

# STAR WARS

## DARKNESS RISING

4-04: RITUAL & TRADITION

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After dealing with the gang of starship thieves the Udras are left with a clue to the travels of Thal N'Krey. This leads them into Wild Space in search of whatever it was that led the artist beyond the Republic's borders. This leads them to the wreck of a Sith starship that has become the basis of the natives religion and they are not happy with the presence of the Sith's traditional enemies.

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# 1.

*"That's a nice ship." the dock master said to the tattooed man who had just exited the vessel that had just arrived in one of the docking bays that he was responsible for. The appeared human but with the number of near human species that still retained that appearance the dock master did not like to assume anything. Like the man who had just disembarked from it the appearance of the ship had been enhanced with paint on each side of the nose. This showed a naked woman lying on her stomach and smiling, something that the dock master found very appealing, "Did you paint it yourself?"*

*"Yes. That's what I do. I paint. I sculpt. I create." the visitor replied.*

*"And will you be here long?" the dock master asked.*

*"No. This is just a brief stopover while I have my ship serviced and resupplied. Then I will be on my way. I have somewhere else to be. Somewhere I hope to find inspiration." the man told him and the dock master nodded.*

*"Well if you don't mind can I take an image of your ship. I know someone that will be very interested in that artwork." he said.*

*"Go ahead. My art is for all to enjoy." the other man said.*

"Tell me about this ship." Jedi Knight Jayk Udra said as he put a datapad down on the table and slid it towards the man sat behind it. Jayk was one of three beings questioning the man. The other two were Brae Udra, Jayk's padawan and daughter and a man called Tylo Kurrast. Tylo was a former smuggler who as part of a plea deal to keep him out of prison was compelled to provide transport to the Udras while they hunted for the missing kiffar artist Thal N'Krey.

"What ship?" the man responded, glaring at Jayk and ignoring the image on the datapad that showed a starship with prominent artwork painted on the side. This artwork was obviously the creation of Thal N'Krey, being of the woman who had been both his favourite model and girlfriend.

"The ship that you and your friends may have stolen." Tylo added, leaning on the table. The image had been taken from the computer system of an asteroid base operated by a criminal gang who stole starships from surrounding systems. The man sat behind the table was one of the members of this gang that had been taken alive when the jedi, backed up by the police from one of the nearby systems had stormed it.

"I don't know anything about that ship." the man said.

"He's obviously lying." Tylo said, looking at Jayk, "Why not use the old," and he waved his hand, "and make him tell us?"

"We have to respect the due process of law Tylo." Jayk pointed out, "Using the Force to compel an answer would destroy any chance of prosecuting him."

"He's telling the truth anyway." Brae said.

"I didn't sense any deception from him either." Jayk agreed.

Just then the door to the room being used for the interrogation slid open and a woman in the uniform and armour of a police tactical team sergeant entered.

"Yes Sergeant Dayan?" Jayk asked.

"We've found where that ship was Jedi Udra." Dayan answered as she handed Jayk another datapad, "Captain Marshal distributed the images to the surrounding systems and we got a hit on the background. It's a docking bay at the orbital foundry in the Gellen system. About sixteen parsecs from here."

"That's excellent news. Is there any word on the owner?" Jayk asked.

"Not yet sir. The local authorities are checking though." Dayan said.

"Sixteen parsecs, now we've got the *Swift Exit* back we can be there in under an hour." Tylo commented and Jayk nodded.

"Yes, that's a good idea." he said before he looked at Sergeant Dayan, "Sergeant, could you have Captain Marshal call ahead and tell them to expect us?"

The Gellen system lacked planets with environments that could support human or similar life and only the presence of precious minerals had brought any settlers here at all. Surface conditions on the primary world were so destructive though that even a sealed and environmentally regulated colony was judged to be impractical and instead orbiting space stations were used to keep the necessary facilities safe while mining vessels fitted with easily replaceable ablative armoured hull panels would be sent down for short periods. As soon as the *Swift Exit* dropped out of hyperspace the freighter was scanned and contacted by the local authorities.

