Are you prepared for your date with Prefect Arnon?"

The girl who had opened the door beamed, partially confirming Fi's who's-who. "Indeed I am!" she replied. "Prefect Arnon is a notable man, and I can't wait to meet him!"

"Excellent," Inex nodded. "Miss... *Jean* and I will be having dinner in this area. Amra, we'd like you to join us-"

"I would be delighted!"

"-and Celeste, you will return to the ship, if you please."

"Oh, good!" Celeste replied without a hint of sarcasm or bitterness. "I have some reading I would like to do!"

Inex Jonn turned toward Fi, smiled, and ran a hand along his smooth, shiny black head. "Are you hungry, my dear?"

She was.

Posted by Corr Terek on 23 May 2009 02:40 AM:

Damon couldn't help but notice Tam staring out the viewport, lost in his own thoughts. It didn't take the Force to guess what he was thinking about. *Can't exactly blame him*, Damon admitted to himself. It wouldn't do any good, though, to let Tam continue to dwell on it. Fortunately, Damon had just the diversion in mind.

"There you are," he said. "I was wondering where you'd gotten off to."

"Hey," Tam replied, trying to smile. "What's up?"

"Actually, I could really use your help with something," Damon said. Tam's interest was piqued.

"Really? What?"

"The fact is," Damon explained, "I need a sparring partner." He grinned at Tam's confused look. "I'm a pretty fair hand when it comes to shooting, but you have to admit that the people we've been running into lately don't seem to have much trouble dealing with me -- especially when they get up close."

"So you're trying to close a hole in your defenses," Tam observed. "I don't think I'd be a whole lot of help. I don't know much about self-defense."

Damon grinned. "That's why I wanted you as a sparring partner -- gives us both room to grow." He winked at the boy. "Unless you're afraid I'll beat you too badly."

"Not a chance," Tam retorted.

"Good! Meet me in the cargo bay," Damon replied. "I'll see if I can't scrounge up some decent poles for us to use."

Posted by Ice Hawk on 24 May 2009 11:20 AM:

Zealos settled into the pilot's seat just as Mir entered the cockpit. He wondered briefly if he had been presumptuous in taking the pilot's chair, but Mir said nothing about it when she sat in the copilot's seat. As they were plotting the course to the mouth of the Rishi Maze, Mir spoke up.

"So, how'd you and Cali hook up with Tey and Fi?"

The question caught Reil off guard.

"What?"

Mir shrugged.

"I was just curious, since we last saw Tey and Fi with Luis on Tatooine, then we meet above Ryloth and they've picked up you two. Your are new arrivals."

It was a fairly innocuous question, but Reil finished entering the hyperspace co-ordinates before answering.

"I met up with them on Tatooine. Probably not long after you guys split up. I needed shelter, and so did they, so Cali took us all in. She was a slave for a guy named Bartok."

Mir activated the hyperdrive, and the ship rocketed away from Rothana.

"And?"

"And we killed Bartok, and then we ran into bounty hunters and then Imperials. Luis stayed behind to keep the Imperials off our tail, and we fled to Ryloth. And then we ran into some trouble with slavers, and we found Tam, stole a ship, and tried to break through the blockade in space, and that's where you guys came in so you know the rest. . ."

Mir whistled.

"Quite the resume. . . So how'd you get stranded on Tatooine?"

"I'm a. . . Well I guess I "was" is more appropriate, a pilot for the Alliance. I was ambushed by Imperials, and I made a blind jump and ended up by Tatooine, and then I limped there, when my X-Wing quit on me-"

Cali's voice came from behind them.

"That was your X-Wing?"

Both Mir and Reil turned around.

"What are you doing here?"

Cali shrugged.

"I've got nothing better to do, besides I like looking at hyperspace."

Reil frowned.

"Yeah well. . . just don't get hyper-rapture. . ."

Cali looked confused.

"What's that?"

Reil made a circular gesture around his right ear.

"It's where you go loopy from looking at Hyperspace too long. Imperials design their viewports to opaque to prevent it, but most civilian models don't bother with it."

Mir interrupted them.

"It was your X-Wing that did what. . .?"

Cali spoke before Reil could.

"The day I met up with Reil and everybody, an X-Wing crashed into Mos Eisley, in fact, Fi and Luis came looking for medical help after surviving the explosion. . ."

Mir looked at Reil in disbelief.

"You dropped an X-Wing on a city?"

"There was nothing I could do. I just broke atmosphere when the controls froze up on me, and I had to eject. . . It's not my fault!"

Mir's expression softened.

"I suppose not. . . Well, we've got a few hours to kill before

we hit the mouth of the maze, and then we'll have to plot a bunch of short jumps through it." Mir got up and moved to exit the cockpit, but Zealos stopped her.

"Wait, what about you?"

Mir turned to Reil.

"What about me?"

"Well, what did you do before. . . this whole. . . thing."

Reil made vague gestures to the surrounding ship.

Mir's eyebrow arched.

"You mean before I met up with Damon?"

Reil shrugged.

"I guess. . ."

"I was a pirate for Travos Ghull."

Mir didn't elaborate on that as she exited the cockpit. Cali took Mir's seat beside Zealos.

"So, wha'd you wanna do now?"

Posted by ij thompson on 24 May 2009 08:34 PM:

It was dark when Fi and her companions reached the open hangar, and the sky was filled with millions of stars, as though spilled out of some giant, cosmic bucket.

Fi had to hand it to this Inex Jonn. The being, whom she'd come to learn was of a species called Sakiyans, was a well cultured fellow, and knew where to find a fine meal. Given the lack of aliens on the Imperial world, Fi had been afraid there might be trouble. Thankfully, there had been none, and the service in the restaurant they'd visited had been exemplary. This may have been due to the presence of Amra, whose beauty seemed to startle all that laid eyes on her, but Fi didn't think so. Inex clearly knew his way around.

And Amra, what a sweetheart! Fi had been around the spectacularly beautiful before; models, movie stars, and the like. Usually, she'd found them so full of themselves that she could only tolerate their company for about ten minutes. Amra, on the other hand, seemed to be completely oblivious to the effects she had on others, and was positively bubbling over with questions about, and compliments for, nearly everything she saw. In fact, not that Fi was counting, but she was pretty sure she hadn't heard the woman say a negative word about *anything*.

"Here she is," announced Inex Jonn, pointing up at the silhouette that blotted out a large portion of the stars above, "the *Skalen II*". Clicking a button on a small device he held in one hand, exterior lights lit up the lower hull of the transport, which was streamlined, attractive, and clearly built for speed. A ramp lowered before them, and Inex motioned toward it.

"After you, ladies."

The interior of the vessel was modest, but just as attractive as its exterior, and very clean. The trio made their way to the crew lounge where Celeste, another third of The Luminous Three, rose to greet them.

"Back so soon?" The blonde-haired beauty smiled at them. "How time has flown, with me all wrapped up in this information!" She motioned to the table before her, where a datapad glowed serenely.

"Whatcha reading?" Fi asked, genuinely interested. After all, what could a woman whose looks could stop a blockade runner in its tracks ever want to waste her time reading about?

"Oh, it's the most amazing thing," Celeste beamed. "I'm learning about the long-term effects of artificially raising certain arctic microorganisms in an extraterrestrial, cryogenic environment!"

Fi felt her brain fogging over, as it often had in senior school Xenobiology. "Uh... why?"

"Why?" Celeste looked slightly puzzled, but her smile never wavered. "Well... because it's interesting!"

"I've no doubt about it," Inex agreed. "And now, once Veah has returned, we-"

A chime rang, and right on cue, the entry hatch opened, and there stood Veah. She was, of course, identical to Amra and Celeste, but no less stunning for it.

"Ah," Inex motioned toward her, "Veah, my dear. Did you enjoy your date with Prefect Arnon?"

"Oh, very much!" Veah nodded enthusiastically. "Prefect Arnon is a kind and cultured man. Did you know that he's the youngest person in the Empire to have been awarded such a post?"

"I did not," Inex replied. "Will you be seeing him again?"

"No," the radiant woman replied without a trace of regret, "just the one date."

Inex appeared satisfied. "Very well. It appears that we are finished with Rothana. F- 'Jean'," he corrected himself, "we'll be taking off in moments. Feel free to remain here with the girls, and help yourself to any refreshments you may desire."

Fi mulled it over. "Mind if I come and hang out in the cockpit? I like lookin' out the window." She considered, then raised her hands in apology to The Luminous Three. "No offense?"

The girls smiled happily. "None taken!"

The *Skalen II* rose gracefully over the metropolitan skyline of Jynton, Rothana, gliding smoothly across the urban landscape. With so much to see, Fi paid no special attention to one of the taller buildings they passed, around which several emergency vehicles converged...

Posted by Rakyu on 25 May 2009 02:56 AM:

The Force.

To the Togorian in that brief moment, it was all there ever was. It invigorated her. It made her stronger, faster, more agile, more perceptive. And more than a match for the stream of white-armored men that came from beyond the bridge.

By the time the moment passed, no one but herself was alive on the bridge. There were others still on the ship. Some were hiding, attempting to save themselves, their lives. The Togorian did not care about them. The rest of them were attempting to regroup, so as to have a better chance of reclaiming the bridge. Like fools, they did not realize they stood no chance. They did not realize that this was her ship now. She had a goal, a destiny she had to complete. And the ship was now apart of it.

In her mind's eye, there was a flash. A flash of colour. A flash of sound. A vision. The vision that had prematurely awoken her from her slumber. The vision that had plagued her all the way to where she stood: on the bridge of a starship orbiting a Force-forsaken planet out in the Outer Rim.

And the vision was always the same. The same plant. The same dungeon of a ship. The same Jedi. The same teenage girl. The same desert. The same jungle. The same pilot. The same half-constructed space platform. The same armored man.

All the same. Except for the end.

At first the changes had been slight, barely noticable; a different shot here, a different death there. But as time went along, the variations grew larger. The detail, however, did not matter to Aerie. Indeed, it had never mattered, for detail was just that: detail. It was what the last flash represented, that mattered. The fulfilment of her eternal journey. Finally, after so many

centuries, knowing everything there is to know. And through that knowledge, the death of the Force.

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 26 May 2009 12:27 PM:

With every blow, sweat jumped off of Tam's forehead. He hadn't been lying when he'd told Damon Aligeri that he had very few combat skills, but he felt that he was giving the gunslinger enough of a challenge. He surged forward, swiping his blade as unpredictably as he could. He cast all else from his mind; the hum of starship engines, the aging but sturdy wall paneling of the cargo bay, the memories of Fi. They were all gone now, buried under the fierce will of his current task. Hacking and pounding, he only let up when his opponent held up a hand. "Tired already?"

"No," said the man, panting, "I just didn't want you to hit Mir with a backswing."

Tam spun around to see Mir'isha step through the port into the *Nova Viper's* cargo bay. She paused tentatively, and her tail swished with the inrush of anticipatory adrenaline. Tam lowered his pole, only now realizing that he'd bent the metal rod in half.

"Is it safe to come in?" she asked, half jokingly.

"I'm not really sure," said Damon. He eyed Tam with a concerned glance. "He tends to fly off the handle when he gets going." He poked his own improvised weapon into the boy's shoulder, and managed to dispel the ire that had surfaced at his apparent ridicule.

"Y'know," Mir said, stepping fully into the room, "you'd probably have more luck against each other if you *both* put a little more finesse into your movements."

Damon smiled. "I should have sparred with you instead." His voice took on a hint of romance.

Tam ignored her coquettish response, and made for the door. Before he could step through it, however, the starship intercom squawked to life. Zealos Reil's tinny voice said, "Uh, guys, you might want to come up here. We have a problem..."

"Solo was a fool!" the man said leaning back in his chair and putting his feet up on the table. "I mean, I've had to dump cargo myself from time to time, even spice, but I always go back for it."

"He tried..."

"He should have died trying, says I." He hiccuped and, pouring himself a fresh glass of Corellian whiskey, glanced at the empty monitor he was supposed to be watching. "Now I hear Jabba's put out a bounty."

"That's old news, Bolly."

Bolly harumphed. "Shows how long I've been holed up here. This ain't exactly the hub of galactic events."

"That's why I came here," said the other man. He poured himself a glass as well. "Yeah, some Rodian took the bounty and now he's food for Tatooine womp rats."

"Well, as long as he doesn't have Boba Fett on his tail. They got history, those two. And the last thing a smuggler wants is to see a bounty hunter..."

The monitor Bolly should have been watching began to flash, and finally got his attention. He blinked slowly and wiped away the inebriation. Finally, his drunken mind registered what he was looking at, forcing him to his feet. He slammed the first intercom panel he could find and shouted, "All station personnel, we have a bogey! A starship fitting the description of the *Nova Viper* has entered sensor range. Anybody flight-ready get out there and blow the "Warhog" from our sky!"

He took his finger off the intercom control. "Damn bounty hunters..."

Posted by ij thompson on 26 May 2009 07:23 PM:

The *Skalen II* sped smoothly over the surface of Rothana at low altitude, the glittering lights of Jynton fading away behind the sleek transport.

It was perfectly dark out here in the wilderness, Inex Jonn trusting his sensors to provide him with a topographical view of his vessel's surroundings. Fiola studied the Sakiyan, his shiny black face reflecting the green light of the sensor readouts. Sneaking a peek at his monitor, she saw that the vessel wasn't climbing, but rather, continuing to travel overland.

"We're going to another city, then?"

Inex Jonn jumped slightly, as though surprised to have a guest in the cockpit. Then he spared Fi a glance, and smiled.

"No no, we're leaving Rothana."

"Ah."

Inex returned to his sensors, seemingly satisfied. Fi examined them as well, watched as green contour lines flattened, and were soon replaced by blue depth lines. It seemed they were now over water. A large body of it, by the look; if not one of Rothana's oceans, then at least a very large lake. Nearby, another monitor displayed the *Skalen II's* position on a globe, in relation to various orbital objects and craft.

"Oh, I get it," Fi offered. "Looking for a hole in their orbital security net? Don't blame you. We-" she caught herself. "I had a lot of trouble avoiding them on the way down."

This time Inex didn't turn from his instruments, merely replied flatly, "Not exactly."

Fi was suddenly gripped by a paranoid, irrational certainty: *He's gonna put this baby in hover, she told herself, and then he and the girls are gonna take your money and throw you into the sea.*

As it happened, nothing so dramatic occurred. Without warning, Inex pulled on the flight stick, bringing the *Skalen II* into a steep climb. Short minutes later they were in low orbit, and Fi breathed a sigh of relief... until an alarm beeped.

"Incoming!" Fi announced, though this was not exactly news to her alien companion. "It's a..." she studied Inex's readout. "It's called the *Pincer*, it's a... it's an Imperial Customs Corvette!"

Inex Jonn continued flying his vessel smoothly, making no attempt to evade the capital ship, which was now looming larger in the inky distance.

"That, it is..."

Posted by Corr Terek on 26 May 2009 11:22 PM:

"Not good!" Damon said, watching the sensor board light up with multiple contacts. "What set them off?"

"I don't know!" Zealos replied. "We just dropped out of hyperspace -- we haven't even had *time* to set them off." He paused. "Unless...they've recognized this ship?"

Cali shot a look at Mir. "I thought you said you could change the ship's transponder codes!"

"I can and I did!" Mir retorted. "But there's nothing we could do that would keep someone who's familiar with this ship from recognizing it on sight."

"Shields are up to full power," Elayne reported from her station. "What now?"

Damon and Zealos exchanged glances. "We could always try diplomacy," the pilot drawled, though Damon could tell that he didn't think they'd be able to talk their way out of this one.

"Worth a shot," Damon conceded. He leaned forward and flicked the comm unit on. "This is Captain...Ziro...of the *Nexu's Fang*. Please stand down, we are *not* hostile. Repeat, please stand down."

Posted by Ice Hawk on 27 May 2009 04:43 PM:

There was no reply on the comm, just a green light on one of the instruments that lit up. Cali reached out to touch it.

"What's that light?"

Reil slapped her wrist.

"It's a warning indicator, don't touch it." He turned to Damon. "They've activated their weapon's targeting."

The indicator light changed from green to yellow. Cali didn't reach out to touch it this time.

"Well what's tha-"

"They've got missiles!"

Posted by ij thompson on 27 May 2009 06:46 PM:

Fi's heart sank. *He's gonna turn me in.*

She thought of Tam. How she loved him. How she'd left him high and dry out of some misguided plan to keep him from heartbreak, keep him from harm. Somewhere in the back of her mind, Fi had assumed she'd get the chance one day to apologize. Instead, she'd traded a beautiful, rewarding relationship with the young man for a one-way ticket to Kessel. It was senseless.

Hopelessness turned to anger. Anger pulled the blaster from Fi's jacket, and pointed it at the pilot's head.

"Alright Jonn," Fi growled, "Get us out of here."

Inex Jonn was unflappable. "Bad idea."

"Don't think I can't fly this thing on my own!"

The Sakiyan turned toward Fi, her blaster now pointing directly into his face. "It may be difficult for you to see," he explained patiently, "but without me, you stand about zero chance of escaping the planet. But," he added, turning his attention to the blaster she held in his face, "you're going to have to trust me."

Fi didn't trust him. *Couldn't* trust him. But nor could she simply shoot the alien in the face while he sat defenseless in his flight chair. Instead she exhaled sharply, stuffed the blaster pistol back into her jacket, and sat back down.

"Right. What's your plan?"

The cockpit door hissed open, and The Luminous Three entered calmly. "We heard the alarm," one of them said. "Is there cause for concern?"

"Procedure, nothing more, ladies," Inex assured them with a wave of his hand. The Imperial Customs Corvette loomed very large out the cockpit glass, and had been joined by a quartet of TIE fighters, from somewhere or other.

"Those fighters are handsomely symmetrical," one of the girls - Amra? - pointed out happily. "And very fast!"

"Glad you like 'em," Fi replied, but not unkindly. "Look, Inex, I gotta hide."

"Inadvisable."

"They'll take you down with me," she warned.

Inex Jonn turned toward her again, not a hint of betrayal in his eyes or voice. "The *Pincer* is going to be training extremely powerful sensors on this vessel. Even hidden, they would detect you - and that would reflect badly on the rest of us." He smiled at her. "It will be alright."

There was an audible clang, and the *Skalen II* shuddered as it was gripped between the forward mandibles of the much larger customs craft. Inex Jonn unstrapped himself from his flight chair

and rose, striding toward the main airlock.

"Ladies, let us go and welcome our guests."

Posted by Calhexas on 28 May 2009 12:51 AM:

Blam-blam-blam-blam!!

Mak turned away from his pursuers and leapt over a large rock in the plains, turning quickly to get out a few more shots before taking off again. He was out of breath...it had a been a while since he had actually been on the run from someone...anyone.

"What the...where is'ee?" Mak angrily muttered to himself.

Blam blam blam...his slugthrower ripped through the silence of the Dantooine twilight. He could hear them approaching...fast. Blaster fire erupted as he peeked over the rock.

"C'mon fellas...just a lil closer. Lemme get a chance to drop a few more a yas."

He had no idea how many there were, or how many he had already killed...at least five or six he thought to himself. Who were they? Where were they coming from? Why were they after him?

Blaster fire ricocheted off the boulder's edge. Mak reloaded his slugthrower, and pulled his newest weapon from his coat. He could hear the footsteps comin up on him. Three were approaching head on. Two were circling to his right flank, and one was coming up on his left flank. Mak concentrated...focused...listened to the footsteps...

Mak leapt out from behind the boulder, burying two shots into the forehead of the enemy to his left. He rolled at blaster fire honed in on his position, reeling off two more shots as he tumbled. One hit one of the pursuers in the chest knocking him clean off his feet. The other shot merely grazed another pursuer's thigh. Mak gathered to his feet and raced to the fiend whom he had tattooed in the face. Ducking and weaving through stray beams of red energy, he dove for the sentient's weapon. Suddenly a sharp, burning pain in his side as one of the beam connected with his ribs. Mak clutched his side in anguish. The fire stopped as he growled and fell into the dusty plains...motionless.

His attackers closed swiftly but cautiously, blaster barrels trained on his hulking figure.

"Don't kill him. We are to return him alive,"[color] one of the attackers called out,[/color="blue"]"pick him up. *He's* on his way."

As two of the attackers approached the silent Mak, there was a low hum, followed by a flowing beam of red energy that shot out from Mak's right side. He rolled over and stabbed the beam into the first attacker. In almost the same motion, he slashed the blade out the side of his victim and across the neck of another, severing the head. He raised his hand to the rest of the figures and a wave of brutal force bashed into the group of thugs and two fresh corpses sending them tumbling backwards several yards.

"Hmmpfh." Mak smirked.

Suddenly, Mak felt dizzy...which was soon followed by an extreme bout of nausea. Before he knew it he was on all fours, thinking his insides were going to violently purge themselves from his body. He fell to the ground, and rolled onto his back in immense pain...like nothing he ever felt before.

"So we meet again old friend," a voice said...just as Mak's conciousness slipped away.

Posted by Ris on 1 June 2009 11:57 PM:

The Doctor Is In

Medical Bay

To Cin's surprise, Cracken asked the guards to take her to Medical. "I want you ready to fly when we need you, my Lady."

Cin dutifully went with the guards. So far, so good. At least for her. She hoped things were going as well for Drendar and Santee. A guard told the Triage Medic, "Here's the one Colonel Cracken wants cleared for snubs ASAP."

The Triage Medic told her to go on in. Her escort indicated they would wait outside, so she complied. Although Cin hated physicals, she was glad for the chance to strip out of the flight suit, down to the running shorts and brief racerback top she wore underneath. She heard a doctor's voice behind her, an oddly familiar one. "Now if only I could get every one of my return patients to greet me like that," he laughed jovially. "Cin'ownantilles, how good it is to see you again."

Cin whirled--and broke into a smile. "Di'nos!" As he had done, she gave the name an affectionate inflection. She launched herself at him and threw her arms around the doctor, heedless of the shocked medtech behind him. "Col. Cracken hinted you were here!"

"And now you're throwing yourself at me, this is great," he laughed and put her back down, "but I imagine my old compatriot is around here somewhere. Where *is* Drend?"

"I guess they're still debriefing him. Probably about the ship--but Colonel Cracken is arranging quarters. Now how did you get here?" She kept an arm around him as she would any friend.

He draped a brain tail over her shoulder as he explained, "Well, see, Drend's cousin Dan, well, he wasn't too happy, nor were his henchies that you left in a rather...compromising position. Anyway, they came looking for me after Dan did some digging and realized Drend and I had gone to school together. Dan just connected the dots, so I found a shuttle and hitched my way out into the Outer Rim. Shortly after that I met an attractive medtech who lured me in with the promise of doing two things, and one of those was good works for the Rebellion."

"And the other?"

Dino only winked.

Cin chuckled, leaning into the braintail. "I can guess. So what's next? The usual poking and scanning?"

"Stand over here on the scanner and hold your breath when I say so, that's all."

"Gee and I was wanting to get off my feet," she grinned, but did as he asked.

"Alright, yep, that's good, now hold your breath for 15 seconds." He looked over the data that came in from the scan. "Hmm, you appear to be in good health, kinda surprising. Have you been exercising a lot lately?"

Cin let out the breath. "Surprising? What do you mean? I've always been healthy. Was there anything wrong with me last time you saw me? Besides a cracked skull & arm?"

"Well, I mean, your endorphins, serotonin, and other wonderful hormones are through the roof as if you've been very happy, quite a lot, recently. That or you've been exercising." Then he thought for a moment, "How *are* things between you and Drend?"

Cin said, "Why fine--I think we might be teamed up. I hope so. But what's that got to do with--whatever you said?" Cin hadn't skipped biology, but she hadn't exactly been attentive. "It's okay, isn't it?" She sounded either a little worried or confused.

"No, it's good, it just means you're more fit than the last time I saw you, which is surprising because I doubt you had much time for PT while hanging out with Drend."

"Um, no. But what are you really asking, Di'nos?"

"I'm a doctor, not a gossip, but I must know. How are you and Drend getting on? Did he finally make a move on you or is he still just swooning?"

The flaming cheeks--and a rise in skin temp that the scanner could easily pick up--were answers themselves. Dino saw the indicators and smiled a big, toothy, predatory smile. "Oh... my... this is gonna be fun."

"Drend? Swooning?" The word, and embarrassment, resulted in her laughing out loud. "What's gonna be fun?" she managed to gasp.

"Drend doesn't know what he's in for."

"Drend is...great."

"So does Drend know he's been tumbling with full-fledged minor nobility? Or does he treat you like it anyway?"

"He treats me wonderful! And he sure didn't need your advice. Throw me on the nearest flat surface, indeed!" Cin stopped as she realized what else the doc had said. "How'd you find out who I am?"

Dino smiled and flashed her the medical chart/personnel datapad he was tapping on and reading over, which showed exactly who she was, where she was from, so on and so forth. He chuckled, "So, that's gonna be nine months no-fly for you then. Do you want to tell him or should I?"

Drend came in the room behind Cin just as Dino said that.

"What?!?! You're crazy, Di'nos!" Her voice was just indignant but Dino picked up on the hint of fright at what she thought was a diagnosis. "There's no way!!" She added a term she hadn't learned in a palace or on a consular ship

Dr. Dino'slussevi's medtech told her, "My Lady, this is quite unseemly," as she tried to get Cin to sit down and relax. Dino laughed, hard at that, and then pointed to Drend, whose face had gone absolutely white. "Wait, what?"

Cin didn't notice him with the medtech still fussing over her.

Dino looked at her. "Chill, girls. Cin'ownantilles--you're not pregnant, but the look on his face is absolutely priceless." That line started with authority and then ended with amusement.

"That's an awful thing to joke about, Di'nos," Cin chided him, not about to admit that she'd never given a thought to any consequences of the relationship. **That** had really scared her.

Dino immediately went into damage control mode. "Cin, I swear, you're not pregnant, and I'm sorry, I didn't realize how freaked out that would make you."

The accompanying lekku gestures confirmed his sincerity, and something in his voice and body language reminded her of her next-younger sibling, Trevor, apologizing. It was the latter that made Cin forgive him so easily. "It's alright. You pay for med school doing shock-comedy?"

Drend finally made his presence known to Cin, tapping her shoulder.

"OH! Drend! When did you get here?" She perked up but was still a little flushed from panic followed by anger.

"About a minute too soon."

"Huh?"

"Well, I heard something about you being pregnant and I turned stark white, I imagine, judging from Dino's smile."

"Oh, you did, Drend," Dino spoke up, with another of those sharp-toothed grins, "and you--"

"And **you** owe us big time, Di'nos, I think. Like several strong drinks and a good meal," she told the doctor imperiously as she hugged Drendar. "At least. After I figure out where our quarters are so I can put on something warmer."

"Well, I have good news that should perk you up as well." Drend told her as he held her close.

"Better than Di'nos' bad jokes?" she grinned, a little of her

merriment returning.

or her merriment returning.

"Yeah, I'm joining the rebellion." He smiled and then said, "And I've been told by our guards that we're bunked together."

Cin just smiled up at him, until Dino cleared his throat. "All I have to do is wait & that diagnosis will be true..." he snickered.

Cin glared at Dino, finally let go of Drendar and started pulling her flightsuit on. "Is he always like this, or usually worse?"

"Depends on if he's in a good mood or not." Drend half-smiled and kissed Cin on the cheek.

"I guess we can leave now."

Dino spoke up "Procedure dictates that I'm supposed to give him a full physical."

"Can I watch? Can't wait to hear what you're gonna diagnose this time."

Dino smiled and told Drend to take a step onto the scanner after stripping to his skivvies.

Cin settled onto a stool. "So how's his sero--whatever you were jabbering about before, Doc?"

"Oh, his levels are elevated alright," he laughed.

Dino smiled, "Alright, Drend, you're done, now. Do you want to go get a drink, or should I let you two get settled in first?"

"Meet us at our quarters in an hour, okay? You can be our escort, give the MPs a break."

The pair, guarded by their mutual MPs, made their way out of the med bay and down to C-Level, room 14. The door was a normal door, nothing electronic. Drend guessed the Rebellion had to economize. Then they entered the room which featured two twin-sized beds, two desks, two lockers, one refresher, and an overall color of...well, gray.

"Well this is drab."

Cin n/said, "About what I expected, typical accommodations for starfighter pilots. The only difference between this room and my old quarters on *Rakashandra* is this one is slightly bigger." It was as close to home as she had, now that there was no Alderaan.

At the end of each bed was a footlocker, and on top of the footlocker was a set of drab tan and forest green BDUs. "This'll do for now, clothing-wise. Maybe I'll eventually get my things shipped from the *Raka*," Cin said, glancing at them. "I hope they didn't give you a bad time at the debrief, Drendar."

"Not terribly, not enough that getting all this way hasn't been worth it, at the very least," he smiled.

Cin smiled in reply, but her eyes were distant, recalling how they'd met, how he'd taken care of her, how much fun they'd had--and thinking what a good team they made. "Yeah, worth it all, love."

Posted by ij thompson on 2 June 2009 09:35 PM:

The *Pincer's* scanning crew (and the squad of stormtroopers who accompanied them) had done a thorough job of scrutinizing the *Skalen II*, and were assembling at the transport's boarding hatch when a youngish Imperial officer entered the crew lounge, metal case in one hand, surveying the situation.

"The ship is clean, sir," the lead stormtrooper saluted. "No contraband. There was one unregistered weapon aboard."

The neatly-bearded officer placed the case he held on the ship's deck and took the blaster pistol that the trooper held out for him. "Thank you, that will be all. Have your team return to the *Pincer*."

"Sir?"

The officer eyed him coolly. "Something wrong with your

audio, trooper?"

"Uh, no Sir," the stormtrooper replied, signaling to his squad. "March."

The scanning crew and stormtroopers were gone in a moment, leaving the bearded officer quietly contemplating the blaster, *Fi's* blaster, which he still held. Fi studied her companions. Inex Jonn was calm, even smug, which Fi found slightly comical since, next to herself, he was the shortest person in the room. Veah, Amra, and Celeste of The Luminous Three looked pleased as usual, seemingly delighted by the unexpected visit. Fi envied their naivete.

It was Inex who broke the silence. "Commander Tazen, it is a pleasure to meet with you again. You've no doubt seen the reports? An accident has befallen Prefect Armon. It appears a vacancy has become available on the surface."

Tazen studied the Sakiyan expressionlessly. "Your reputation is an accurate one."

"You flatter me."

"That wasn't flattery, alien," Tazen growled. "Your kind make me sick. Nothing would make me happier than to end our acquaintance by blowing your vessel out of space."

Inex stiffened, and Fi could see him straining to be polite. "If you're unhappy with my work--"

"I'm not unhappy with your work," the Imperial snapped, and then brightened. "And who knows? I may have need for you again in the future."

Inex smiled, his sharp teeth as shiny as his ebon face. "My door is always open."

Commander Tazen kicked the case at his feet toward the bald alien, who made no move to pick it up. "I want you away from here," Tazen warned, "you will steer clear of the Rothana system for the next... five years."

"Must I?" Inex smirked.

Tazen ignored him, turning back for the boarding hatch. Without warning he stopped in mid-stride, and turned back.

"There were four aboard when you landed," he pointed out. "Now, there are five."

Fi stiffened as Tazen turned his eyes toward her, and struggled to stay still as he came forward. The young officer stood uncomfortably close, studying her features. "Your face," he breathed, "is somehow familiar to me."

"Petty criminal from the surface, Commander," Inex reported, sweat lightening his black forehead. "Nothing special, but I could use a couple of extra hands."

"That right?" Tazen sneered, looking back at Fi. Then he pushed her blaster pistol back into her quivering hands, backing away from the group to stand in the boarding hatch.

"Get out of here, Inex Jonn."

He exited, the hatch sealing behind him.

They got out of there.

Posted by Corr Terek on 2 June 2009 09:41 PM:

"Fierfek!" Damon swore as Zealos whipped the *Fang* into evasive maneuvers. "Mir, Tam, I need you both manning the ion cannons, *now*. I'll take one of the quads." He glanced at Cali. "Strap yourself in, it's about to get rough."

"We'll need more than a set of ion cannons to blast through that." Elayne said from the copilot's seat.

"These people aren't our enemies," Damon said tersely. "If we start blowing them out of the sky, we can kiss Rishi goodbye, as well as any other smuggler's haven. Word will get out."

"He's got a point," Zealos gritted, throwing the ship into a steep dive. "But what about those missiles?"

Damon half-smiled. "You worry about flying, *I'll* worry about the missiles."

"We're in!" Mir shouted over the comm.

"Good!" Damon replied, warming up the quad-turret. "You know what to do!"

"You got it, Captain!" she replied. He had to have faith that Mir and Tam could shut down enough of the smugglers for them to get the message. As for his job...

"Damon!" Zealos's voice came over the comm. "I can't keep evading these missiles forever!"

The status indicators lit green just as the first of the missiles came into view. "Don't worry, Zealos," Damon said, giving himself over to the Force. "You don't have to."

Posted by ij thompson on 5 June 2009 07:14 PM:

"Veah?"

"Yes?"

