

# DAY TRIP TO DRESHDAE

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## OUTSKIRTS OF DRESHDAE

5 KM FROM THE CITY GATES

11:35 LOCAL TIME

The lone figure stood on a ledge. His brown coat moved in the wind blowing across the deserted wastelands of Korriban. The man had a pair of macrobinoculars raised to his eyes, pointed at the city in the distance.

Dreshdae.

The name meant nothing to the man. It was just the name of the only city on this forsaken planet. He coughed, and threw a cigarette bud on the ground. The macrobinoculars disappeared into pocket of his coat, and he moved back towards his speeder. He got on, fired up the engines, and lit another cigarette. After putting on his goggles, he hit the accelerator and the speeder darted off towards Dreshdae. Gusts of sand whirled up as the speeder passed over, and soon it had disappeared from sight.

Behind some rock formations, Dempsey frowned as she lost sight of the speeder. She hadn't had any trouble recognizing Connor Grey from the description on her datapad. His presence here did complicate matters a bit though. She had heard rumours that Rhiaen Ust'essi and her sister Nalia were close to Dreshdae, or already within the city walls, and that was worrisome enough. Connor Grey was an extra complication she did not need.

She, too, pocketed her macrobinoculars and stepped over to her speeder. She sat down, and pondered her actions for a moment. The original plan had been to find out if the Ust'essi sisters really were in the city, and then let them do the hard work. That plan would have to be amended. But not by much. If she played her cards right, there still would be very little work for her to do to claim the writings she was looking for.

# WHITLOCK'S

MAIN CANTINA

11:50 LOCAL TIME

No one looked up as the threesome walked into the bar. Nearly all patrons knew it was always best to know who came in, but to ignore everyone you didn't know. It was safer that way. Everyone in the bar saw the threesome come in, but no one paid them any attention. The tall, slender looking human lead his companions to an empty booth and sat down with his back to the wall. His head was bowed down, but his eyes were already going all over the bar. Rodians, Twi'leks, humans, and even a Trandoshan. All the rabble in the city accumulated here. With all the diversity, no one would notice them. Or so he hoped.

His first companion, a human female, sat down beside him. Trained as she was, she had already gone over the bar for the usual. The man looked at the guests to see if there was anyone they needed to watch out for, she was pinpointing the entrances, the exits, and where they could exit the bar should the actual exits be blocked. She gave an almost imperceptible nod to the first man. She knew where to go.

The third of the group was the oddball out. The Kiffar was dressed in an all black suit. Under the cloak he wore, you could clearly discern the shape of a large weapon. Although most of the patrons recognized this, they also knew what it meant. Anyone sporting a weapon this obvious in Dreshdae had no qualms about using it in public. And so the best course of action would be to stay away. The Kiffar sat down beside his companions and looked at the man. "So what do we do now, Jek?" he asked in a hushed tone.

Jek snorted. "We go ahead with the plan as we always do," he said. "We sell the loot, and get off planet."

"That might be harder than we had planned," the woman joined in. "In your scheme, there were no Star Destroyers in orbit, and there were no Jedi nearby to go after us."

"You worry too much, my dear," Jek said. "Jaless here has organized transport off planet for us, and it's fast enough to outrun those Star Destroyers. Besides, those stupid Jedi are way too busy fighting each other, they have no time to worry about us."

"But we have something they want. They will not let us get away with it that easy," Jaless retorted. "Perhaps we should have gone for the other stuff in the tombs. Stuff that's easier to sell."

"And stuff that's harder to move," Jek interjected. "Remember - all we have now is a few scrolls that are easy to move. The only thing even close to its value was that golden statue we saw. Which weighs a tonne! Besides - those Jedi aren't after us, they're after the scrolls. If we don't have them, they won't be going after us anymore. For some reason, these scrolls are very important to them - they won't go after us and risk losing them!"

"I still don't like it," the woman said.

"Beli, my love, stop worrying. Once we get rid of this loot, you can worry all you want. About how many slaves you're going to buy with your share." Jek smiled as he ran his hand down the woman's cheek. "I promise you - in two days we'll be back home."

Beli sighed. Perhaps Jek was right. So far, he'd always been right.

## **DRESHDAE**

### **CITY GATES**

**12:45 LOCAL TIME**

Connor's speeder slowed down and came to a halt just beyond the city gates of Dreshdae. Connor had never been there, but he recognized the stench. It was the same in every other hellhole he'd visited in his time. Every spaceport on every world where smuggling and crime ran free was the same.

Good. It would save him the trouble of adapting to his surroundings. In a place like this, he was perfectly at home.

He kicked the speeder into low gear and gently eased it through the city gates. A few meters further along, he switched off the engines and stepped out. In places like this, one was often better off on foot. It was far easier to move, and you were less easy a target. Instinctively his hand brushed by his coat to feel the familiar shape of his .48 blaster pistol on his belt. He knew it was there, but he had trained himself to always inconspicuously confirm its presence. Better safe than sorry.