"Attention approaching vessel. Can you confirm that you are the *Swift Exit* out of Coruscant?" a voice said.

"Sounds like Captain Marshal did what you asked and let them know that we were coming." Tylo

commented, glancing at Jayk.

"Yes, that's promising." Jayk said as he reached out to activate the *Swift Exit's* transmitter, "This is the *Swift Exit* out of Coruscant. I am Jedi Knight Jayk Udra and we request permission to dock at the foundry platform."

"Confirmed *Swift Exit*. You have been cleared for docking. Set your navigation to follow beacon Trill Herf Xesh one-one-three-eight."

"Thank you control. *Swift Exit* out." Jayk said.

"I've got the beacon. Taking us in now." Tylo said.

The orbiting foundry was among the largest of the space stations around the planet that gave the system its name, and was fitted not only with numerous internal docking bays but also multiple external docking ports for larger vessels to be able load and unload goods from the station directly.

The beacon led the *Swift Exit* directly to one of the internal docking bays and as the ship passed through the magnetic field that maintained its internal atmosphere Jayk and Tylo saw a pair of station security officers stood watching it land while more security officers were visible through the viewport of the control booth.

"I've got a bad feeling about this." Tylo said.

"You can stay here if you want. Brae and I can deal with them." Jayk suggested.

"Hell no, if I do that then I won't know what's going on and from what I've learned with you is that what I don't know can very easily hurt me." Tylo replied.

As the two men made their way to the cargo hold where the *Swift Exit's* access ramp was located they passed through the lounge where Brae sat on the floor meditating while the holographic image of a man in Jedi robes watched over her.

"How's she doing Cal?" Tylo said.

"Brae is maintaining a reasonable level of concentration." the hologram replied.

"Reasonable?" Brae said, opening her eyes and looking up at Cal, "What do you mean 'reasonable'?"

"I mean that you can be distracted by a simple comment." Cal said.

"Never mind that now Brae. We've arrived and there are people waiting for us." Jayk told Brae.

"Security officers." Tylo added.

"Security. What's wrong?" Brae asked as she got to her feet and grabbed her cloak.

"That's what we're going to find out kid." Tylo answered.

The two station security officers had moved to stand at the bottom of the access ramp as Jayk, Brae and Tylo all walked down it together.

"Officers I am Jedi Jayk Udra." Jayk announced, "This is my padawan Brae Udra and our pilot Captain Tylo Kurrast."

"Brae Udra. Any relation?" one of the security officers commented.

"It's complicated." Tylo responded.

"If we could get down to business." the other security officer said, "Jedi Udra this is Constable Lenner and I am Superintendent Follan, I'm in charge of security for Besh Shift here on the foundry."

"I notice that you have a lot of your men here superintendent." Jayk said, looking up at the control booth.

"Yes well we're running things here right now. We have the dock master in custody." Follan replied.

"Custody? What for?" Brae asked.

"He's suspected of being an accessory to multiple incidents of theft of starships." Lenner answered.

"The data provided by Captain Marshal led us to the dock master. We found communication records and payments to his accounts from off world that he couldn't account for. Right now we're going over every computer he had access to just in case there is any more evidence in any of them." Follan said.

"Master look up there." Brae said and she pointed to the wall of the docking bay where markings were painted.

"Yes, those match the markings on the wall behind Thal N'Krey's ship in the images we saw." Jayk said.

"So this is the docking bay where his ship was stolen from?" Tylo added.

"Oh we don't have any record of the ship registered to Thal N'Krey being stolen." Follan said and he looked at his datapad, "I had to look up the immigration records to find him but he made no attempt to hide his identity. Thal N'Krey, a kiffar who listed his occupation as an artist. He came here ten years ago, stayed for six days and then left. With his ship."