Not bad, Fi commended herself. The second of the three identical women she'd located had turned out to be the one she was looking for. The Luminous Three had removed their subtle, identifying earrings earlier, and Fi could no longer tell them apart. She was no longer sure if they could tell *each other* apart.

"Whatcha doin'?"

"Playing Dejarik," Veah replied happily, if a bit redundantly; the blonde beauty was very clearly sitting at the *Skalen II's* lounge table, playing Dejarik.

Fi crossed the dim chamber, and slid into a chair opposite the woman. "How's it going?"

"I'm losing," Veah replied with a smile as she keyed in a move. "But, so far, I've lasted six moves longer than I did during my last game against the computer's 'difficult' setting!"

"Nice!" Fi replied, falling silent and watching the game for a moment. "So," she went on, in her best 'just us girls' voice, "how was your date with Prefect Arnon?" She pointed a thumb toward the aft of the ship, indicating the planet they'd left a couple of hours ago.

"Oh, it was wonderful!" Veah replied, responding to another of the computer's moves. "The Prefect is a funny and charming man!"

Fi took this in, reaching out a hand and absently passing a finger through one of the tiny, holographic monsters on the table. "Pity about the accident."

"Yes," Veah agreed. "Still, I'm sure it will be alright. Rothana is a major Imperial world - I'm sure their medical experts are second to none."

Fi blinked in confusion. "You think the Prefect is still alive?"

"Why wouldn't he be?"

Fi studied the woman for a moment. "Inex told that Customs guy that a position had opened up on the surface."

"Ah yes," Veah replied, "a position. That's good news!"

Fi was unnerved. Veah and the rest of The Luminous Three were not stupid. But if the woman playing chess before her was *playing* dumb, she was a better actor than Fi had ever seen.

"You don't think there's... a connection there?"

Veah keyed another move into the lounge table. "I've no reason to think so." She turned and smiled at Fi. "If anything bad had happened, Inex would have said so!"

"Of course," Fi replied, biting her lip thoughtfully. "Still, that Customs inspector gave Inex a case of something. In my experience, when it comes to Imperial Customs, the 'gifts' usually travel in the other direction."

"A gift!" Veah's features lit up. "And who could be more deserving than dear, old Inex?"

"Beats me," Fi agreed weakly, rising from the table and feeling slightly sick, but not knowing why. "Enjoy your game."

"Thank you, I-" Veah replied, keying in another move. Her eyes brightened as she saw the result. "I won!"

She turned her angelic smile up toward Fi. "Isn't that great?"

Fi smiled weakly, nodded. "Great."

Turning from the table and its occupant, Fi left the *Skalen II's* crew lounge in search of a bunk...

Posted by ij thompson on 9 June 2009 06:36 PM:

Inex Jonn's quarters aboard the *Skalen II* were dim at the moment, lit only by a small bedside lamp. The Sakiyan himself rested in his modest bunk, propped up against the gray wall, reading a datapad. At the bed's foot, the case given him by Inspector Tazen lay unopened.

The door chimed, interrupting his study of the datapad. Inex set the device to one side, folding his fingers across his middle. "Come in."

The steel door opened, and there stood one of The Luminous Three, breathtaking in the dimness. "Inex? It's Veah."

"Come in, my child."

The woman entered, the door sealing behind her. "If it's alright, I'd like to talk with you... about Prefect Arnon."

Inex smiled warmly. "What would you like to know?"

"Well," Veah began politely, unsure how to proceed, "this woman who's travelling with us, Ms. Arterjenson, she believes that he may have died."

Inex smiled sympathetically, and patted his cot. "Come sit."

Veah obeyed, coming to rest on the side of the bed, looking at the alien expectantly.

"It's true," Inex informed her gently. "Prefect Arnon was killed, possibly right after your date with him."

"I see," Veah replied, looking almost sad. Almost. "Still," she went on, "it's good that, in his short life, he had a perfect service record. Not a blemish, there!"

"That's right," Inex agreed, "His life is to be celebrated."

"Yes."

Inex studied her. "Is there something more, my dear?"

The blonde beauty thought a moment. "Inex," she began, struggling with what she wanted to say. "I don't remember part of my date with the Prefect. I remember dinner, and then we went to visit the gardens, but... after that, I only remember returning to the ship."

Inex smiled at her warmly, taking one of her hands in his own. "Memory is fickle, my dear," he told her, "and, dare I say it, frivolous. Do not concern yourself with the past... enjoy the present, the future!"

Veah smiled back at him. "You're right, of course," she agreed. "You're the wisest person I know, Inex. We all thank you for taking care of us."

Inex patted her hand gently, nodding in gratitude.

Veah looked thoughtful. "It's funny. It just never seems to work out with any of the people you arrange for me to meet. Or for Amra or Celeste, for that matter!"

"It's true," Inex agreed.

"But that's good, too," Veah volunteered. "It may mean that the perfect man is still to come, in the future!"

Inex nodded, smiling widely. "That's the spirit!"

Veah rose, moving to the chamber's doorway. "Thank you so much for speaking with me, Inex. I always feel so much better after our talks."

"Me, too."

Inex watched the door swish closed behind the stunning beauty, and lay silent a moment. Then he powered down his datapad, clicked off the bedside lamp, rolled over, and went to sleep.

Posted by Dread Pirate Roberts on 9 June 2009 07:42 PM:

Lights flickered on in the dark cockpit of the *Archaeologist*. A computer screen blinked to life, though it was difficult to read it through the layers of accumulated dust. There was an almost paradoxical silence, contrasting the various lights and screens that burst to life, unaccompanied by sounds of any kind. It lasted only a short time before the sirens sounded. Soon, the entire ship was engulfed in the clamor of klaxons and bells. Eventually, something stirred in the bowels of the living quarters.

Footsteps echoed through the frigate corridors for the first time in centuries, as the lone passenger walked towards the head of the starship. Surveying the screens for a short time, the robed figure sat down in the pilot's chair and plugged something into the newly awakened ship systems. Shortly thereafter, an old speaker barked to life.

"Warning, conflict detected. Advise new course to avoid."

The pilot drummed fingers on the screen with a methodical tapping noise. A small screen displayed a datafeed of another ship in the area. Only the word *Fang* was visible through the dust. The pilot reached out through the Force, scanning for life, as had happened many times before. This time, however, there was a response. Several, in fact. A number of force-sensitive beings were on that ship.

Perhaps they would know where this is... thought the pilot.

Opening a hailing frequency, the voice of a middle aged man broke out to address the *Nexu's Fang*.

"Pardon the interruption, as this may not be a good time, but this is....Jedi Master Kell Lanker. My navigation systems are broken. Are we near...Coruscant?"

Posted by Ice Hawk on 10 June 2009 06:51 AM:

Reil banked the ship hard to port, trying to put a little more distance between them and the missiles, as an alarm went off indicating that two missiles were dangerously close to impacting against the ship. He was about to comm Damon again, when a burst of fire from the quad intercepted both missiles. The ship shuddered as the missiles detonated dangerously close to the *Nexu's Fang*.

Reil exhaled the breath he had been holding, and turned the ship to curve around their aggressors, as Damon continued to intercept the rest of the incoming missiles.

"What the frell's shooting at us anyway?"

Elayne's fingers flashed over the controls of the targeting computer, turning the red dots into images of their targets.

"Four Headhunters, and two Starchasers, at 2.56 clicks away. The Headhunter's are the ones with missiles, I think. . ."

Reil grimaced. That was a lot of firepower to be dealing with in any ship, especially if they were fighting with kiddy gloves still on.

"Mark the Headhunters as priority targets one through four, and the Starchasers and secondary targets one and two, and then relay the information to Tam and Mir."

Reil yanked hard on the controls and pointed the *Fang* directly at the loose gaggle of starfighters. Immediately the yellow warning indicator went active as the Headhunters tried to get a missile lock on them. This proved to be a mistake, since the

Nexu's Fang closed the distance too quickly. By the time the indicator changed to red, to signal a target lock, Tam and Mir were already in range to use the ion cannons, and they began to light up space with blue streaks of energy.

Faced with the *Fang* baring down on their formation, ion cannon's blazing, the enemy fighters flinched, breaking target their target locks as they moved out of the way to avoid collision. Only the Starchasers were able to fire back, their laser and ion blasts battering the forward shields as they flew past.

Tam caught one Headhunter as it tried to pull off the *Fang's* port side, and Mir caught another as it tried to escape over head. Both were stopped dead in their tracks, as blue lightening fried their electrical systems. Reil throttled back to one third thrust, and flipped the *Nexu's Fang* 180 degrees, just in time for Mir to wing a third Headhunter, before it moved out of range.

The other Headhunter and the Starchasers began falling back towards what looked to be a large collection of derelict hulks fused together, with their companion trying desperately to catch up. Reil pushed the ship to full throttle and gave chase. Almost immediately the scanners began picking up an energy surge from the pile of debris, as sections of the hulk began lighting up with activity, previously docile turrets began targeting them, and three more red dots appeared, flying out of a makeshift hanger.

"Well. . . Sith. I guess we know where these guys came from at least. What are those new bogies?"

Elayne was about to bring image resolutions on the new fighters when the comm crackled to life.

"Pardon the interruption, as this may not be a good time, but this is....Jedi Master Kell Lanker. My navigation systems are broken. Are we near...Coruscant?"

Posted by Mack Jace on 11 June 2009 12:11 AM:

It was, as the saying went, quite the wretched hive. The LoBue Cantina on Abregado-rae wasn't the type of place that most people liked to frequent, but Morec Birtrok wasn't most people. Sitting alone in a cantina was something he had gotten used to over the past couple of years. It wasn't so much the loneliness that got to you, but rather the jumping around from job to job that got to you more.

That was where he was at now, looking for someone to work for. He had been to the spaceport earlier, looking for some possible openings. It was mostly just him keeping an eye on any new arrivals and checking out the crew. He tried to stay back in the shadows so as to keep from arousing suspicion from anyone.

He had seen some interesting ships come in, but by far the most interesting one was a vintage pre-Clone Wars Republic Cruiser. It was a big Corellian one, the one used by delegates and diplomats the galaxy over. It was by no means a cheap ship either, Morec knew that much, though it probably paid off for whoever was piloting it.

Back to the present, Morec took a casual look around the cantina. It was late afternoon, time for all the crews who didn't need to get out in a hurry to get a nice break from routine. Morec spotted at least a few enforcers hanging around their bosses, and made a mental note connecting faces to ships.

One of the captains he saw was the one from the Republic Cruiser. He was an older man, well into his fifties, but he didn't seem to have lost a step. His eyes were covered by reflective glasses, the kind pilots liked to wear. The way his clothes were cut, combined with the way he carried himself suggested time in the military. He was sitting at a table, surrounded by his crew, or what seemed to be his crew. To his right was what seemed to be his enforcer, a hulking man who looked like he came straight out

of Wild Space. Across from the captain was a young woman with blazing red hair. She was paying more attention to the rest of the cantina than anything. Probably his bodyguard, Morec thought to himself.

Eyeing the rest of the possible candidates, Morec decided that the Cruiser's crew was probably the best option. Downing the last of his drink, he pulled his cap tight and got up, angling for the Cruiser's crew's table.

Posted by Corr Terek on 11 June 2009 11:46 PM:

Damon could hardly believe his ears. "A Jedi Master?" He laughed incredulously. *And he just blurts it out over an open channel. Either he's crazy or he's seriously out of touch with galactic events.* "Is this guy for real?"

"I don't know if it's a Jedi or not, but there's definitely another Force-user out there," Elayne confirmed, Tam chiming in his agreement. Damon shrugged, catching sight of a missile headed their way. A quick pull of the trigger and it was space dust. The attacking fighters had become much more wary of the *Fang* after they'd seen the accuracy with which her weapons -- all of them -- found their targets. Even so, Damon wasn't sure they'd gotten the message.

"We've found this 'Jedi Master's' ship," Reil reported. "Looks like a hunk of junk."

"If he's really a Jedi Master, he might have some tricks up his sleeve," Mir said tersely. "And we need all the help we can get."

"Agreed," Reil said. A second later his voice came over the comm system. "Uh, actually, Master Lanker, this is Rishi." A blast shook the ship. "We'd love to chat with you, but we're kind of busy trying to keep the locals from killing us. Do you think you could give us a hand?"

Posted by Dread Pirate Roberts on 12 June 2009 01:49 AM:

The *Archaeologist's* pilot again drummed fingertips on a data screen. Various diagrams and arrays appeared and disappeared, with one finally staying for more than a few nanoseconds. Through the dust, it was just possible to infer that this was the weapons systems.

On the hull, old turrets began crankily spinning about, the double barrels pointing in seemingly random directions, as though stretching before an exercise. Just as suddenly, they stopped.

The man's voice again crackled over the comm, volunteering his assistance.

"My weapons systems appear to be undamaged. I will see what I can do," the voice said studiously.

Each of the four turrets snapped into position, each targeting a different enemy vessel. The first volley went wide, the turrets re-adjusting to compensate for the failure. The second and third volleys were all on target, but only enough to disable the targets, their firepower having degraded over centuries of disuse.

From there, each turret seemed to pick its own target, blasting it with surprisingly accurate, but disappointingly weak laser blasts. Whenever a target stopped moving, the assigned turret would pick a new target and follow that.

Meanwhile, the *Archaeologist* itself closed in on the *Nexu's Fang*.

Posted by Mack Jace on 12 June 2009 03:13 PM:

"--but like I said, keep your eyes open." The man with the glasses was saying as Morec approached. He could see the

woman's eyes staring turbolasers at him as he approached, at the same time as her hand casually dropped beneath the table.

"Good afternoon gentlemen, lady," Morec said, tipping his cap slightly.

"Depends," said the man with the glasses. He had a deep voice, slightly hoarse, the kind of voice attributed to a military man, further confirmation of Morec's thoughts. "Who are you?"

"Just someone looking for some work. The name's Morec," he said, extending his hand. Glasses, as Morec mentally named him, took the hand cautiously. It was slightly unnerving being unable to see the man's eyes, but he assumed that was all part of it. A person's eyes played a big part in their body language, and being unable to see them took a big piece of that away from the other person.

"Well, Morec, what makes you think I need help?" Glasses countered.

"Call it a hunch," he said with a grin. "I saw your ship, and I can only assume that it takes a good sized crew to run it. And like the saying goes, many hands make light work."

"In my experience, hunches don't usually amount to anything worthwhile." He paused for a moment, the glasses seeming to look into Morec's soul. "On the other hand, I was just mentioning bringing on some more help to my associates here. What a coincidence." He said emotionlessly. "Why don't you give me your --"

He was interrupted by some newcomers to the cantina. Morec turned to look, just as his mind started tingling with warning from the Force. A group of stormtroopers, led by an Imperial officer, were standing in the entrance.

Morec looked back to the table, all eyes expectantly on Morec. "Friends of yours?" The woman asked.

"I hope not," Morec said. "All my friends know I hate surprise visits."

"That's what I was afraid of," Glasses said. "Well, I guess my hand has been forced. Let's go, Morec. Maybe you can start proving to me why I hired you."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 12 June 2009 05:31 PM:

"Primary Three is down!" Tam shouted as the Z-95 Headhunter spiraled out of his sights trailing debris. "Targeting Primary-- wait! Incoming!" He swung his turret around, pouring laser fire onto another incoming missile. Once it erupted into a ball of death he wiped his forehead. "Okay, *now* I'm targeting Primary Two. Hey Damon, where's One at?"

"Looks like he's turning around for another run. I'll take him when he approaches. Meantime I'm scaring off the Starchasers."

"Copy that. Any word on that Jedi?" He eyed his targeting computer, focusing for only a moment on the small gray dot designated *Archaeologist*. A tempest of emotions and opinions swirled through him. Another Jedi, and present just as they fell into trouble. While he waited for Damon to have a moment to respond to his question he considered how things might have been different if they'd approached the Rishi Maze with a little more diplomacy...

"Elayne's in contact with him, but--" he paused to unleash his own turret at the enemy. "I guess we'll just see if he can save our aft sections..."

Posted by ij thompson on 12 June 2009 10:09 PM:

The Whirl nebula enveloped the *Skalen II* as it emerged from hyperspace, dazzling Fiola Shaku with its flowing spectrum of colours.

"Amazing!"

Veah turned toward her in the cockpit, favouring her with another dazzling smile. "You've never been here before, Ms. Arterjenson?"

Fi snorted laughter despite herself, grinning back at the woman. "No, I haven't. And you can call me Fi."

"Of course," Veah replied. "But, if I may, why would I call you Fi, when your name is Jean Arterjenson?"

"That was a fake name," Fi told the woman without pause. "I wasn't... I didn't know if I could trust you."

"A-ha!" Veah replied, grinning slyly. "An alias. Incognito!"

"I want an alias!" Veah's twin, Amra, volunteered, straightening proudly. "Henceforth, you shall all refer to me as... Jane Antilles!"

Celeste, the third of the identical trio, nudged Amra gently on the arm. "Silly, 'Antilles' is the one hundred and thirty-third most common name among humans!"

Amra considered this. "Very well," she conceded, "you shall call me... Jane... Antilles...terjenson!"

Fi and The Luminous Three howled laughter, while Inex Jonn grinned in amusement. "I shall call you all fortunate, ladies," he announced, as their destination came into view. "For, despite the nebula's interference, we've arrived right where we intended to be."

Fi looked out the cockpit glass, shaken slightly by the awesome sight before them.

"Oh, my..."

Posted by Dread Pirate Roberts on 13 June 2009 06:42 PM:

Still spewing laserfire, the aged *Archaeologist* had begun to take its share of retaliatory blasts. By now though, it was very near the besieged *Nexus's Fang*, further concentrating their enemies' targets. More and more lances of energy seared the hull of the old starship as the pilot tried to interpose it between the attacking fighters and the *Fang*. Again the man's voice crackled across the comms, but this time on an open frequency, addressing the adversaries.

"Attention starfighter pilots, this is Kell Lanker, pilot and owner of the the Republic Vessel *Archaeologist*. Surely there must be a diplomatic solution to this conflict," the voice said with charisma. "Put your flight commander on the air, and we can discuss a mutually beneficial end to this."

With that, the pilot stood up and walked into the depths of the ship's cargo hold, rummaging about in the darkness.

Posted by Mack Jace on 14 June 2009 11:18 PM:

The three sitting at the table rose as one, and began to walk briskly to the back of the building. The Imperials, who had been looking around the cantina, noticed their exit, and shouted for them to stop, knowing full well their efforts were in vain. The troopers raised their rifles, but were only able to see the group disappear out the back door. The officer with them yelled, "Smuggler scum! Back outside, they're heading to their ship!"

Morec followed close behind them, hoping that they weren't looking for him, and rather looking for the crew he just signed on with. It would be better for them in that case. He slung his pack across his back and pulled his cap down over his eyes. He came up next to Glasses and said, "I hope you've got a plan, 'cause you know those Imperials are waiting outside your ship."

Glasses's gaze never left the streets they were walking. They were hurrying toward the spaceport along one of the narrower merchant streets in the city, hopefully avoiding any Imperials

along the way. "I don't," he said simply. "I guess you'll just have to trust me."

The street wasn't very crowded, but there were some people out and about. The way the group was moving, people seemed to be staying out of their way. They were coming up to an intersection when Morec's senses started tingling again. Ahead, he saw two stormtroopers enter the intersection and they both happened to glance their way.

"Get to the ship, I'll meet you there!" Morec shouted as he pushed his way forward. The two troopers lifted their rifles and fired as the crew of three dashed out of the way. Morec ducked both shots, feeling the Force flowing through him as he hadn't in quite some time. He jumped into the air, launching himself into a dive. As he landed on his hands, he immediately pushed off and rebounded into the troopers, catching them both off guard. His feet connected underneath their helmets, knocking them out cold. Landing on his feet, he glanced around, noticing with some humor the people standing in awe around him.

He headed off at a quick pace toward the spaceport, hoping that was the last of the Imperials he'd be encountering. At the same time, knowing that wouldn't be the case.

The Imperials hadn't gotten to the spaceport by the time Morec arrived, so that either meant they didn't know where they were, or it was a trap. Morec assumed the worst. The ship was sitting there with it's ramp down and waiting. The engines were warming up, so it would only be a matter of time before they got going. Jogging up the ramp, he found his way to the cockpit to find Redhead sitting at the yoke. Her fingers were dancing across the boards, trying desperately to get the ship off the ground as quickly as possible. At the same time Morec felt anger and frustration radiating from her.

"Any sign of the Imperials?" Morec asked.

"No," came the terse reply. Morec sensed the surprise, but she didn't show it. He also sensed the anger and frustration being aimed his way.

"Right, well that's a plus. Maybe they couldn't find us..."

"Huh. Yeah sure. You keep telling yourself that, and I'll keep getting us off this planet."

And with that, Morec knew the conversation was over. He started to turn around, and almost ran straight into Glasses. He wasn't looking at Morec though, and he brushed past him and sat down into the copilot's seat. "How's it looking?"

"So far so good," Redhead responded, and with a few more buttons and levers manipulated, the ship was ready to go. Morec stepped out of the cabin and found the Comms station empty, so he sat down and strapped in.

"What do you think you're doing?" came Redhead's question.

"Helping. Somebody's gotta mind the comms," he flipped some switches and checked to make sure all lights were green. "So are we planning to blast our way out of here, or should we try to remain inconspicuous?"

"Let's try to keep a low profile, shall we?" came Glasses's reply this time.

"Roger that Captain." Minutes later, they were airborne, shooting for space.

Behind him, he heard someone strapping in to the navigation station.

"Where we headed Cap'n Ramis?" asked a new, unfamiliar voice. *So that's the name, Ramis*, Morec thought.

"Set course for Rishi. Seems we've attracted a little too much attention here, must be time to lay low for a while."

"Roger that, Captain. Setting course for Rishi."

As they sped into space, no ships in sight, something that struck Morec as odd, they vectored the ship, and jumped into

hyperspace.

A few days later, Morec felt like he was a part of the crew. He had learned most of their names, for one, and they knew his. Glasses was known as Jyn Ramis, or Captain Ramis to the crew. Redhead was Mara Ramis, his daughter. He didn't know too much of their history together, except that they made a good team. The man Morec had identified as the enforcer that day was called Jaso Meros. There were a few other members of the crew, though he wasn't too sure of their names yet. Either way, they were a solid team, and Morec was glad that he joined up with them. He was looking forward to something more solid than the past couple of years had been.

Jyn's voice came over the ship's comm, "We'll be reverting to back to realspace in a few minutes, everyone get to your stations. You never know what we'll find out here."

Morec settled down into the comm station and donned his headset. The rest of the crew signed on, and Morec did the same. He felt a slight shudder as the ship reverted to realspace.

Seconds later, "Uh oh folks, seems like we've got a battle going on out there. Let's stand by on the turbolasers, and keep an eye open."

Posted by Corr Terek on 16 June 2009 12:24 AM:

There was a long moment of quiet after Master Lanker's calmly spoken request, which was punctuated by the arrival of a positively ancient Republic cruiser, weapons at the ready. Perhaps this influenced the smugglers of Rishi, for after a second Elayne heaved a sigh of relief. "Their weapons systems are powering down."

"Good," Damon muttered. "Maybe they're finally willing to listen."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 16 June 2009 04:32 PM:

When things in the void outside finally cooled off, Tam leaned back and exhaled heavily. The new Jedi was working toward negotiations with the hostile residents. He didn't disagree with the course of action, but he'd met Jedi in the past, and he knew that they often twisted things to go their way. He'd keep an eye on this Lanker fellow...

"So what's the plan now?" he said as he came into the cockpit. Elayne, Reil, and Mir were staring intently at the sensor board.

Elayne held a hand up to silence him. "Just a moment, Tam. The *Archaeologist* is docking with us, and its maneuvering thrusters aren't what they used to be."

Fine. The Jedi are gonna have a pow wow before talking with the locals. Let's just hope they're willing to wait until all us big bad Force users can figure out how to work everything to our advantage...

Posted by ij thompson on 16 June 2009 07:14 PM:

It was a ship. Or, more accurately, *had been* a ship. Right out of the history holos Fi had viewed in school, the old *Venator* stood proudly in The Whirl nebula, though it was clearly immobile.

"*Skalen II*," a voice called over the comm, "this is Mull Station. Are you on general business, or do you have an affiliation?"

"Affiliated," Inex Jonn replied immediately. "We're with

Obar Mull."

"Roger that," the voice replied. "Please proceed to landing bay P-12"

"Understood," Inex replied, banking the vessel toward the Venator's large, dorsal hangar opening. An escort of V-wings appeared around them, accompanied by an ancient... was it? Yes... an Eta-2 Interceptor. A Jedi starfighter.

Fi remembered her history and thought of the Jedi, who'd allegedly conspired to overthrow the Republic. She then thought of Tam, the Jedi she'd known and loved, and how *he'd* conspired to overthrow anything.

Like, never.

It was all such a mystery. The first question of which being, what was this old ship doing out here?

As the battleship/space station loomed larger outside the cockpit glass, Fi had no doubt - she would find out soon...

Posted by Dread Pirate Roberts on 16 June 2009 09:31 PM:

The docking process, though loud and clumsy, was soon finished uneventfully. Sparks flew as ancient wires were called to duty for the first time since the *Archaeologist* left the Chu'unthor in orbit over Abhean. Screeches of metal accompanied the procedure, a cacophonous racket that was more than a little unkind to the ears of both ship's occupants.

Almost ignorantly, its pilot continued to search about in the dark for a few minutes before finally retrieving a power coupling from a crate of spare parts. Trekking again down the corridors of the ship, the pilot opened a panel in one of the walls and removed an older, barely discernible coupling, replacing it with the more recent one. At once, bright lights seared through the dark interior, revealing rust and cosmetic damage ranging from misdemeanor to felony several times over.

Satisfied, the pilot navigated to the cargo storage again. Throwing on an old Jedi robe, the pilot finally walked to the airlock, awaiting the inevitable meeting with the *Fang's* crew.

Posted by Mack Jace on 16 June 2009 10:02 PM:

A few tense moments passed, during which Morec could hear the crew checking in on the turbolasers. Then came the report from Sensors, "Captain, looks like all ships are standing down. I'm getting readings of their weapons systems powering down as well."

"Sounds good Jaso. Morec, why don't you open up comms with them, see if there's anyone needing any help? I'm feeling particularly generous today."

"Copy that Captain," Morec replied. He dialed a few keys, and broadcast a message. "Attention all ships, this is the *Second Chance*. If you're willing, we're available to provide aid to any that require it."

Posted by Corr Terek on 16 June 2009 10:33 PM:

Damon depressed the comm button. "Thanks for the offer, *Second Chance*. We're good, but I think there's a couple of disabled fighters that could use a hand in getting flightworthy again."

"Uh, yeah," a gravelly voice came over the comm. "Any help would be greatly appreciated."

They finally broke comm silence, Damon thought, amused.

"Copy that," the man from the *Second Chance* replied. "What happened here?"

Damon grinned at the others. "Funny story, that. Buy us a

round or two at one of the local pubs and we'll tell you about it. Soon as we finish up with the *Archeologist* here."

The crew of the *Fang* had gathered around the docking port, intensely curious as to the identity and purpose of their new acquaintance.

"Time to meet the 'Jedi Master'," Mir said as she finished adjusting her blaster. She eyed Damon. "This feel familiar to you at all?"

Damon grinned at Tam. "Sure. But this time, I'm not asking to see any tricks. I'd like to stay here at Rishi for a little bit."

Elayne cocked her head. "He's coming."

"Right," Damon said. Now that she mentioned it, he could feel the presence aboard the other ship drawing closer. "Stay sharp, everyone. This guy might be legit, or it might be some sort of trick, so be ready for anything."

The door hissed open, and a tall figure stood before them, dressed in the cowed robes that Damon had come to identify with Jedi. "Greetings," it said, drawing back its hood. "I am--"

"A droid!?" Cali blurted.

Well, I sure wasn't ready for that, Damon thought ruefully. The looks on the others' faces pretty much said the same. Shaking his head at Cali's outburst, he intervened.

"Please, forgive my companion's outburst," he said, stepping forward. "I'm Captain Damon Aligeri, and this," he gestured towards the others in turn, "is my crew: Mir, my first mate; Reil, our pilot; Elayne, our copilot and navigator; and Cali and Tam." He flashed a smile at the droid and a wink at the two young people. "They're the new hired hands."

He bowed slightly to the droid. "Who do we have the honor of meeting?"

Posted by Dread Pirate Roberts on 17 June 2009 03:52 AM:

Cut off in mid-sentence and noting the surprise of the crew, the droid bowed deeply, righting itself tone of the before continuing in the tone of the late Master Lanker.

"Please forgive the deception, as I assumed a human guise would be more beneficial to diplomacy. I am not, as you may have guessed, Jedi Master Kell Lanker," the droid explained. His blue optical sensor adjusted itself as it prepared to continue.

"Well of course not," interjected Cali. "A droid can't be a Jedi," she stated matter-of-factly. She tossed a questioning glance to Damon and Tam. "Right?"

"I am JEDI Prototype One," the droid said, its voice now distinctly modulated. "You may call me Proto," it declared.

"See?" Cali triumphed.

"-Jedi Knight," the robot continued. "I'm on my way to Coruscant to report the death of my Master, the real Kell Lanker, to the Jedi Council. I also wish to report the activities of Sith Assassins in the Outer Regions to the Republic Security Bureau."

The crew stared in silence at the newcomer, incredulous and unsure of what to do next, or even where to begin. It was Damon who finally spoke up, albeit with hesitation.

"So...first things first. Jedi Knight, you say. But you're a droid. How can that be?" He asked hesitantly. Tam watched the inscrutable faceplate of the droid with vindictive curiosity.

The droid reached into its robes and drew forth a long lightsaber, twirling the inactive weapon about on fine, dexterous fingers that looked plated in some sort of ceramic. Cocking its cylindrical head to the side, Proto addressed the crew. "Is this not the most common identifier of the Jedi? A lightsaber?"

"Carrying a lightsaber doesn't make you a Jedi." Elayne

remarked pointedly.

Again secreting the weapon into its robes, Proto looked upwards, the inner optical sensors spinning and calculating. "I suppose you are talking about the Force. Very well then, for example..." Proto's voice trailed off as various items around the and belonging to the crew of the *Fang* began to rise up, floating in the air around them.

Posted by Mack Jace on 17 June 2009 10:58 PM:

Morec chuckled to himself at the reply, "Maybe we will. Safe travels, friend." He switched to the ships comms and said, "Jaso, can you get me a reading on those ships? Try and see if you can sort out which ones need the most help."

"Morec," said Jaso, "Looks loike thar's two o' them in bad shape." Moments later came the coordinates and vectors of the ships.

He called out to Captain Ramis, "Captain, looks like we've got a couple of disabled birds out there. What's the call?"

A few seconds later the reply came, "Like I said before, I'm feeling particularly generous today, so we'll see who needs help and give it."

"Aye, aye, Captain."

He opened comms with the fighters as he felt the ship begin to move toward them. "Attention fighters, this is the *Second Chance*. We're here to assist in any way we can. We're reading two of you as disabled."

The reply came quickly, "Uh, yeah...If we could just get a lift down to the planet, we can handle the rest." Morec could tell this was hard for the man, as it was with most of the fringe types. Asking for help was something most people would rather avoid.

"Sure thing. You're in luck, we've got a couple of docking clamps for you to use." Morec smiled, knowing even after a short amount of time that the Captain would try and milk this for all it was worth. Since he was feeling generous, maybe all that would be was a few rounds at the pub. One never knew...

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 18 June 2009 04:06 PM:

So this is what it's like, Tam thought as he floated in the air. He'd never been on the business end of a "Force Trick" before. Concern welled inside him that this droid going to be able to make an encore performance of his own abilities, but something deeper told him that no, they were not in for a sudden relocation.

In moments, everything was lowered back to its proper place.

"So," said Mir, adjusting her outfit after regaining her feet, "a Jedi Droid. Now I've seen everything."

"Not everything," said Damon.

"He's right," Elayne added. "Something isn't adding up here. Proto, would you care to explain how all of this is possible?"

"Meanwhile," grumbled Tam, "those smugglers outside are wondering why they took their itchy fingers off their triggers."

Elayne held up a forestalling hand. "I think they can wait. We need to know who our allies are before we can negotiate with enemies..."

Posted by ij thompson on 18 June 2009 10:09 PM:

Landing was smooth and incident-free, the *Skalen II* swallowed up neatly by Mull Station's cavernous dorsal hangar bay. As Inex Jonn piloted the transport down the ex-Venator's central deployment trench, Fi was able to see all the other vessels in their adjacent bays. Many were independent transports much

like their own, but there were also a great number of Republic-era fighters, like the ones that had escorted them to the Station's entrance.

In fact, Fi began to notice that all the fighters on their left, the warship/station's portside, were painted a bold red. Similarly, all the fighters on the starboard side of the trench were an equally bold blue.

"It's nice to be back!" Veah announced, interrupting her thoughts.

"You come here a lot?" Fi asked.

"When time and work allow it," Celeste interjected. "It's always a lot of fun."

"Everyone is so nice here," Amra agreed.

