Seridan tilted his head, and looked down at the metal spike protruding from his chest. He didn't feel it - only a dull ache indicated that anything had happened at all. That still bugged him - the not knowing. Being aware of your ignorance always had sat wrong with him. How could he heal himself without conscious effort? Could he die? Would age still claim him?

He slumped his head back onto the cool concrete, and directed his attention back up to the ledge he had just fallen from. There was a small pair of eyes staring down at his prone body through the darkness. They glinted with terror. It was likely an unintentional shove, then. What assassin is fearful when they push someone from a great height? Not professionals, and generally, they were the only ones that could come close enough to him to attempt anything. That said, he had been distracted.

'They wanted to rob me, not kill me. Huh,' he thought to himself. 'I'll leave a few coppers on the floor when I leave, then.'

He waited until the eyes disappeared, then twisted his arms round to give him the leverage he needed to push himself free. The friction was the most unnerving part - the tugging of the spike against his insides. He dipped a hand into his coin pouch and let a few drop to the floor. As he waited for his chest wound to congeal and then knit itself together, he surveyed the construction site around him. This late at night, no-one was near - just the few people who use the high scaffolds as a hidden highway in the night.

As the ache faded, he set off. His target tonight was Jul Satrios, a Duros shop owner. Recently, he'd started stocking some rare equipment, and Odan-Urr wanted it. He had been crossing the rooftops, but now that he was street-level, the alleys were a fine alternative - there was just less flexibility of movement. Some had moaning people trying to sleep, whilst others had groups of people. They would either be intoxicated, giggling to themselves, or waiting for some unsuspecting passer-by to wander through. Seridan *was* suspecting, so he always cloaked himself when he passed such groups.

The shop was on the next street. It had a small, unassuming shop front, with a miscellany of items in the window. Closed, of course - that was the trouble of conducting business in the small hours. The door to Satrios' residence was on the second level of the building, with a ladder around the side of the shop.

The side of the shop was dark, though. You notice things like that when you can't properly see light. It was darker than the other alleyways, with no discernible reason. Seridan tossed a coin forward, and waved it around a bit in the core of the blackness. It wasn't long before a soft yelp sounded.

Seridan called softly, but with steel in his tone, "I see the blackness. I hear your yelp. Who are you?"

The blackness held, but a female voice spoke with a deep contralto voice, "Madi. Good intentions. Who are you?"

"Phalanx," Seridan replied. "Private emissary for a noble house."

"Pardon me, but that’s fodder. You fell sixty feet only 20 minutes ago. Not to mention that coin trick you just did."

"Why can't emissaries be allowed to know a few magic tricks? It helps us out in cantinas, I can tell you. And as for falling," he paused, "I think I'd remember something like that."

"Drop the act. You have the Force. You cloaked yourself in some of those alleyways. You survived a fall onto a spike. You see my Force blackness. You see through the Force, dammit - you're one of those Mirialuns."

"Miraluka – we’re quite rare now, I understand. Just because I use the Force to help me see doesn't imply anything else. A lifetime on the streets with enable you to avoid detection. I have no idea about this fall you keep mentioning. I have business with the owner of this shop. I trust you not to use your own Force talents to hinder --"

His monologue was interrupted by the sound of a blaster. The Miraluka turned to the side and stepped back as a red bolt flew past.

"The Force gives reflexes like that, I understand. Why are you hiding it?"

"Why are you so interested?"

The blackness started to melt away, and the same pair of eyes he'd seen earlier looked out from a Twilek's face.

"I thought I'd killed you," Madi said. "Yet here you are, with nothing but a torn robe. How long have you been studying Force healings?"

"First off - and this isn't me admitting anything - but what faction do you align with?" Seridan had basically admitted to everything in that one statement, but the girl looked honest enough, and her Force aura wasn't contaminated with anything evil-looking.

"I apprenticed with the Dark Brotherhood a few weeks ago."

"Then may I praise the strength of your Force Blackness - it is almost abnormally powerful."

"I had to use that before, often."

"May I discourage you from the Brotherhood, though. There are shifts in power going on in the highest places, and its soon going to reach critical mass."

"Who are you with, then? Do they teach healing?"

"You've probably heard of the Lotus by now. I recently re-joined them."

Madi hesitated, and seemed to look at Seridan with new eyes, apprehension replacing any admiration that had been there before.

"Up to you. To me they seem to be a safer and more stable. That's part of why I returned."

"It's not that - the Lotus seems to be a good cause. It's just, there were reports that a dangerous anti-Brotherhood leader had disappeared. We were asked to be on the lookout. Phalanx was one of his aliases. Raven was another. Miraluka. Leader of the Kzenoi gang."

Seridan cocked his head. He reached into his pocket and removed a small data chip. He tossed it over to Madi. She seemed intelligent. "On there is information about a teacher who sometimes teaches people from Arcona."

He started walking forward, for the ladder. "I really must go, I'm afraid. I need to buy some spark plugs from this shop's owner."

Madi sidestepped, allowing his to pass. "What makes you think I won't just turn this intel in? Phalanx wasn't known for his mercy."