"Ten years. That's two before he vanished." Tylo pointed out and Jayk nodded.

"Superintendent do you require vessels to log flight plans?" he asked.

"Of course. Mind you after they leave here there's no guarantee that a captain will stick to what he's told us." Follan replied.

"And do you have the flight plan that Thal N'Krey logged?" Jayk added.

"No, not to hand. But I can check with our records office and find out if it's available." Follan told him.

"Thank you superintendent, that would be appreciated. Please deliver what you have to our ship." Jayk replied.

## 2.

Brae entered the *Swift Exit's* lounge to find Jayk sat at the table reading from a datapad.

"Is that from station security?" she asked and Jayk looked up from the datapad and at her.

"Yes. They've been very thorough in their research." he replied, "Not only have they provided us with the flight plan that Thal filed with them before departure they have also included the point of origin he declared on arrival and contacted that planet to confirm his presence there."

"What does that tell us?" Brae said.

"It tells us that Thal N'Krey told the truth about his travels so there is no reason to suspect that he lied about where he was going." Jayk explained.

"So we can track him. This is the first time we've been able to pin him down like this. Now we can follow every step-" Brae began.

"Unfortunately we cannot track Thal by the flight plans he logged." Jayk interrupted.

"Why not?" Brae said, frowning.

"Because the planet that he logged as his destination after leaving Gellen is not in the Republic." Jayk told her.

"So is it the sort of place that isn't going to keep records of who comes and goes?"

"Unlikely. The planet is primitive and inhabited by feudal tribes who haven't even mastered motorised ground transport, let alone interstellar travel."

"So going there would be a waste of time." Brae said, sighing.

"Perhaps not." Jayk said before he looked towards the centre of the room, "Cal." he said and the image of his and Brae's ancestor Cal Udra appeared.

"I assume you're asking what I've found out about the planet Navan." Cal said.

"If you wouldn't mind." Jayk replied.

"All the stored knowledge of a jedi knight and now look what I'm reduced to. I'm a damned tourist information centre." Cal said, "Oh well, here goes. Navan was first catalogued in the aftermath of the Great Hyperspace War when the Republic were chasing the retreating Sith forces all over the galaxy. A few of the Sith made it out into Wild Space where they tried to hide among the primitives on Navan."

"Tried?" Brae commented.

"Yes, something happened to them there that meant they were dead by the time a Republic task force arrived. I don't know what exactly, old military records are difficult to access now that the Republic barely has a military to speak of." Cal said.

"Damn that pesky galactic peace hey?" Tylo commented as he entered the lounge at that moment and headed for the fridge, "Anyone else fancy a beer?" he added.

"You may have one if you want. I need to set the nav computer for a jump into Wild Space. Brae can fly the ship if you like. She needs the practice." Jayk said and Tylo suddenly closed the fridge door and turned around.

"Whoa there a moment. Did you just say Wild Space? Since when are we heading for Wild Space?" he said.

"Since that is where Thal N'Krey went." Brae replied.

"Oh great. Wild Space. You know that there's a reason why it's called 'wild' don't you?" Tylo said.

"Nevertheless, that is where we are going." Jayk told him and he sighed.

"I've got a very bad feeling about this." he said.

*Surrounded by a dozen of the local warriors, grey skinned near humans clad in animal skin clothing and wielding primitive axes and spears and one of their priests Thal N'Krey made his way through the forest. The natives led him to the top of a steep slope where the priest pointed along the deep furrow in the ground in front of them at the strange shape visible further along it. Although it was partially overgrown there was no mistaking the fact that what was being pointed out to Thal was not only artificial in origin but was also something that the natives could not possibly have constructed themselves, being thousands of years too primitive in technological development.*

*The priest was pointing out the remains of a Sith starship and he spoke a few words in a language that Thal was just beginning to comprehend after years of studying it mainly in a written form. The priest was speaking the language of the Sith. Thal could not understand every word that the priest spoke but he understood enough to know that he was telling the artist that the ship was where 'they' had come from. He did not name specifically who 'they' were but Thal knew that the priest meant the Sith who had been driven here by the Republic so long ago.*

*"Show me." he said, pronouncing the Sith words carefully. The priest then addressed the warriors in their*

own language and they all turned around before heading back towards the settlement they had come from. Access to the ship was limited only to a select few and for the warriors it was forbidden. With only Thal and the native priest left, the priest began to climb down the slope and Thal started to follow him.