The *Skalen II* found its landing space on the port side of the trench and descended. Out the glass, Fi spotted some guards coming their way, and felt her heart start to pound. They were stormtroopers, but an older kind; the ones from back in the war. At least, that's what they were wearing - though this armour was painted red, just like the ships. Their gait was much more relaxed than a stormtrooper, however, jaunty even, and their weapons were not drawn.

Inex Jonn rose from the pilot's chair, gripping the case that had been resting at his heel since they'd all risen earlier.

"Ladies," he invited, "let us go and pay a visit to our host..."

Posted by Dread Pirate Roberts on 18 June 2009 11:31 PM:

Gently resting the crew and their belongings back on the ground, the white droid cocked its head to the side and quizzed them. "Are you familiar with the Seresatz Crystal?" it intoned.

Judging from the blank stares it received, Proto righted itself and continued began a tale.

"The Seresatz Crystal is an ancient artifact only recently brought to light. Well, when I say recently, I mean when my Master and I set off to retrieve it. Anyway, there were rumors of a powerful Force-Sensitive with previously undocumented powers. Naturally, the Council sent a team to investigate. It was revealed that the Force-User in question was not a Force-User at all. In reality, he had discovered a shard of what came to be called the Seresatz Crystal. The shard, small enough to be worn on a necklace, granted an otherwise mundane human a connection to the Force rivaling that of some Jedi Knights. This piqued my Master's curiosity, and we were quickly assigned to investigate it. Leaving the Chu-Unthor near its completion, we made our way to the outer rim."

A palpable wave of sadness emanated from the glistening droid as it looked away momentarily. Shaking its head, Proto once again told of ancient times.

"It is here that my story takes an unfortunate turn. We did indeed find the Crystal, in an ancient temple that predated the Jedi Order. However, we were not alone. Sith Assassins, also aware of the Crystal's power, had come to claim it as their own. In the battle, my Master was wounded. We escaped to another chamber and sealed the door, but my Master was not far from death's door. He hid the Crystal shortly before his death. Afterwards, I was able to defeat the Assassins and return to our ship. Somehow, my navigation systems were damaged, and my path to Coruscant interrupted. I have been wandering since then, searching for life-forms that could assist. It is here that you find me."

Elayne was the first to break the silence, pursuing her original question. "But where is the crystal now?"

Proto's optics shuttered, imitating an organic being's eyelids. "It's here." the droid explained, tapping his chest. "My master

hid the Crystal inside me. Remember how I said a mere shard granted significant powers? It would seem the entire Crystal is enough to grant the powers of the Force even to a nonliving being. Thus you find me a Jedi Knight, returning to the council to report the death of my Master."

Posted by ij thompson on 19 June 2009 07:13 PM:

"Inex Jonn!" Obar Mull boomed, raising his great, flabby arms outward toward the Sakiyan and his companions. "Here you are again, at last!"

Inex bowed deeply on Mull Station's portside bridge, while all the other shady types present craned their necks to see who had so captured their host's attention.

"It is a pleasure to be back," the Sakiyan announced. "And with such good news," he added, raising the case he carried slightly.

Obar Mull's eyes lit at the sight of the case, his fingers dancing in anticipation. The crimelord was corpulent, bald, rosy-cheeked, sweaty, and wore more gold than Fi had ever seen one human carry. Around his great form the man wore a drape of loose-fitting elegant gold fabric, and little else.

"You've come through again, my friend," he cheered. "And you will be rewarded, just as we discussed!"

Inex simply smiled and nodded at the news.

"And look," Obar went on, "you have your trio of luscious girls with you!" He eyed The Luminous Three admiringly. "Why, if I were twenty years younger... or two-hundred pounds lighter!"

"Or single!" Amra teased him with a smile.

"Gah!" Obar spat in good-natured distaste. "Don't remind me!"

"How is the 'little woman'?" Inex inquired.

"The 'little woman'," Obar boomed, "is a force pike in my side, as usual. Did you know," he enquired, "that a new trader, a rare food trader, has affiliated himself with that wretched woman?" He scowled at the vessel/station's starboard bridge, visible out the towering windows to his right.

"Now, all of her people are eating rare, precious delicacies, while all of *my* people," he waved a hand, indicating the rest of the crowd, "are crying because they're eating rations and recycled slop."

"Perhaps something should be done," Inex volunteered.

Obar looked at him slyly, licking his lips. "Perhaps something should."

"You have a name?"

"I'm told his name is Roggo," Obar muttered, before discovering the Sakiyan's fourth companion. "Wait a minute, you have a new friend!"

Fiola was startled as all eyes turned toward her, and she looked to Inex for instruction. The Sakiyan simply nodded slightly, suggesting she introduce herself. Fi thought about using her slapdash pseudonym, but knew instinctively that Obar Mull would not be fooled.

"Sir," she said, stepping forward, "My name is Fiola Shaku, and it's a pleasure to meet you."

Obar eyed her wisely. "Indeed you are, Ms. Shaku, as my agents have told me. And now you may relax, for you are safe from the Empire here on Mull Station."

Fi tried not to show her surprise. "Thank you... my Lord."

"The blaster hidden in your jacket however," Obar continued, "is troublesome. Someone get this girl a proper holster!" he commanded, and several in the crowd rushed to comply.

"Come here," the sweaty fat man commanded her, and Fi did as told. Obar leaned in toward her, scrutinizing her closely. "I am

told you are a musician of some repute... this is correct?"

Fi thought, grinned. "How'd you like to find out?"

Obar Mull's eyes flashed, and he barked laughter, which shook his giant frame. "Excellent! Make your preparations... we shall have music! And dancing!"

Posted by Corr Terek on 19 June 2009 11:27 PM:

There was an awkward silence following the droid's pronouncement. Then Damon cleared his throat. "Well, the truth is, Proto, that might be a little difficult."

Proto looked at him quizzically. "What do you mean?"

"The Jedi were all wiped out," Mir said bluntly. "About twenty years ago."

"What?" Proto's photoreceptor dimmed. "That's impossible!"

"It's true," Reil replied. "Supposedly they were plotting to overthrow the Republic, and the Emperor was forced to destroy them."

"The Jedi would never do such a thing," Proto replied, indignation evident in his well-modulated voice. "We serve the Republic, not our own interests."

"Be that as it may, there's no Jedi Council to report to anymore," Elayne put in sharply. "They're all dead."

The droid seemed to take a moment to steady himself. "I...feel no deception from any of you. But I am...confused." He took them all in with a glance. "How much has changed while I've been gone?"

"We'll get you caught up in no time," Damon said reassuringly. "But for now, we've got to sort out this mess with whoever's in charge on Rishi."

Posted by Mack Jace on 20 June 2009 11:31 PM:

With the ships locked into the docking arms, and the pilots under sufficient watch, they were a bunch of smugglers anyway. And smugglers never let their eyes off their back, especially in their own ship. Jyn had the ship secured away, and they headed down to the planet. Morec left the comm station and headed aft to the turbolift. He came out facing the crew lounge to see the two fighter pilots sitting on one of the couches, making light talk with Jaso. Behind them, keeping an eye on them, blaster close at hand, was the *Second Chance's* chief engineer, Zanis-Rit Rochist.

Rit, as he liked to be called, was a tall, black, and very tough-looking individual. He looked more of an enforcer than a techie. He wasn't that comfortable behind a gun, but was at home behind a computer terminal or with a hydrosponder in his hand. He saw Morec enter and inclined his head, who returned with a smile.

The room wasn't sparse but it wasn't exactly well-furnished. Morec sat down on the couch facing the pilots and caught their conversation.

"-the tail end of the Wars. After that, I figured, kark the Empire, so I hired myself out. How'd you wind up here?"

Morec realized belatedly that the pilot was talking to him. "I was picked up along the way. Just going from one place to the next," he said.

The pilot nodded slowly, "Yeah, I know how that one works. You sign on for one job, then it's two, then it's ten years later and you're wondering what you did to deserve this." He chuckled and threw Morec a knowing wink.

Morec was about to retort when the turbolift returned. This time it was Mara, her face set in neutral. Morec could tell she didn't like having these pilots on the ship, but it was considerably

less dislike than she had for Morec. Even after a few days, and acceptance from the rest of the crew, she still wasn't happy about Morec's presence on the ship.

He caught a flicker of emotion as her gaze met his. "We're landing now. We'll help you get your ships squared away, then you're free to go."

"Thanks. I guess we owe you guys one."

"Why don't you buy us a round at the cantina and we'll call it even." Her eyes rested on Morec for a second, then she continued, "Come on, let's get going."

Posted by Dread Pirate Roberts on 22 June 2009 04:16 AM:

For a time, there was silence amongst the group. Finally, Proto looked to Tam, then Damon and Elayne.

"You are not Jedi then?" it inquired.

"Nope." Came Elayne's reply.

"I'm studying, and there was a Jedi travelling with us until recently." Damon offered.

"No, and I don't want to be one either." Tam said tersely.

"Well, then, Jedi or not, you must beware the powers of the Dark Side. My Master compiled quite the library of techniques and texts. If you would like, you may browse through it some time. For now though, we should probably conclude out diplomatic relations here."

Posted by ij thompson on 23 June 2009 11:37 PM:

Now *this* was a party.

Fi had been apprehensive about performing with the girls so soon, with no rehearsal, but The Luminous Three (minus Celeste, who'd been off on some sort of business for a while) had assured her that they could adapt to whatever Fi laid down. So, on a battered mandoviol borrowed from the house band, Fi had let rip. With an antiquated rhythm droid providing accompaniment, Fiola overflowed with soaring melodies, which Veah and Amra punctuated with dazzling, spontaneous choreography.

The crowd of humans, aliens, and droids was ecstatic, bouncing around Mull Station's portside bridge while their leader, Obar Mull, waved his great arms in appreciation. Even Inex Jonn leaped across the dance floor with an abandon Fi had so far never seen in the Sakiyan.

The number finished, Fi decided to improvise for a while. Starting out in the F-sharp Phrygian mode, Fi let her mood take over, fingers dancing over the borrowed instrument's strings. Before long a melody emerged, although it took Fiola a moment to fully internalize what it was.

Tam's theme.

The realization was brutal, and Fi's fingers faltered for a moment. But she played on, now fully committed. As the piece she'd written way back on the *Koralak* continued, the shady figures in the room became fully involved in the piece. As one, everyone experienced the crescendo, transfixed until Fi played the song's final notes. She then lay her mandoviol down on the stage, spent.

Somewhere in the chamber, a being was clapping. The clapping was picked up by others, turning to cheering. Bewildered, Fi looked up into the crowd and was met with countless faces, cheering gratefully. Some with tears in their eyes.

Slightly teary herself, Fi smiled, and bowed slightly. The crowd's cheering was interrupted by a gasp, and several surprised murmurs and shouts. Around the chamber's entrance, the crowd parted to admit a new visitor. It was Celeste, wearing a dazzling

evening gown, and covered almost head-to-toe in blood.

"Inex?" Celeste asked, staggering timidly into the room. "Inex? Something's happened." The girl raised her bloody hands up pleadingly.

"Inex, I'm afraid."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 24 June 2009 03:11 PM:

"Again," said Damon into the holorecorder, "we apologize for the misunderstanding. Please believe us."

"It's not that we don't want to believe you," replied the half-size, projected man. "I'd be the first man to see someone pull a fast one on the ol' 'Warhog,' but this could all still be a trap."

Tam rolled his eyes. What was it going to take to convince these smugglers they were on the up-and-up? Well, they *weren't* on the up-and-up, having stolen the ship, but how could they resolve this conflict?

Apparently, Damon was thinking the same thing. "Captain, how can we convince you of our good intentions?"

The holographic man scratched his scruffy chin. "I tell you, we'd be more inclined to believe you if you hadn't blasted our fighters. Two pilots injured and adrift, and one dead."

"We regret our actions and take full responsibility for your loss." Damon radiated his honesty so clearly that Tam could swear it would be picked up by the holorecorder. He added his own silent but earnest plea to the atmosphere.

The smuggler waved a dismissive hand. "You're just lucky nobody really liked him. Listen, we're deploying retrieval ships to pick up the others. Power down your ship and we'll send out a team to board you and make sure you are who you say you are. After that we'll..."

The hologram started to go fuzzy. Tam blinked his eyes reflexively, only to find everything blur around him. His fingers went to his eyes and came away wet. He looked around at the concerned faces of everyone else. He could only shrug in response.

"What's going on?" demanded the smuggler. "Captain Ziro, did you hear me?"

Damon turned back, clearly rattled by Tam's sudden outburst of tears. "My apologies, Captain. One of my crew, he..." he glanced over his shoulder at Tam, "...he'll be fine."

"No funny business, Ziro. Station out."

Once the man's projected presence blinked out of existence, Damon turned back to Tam, who had taken a seat and had Mir's arm around him. "Is everything okay, Tam?"

"It's nothing, I think," said the boy between snuffles. "I just... I just thought I heard a song..."

Posted by Corr Terek on 25 June 2009 12:11 AM:

"Okay, crew," Damon said, trying to maintain a lighthearted tone despite Tam's earlier loss of composure. He knew the boy wouldn't want any special attention right now. "We've got visitors coming, so let's make sure we're as nonthreatening as possible."

"Big smiles, everyone," Reil muttered sardonically.

"Those of you who have lightsabers, keep 'em hidden," Mir added as she walked in from the cockpit. "That's more publicity than we want right now." The remark was more pointed towards Elayne than Tam. Tam had learned long ago not to openly wear his lightsaber.

"Everything powered down?" Damon asked. Mir nodded the affirmative.

"Good," he said with some satisfaction. "Now all we do is

wait."

The boarding party went over the *Fang* with a fine-toothed comb, checking for any possible traps or tracking devices. Their leader carefully scrutinized each member of the crew in turn, apparently trying to be sure that there was no possible way any of them could be Goa in disguise.

Finally they were satisfied, and Damon was able to obtain clearance to land. It was with the assumption, of course, that his activities would be closely watched -- at least for the time being.

Mir watched them leave and heaved a sigh of relief when their ship disengaged from the *Fang*. "That was fun."

"Yeah, but now we've got landing clearance," Damon pointed out. "Our best bet is to hit the pubs -- we might find a local who's heard something about my brother." He glanced around at the others. "And, I guess, if any of you want to strike out on your own, this would probably be the place to do it."

Posted by Mack Jace on 25 June 2009 11:38 AM:

As the rest of the crew began to disembark the ship, Morec headed to the crew quarters to grab his backpack. He learned to never leave his backpack anywhere unless he knew that it would stay there. As he was leaving his room he bumped into - literally - Mara.

"Sorry, I didn't see you," Morec said hastily.

"Why don't you watch where you're going then?" she retorted. She started to walk away, her emotions a maelstrom.

Morec started after her and asked, "How long are we staying here you think?"

"I don't know," she said, not turning to look at him. "Why don't you ask the Captain?"

"Because you're right here and I thought maybe you'd know, that's all."

"Well I don't, ok?"

Exasperated, Morec asked, "Why don't you like me? Ever since I came on this ship you haven't liked me."

Now she turned to look at him, her eyes blazing. "Whatever gave you that impression?"

"Call it a hunch," he said with a grin.

"That's just it," she said. "All these hunches you have. There's something about you that you're not telling us, and I don't like it. I don't like secrets." As she said this Morec sensed for a split second her emotions fluttering, the anger and frustration replaced with...but it was gone before he could put a finger on it, her defenses back up and stronger than before.

Morec's expression softened, and he said, "Trust me, there're some things you're better off not knowing. It's safer that way."

They were just getting to the ramp when she paused. "Well, in case you haven't noticed," her hand rested on her blaster, "I'm not exactly the type that needs protecting."

She turned and walked down the ramp, leaving Morec at a cross-roads. That little flicker had thrown him for a loop, and now everything that he had ever learned was coming to clash with everything that was happening now. *This should be interesting*, he thought to himself.

Posted by Dread Pirate Roberts on 25 June 2009 02:05 PM:

"Pardon the interruption," Proto remarked to the *Fang*'s newfound captain, leaning down next to his ear as the crew departed down the landing ramp. "But I was hoping I could stay with your crew for at least until I can find out what has changed

since I was last at port."

"Fine with me," Damon remarked without looking. "But I'll warn you, we've had mixed experiences with Jedi in the past. Tam in particular. So be careful what you do and say."

The droid's sensor shuttered. "Then not all the Jedi are gone?" It inquired.

"No, but for now let's just drop the whole Jedi thing. We have enough to worry about as it is." The captain replied. He looked around the hangar of the station as he exited the ship.

Hanging back for a moment, Proto appeared again behind the captain, sans robe and lightsaber. Swiveling its cylindrical head, the robot also took in the sight of the busy hangar. The *Archaeologist* had landed next to the *Fang*, guided by an ancient slave unit in the ship's computer.

The rest of the crew stood in a semi-circle facing Damon, though Tam had focused a disapproving stare on the newcomer droid.

Posted by Corr Terek on 2 July 2009 10:21 AM:

"Okay," Damon said, catching Tam's look and speaking quickly to explain the situation. "Proto's going to be traveling with us for awhile, at least until he gets a better sense of how the galaxy's changed."

"Great," Elayne muttered. "We keep this up and we'll have Darth Vader himself after us."

"Well," Mir said, "if that happens, at least there'll be someone here halfway competent to deal with him."

Elayne looked as if she thought differently, but kept quiet. Damon was unnerved at the idea of Darth Vader coming after them...but then again, they already had Lord Tremayne after them -- whoever he was -- and they were doing just fine.

"Be that as it may," he said, clearing his throat, "he's the newest member of the crew."

"Okay," Reil said. "So what do we do now?"

"Well, first," Damon said, "I want a drink. And something besides rations to eat."

"This place isn't half bad," Mir observed. "The food is decent, the drinks could be worse, and the atmosphere is nice." She nodded towards another table. "I think that's our friends from the *Second Chance* over there."

"Everybody's watching us, though," Cali said, sinking low into her seat.

"Just the locals," Tam pointed out. "I can feel them -- they're curious."

"Of course they are," Reil said. "We did make a rather flashy entrance, after all." He looked up as Damon and Proto returned to the table. "Any news?"

"Some," Damon replied. "Elayne's checking on a few things still, but we've got a lead. There's a smuggler -- Renu Tor -- based out of here who's been known to work near my home planet. He might have heard something about my brother."

"So what's the catch?" Mir asked skeptically.

Proto's photoreceptor shuttered. "The 'catch' is that Tor regularly makes runs to a small, recently colonized planet called Owara." He glanced at Mir. "He is on one of these trips now."

"No problem," Reil said. "We'll just wait for him to get back. I'm sure we could all use a little R&R while we wait."

"I don't think that's going to be an option," Elayne's voice came from behind them. She stepped over to the table and looked at Damon grimly. "Tor should have been back a week ago."

"Great," Mir snorted. "Fine time for him to take a vacation."

"It gets better," Elayne replied. "There've been rumors of some kind of trouble brewing on Owara. It's a good bet Tor is involved somehow."

They were all quiet for a moment. Then Tam broke the silence. "I wonder what Owara's like this time of year?"

Posted by ij thompson on 4 July 2009 05:32 PM:

Inex rushed across the chamber toward the blood-soaked Celeste, Veah and Amra close behind. Hopping off the stage and pushing her way through the crowd, Fiola was finally able to reach the girl, who had collapsed into her companions' arms.

"What is the meaning of this, Inex Jonn?" Obar Mull bellowed from his throne on Mull Station's portside bridge.

Ignoring him, the black-skinned Sakiyan kneeled at Celeste's feet, and held her dripping hands. "My darling," he implored in hushed tones, "what's happened?"

"Oh Inex," the girl explained, "I found the person you spoke of... the Rodian, Roggo..."

"Yes?"

"He invited me back to his ship. I..." she stammered, as though disbelieving her own memory. "Inex, I tried to murder him!"

Inex Jonn swallowed, and Fi could see him trying to maintain his composure. "Tried?"

"There were droids," Celeste explained, horrified. "I didn't know that they were there. I subdued them, but while I was doing that, though he was horribly wounded, Roggo ran away!"

"Ran away," Inex echoed, his voice far away.

"Still, it's good that..." Celeste began, then looked at her hands. "No, it isn't. It is not good," she choked, "Inex, none of this is good!"

"Inex!" Obar Mull thundered.

Inex stood, humble before his employer's wrath. "Forgive, sir... I have trouble with my associates..."

"You think I am deaf?" the corpulent gangster shouted. "Your girl tried to kill that food trader I told you about! I thought I'd hired *you* to..." his voice trailed off as he pieced the information together. Realization turned to wicked laughter.

"Well, what do you know, everyone?" Obar howled. "The great assassin, Inex Jonn, has been hiding behind the skirts of his three young beauties all this time!"

Inex visibly bristled before the ridicule of all assembled, raising himself to his full (and not very impressive) height. "I get the job done," he countered.

Obar spat on the deck. "Not *this* time, you didn't! And now, I'm going to have to explain all this to that hateful, wretched woman I married, over there!" He raised one flabby arm to the tall windows, beyond which stood Mull Station's starboard bridge, inside of which many hostile faces stared back at all assembled.

The gangster considered, then pointed one chubby finger at Inex Jonn. "You got me into this situation," he announced, "and you're going to get me out of it. If *you* can sort things out with that blood-sucking mynock over there, you'll be welcomed back in my employ. Until then, if you try to come back to my side of the station, my guards will kill you... *and* your women."

Inex Jonn was not one to grovel. Instead, he nodded toward the metal case he'd delivered, still resting at the crimelord's feet. "My payment."

"What!" Obar roared, "after this fiasco with Roggo, you want me to *pay* you?"

"Roggo was a completely different contract," Inex argued.

"Contract?" Obar Mull shook, his menagerie of gold jewelry rattling in the tense silence. "Where do you think you are, fool? Guards, escort our 'prized assassin' and his friends to their ship." Obar thought, added, "And watch the blondes. Real close."

As the group were marched unceremoniously down the corridors of Mull Station, Fi wrestled with her fury at Inex Jonn, and her sympathy for Celeste, who hurried along with them, cradled by her twin sisters Veah and Amra. Fi couldn't believe how Inex had been selfishly using the trio, and for who-knew how long. But she also knew that now was not the time or place for her to confront him about it. For if the lot of them weren't off the station in short order, it would be the end of them all.

"Well, Inex," she glared at the Sakiyan pointedly, "we had a good thing going, there... for about two hours! How are we gonna smooth things over with Obar's wife?"

"We have more pressing concerns," Inex countered, his speech clipped. "I need to find out what's wrong with Celeste; why she failed, and why she *remembers*."

"And how do you plan on doing that?"

"By getting out of here."

"And going where?"

The Sakiyan's response was immediate.

"Kamino."

Posted by Mack Jace on 6 July 2009 08:45 PM:

It was like being suddenly doused with cold water. Morec threw a few furtive glances around the room and realized the feeling was coming from the recently arrived visitors. They looked his way and he figured that they were from the *Nexu's Fang*. He still couldn't believe what he was feeling. *Force users. At least one, and maybe even a Jedi!* He realized that there was bound to be more Jedi who had survived, like him, but he never figured he'd happen upon them like this.

He excused himself from the *Chance's* table, and made his way over to the *Fang's* table. He signaled a server droid over and introduced himself. "Greetings. I assume you're the crew of the *Nexu's Fang*?"

Damon looked up and said, "That we are. I assume you're from the *Second Chance*?"

"That's right. Mind if I join you?"

"Be my guest," Damon said, waving his hand to an open seat.

As he sat down, the droid brought over a tray of drinks, and began placing them on the table. "The round we talked about earlier," Morec said with a smile. "I couldn't help but overhearing you talking about Owara."

"Maybe we were," Damon said. "What of it?"

Morec shrugged and leaned back in his chair, "Just wondering. I've heard a little about it, but not much. I'm betting that somebody in my crew knows something about it though. I can look into it if you'd like. I definitely know that the Captain has a tendency to dabble in information. If you're interested I'll ask."

Posted by Corr Terek on 8 July 2009 11:20 PM:

Damon considered the offer carefully. "Sounds fair," he said finally. "We're new to this part of space and could use the help."

"Great," the man said. He extended a hand. "I'm Morec, by the way."

Damon shook his hand. "You can call me Ziro." He caught a

curious gleam in the other's eye, but chose to ignore it. Morec could keep his curiosity to himself for the time being -- maybe if he proved to be trustworthy, they could bring him into their confidence.

"Quite a crew you've got here," Morec observed. His gaze seemed to linger on some of the crew more than others...most notably on Tam and Proto.

"They've watched my back through plenty of scrapes," Damon said. "Couldn't ask for a better crew."

"Speaking of tough scrapes," Morec said, "you promised me a story in exchange for these drinks." He gestured to the surrounding cantina patrons. "I heard the locals mistook your for some bounty hunter. How'd that happen?"

Damon was relieved by the change of subject, and quickly launched into a slightly-edited version of the theft of the *Nova Viper* and their subsequent arrival on Rishi.

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 9 July 2009 03:09 PM:

Tam listened as Damon explained the latest chapter of their painful and convoluted history. He was relieved to hear the gunslinger carefully tiptoe around anything too sensitive, but even though he sensed the man clench down on his feelings, but muffled they were, each gap in his story reverberated in the Force like the 'whump' of an robo-compactor.

And he could sense the other man's awareness. *Another Jedi...*

"So now here we are," he said, cutting Damon's story short before he got them into too much trouble. "So what can you tell us about Owara?"

Posted by Ice Hawk on 14 July 2009 12:14 AM:

Reil hunched over his food with a look of deep concentration as Damon related his edited tale to the newcomer Morec. Throughout the discussion, Cali had been trying to discreetly get his attention, and Reil had been taking obvious pains to ignore her.

At first, he easily avoided making eye contact; then he braved the fierce scowl and menacing glare; but then she started kicking him in the shin, and Reil decided to cave. Reil dropped his fork with a loud clatter, interrupting Morec, and made a large show of calmly turning to the agitated girl beside him. Through clenched teeth and with a sore shin he addressed her.

"Yes?"

Cali was practically bursting with impatience.

"You promised that once we were planet side we'd-"

Reil raised a hand to cut her off.

"I know I did, and we will, but right now we're eating and Morec was just about to tell us about things on his end. I want to hear what he has to say, and then we'll go."

Damon tried to interrupt.

"Go? Go whe-"

"But we don't have time! We might be leaving for Owara soon!"

Reil sighed. This was frustrating and a little embarrassing. The rest of the table and some of the other tables were staring at them, with mildly puzzled expressions but Reil ignored them.

"I'm sure we'll have lots of time after we finish eating to-"

Damon finally injected himself into discussion.

"You two want to tell the rest of us what the frell you're talking about?"

Reil considered it for a moment then turned his head to face Damon.

"Not especially."

"Reil promised to take me shopping and now he won't!" Cali blurted out her appeal.

Elayne burst out laughing; Tam and Mir looked at each other and grinned widely; Damon managed to keep a straight face, but the edges of his lips curled; Morec turned his laughter into a cough. The droid blinked. Reil lowered his head and rubbed his temples.

Well, there goes my masculinity. . .

"There's a few things I was hoping to pick up here, and I said Cali could tag along. . ."

"You said you were going to get me my own blaster."

"Among other things, yes, I'm going to get you your own blaster. And some proper clothes."

Cali looked genuinely hurt.

"I thought you liked this dress. . ."

Reil began going slightly red. This wasn't really a discussion he wanted to have with Cali in front of table full of people. Or ever actually.

"I do, it's very. . ."

Reil searched his vocabulary for the proper adjective.

Submissive? No.

Revealing? No.

Kinky? Yes. But No.

"It's very elegant. It's just not practical, being all poofy and the like. You need clothes that are . . . less poofy."

That seemed to mollify Cali. Damon looked pensive for a moment, and then made a declaration.

"Well since you promised her Reil, you should probably get going now. I'd rather not have to wait around while you two go dress shopping."

"What? But I'm not finished my-"

"We need to talk with Morec, discreetly, and the two of you are becoming big magnets for drama. Go do your shopping, we'll fill you in on everything when you get back."

Reil sighed and downed the contents of his glass, as Cali began dragging him towards the door.

Posted by Dread Pirate Roberts on 14 July 2009 05:09 AM:

Proto stood up noiselessly, addressing Damon with a light bow. "I shall accompany them. I myself am in need of information and possibly equipment," it explained. With a courteous nod to Morec, he left the table and joined the Cali and Reil as they made their way to the bar entrance.

As they walked, Proto took as much of the scene in as he could, comparing the people and aliens he saw here to his internal library marking new species and items for further study. The droid was like a Jawa in a junk shop, though it tried to keep it's observation discreet. As the trio exited the establishment, the droid chirped to Reil, who was trying his best to look serious, Cali practically prancing around him. "So many new species and things. Much has changed since I was last in society."

Reil, thankful for something to think about other than shopping, responded quizzically. "Just how long have you been gone? The Jedi purge wasn't that long ago."

The white droid's photoreceptor whirred and dimmed for a moment, before focusing itself on the young Rebel. "According to my calendar... About 500 years."

Posted by Mack Jace on 17 July 2009 03:52 PM:

Morec watched the exchanges, slightly amused. This was a heck of a group, he thought. Once the three left, Morec turned

his gaze back to the table to answer the question posed to him.

"Well, I don't know a whole lot, but I'll tell you what I know. The planet was recently colonized, and from the start it looked like the government installed on the planet wasn't exactly up to snuff. From what I hear, there's some people there who aren't too thrilled with the guys in charge, if you get my drift."

He paused for a moment, pondering what else to tell them, and then continued, his voice just an octave lower than before, "I also heard that there are rumors that the Imperials are in on this too. From what I can tell, it's nothing large scale, if they're even there at all."

He leaned back again, and said, "I heard that about two weeks ago, from a guy I was working with. He had been on planet when things were getting started."

Posted by ij thompson on 22 July 2009 07:39 PM:

The room was white.

Which should've been nice, but it wasn't. This wasn't 'fancy hotel' white, this was 'doctor's office' white, with all the attendant anxieties that went along with it. And too bright, as well. *Way* too bright. Upon arriving on Kamino, Fiola had been dazzled by the endless rolling oceans, the elevated cities, and had been eager to feel the spray on her face, meet the locals, and partake of some fantastic seafood.

Well, the only seafood she'd encountered thus far had been a long-necked, two-legged number named Shaz Ru, a smooth-talking bureaucrat who'd collected Fi and her fellows, escorted them on a very long, downward lift ride, split them up, and invited Fi to kindly wait in this antiseptic, white room.

Could've at least given me a holomag, Fi mused.

A table, a cot, a refresher, and a window. She tried the window, which was a disappointment. As deep below sea level as she was, the window looked out on only black. It was as bad as a port on a starship. Worse, actually, as a starship's port would have at least revealed a star, or something.

But a star somehow appeared, miraculously, growing larger. The star eventually revealed itself to be a fish, attracted by the light in her spartan chamber. Fi studied the fish, who looked back at her emotionlessly.

We came here looking for a way to help Celeste, Fi thought, *and I get stuck looking at a fish in a bowl.*

It occurred to Fi that, between herself and her aquatic friend outside the window, it was she who probably more closely resembled a fish in a bowl. She stuck her tongue out at the sea creature, who flapped its fins in indignation, and swam off.

Right.

Fi went to the chamber's door and thumbed the controls. The hatch opened smoothly, revealing a corridor that might even be brighter than the room she was leaving. Glancing left and right, Fi spotted no one about.

She marched off down the corridor.

Posted by Corr Terek on 24 July 2009 10:14 PM:

Damon considered Morec's information for a moment. "Sounds like we'll need to be careful." He looked at the other man. "I don't suppose you could find out what our smuggler friend was running to Owara? That might tell us who to talk to when we get there."

"I'll see what I can do," Morec said thoughtfully. "Where can I get in touch with you?"

"Here, most likely," Damon replied. "If not, we'll probably be around town." He paused, then took a wild guess. "I'm sure

you'll be able to find us if you need to. You seem to have a knack for finding things."

Morec cocked his head in amusement, then nodded slightly. "You're probably right." He waved to the others. "See you soon."

After he was out of earshot, Mir turned to Damon. "What was that last little bit about?"

Damon glanced at her. "I'm pretty sure he can feel the Force." He looked at Tam and Elayne for confirmation. "Right?"

They both nodded. "So you *did* notice," Tam observed. He seemed doubtful. "He could tell you weren't telling him everything."

"I realized that after the fact," Damon sighed. "But we can't do anything about it now, so we'll just have to keep an eye on him."

He stood, wincing slightly as he did so. His injuries still weren't completely healed and while they weren't painful enough to cause a lot of trouble, he still tried to keep from aggravating them. He dug into his pocket and handed a stack of credit sticks to Mir. "I have a feeling things on Owara could be rougher than we thought -- stock up on anything you think we might need."

"Got it," Mir said, taking the cred sticks. "Where are you going?"

"Back to the ship," Damon replied. "Gonna rest for a little bit, maybe do some studying." He glanced at Elayne and Tam. "Either of you got anything in particular you'd like to do while we're here?"

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 26 July 2009 08:40 PM:

Responding with a shrug and a yawn, Tam sat back in his chair. They needed to find Damon's brother, and time spent here, among people whom they had fired upon, made him nervous. How long would it be before some drunk smuggler got up the courage to avenge a dead comrade?