He looked around. Dreshdae was like most other towns on similar worlds. One large street going from one end to the other, with dozens of side streets all over the place. Most businesses were cantinas or casinos. Nothing new. And so he stepped into the street and started for the first cantina. If he was to find his quarry, he'd better start fast. They could be in any one of these bars. And since he had no idea who exactly he was looking for, this might take awhile.

As he stepped through the door of the first cantina, a nagging feeling alerted him. He quickly scanned the cantina, and his eyes fell on a large Togruta male sporting several tattoos and scars across his arms. Connor immediately recognized the Togruta. He was wanted for an assortment of crimes in over a dozen star systems. The bounty on this one was high, he remembered. But not as high as his current target. He decided not to get sidetracked, and quickly moved straight for the bar, ignoring the Togruta. He could feel the ignorance wasn't mutual, the Togruta's eyes were burning in his back. But this wasn't the time to start a big fight, and so he ignored the feeling. He ordered a drink, sat down, and sipped his drink, staring at the counter.

Well, pretending to stare at the counter anyway. He was actually moving his eyes all over to see if he recognized anyone else, as well as keeping his attention on the Togruta. He had shown no interest in the criminal, but that might not have come across properly. If the Togruta wanted a fight, he could get one of course, but Connor preferred to keep a low profile while in Dreshdae. At least until he had what he came for. He closed his eyes, and pictured the Togruta in his mind. Then he snuck his way into the Togruta's mind, which was surprisingly easy, and started working on him. Within moments, he could feel the Togruta losing interest in him. Connor ended his manipulation, finished his drink, and got up. He turned, and left the bar.

Once outside, he let out a little sigh of relief. It wasn't exactly like him to avoid a bar fight, but sometimes, other things were more important.

## **DRESHDAE**

**MAIN STREET**

**13:00 LOCAL TIME**

Dempsey stood in the shadows of a building, overseeing the entrance to Whitlock's. She'd seen Connor go in, but decided not to follow him in. It would be too obvious, and the risk of detection would be too great. Connor Grey was a master in picking up danger. And she was definitely a danger to him. She felt something going on in the bar, but the lack of loud noises probably meant it was nothing serious, and a few moments later Connor exited the bar again. As he moved to the next bar, Dempsey quietly followed at a safe distance. She figured Connor was looking for someone. More specifically, he was looking for the people who had swiped their prize from the tomb of Marka Ragnos.

As Connor entered another bar, Dempsey ducked back into the shadows.

## **OUTSKIRTS OF DRESHDAE**

**5 KM FROM THE CITY GATES**

**13:20 LOCAL TIME**

A speeder bike slowly came to a halt, and a female pilot stepped out. She looked around, closed her eyes, and concentrated. She opened her eyes and looked into the direction of Dreshdae, her ultimate target. She had felt something familiar. She couldn't quite place it, but there was definitely someone here. Well, someone had been here anyway.

She looked around her, peering into the desert. Nothing moved. She turned her head the other way, and again, nothing.

Well, almost nothing. She stepped forward, bent down and picked up a cigarette bud. She frowned. "Connor?" she asked herself. She dropped the bud and looked back at Dreshdae.

*So, you are here too, she thought. But who is the other one? Whose presence is it that I can sense here?*

For a moment she stood, eyes closed, concentrating. The feeling remained, but she still couldn't place it. She knew it wasn't Connor she sensed. She sensed something much darker. Connor probably wasn't going to be her biggest problem once she hit Dreshdae.

## **DRESHDAE**

**CITY GATES**

**13:35 LOCAL TIME**

Rhiaen stopped her speeder about 300 meters from the Dreshdae city gates. She stepped out and looked at the wall. Going through the front door would of course have been easier, but she didn't want to be spotted entering the city. The element of surprise was too valuable when it came to an opponent like Connor Grey. Besides, she still hadn't figured out who the other person she knew was also in the city. Until she did, she preferred to be an unknown factor.

She crouched down, looked up at the wall, and drew in the Force. A moment later, she leapt into the air, reached out, and grabbed the top of the city wall. For a moment, she hung dead still, stretching her senses to see if anyone might have noticed. Of course, this would have been a lot easier in the dead of night under cover of darkness, but she didn't feel like waiting for the Horuset star to disappear from the sky. She had a feeling time was not on her side today.

She pulled herself up until her eyes could see beyond the city walls. She smiled - she had picked a part of the city where she was unlikely to be spotted. As she peered over the wall, she could see nothing but the dreary backsides of houses. Well, houses probably wasn't the right word for what these buildings were. Either way, no one was walking here, there were no windows on this side of the buildings, and so no one saw her as she climbed over the wall and jumped down to the ground. With a soft thud, she landed on her feet. For another moment, she sat motionless, listening to her surroundings. There were no sounds other than the bustling from the cantinas in the distance. It would appear no one had seen her.

She raised herself to her full height, and pressed her back against the wall of the nearest building. Slowly, she moved towards the corner. A cracking sound made her freeze. She cursed inside herself as she realized who had made the sound. She stood frozen, listening again and deciding if anyone had heard her.

