Her eyes were unfocused as they slowly began to open. Blinking to clear her vision, she gazed around, trying to make out her surroundings. Faintly, she could hear a voice calling her name and she looked upwards. Vivackus stood quite a few metres above her, staring down at her through a hole in what was once the floor she was standing on before it gave way, sending her plummeting through to the corridors below. She winced as a pain shot through her side and her hand automatically travelled to the area in question. She could definitely feel wetness which proved to her that she had a nasty gash on her side at the least. The voice sounded closer now, but that was because her brain was clearing the fog inside her head and she could hear more clearly.

“Taranae! Are you alright?” Vivackus called down to her. She moved, uneasily at first, and she heard him speak to someone else, probably the rest of the team sent to investigate the lower bowels of the *Anchorage*.

“We can’t get to you, Taranae,” he called, “but make your way south of your position and you should find a way up. Can you make it down there? Are you hurt?”

Moving slightly, she winced again as she called on the Force to heal herself. As the wound closed and stopped bleeding, she called back.

“I’m ok, Viv. I cut myself but I can carry on – it’s nothing I can’t handle.”

“Ok. Make haste and be careful – we still don’t know what’s down there.” He replied. With that, she heard the team move onwards and she pulled herself to her feet. Her eyes had become more accustomed to the blackness now and as she looked around, her expectations were confirmed. The lower levels of the Anchorage had been left to wrack and ruin. Control panels hung off walls, doors were bent and sections of floor were missing. Looking down, she realised how lucky she had been in her fall, as the floor next to her was missing; beams of metal showing through where the drop continued to another floor below her. Thanking the Force for her good fortune, she sidestepped along the wall edge, being careful not to overbalance and fall to her death.

As she reached the far side of the precipice, she heard faint sounds from ahead, much like scuttling. She had heard of vermin finding their way onto stations, but had no idea what type of vermin it could be. Steeling herself, she pushed onwards. As she rounded the next corner, a sight that both stunned and intrigued her caught her attention. One of the blast doors had been torn open from the bottom where it reached the floor. The piece of door in question had been bent upwards and across the door at a ninety degree angle, showing a triangle of blackness beyond. In front of the door was a pale, murky substance with bubbles on the surface here and there. Approaching the door, Taranae kept her senses on high alert as she tried to ascertain what could have happened. Kneeling to get a closer look at the fluid, she noticed small marks at steady intervals marking a path from the hole in the door and through the substance. As they reached the edge of the puddle, the prints continued, but as small, wet prints; it seemed they belonged to some creature. She stood again, at a loss as to what this could mean for her mission, but she set off past the door in the direction of the prints.

After a couple of dead-ends, the corridor opened up into a large room which was also in ruin; holes in the flooring and roof, once again showing bare beams before opening up into the areas above and below.

“Viv!” she shouted, hoping she could get the attention of the other team members. This was a possible way for her to return to them and continue on together. When there was no reply, she grudgingly started towards the opposite side of the room, sidestepping holes and sparking wiring, which gave an almost strobe effect to her surroundings.

Suddenly she heard the most horrifying noise her ears had ever had the displeasure to pick up. A low, grating growl came from ahead, through the doorway where she was headed. She glanced around quickly, looking for a possible escape route, but finding none, she dashed quickly for an old broken maintenance hatch in the wall which was covered by grating. Grunting, she used strength aided by the Force to remove the grate. As it dropped from her hands, it made a loud clanging sound and she berated herself for being so clumsy. An answering growl came from towards the doorway and she panicked. She grabbed the grating, jumped inside the hatch and pulled the cover back over the hole to hide her from whatever it was that was arriving.

She only had to wait seconds before a huge, rounded bulk emerged into the room. Judging by what she could see from the sparking wires and dim light, it looked about the same size as a Kaadu and walked on all fours. It rose up onto two stocky hind legs and sniffed the air, obviously aware that something was down here, and Taranae prayed that it didn’t hunt by smell. It dropped to all fours with a resounding thud and grunted. Moving with the grace of a predator, it made its way into the room. As it neared the centre, there was an ear-splitting bang as some wiring touched and created a small explosion, lighting up the room. Taranae’s heart raced and her blood ran cold. Sweat started to bead on her forehead as the beast was illuminated in all its glory. A *Sithspawn*.

She had heard tales of these creatures, but had never seen one so close. She was aware now that it was hunting her, and she stilled. Using her training, she slowed her heartbeat to make herself less noticeable to the hunter and her breathing became shallower. The beast sniffed once more. Outlined in the flash, it was huge. A dark mass of muscle and exoskeleton, rows of teeth in a head that could engulf Taranae’s own easily and kill her in an instant. She watched, mesmerised as the creature slowly made its way across the room. She sighed as it exited through the room she had entered through and waited longer then she knew she should before removing the grate quietly and continuing to the other side of the room. Away from the monster, she picked up pace, eager to meet up with the rest and get off this level of the Anchorage.