"I think our time would be best spent preparing for departure," announced Elayne. "We can await the others aboard the *Fang*."

Damon nodded. "And I'd like some help learning more about those Jedi healing techniques."

Elayne chuckled, and clapped the gunslinger lightly on his shoulder. Tam sneered, for it hadn't been long since the woman had run her energy blade through the man's back. The detail that she had been possessed by Sith spirits certainly didn't escape him, but neither did the significance of the bad feeling he always had around Elayne. She was a Jedi, and an Imperial; two facts that Tam found difficult to forget.

And she seemed far too chummy around Damon...

Posted by Corr Terek on 1 August 2009 07:56 PM:

Meanwhile, in the skies above Praesitlyn...

Verik listened to the Imperial captain's ultimatum. *There don't seem to be any other options*, he thought to himself. He turned to Ghull. "I'd better make my way to the escape pods, then. Wouldn't want the rest of you to have to deal with the Empire on my account."

The rest of the command deck looked at him in surprise. Evidently they weren't used to any sort of display of selflessness. Ghull merely shook his head, then turned to the bridge crew. "Shields to full! Let's put some distance between us and the Imps." He looked back at Verik. "Let's look at our other options first."

Verik was perplexed. "Sir?"

Ghull pressed a button on his command chair. "Larano, what's your verdict on the hyperdrive?"

A voice came back over the intercom. "It's not serious, Captain, but it's not something we can fix before they blow us to smithereens."

The ship shuddered from a turbolaser blast, but its shields held. Ghull ignored it. "Can you fix it in ten minutes?"

"If we've actually got ten minutes to work with, then yes, I can jury-rig something."

Ghull nodded in satisfaction. "That should do nicely."

"I don't understand," Verik said. "What are you planning?"

The pirate captain grimly smiled. "I would've figured it would be obvious to someone with your skills."

Verik frowned in confusion. Then, suddenly, he felt an echo in the Force as several new ships dropped out of hyperspace almost on top of them. He looked at Ghull. "They're yours?"

"You didn't think I'd pick up a troublemaker like you without keeping a few aces up my sleeve, did you?" The pirate captain chuckled to himself.

The comm crackled. "Orders, Captain?"

"Just buy us ten minutes, Stark. That's all we need."

Posted by Corr Terek on 3 August 2009 10:00 PM:

Verik closed his eyes and allowed the flow of the battle wash over him. He could feel the Imperials reacting with surprise to the unexpected arrival of Ghull's fleet. He could feel the pirates as they dropped into battle positions around the *Ivory Raptor* to defend their captain.

"Farmboy!" Verik's eyes snapped open. Navarra was gesturing to him. "You got any skills that can help us out?"

"Nothing for the battle at hand," he replied shortly. The Falleen sneered at him.

"Some help you are."

"Maybe," he replied, "But you'll be glad you have me around when your next raid goes sour."

"We'll see."

For the next several minutes the bridge was a scene of pure chaos, as updates on the hyperdrive repair job and the raging battle outside flew in. Through it all Ghull stood firm, barking out orders and grinning madly. It didn't take a genius to see that he was *enjoying* this. And, frankly, so was Verik.

He was almost disappointed when the engineer reported they'd completed their repair attempt. "I can't promise you'll get more than a few jumps out of it," he warned.

"It'll have to do," Ghull replied. "Give the signal -- we'll count heads when we meet up later."

"Aye, Capitan," Kelp responded as he transmitted a signal. Verik assumed to be some kind of "bug out!" message.

"Take us out of here, Belko," Ghull ordered. The nav officer pulled the hyperdrive lever, the stars blurred, and they were gone.

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 6 August 2009 12:51 PM:

Tam sat in the broad docking bay, anxiously awaiting everyone to return. He was starting to get worried. Mir had been gone too long to have gotten lost, and the others were no-shows too. No doubt that new Jedi- what was his name?- was off preparing some fateful future for them; something requiring his skilled assistance.

Jedi. He would have waited on the ship with Damon but Elayne was there too, taking him through another series of mind-numbing Jedi meditation. He didn't like how friendly she was

with the gunslinger, especially after she'd nearly killed him with her lightsaber. He was sure Mir didn't like her either.

Jedi, he thought, *once they get something in their head...*

"...Jedi..."

The strange, echoing voice launched Tam from the crate he'd been sitting on. Was he being contacted once again by some meddling Force spirit? He unclenched his fists when he realized the voice was that of an old roustabout, acerbically talking to a young local.

"Nobody can tell me they're not crazy. I was there. I saw them clones kill the Jedi what was leadin'em. I was haulin' a load of droid parts fer the Seppers. What? Never heard of the Separatists? Kids these days!"

"Any way, they'd pinned me and ol' Smokey dirtside on Owara. This was back before the settlers there; just a big lump of dirt we thought we could lay low on 'till CIS gave us the go-ahead. But we'd barely landed before a half dozen larties drop outta the sky like a swarm of razor crows.

Smokey had the bright idea to get a couple hundred of battle droids up and running; useless things if you ask me, but they made a good front line. Those clones come a-boilin' outta their gunships, and WHAM! Those droids opened up on them full bore! We couldn't rightly see, on account o' the smoke and dirt and whatnot, but there was two glowing bars darting this way and that in the thick of it, like berseker will o' the whips! That's right, the Jedi.

Now I'd never seen a Jedi up close, but something in my gut was tellin' me these two were getting closer than we'd have liked. They tore through those droids of ours like a Herglic through a stack o' sabacc cards! The dust finally settled, and the two of them just stood there, bold as bronzium, on top of what was left of the droids. The older one, some Twi'lek *schutta*, shouted something about nobody getting hurt if we came quietly, but I knew they'd be handing us over to the Hutts sooner or later. I took one look at ol' Smokey and told him to prep the *Bucket* for takeoff.

"Soon as they got wise to our plan, the Jedi ordered her pet clones to shoot out our engines, while the little Jedi whipped out his laser sword and started carvin' a hole right through my airlock! I fired up the *Bucket's* dorsal turret and cleaned off a clump of clones before they could get their E-web set up, but Smokey roared over the comm that I was drainin' the power supply. What was I supposed to do, let'em ground us for good?"

"I thought I'd buy Smokey some time by slowing down the Jedi brat. He was already halfway through the hatch, but I punched the controls to close the blast doors on him. None too soon, too, fr they'd set off a det just outside. I ran to the terminal t'assess the damage, and that's when I'd realized the clones hadn't waited for the boy to get out of the way!"

"The Twi'lek Jedi stood in shock, but still managed to get a few of the clones before they gunned her down too. I had no idea what made them turn on the Jedi like that, and to be honest, I'd had my doubts that Jedi could even die; them clones sure proved me wrong. All I know is that when Smokey told me we were ready for liftoff it was music to my ears.

"So you can say what you want about the glitchy ol' battle droids and their penchant for friendly fire, but I'd rather have them behind me than those damn clones."

While he appreciated the old man's point, there were other parts of the story that stood out in his mind. Jedi. On Owara. Was there no escape from them? As crazy as they may have been, those clones had found a way...

Posted by Corr Terek on 11 August 2009 10:15 PM:

Damon was at peace with the galaxy, at least for the moment. They weren't safe yet -- and they were about to be heading someplace that was likely to be even less safe -- but so far his little crew had stayed together. He let the Force flow through him, directing its healing energies toward his wound as the datapads instructed. There was just enough of a tingle to let him know it was working. *Good*.

"You're really getting good at this," Elayne commented, snapping him out of his meditation. She was studying him critically.

"Think so?" he asked lightly, stretching a little bit. She shrugged.

"I've not had much experience with healing techniques, but you really seem to have a knack for it."

"Good to know," Damon grinned. "Seeing as I manage to get beat up a lot."

"Yeah," Elayne said, growing serious. "Listen, Damon," she said, placing a hand on his arm, "I haven't really had a chance to apologize for, well, *everything*. You've all been very good to me, and I repaid you horribly."

Damon shrugged. "You weren't yourself -- you didn't have any control over what was going on." He smiled at her reassuringly. "It won't happen again, right?"

She smiled back uncertainly. "Yeah."

There was a cough in the doorway. They both looked up at the same time, Elayne withdrawing her hand from his arm. Mir stood in the doorway, her face unreadable. "Everything's loaded up. I talked with the others -- Tam is on his way back, and the others are still finishing their shopping. Once our friend from the pub gets back to us, we can get out of here."

"Good," Damon said. "I think we're all ready to leave Rishi."

Elayne chuckled. "And Rishi won't be sorry to see us go."

Mir smiled briefly before looking to Damon. "Can I talk to you for a moment?"

"Sure," Damon said, concerned by her abruptness. As he followed her back to her quarters, he tried to get a sense of her mood through the Force. *Nothing*, he thought, confused. *Why can't I read her?*

They stepped inside Mir's quarters and the door hissed shut behind them. "Okay," Damon said. "What's wrong?"

"Her," Mir said, jerking her head back toward the crew lounge. "Not too many days ago she was trying to kill us, and now she's buddy-buddy with everybody."

"She wasn't in control of herself then, you know that," Damon pointed out. "Besides, when we first met you would've killed me if I hadn't been faster. Shouldn't she get the same chance you got?"

Mir's eyes narrowed. "I wouldn't be so quick to compare us," she said, her voice low. "But maybe you're right." She stepped past him. "Just watch your back, Damon. It's already been stabbed once."

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 12 August 2009 03:55 PM:

The old roustabout rambled on to less interesting topics, and Tam decided to travel the rest of the way to the *Nexu's Fang*. He hadn't seen them, but he hoped that Reil and Cali had beaten him back to the ship. He honestly didn't much care if their new Jedi droid friend or that Force sensitive character showed up. They were starting to attract quite the crew, and a large crew can attract attention; a lot of attention can only attract trouble.

"Excuse me," a woman voice said. Tam spun around to see a woman approach him. She smiled and said, "I'm sorry. I didn't

mean to frighten you." Her skin was a bright blue and adorned with intricate yellow markings. She carried herself like a swarthy, experienced spacer, but her attire matched some of the most stylish Core fashions Tam had ever seen.

The boy wiped the shock from his face. "No, no you didn't scare me. Just... I was deep in thought."

Her smile stretched a little tighter and she gestured at the *Fang* at the far end of the docking bay. "You come in on that?"

Tam blanched. Was this some smuggler looking for some kind of retribution for their 'big entrance'? Or was Rishi Port Authority finally bringing them some consequence? "We're leaving soon."

"Where to?"

Now, Tam knew better than to answer, truthfully at least. Rishi PA would certainly know where they were going. No, this had to be someone else. Someone... independent. He drew inspiration from the woman's attire to fuel his lie. "We're heading coreward."

The woman's deep blue eyes lit up. "Oh, good! I was wondering if I could charter a ride to the Core."

So, she was just a traveler, Tam thought, and a great sense of relief rested upon him. *But yet another pathetic life form to add to our entourage?* "I'm not sure we have room." He nodded politely to excuse himself, and began to walk away.

"I can pay you." The woman was clearly desperate. She waved a credit bar in the air as if it was a flag, drawing a great deal more attention than Tam wanted anywhere near him. "I don't have much now, but I think I can pay your captain enough to at least get to my long-term funds, where I can quadruple this amount."

Tam stopped, regarding the woman once more. He cast his feelings out to her, evaluating her in manners much more understanding than with his eyes alone. She was young, but well traveled; the 'flavors' of a hundred planets coiled around her. There was an edge to her personality, sharp and biting, but it was sheathed in the soft life of the core worlds. And that credit bar she was waving was worth 5,000 credits...

"What were you thinking, Tam?" Elayne said, once the woman- who had revealed her name to be Teece- had been shown to a room. "We're not a passenger liner."

The boy's eyes widened, then narrowed. "You could have fooled me. Besides, it's income. Honest income."

"We're not going to the Core, though," Damon added. "What are we going to tell her when we arrive at Owara?"

Tam shrugged. "A slight detour." Besides, she might be useful."

"Useful for what?" the Jedi woman insisted.

"Look, we've taken on crew members for a lot less than this." He held up the 5,000 credits. "And she promises more, so when you can tell me why we're taking on Force users left and right- who we can't be sure are even *trustworthy*- I'll tell you why I think she might be useful."

Posted by Mack Jace on 12 August 2009 10:02 PM:

Morec bid the crew farewell and left the table. He mulled over what had taken place just then. At least a few of them could feel the force, though if they were Jedi remained to be seen. He could tell that they hadn't told him everything, but that tended to be expected when meeting new people. He sat back down at the table where his crew was still sitting.

"So what was that all about?" Mara asked, her eyebrows raised.

"Just playing a hunch. And getting some information," he looked over at Jyn, who was sipping quietly at his drink. At this he raised one of his eyebrows, the rest of his face unreadable.

"Oh? Like what, exactly?" Jyn asked.

"Our friends over there are interested in a little place called Owara. Ever heard of it?"

If Jyn was surprised he sure didn't show it. At least not physically, anyway. Morec felt the spike in the older man's emotions at the mention of the planet. This didn't necessarily surprise Morec. "I might have heard of it. Let me check my contacts, see what I can come up with. What exactly are they looking for?"

"Seems they're looking for a smuggler named Tor, if I'm not mistaken. They wouldn't say what for. Not exactly the trusting types, it seems."

"Hmm," Jyn was mulling things over in his head now. He finished his drink and stood up, "I'm heading back to the ship. I'll check out my contacts, see what I can come up with. I'll comm you if I come up with anything Morec." Morec nodded his understanding. "Mara, figure out if we need any supplies, and stock up. The rest of you can help. Comm me if you need me."

And with that, Jyn walked out of the cantina. The rest of the crew finished their drinks and headed out to find supplies.

Posted by ij thompson on 13 August 2009 06:43 PM:

"Clones?"

"Clones."

Fi took in the news. It was pretty weird, but then, over the past couple of months, she'd heard (and seen) plenty weirder. But at least it was an answer, which is what she supposed she'd gone looking for when she'd left her assigned quarters thirty minutes ago. She'd soon spotted Inex Jonn, returning from somewhere and looking for all the worlds like he was going to pretend not to see her. Perhaps realizing how foolish such a deception would have been in the wide, white corridor, he'd beckoned her to him and invited her into his own quarters. Now they sat on his hard, white cot, looking out the window at blackness interrupted only by the occasional air bubble making its ascent toward the surface of Kamino, far above.

"I don't get it," Fi protested. "Isn't only the Empire allowed to have clones?"

Inex smiled patiently. "Only the Empire' is allowed to have a lot of things. And yet, citizens still find a way to have them."

"Point," Fi conceded. "But aren't clones supposed to be, like, ridiculously expensive?" She hated to speak of The Luminous Three like so much common property, but there didn't seem to be a way around it, just then. "What are you, rich, or something?"

"No, but I aspire one day to be." Inex looked thoughtful. "That case I delivered to Obar Mull would have gone a long way toward getting me there."

"What was in that case, anyway?"

"Spice," he told her without hesitation. "The finest kind. Confiscated by none other than Captain Tazen of Imperial Customs. Or should I say, newly-appointed Prefect Tazen of Jynton, Rothana... thanks to Veah's ministrations."

Veah. Fi pictured the spellbinding beauty on her date with the former (and late) Prefect Arnon, laughing gaily and clapping her hands at his jokes. She also pictured the woman murdering the Imperial with her bare hands, disposing of the body, and strolling back to the *Skalen II* for perhaps a cup of tea and some

late night chit-chat with her twin sisters, both of whom were capable of the same barbarism that Veah was. It was unnerving... made all the more so because Fi honestly *liked* all of them.

"Inex, what's wrong with Celeste?"

The black-skinned alien looked worried, but resigned. "I honestly don't know," he admitted. "I'm afraid it's just not my field."

"And what exactly *is* your field? I mean, apart from exploiting three trusting, innocent girls?"

Inex winced slightly at the barb, but didn't object. Instead, he just looked sort of deflated. "I am little more than a doer of favours," he explained, "an errand-boy, if you will. I find out what people want, and I get it. Or, more recently, I find out what people *don't* want, and I get *rid* of it." He straightened slightly. "It's not much, but it's put fuel in the tanks and food on the table, for all of us. Up until now."

"So why get me involved?"

"Because you are a truly gifted musician," he told her, his eyes betraying no hint of a lie, or false flattery. "I honestly hoped that you, I, and The Luminous Three could travel the stars as entertainers... legitimate ones." Inex looked at Fi, appearing much older than he had previously. "I am not a common thug, Ms. Shaku. I do miss culture so, and conversation, and I grow weary of having to look over my shoulder at every two-credit port I pull into."

"And besides," he added softly, "the girls really did love dancing."

Fi could agree with Inex's sentiments, but she didn't much like his sudden switch to the past tense. She fixed him with a look.

"You're being pretty fatalistic about all of this, Inex."

The doorbell chimed softly. Fi held Inex's gaze for another moment, but the Sakiyan made no move to answer either herself, or the door. Rising, she crossed the chamber and thumbed the switch. There stood Shaz Ru, looking confused and flustered to be greeted by someone other than the chamber's intended occupant. Amused by the Kaminoan's obvious discomfort, Fi held up her hand in mock apology.

"Guilty," she confessed, "Inex Jonn has a girl in his room. Please don't call our parents."

"Em, er..." Shaz Ru stuttered, craning his neck to see past Fi and into the room behind her (which wasn't difficult, as he stood at least a meter taller than the girl).

"Inex Jonn," he called, "if you please, we would speak with you about your units."

Posted by Ice Hawk on 16 August 2009 04:23 AM:

They kept walking towards the market place as Reil mulled over Proto's statement. He didn't know what to say, so he ended up saying the first thing that came to mind.

"That's a long time."

Cali grinned impishly.

"These updates and more brought to you by captain obvious."

Reil frowned.

"Shadup."

Cali's grin widened.

"No, no, keep it up. You might get promoted to major redundant."

"Next time we go into town" Reil growled, "I'm leaving you locked in the cargo hold."

Cali stuck out her tongue at Reil.

"You're a hypocrite."

"Firstly, I am not. Secondly, are you sure you even know what that word means?"

Cali scowled.

"I'm not stupid. I know words. And you are too 'cause if anyone else had said something so stunned like ' *That's a long time* ', you woulda' riled them about it too."

Reil sighed, she had a point.

"All right fine. You got me." Then he grinned. "But I'm still gonna leave you locked in the cargo hold next time if you keep pointin' out my character flaws."

Proto took this opportunity to inject himself back into the flow of conversation.

"If I could interrupt, perhaps you could save me time and energy, and perhaps provide me with an abridgement of what I missed?"

Reil shrugged.

"The long and short answer of that would be no, not really. I'm not exactly an academic; you want a professor or a historian, or someone with too much time on his hands who buys into history. I'm just a pilot."

Proto remained insistent.

"Surely you could provide something?"

Reil shrugged again.

"Nothing that nobody else couldn't tell you. It was a republic one minute, the next it's an Empire. Things happen fast when they happen these days. Frell, just look at Alderaan."

Cali nodded sagely in agreement with Reil, but Proto was perplexed.

"What about Alderaan?"

The company halted, and Reil opened his mouth to break the situation to Proto as tactfully as he could, but Cali was faster.

"It blew up."

Reil winced. Proto blinked.

"It did what?"

Reil stepped in to fill the gaps.

"It was destroyed, by the Empire."

Proto was silent for a moment, and then resumed walking towards the Market.

"You are playing a joke on me. Very humorous. If you did not wish to relate the information you simply had to state that. I will search on my own and meet you back at the ships."

Reil shook his head. Proto had to find out one way or another. Considering all the other surprises that the Droid was dealing with, he was taking it quite well. He and Cali continued towards the market place on their own. They walked in silence for a ways, but Cali clearly had something on her mind. After a few minutes she finally decided to break her silence.

"So. . ."

Reil arched an eyebrow.

"So what?"

Cali remained sheepish.

"About Proto. . ."

"What about him?"

Reil became irritated when Cali hesitated further.

"Spit it out already!"

"Do you think he can really be a Jedi? I mean he is a droid and all. . ."

Reil rubbed his temples. Why wasn't she directing this sorta thing to Damon or Elyane? Well, Elyane would probably kill her, but Damon was like their resident expert on that stuff now that Thel was gone. Actually, now that Thel was gone, Damon had taken charge of everything, and Reil had barely noticed. He pushed those thoughts aside for later.

"First of all stop using the J word."

Cali was puzzled for a moment.
 "You mean Jed-"
 "Yeah, exactly. Don't use it. It'll attract unwanted ears."
 Cali frowned.
 "So what am I supposed to call it?"
 Reil sighed.
 "I dunno. . . Monk. Wizard. Rodian dairy farmer. Take your pick."
 Cali giggled a bit.
 "So do you think he's a. . . Rodian dairy farmer?"
 "I dunno. He says he's a Rodian dairy farmer, he dresses like one, he can do whatever a Rodian dairy farmer could do, and it's not like there are any other Rodian dairy farmers around to say he's not allowed to be one. Frankly, it doesn't matter none to me whether he is or he ain't, but even if he ain't, he isn't gonna hurt anybody with delusions of grandeur."
 Further conversation was interrupted by their arrival to the entrance of the market place. It was fairly low tech, and laid out like an old Agora, with lots of stalls and temporary shops set up inside the market place. It was heavily populated with various smugglers and temporarily benign pirates showing off their wares, as well as the occasional honest businessman who wound up on the rim. Cali insisted on buying her blaster first, so they stepped inside one of the better kept shops.
 The Duros manning the shop took one look at Cali, and immediately pointed towards the exit.
 "I deal only in weapons here. You take your merchandise somewhere else."
 Reil and Cali exchanged perplexed glances. Reil found his tongue first.
 "Wait. . . What?"
 The Duros indicated towards Cali.
 "Your slave. Take her somewhere else. I don't deal in them here."
 Reil became very indignant.
 "She's not for sale!"
 Cali looked at Reil in amazement for a moment before exploding.
 "I'M NOT A SLAVE!"
 Reil glowed red.
 "Uhhh yeah. That's what I meant to say. . ."
 The Duros looked fairly abashed himself.
 "Ehhh, my apologies. But I cannot be blamed for assuming. You've got her dressed like you're taking her for auction."
 Reil suddenly felt very compelled to set the Duros straight.
 "Woah, slow down there. I didn't dress her, she picked that out herself."
 Cali got slightly more indignant, if that was even possible.
 "I'm not dressed like I'm being taken to auction!"
 "Right. I meant that as well. . . Look, we're here to buy a blaster, so lets cut the chatter and get down to business."
 The Duros spent over half an hour showing off his various wares despite Reil's insistence that they were just after a handheld blaster pistol. All of the wares were in good condition, and highly illegal. Reil had to put his foot down several times to keep the shopkeeper from selling Cali hull piercing slug throwers, and other such suicidal purchases.
 "I can see you are very particular customers. I know exactly what you need."
 The Duros disappeared behind his counter for several minutes, before returning with a Tenloss DXR-6 disruptor rifle. Cali's eyes lit up, and Reil felt the veins in his forehead threaten to burst.
 "Abso-frelling-lutly not!"

"Awww, c'mon!"
 "No. No, no, no! I've seen what those can do to a person with only half a charge. It's not pretty."
 Cali refused to give up.
 "But that's the idea! If someone gives me trouble I want to be able to drop him in one shot!"
 "You're supposed to be getting this to defend yourself, not to drop lippy bystanders!"
 "And I'll be able to defend myself better with this!"
 "No! You'll puncture the fraking hull with it, and then we'll all be sucking vacuum."
 "They're my credits!"
 "I don't care. I wouldn't travel with anyone carrying one of those, and sure as frell not you, whose never held a blaster before."

Reil turned to the shop keeper.
 "Look, she isn't about to storm the Core all on her own. She just needs a blaster pistol for personal defense! I'm sure you've got something small like that."

It took another 10 minutes, but they finally emerged from the shop, Reil exhausted, and Cali beaming as she held up a pair Echani crafted pistols that the Duros had refused to separate.

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 21 August 2009 02:43 AM:

Too easy, Reani didn't know why she still took these jobs, they weren't a challenge and they weren't getting her closer to her parent's killers. No, she knew why, she needed the creds, and it annoyed her to no end. A vibroblade flew past her ear as she twisted out of the way. *Too easy* she thought again, *Time to finish this*, she picked up a dead man's vibroblade with her left hand and hefted her own vibrosword. The few remaining men opposing her each took a step back, then she launched herself at them, through them, when she reached the other side of them every one dropped to the ground. She dropped the dead man's vibroblade, sheathed her vibrosword and walked up to the computer console. She had been hired to retrieve a hard disk, fighting the people who stole the hard disk was just a bonus. She booted up the computer and checked the hard disk, *Yup, that's the one*, she accessed it and sighed. Another political blackmail disk, why did nobody fight honorably anymore? *Well, a job is a job*, she ejected the disk and slid it into a pocket, *Time to get paid and move on*, she left the building, got into her waiting speeder and flew towards the city.

"Well done Wolf." The administrator was by all accounts tall, dark, and handsome. If he wasn't a sniveling coward who couldn't even retrieve his own datadisks Reani might have found him charming enough to stay around awhile for. But not charming enough to give him her real name. In fact, she very much doubted that anybody outside of her home and teachers knew her real name, to everybody else she was Wolf, a canine predator from her home. She would have tried to hide where she was from as well, but if her white hair could be explained and accepted she doubted her silver eyes could be, and they were her mother's eyes, she would not cover or hide them.

She accepted the cred sticks he offered her without a word, spun on her heel and left the office before she became too tempted to teach him.

The cantina was dark, they usually were, but that made little

difference, she could fight blindfolded. Every time the door slid open to admit another patron she looked up from her table to decide whether or not he or she was a pilot, she wasn't having much luck.

A thin man with a sly grin slid on the chair on the other side of her table, "Can I buy you a drink?" He asked, his grin growing slightly.

"No." Reani replied curtly.

"Oh, come now, just one drink." He said as three large men walked up and stood behind him.

Reani stood up from the table and the three men took a step closer. She sighed, locked eyes with the grinning man and wiped the grin from his face with a slap hard enough to throw him from his chair. The three men stared at their employer for a second then attacked Reani, the tables prevented them from attacking her at the same time, so one started around the table to get her from behind while the one in front of her threw a punch at her head. She bent backwards at the waist and the punch flew right over her, she righted herself as the large man tried to puzzle out why his fist had not connected like it always had before. Reani sighed again as he brought his hand back for another punch, this time she simply raised her hand in front of her face and caught the punch, applying subtle pressure in certain points killing the power in the punch. The large man again tried to puzzle out why she was not lying on the floor, she wrapped her hand around his wrist and twisted her hips pulling him with her, she imagined that as he flew through the air he was still trying to figure out what had happened. By this time the second man had gotten around her and the third one came at her from the front at the same time. She waited until the one behind her threw a punch she knew was coming, she tilted her head and watched it fly right past her, she imagined the confusion on the face of the man behind her, this fight was demeaning, she stepped back at the same time she grabbed the man's hand and threw him over herself at the third man, the two of them fell to the floor and decided to stay there. Reani left the cantina and wandered towards the spaceport, maybe she could find a pilot there willing to take her somewhere else.

She entered the spaceport and looked around, lots of big ships, but they would be going to other big, industrialized worlds, more politicians, more sly, grinning men with large bodyguards, more wastes of time. She walked around the spaceport until she found a nice, small freighter.

As she approached an elderly man came down the ramp, "Can I help you miss?"

"I hope so, I'd like transport off-planet."

"Sorry miss, I'm just a freighter pilot, all I've got are supplies for a small colony world."

"A small colony world? Sounds perfect."

"Perfect? Are you in trouble with the law or something?" The man asked taking a step back as if to disassociate himself from her with physical distance.

"No, nothing like that, I'm just tired of big city life." She said with a wry grin.

"Ah, well, I can understand that just fine, that's the reason I got into this business myself."

"I'll pay for my passage, don't worry."

The man chuckled, "Oh I wasn't worried, mostly because I don't want you to pay, I consider it a favor from one small colony loving man to another, metaphorically speaking he added hastily. But I'll tell you what, if anything happens during our journey that you happen to be good at, you can help me out and we'll call it

even."

Reani smiled, "Deal."

The man was about to turn around and return up the ramp when a group of five men approached the ship, armed with clubs. "Ah, just the man I'm looking for, how do you like that." The man in front said freezing the old man.

He turned back slowly, "Oh, Jaren, didn't expect to see you here, fancy that."

"Fancy that." Jaren replied apparently joining his thoughts on the chances of it happening, "And yet," he looked around, "here I am, and, here you are, but" he looked around again, "I *don't* see my 'supplies', now why do you suppose that is?"

The old man looked around nervously, either looking for security or the missing 'supplies', "Now Jaren, nobody told me what those supplies where, I don't do that kind of business."

"Oh, you don't do that kind of business, well, in that case I think we can all understand, can't we boys?" He asked, the other men started nodding and chuckling, the old man's face started going pale, "In that case, we might just take your ship as... compensation."

"M ship?! But my ship is my livelihood, I can't make any money without my ship!"

"Too bad, you should have thought about that before you left my supplies behind. Come on boys." The men took a step toward the ship, Reani moved between them and the ship. "And what do we have here?" Jaren asked looking her up and down, "You have beautiful eyes, has anyone ever told you that?"

"Yes." She replied, "They're my mother's."

"She must have been nearly as beautiful as you are."

"Oh, she was exactly as beautiful as I am."

A moment of puzzlement crossed the man's face, "Now, it would be a shame to mar such beauty, but I'm afraid I'll have to if you don't get out of the way."

Reani just smiled, "If only I could say the same thing, but I think what I'm about to do will be an improvement." She lashed out flattening his nose with her fist. Before the other men had a chance to attack she was among them, punching, kicking, elbowing, and kneeing. The 'fight' lasted less than a minute and all five of the men were down. She gestured toward the ramp as the old man stared about with shocked look on his face, "After you, please."

The man went up the ramp and she was about to follow, she heard Jaren try to walk up silently behind her, she spun around feeling movement within her body, she threw out her palm, it stopped an inch from Jaren's chest but he dropped to the ground groaning anyway. "What was that?" The old man asked when she met him at the top of the ramp.

She smiled, "That was a secret technique that you'll likely never see again, he won't be able bother people for at least a year or two." She passed him to sit in a seat in the cockpit while he just stood there looking dumbfounded. Eventually he snapped out of it, came into the cockpit and they left the planet behind. *Hopefully this small colony will have some good fighters*, she looked back, *or at least one passable fighter*. "So, what's the name of this small colony world?"

The old man didn't look up from his console, "Owara."

Reani leaned back, *A good name for a fighter's world* she thought as the stars around them stretched into lines signaling their entrance into hyperspace.

Posted by Dread Pirate Roberts on 21 August 2009 03:54 AM:

Proto wandered somewhat aimlessly through the market

stalls, occasionally stopping to take in the various holovid newscasts. It drummed its fingers loudly against the side of its cylindrical head. eventually, the alabaster droid found its way into a run-down archive library in an abandoned set of market stalls.

Covered in rust and, in some places, moss and other rudimentary greenery, it was clear no one had attended to the shop's aesthetics in years. Small rodents scurried around and sparks flew from malfunctioning machinery.

Perusing the tattered shop, it was surprised to see an ancient protocol droid, rusted, but still functioning. Proto greeted the machine with a series of clicks and whistles, to which it responded in kind. The two droids talked several minutes, exchanging information as fast as the library droid's processor would handle. Eventually, the droid clicked for Proto to follow, which it did.

As the library droid moved to walk, however, time took its toll, and rusted servos failed, dropping the derelict machine to the ground. The Jedi Droid stooped low and carefully picked up the new acquaintance. The library droid directed it towards what seemed to be the only recent addition to the shop, a digital history archive.

The two droids spent some time poring over a table of data discs and other computer relics. Finally, the pair found what they were looking for. A brand new Galaxy Archive, one of the more illegal data discs in Empire Space.

Proto turned to thank the library droid just as its arm joints finally gave way, dropping the limbs to the floor. The crippled machine chirped despondently as the Jedi knelt down next to it. Carefully removing plates and protector's the white droid soon reached the center of its new friend's head. With a sharp tug, it removed the memory core of the now lifeless droid and stood up again. Casually grabbing the Galaxy Archive and hiding it in another chest compartment, Proto left the library and headed back to the *Fang*.

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 21 August 2009 05:18 PM:

"Hi," Teece said as Tam stepped into her private room.

"I don't mean to interrupt," said the boy. "I just thought I'd come in and, uh, make sure everything's okay."

"Oh, it's no intrusion; your ship, your rules, right? I'm just sitting tight until we take off."

Tam shuffled his feet. "Yeah, sorry about that. We're just waiting on some of our crew."

After an awkward silence, Teece sat up on her bed. "You look like you have a question."

"Oh, me? No. I just... So what were you doing out here?"

"Hm?"

"I mean, we're a long way from the Core. What would somebody from the Core be doing in the Rishi Maze?"

"Can't a girl travel?" said the blue woman coyly. "What's a kid like you doing out here?"

"I'm almost 15," said Tam, working hard to keep his hackles down. "And for most people, we go where the winds of the galaxy take us."