A door not far behind her opened and a young man peeked his head through.

"See!" he yelled back into the house. "I told you someone was here!"

Rhiaen cursed as she turned around. With one quick move she reached the door. She extended her left arm as she shoved the young man back into the house with the Force, while she drew her light saber with her right hand. She jumped into the house while the young man, who had been pushed against a wall, looked at her, his eyes growing wide. Before he could make another sound, Rhiaen's light saber slit through his thorax. The man's head slumped backwards and rolled onto the floor. Just at that moment, a young woman, probably his wife, stepped through the opening to the living area. She saw the man's head fall down. Her eyes opened wide, immediately followed by her mouth. The first second of a loud scream came from her mouth before Rhiaen jumped her and smashed into her with her full weight. The two women fell to the ground, but Rhiaen had struck again before the young woman's body hit the floor. When it did, the woman made no sound. She never would make a sound again. Rhiaen got up and looked around. It appeared the dwelling was deserted, and no other noises could be heard. Rhiaen cursed again. A few days ago, this would never have happened. If Nalia had been with her, this would never have happened. She swallowed as she remembered the last time she had seen her sister alive. Then she bit her tongue and put her light saber away. This was not the time, nor the place for such thoughts. Only after she had acquired these cursed scrolls would there be time to mourn Nalia properly. And to avenge her death. Not yet. Not now.

# WHITLOCK'S

MAIN CANTINA

13:35 LOCAL TIME

Jek nudged Beli's hand. "No time to get impatient now, my dear," he whispered. He could feel and see Beli's impatience growing. They had been sitting in this bar for almost two hours now. Beli had never had much patience. Neither had Jaless, but the Kiffar seemed to be handling the wait a lot better than Beli did.

"Where is he," she asked him. "Our appointment was for 1300 hours."

Jaless agreed with her. "He is late. I don't like people who are late. They are untrustworthy. Perhaps we should see if we can find some other buyer."

Jek shook his head. "No way, Jaless. We have some ancient Sith scrolls here. Something even the old Sith didn't wanna put into a holocron. Our buyer knows what it's worth. No one else in this forsaken pit is gonna offer us money even close to what he's offering. Unless you wanna shout out to everyone what we have. That should draw in those blasted Jedi from the Valley. But I don't think they'd pay us for the scrolls. Not with credits anyway!"

Jaless sighed. "You are right, as usual. But so am I. We should be very careful when this contact of yours shows up."

"I know," Jek agreed. "It's not like I trust this guy. Heck - you can never trust anyone who works for a Hutt."

"Why are you selling this to a Hutt anyway," Beli asked. "You never did say."

"Simple, my dear," was Jek's answer. "For starters, he's the only one with the credits to spare to afford this. Plus - Hutt's aren't susceptible to those Jedi mind tricks. Once these Dark Jedi or whatever realize their prize is in the possession of a Hutt, they'll have to think of other ways to get it back. History has seen enough dealings between Jedi, Sith and Hutts. More than often enough, the Hutts come out as the winners."

"Which solves part of our problem," Beli continued voicing her doubts. "Do you really think these Jedi will stop coming after us once they realize the scrolls were sold to the Hutt?"

"Most likely, yes," Jek said. "Remember, they don't know us. They have no idea we took the scrolls. All they know is who possesses them now. I'll make sure of that."

# Braliff Waystation

DRESHDAE

13:45 LOCAL TIME

"Yes, Great Borga," Smarit said as he bowed his head. A moment later, the holographic projection of Borga the Hutt disappeared, and he raised his head again. It was time to meet the criminals who had offered his master a great prize.

Smarit turned towards the bed, and collected his weapons. A small blaster pistol disappeared into his left boot, with two knives finding a place in his right boot. Another knife ended up in a hidden pocket in his coat. A light saber was clipped to his belt. Smarit had no Force sensitivity whatsoever, but he knew a light saber was a deadly weapon in the hands of anyone. And he had had a lot of practice wielding it. It had become his most trusted weapon.

But not his only weapon, as several grenades were tucked away in his coat as well. A few spare power packs for his blaster were clipped into utility pockets, and the bed was now empty.

The Klatooinian softly closed the door of his room behind him, and headed for the exit. He realized the appointment he had made with the smuggler Jek was long past, but there was little he could do about that. Borga had specifically instructed him to wait for his communication before contacting the smuggler. And one never disobeyed a Hutt.

Well, you could of course, there was no universal law against it. But one rarely lived to tell about it. And so Smarit had opted to let the time of his meeting pass by while he waited for Borga's last orders. It had been a waste of his time, as was normal when it came to direct contact with the Hutt crime lord. Borga had said nothing that Smarit didn't already know, or hadn't already been told several times by the Hutt's henchmen. But life, he had learned, was easier if you didn't contradict or correct a Hutt. And life was also longer and more prosperous.