Around the corner, she spied movement in a side room. She slid up against the side of the door, hare hand reaching for her lightsaber, placed her back against the bulkhead and peered in. It was Teylas! He was ambling around in the centre of the room apparently doing nothing. Taranae kept her hand near her hip and entered. As she did so, she quietly called his name. Teylas slowly turned around and Taranae was met with a blank stare. Whatever happened to Teylas, he was now a mindless zombie. She approached carefully, not wanting to startle him and unsure of his reaction to her presence. Teylas just watched her close in; his mouth hanging open and staring straight ahead.

Reaching him, she glanced into his eyes. She removed her hand from her weapon and reached out to touch him. He suddenly backed off, shaking his head. Over his shoulder, Taranae could see some sort of mass behind him. Curious, she moved around him as he just stood, motionless. On his back was some kind of organism. It stretched the length of his spine from neck to rear, covering it with its own body. It looked like a cross between a maggot and a completely new spine, and had tendrils burrowing into Teylas’ back on both sides of his own spine for the entire length. Now Taranae was scared; first the Sithspawn and now this. The creatures looked like some kind of parasite and she hoped this one wasn’t taking something from Teylas, aside from his ability to do anything much. Taking her lightsaber and igniting it, Taranae had three options; she could leave Teylas like this, a zombie for life. She could try to kill the parasite in the hope it released its host and free Teylas, not kill him, or she could kill Teylas.

Thinking that the third idea wasn’t going to happen, she decided to kill the parasite. Taking her lightsaber, she lined it up against the length of the spine creature and touched it to the thing with a downward slice of the weapon.

The creature split in two along its length, screamed, and dropped from Teylas’ back. As it did, the tendrils connecting it to the host squirmed free and retracted into its body. As it hit the floor, Teylas collapsed too and Taranae thought him dead. On closer inspection she found h9m to be breathing. His chest rose and fell in steady movements and his body twitched every now and then.

The creature lay as if dead and Taranae prodded it with her foot, puzzled as to its exact nature. At her touch, the creature’s back began to knit itself back together and the tendrils appeared again, as if seeking purchase on a new host. Startled and disgusted, Taranae moved away and knelt next to Teylas again. She hoped she had enough energy left to do this without passing out or weakening herself too much, and she used the force to try to heal Teylas’ wounds. The entry points around his spine closed, and as she looked under his eyelids, he was no longer pupil-less. Instead, his own eyes stared back. With relief, she rose and cast a glance toward the creature. She gasped to find it missing, and grabbed Teylas. Dragging him along the floor, she headed in the direction that Vivackus had told her to go.

Heading out into the corridors again, she heard the growl of the Sithspawn from where she had hidden from it and she quickened her pace; The Sithspawn was enough to deal with, without being taken by the parasite too. As she rounded a corner, metal stairs came into view. They were blocked with debris, but Taranae gently laid Teylas on the floor and summoned every ounce of power she had. Slowly she moved beam after beam as the growling drew nearer and she heard scuttling off to her left. Just as she levered away the last beam, a figure showed itself at the far end of the corridor and growled deeply. The Sithspawn had detected her again and truly had her scent this time. Grabbing Teylas roughly by the shoulders, she was surprised to find him stirring.

“Teylas wake up!” she shouted, “There are Sithspawn on the Anchorage!”

Teylas opened his eyes, groggily, and stared at Taranae. He smiled slightly and slumped again, unconscious. She cursed, then, as the monster closed and the scuttling came closer still. She thought back on her times in the Brotherhood and regretted that she wouldn’t be around to see the Anchorage in its full glory. Suddenly a light burst from the stairs and the rest of the team walked down towards them. Seeing Teylas and Taranae, they all dashed the rest of the way and two picked up Teylas while the others supported a much weakened Taranae as they headed back up the stairs to the sound of a low growl and a hiss behind them.

Vivackus glanced around and noticed the Sithspawn. A look of surprise crossed his face before a grin spread across it instead. He gestured, and everything Taranae had worked to remove from the stairwell blocked it again behind them as they made their escape. The creature behind them would not be following through the rubble; Viv had made sure of that.

“Ok everyone. Let’s get Teylas to Medical. Taranae – congratulations on a job well done.” Said Viv as they exited the top of the stairs. “We now have a report as to what’s down there, plus you found Teylas. Nice going, Overseer.”

With that said, they all headed back to the rendezvous point, with Taranae casting nervous glances behind her as they went.