"And others are able to choose where the winds of the galaxy take them, is that it?" Though the words seemed a touch adversarial, her small smile kept the mood light and playful.

Laughing, Tam said, "I guess it's none of my business, really." He excused himself before Teece could say another word.

"Well?" asked Damon.

"Nothing much," reported Tam. "She's just looking for a ride to the Core. I guess we'll take her as far as we can."

"I still don't trust her," said Elayne. "I can't say why, but there's something... off about her."

"Y'know," said Tam, "we said the same thing about you."

This seemed to mollify the woman, but Damon chimed in to keep things from getting any worse. "Well, it looks like Reil and Cali are approaching the ship. They don't have Proto with them, though."

"Are we really going to care about a droid with an overgrown glitch?" Tam asked. "Jedi or not, he seems like more of a danger than he's worth."

"Funny," Elayne intoned, "we said the same thing about you."

"Stow it, you two," said Damon. He pointed out the viewport. "Look, there he is. Tam, go find Mir and let her know we're ready for takeoff..."

Posted by Ice Hawk on 22 August 2009 03:22 AM:

Cali trailed behind a furious Reil as they reached the ship. The sun was setting, and Cali was still in her maid uniform. As they climbed aboard they were greeted by Damon.

"What took you guys so long? You said it'd only take a couple of hours."

Reil gestured behind him towards Cali and hissed through clenched teeth.

"Ask her."

Damon turned to Cali.

"Well?"

Cali tried to look as innocent as possible.

"Everything was fine, until some brute attacked me--"

Reil turned and glared at Cali.

"You mean caught you stealing from his stall."

Cali turned red.

"Well. . . then he attacked me. . ."

Damon arched an eyebrow.

"When you say attacked. . ."

"I mean he tried to cut my hand off, okay?! Is that close enough to being attacked for you?"

Damon turned to Reil for confirmation. Reil nodded.

"Yeah, he was an Aqualish fellow. Tried to cut off her theiving hand."

Damon sighed.

"So then what happened."

Reil became uncomfortable.

"Well, he grabbed Cali by the arm, pulled out a vibro blade. . . and uhhh, so I shot him."

Damon balked.

"What?"

"I shot him. Fatally."

Damon rubbed his temples.

"In broad daylight? In the middle of a crowded market place? On a planet that already dislikes us?"

Reil held his ground.

"It was either that or we changed Cali's name to stumpy. I stand by my decision."

Cali chimed in.

"So why am I in trouble?"

Reil rounded on Cali.

"Because I should not have had to make the choice in the first place! How could you be so stupid as to try and shoplift from a pirate?"

Cali shrank back from Reil's outburst. Damon shook his head.

"I'm almost afraid to ask, but what were you stealing anyway?"

Cali squirmed on the spot now that she was answering questions again.

"A datapad and some other small things. He had the price outrageously jacked up, seeing as how they were obviously stolen. . ."

Reil regained some of his composure.

"Well, then just about everything went down the frelling tubes. Locals got real upset, the sheriff showed up, and stopped a lynch mob from forming, then he took us in for questioning."

Damon looked on expectantly.

"And?"

"And he told us to get back to our ship and leave. Our landing permit is about to be revoked."

Proto entered the ship behind Reil and Cali, catching the tail end of the conversation.

"Then it is fortunate that I've arrived in time for departure."

Posted by Corr Terek on 24 August 2009 01:08 AM:

It really was amazing how one's mood could swing from "serene" to "furious" in a matter of moments. Damon made his way to the cockpit and began the warmup sequence for the *Viper*. After a few minutes Proto joined him.

"You seem upset," the droid observed.

"You've got a knack for stating the obvious," Damon replied shortly.

"Indeed," Proto replied. "It *is* one of the primary functions of a protocol droid, you know." His photoreceptors flickered. "If you like, I can also calculate the odds of any given course of action and relay them to you at inconvenient times."

Damon cocked his head, a faint smile on his face despite himself. "Sarcasm? From a droid?"

"My programming is not as restrictive as that of most protocol droids," Proto replied, moving over to the comm board and opening up a channel. Damon winced as a series of electronic noises broadcast from the droid.

"What was that?" he asked.

"I merely set up a slave circuit between this ship and mine," Proto explained. "The *Archaeologist* will follow us to Owara and beyond, at least as long as I remain with you."

"Nice," Damon commented. "You might come in handy around here after all."

He pressed the intercom button. "Mir, make sure we have at least one gun warmed up and ready. We don't want to get blindsided on our way out."

Posted by Dread Pirate Roberts on 25 August 2009 03:52 AM:

Proto retreated to gather with the rest of the passengers. It glanced around the crew, trying to get a vague idea of how everyone was feeling. There was a newcomer, a woman it had not seen before. Making a note, the droid continued. The rest of the crew seemed normal, if a bit disgruntled.

"It would appear something has happened in my absence. Judging from the hasty departure preparations, I would gue-" Proto started before being cut off quickly.

"We got kicked out." Snapped Tam, his arms crossed, and his face concealing a frown with admirable effort.

"I see. The rest of you may be pleased to hear that I have

learned a great deal of what has happened in my absence, and while it is not nearly as complete as I would like, I believe I have a general idea." The shining robot intoned. Turning to the new woman it bowed.

"Greetings. My name is J-...ProtoType One, but you may call me Proto. I was, until your arrival, the most recent addition to this fascinating and skilled crew. Might I inquire as to your name?" Proto asked.

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 25 August 2009 04:37 PM:

"Teece," said the woman, extending a hand. After a brief examination, the droid took it. Then she looked around at the quietly amused looks. "Am I to understand that we'll be leaving soon?"

Elayne shot Damon a glance, and the gunslinger said, "Yeah, about that--"

"We're just waiting on another member of our convoy," Tam interrupted. He turned to Damon and Elayne, giving the two his most intense smile. "Morec, wasn't it?"

"I think that, given the circumstances," Damon turned his gaze significantly to Reil and Cali, "we should get a head start."

Tam shrugged, smiling. "You're the captain, Captain!"

Posted by ij thompson on 26 August 2009 01:50 PM:

The hatchway was much wider than it was tall, indicating a portal meant to allow large numbers of beings to come and go. Despite its size, the hatch irised open soundlessly, portions of the partition disappearing gracefully into the surrounding walls.

Fi and Inex followed Shaz Ru, their Kaminoan chaperone, into the medical/examination bay. It was massive and ring-shaped, curling away on either side of them around a central column that rose to dizzying heights above. Many balconies and bridges circled the central column at various altitudes, though no beings walked upon them. Despite the immense size of the chamber, it housed only four visible occupants: another Kaminoan and three female clones, all here on the ground floor. The clones were familiar to Fi and her Sakiyan companion, and the pair raced forward to stand at the foot of the girl's beds, which were three of several radiating outward from the chamber's thick, central column, like the spokes of a wheel.

"My darlings," Inex addressed them all, tension bleeding through his voice. "How are you?"

"We're clones, created for the sole purpose of being trained assassins." Yeah informed him without preamble. "Did you know this?"

"I did," Inex Jonn confessed softly.

"Why didn't you tell us?" Amra inquired.

"Because, with our payment from Obar Mull, we were a hair's-breadth away from getting out of the business forever," Inex explained. "And then, it would not have mattered anymore."

"It's better to know things, than to not know them," Celeste replied gently.

Fi had to hand it to these girls. They'd just found out that their entire *existence* was a lie, and yet they were still somehow able to put a positive spin on things. They lay serenely on their spartan beds, looking glamorous despite the short, white paper nightgowns they were wearing, and the electrodes that stuck to their bodies and faces at various points. Though Fi could clearly see that they were struggling with the news, the friendly smiles never left their faces.

"Are you feeling any better, Celeste?" She asked.

The clone smiled at her. "Yes, thank you, though some

unpleasant memories have been popping up... for all of us. Dealing with them is a challenge!"

"Why do you remember?" Inex Jonn asked.

"I can answer that," replied the gravelly-voiced Kaminoan who hovered near the girls.

Shaz Ru motioned toward the speaker with one long, graceful arm. "Inex Jonn, Dr. Aqwe."

Inex nodded at the doctor. "We're acquainted."

"Indeed," Dr. Aqwe replied, his long, dorsal head-fin wagging slightly. "To get right to the point, there are troubles with this line, as I had warned there might be. These troubles stem from the Amnesia Effect, which is largely unperfected."

"So why use it?" Fi interrupted. "Whatever it is."

Aqwe looked at her, his great black eyes thinning slightly. "A sensible, if ignorant question. For a proper line of combat clones, we select a host that has a tendency toward, and hopefully even a love for, violence. We can train a clone to fight, but we cannot make it *like* fighting. If a host finds killing and violence to be unpleasant, even deplorable, their clones' programmed activities and latent personality will conflict to such a degree that the unit will become unable to function."

"Thus, the Amnesia Effect: setting in when a clone of this line begins an assignment, and concluding upon the assignment's completion. The effect is far from perfect, however; too mild, and the clone begins to become aware of what they are doing. Too intense, and the clone can lose access to training, or even basic motor functions." The Kaminoan turned back toward Inex.

"I am afraid that the host you delivered to us just didn't have the heart for this kind of work."

Fi's mouth dropped open, and she found herself taking a step away from the Sakiyan.

"Now wait just a damn minute," she said. "The host that *you* delivered?"

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 27 August 2009 04:24 PM:

Reil threw his hands into the air. "Look, I did what I thought was right--"

"Nobody's saying otherwise," Damon interrupted, "but the shifting phase is over, and we're holding the Idiot card." He slapped the comlink panel on the wall. "Mir?"

"Captain?" Mir's voice was clipped and monotone. And Tam had rarely heard her refer to Damon as 'Captain'.

"Mir, let's blast outta here. Now."

"But Morec and his crew..."

Damon finished her sentence as well. "... Know where we're going. They can catch up to us when they're ready. For right now, we gotta get clear, okay?"

"Copy that," said the Farghul, and the ship's intercom clicked off.

Damon lowered his head, then looked to the rest of the *Fang's* crew. "I'm going to be up in the cockpit. The rest of you, secure for takeoff." He gestured to a circle of flight couches, then disappeared up the corridor.

As they all strapped in, Elayne eyed Teece with suspicion. Finally she said, "I can tell, you know."

"What?" said the blue woman, looking around nervously.

"You're clearly hiding something. Who are you really, and what are you doing on our ship?"

With everyone's eyes on her, Teece hung her head and sighed. "My name really is Teece, and I really do need a ride."

"But?"

"I heard you were going to Owara," she continued, letting the words pour from her like a depressurizing airlock. "I've been

there, and know someone who needs your help..."

Posted by Mack Jace on 31 August 2009 03:55 PM:

The crew of the *Second Chance* filtered in one by one as they returned from their shopping expeditions. After dropping off his purchases, Morec made his way to the bridge. Jyn was there, starting the pre-flight checklist. He didn't acknowledge Morec as he entered.

"Did you find anything out from your contacts?" Morec asked.

Without turning, Jyn replied, "Yup." He continued to check readings and flip switches as the engines warmed up. "It seems that things on Owara have been heating up in the past couple of weeks. There was a government installed when the colony was founded, and now it seems that tensions that have been building are boiling over." He turned and looked Morec in the eye. "It also seems that the Empire is involved in this."

"That's what I had heard," Morec said. "What kind of a presence do they have there? Are we talking large ground force?"

"That's the thing. There's almost no sign of the Empire anywhere on planet."

"So how do you know they're there then?" Morec asked.

"It's a hunch." At this both men smiled. Jyn continued, "According to my contacts, several veins of ore were found on planet. It's really good stuff. The Empire's always looking for more ways and places to get their ore as cheap as possible. And a few months after these veins are found, there's suddenly a huge uprising on planet? It sounds fishy to me."

"That makes sense. But where does Tor play into all this? I thought he was just a two-bit smuggler? At least that's what I had heard."

Morec felt the uneasiness in Jyn as he spoke. "Well, he is. At least, in a way. He and I used to work together, but he was never interested in making it big. He did it for the thrill, not for the credits. We each went our separate ways, each with a bit of a debt to the other. And now he's calling in a favor."

"He contacted you?" Morec asked, incredulous.

"Yeah. Seems he's in a bit of a jam on planet and could use the help. He heard I was sniffing around and took a chance."

"Hmm. I guess we're heading to Owara then?"

"As soon as I finish this checklist we are. I want to get there as soon as possible. And it seems those friends of yours have the same idea." He glanced out the window to the *Nexu's Fang* which was just lifting off.

"I've got the feeling we'll be seeing them a lot sooner than most of us would like," Morec said. Jyn just nodded his head somberly and turned back to his instrument panels.

Morec headed to the communications suite and typed out a quick message to the *Fang* and sent it off, hoping that they would get it before they reached hyperspace.

Seems we've got a mutual friend at the place we discussed. I guess we'll be seeing you sooner than expected.

Until then,

Morec

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 1 September 2009 04:29 PM:

They looked over the vast reflective horizon from the deck of their exploratory skiff, a perfect place for their master. Colonists so far had focused on the fertile grasslands, and the Empire's eye is fixed only on the mountainous ore deposits, so by digging in at the vast regions of planetary salt flats their efforts to establish a

foothold on Owara for Lord Pavana will go unnoticed before it's too late. They will overtake the Imperial presence, commandeer their mining equipment, and further their master's *own* long living empire.

Another skiff came over the salt encrusted rise, much larger and more opulent than the first. It came to a halt as well, and after an honor guard emerged with appropriate stateliness there arose a being easily twice the size of any present humanoids. Swathed in gossamer white muslin, the great being gazed out on his new home. The blue gray sky was mirrored Owara's salty surface; smooth, clean, and flawless.

A subordinate approached. "Lord Pavana? Does this location please you?"

The massive alien's response was answer enough. "Begin construction immediately. We will make this our new home, and take Owara for ourselves..."

"...and that's when the problems really started on Owara," Teece said. "We need to help those settlers. Even the Imperial government would be preferable to Lord Pavana and his crime syndicate."

"Be careful what you say," said Reil. "This crew didn't exactly vote for Palpatine."

Tam nodded his agreement, his eyes distant and haunted. "Some gangster with money in his pocket doesn't compare to the horrors I've seen attributed to the Empire."

"At any rate," Elayne added, "the Empire is powerful enough to quash any resistance from this 'Pavana'."

"Lord Pavana," corrected Teece, "and you don't understand. Everything they've done has been quick, quiet, and methodical. At first the Empire didn't even believe they were being attacked, they just blamed their losses on natural events or something, like landslides, or cave-ins or something. That's how careful Lord Pavana's men are."

Reil hooted with laughter. "And you think *we* can do something about it? You're as looney as a mynock chewing on my left--"

Teece's heated rejoinder was cut short by the hatch opening and Damon emerging. "We've officially said goodbye to the Rishi system." He waved a datapad in the air. "But not before getting a message from Morec's ship. It says something about a mutual friend. Any ideas what he's talking about?"

All eyes turned to Teece...

Posted by ij thompson on 1 September 2009 07:11 PM:

Inex Jonn looked slumped, making no effort to sidestep Fi's question. Instead, he simply nodded.

"Correct," the Kaminoan, Dr. Aqwe, explained for him. "The host that Inex Jonn provided. What was it, again? A bounty you'd acquired?"

The Sakiyan sighed. "A kidnapping. A *legitimate* one..." he explained, palms up.

"A legitimate kidnapping," Fi echoed flatly.

"I was hired twelve years ago by an Imperial officer to kidnap this woman, I don't remember her name..."

"Vonn Ellu," Dr. Aqwe supplied.

"Why?" Fi asked.

"I don't deal in 'why,'" Inex retorted. "I did what I was hired to do, as any responsible businessman would. But when I tried to deliver Vonn, I found that the officer who hired me had been killed in a battle. I didn't know what to do with her!"

"Like return her to her home, for instance?" Fi spat.

Inex shook his head rapidly. "Impossible. You see, by then she *knew* me... she knew my name, she knew my ship. I had to recoup my losses--"

"And save your neck."

"In so few words, yes. So I..."

"So he brought her here," Dr. Aqwe completed. "Inex came to me with a proposal. He felt that a female assassin, a *beautiful* female assassin, would be able to go places that others could not go. Would be *welcomed*, in fact... the perfect instrument of murder, prized by not only the underworld, but politicians of the galaxy over. I was intrigued, and I approved a test-run of nine hundred and ninety-nine. And from that number, as payment to Inex Jonn..."

"Three clones of his own," Fi concluded, biting back the venomous hatred for the Sakiyan she now felt rising within her. "But, the Empire... they've just allowed you to run this new line?"

"Em..." Dr. Aqwe stuttered, looking pained. "While a formidable cloning installation, Ashlud City is not exactly a part of mainstream Kaminoan society..."

Fi looked back and forth between the doctor and Inex Jonn, unsure which one she was more furious with. She turned her thoughts elsewhere.

"And this 'host'... Vonn," she said, "what finally happened to her?"

Dr. Aqwe favoured her with a grin that held not a trace of humour.

"Oh, we keep her here..."

Posted by Corr Terek on 2 September 2009 12:24 AM:

"Probably has something to do with Renu Tor," Mir said, stepping in from the corridor that led to one of the gun turrets. "He's the reason we spoke to Morec in the first place, and I doubt there's anyone else we know on Owara."

Damon glanced back at Teece. "Know anything about him?"

"Renu Tor?" Teece said, blinking nervously. "He's a smuggler, I think. I've heard him mentioned a few times around town. He was very popular with the kids in the colony. Told them stories and such."

"Anything else?"

"Well," Teece thought for a moment, "when I left the planet, I thought I'd see if he could give me a ride. But his ship seemed to be deserted."

"What do you mean?" Elayne asked.

"It was locked down, and when I asked around, I was told that nobody had seen him for a couple of days."

"Do you think Pavona got to him?" Reil said.

"Maybe," Teece replied. "I can't imagine why Pavona would do anything to him, though."

"I hope not," Reil muttered. "This 'Lord Pavona' sounds like bad news."

Teece turned back to Damon. "Please, you've got to help us. If Pavona isn't stopped, he'll make life on Owara a living hell."

Damon was silent for a long moment. "I'm sorry, Teece," he said finally, "but we're only heading to Owara because we need to talk to Tor. We've enough enemies as it is without starting a whole new fight."

"But what if this smuggler has fallen afoul of 'Lord Pavona'?" Proto asked, his photoreceptor trained on Damon.

Damon considered. "If that's the case then...well, we'll see."

"Thank you!" Teece said fervently. Damon held up a hand to forestall further thanks.

"Don't misunderstand me," he said. "We just want to get

what we're there for and then leave."

"That's how it always starts," Mir muttered.

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 2 September 2009 01:44 PM:

Damon had a point, Tam had to admit. He knew that the gunslinger wasn't an enemy of justice, but he had many other things on his mind, not the least of which being his wayward brother. At any rate, facing off against some crime lord sounded like more trouble than they needed to involve themselves with.

"Owara isn't too far from the Hutt Space frontier, right?" Reil offered. "So is Pavana a Hutt or something; looking to carve a bigger slice of the galaxy for himself?"

The pilot's answer came from his new friend. Cali stared at the man in astonishment. "You've never heard of Pavana? He's no Hutt, but that doesn't mean he isn't trouble." She looked around to see that nobody else seemed familiar with the crime lord. "He's old, several thousand years old, I think, and they say that the age and the underworld of the galaxy got to him. He thinks everyone's out to get him, and has built his personal empire as a shield against imagined, nonsensical threats.

"Still," she continued, "he's smart. *Very* smart, and a brilliant strategist. It doesn't surprise me that the rumors we've been hearing about Owara have something to do with Pavana."

Tam stared at the girl. What with her ruthless edge and odd taste in clothing, it was hard for him to imagine such words coming out of her. Everyone else seemed to look on Cali, and she folded her arms defensively. "What? Slaves hear all sorts of things..."

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 2 September 2009 02:40 PM:

"Pavana?" Reani entered the room at a brisk walk. "Pavana, you told me it would be a challenge."

A small man at the crime lord's side bristled, "How dare you address him so casually?! Show respect woman!!"

Reani ignored the little man, "You told me it would be a challenge." She repeated.

The little man practically shook but the massive alien Reani had addressed merely waved the man off, "Not a challenge? Perhaps you're better than I thought. You know, you're not the first Echani I've met. Though you may be the strongest. Do you have what I sent you for?"

Reani scowled, "Yes." She reached into a pocket, drew out a data card and threw it to him.

"Excellent." He caught it out of the air, "Tell me, and be truthful now, did you look at it?"

"Yes." She replied without hesitation.

Pavana smiled, "There are not many people who would take such liberties, and fewer still who would admit it. How do you know I won't kill you for it?"

Reani smirked, "Because you can't."

The little man looked at Reani as if she'd just said that the Emperor was an Ewok but Pavana just laughed, "I can't? I am the strongest crime lord in this sector, at least of those who know of me. You may be strong, but someday you'll meet someone stronger than you, and when you do, your tongue will get you into a lot of trouble. The other Echani I met were somewhat more modest and accommodating, granted they didn't know who or what I am."

"The other Echani you may or may not have met weren't as good as I am, nor did they have the same goal." She said every muscle in her body relaxed, ready for anything. The information on that disc was indeed something that many people would kill

over.

Pavana seemed to think about this, "Perhaps, perhaps." He waved a man over and handed him the card. Then he turned back to Reani, "You want a challenge? I have heard that a certain group of people are on their way to my fair planet, or what will soon enough be my fair planet, this group of people have evaded everybody who've gone after them. And according to my sources that list includes some rather powerful people and some extremely strong fighters. Now, as of the moment I don't know what they want on Owara but I will soon enough and I may call on your abilities. If they attempt to interfere with my operation I'd like you to convince them not to. Permanently. Do that and I'll give you a permanent place in my organization that, I guarantee, will eventually find your challenge. Do we have a deal?"

"No. I don't want any place in your organization, I want two things. A challenge, if I don't find it here, I'll find it elsewhere. The other thing I want you can help me with, find out who killed my parents."

"I see. So that's why you left your home. You Echani always have a good reason. Who were your parents?"

"The only Echani in recent history to have been assassinated on their home planet." Reani snarled.

Pavana arched an eyebrow, "Any information will help. But still, I suppose you're right, that must be a pretty small list. If that is all, I have made accommodations for you, a room where you can stay for the duration of your 'visit'."

Reani turned to follow a servant out of the room, at the door she stopped. "They were murdered by Jedi." She said over her shoulder before she left.

Posted by ij thompson on 2 September 2009 08:00 PM:

"We are just *three* of nine hundred and ninety-nine copies?" Veah asked from her medical bed, eyes wide with wonder. "I would really like to meet the others, right away!"

"Me too," agreed Amra. "We could learn all about their experiences!"

"And tell them about ours!" Celeste agreed.

"I'm afraid that that will not be possible," Dr. Aqwe stated, ignoring the girls and choosing instead to speak to Inex Jonn directly. "You desired to take your units away before testing could be completed, and I agreed. Had you waited for the tests to be performed, you would have found, as I did, that the units are unstable, and unreliable. We could not allow a faulty product to enter the market." The Kaminoan's expression was blank.

"We terminated them."

Inex Jonn staggered backward slightly, gripping the edge of Veah's bed for support. "So," he breathed, "where does that leave us?"

Dr. Aqwe said nothing, merely nodded at his aide, Shaz Ru. "As we compute it," Shaz Ru informed the Sakiyan, "this project has been an utter failure. The waste of time and resources has been nearly incalculable. But, we are sympathetic to the fact that you had no knowledge of how things would ultimately turn out, and are prepared to release you of all culpability for..." the Kaminoan checked a datapad. "Three hundred and thirteen million credits."

Inex Jonn stiffened, shaking with rage. "You... you can't! It was *your* choice to proceed with the project... It's not my fault!"

Dr. Aqwe grinned coldly. "There is only one other option." He waved a long, spindly hand toward The Luminous Three in their beds. "These units-"

"Will you stop calling them 'the units'?" Fi shouted. "Their names are Veah, Amra, and Celeste, and they happen to be

friends of mine!"

Dr. Aqwe cleared his throat impatiently, and continued speaking to Inex Jonn. "These units are an embarrassment to us, and cannot be allowed to re-enter the galaxy at large as they are. If you will allow me to dispose of them, we can forget that this whole affair ever took place."

Inex was still slumped against Veah's cot, seemingly unaware that he was holding the beautiful girl's -the beautiful *clone's*-hand. "I..."

"Inex..." Fi warned, "Inex, it's never... it's never too late... to change..."

The Sakiyan looked back at her, his eyes misting with tears.

"Dr. Aqwe..." he choked, "do what you think is best."

The Kaminoan doctor smiled, already flipping switches that were no doubt connected to the electrodes that studded The Luminous Three's faces and bodies. "Fear not," he told them, "the process is quite painless, and will be over very quickly." He turned to smile reassuringly at Inex and Fi, and was surprised to find a blaster pointed directly at his forehead, with Fi on the other end of it. The human girl eyed him coolly.

"Not on my watch, fish-face."

Posted by Mack Jace on 2 September 2009 09:34 PM:

Hyperspace was a quiet, yet chaotic place. Morec had always enjoyed sitting in cockpits and watching the scene that stretched out before him. They had jumped into hyperspace a few hours before, leaving the Maze and all its inhabitants behind. Morec was on the first watch, and so he sat and waited for either something to happen or for someone to relieve him. As he sat, he couldn't help but wonder just what kind of a mess he had gotten himself into. A few short weeks ago he was doing the best he could to stay in hiding, out of sight, and as far away from the Empire as humanly possible. And now here he was, heading straight toward them, only to help out a person he had never met get out of some trouble that he had no real reason to deal with.

And yet there was something pulling him there. He knew it was the will of the Force that was guiding him, but after all the years of pain and suffering the galaxy had endured it was hard to believe that there was still some good out there. There was something about Owara, a feeling that he couldn't shake. He couldn't tell whether it was good or bad, and he knew that it wouldn't do him any good to try and see the future; he had never been a good enough student in that field anyway. He was always more of a combatant, loving the thrill of the battle and using his body as a force for good. At this he thought of his lightsaber with a pang. He still kept it, unable to rid himself of it, knowing that the moment he did would be the moment he would most need it. It was safely tucked away in his bag, which was never too far away.

He considered taking the weapon out of hiding to give it a once-over, but that thought evaporated as he heard footsteps coming from behind him. Mara sat down in the pilot's seat next to him without saying a word, and began checking and double-checking the status boards. Her hair shimmered in the light coming from the viewport, and her fingers danced over the keys as she typed in status-check commands.

"Still don't trust me?" Morec said lightly.

She threw a sideways glance at him and said simply, "I just prefer to do things myself is all."

"Well," Morec said, "I guess that's better than all-out contempt." He reached out to the Force and felt her presence. She definitely felt differently, that was for sure. Where there had once been anger and hatred was replaced with worry, and...fear?

That caught Morec off guard, and when she didn't say anything in return, he decided to probe a little deeper. "Everything all right? You seem a little distracted."

She paused for a second, and turned to look at Morec. Her eyes weren't as hard as they normally were. She stared into his eyes, searching for something. Morec matched the stare with equal intensity, searching her eyes for whatever she chose to show. There was pain and sorrow, and most striking, the fear that Morec had felt within her. After what seemed like an eternity, she blinked, breaking their connection. She took a deep breath and turned back to the board and said quickly, "I'm sorry." Again she paused. "It's just - I don't know what to say. I guess I'm kind of afraid."

"Of what?" Morec asked, pushing her ever so slightly.

"What's happening. I mean, a few days ago, everything was fine until you showed up. Next thing you know, we're on the run from the Imperials, hiding out with the scum of the galaxy, and now we're rushing off to some planet we've never even heard of because of some hunch you and my father have." She took a breath, and continued, "I just feel like I've got no control any more. I'm being pushed into corners and I've got to fight my way out now. And all this started when you came on board this ship."

"Believe it or not, I know what you mean," he offered, hoping to quell her fears and insecurities. Inside, he felt his own feelings, his own fears pressing against him, threatening to explode from within. "But you don't know the half of it. Have you ever been cornered, literally? By people who would love nothing more than to see your body floating through space to the nearest star? I have. And trust me, it's not fun. You may feel like you've been pushed around, but wait until you're really in trouble. When you've got no one to turn to and three blasters pressed against your head, and you know that you won't make it out alive."

He inhaled deeply, trying to calm himself, "Trust me, you haven't really felt fear until death's staring you in the face, and you can see all your friends that left you behind beckoning you toward them. But you know it's not your time, and so you keep fighting. No matter how much it hurts, or how hopeless it seems, you keep fighting. Because the longer you're alive, the longer you're a thorn in the sides of your enemies. And that is worth it all." Without another word, he stood, picked up his bag, and left the cockpit, leaving Mara alone.

Posted by ij thompson on 3 September 2009 07:45 AM:

With Fi's blaster aimed squarely at his forehead, Dr. Aqwe stopped his pressing of the buttons, save one - a large, clearly marked button that set red lights strobing and klaxons hooting.

"Security is on its way," he told Fi, beaming.

"You'll never see them."

Another blaster was drawn, this one by Inex Jonn, who aimed it at Fi's temple. "Fi, don't," he pleaded. "You don't know what they'll do to us! Do you want to be stuck down here forever? Or thrown in that ocean?"

Fi breathed deeply. "Inex, if you're gonna use that thing, you'd better get on with it, 'cause after I drop the 'chicken of the sea' here, I think you just may be next."

"Please stop fighting," Veah interjected meekly.

"I can't let you do it," Inex vowed. "I can't let it end, down here. I've come too far..."

Fi kept her eyes on the doctor, and smiled coldly. "What's a little farther?"

She pulled the trigger.

Posted by Mack Jace on 4 September 2009 07:15 PM:

Morec sat alone in his bunkroom, on the floor, his feet crossed in front of him. He was trying to meditate, trying to get himself back into line with the Force. But all of the emotions that had been stirred up with his outburst lingered. He remembered distinctly, as if it had just happened, the start of what would become known as the Purge. He remembered the stench of the wounds his Master had inflicted on the clones who betrayed them, and those they had returned the favor with. Those first few weeks after losing everything he had ever known had been like hell to Morec. Each step was another the Empire could track. Each contact made was one more person who could betray his innermost secrets.

He had lived the life of an animal for a large part of those weeks, scrounging for food late at night when no one was around to catch him. Hopping from ship to ship like a mynock, moving on only when he needed to. And slowly, he had built some trust in himself, in his abilities, to be able to get him away from any trouble.

For a few minutes he sat there in absolute silence, the only sounds being those of the ship as she moved through hyperspace. He focused on calming himself, on quelling those emotions. Just as he had succeeded, there was a soft tap on the door.

He opened his eyes, and called, "Come in." He stayed where he was on the floor as the door slid open, revealing Mara.

She stood there for a second, then walked in and sat down on a chair. Morec said, "Listen, I'm sorry for -"

She cut him off, "No, wait. I'm sorry for what I said. Things were just catching up to me, is all. I appreciate what you said though."

This puzzled Morec. "What?" he asked, his face showing his confusion. "Um, you're welcome...?"

She smiled, "No really. It got me to think about what I was worrying about, and you're right. There wasn't anything for me to be getting upset about."

Morec scratched his head, still perplexed, but accepted what she said. "Well, I'm still sorry for freaking out like that." He laughed, trying to lighten the mood a little, and failing miserably. "It's just...well, let's just say that it's a long story."

She spread her arms to the side, "We've got nothing but time here."

He shook his head firmly, "No, trust me, you don't want to know. It's a lot better for everyone here that you don't know."

"Look," she said, her eyes getting fiery again. "If you want to stay on this ship, you've got to learn to trust people. One word from me and you're out. I don't give a frell what your story is, if you can't trust me or any of us with it, then we can't trust you on this ship."

She glared at him, but he kept his face set in neutral. She got up and shook her head in contempt. She moved to the door and reached for the door release.

"Wait." Morec took a deep breath, every fiber in his body telling him he was making the wrong decision, but the Force telling him otherwise. "You really want to know?" he asked rhetorically. She nodded her head slowly, unsure what he was about to tell her.

"Ok then." Another deep breath. "My name is Morec Birtrok, Jedi Knight."

Posted by ij thompson on 4 September 2009 07:15 PM:

Fi was aware of the impact not as pain, but rather like her arm had just decided to spasm on its own. Though this was not

the case, the effect was the same; her blaster (and the bolt that was, at that moment, coming out of it) were sent spinning harmlessly across the medical chamber. Despite the blaring sirens and flashing red lights, Fi was peripherally aware of Inex's blaster doing the same.

And she was aware of a blur; a white and gold blur that was The Luminous Three, disarming her and Inex and leaping from their beds and pulling electrodes from their faces and bodies.

"Friends shouldn't shoot their friends, Inex," Celeste scolded the Sakiyan.

Dr. Aqwe seized the momentary distraction, and with surprising speed, had hold of some kind of sharp instrument - an instrument that *whined*, singing power and menace. This he thrust at the throat of Veah, the nearest clone girl.