As Smarit stepped into the street outside the lodgings he was staying in, he looked around himself. He had arrived in Dreshdae two days ago, after some lowlife smuggler had promised him a great bounty for his master, and had used that time to get familiar with the city. He had actually been surprised when he received word from Jek that he could actually deliver on what he had promised. And now here he was. Time to meet this smuggler. Smarit turned, and headed towards Whitlock's.



# DRESHDAE

DEVER ALLEY

14:00 LOCAL TIME

Rhiaen watched from the shadows. In the distance, she had spotted a Klatooinian. As she had seen him, her senses had flared up. She knew it wasn't who she had sensed before, but she knew this one. It was one of the peons that worked for Borga the Hutt. Rhiaen had enough common sense to realize this was not a coincidence. The Hutts usually stayed away from places like this. Even though they couldn't be affected by Force tricks, they still stayed away from anyone who could use the Force. Even their henchmen would stay away. If one of Borga's men was on Korriban, he meant serious business.

Perhaps finding her target was going to be easier than she had expected. She decided to follow the Klatooinian. Most likely, he would lead her to her quarry, and her prize. And perhaps then, she could save her own life and avenge Nalia's death.

She followed her man through several streets and alleys until they reached Main Street. The man halted, and looked around. He was obviously looking for something.

No, not looking for something, she realized. He was looking around to make sure it was safe. Apparently, he was expecting trouble. Instinctively, Rhiaen rested her hand on her light saber.

In the distance, the Klatooinian crossed the street and entered a cantina. With a s=quick spurt, Rhiaen crossed the street as well and ducked into a small alley beside the building that housed the cantina. She snuck around, knowing a place like this always had a back entrance. It didn't take her long to find it, and she entered the door. She stayed low, but couldn't help being spotted by one of the kitchen aids. He looked at her in surprise. Then he frowned. He tilted his head, wondering what was going on. The he started to open his mouth.

Rhiaen flashed him a glance at her light saber and put her finger onto her lips indicating the kitchen aid should remain silent. Apparently, the young man was smarter than he looked, as he closed his mouth again. For one more second, he stared at Rhiaen, then he turned away and returned to his duty station. He grabbed a plated and dunked it into the water to clean it off. Rhiaen smiled, closed her eyes for a second, and entered the man's mind. There she erased his memory of seeing her. Just as she was pulling back, she changed her mind. She went back in, and a moment later the young man slumped to the ground. She quickly moved towards the body, and dragged it out of the kitchen. She opened the back door, and pushed the body out into the alley.

# WHITLOCK'S

MAIN CANTINA

14:20 LOCAL TIME

As the Klatooinian entered the cantina, Jek immediately spotted him. He shushed his companions. A moment later, the Klatooinian walked over to their booth and sat down.

"My master, the great Borga, salutes you on your acquisition," Smarit said. "I am here to ensure that you have what you claim to possess, and Borga has authorized me to buy it from you."

Jek smiled. "Excellent, my friend," he said. "Can I get you a drink while we speak?"

Smarit made a growling sound. "No small talk," he said. "There are too many dangerous people nearby, I wish to get off this planet. The sooner, the better."

Jek nodded. "As you wish." He produced a small package from his coat. He laid it before the Klatooinian and opened it. Inside was a single sheet of parchment paper. It looked very old, but Smarit immediately recognized it for what it was. This piece of parchment was far older than it looked. He moved his hands towards the paper and let his finger run across it. It felt good.

"It appears to be what you say it is," he said. "But this is not all there is I hope..."

Jek smiled. "Of course not. But it is far too dangerous to carry it all. Once you agree to buy, and come up with the credits, we will deliver the rest."

"But there we have a small problem," Smarit returned. "Borga will not authorize payment until I have verified all is complete."

"He will have to," Jaless said. "Otherwise, we will find someone who will."

"As if you could find anyone who would be willing to pay you what Borga has offered," Smarit said. "We both know that there is a small chance that you will find someone like that, but that may take many months. You three won't survive that long with all these Jedi hunting you down. You do realize there's three parties after this piece of paper, don't you...."

From the way the woman's eyes twitched, Smarit could tell they had not known this.

# WHITLOCK'S

KITCHEN

14:30 LOCAL TIME

From the kitchen, Rhiaen observed the Klatooinian sit down at a table with 3 people already sitting down. She didn't recognize any of them, but did notice one of them, the Kiffar, had a weapon stashed under his coat. She strained her ears, but knew it was useless. There was no way she'd be able to hear their conversation from here.

At that moment, her Force senses screamed at her, and a fraction of a second later she heard a noise. She ducked to the ground, rolled over while unhooking the light saber from her belt. By the time she'd rolled onto her back, she had ignited the weapon and held it before her to stop an incoming light saber.

Instead, a man stood over her with a small weapon pointed loosely in her direction.

"Rhiaen Ust'essi," the man said. "What in the name of the Sith are you doing here?"

Rhiaen eyed the man carefully, trying to ascertain how much of a danger he was going to be to her.

