The sun was on the verge of setting and a small fire crackled in the clearing Torin Ardell and Fenn Prisk’fey had chosen to rest in for the night. Torin stared across the flames at the Bothan Jedi seated there and began to think on how similar their lives had been. Both had been born on New Tython, Fenn in Menat Ombo and Torin in the Melewati compound. Both had come to the Force late in life, after their twentieth birthday, though the Force came much more easily to the Bothan. They had been at the Praxeum at the same time and, while they hadn’t been exactly friends they were at least friendly to one another.

“Fenn,” Torin said breaking the silence “why did you leave?”

Looking up from the meat he was devouring Fenn replied “Leave? Leave what?”

“The Clan” Torin answered.

He sat quietly for a moment before replying. “When I went out there I had every intention of returning but after hearing Mar speak about what the Order’s goals where it spoke to me and I just knew I had to be a part of it.”

They sat in silence for a while after that until Fenn rolled himself up in a sleep roll and dropped off into sleep. Torin sat there for a while watching the Bothan’s chest rise and fall and pondering the change in him since he’d first entered the jungle in search of the Order. He’d always been cocky but that cockiness had transformed into self-confidence and he seemed surer of himself and his abilities than ever. With those thoughts ricocheting around his head Torin rolled over and tried to get some sleep.

What seemed like only moments later he felt a hand on his shoulder shaking him gently from sleep. “Mmmm, five more minutes Kiera” he said sleepily.

“Come on lover boy” said Fenn with a chuckle. “Sun’s up and we need to get moving.”

Rubbing his eyes Torin picked himself up off the ground and said “Please don’t tell anyone I said that.”

“Come on the village is this way. We should be there in an hour or so” Fenn said as he strode of into the jungle.

As the pair made their way through the thick jungle Torin took in his surroundings. So different to the open forests and mountains of his home this jungle was thick and swampy, the heat and humidity stifling. All around were the sounds of insects and birds, reptiles and amphibians all buzzing and squawking and croaking a symphony of sound that seemed to come from every direction at once. It was slow going, Fenn using his lightsaber to clear a path through the undergrowth.

Eventually they broke through the jungle into a clearing populated by a small village built on stilts in the middle of a small body of water. To call it a lake would be generous, it was more of a swamp than anything. As the natives caught sight of the pair they hurried back to their homes, slamming doors and shuttering windows to keep them at bay. From within the largest of the huts an old Harakoan stepped forward, a large club clutched in his gnarled hand.

Stepping forward Fenn raised his hands and said “Easy friend, we mean no harm.”

The old Harakoan raised his club high and shouted something in his native tongue. Fenn was about to say something when Torin put his hand on the Bothan’s shoulder and stepped past him speaking to the old man in a fair approximation of his native tongue. The Harakoan seemed to falter for a moment before he lowered the club and spoke again.

“What’s he saying?” asked Fenn.

“Gimme a minute, my Harakoan isn’t great” replied Torin.

The pair exchanged a few more disjointed sentences before the Harakoan pointed off to the west, turned around and headed back to his hut. Turning back to the Bothan Torin said “He said they had an encounter last night, nobody was injured. He said the next morning they found tracks heading west into the jungle.”

“Can you find the tracks?” queried Fenn.

Torin gave him an indignant look and headed off to the west. He began to search the jungle floor for the tracks the old man had mentioned and after a few minutes of searching found a large paw print in some mud. It was large, easily 10 inches across, with a large centre pad and five distinct toe pads each with the tell-tale sign of a large claw digging through the mud. To Torin it appeared as if some species of large cat had been through the area but whether or not it was the Harakoan beast of legend still remained to be seen. The pair followed the trail of footsteps through the jungle for what seemed like hours until they came upon something neither of them had expected to see. Up ahead, slumped over a fallen tree, was their mystery beast. It was a large cat, unlike anything either had ever seen before, with a short coat of jet black fur.

As they cautiously approached the now dead beast they got their first real good look at it. It was huge, easily bigger than any feline predator they had seen, measuring about eight and a half to nine feet long and weighing the better part of half a tonne it had a huge pair of scimitar like canine teeth and massive claws extending from its massive paws. Clearly it had died in last few hours but what wasn’t as obvious is what had killed it. Torin began to search the body for any obvious signs of death when Fenn called him over.

“Look” said the Bothan pointing to something on the ground. There it the dirt and mud were several sets of boot prints heading off into the jungle.

Looking up at Fenn Torin said “I don’t need the Force to tell me the owners of these boots had something to do with this. Let’s go.”

They took off into the jungle following a trail even a child could follow until, as the sun began to dip low in the sky, they came upon a small camp in a clearing. There were a dozen men of various species milling around a large campfire chatting and laughing amongst themselves. On the far side of the camp sat four or five large cages, empty now but each easily large enough to accommodate the beast they had seen in the clearing.

Without warning Fenn stepped from cover and approached the camp. Pulling his lightsaber from his belt he ignited both of the emerald coloured blades and said “In the name of the Order of Force Ascendants I demand you throw down your arms and surrender immediately.”

The men around the fire were momentarily caught off guard by the Bothan’s sudden appearance but one of their number seemed to come to his senses faster than the others and raised a large rifle, drawing a bead of the Bothan. Just before he could fire a bolt of energy leapt from the shadows and struck him in the face before punching a fist sized hole in the back of his skull.

Torin strode from the shadows, his A-280 raised to his shoulder, and said “Do as he says boys, nobody else needs to die here tonight.”

The men complied, some faster than others, until all were disarmed. Fenn bound their hands with some rope he found lying about and turned to Torin. “What do you think there doing out here? And what are the cages for?”

Shrugging Torin replied “My guess is those cages had more of those cats in them. These guys probably paid big money to come out here and hunt them, just look at their gear. This is top of the line stuff.”

“Keep an eye on them, I’ll contact the Order for reinforcements. If there are more of those cats out there we need to find them and fast” Fenn said as he wandered off to contact his people. Fenn was right, if more of those cats were out there it was going to get a lot worse before it got better.