The Kaminoan never had a chance. Veah grabbed the doctor's weapon arm by the wrist, curled gracefully into his embrace, and spun him by the arm once, twice, three times, the doctor rising into the air with the momentum. Dr. Aqwe's third orbit sent him smashing directly into the round room's massive central column, where the sound of his spine breaking was punctuated by a dazzling shower of sparks. He dropped to the floor, dead.

Everyone stood stock still - Fi, Inex, and Shaz Ru blinking in shock, The Luminous Three poised, serene, alert to any threat.

Fi acted first. "Hold him!" she shouted, pointing at Inex Jonn.

Amra, who was nearest the Sakiyan, responded with startling speed, threading her arms through Inex's own and subduing the alien man as neatly as one might tie a shoe.

Celeste nodded at Amra approvingly. "That's a very effective choke hold you're using on him!"

"Thanks!" Amra beamed back at her sister. "Only the very best, for our Inex!"

Satisfied, Fi scanned the chamber and located her and Inex's blasters. She took one in each hand and, blasters leading the way, marched directly toward the remaining Kaminoan, Shaz Ru.

"Right," she said. "Which way equals 'out'?"

Posted by Corr Terek on 6 September 2009 07:30 PM:

The *Viper* dropped out of hyperspace above Owara. "Nice place," Reil commented.

"Doesn't look too bad," Damon agreed. "You could almost believe there's not a crazy crime lord running things down there."

"Yep," Reil said laconically. "We still running under the *Nexu's Fang* ID?"

"For the moment," Damon replied, stifling a yawn. He hadn't gotten much sleep over the past few hours -- there was a lot on his mind. Mir had hardly said two words to him since their conversation earlier, and the knowledge of what they could be getting into here on Owara weighed heavily on his mind. Not for the first time, he wondered if it was really worth the risks. He had somehow ended up as the leader of this group, more or less, and the responsibility was more than Damon was used to.

"Hey!" Reil said, snapping his fingers in front of Damon's face and jerking him back to attention. "You with me?"

"Yeah, sorry, I'm just tired," Damon replied. "What'd you say?"

"No one's hailed us," Reil repeated.

"That's not good," Damon muttered. He moved to the comm board. "This is Captain Ziro of the *Nexu's Fang*, requesting permission to land."

There was no response. Reil and Damon looked at each other. "I don't like this at all," Reil said.

Damon nodded. "I'm with you. Let's hang back for a moment. If we don't get a response in a few minutes, we're out of here."

Reil nodded. "That's what I was thinking."

Abruptly the comm crackled to life. "*Nexu's Fang*, you are cleared to land on platform twelve."

Damon and Reil exchanged skeptical glances. "We wondered if we were going to hear from you, Control," Damon replied.

"Sorry. We had an issue with the communications relay," Control said. "They don't exactly send us the best stuff out here."

"Understood," Damon replied. He turned back to Reil. "You buy any of this?"

"It *could* have happened," Reil said slowly. "But given what we already know about this place, I'm not taking anything at face value."

"Yeah," Damon said. "Let's go, but be careful."

"You don't have to tell me twice."

Posted by Dread Pirate Roberts on 6 September 2009 07:58 PM:

"Captain Damon," Proto began as he entered the cockpit of the landing starship, "If you would like, I can leave the Archaeologist in orbit about the planet, hidden by debris. This would allow for a relatively quick extraction, should the need arise."

Damon's eyes never left the controls. "How quick is 'relatively'?" He asked sharply.

"At most, ten minutes to arrive. Leaving again is a slightly complicated matter dependent on weather, orbital debris, wildli-" The white droid explained.

"Anything I'd actually *worry* about?" The pilot cut Proto off.

"Well, if there are planetary defenses, they could pose a potential problem." It hypothesized.

"Wonderful. Now go sit down, we're getting ready to land." Damon said wearily. As the droid left he muttered something under his breath.

"Kind of makes you see the brilliance of the astromech droid doesn't it?" Reil joked, somewhat to relieve the tension.

Damon shook his head and sighed. "Yeah, but an astromech droid is useless in a firefight. Hopefully our new-found mechanical friend will prove otherwise."

Posted by ij thompson on 8 September 2009 06:01 PM:

Shaz Ru looked back at the massive, wide hatch through which they'd entered, now sealed up tight. "That was the only exit," he sputtered. "You should give yourselves up, right now!"

Fi raised the two blasters she was holding a little higher, approaching the Kaminoan's panicked face, which sat atop that cursed long neck of his.

"Did I ask you for advice, Shazzy?" she asked, looking slightly maniacal, though that may have been due to the flashing emergency lights.

Inex Jonn, held fast in Amra's formidable choke hold, was studying the round room and its towering central column. "All those bridges and ledges up there," he wheezed, "How do you get at them?"

Fi looked up, scanning the room's fathomless height. "I see a hatch!" she announced. "And another! I see..." She trailed off as, from both hatches, squads of Kaminoan soldiers armed with fearsome-looking blaster rifles spilled forth, training their weapons downward at the girl and her friends.

"Uh-oh..."

Posted by ij thompson on 9 September 2009 05:59 PM:

Fi once again pointed her and Inex's blasters at Shaz Ru's bobbing head. "We have your man!" she announced to the Kaminoan troops above, shouting to be heard over the wailing alarms. "Or... your fish!"

In answer, the troops sent down a torrent of blaster rifle fire, sending Fi and her companions scrambling around the other side of the cylindrical chamber's massive central column.

"Those guards don't seem too concerned with your safety, Shaz Ru," Inex ribbed the Kaminoan bureaucrat, while being dragged along in Amra's chokehold.

The guards above simply ran along the ledge that bordered the medical bay's wall, getting their quarry back in their sights. As they opened fire again, Fi, Inex, and The Luminous Three scrambled to take cover under the beds that the clone girls had occupied moments before. Shaz Ru, surprisingly, remained standing, frantically hammering at controls built into the towering column.

Without fanfare, rows of beds just like the ones the Kaminoan's captors were hiding under began radiating outward from the column like the petals of some great flower, each row about two meters above the one beneath it. With a few more button presses from Shaz Ru, the rows began rotating around the column slowly, each row in an alternating direction. The blaster bolts from above hammered into the rows of beds, sending bits of scorched foam bedding raining all over the chamber.

Fi pulled herself partially out from under her own bed, noting absently that the Kaminoan hadn't set the bottom row in motion. "Nice work, Shazzy," she applauded. "You may have a little 'hero' in you, yet!"

"At present, my own survival is my principal interest."

Fi frowned. "See, there you've gone and spoiled it."

"But it doesn't help any," Inex pointed out as still more blaster bolts hammered at the beds rotating above them. "We have to find a way up to those hatches!"

"This is a tricky tactical situation!" Celeste commented, looking exhilarated.

Fi sighed in exasperation and wonder. Here she was, preparing to meet her own demise, and there were The Luminous Three, frightfully vulnerable in their little paper nightgowns, talking about how the situation was little more than 'tricky'. Fi was beginning to wish she were a clone.

"Well," she posited, looking at Shaz Ru. "How do you guys get to those beds, up there?"

The Kaminoan said nothing, merely gestured toward a row of simple repulsorlift vehicles lined up against the chamber's outer wall. These were little more than a metal disc, meant for standing on, with a pair of waist-high handlebars, attached to which was a leather safety belt.

Fi had seen the model before. "Are you crazy? Do you know how *slow* those things are?"

Inex nodded. "She's right. We'd be sitting ducks on those. We'd never make it to the top... not without a diversion."

Yeah's face lit up. "A diversion!" She put a hand on Celeste's shoulder, smiling widely. "Come on!" Without another word, the stunning beauty leapt upward, catching the edge of the nearest turning bed. In a flash she'd hoisted herself up and onto it, and was leaping for the next, with her twin sister Celeste close behind.

"Okay," Fi breathed, chilled again by the sight of the girls in action. "It's on..."

Posted by Mack Jace on 10 September 2009 10:51 AM:

Mara stood there, stunned at what she heard, but not giving it away on her face. "The kark you are! If you're really that desperate to stay on this ship, you should have come up with a better story. Pack your things, you're out of here as soon as we get to Owara." She turned to leave, but stopped when she heard *snap-hiss*.

She turned back slowly and was surprised to see what she could only describe as a lightsaber. Though it didn't look at all like any lightsaber she had ever seen, it could only be that. It looked like a baton, the kind that police forces used on technologically backward planets. The "blade" was parallel to Morec's arm, and he gripped a handle that extended perpendicularly out from the actual lightsaber. The "blade" itself was a silvery-green, something she had never seen before.

Morec waited a moment longer then asked, "Do you believe me now?"

She didn't say anything, her eyes fixed upon the lightsaber. Her eyes slowly drifted up to meet his, and she nodded her head. "But...I guess...How did you survive the purge?"

"A lot of luck, I guess. I was stationed on Kasshyyyk with my master..."

"...and then I went to Abregado-rae, and met you guys."

During his story Mara hadn't said a single word. She listened to him intently, taking in everything he was saying. It was a shock to her, to listen to the horrible things he had endured, of the life he had had to lead. It put things into perspective for her.

After a minute or so of silence, she said, "Wow...it's all so hard to believe."

"I know," Morec said. "Sometimes I wake up in the morning and hope that it's all been a dream, but I know it hasn't been. It was hard at first, but I guess I've gotten used to it."

She nodded absentmindedly. There was something bothering her, Morec knew, but couldn't tell what. "So, is the whole reason we're going to Owara because of a feeling in the Force?" she asked.

"I guess you could say that. I think there's something there that we need to do, or at least I need to do. Either way, we're headed there, and there's not a whole lot we can do about it."

"Yeah, don't remind me," she said.

Posted by Ice Hawk on 11 September 2009 05:02 PM:

Reil brought the *Fang* down to buzz the landing platform before setting down. No other ships registered on sensors, and there was barely any activity on the platform.

Reil double checked the readings.

"This can't be right. . . Where the frell is everybody?"

Damon looked over the readings.

"Are you sure this is the right place?"

"Yeah, these are the co-ordinates. . . I don't like this. We should get out of here. . ."

"It's odd. . ." Damon agreed "but maybe having nobody here will work to our advantage."

Reil wasn't convinced.

"I dunno. . . This feels awfully familiar. . ."

"Nothing's happened yet. If we get in and out real quick, maybe we can avoid all the trouble planetside. Take us down."

Reil complied, but he mumbled under his breath.

"Sure. . . and maybe whatshisname just blew a power coupling, and is waiting for us on the ground. . ."

As the *Fang* touched tarmac, Damon flipped on the intercomm.

"We're here. . ."

Posted by ij thompson on 11 September 2009 06:05 PM:

Looking up through the occasional crack between the moving beds, Fi was able to just barely catch the occasional glimpse of Veah and Celeste as the pair made their ascent. She looked nervously over at the hoverdiscs parked against the chamber's wall. If she, Amra, and Inex got on them too soon, they'd be blasted to smithereens. But every moment they hesitated left the advancing twin girls above without cover fire.

Taking a chance, Fi slinked out from the cover of the rotating beds, looked up just in time to see Veah and Celeste leaping from the higher beds to the ledge where the Kaminoan troops awaited them.

"Now! Now! Go! Go!" Fi cried.

Holstering Inex's blaster and tucking her own under one arm, Fi hopped onto one of the hoverdiscs, fastening the safety belt and jabbing at the controls. She spotted Amra, fastening her hoverdisc's belt around Inex Jonn, strangely, then returning her arm to its place around the Sakiyan's neck and thumbing the primitive vehicle to life. Even Shaz Ru hopped on a disc, perhaps hoping to be on hand when the five of them were taken into custody. Either way, no one objected.

The climb was painfully slow on the rickety conveyances, and Fi feared for the twin girls above. She could only imagine what Amra was feeling, as the clone's disc was slowed by the double weight of both herself and Inex Jonn.

Rising, the ledge finally came more fully into view. These Kaminoan soldiers were faster than the average Kaminoan, but nowhere near as fast as the clones they'd created. Once Veah and Celeste were in their midst, it was no longer an execution, but a fight for survival. Their weapons, next to useless in close quarters such as these, doubled as clubs, with which the Kaminoans tried desperately to block the kicks and punches coming their way.

Still, as she closed the distance, Fi saw no reason not to help things along. Steering her hoverdisc with her left hand, she began taking shots at the troopers with her right. She managed to drop a couple of them as she and her fellows advanced, and as they reached the balcony's edge, Veah and Celeste had defeated the last of the troopers.

Unhooking her safety belt and leaping from the disc and onto the ledge, Fi drew Inex's blaster and, one weapon in each hand, assessed the situation.

"That..." she stammered, "that was *art*."

"Thanks!" Veah beamed. "If you're good at something, you might as well do it!"

"My angels," Inex said fondly from within Amra's chokehold. "You really are a treasure."

"Oh Inex," Amra chastised him. "You know we love you, but we don't trust you anymore!"

"What next?" Celeste asked.

None of them noticed the shadow that moved in one of the nearby hatches...

Posted by ij thompson on 12 September 2009 07:14 AM:

Maybe the Kaminoan trooper had been standing in the outer corridor, waiting for the mayhem to abate. Or, maybe he'd just been late to the party. It didn't much matter, either way. The trooper, and the strange hand-cannon it carried, was on the ledge

with them now.

The trooper thumbed his weapon, and a green ball of energy erupted forth, slamming directly into Veah's midsection. From the way the clone girl's head snapped forward from the impact, they all knew that she was already dead. Veah's body flew off the ledge and out into the chamber, bouncing horribly off the rotating beds as it made its way to the cold floor below.

"NO!" Amra and Celeste shrieked in unison.

As the trooper brought his cannon to bear for a second time, Fi raised her and Inex's blasters in his direction, twin laser bolts punching holes in each of the Kaminoan's black, staring eyes. The trooper's body slumped to the floor, his upper half hanging off the ledge, and pulling the rest of him off with it. Short seconds later, the thump of his body hitting the chamber's floor was barely audible over the blaring alarms.

As Amra and Celeste clung to one another in grief, Inex Jonn fell prone on the ledge, his upper half hanging off the edge, reaching down to the fallen clone girl.

"Oh Veah," he wept, "Veah, my darling. I'm so sorry..."

Fi grabbed the Sakiyan by the back of the collar, wrenching him back up onto the ledge. "Not sorry enough," she spat. "Seems to me this whole situation could have been avoided."

She studied the two hatches that bordered on the ledge. "What's this way?"

"A main connecting corridor," Shaz Ru informed her. "Turboshifts, to the surface."

"And this way?" Fi demanded, motioning to the other hatch.

"That way is housing," the Kaminoan told her. "Living quarters, like the ones you occupied."

"Then we're going this way," Fi stated flatly, motioning toward the hatch that led to the living quarters.

"Are you insane?" Inex Jonn erupted in panic. "We have to get out of here, right now!"

Shaz Ru nodded. "It's true," he agreed. "It's illogical to visit the housing now. Why would you wish to take us there?"

"Because," Fi told him, "you're going to take us to meet someone named 'Vonn Ellu'..."

Posted by Corr Terek on 14 September 2009 02:51 AM:

Damon made his way through the spaceport's streets. There were few people around, and so far no one he'd asked had provided him with anything useful. He'd picked up a lot through the Force, though -- he was making people nervous, even though he'd thought that by coming alone he might attract less attention. The people here didn't *like* him asking questions. Whatever Lord Pavona was doing here had these people spooked.

His commlink beeped and he answered it. "Yeah?"

"Hey, any luck?" It was Mir on the other end, and Damon's mood brightened. She was talking to him again!

"Not really," he replied. "People won't even give me the time of day."

"Probably Pavona's influence," Mir surmised. "So what now?"

"I'm not sure," Damon said. "Maybe--" Abruptly he stopped. While his Force talents weren't on par with Elayne's or Tam's, he'd studied and practiced enough to work the basics. And right now he could sense a presence nearby -- one that was focused solely on him.

"Damon? What's going on?" Mir sounded slightly worried now. "Talk to me!"

"I think someone nearby is taking an interest in me," Damon said.

"Good or bad interest?"

"I'm not picking up any hostile intent, if that's what you're asking," Damon replied. He looked around curiously. It was then that he realized that he was alone on the street.

"Look, Damon, just come back to the ship and we'll figure out something else," Mir said anxiously.

"Yeah, uh, Mir, that might be a problem," Damon coughed nervously. He wasn't alone on the street anymore, if the blaster pistol pressed into his back was any indicator. *Just my luck. I bet Elayne wouldn't have let someone sneak up on her,* he thought dismally.

"Damon? What do you mean? Damon!?" Mir's panicked voice came over the comm.

"Turn it off," the man behind him ordered. Damon complied, cutting Mir off in mid-sentence. "Now let's go."

"Sure thing, Damon replied as he was led down a side alley. Soon they were lost in a maze of alleyways. "What do you want with me?"

"You've been asking a lot of questions around town," the man replied. "And we'd like to know why."

"Who is 'we'?" Damon asked as they arrived at a small, run-down shack near the edge of town. "You work for Lord Pavona?"

The man behind him snorted in disgust. "Pavona? Hardly!" As he was ushered inside, Damon's eyes adjusted to the semi-darkness and he realized that the two of them weren't the only ones there.

"We're what's left of the Empire here on Owara."

Posted by Dread Pirate Roberts on 14 September 2009 01:41 PM:

"Has something happened?" Proto inquired to Mir as he caught up to her. The two of them had paired up in their search, Damon electing to go alone. The white droid had been asking his own questions when he heard her call for Damon on the commlink. Dropping his inquiries, which were not getting them anywhere he found Mir fiddling with her communicator, trying to reach the captain.

"I don't know!" Mir said hurriedly, stowing the device. "He was somewhere over this direction!" She called, darting off into the crowd. Proto followed quickly.

"One would argue that something would *have* to have happened in order to elicit such a response." The Jedi protested. Mir shot him a scowl, and he fell silent.

After a few minutes, they reached the edge of town, guided by Mir's instincts and Proto's senses. Eventually, they came upon a number of small buildings, broken down, but still standing.

"He must be in there," Mir proposed. "What do you think?"

"I think we've walked into an ambush," the droid stated matter of factly.

"What makes you think that?" The woman asked, exasperated.

"Them." Proto pointed a finger towards three men, armed with blaster rifles emerging from a building nearby, weapons trained on the pair.

Behind them, the click of safety catches could be heard.

"Them too."

Posted by ij thompson on 15 September 2009 07:39 PM:

Somebody somewhere had seen fit to deactivate the blaring alarm klaxons, plunging the halls and corridors of Ashlud City into an eerie silence. The crisis was not over, however, as numerous subtle, red lights blinked at regular intervals, informing the Kaminoan guards that Fi and her fellow fugitives

were still at large.

Fi's decision to take the group to the vast (and largely vacant) visitor's quarters had been an unexpected one, and the area was largely devoid of armed enforcers. The single pair of Kaminoan troops they did come across had been completely unprepared for them, and the speed and coldness with which Celeste had torn through the pair had frightened Fi, Inex (still in Amra's clutches), and Shaz Ru to the bone.

Now they were gathered around an immaculate white hatch, toward which Shaz Ru gestured with long, elegant fingers. "22H," he told them, "Vonn Ellu."

"Do it," Fi ordered.

Shaz Ru thumbed the controls, and the hatch opened without fanfare. Behind it was a very ordinary Kaminoan apartment, clothing and personal effects strewn about haphazardly. At the far end of the chamber was a small, neat table and two chairs, upon one of which sat a woman in her mid- to late-thirties, a woman whose face Fi recognized immediately. The original human template of The Luminous Three, Vonn Ellu. The woman stared at them emotionlessly, not getting up.

"What's going on?" she asked flatly.

Celeste stepped forward. "It is a pleasure to finally meet you, Vonn!" she gushed. "I am Celeste, and this is—"

"What is the meaning of this, Shaz?" Vonn Ellu demanded, ignoring the clone girl completely.

The Kaminoan cleared his throat and raised his hands. "It would appear," he explained, "a rescue is being attempted."

"We escaped from their lab," Fi elaborated, "and we have a ship. We're gonna get you out of here."

"Are you, now?" Vonn mocked humourlessly, rising from the table and walking slowly toward them. As she came nearer the group, she spotted Amra, or, more specifically, the Sakiyan that the clone girl still held in her unbreakable choke hold. She froze.

Inex Jonn nodded at the woman stiffly. "Long time, Vonn," he said.

Vonn nodded back. "Long time, Inex."

Fi held out Inex's blaster, which she still carried. "You'll want to take this," she explained. "I'm sorry, but you're probably going to have to use it. If it helps, just try to think about—"

In a flash, the woman had the blaster in her hands and aimed squarely at Inex Jonn. Amra, unsure of what to do, released her captive, and Vonn had the Sakiyan up against the corridor wall in seconds, blaster pressed against his temple.

"Do you have any idea," Vonn whispered, "how I have dreamed, over the last twelve years... of killing you, Inex Jonn?" As she spoke, a tear ran down her cheek. A tear of hatred. The absolute worst kind.

Fi had never seen such a beautiful woman so angry. She'd never seen Amra and Celeste so afraid. She'd never seen Inex's eyes so wide. She stepped toward Vonn, trying to sound more calm than she felt.

"Ma'am," she reasoned, "we're gonna get you out of here. Please... work with us..."

Vonn Ellu spared her a quick, sideways glance before turning her vengeful stare back toward the Sakiyan. "How could freedom ever compare... to murdering this hateful slime?"

Fi held up her hands in a placating gesture. "I know you have no reason to trust me," she breathed, "but I have plans for him. *Better* plans. For you, for all of us. If you'll let us get you out of here, I'll explain."

Vonn looked back at her again. Then, grinning a humourless grin, she lowered the blaster. "Alright," she nodded, "we try it your way."

"But one thing, right now," she warned. "*Don't* call me

'ma'am'..."

Posted by Corr Terek on 16 September 2009 11:56 PM:

Damon looked around curiously. He still wasn't picking up any hostile intent from these Imperials -- perhaps that was why he wasn't feeling particularly afraid. There were at least three other men aside from his captor in the building that he could see -- a tall, dark-skinned man in trooper armor, his helmet lying on the desk next to him; a freckled, lanky redhead in an Imperial officer's uniform and a headset sitting crookedly on his head; and short, dark-haired fellow with a perpetual nervous air about him.

"Nice little place you got here," Damon commented. The redhead grinned at him, but the smile faded under the gaze of Damon's captor.

"Glad you approve," the man behind him said. "Now, sit down."

Damon took a seat, noticing as he did so that the dark-skinned man had taken a position off to his left and was casually covering him with a blaster rifle. His captor was in front of him now, a man with the look of aristocracy about him, and just a trace of one of the Core world accents in his voice. He wore the uniform of an Imperial officer, and judging by the others' reactions to him, he was their superior. "What do you want with me?"

"Who are you?" His captor was in front of him now, a man with the look of aristocracy about him, and just a trace of one of the Core world accents in his voice. He wore the uniform of an Imperial officer, and judging by the others' reactions to him, he was their superior -- despite the fact that he was easily the youngest of them.

"I'm Captain Ziro Caldera of the *Nexu's Fang*," Damon replied promptly. The Imperial officer appraised him.

"Why are you here?"

"I was looking to transfer some cargo from a business associate of mine," Damon said, thinking quickly. "I was expecting to meet him here, but the locals say he hasn't been around lately."

"This associate being one Renu Tor, correct?"

Damon hesitated for a moment, but saw no point in lying. Obviously they'd been watching him for some time. "That's right."

"What is your connection to Lord Pavona?"

"None," Damon said. "A few of my crew have heard of him, but that's about it."

"You were not aware of the fact that Lord Pavona has assumed control over this planet?" The Imperial's tone was clipped.

"Not until we were on our way here. One of our passengers informed us about him."

"You carry passengers?"

"If the price is right, yes," Damon said disinterestedly. So far, this hadn't been any worse than getting pulled over for reckless speeder driving.

"Who was this passenger?"

Damon considered, but he didn't see any particular reason to keep this hidden, either. Teece *did* seem to have a high opinion of the Empire, after all. "An alien girl named Teece."

That got the officer's attention. "You're with Teece?" He seemed strangely eager. "How is she? Is she safe?"

"She's...fine," Damon replied, confused by his reaction. "She's back at the ship."

The officer closed his eyes in relief. "Thank the stars."

The dark-skinned trooper cleared his throat. "What's your

assessment, Captain? Is he a threat?"

This brought the officer's attention back to the matter at hand. "Yes, uh," he coughed and turned back to Damon. "Teece is known to us, and if we can get her to verify your story then you'll be free to go -- as long as you don't run afoul of Pavona, that is."

"I'll get my weapons back then?" Damon asked. "I feel naked without them."

"Jenoll will hold on to them until then, yes."

Damon glanced over to the dark-skinned man, who nodded to him. "Be careful with them, they're very valuable," Damon said. Jenoll looked over the slugthrowers.

"I can see that."

"Sir," the redhead said, touching his headset, "Cevhu and the others have picked up a couple beings snooping around. A Farghul and a droid."

"They're with me," Damon said quickly. "They're probably worried about me."

In short order Mir and Proto were ushered into the room. Mir's fur bristled as she saw the stormtroopers, but she gave no other outward sign of unease. Proto merely looked around curiously. "Easy, Mir," Damon said. "They're friends."

"Must be why they stuck a blaster in our faces," Mir replied.

"I apologize for my men's actions," the captain said. "We can't be too careful with Pavona's men around."

"From what Teece told us, I don't blame you," Damon said heavily.

"Guess you had no choice," Mir grudgingly admitted.

"Captain Errolt!" It was the redhead again. "Donis says several of Pavona's men are moving toward the *Nexu's Fang*, and they don't look happy."

Errolt frowned. "It looks like we weren't the only ones who have been keeping an eye on you." He glanced at Mir. "Would Teece and the rest of your crew still be aboard ship?"

"Probably," Mir said. "I suppose some of them could have left after we did."

"Wonderful," Errolt said. "Cevhu, Stebs, Jenoll, you're with me. Give our guests their weapons back."

"What's your plan?" Damon asked.

"When I joined the Empire, I took an oath to protect and serve its citizens," Errolt replied. "And that's what I intend to do."

Posted by Ice Hawk on 17 September 2009 01:04 AM:

Reil strolled into the central lounge area of the *Fang* to find the new girl, Teece, there; tapping away furiously at a data terminal. She turned as she heard him approach.

"Oh, it's you. . ."

Reil yawned.

"Yep, just me. The pilot that brought us all to Owara safely without crashing the ship. . ."

"I didn't mean it to sound like that. It's just that Damon and the others aren't back yet. I know I pushed for this, but I'm worried I might have put them in harms way. . ." She hesitated, and then spoke up "Ummm. . . I heard some shouting earlier by the cargo hold. . . Do you know what was up with that?"

"Nothing serious, just disciplining a teenage girl. Oh, by the way, don't go into the cargo bay for another" Reil checked his chrono, "forty-five minutes."

Teece looked at Reil with suspicion.

"What's wrong with the cargo bay?"

"Nothing, I just locked Cali in it, and she's got another forty-five minutes to go before she can come out." Reil stated matter

of factly.

Teece shook her head, trying to get it around Reil's statement.

"You. . . locked her in the cargo hold?"

Reil shrugged.

"I told her on Rishi if she was trouble she'd be locked in the cargo hold the next time people went into town. She caused trouble, people are in town."

Teece cocked an eyebrow.

"Don't you think she's a little old to be given a time out?"

Reil sat down in the lounge seat across from Teece.

"Sealing people in cargo holds has been scientifically proven to improve their behavior and attitudes. So what are you doing?"

She returned to her work on the data terminal.

"I'm trying to find a news site, to find out what I missed while I was away; but they've all been taken down, or had their archives deleted. It's like a press blackout. . ."

"It'd all 'ave been censored anyway. It's not like you'd ever get the real story."

"Owara's news networks aren't very good liars. It's pretty easy to see where they've glossed issues over." Teece smacked the console in frustration. "But it doesn't matter since there's nothing left to gloss! Not even the opinion pieces are left! Nothing."

"Least it's honest nothing," Reil offered, unhelpfully.

Teece turned and glared at him.

"Yeah, it's so much better being deaf and blind, than dealing with a little propaganda." Suddenly, the terminal beeped. "Hello. . ."

Reil got up and tried to get a better look.

"What is it?"

"Someone recorded a selection of news clips, and hosted them on a public domain. It's just sound, but it's better than nothing. . ."

The recording began with a bust of static, then:

An Imperial transport went down today over the Carter salt flats. Equipment malfunction was to blame, and there were no reported casualties. "Just another day on the job." quipped Governor Tanis.

There were several seconds of silence. Reil blinked.

"Well that was really informative."

The speakers blared out static again, then resumed the news casts:

Due to the recent rash of equipment failures, and industrial accidents in the Imperial mining and processing facilities, a restructuring of the safety guidelines, and maintenance protocols has begun. Workers are to attend a variety of seminars on how to improve safety, and safety inspectors have been dispatched to identify the problem areas. It is hoped these measures will noticeably curb the disturbing rate of work related deaths that have become sadly common these past few weeks.

There was no silence this time, but a smooth transition into further stories:

Our top story tonight: terrorist raiders ambushed an Imperial supply convoy in the Valles region. Imperial casualties were minimal. Imperial authorities are now willing to concede that the recent industrial problems may in fact have been acts of terrorist sabotage, however Moff Tanis denies that this would indicate an escalation of terrorist activity; releasing this statement: "These raiders are hitting our supply lines because they are desperate and ill-equipped. They are disrupting our workers and factories because they lack any real substance or support. They are using makeshift weapons and hit and run tactics. Any reports of widespread subversive activity is simply

media exaggeration.”

Moff Tanis says that he plans to deal with the current rebel infestation conclusively. “The first step” he says, “is restoring a sense of order”. Starting tomorrow, Imperial forces will be instituting a curfew. Any citizen found out of doors after 1900 hours without proper authorization will be detained.

Imperial forces stand their ground bravely in the face of brutal rebel attacks. “It’s not easy” says one unnamed officer, “It’s like fighting ghosts”. Reports however indicate that the Imperial forces on Owara are turning the tide against the insurgents. When questioned about a potential rise of rebel activity, Moff Tanis chuckled. “The barbarism and cruelty of the rebels has shaken some of our younger officers; but don’t let a few panicky voices give you the wrong impression. Everything is under control. The rebels are on the ropes.”

Rebel thugs raided an Imperial Field Research station yesterday, killing all inhabitants, including scientists and other non-combat personnel, when their demands for drugs and weapons were not met. Imperial forces were grim in examining the bodies of the butchered victims. After attending a vigil for the families touched by this tragedy, Moff Tanis released this statement: “These terrorists are murderers, pure and simple. They will be brought to justice, no matter the cost. Accordingly, tomorrow, I am calling a joint council of war, to enact new measures, and crush these vermin once and for all. I call on the citizens of Owara to give us their full co-operation, and in return, I will hand them the terrorist leader’s head on a pike!” This is the largest target ever hit openly by the insurgency, and marks a significant escalation in the conflict.

A transmission today was broadcast on all channels, by a previously unknown group; claiming responsibility for all terrorist activity on Owara. It is as follows:

Greetings and good omens to Owara. I am Skor, and it is my duty to be the voice of Lord Pavana to all his new subjects, bringing his wisdom and prosperity with each syllable. I bring two messages, the first, to the Imperial forces, formerly in control of Owara. It is we, the servants of Lord Pavana, who have been engaging you in these tragically necessary acts of destruction and confrontation. We, however resent the crude label of Terrorist and Rebel that you have thrust upon us, for we are humble servants of a great master, bringing the joys of servitude in his name to all of Owara. Accept defeat, and do not deny the new citizens of Lord Pavana’s kingdom their joyous bondage any longer. There is no shame in defeat at our lord’s hand, for none can stand against him. Spare your lives, and the lives of the people; simply flee. We bear the empire no malice, so long as it complies with our demands. My second message is to the people of Owara. Rejoice! You have been selected to become the citizens of our lord’s New Kingdom. Today, Owara is reborn in the purifying fires of his glory and might. Do not let your old oppressors drag you into a prolonged conflict. You have been exalted, and in time, will relish in your new positions as the mighty Pavana’s vassals.

There has been no official reply from the office of Moff Tanis.

The subversive leader, the self styled ‘Lord’ Pavana is dead! The patriot who fired the fatal shot has been identified as Tiber Drason. Unfortunately, criminal agents executed the heroic Drason before he could escape. Governor Tanis spoke briefly to reporters. “Although some of us would disagree with assassination, haven’t we all hoped that someone would put an end to Pavana? His death should make mopping up these insurgents far easier for our men on the ground. Pavana had a certain dark charisma, pushing his raiders on, despite overwhelming odds, and fierce Imperial retaliation. Without him,

the brief embers of subversive activity will be scattered, and then extinguished. Rest in peace Drayson.”

This week Pavana’s forces broadcast another message on all channels, claiming that the terrorist leader is still very much alive. Let us play it for you now:

The reports of the mighty Lord Pavana’s demise have been greatly exaggerated. No power in the universe can stop him. He sends a message to the Imperial forces: Your actions have been taken as a sign of continued hostility. This is unfortunate, as now, all of your lives will be forfeit. We extended the hand of mercy, and you shunned it. This is unforgivable. My lord also extends a personal message to Ex-Moff Tanis: It does not take an orbital plotter to know who was pulling Drayson’s strings. Pray that you can breathe duracrete.