"Connor Grey," she said.

Connor nodded. "In the flesh," he said. "But you knowing my name does not answer my question."

"Why should I tell you anything?" Rhiaen asked while getting back onto her feet, keeping one eye on Connor and the other on his weapon.

"Because something tells me you ran into a bit of trouble," Connor said. "And perhaps we can help each other."

"You cannot help me," Rhiaen said. She could feel her agitation growing. She should be watching her quarry, not trade words and insults with this lowlife.

"I beg to differ," Connor said. He pointed at the wall towards the cantina. "In there is a man who possesses what I want. And something tells me you want it too. Are you sure you can take him alone?"

"I am never alone," Rhiaen spat out before she realized what she said. The realization turned her agitation into anger and she raised her light saber in a threatening move.

"If that's so," Connor said, "then where is Nalia?" He looked around demonstratively. "She's not here. Which means you are alone." He could see and feel the anger build up in Rhiaen. Although it was fun, it wasn't helping him, and it wasn't what he wanted.

"Let's relax," he said as he holstered his weapon. "We both know what that guy has. I don't know why you want it, I do know why I want it. You know why you want it, and not why I want it. It seems we might have something in common. Perhaps we want it for the same reason, and then we'd be better off working together."

Rhiaen pondered his words. She didn't lower her light saber, but she did feel her agitation ebb away a bit. "So why do you want it?" she asked.

"No no," Connor said. "Ladies first!" For a moment, both were quiet. Then Connor decided that this might not be the best way after all. He knew Rhiaen better than this, she would never say what he wanted to hear if he didn't go first.

"Well, I know someone who is very interested in this item," he said. "Someone who doesn't want to see a certain Dark Jedi gain the power that he seeks."

Rhiaen eased up some more. At least Connor wasn't working for Muz Ashen then. That left Jac Cotelin and Esoteric. Assuming no one else was trying to get his hands on the scrolls.

"That's not enough," she said. "Ashen's time is over, and someone will have to take his place. Who are you working for, specifically?"

Connor looked at her. Perhaps telling her he didn't work for Ashen was a wrong choice. He could have always lied. He paused as he stared her down.

"Well, you see - that's something I really cannot say," he started. "I may have already said too much."

Rhiaen tensed up. She opened her mouth to speak, as a loud noise and yelling came from the cantina. In moments, both she and Connor were by the kitchen window looking into the cantina.

# DRESHDAE

MAIN STREET, OUTSIDE WHITLOCK'S

14:32 LOCAL TIME

Dempsey had spotted Rhiaen Ust'essi from a bit away. She had been following Connor going from one cantina to the other, obviously looking for something while trying not to get noticed. It hadn't been hard to see the change in his pattern when he suddenly ducked into an alley. Only a moment later, Dempsey spotted the Ust'essi sister going down another alley, only to be followed by Connor a few seconds later.

Dempsey frowned. She had never seen or heard of the Ust'essi sisters being far apart, but she couldn't sense Nalia anywhere. Carefully, she followed Rhiaen and Connor.

Before she reached them, she passed by the entrance to the bar and stopped. She felt something very wrong here. Not dangerous, just wrong. Anxiety emanated from the cantina as it did nowhere else. Deciding on a whim she should see what it was, she entered the cantina. Rhiaen and Connor had entered an alley she could always go into as well, and she figured that if they Rhiaen spotted Connor, she'd know about it quickly enough anyway.

She pulled up her cloak and stepped through the doors. The cantina was a smoke-filled hole filled with patrons of all species, genders and types. Not a place to bring your kids. In one corner, a Twi'lek girl was dancing to some music, but no one was paying any attention.

Dempsey's focus was immediately drawn to a booth in the corner. Two humans, a Kiffar and a Klatooinian were sitting there discussing something. Dempsey let her gaze go over them and past them, careful not to show them she had seen them. Instead, she focussed her attention on Duros two booths down from the one with the Klatooinian. For two seconds she stared at the Duros, then averted her gaze and walked to the bar.

Before she got there, she heard a loud roar and her Force senses went off. She grabbed her light saber and ignited it. She swung it around just in time to deflect the first blaster bolt coming her way. Not, as she had expected, from the Duros, but from the Klatooinian. He stood, raised up to his full height, with a large automated blaster rifle pointing in her direction. His companions had also gotten up and pulling their weapons. Dempsey cursed. This was not going to make things easier.

She stared at the Klatooinian for a second. Before he could fire again, she saw movement in the corner of her eye, and instinctively dropped to the floor. The chair that was flying through the air missed her by inches as it smashed into the collection of liquor bottles hanging on the wall behind the bar. Dempsey was sprayed with more types of liquor than she cared to remember, but had no time to consider this. At that moment, the Klatooinian aimed his rifle and started shooting at her again, this time on the weapon's automatic setting.