"How are you Tylo?" Jayk asked from the co-pilot's seat in the *Swift Exit's* cockpit.

"Fine. How long until we drop out of hyperspace?" Tylo responded over the intercom.

"About three minutes." Brae said as she checked the instruments in front of her, "Are you sure you want to be in the turret when we arrive?"

"Yes I'm sure. You fly the ship and I'll be ready just in case this trip beyond Republic space goes as well as the last time. Do you remember me almost being shot down and you two burned at the stake?" Tylo said.

"Ugh. Don't remind me." Brae commented and then an alarm sounded from the console, "Okay, we're coming up on the Navan system. Two minutes to realspace."

"Laser cannon is ready." Tylo responded.

Two minutes later the bright tunnel of light that was hyperspace shifted into the stars of realspace and Brae smiled as she spoke into the intercom again.

"Tylo are you seeing this? There's a lot of nothing out there to be shot at." she said.

"Ha ha, very funny kid. You just get us into orbit around Navan and I'll keep watch. Who knows what the Sith left here?" Tylo responded.

"Navan is half a million kilometres, thirty degrees to port." Jayk added and Brae nodded as she turned the *Swift Exit* towards the planet.

The planet Navan had the blue and green appearance that many of the worlds habitable by humans and other similar species had. However, unlike the more advanced planets of the Republic this world lacked the grey of urban development and the mass of space stations and satellites in orbit around it.

"I'm not reading anything in orbit. No debris from any battles or anything." Brae said as she checked the ship's sensors.

"No, there were no space battles here Brae." Jayk reminded her, "They made their landing on the surface before Republic forces caught up with them. In any case we are talking about events that took place well over four and a half thousand years ago, a millennium before even Cal was a Jedi knight."

"So how do we figure out where to land?" Brae asked, "There aren't any beacons or landing strips. The natives don't even have atmospheric flying vehicles to have transport hubs for."

"Think Brae, Thal came here most likely looking for something related to the Sith. All we need to do is search for what he searched for." Jayk said and Brae frowned.

"But what was that?" she said.

"The Sith did not simply teleport themselves across space to get her Brae. Thal would have looked for the ship that they arrived in." Jayk told her, "Or possibly an escape pod if their ship was damaged. A wreck in orbit would have long ago fallen into the atmosphere and burned up. The debris would be scattered but an escape pod or an intact ship would show up as a concentration of alloys far more advanced than what the natives are capable of producing."

Brae smiled.

"Starting surface scans now." she said as she began to set the *Swift Exit's* sensors to search for the alloys used in starship construction.



### 3.

*There was an open hatch at the rear of the Sith vessel where it protruded from the ground and a ramp of compressed dirt led up to this to provide easy access. It was obvious to Thal that the ship had crash landed here, creating the deep groove in the ground as it skidded along and hurling debris into the air that then fell back down to partially bury the ship. Taking a glow rod from his bag Thal shone it through the hatch and he smiled as he heard the priest gasp in wonder at what Thal considered a basic device. Climbing inside the ship Thal took out his datapad while he waited for the priest to follow him and called up a floor plan of the ship. Enough of this class of vessel had been studied by the Republic's engineers that complete design blueprints existed for them if someone knew where to look and Thal knew where to look, having started out his quest by exhausting all of the Republic's publicly available information on the Sith before starting to gather his own.*