There has been no official response, though inside sources say that military intelligence is skeptical of this transmissions validity.

It has been confirmed today by local intelligence operatives, that Pavana is indeed alive, as claimed in the recent terrorist transmission. Governor Tanis’ office released a statement saying that he did feel that this was a setback, but reminds the people of Owara that everyday the Imperial Army is turning the tide. He is still optimistic, and says at the latest, the insurgency will be over by the mid summer months.

There was static, and then another file began to play, but it didn’t sound like a news report. Blasterfire and explosions crowded the background, and the shouts of soldiers were heard in the brief interludes of relative peace. Suddenly, someone started speaking:

Anyone who can hear this, SCRAMBLE! Dispatch units to support our forces retreating from the Capital. Moff Tanis has ordered a bug out! Standard double cover formations. Don’t let Pavana’s ghosts slip through the second perimeter. They should be busy enough with the thermal charges we seeded behind us though. There wont be much of Barsoom left for them to occupy. . .

This was followed by static, then the resumption of the now familiar news reports.

Moff Tanis has relocated his staff to the Imperial Military Facility of Pei Shaun. The structures are heavily fortified, and well defended. Tanis could not be reached for comment, but his office says the Governor wants to use the high security uplink at the Pei Shaun base for the final push against the insurgents.

There was another military transmission, though it was mostly garbled.

Pei Shaun calling. . . Pei Shaun cal*** South perimeter breach** positions failing, you copy, Stoltz? Tak**** to lower access relays*** Local boys will have to hold th***mn it! Goddamn! Sector three is cracked wide open! This is Pei**** our defenses are gone*** Fall back to Sai Thari, you roj? Tr**** regroupin’ there*****

One final newscast played, though the now familiar cheer of the lead anchor was conspicuously absent.

Sources say the insurgents of Lord Pavana slaughtered the last of Owara’s defenders at Pei Shaun this morning, accepting no surrender. Moff Tanis was murdered immediately upon capture, and the Warlord Pavana made good on his threat, executing Tanis by encasing him alive in duracrete. There has been no word of Imperial reinforcements. We are truly alone.

Finally there was complete silence, as the recordings ended. Reil and Teece didn’t move for several long minutes, letting the import of what they had just heard sink in. Reil spoke first.

“Well this is an odd feeling.”

Teece turned and looked at him in puzzlement.

"What is?"

Reil turned and made his way toward the cargo hold.

"Knowing that we're all going to die." He tossed over his shoulder.

Teece returned to the console to see some sort of proximity alert flashing.

Posted by Dread Pirate Roberts on 17 September 2009 04:46 PM:

"Captain," Proto addressed. "The *Archaeologist* reports activity near the *Fang*. There appear to be about twenty men, armaments unclear. No heavy support is apparent." the droid reported.

"How do you know all this?" Damon asked incredulously. "I thought you said your ship was hiding."

"Indeed it was, Captain. However, the primary function of my Master's ship was survey and analysis. It would be foolish not to order occasional reports. It's currently 20C outside, by the way," the droid Knight lectured.

"Wonderful, let's go," the younger Aligeri rolled his eyes. "Mir, Proto, we've got to get to the ship as soon as possible. Keep an out for anything suspicious on the way over there."

"Sir?" A stormtrooper behind him interrupted. Damon turned as the trooper handed their weapons back.

A strange look crossed his face as the

Fang's captain managed to stammer out "Thanks." before the three of them headed out the door and raced towards the dock.

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 18 September 2009 09:51 AM:

Reani watched from her hiding place as Pavona's men approached the ship, she was done wasting her time with people who ordinary gunmen could take care of. If Pavona's men were defeated, she might dance with these people; but only if they looked like a challenge.

Posted by Mack Jace on 18 September 2009 11:18 AM:

The *Chance* exited hyperspace just outside Owara, the stars streaking back into position. Immediately she moved toward her destination, sensors up and running in case there were any surprises heading their way.

"Owara Control, this is the *Second Chance*. Requesting permission to land."

Immediately there was a response, but it was more a jumble of words intermixed with static.

"Say again, Owara Control, you're breaking up."

"----form ---rteen---Clea--" This time the transmission was a little bit clearer, but he could tell they were playing around with the controls to get a better transmission.

"You're clear to----and on Platform---Thirteen."

"Copy that Owara Control, Platform Thirteen. Trouble with the comms?" Something about this had piqued his curiosity.

--Yeah, they've been giving us trouble for a ---ile. Not exactly top-shelf stuff out here, if you know what I --ean."

"Copy that Control. Good luck with that." He flipped the comms off and walked into the cockpit. They were already heading to the planet, Mara at the controls. Jyn was keeping an eye on the scopes, looking for anything that might be out of the ordinary. As the spaceport came into view, Mara started slowing the ship.

Suddenly, the sensors lit up like a fireworks show on Coruscant. Claxons began blaring, and the scopes showed a

missile launch in their vicinity, and it had a lock.

"Evasive maneuvers!" Jyn shouted to Mara, who didn't need to be told twice, already she had the throttle thrown open, the ship screaming in protest. "Everybody strap down, we're under attack! Get to the turbolasers, I don't want anyone sitting around with their thumbs up their --" he was cut off as the claxons got louder. There were two more missiles joining the first!

Morec jumped into the comm seat, "Mayday, mayday! Come in Owara Control! We are under attack! I repeat, we are under attack!"

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 18 September 2009 06:13 PM:

Making his way to the nearest viewport, Tam found Elayne already standing at it, peering intently outside. "I heard a proximity alarm. What's out there?"

The woman held up a finger to silence him. "Hostiles. I'm doing my best to mask confuse them and mask our presence, but there's a lot of them out there."

Tam turned up his nose. Even with all of her Jedi training, the woman still wasn't able to live up to her all-powerful reputation. Insufferable...

She sighed. "I can't very well keep this up with you standing behind me causing such a disturbance."

"But I didn't say anything..." said Tam, nonplussed.

"You didn't need to. Now either change your attitude or kindly leave."

If he'd had the proper physiology, steam would have erupted from Tam's ears. He opened his mouth to speak, but another upraised finger from Elayne made him think twice. Instead, he moved closer to the viewport to see about the situation outside. A half dozen thugs gestured in random directions and pointed accusatory fingers at each other. For all her faults, Tam had to admit that Elayne had come up with a good idea. He placed a hand on her shoulder and let his own will flow into her efforts, like a tributary to the rushing power of the Force...

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 18 September 2009 09:33 PM:

It took Reani a minute to realize that at least one of the people on board the ship was a Jedi, that was the only reason that Pavona's gunmen would be looking right through the ship and pointing at each other accusingly. She had undergone intensive training to block her mind to the influences of the Force. If only the same could be said for Pavona's men. Reani just wanted to throw some stones at them, unfortunately there weren't any stones around, and that would give away her position. Although if there were Jedi on-board and they'd searched the area with the Force they'd already know she was there. Only thing to do was wait and watch, and mention the idea of anti-Force training to Pavona later.

Posted by ij thompson on 22 September 2009 11:51 AM:

"Run!" Fi hollered, "Don't stop!"

Though the dormitory areas of Ashlud City had been quiet at first, opening the door to Vonn Ellu's apartment/cell had changed all that, and squads of Kaminoan soldiers had poured into the area within minutes. Fi, Inex, Amra, Celeste, Vonn, and even Shaz Ru had flown as fast as their feet could carry them, hoping to lose their pursuers amid the city's labyrinthine white corridors.

"Go left at the T-junction, ahead!" Shaz called from the back of the group. "There's a turbolift!"

Fi brought the group to the intersection, and turned left as

instructed. Here was a long, straight corridor, four or five meters high. It appeared that they'd come to one of the extreme edges of the city, as the wall on their right was simply a thick, floor-to-ceiling window, which looked out at nothing but the inky depths of the cold, Kaminoan sea. The wall on their left was smooth and featureless, but for a lone hatch about thirty meters away... a turboshaft, as promised.

The group ran down the towering hallway, Shaz reaching the hatch first. He thumbed the switch.

"It's on its way."

"Yeah," Vonn agreed, pointing Inex's blaster in the general direction of the pursuing security forces, who were surely gaining. "So are they."

Fi looked around the corridor nervously. Opposite the turbolift door, in the window-wall, was another hatch. Though its Kaminoan aesthetics were unfamiliar to her, its function was very clear; she'd seen many such hatches, on the *Star Queen*.

"Hey," she told the others, "this is a lifeboat!"

Vonn looked at her sideways. "What do you want to do in a lifeboat? Go fishing?"

"We could take it to the surface," Fi proposed. "Find another way back in, and up to the ship..."

"There are no entrances to Ashlud City at sea level," Shaz Ru told her. "The entire area is too dangerous, and unpredictable."

"Well, I don't know..." Fi looked to Inex Jonn. "Is there some way you could remote-pilot the ship, to come down and pick us up?"

"Of course not!" Inex replied incredulously. "What do you think this is, 'science-fiction'?"

"We should wait for the lift," Shaz said.

"Right," Vonn replied. "Now when the frell is it gonna ge-"

Blaster fire from back the way they'd come interrupted her, as the pursuing squads arrived and opened fire from around the corner she and the others had turned earlier. Fi and Vonn dropped prone, firing back at the troopers as Inex, Shaz, and the clone twins tried their best to become part of the corridor walls.

"We can't hold 'em off forever," Fi cried. "Now what?"

In answer, the turbolift chimed once, softly.

"It's here!" Shaz cheered.

The turbolift door slid aside, revealing a new squad of Kaminoans; fresh, armed, and ready for battle...

Posted by ij thompson on 23 September 2009 07:50 AM:

"Go for the lifeboat!" Inex shouted. "Now!"

Fi didn't argue, as, in this instance, arguing would mean death. Picking herself up off the corridor floor, she leapt for the lifeboat hatch, which Celeste had already hit the button to open. As her fellows plowed into her in their attempt to get inside the lifeboat, dodging blaster fire all the way, Fi was able to catch glimpses of Inex Jonn, rushing the Kaminoan troops who'd been waiting in the newly-arrived turbolift. She saw the Sakiyan take a hit in the shoulder, in the leg, and square in the chest, before he was able to get among the soldiers, clutching desperately for one particular Kaminoan who held a large, terrifying hand-cannon, of the type which had killed Veah.

Inex wrenched the weapon from the spindly alien's grip, turning it for one terrifying moment toward Fi and her companions. Then, struggling to remain conscious, he pointed the cannon toward the towering window that made up one of the long corridor's walls.

"Go..." he whispered, and fired.

Posted by ij thompson on 27 September 2009 08:14 PM:

The giant window/wall was strong, but not that strong. It would surely have stood up to ordinary blaster fire, but when struck by the green energy ball that Inex Jonn had fired at it, a series of cracks spider-webbed outward from the point of impact. As the Sakiyan slumped, motionless, to the corridor floor, the Kaminoan troops around him stood deathly still.

"Will it-" one of the troops began to ask.

With a terrifying smash, a speeder-sized hole exploded inward, raining a torrent of frigid sea water into the corridor and throwing the troops and Inex's body into the corridor walls. As Fi began to power up the lifeboat, she was aware of water lunging inward, freezing her up to the ankles.

"Shut that hatch!," she yelled, "shut it!"

Celeste had other plans. "Inex!" she called, throwing herself out of the lifeboat and toward the Sakiyan's lifeless form, catching it just before it was swept away by the vicious current. Amra reacted just as fast, reaching out of the lifeboat's rear hatch and grabbing her sister by the ankle. As the vehicle filled with water, the clone girls dragged Inex back inside.

"Shut it! Shut it! Shut it!" Fi repeated madly, and Vonn Ellu rushed to comply, jabbing frantically at the hatch controls. An inch from Inex's head, the partition sealed, and Fi hammered the emergency launch button.

The small lifeboat lurched forward as the explosive bolts detonated. Up to her waist in water, Fi tried to accelerate the craft. It moved sluggishly, no doubt due to the extra weight.

Please, please, please, please, Fi thought as the vehicle made it ten, then twenty meters from the hole in the window behind them.

"I think," Fi gasped, gripping the controls painfully, "I think we're gonna make it!"

As if in response to her statement, the giant window behind them finally succumbed to the force of the water coming through it, and shattered entirely. Everyone was thrown forward as the lifeboat was sucked backward, toward the giant cavity, which the sea around them was rushing to fill.

"We're being pulled back in!" Shaz Ru exclaimed from the co-pilot's seat. "We'll be smashed in the corridor!"

Fi hammered on the accelerator, to no effect. Maybe if they weren't half-filled with water, maybe if they weren't so close to the window, it might have worked. But the lifeboat simply raced back toward the giant hole, fully at the whim of the water around it.

Hey, 'Force'? Fi pleaded desperately. *Force, if you're listening... I could really use a break right now...*

Oblivious, the lifeboat continued being sucked backward. And then, two meters from the corridor they'd stood and fought in moments before, the craft stopped, listing confusedly from side to side. The corridor behind them must have filled entirely with water, because the tide that had pulled them backward now stopped completely, and the lifeboat was now directionless, subject only to its own power.

"Thanks!" Fi bleated, tears leaping to her eyes and mingling with the sea water on her face. "Thank you, oh, thank you!"

Fi stomped on the accelerator, and she, her companions, and half a lifeboat of sea water sped off into the fathomless Kaminoan sea...

Posted by Corr Terek on 28 September 2009 10:55 PM:

Damon could sense Elayne and Tam's efforts long before they came near the *Viper*. He could tell that Proto was picking up on it too. Thus it was no surprise when they managed to catch

sight of Pavona's goons arguing loudly with each other and completely ignoring the ship.

"Pavona's men aren't usually this sloppy," Errolt observed, coming up behind them.

Damon unholstered his pistols. "Guess it's our lucky day, then. What's your plan?"

"Cevhu and I will hit them first, to take advantage of their confusion, while Jenoll flanks the enemy from behind." Errolt gestured to the redhead. "That will give Stebs here the time he needs to warm up the T-21." He eyed Damon. "Where will you be?"

"I'll go in with you, captain," Damon said. "The rest of my crew will assist as needed."

"Sounds good," Errolt said. He nodded to Jenoll who immediately moved off. Mir and Proto did likewise, as Damon sent a quick thought flashing to Elayne and Tam. *We're here!*

"Alright," he said, rocking back on his heels. "Let's roll."

Posted by Ice Hawk on 29 September 2009 07:03 AM:

The door opened, and light flooded into the darkened cargo bay. Cali blinked as her eyes adjusted, and as soon as they focused, she fixed her liberator with a fierce scowl.

"What do *you* want?"

Reil ignored the venom in her voice, and palmed the control so the cargo bay's lights came on. He fixed Cali with a quizzical stare.

"Why're you sittin' in the dark?"

The vein in her forehead began to throb noticeably. Through clenched teeth she answered.

"'Cause you locked me in here without turning the lights on!"

"Oh. My bad." Reil moved deeper into the hold, opening containers looking for something.

Cali looked at the open doorway, and considered making a break for freedom, but thought better of it. There was no where to run, and she'd probably just end up back in there for an even longer sentence.

"So why're you here?"

Reil didn't look up from his search.

"Mmmm? Oh, you're free to go. Time's up."

Cali checked the timer Reil gave her when he locked her in the hold.

"No it isn't, I still have another 15 minutes."

This did cause Reil to interrupt his search.

"Yeah well. . . Wait, are you complaining about being let out early?"

"No. . . But what if I was?"

She asked defiantly.

Reil had to think about that for a minute.

"Well, it would imply that you enjoyed being locked into cramped dark spaces. . . So, first chance I got, I'd ship you off to see a minder, cause that's all sorta strange behavior."

Cali gave a wry smile.

"And locking people in dark cargo bays is normal behavior?"

"Ah. Well. . . Touché."

Reil resumed his search.

"Still, combined with your rampant kleptomania, this whole dark loving thing would mark a disturbing trend of delinquent behavior."

Cali sighed.

"You're never going to let Rishi go are you?"

Reil looked up and grinned.

"I had to get one last dig in. You did the time, so you may

consider the incident on Rishi a bad memory; one that will not be thrown in your face, unless you do something similarly stupid, or get overtly mouthy."

Cali beamed.

"So what are you looking for, anyway?"

"This!"

Reil held up a large bottle of orange liquid triumphantly.

Cali was less than impressed.

"That's a large bottle of booze."

"Yes it is!"

Reil was rather enthused about his find.

Cali sighed.

"When your liver fails, I'm taking back your share of the Rylloth credits."

Reil looked at the bottle and considered the proposal.

"Deal."

Reil made his way to the galley to find a bottle opener, with Cali trailing behind.

"I heard an alarm just before you let me out. What was it anyhow?"

Reil shrugged.

"I dunno. 'S not like I read the user manual for this thing. I don't know even what half the buttons in the cockpit do. . ."

Cali balked.

"Wait, seriously?"

"Well, maybe half is an exaggeration. . . Look, I know the important controls. You can't just sit a pilot down in an unfamiliar ship and expect him to be able to run it perfectly. Ships ain't all the same you know."

"No, I mean you're not even planning on checking it out?"

"Oh. Well there's Tam and Elayne for that sorta. . ."

Reil trailed off as he caught sight of Elayne staring out of a viewport, with Tam beside her, resting an arm on her shoulder. Cali was still several paces behind Reil, and hadn't seen them yet.

"What're you. . ." She rounded the corner and caught up to Reil, "Oh."

Cali whispered to Reil.

"Are we intruding on something?"

"How should I know?" Reil whispered back. "And why're we whispering?"

Cali couldn't really think of an answer, so she steered the conversation back in it's original direction.

"Still wanna leave the alarm to Tam and Elayne?"

Reil sighed, handed the bottle to Cali, and made his way to the cockpit to investigate.

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 29 September 2009 08:57 AM:

Reani saw the new-comers studying the situation. Imperials, and some of her targets. Some of them broke off, Reani watched one move around to flank Pavona's utterly useless men. She slipped from her hiding place, and snuck around the flanker when he was almost in position. He didn't even get a chance to cry out. Reani didn't like killing people from behind, but she didn't take chances with Jedi around. She pulled her vibroblade out of his lungs and wiped it off, lowering him to the ground quietly. Without him, Pavona's men might actually take out an Imperial or two, at the very least they should provide enough of a distraction for her to sneak around and flank the rest of them. She had a funny feeling about the man with the Imperials, she'd have to keep an eye on him. She started moving around the other Imperials.

Posted by ij thompson on 29 September 2009 12:11 PM:

The tiny lifeboat continued its ascent through the black ocean of Kamino, Fi keeping it in a loose, corkscrew path, to keep from getting too far from Ashlud City. Its twin headlights looked out at only darkness.

Inside, there was a tense quiet. Behind Fi, the other women sat on two inward-facing benches, Amra and Vonn on one, Celeste on the other, and cradled in her lap, the limp form of Inex Jonn. Celeste did her best to keep the Sakiyan's head out of the water, which filled the lifeboat up to everyone's waist and sloshed back and forth in response to the motion of the sub-aquatic vehicle.

"Is he...?" Amra asked timidly.

Celeste held her ear very near Inex's mouth, and with her free hand, searched out one of his wrists. After a tense moment, she spoke.

"His pulse is very ragged, and his breath is faint, but... he's alive!"

"Lucky us," Vonn quipped.

"Yes," Celeste agreed, not recognizing the woman's sarcasm.

"I hope he will pull through! Vonn, do you-"

"Hey, Fi," the woman interrupted. "What was your big plan for him? I mean, if he lives?"

"He won't," Shaz Ru commented from the co-pilot's seat. "His injuries are too severe. He will surely die."

"You a doctor?" Fi asked him, nonplussed.

"I am a Medical Administrator," Shaz Ru announced, straightening in his chair. "But his condition hardly matters. When we reach the surface, you will all die."

Fi halted the vehicle. "What are you still *doing* here, Shaz? Shouldn't you have found a way to turn us in, back there?"

"It is not my responsibility to apprehend fugitives," the Kaminoan explained. "And truthfully, I had no desire to be caught in the crossfire. Besides," he went on, "my superiors will be expecting a full report on this situation, and on how similar situations might be forestalled, in the future."

Fi frowned at him. "Well as long as you're here, why don't you try to make yourself useful. Is there a way to -what do you call it- 'vent' some of this water out of here, before it shorts out a critical system?"

"Simple," Shaz replied, and punched a few buttons. Water gurgled as the auto-bail mechanism performed its duty, and as the chamber emptied out, Fi set the craft back in motion.

Behind her, Vonn Ellu leaned in, putting a hand on her chair. "What's your plan?"

Fi laughed despite herself, but immediately choked it back. She knew full well that her laughter was merely a gateway to sobs of panic and despair. It wouldn't do to lose it here, not with everyone looking at her.

My plan, she thought. That's rich.

Her thoughts sailed away, back to Tam, somewhere out there in the galaxy. Tam, who was probably, at this moment, in more trouble than even *she* was. And she'd left him on Rothana to try and protect him.

Well played, Fi. Well played, indeed...

She shook the painful thoughts away. "Well," she offered, trying to look more confident than she felt, "does this boat have any lifejack-"

"What was *that*?" Amra exclaimed, coming to the window.

"What was what?"

"Something passed in front of the lights... something big!"

"How big?"

"I'm not sure... bigger than us!"

The vehicle rocked back and forth in agreement, carried by the wake of whatever had come past.

"Everybody keep your eyes peeled," Fi said. "It may come around aga-"

At that moment, the water that had filled the cabin before must have finally found its way to something important, because there was a loud shock, making them all scream in fright. Sparks rained down around them momentarily, and as they all clutched the lifeboat's walls, they felt the vehicle's drive shut down, and could only stare helplessly as the cabin was plunged into darkness.

Fi dropped her forehead sadly onto the now-useless steering apparatus, Vonn's words echoing in her head.

What's your plan?

...What's your plan?

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 30 September 2009 02:52 PM:

With a start, Tam let go of Elayne's shoulder. "Did you feel that?"

"It's death, Tam. You'll get used to it, unfortunately." Elayne rose to her full height and readied her lightsaber for combat outside the ship. "You coming?"

"That's not it," the boy insisted. "I felt... It was surprise."

"I had a hold on those thugs until we heard Damon and the others showed up. A little confusion would be expected."

"Confusion, yes. This: this was surprise. Pavana's men were under your sway."

"Our sway," corrected the woman.

"No, *your* sway. I didn't do the same thing you did with the Force. I..." Tam took a deep breath. "We're getting off the subject."

"Ah, yes. Let's get to that quickly so we can go out and help Damon."

"Exactly my point!" After another deep breath, Tam let his words flow out like quicksilver. "This was surprise, like a man poised to strike but taken from behind; not someone just waking up from an induced stupor of self-control. This was someone... alarmed? Calling for help but he couldn't? I don't know. He was ordered, he was well trained. He was..."

"An Imperial," Elayne offered.

That was it. An Imperial had died. But if Pavana's men were under Elayne's control, who--?

"What's going on out here?" said Reil, looking more annoyed than anything else. "Is there a fire or something?"

"Something," Tam said. He wasn't sure if it had any other name.

While all three of them exchanged glances, Teece ran out of the communications suite. "Guys, things are a lot worse out there than we thought!"

Posted by ij thompson on 30 September 2009 07:48 PM:

"Well," Vonn said despondently in the darkness, "I guess that's it."

"Yes," Celeste agreed. "But, we put up a good fight."

"For what it's worth," Shaz Ru pointed out, "we are still rising."

Fi lifted her head off of the controls. "You're right, we are. I can feel it. There must be enough air in here to do *that*, at least."

"But none of you will survive, once we reach the surface."

Fi unstrapped from her seat angrily, crouching in the cabin. "Shaz, if there's one thing I've learned in my travels, it's that it ain't over 'til it's over." She looked to the others. "Come on, you

guys... let's search this boat for something we can use. I don't care what... *anything*."

"I think I've got something, here..." Vonn replied, fumbling with part of the lifeboat wall. "I think it's... yes!" she exclaimed, as a beam of light erupted from her hands. "A glowrod!" She shone the glowrod's beam to the same location in the opposite wall. "There's another one!"

"I've got it," Amra replied, taking the device down and activating it.

"Good work, you two," Fi commended them. "Now let's tear this place apart. What do we have?"

Celeste lifted one of the two rear benches, revealing a compartment beneath. "You guys! Life vests... and breath masks!" She held the booty up for the cold glowrod beams to inspect.

"I just *know* you were gonna tell us about those, Shaz," Fiola said accusingly.

The Kaminoan spread his hands in apology. "Just because I am not hindering you, doesn't mean I am going to help you."

Fi nodded coldly. "Noted. Alright guys, let's get this stuff on. It's getting lighter... I think we could be getting near the surface."

"What are we gonna do about that 'thing' out there?" Vonn asked.

"We're gonna hope it's not hungry."

As they donned the vests and strapped the filtration masks over their heads, the tiny lifeboat did indeed erupt from the surface of the ocean, thrown dizzyingly about by the waves. It wasn't completely dark up here, but it wasn't light, either; the local sun obscured by thick, foreboding clouds. In the near distance, the upper spires of Ashlud City beckoned.

"Alright, guys," Fi said, her voice muffled by the full-headed plastic mask. "I'm gonna pop the top on this thing. We're gonna try for the city. If-"

"There are no entrances at sea level," Shaz Ru reminded her.

"Shaz, shut up. Everybody hold on real tight, okay? Amra, will you be okay with Inex?"

"I've got him," the clone replied, double-checking the unconscious Sakiyan's breath mask.

Fi reached for a handle on the wall, and yanked with all her might. With a gasp of rushing air, the top of the lifeboat flew back, letting in the wind and spray of the Kaminoan sea.

"Right," Fi hollered, "everybody-"

There was a tremendous splash, and beside them, a large, aquatic animal erupted from the water. It was whale-like, with long pectoral fins that carried the creature up and out of the water, and soaring into the sky.

"That's it!" Amra shouted excitedly through her mask. "That's what I saw!"

"It is an Aiwha," Shaz informed them. "Your journey is over."

They watched the creature soar into the air, taking note of the Kaminoan soldier strapped into a saddle on its back. The aiwha flew a distance away, then looped around, and back in their direction. As it came, Fi saw the trooper on its back reach into a saddlebag and bring forth a fist-sized, dull metal object.

"Grenade!" she shrieked, "take cover!"

She and the others leapt from the lifeboat, grasping for the handrail that some thoughtful designer had seen fit to install around the vehicle's perimeter. Most of them -even Amra, with the unconscious Inex Jonn in tow- made it. Shaz Ru, however, did not. The Kaminoan bureaucrat, unaccustomed to danger, stood stupidly in the centre of the lifeboat as the grenade landed squarely at his feet. The explosion threw his limp form high into the air, only to plop unceremoniously into the rolling sea.

So long, Shazzy, Fi saluted him mentally. *No more reports for you, mate.*

"That was close!" Celeste exclaimed, while behind her another aiwha surfaced, this one staying on the water. Seeing the beast, the beautiful clone girl, still in her little nightgown, leapt onto it, pulling herself up the saddle straps to attack the Kaminoan rider on its back. What should have been an easy fight was made more difficult by the tumultuous sea, which threatened to throw Celeste from the cetacean's back at any moment. The Kaminoan rider, strapped into the saddle, suffered no such handicap and fought heartily.

The first aiwha, high in the air, was coming around again. Fi and Vonn readied their blasters as the Kaminoan trooper readied another grenade. The two women shot frantically at the alien, their shots finding home just as his mount came over them. The Kaminoan slid off the aiwha, he and his grenade falling harmlessly into the sea.

Fi wiped water from her mask, and looked over at Celeste. The clone girl had finally incapacitated the other Kaminoan, and was strapping herself into the saddle.

"Vonn!" Celeste held a hand out to the woman, who was nearest, "Vonn, come on!"

But Vonn didn't move. She merely held onto the lifeboat's safety rail, looking down at nothing.

"Vonn," Fi told her gently through her mask. "Vonn, don't be a fool, honey. Let her help you."

The woman looked at her, and even through the mask, Fi could see the pain. Twelve years of pain. "Vonn," Fi appealed to her, "let's just get *off* this blasted planet, okay?"

The woman looked at her a moment more, then swam off toward Celeste's waiting hand. The first aiwha, riderless and not knowing what to do, descended from the air and splashed into the water to rest near its mate. "Come on, Amra!" Fi cried, swimming to the animal, Amra and her Sakiyan charge close behind. Fi climbed the beast and strapped herself into the saddle, while her clone companion strapped Inex in, and then followed suit.

Fi tugged at the reigns, realizing she had no idea what to do next. "Well, go!" she hollered, "fly, stupid!" But the beast just sat. Desperate, Fi thought back to the old historical adventures she'd enjoyed as a youngster, where heroes rode animals all the time, and hoped that they had any validity whatsoever. Feeling perfectly ridiculous, she dug her heels into the creature's sides and, tugging back on the reigns, shouted, "hee-YAH!"

The aiwha leapt forward with terrifying speed. But it didn't go up.

It went *down*.

Down into the dark, freezing depths of the sea. Fiola held on for dear life, as did Amra who, though strapped in, held Fi around the waist for good measure. Presumably, she was also holding onto Inex Jonn. The aiwha took them deeper, deeper, turning all the while. Then it began to swim up, up, and suddenly, with a shriek of glee from Fi and Amra, it erupted from the water, bearing them up and into the stormy Kaminoan sky.

A splash erupted below and behind them, as Vonn and Celeste's aiwha also burst from the depths. The two majestic creatures flapped their fins mightily, as their pilots steered them toward the upper spires of Ashlud City.

"All right," Fi shouted to the others, hoping she could be heard, "does anybody remember where we parked?"

Posted by Dread Pirate Roberts on 1 October 2009 02:46 AM:

"Pardon me, sir, but do you have a permit for that weapon?"

No one was quite sure how Proto had appeared behind the pair of thugs. It seemed only a moment ago he was splitting from the group as they positioned themselves. But he was there, and his request startled them. The two men turned, dumbfounded to regard the droid as he spoke.

"Permit?" The brute repeated before Proto's claw like fingers closed around the man's blaster rifle, ripping it away and tossing it aside, ejecting the power pack as it went. Stunned, the thug watched helplessly as his partner turned to attack the droid with a vibroblade.

His first vertical slash went wide as the white Jedi stepped lightly to the right and inside the man's reach, grasping the swinging arm with his left hand and pulling hard to trip the thug over his left leg. As he went, Proto turned, shoving his right hand down hard on the ruffian's back, crashing him to the dirt. The man groaned and rolled over, disarmed and disinterested in continuing the fight.

Turning again, Proto looked up as the first man regained his composure and drew a hold-out blaster, hurriedly aiming it at the droid. Proto held up a waiting hand and felt his way through the force across across the small gap that divided them and pulled hard, willing the weapon into his grasp.

"Buh-" was all the disarmed brute could manage before the Jedi flicked the safety switch to "Stun" and dropped him with a blue bolt to the chest.

Dropping the pistol disdainfully, the droid looked up to see the remaining thugs turning towards him, weapons trained on the lone Jedi.

"Captain?" The droid asked loudly. "Have I provided you with enough time for a sufficient ambush, or shall I attempt to stall them further?"

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 1 October 2009 04:23 PM:

After hearing of the reports from Teece, Elayne placed her lightsaber back on her belt. "Under the circumstances, perhaps it's unwise to go around flashing our lightsabers."

"But we have to do something!" insisted Tam. "There's something going on out there, and Damon's out in the thick of it."

The woman's voice was soft, measured, and completely condescending. "Tam, listen. We're not exactly unobtrusive when we flash our lightsabers about. With the kind of attention Pavona already has, local media would fixate on us like a toskat on a pimmelgar."

The boy didn't know what she meant by that, which only reinforced his assertion that the Jedi woman was wrong. "This isn't about Pavona, or us being caught, or anything else your petty Imperial mind revolves around. Damon is out there, and he's in danger. Besides, who said we had to use lightsabers?" The boy stepped out onto the *Fang's* boarding ramp.

Turning a confusing face to Reil, Teece said, "Um... Lightsabers?"

Posted by Corr Terek on 2 October 2009 12:16 AM:

Damon felt a sudden absence in the Force. It was like listening to music and having one of the instruments abruptly fall silent. At the same moment he felt a brief sense of loss. At any other time Damon would have tried to figure out what had happened, but there was no time. Proto had already entered the fray, and -- Jedi or no -- the droid couldn't very well stop all twenty thugs by himself.

Damon focused the Force within himself. Over the last several days he'd been researching techniques that would fit his talents and interests, with help from Tam and Elayne. Right now he was going to test one of them. Stepping quickly ahead of Captain Errolt and Cevhu, he began attuning himself to the Force, getting synched with it like he had during his healing meditations.

Then, as he came into view of the thugs, he acted.

He took three steps before the first thug could fully turn towards him, easily slipping inside the man's guard and clubbing him with one of his pistols. The Force sang through him, and he didn't even have to see the thug behind him to backhand him. Three more goons moved to confront him.

They moved so *slowly*.