The other patrons in the bar started screaming and ran for the exit in a panic. Tables and chairs were overturned and Dempsey had a hard time taking cover and deflecting the Klatooinian's fire. Within a minute, the cantina was completely empty except for her and the Klatooinian. She noticed his companions had used the panic as a diversion, and had left the bar in the crowd. She'd have to worry about that later, at least she had seen them. Most likely, they were the ones she was looking for.

She drew on the Force and jumped from behind her cover.

## **WHITLOCK'S**

### **KITCHEN**

**14:34 LOCAL TIME**

"Sithspawn," Rhiaen cursed. Beside her, Connor growled a curse as well.

"Who in blazes is that?" he said.

Rhiaen looked at him. "A Dark Jedi. Dempsey. Her House is backing Cotelin in this war."

Connor frowned, but didn't seem too worried. Rhiaen concluded that Connor was probably working for Cotelin too then. At least it wasn't Esoteric. This offered possibilities.

"They're getting away," Connor said as he got up and ran for the kitchen door. Rhiaen jumped up and followed him out. In seconds, they rounded the corner into Main Street. Dozens of people were running from Whitlock's in a panic. Rhiaen strained her eyes to spot the Klatooinian. he would be easiest to recognize in the masses, but he wasn't there.

Connor on the other hand was searching for the Kiffar and two humans. The threesome should be easy to spot, and indeed they were. He darted into the melee after them. Rhiaen didn't hesitate and followed. It took her only moments to spot the human female, and after that, she noticed her two companions as well. All three had their blasters drawn.

A blaster bolt sizzled past Connor's head as his quarry had spotted him. The Kiffar was running and shooting his weapon in his direction. Fortunately, running and aiming don't go together well, so Connor had no trouble following his prey. He could feel Rhiaen was not far behind. His mind raced. The time for subtlety was long gone. He would need to reach the threesome first, get the scrolls from them and disappear before Rhiaen would have the chance to get at him. He needed to get rid of Rhiaen, and fast.

Rhiaen was right behind Connor, and her mind was going into overdrive as well. She had now locked onto whoever it was that Connor was following, and she had no doubt they were in possession of the scrolls she needed. The only problem was Connor himself. If she wanted the scrolls for herself, she needed to get rid of Connor, and fast.

# WHITLOCK'S

MAIN CANTINA

14:35 LOCAL TIME

Dempsey leapt high into the air deflect blaster fire with her light saber as she went. As intended, she landed right behind the Klatooinian and she sliced at him.

The light saber cut through the air where only moments earlier, the Klatooinian's neck had been. As he watched Dempsey jump over him, he had ducked behind a table, and turned. During this move he replaced the power cell on his blaster rifle and started fire again.

He cursed to himself. Perhaps his move had been premature, the woman had definitely seen him, yes, but she had seen the Duros as well. Perhaps she had been there for him. But there was no way back now. Smarit didn't like the situation. When he trained his weapon on the woman and fired, he had expected the bolt to hit the target and fry her brains. Instead, a light saber had appeared and she had easily deflected it. Now he was the one who was cornered. He had not expected a Jedi.

Too late, he realized that this had been his mistake. Of course he should have expected a Jedi. He knew what the humans were selling, and he knew how many Jedi were on Korriban. Chances are one would have found his way here. He just had expected the woman was after him, not the scrolls.

His thought lasted for only a second, as he knew it wasn't going to help him. He needed to get out of here, and fast, and hope the woman would go after the scrolls instead of him. Borga wasn't going to like this one little bit.

Unfortunately for Smarit, worrying about Borga's reaction was a little premature. Dempsey made another leap, and landed right beside him. Smarit's eyes grew wide as he looked Dempsey in the eye. A moment later, her light saber pierced through his left eye. His fingers released the grip on his blaster rifle, and it fell to the ground. Smarit didn't hear the clank anymore.

Dempsey pulled her light saber out of the Klatooinian's head and looked around. The cantina was a mess, and empty. She cursed. She spurted out the door into Main Street and looked around. She cursed some more. She couldn't see the people the Klatooinian had been talking to. She couldn't feel Connor or Rhiaen nearby either. For a moment, she stood in the middle of the street. Then she turned, and ran down the street, hoping she had picked the right direction.

# DRESHDAE

MAIN STREET

14:40 LOCAL TIME

Connor grew tired of the chase. The Kiffar had stopped firing at them, probably because his weapon had run out of power, but he wasn't getting any closer. And soon, this street would come to an end and split up into several others. If he didn't see where they would go, he could lose them altogether.

His fear became real as he saw the three people he was chasing all dart into a different direction. His mind raced. The Kiffar looked like the hired gun, and he doubted he was carrying the scrolls.

"Take the girl," he yelled at Rhiaen. A moment later, he turned left in pursuit of the man. He figured if either of the two humans was holding the scrolls, it would be the man.

Rhiaen considered her options. If they split up to follow both humans, the odds of getting the scrolls would increase. On the other hand, the odds the male was carrying them were larger than the odds the female was. Something Connor had obviously figured out too, as he had picked to follow the man. She decided to ignore Connor and pursue the man as well, and so she, too, turned left.