"Phalanx only dealt with criminals. Raven only lead the group. They were who I needed to be at the time. Seridan was always underneath. Seridan watched, only stepping in when necessary."

"Then who is Seridan?"

"You might give that intel in, but none of it ever goes through. The teacher is very well protected."

Madi nodded, turning slowly. He reached the ladder and started to climb. As Madi was about to disappear from sight, he said softly, "Seridan is me. Seridan is the Jedi."

Madi didn't slow her pace, but the tension of her shoulders relaxed slightly. He allowed himself a small smile, and then he went and knocked slightly on Satrios' window. The window opened immediately with a Durosian face glaring at him, "You could have woken up half the street with that standoff. It doesn't do well for business."

"I apologise. I changed my appearance out there, so I appeared shorter and stouter," not to mention the concealment and cloaking, he added to himself.

"I'd be angrier, if you weren't such good customers. I have your order just here. You have the credits?"

"Right here, minus the 2 coppers it took to get that girl to go away," he smirked.

"Very well - I'll let it slide this time." Jul said in a mock-scolding tone.

"We both know you'll just add it on to our next order."

"Maybe, maybe not." He passed out a flat bag, which Seridan tucked into his robes. "I'll see you next time, Tern."

"See ya," returned Seridan.

As Seridan leapt up to the roof, he sensed someone already up there, waiting. There were similarities to Madi's essence, but somehow different. He pulled himself up and saw a figure standing on the opposite side. Male Twilek, by the look of those lekku. He pulled the shadows around him, and set to sneaking away.

"You tried to convert my sister to the Lotus."

"You tried to have me killed," Seridan guessed, several strands of thought pulling themselves together.

The Twilek turned his head slightly. "It's what you deserve," he spat. "It was to be a defining moment in Madi's journey to Knighthood. Instead you have filled her head with doubts about our Path."

"Have I lured her from the path? Have I made the balance of nature so appealing? Or have you dirtied your road so much that one would prefer a dirt path?

The Twilek turned. "You're just like the rest, zealot. My brothers and I will deal with you, and then Madi will know which one of us is truly superior." He gestured to a huddled figure in the corner, and he recognised the trussed form of the girl he'd met earlier.

"Did you have to truss her? Surely now she will want to escape you more than ever. Come at me, and I will show you the meaning of freedom."

The Twilek grinned, and didn't move.

Two lifeforms revealed themselves to the Miraluka's awareness, uncloaking from behind him. Two scratches of pain flared up inside him - stilettos stabbed into his heart. He fell to his knees. He had to make this look proper, otherwise he'd become a much bigger target than he already was. He let his jaw go slack, his cheeks tightening as if in pain. The Twilek walked forward.

"You live by such rigid rules, Jedi. It makes it easy to creep up on you from the shadows. The brighter a light shines, the sharper the shadows it creates. And now, you die." He started to raise his own stiletto.

Madi's shout reached him, "Phalanx, no!"

Seridan winced.

His attacker paused. "Phalanx? Oh, this is too good. Enjoy your retirement, scum."

Seridan was knee deep in it now. At least one of these men would have to die. He couldn't just pretend to die now - they'd take his body for the bounty. Internally, he sighed. These men were criminals, and Phalanx would have to deal with them.

Phalanx surged upward, spearing himself on the third stiletto and stunning the Twilek with a head butt. He then gathered the Force into his hand, spun, and punched the roof. The resulting shockwave made the other two attackers stumble back - one of them reached the lip of the roof and disappeared over the edge. He tugged out one of the stilettos, lunged forward and plunged it into the knee of the other one, sending him to the ground.

He turned again and started approaching the main Twilek, who had now retreated a few steps, and had a lightsaber in hand.

Phalanx sneered, "I can't die. Something happened, and I am forced to live. Can't you see the freedom in that?"

A red blade hissed as it was ignited. "Demon," he whispered. "There is no freedom in such a thing."

The Miraluka smiled grimly, withdrawing a coin from his pocket. "You're almost right. There is no freedom in it, but it does teach you the meaning of freedom. Freedom -" he sent the coin flying forward, aimed right between the Twilek's eyes. "- is death."

His eyes widened, and the Twilek tried to catch the coin on his blade, but he was too distracted by his victim's apparent invincibility. He fell to the ground. Free.

Seridan fell to his knees, not feigned this time. He looked at the blood, then bowed his head. His hands tenderly removed the remaining stilettos, even though tenderness was unnecessary. He then stood, and approached Madi, untying the knots that held her. Apprehension had returned once more to her features.

"I ask you not to forgive me for what I do when I am Phalanx. Just understand that I am not him all the time. If it is learned I cannot die, I will be far more of a target than I already am. Do as you will, but I ask you not to reveal that. To anyone."

He looked away for a moment, "I'm sorry. Farewell."

Madi stared after him as she rubbed her wrists. She felt inside her robes for the data chip he had given her earlier. Her eyes betrayed nothing, as they should.

A good Inquisitor is always in control of her appearance. A great one can even fool a Jedi with it.