He casually raised his pistol and shot the blaster out of a Weequay's hand, then took out his kneecap. The Weequay fell, cursing, and Damon turned his attention to a menacing Shistavanen. She swung a knife at him clumsily -- he swept away the blade with one of his pistols and brought the other one up, snapping off a shot that creased her skull and dropped her, unconscious, to the ground.

It was like riding a wave -- Damon was constantly on the edge, balancing between attunement to the Force and the limits of his own body. A trained Jedi Knight would be able to keep up the pace for at least a minute.

Damon managed for approximately three seconds.

Suddenly his connection was gone and he sagged toward the ground as a Gamorrean lunged toward him. *I can't believe it worked*, he thought giddily. Three blaster bolts slammed into the Gamorrean, slowing it down but angering it in the process. Then a much larger bolt blew a hole in the Gamorrean's chest, and someone was helping him to his feet.

"...never seen anything like it," Errolt was saying as he and Damon dove for cover behind a cargo transporter. "Where did you learn to do that?"

"Picked up a bit of teras kasi here and there," Damon lied. "Takes a bit out of me, though."

He looked across the cargo bay, where Stebs had finally gotten the T-21 warmed up and was judiciously picking off anyone who threatened Cevhu and Proto as they dealt with Pavona's men in their own respective ways. Mir was hanging back, keeping a wary eye out for any flankers while popping off a shot every now and then.

Jenoll was nowhere to be seen, and Damon suddenly made the connection between the absence he'd felt earlier and Jenoll's absence now. He could tell from the grim look on Errolt's face that he'd figured it out too. "There's someone else out here," Damon said.

"Someone that's better than this riffraff," Errolt agreed.

"As long as we can get to the ship, it won't matter," Damon said. "We're out of here."

"Take Teece with you," Errolt urged. "As long as Pavona's men haven't activated the missile towers or scrambled any fighters, you should have no problem--"

His words were drowned out as a freighter screamed overhead, followed closely by a pair of concussion missiles.

The two men exchanged glances. "So yeah," Damon said. "Leaving might not be an option after all."

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 2 October 2009 03:54 AM:

The Jedi no doubt knew about her presence now, but that wasn't going to stop Reani. She took advantage of the confusion to move back around to the other side while some droid appeared

out of nowhere and started taking out Pavona's men. The gunfighter went down and the two Imperials she could see took out a Gamorrean that was about to take him out. Then one of the Imperials went out to help him, Reani pounced on the other Imperial and snapped his neck before he could react. She lowered him to the ground and moved back out of the fight again to watch. Any Jedi would look toward her when they felt the Imperial's death.

Posted by Jedi_Shadow on 2 October 2009 02:43 PM:

By the time the loading ramp had cycled open and Tam had stepped outside the ruffians were on the ground, with Damon and the others standing over them. "Hurry inside!" he shouted. "We've gotta take off!"

"No can do, kid," said Damon as he pointed to a freighter in the sky. As if on cue, it blossomed into an incandescent ball of fire and debris. "We're grounded."

The boy's arms flailed wildly. "Get inside anyway! We're safer in the ship than outside it!" He pointed to the ventral turrets on the *Nexu's Fang* which, also on cue, swerved around to cover their approach.

Damon looked over his shoulder at the lingering menace waiting in the wings and exhaled slowly. When his gaze returned to Tam it was uncertain and wary.

"What are you waiting for? Get inside!"

Posted by ij thompson on 2 October 2009 06:49 PM:

"There!" Amra cried.

From the back of the flying aiwha, Fi followed her passenger's pointed finger. Sitting serenely on one of Ashlud City's landing balconies was the black, axe-head shape of the *Skalen II*. Assembled in front of it were two entire squads of Kaminoan security troops, facing away from them, toward the hatch that they assumed the fugitives might come through.

Keeping one hand on the flying beast's reins, Fi dug into one of its saddlebags, pulling from it one of many items she'd hoped to find - grenades.

"Take this," she hollered, reaching behind her to hand the device to Amra, who grabbed it. Fi dug back into the bag again and grabbed another, which she held high and waved at Celeste and Vonn, who rode their own aiwha. Vonn spotted her and, nodding, reached into her own saddlebag and grabbed two of the explosives, giving one to Celeste, who steered the animal, and keeping one for herself.

"Get ready," Fi called behind her to Amra, who still held onto Inex Jonn, unconscious and tied into the saddle. "I'm gonna bring us in!"

She dove the animal toward the landing platform, behind the backs of the Kaminoan squads. As she came close, one of the rear troopers, perhaps hearing something in the wind, turned around toward them. Fi hadn't imagined a Kaminoan's eyes could get any wider, but she was pretty sure that *this* one's did.

As she swooped her aiwha over the troopers, Fi threw her grenade into the centre of the crowd. There was a monstrous explosion, bodies flying in all directions. Before the ones left standing could even react, they were hit by Amra's grenade. Reduced by more than half, the remaining terrified troopers struggled to bring their weapons to bear as Fi, Amra and Inex flew past.

Hot on their heels, Celeste and Vonn flew in, hurling their grenades, as well. Two more explosions, and the pair of security squadrons was reduced to three panicked individuals, grievously

wounded and fleeing for the doorway back into the city.

Fi brought her aiwha around, coaxing it to land on the platform as Celeste did the same with hers. "Nice work, big fella!" she said, patting the animal, while Amra untied Inex Jonn. They leapt off the beast, which pulled itself off of the platform, followed by its mate, the pair making for the open sea below.

The three remaining troopers had taken cover in the doorway and were still firing, though their hearts were clearly not in it. Fi almost felt bad about firing back at them... almost. So instead of trying to hit them, she fired wildly in their direction, just to keep them from getting bold.

Celeste was at the *Skalen II*, and had the hatch open fast. While Fi and Vonn covered their escape, Celeste helped Amra assist the now semi-conscious Inex Jonn, who howled in pain. Once the three were aboard, Vonn and Fi fired a few more shots, then raced up the boarding ramp, shutting it quickly behind them.

Fi had never been so happy to see the interior of a starship. Throwing herself into the pilot's chair, she felt the vehicle shuddering to life as she flipped switches, and read gauges.

All systems go.

With a shriek of its powerful engines, the sleek, black starship rose up as more troopers poured onto the scene. But before the Kaminoans could get a decent shot off, the *Skalen II* had left them and their watery world behind...

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 2 October 2009 11:32 PM:

The gunfighter looked in Reani's direction. He was the Jedi. She walked out from the shadows and straight into his line of view.

"You fight well Jedi. But not well enough to dodge concussion missiles I think. Pavona won't let you leave this planet. In fact, he sent me here to kill you." She watched his hands drop seemingly naturally to his sides. "I wouldn't try that if I were you. That trick you did has left you exhausted, you wouldn't stand a chance against me right now." A funny feeling made her glance over at the boy standing at the bottom of the loading ramp. Another Jedi? This Jedi's apprentice perhaps. "I'll make a deal with you Jedi. I'll keep Pavona's hordes of men, and electronically guided missiles away from your ship and crew for one day, and tomorrow, you and I fight. Right here, in front of your ship. Your crew, and apprentice" She nods at Tam, "don't interfere, and Pavona's men don't even appear. I'll rig it so that if you win the missiles will go off-line long enough for you to escape, and if I win than you answer my questions before I turn you over to Pavona. Only you, I'll leave your crew alone, but when they come to rescue you, they'll probably have to fight me. So, Jedi, what say you? Do you want a chance of leaving this planet alive?"

Posted by Corr Terek on 3 October 2009 12:12 AM:

Damon considered her offer. Out of the corner of his eye he could see Mir and Stebs moving cautiously forward, ready to follow his lead. Errolt still had his blaster trained on the assassin, his eyes cold as he looked at the killer of his men. Proto had stopped mid-pummeling, a thug still held in one metal hand. Tam was very still, but Damon could feel him working out possible options. Elayne...

And then Damon found Elayne, and things became much clearer.

"You know I'm not a Jedi, right?" he asked. *Little faster, Elayne!*

"Quit stalling," the assassin replied. "I want your answer now."

And she was done. "Sure, I'll fight you," Damon agreed affably. The assassin relaxed slightly, just in time for Damon to add, "But tomorrow doesn't work for me."

"Wha--?"

One of the *Viper's* turrets opened fire, and the assassin vanished in a cloud of dust. "Let's move people!" Damon yelled. "We're taking our chances with the missiles."

Mir and Stebs sprinted for the ship, with Proto following closely behind to prevent attacks by Pavona's scattered goons. "Did Elayne get her?" Damon asked Tam. "I can't tell."

Tam concentrated. "She made it clear of the blast, but she's unconscious, I think."

Damon relaxed. "Good. Let's get out of here -- it's not worth the trouble."

Suddenly there was a sputtering sound from inside the ship, followed by a billowing cloud of smoke. Elayne and Reil emerged from the smoke, dragging Cali and Teece along with them. Reil was battered, and looked like he'd tangled with something particularly fierce.

"There's a coolant leak," he coughed. "We've got to get out of the ship!"

Posted by Ice Hawk on 3 October 2009 05:17 AM:

Teece looked at Reil expectantly "Um. . . Lightsabers?"

Reil's mind blanked.

"Uhh. . . That is. . . They're dairy farming instruments." Reil began picking up momentum, "Not to be confused with. . . other things. . . Don't ask so many questions!"

Reil sat down in the pilots chair and began powering up the ship for take off. Teece remained standing.

"What are you doing?"

Reil didn't turn to face her.

"Powering up to get off this dirtball."

Teece became alarmed.

"But the others aren't on board yet."

"But when the Captain gets onboard, he's gonna want us off this stinkin' rock."

The alien girl was growing increasingly agitated.

"You don't know that. . ."

Elayne fired the bottom turret, draining the power, and temporarily halting the startup sequence.

"I'm fairly certain we'll all be of one mind on the issue. The welcoming comity scared us off."

Teece couldn't contain herself any longer.

"But what about Owara!?"

Reil turned to Teece.

"What about it? 'S not worth our lives."

Teece's reply was cut off, as blaster fire echoed from the rear of the ship. Reil swore, and leapt out of his seat to investigate, blaster drawn. He found the source of the trouble by the entrance to the engine room.

Cali stood with her back to Reil, both of her pistols drawn. There were several carbon scoring marks on the walls surrounding the entrance to the engine room. She turned when she heard Reil approach behind her.

"Oh, it's just you." Relief trickled through her voice.

Reil frowned.

"Why does everybody say that? And what the frell are you shooting at?"

Cali faced the engine room door again, blasters held ready.

"I don't know. It was like . . . a shadow. I saw it go into the

engine room."

Reil was puzzled for a second, then he noticed the bottle he gave Cali was nowhere to be seen. Reil lowered his blaster, and sighed in exasperation.

"Awww, frell Cali, Damon's gonna give me an earful. This is the last thing I needed."

Cali looked at Reil in bewilderment.

"Huh?"

"Where's the bottle?"

Cali only grew more perplexed.

"What're you-" Then it dawned on her what Reil was alluding to, "I'm not drunk! I saw a shadow that moved! It's in the engine room right now!"

Reil rubbed his temples.

"You realize of course, you're not doing much to prove my suspicions wrong?"

Cali grew impatient. "I'm not-"

A shadow darted out of the engine room and struck Cali, sending her sprawling. Reil hesitated, and then fired twice, before the shadow grabbed his right arm and twisted it behind him. A husky voice began speaking into his ear.

"You're not a terribly good shot are you?"

Reil struggled, but the shadow only applied more leverage, and his right arm protested heavily to the torque it was subject to.

"Lemme go, and I'll show you good shootin'." Reil snarled through clenched teeth.

The shadow chuckled and applied more torque. Reil yelped in pain.

"Dammit, that hurts!"

"That's kind of the idea. Drop the blaster, or I'll snap the arm clean off."

Reil dropped his blaster, and his arm was released. Instead, however the creature grabbed his shoulders and threw him against the bulkhead. Before Reil could get to his feat, the shadow, which felt to be a large, hairy creature, was on top of him, beginning to beat him into unconsciousness. He was saved by the familiar snap-hiss of a lightsaber activating.

Elayne stood in the hallway, lightsaber active, squinting to get a proper look at the assailant, so she didn't skewer Reil by mistake. The attacker froze, and there was an uneasy stillness as everyone waited for someone to make the first move. The standoff was broken when a small charge went off in the engine room, and coolant started flooding out, its poisonous fumes wafting visibly through the air. The creature threw Reil at Elayne, who had to twist out of the way to avoid stabbing Reil, which, while preferable, meant that the pilot ended up getting a face full of deck plating. Before either of them could regain composure enough to react, the shadow was gone.

Reil got up groaning, but there was no time to lament his injuries, the fumes were already making the air too thick to breathe. Reil snatched up his pistol, and Elayne helped Cali to her feet. Reil took up the job of supporting Cali, who was slightly concussed, and Elayne took off to grab Teece. The four of them stumbled off the *Fang* choked for air just as Damon was calling for everyone to get onboard.

"There's a coolant leak," he coughed. "We've got to get out of the ship!"

Damon swore, and turned to the Imperial officer beside him. The officer's eyes locked on Teece, who'd taken in a huge breath of fumes before Elayne could get to her, and was having difficulty breathing now.

"No choice" The officer signaled his remaining men, "Fall back to the hideout, double time! Leave the E-Web!"

Amidst a storm of blaster fire, they all withdrew from the

hanger.

Posted by ij thompson on 3 October 2009 12:34 PM:

Inex Jonn blinked his eyes, trying to make sense of his surroundings. He appeared to be in bed, in his quarters aboard the *Skalen II*. He also, the Sakiyan noted, appeared to be tied down. *That* was new. Slowly, he became aware of a form in the room with him, that of a petite, black-haired young woman. The woman smiled at him.

"Good morning, Inex," Fi said.

Inex stretched slightly, giving his bonds a little test. They were, in his condition, unbreakable. "And to you," he replied politely, if weakly.

Fi studied the Sakiyan. "I'm sure you'll be glad to know," she told him, "your business on Kamino is all wrapped up."

"Is it?" Inex asked, then dropped his head back onto the pillow. "I wish I'd never gone there."

"I can think of a few other people who'd agree."

Inex studied her silently. "Fiola," he began, "I can only imagine what you must think of me. But I *swear* to you, I only ever wanted us to be successful. You, me, and The Luminous Three. I only ever wanted us to be free."

Fi crossed her arms. "And yet, you'd sign the girls' death warrant, to skip out on a check?"

Inex sighed, coughed painfully, and looked thoughtful. "It may be hard for you to understand," he told her, "but I really do love them, Amra and Celeste. And I loved Veah."

Fi nodded noncommittally. "Perhaps," she said, "but I don't think 'love' means what you think it means." She turned to go.

"Fi," Inex said, stopping the girl. "Fi... I saved your life back there, you must admit. Without me, none of us would have made it." He stared at her. "Are we square?"

"You and me?" Fi asked, and considered. "Yeah," she confessed, "I guess we're probably square." She made once more to leave, but paused in the doorway, looking back at him.

"But I wouldn't go thinking your books are balanced just yet, Inex Jonn."

Leaving him, Fi entered the *Skalen II*'s lounge area. It was deserted. She continued forward to the cockpit, where a single figure sat in the pilot's chair, admiring hyperspace.

"Fi," Vonn Ellu smiled, "Come sit."

Fi accepted the offer, taking a seat at the comm station. "What are you doing up here, alone?" She asked.

"Alone?" Vonn laughed. "Who am I gonna talk to?"

"The girls?" Fi offered.

Vonn frowned, turning her attention back to the instruments. "Those aren't girls."

Fi ran a hand through her hair, choosing her words carefully. "Vonn, I understand how you must—"

"No, you don't," Vonn cut her off. "No, you don't. I'm sure you're all great friends and everything, but I don't want any part of it, Fi. I don't. Really sorry."

Fi swallowed. "They came to rescue you, Vonn. One of them—Veah—she *died*..."

"Fi!" Vonn blurted out. "I don't want to know, don't you get it?" She wrung her hands together. "I don't. I look at them, and I see me, Fi... me, twelve years ago. The me I *used* to be... before any of this ever happened."

Fi tried to be gentle. "Vonn, nobody's disputing you've been through a lot. But, Amra and Celeste..." she searched for the words, "they haven't had the easiest go of it either, you know?"

"That's hardly my fault, is it?" Vonn asked, turning away.

Fi sighed. "No," she admitted. "No, I guess it isn't." She rose,

walking to the cockpit door. There she stopped, and turned back toward the woman.

"But Vonn, you know... they're not *you* anymore. They're people... *nice* people." She looked at the woman pointedly. "And if you're lucky, you might even get to know them."

Turning, Fi left the bridge. Vonn sat alone, hands clasped together, looking blankly at the silent, blinking controls.

The *Skalen II*'s cargo bay was empty, as it usually was. Its steel floor was covered with a smooth, flat plastic, made for traction and motion. One entire wall was covered lengthwise with a floor-to-ceiling mirror, before which The Luminous Three had choreographed their routines. Now, Amra and Celeste sat on the floor in front of it in silence. There was really nothing to say.

The connecting hatch opened. The clone girls turned their heads to see who had entered, then looked down as they recognized Vonn Ellu. The woman walked toward them slowly. Unexpectedly, she sat down with them on the dance mat. As the girls lifted their heads curiously toward her, Vonn took one of their hands in each of her own. She sighed deeply.

"Tell me," she began, swallowing hard, "tell me about 'Veah'..."

Posted by ij thompson on 4 October 2009 04:00 PM:

The tension was palpable throughout the corridors of Mull Station, as Fi and her fellows were led past scores of hostile faces. Vonn, Amra and Celeste walked proudly, fearlessly, and Fi envied their control. Inex Jonn, on the other hand, shuffled along morosely, heavily bandaged, and shackled for good measure. The shackles were hardly necessary; if the Sakiyan had dared to try anything risky, the thugs around them, in their blue-painted clone armour, indicating servants of Seema Mull, would have made short work of him.

They were soon delivered to the starboard bridge of the station, before the crimelord Seema Mull herself. The massive, round woman in her slip of gold fabric eyed the group suspiciously, then paused to listen to a few whispered words from the (also heavily bandaged) Rodian who stood just behind her flabby left shoulder.

Seema Mull belched, and scratched absently at the top of one bulky, bare leg. "One of these two women," she announced, indicating Amra and Celeste, "one of these two... *revoltingly* skinny women, attacked my prized food smuggler Roggo, here." She motioned back toward the Rodian, who sneered back at the group.

"It's true," Fi admitted, "and, you'll note, we have come to you of our own free will."

"Wise," Seema replied, nonplussed. "Tell me, then, which girl do I get to execute? Or shall I have both of them?" She laughed wickedly, the other thugs in the chamber picking up the laughter.

"Your majesty," Inex interrupted, stepping forward. "The assassin was operating in my employ... I gave the order. I am entirely to blame."

Fi looked admiringly at Inex, and favoured him with a wink.

"Yes, and who hired *you*?" Seema Mull countered, becoming enraged. "I suspect it was that treacherous, no-good lout of a husband of mine, Obar Mull!" she shouted, motioning toward the tall windows on her left, outside of which stood Mull Station's portside bridge, and the man in question within it.

Inex shook his head gently. "I sought to win Obar's favour, with the attempted assassination of Roggo," the Sakiyan lied, "I

acted entirely on my own... and I am at your mercy." He bowed.

Seema Mull smiled wickedly, then craned her neck behind her, toward the bandaged Roggo. The Rodian nodded, satisfied.

"Very well," the flabby woman boomed. "Guards, take this person into custody. I will decide what to do with him after I have eaten. As for his companions, these 'ladies'..." she looked suspiciously at Fi and her friends, "see that they never come back here. They really are so bony, and gruesome."

As tables of luxury food were assembled before the woman, her guards took Inex Jonn in hand.

"Thank you, Inex," Celeste said, stepping forward.

"That was very kind," Amra agreed.

Inex smiled sadly back at them. "I was ready to die for you on Kamino," he said, "But I guess this is as good a place as any."

"It probably beats what I'd have done to you," Vonn said smartly, though from her tone, it was clear that she was not untouched by his sacrifice.

Fi took one of the Sakiyan's hands, and shook it. "Inex," she smiled, "I'm impressed."

"Farewell, Fiola Shaku," Inex replied. "Perhaps we may meet again, in some other life..."

"So, Inex Jonn had to be sacrificed," Obar Mull said. "How sad. However, it is worth it, to once again have peace with that horrible, bloated menace of a wife of mine, over there!" he shook his fist at the windows on his right, beyond which stood Mull Station's starboard bridge, and Seema Mull inside it, who shook her fist right back.

"All of this begs the question," Obar continued, "what to do with Inex's payment for this little prize, here?" He indicated the metal case of spice they'd delivered days before, which still rested at his feet. "It wouldn't be prudent of me to just give it to you, now would it? However, I am pleased with what you've done. I offer you... one hundred thousand."

"That sounds completely fair," Fi agreed, motioning toward her companions. "My friends will need it, to begin their new life."

Obar raised his eyebrows. "What, you want nothing for yourself?"

"With all due respect, my Lord," Fi answered, "I would like to come and work for *you*."

Obar sat silent a moment, considering. "You are a talented musician," he admitted, "but what *else* can you do?"

"If you'll give me Inex's ship," Fi replied, "I'm sure I can come up with something." She smiled.

Obar rubbed his flabby, sweaty hands together thoughtfully. "Very well," he agreed. "I don't suppose Inex will be using it."

"Do you have a slicer on your staff, who can forge me a new registration?"

"Easily," Obar nodded. "And the ship's new name will be?"

Fi searched her mind for a name. Her mind's response was immediate, and unwavering.

"I'd like it to be called 'the *Dawncaller*'..."

Posted by Xaturuk on 4 October 2009 11:14 PM:

"Of all the kriffing Johnny-Do-Rights--"

"If this is going to degenerate to petty insults, I can simply ship my cargo with another vendor," The Captain informed.

The Weequay's face turned from irate to desperately anxious. "But it's not like we're stealing, is it? I mean, Imp cruisers frag a trade caravan and they leave the goods just free-floating in space for anybody to pick up--"

Tholme sighed and shook his head in consternation. The branch of his shipping company that focused on the Parlemain Trade Route had picked up so much business that additional resources were required to keep up with demand. He had decided that the easiest remedy was to hire out the transporting responsibilities to small, reliable third-party shipping companies. However, he was constantly moderating their over-zealous business practices. They, with their borderline outlaw mentality, could not fathom the concept of integrity and ethical standards. Try as he might to gauge and hire upright, honest organizations Tholme always seemed to regret his decisions.

Dujx Rlessa, the Weequay captain gaping with genuine confusion on the other end of the holo-image caster, was the latest disappointment – and Tholme had spent a considerable amount of time interviewing and analyzing groups from the uppermost ranks of the Commerce Guild's small transport business records. This was number 2 in the last month alone.

"Dujx, how many times are we going to go over this? There's a war on, if you haven't noticed. Those crates of Bacta are extremely valuable – even to the Empire. Think of how much the Rebels would love to have them. What do you think would happen if Imperial Patrol craft boarded your freighter for inspection, and they turned up that cargo?"

The Weequay frowned, and seemed to be working through the question. Tholme helped him out, "There have been at least five Rebel hit-and-fade operations along that area of the route - all of them resulting in captured cargo for the Rebels. More reports come in every day, along the holonet..."

Realization dawned on Dujx's face, "They'd think we were going to sell the goods to the Rebels!"

"Close. They'd peg you for a Rebel, then and there," Tholme didn't add that the Imperials would also trace a way back to him, his ship, his name, and eventually his history. *The Dark Side take Armand Isard and all his kriffing goons!* Not for the first time, Tholme considered that he may be better off sacrificing the extra business for the sake of maintaining his identity.

With this understanding in place, the rest of the check-in went quickly. Operations were smooth and mostly uninterrupted by the Empire's heightened search&destroy missions – where many honest traders ended up losing their cargo over suspicious inspections and the confounded smugglers, by their very existence, ruined the industry for the rest. Dujx had been forced to make a micro-jump about a day off course, but he was safe from pursuit. Frustrated by the set back in ETA, Tholme bid farewell to Dujx and terminated the call.

The overhead glowlight in the office was set to sunset, and Tholme reclined in his repulsor chair. The galactic map, set as a permanent holo-image in the far wall, showed several dozen colored points identifying the exact status of his logistics. It had taken him most of the day, but the needs of the company were finally in order. The clock on his desk read well past normal quitting time. He stretched and a thought came to him. He reached into the lower drawer of his desk and pulled out an Alderanni liquor, a now-vintage bonus to the jobs in one of the Core worlds.

He'd sworn off drinking for several long weeks much to the crew's unspoken pleasure, but after the previous night's com message he had thought more about taking back up the bottle than ever before. The ice spheres chinked against the squat glasses bottom, and the brown liquid coursed over them as it rushed to meet the brim. Bringing the glass to his lips, he hesitated and then took a deep breath of the potent drink. The strength pleasantly burned his nostrils. He was about to gulp when the ship com pinged. He scowled and switched it on,

"Yes?"

Billee's voice came through calm and friendly, "Sir, we're exiting hyperspace in five minutes. Would you care to take the bridge?"

Tholme looked at the full, inviting beverage and sighed. "Be right there, Bill."

Posted by Corr Terek on 5 October 2009 01:15 AM:

It took longer than Damon expected to return to the Imperial "base". Errolt and Stebs were justifiably wary of being attacked by Pavana's assassin again, and weren't about to lead her back to their only safe house in the city. Elayne and Tam were keeping track of things, too, and neither had indicated that there was anything to be concerned about. Yet.

Teece was doing a little bit better now -- Errolt had insisted in taking charge of her himself, and she seemed to be happy to see him alive and whole.

The rest of the group was...still adjusting. Proto and Elayne seemed relatively comfortable dealing with the Empire but everyone else was on edge, and Damon couldn't blame them. As soon as they had a proper chance to talk -- alone -- he'd explain the situation and go from there.

"Steb's, gather the rest of the men and as much gear as we can take with us," Errolt ordered as they arrived at the hideout.

"Where are we going?" Damon asked.

"There's an old mine that stopped yielding ore about a year ago," Errolt explained. "We've been moving gear and supplies there, and we're hoping to use it as a base for resistance against Pavana."

"Resistance?" Reil asked skeptically. "How many of you are there?"

"I now have twelve men under my command, though we suspect that many members of the Imperial garrison here were captured and are being forced to work in the mines, along with the local citizens," Errolt said. "If we can free them, we stand a chance of succeeding."

He eyed Damon and the others. "We could use your help. Your crew is unusually skilled, and it's obvious Pavana fears you -- the assassin went after *you*, not us."

Damon hesitated. "We...weren't planning on getting involved. This isn't our fight."

"Cowards," one of the Imperials -- the short one, who had not accompanied them to the fight -- muttered under his breath.

The tension in the room immediately came to a breaking point, and Damon had to step in front of Mir and Reil, who both took a step towards the Imperial. Tam looked like a thundercloud, and Damon feared the Imperial would soon find himself embedded in the ceiling. "Easy, guys..."

"Ilsen, stand down," Errolt's voice was sharp. "Captain Caldera and his crew are free to do what they feel is right, and we will *not* castigate them for their choice."

Ilsen nodded smartly, though even Damon could still feel the man's disdain for them. He left the room, and Errolt turned back to Damon. "All the same, captain, I wish you would reconsider."

"Just get us to this base of yours," Damon said tiredly, feeling the others' eyes on him. "I'll speak with my crew then."

Posted by Ice Hawk on 5 October 2009 06:55 AM:

Seated apart from the Imperials, the crew of the *Nexu's Fang* discussed their options.

"So now that we've relocated to this very luxurious, and cunningly concealed mine, you wanna tell us the plan for getting

off this rock?"

A tad more sharply than he probably should have, Reil was never the less expressing the sentiments of most of the crew. The mine the Imperials had taken them to was dark and humid; the lowest levels having flooded completely since the mine was last used. Now, seated on the rock floor, in a circle around a borrowed glowlamp, tensions were running a little high, and all eyes turned on Damon for a decision.

Damon ignored Reil's tone.

"The plan was to hop on the *Fang* and run, but obviously we can't do that now. So now we need to come up with a new plan. Any suggestions?"

Tam was the first to make a suggestion.

"How bad was the damage to the ship? Maybe we can repair it."

Mir shook her head.

"Strictly speaking, replacing a coolant tank isn't that big of a deal, but that's only half the problem. The real trick will be draining the spilt coolant, and venting the fumes built up in the *Fang*. That'll take time and equipment, and we're a little short on both."

Elayne spoke up.

"Besides that, Pavana's men were in control of the hanger and the missile anti-air defenses when we left. He's probably left a trap. Even if we did manage to fight our way through it and fix the ship, in all likely hood we'd be blown out of the sky."

"So we forget the *Fang*," Reil offered, turning to Proto, "Didn't you say you could call in your ship if we ran into trouble?"

The droid nodded.

"Affirmative. Bringing the *Archeologist* in would not be difficult, but until we disable the anti-air, it would be a moot point."

Cali interjected.

"We've got a lot of valuables stored on the *Fang*. We can't just leave it to be looted."

Damon shook his head.

"Nothing so valuable that we should die for it. Everything on it can be re..." Damon trailed off, as something occurred to him.

Posted by Mitka Jawnder on 5 October 2009 06:56 AM:

Reani saw the turret target her just in time to throw a smoke bomb at her feet. It worked, barely. She jumped out of the way, but the turret's shot was too close. The last thing she remembered was the feeling of her body slamming into the wall of the spaceport.

Light. That was the first thing she registered. She opened her eyes. She was in a large, open building of some sort. She tried to stand up, everything hurt, she dragged herself onto her knees moaning, she could feel a large bump on the back of her head. She looked around the spaceport, it seemed oddly familiar, *How did I get here?* She thought, *where is here?* She managed to stumble to her feet with the aid of a nearby crate. She gasped when she looked over the crate, on the other side there were bodies all over the ground, and a ship on the landing pad with the boarding ramp down and something gaseous eking out of it. She sat down on the crate for a minute and tried to remember, but the harder she tried the more horrified she became, realizing that she couldn't remember anything. Where she was, how she got there, what planet she was on, even her name. She was resting on the crate trying to figure out what to do next when she heard a voice beside her.

"What the frell happened?" She turned to find five big, armed men walking up to her, surveying the landing pad, "When you didn't show up Lord Pavona sent us to find you." The one in front said gruffly. "Did you get them?"

The girl stared at him confused. He obviously knew her, and this Lord Pavona did to. But what was he talking about? Who was she supposed to get?

"Well, what happened?" He demanded angrily.

The girl tried to think of something to say, but nothing came to mind. The man's hand flew out to slap her. She flinched away, but the blow never landed, she looked back to find her arm up blocking his slap. She gawked at her arm as if it was some foreign object, as did the five thugs. The one who had spoken to her paused for a minute, then pulled back his other arm and threw all of his weight behind a fist aimed at her face. She didn't remember moving, but the next thing she knew her hand came down on the incoming fist, deflecting and grabbing it, then she twisted her body, pulling his hand with her, and somehow the man flew past her. She was too surprised to even try to run. She just sat on the crate staring at the downed thug that was twice her size. She turned back to the others just in time to avoid getting her head cut off by a vibroblade. The fight lasted less than a minute, but it felt like a lot more than that. Every time one of the thugs tried to hit her, her body reacted, blocking, dodging, and throwing them. At the end they were all lying unconscious around her. She ran out of the spaceport without looking back. She had to find out what was going on, and who she was.

Posted by ij thompson on 5 October 2009 10:25 AM:

It was dusk on the planet Kwenn, its rustic, rolling landscapes bathed in horizontal beams of gold and burnt orange. The flat, black shape of the *Skalen II*, now the *Dawncaller*, gleamed in the setting sun, and at its feet Fi, Vonn, Amra, and Celeste were gathered, drinking in the beauty of the chilly Autumn eve. Near them there stood a tall, thick-trunked wihoru tree, which rained delicate, white leaves down around them.

"Home," Vonn marveled, looking at the solitary farmhouse, modest but handsome, that stood in the distance. Beyond it, in the valley below, the tiny lights of a small town glittered in the twilight. Beyond these, two large, black mountains stood proudly. "Never thought I'd see it."

"I bet there are some people in that house who are gonna be surprised to see *you*!" Fi grinned.

"Not to mention, these two," Vonn agreed with a smile, indicating the two clone girls.

"It'll be such fun, here!" Amra gushed. "We're going to have animals!"

"And take them out running around!" Celeste agreed.

Fi smiled warmly. "That sounds fabulous."

"You are welcome here, you know," Vonn said.

Fi looked around, breathing in the crisp air. It was perfect. Perfect in every way... except one.

"Thank you," Fi replied, sidestepping the offer, "I will *definitely* come back around for a visit."

"Anytime," Vonn replied, understanding.

Fi hugged each of them in turn, drinking in the sight of their smiling faces.

"Bye, guys."

Turning, she boarded the *Dawncaller*, and brought the craft into a gentle liftoff. Vonn, Amra and Celeste watched her go, and then, hand in hand, turned and followed their long, thin shadows toward the welcoming farmhouse in the distance.