"I told you to go after the girl!" Connor yelled as he realized Rhiaen was still with him.

"I don't take orders from you," Rhiaen retorted. "Besides, I'm not letting you get your hands on those scrolls!"

Connor cursed. Blasted woman. Bit that was for later, getting his hands on the man running a few hundred meters in front of him would be his first task.

Sometimes fortune favors you instead of your adversary. It is a lesson that Connor learned twice that day.

First, when only a few moments later, the man, looking behind him to see how much ahead he was, didn't notice a small child playing on the street. The man collided with the child and fell down face first onto the street. The child started screaming, and Jek got up. He tried to resume his run, but a strong Force shove pushed him back down onto the street. Moments later, Connor and Rhiaen were on top of him. Connor grabbed Jek's coat and turned him over on his back. Quickly his hands went through Jek's coat, and found what he was looking for. He grabbed the scroll and held it before him. Connor smiled.

A quick light saber cut ended his smile though. Rhiaen towered over him and looked down as Connor's lifeless body slumped over Jek, who started screaming. Rhiaen grabbed the scrolls, kicked Connor's body off of the man, and looked him straight in the eyes. The man stopped his scream, too scared to utter a sound.

"Where is the rest," Rhiaen asked him calmly, as the tip of her light saber touched Jek's right shoulder. Jek screamed again.



# DRESHDAE

MAIN STREET

14:45 LOCAL TIME

Dempsey stopped running as she hit a fork in the road. The main road split into four. Only one path would lead her to Connor, Rhiaen, and her targets. She cursed as she looked down each road for a second. Then she made up her mind, and took the road on her right.

Dempsey ran down the road, hoping she was gaining on Connor and Rhiaen. If she had picked the wrong road, or if they'd gone into one of the houses, she probably wouldn't find them again. She had to be right.

Dempsey ran for two minutes, when she spotted something on the ground in the distance. She grabbed her light saber and ignited it, reaching out with her senses. She sensed no danger at all, but decided to keep her light saber at the ready anyway.

A few moments later, she reached what she had seen. On the ground was the lifeless shape of a woman. Dempsey immediately recognized her as the woman from the cantina. A single blaster hole adorned her forehead. Dempsey deactivated her light saber and bent over the woman. She could smell the burning flesh and realized it couldn't have been more than half a minute since she had died. She looked at the wound. The blaster would have to have been only centimeters from the woman's forehead when it went off, Dempsey realized.

Which meant she had chosen the wrong road. Rhiaen and Connor wouldn't have done this. Perhaps one of the others the woman had been with, but Dempsey dismissed the thought. No, it had to have been someone else.

Dempsey stood up and reached out with her senses, but felt nothing. She cursed, turned around, and started running back.

# DRESHDAE

DIRT ROAD OFF MAIN STREET

14:55 LOCAL TIME

"I can keep this up all day, you know," Rhiaen told Jek. "And I will keep this up all day until you answer my question."

Jek screamed again as Rhiaen's boot pushed down on the burn wound on his shoulder. Even if he wanted to answer her, the pain wouldn't let him. It screamed through his brain and paralyzed his thoughts. He couldn't even muster enough energy to realize he had bitten off something too large for him to handle this time. Somewhere deep down, a part of him hoped Beli had gotten away. He didn't care much about Jaless, he never had liked the Kiffar. But Beli...

"Let's try this again," Rhiaen said. "Try to cooperate this time, will you?" Again she pressed the tip of her light saber down and this time she cut into Jek's thigh. Then she put her boot onto the fresh wound. "Or perhaps I should try somewhere else."

Her only response was another agonizing scream.

"You know, he's never going to be able to say anything this way," a voice said behind her. Rhiaen spun around, light saber at the ready. Before her stood the Kiffar. "Why don't we join forces?" he asked. "I have part of what you want, and he knows where the rest is. If you will let me talk to him, I can get him to tell you where the rest is."

"Why would I do that?" Rhiaen asked.

"Simple," the Kiffar replied. "You obviously don't have the finesse to get him to talk. The way you're going at it, he will be dead before he can even say a word. The stuff is worth a lot, I want half. You can have the scrolls, I get the money."

Rhiaen pondered the Kiffar's words. There was something logical about what he said. Despite her efforts, Jek still hadn't said a word. And she could always kill the Kiffar afterwards. She stepped aside, and gestured towards Jek.

"He's all yours," she said.

# DRESHDAE

DIRT ROAD OFF MAIN STREET

15:00 LOCAL TIME

Dempsey reached the fork in the road and stopped running. Partly to catch her breath for a moment, partly to make up her mind. There were still three roads to choose from. And every moment she delayed, Rhiaen, Connor and the human were getting further and further away.

For ten seconds she stood at the crossroads. Then she made up her mind and started running again.

She ran for another two minutes. While there hadn't been any houses on this street for awhile, she could see another house appearing on her right. She slowed a bit, considering whether or not to ask the inhabitant if he had seen anyone. Her thoughts raced, until it felt she ran into a wall. She stopped dead where she was as she tried to refocus. An overwhelming sense of fear came over her. She looked towards the houses on her right, and realized it was definitely coming from inside. Slowly she approached the house, and she saw another body lying in the street. Or actually, two bodies this time. One she could recognize from several feet away. There was no mistaken Connor Grey.

As she approached, she saw the light saber slash across Connor's back. The cooperation between him and Rhiaen had obviously not been a profitable one for him. Dempsey didn't feel too sorry for him. You should never trust a Jedi. As she turned, she looked at the other body. It was the man she had seen in the cantina. She could see light saber wounds all over his body, but none of them had killed him. As his female companion, a single blaster bolt through the forehead had ended his life. This one, too, had been fired from very close range.

Dempsey quickly went through the man's pockets, but found nothing. She wasn't surprised. The light saber wounds would have to have been delivered by Rhiaen, and she would have searched the body as well. But it was obvious there was yet another party involved. She still didn't think Rhiaen would have used a blaster to kill someone.

Dempsey pondered for a moment. There was, of course, the Kiffar. He was an unknown factor. Deciding she had better be careful, Dempsey resumed her run.

# DRESHDAE

DIRT ROAD OFF MAIN STREET

15:06 LOCAL TIME

Rhiaen and Jaless were running back towards the center of Dreshdae. They had taken another road, not wanting to run into anyone. Rhiaen realized there was a good chance that Dempsey had followed them, and Rhiaen wanted to avoid the Dark Jedi.

While on her way, she wondered when the Kiffar would attempt to kill her. She had seen his eyes as he pulled the trigger and killed Jek. There was no emotion in the Kiffar. No empathy, no regret, no conscious. She doubted he would willingly share. For now though, she needed him. He knew exactly where Jek had hidden the remaining scrolls. As a gesture of good faith, the Kiffar had given her the scrolls he had had on him, as well as the one piece of paper Jek had carried. Without the rest though, they were worthless. Half a ritual was infinitely more dangerous than a complete ritual, even one as crazy as the immortality thing Ashen was after.

After a few minutes, the pair reached a small warehouse near the spaceport. They stayed close to the shadows, hiding themselves from view. As they slowly moved towards the warehouse doors, Rhiaen took in her surroundings. By the time she reached the door, she had the entire place committed to memory. One by one, the two slipped through the door into the warehouse.

It was empty.

Rhiaen froze. So did the Kiffar.

"I thought this place was supposed to be packed with crates," she whispered.

"It is," the Kiffar answered. "This cargo is set for shipment in five days. The freighter hasn't even arrived here yet."

Suddenly the lights flashed on, and Rhiaen quickly raised her arms to shield her eyes from the blinding light. She wasn't fast enough, and a flash of pain shot through her as her eyesight disappeared and was replaced with flashes. She felt a cringe and heard a thud, and realized the Kiffar had hit the ground. She knew he was dead. Then she felt a strong pain on the back of her head, and the flashes before her eyes were replaced by darkness.

# DRESHDAE

## SPACE PORT WAREHOUSE

17:25 LOCAL TIME

Dempsey crept into the warehouse. It had taken her hours to return to the city center and track Rhiaen. Fortunately, the Jedi and the Kiffar were quite noticeable, and she was able to learn where they had went. Some citizens helped her freely, and some needed a little help from the Force. In the end, they always gave her what she wanted to hear.

The trail had led to this warehouse. Her last informant had seen the Kiffar and the Jedi enter through this very door. And so, Dempsey followed.

The warehouse was empty. She had expected a lot of crates. After all, the man she had spoken to had said the warehouse was packed with cargo for a freighter that was due here tomorrow. Instead there was nothing.

Well, almost nothing.

As her eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, Dempsey saw something lying on the floor. She unclipped her light saber, and walked towards the object. She quickly realized it was the body of a man, and most likely the Kiffar. As she reached him, she saw it was indeed the Kiffar. She rolled him onto his back, and went through his clothes. She removed a blaster pistol from his coat, but found nothing else. Not entirely unexpected. She looked at the blaster a little closer, and saw it was a likely candidate for the weapon that had killed the other two in the Kiffar's party.

"So, you betrayed them, and now someone betrayed you," she said. "What a surprise."

Dempsey got up and sighed. She saw no visible wounds on his body, and wondered what had killed him. There were no light saber wounds on him anywhere. So this wasn't Rhiaen's work. She turned, and started back for the exit when her foot hit something. She bent down and picked it up. She raised her eyebrows.

"Now this is interesting," she said.

In her hands, she held Rhiaen's light saber. Dempsey looked around. She knew Rhiaen would have never left it behind voluntarily. No Jedi would leave his light saber behind like this. Dempsey tucked the light saber into her belt, and continued for the exit. She didn't like to admit it, but the hunt was over. With all parties involved dead or taken, there was nothing left to chase. She could try of course, but Dempsey didn't like the odds.

No, this mission was a bust.