*This meant that by the time the priest was aboard Thal already knew which way he wanted to go and he set off, making his way through the pitch black passageways with the priest still following close behind him. Along the way he passed by numerous sets of remains of the crew. Having been in the ship undisturbed for thousands of years these had long since decayed to the point where all that was left were piles of bones among clothing and it was from the design of this clothing that Thal was able to tell which caste each of the dead Sith had belonged to.*

*Without any need of prompting from the priest Thal found his way to the starship's bridge and he grinned as he shone his glow rod over the walls, largely ignoring the control panels and instead focusing on the supporting struts set into the walls that were covered in engravings in the Sith script. Pointing his glow rod towards the front of the chamber he saw that the viewports were still intact after the crash, blast shields had been lowered over them on the outside to protect them.*

*"Amazing," he said, being careful to stick to words he knew in the Sith language so that the priest would be able to understand him. Then he set his bag down on the floor and took out a chemical light stick, activating this to provide a source of omnidirectional light that illuminated the entire room and once again the priest looked in wonder at the tiny rod that produced light without flame. Meanwhile Thal took an old fashioned sketchbook from his bag, along with a box of brushes and some paints. Then he looked carefully at one of the struts, focusing on the engraving in it and he began to paint.*

"Dad, I think I've found something." Brae said and Jayk looked at the sensor display.

"Yes, I see it." he said, "A large mass of quadrillium alloy."

"Used for starship hulls and needing a plasma furnace to create." Brae added, "So unless the locals have stumbled across nuclear fusion technology then it has to have come from off world. A ship."

"Most likely, yes. That is where we will start our search. What is the terrain like?" Jayk asked.

"It looks pretty rough. Lots of vegetation and uneven ground. There are also numerous small thermal blooms from a point less than five kilometres away from the ship."

"Cooking fires. Probably a native settlement. This hemisphere of the planet is in its winter season. Fire will be the natives' only way of keeping warm." Jayk said.

"Should we land there? Perhaps we can ask the natives for help." Brae suggested.

"No. I'd rather avoid the natives if we can help it. I don't want to interfere in their culture and besides, it would probably take longer to find a way of communicating with them than finding out what Thal N'Krey wanted here on our own would." Jayk replied.

"Okay, I'm setting a course to take us into the atmosphere. I'll try and give that settlement as wide a berth as I can." Brae said and Jayk nodded.

"And while you're doing that I'll go and tell Tylo to get ready." Jayk said.

Entering the atmosphere of Navan was straight forwards and with no risk of other air traffic to collide with Brae was able to fly the *Swift Exit* directly towards the source of quadrillium alloy she had detected from orbit. She kept the altitude of the ship high to try and avoid observation from the ground, relying on its sensors to guide her to the quadrillium as well as to provide detailed mapping of the terrain as she hunted for a suitable landing site. It was while she was still in the process of doing this that Jayk and Tylo returned to the cockpit, both of them wearing white cold weather coats while Jayk had another in his hands for her.

"I've brought you a coat." he said, "Have you found us a landing site yet?"

"No, not yet." Brae replied.

"What about that?" Tylo commented as he looked at the sensor display and saw what looked like a large area of level ground and he pointed to it.

"That's not land. It's a frozen lake." Brae told him, "Radar indicates that it's not thick enough to withstand our

engines without melting enough to crack under our weight.”

“That shouldn’t be a problem kid.” Tylo said, “The *Swift Exit* will float anyway and even if the water freezes around us again we can melt through it when we bring the engines back on line to take off.” then he looked at Jayk and added, “We may want to set a few anchor lines just in case though.” and Jayk nodded.

“How far is it from the quadrillium source?” he asked.

“About two kilometres over rough ground.” Brae answered.

“Then take us in.” Jayk ordered.

“Carefully.” Tylo added, “Keep the landing gear up and hover until the ice is melted. Then set us down gently in the water.”

The two men watched as Brae flew the *Swift Exit* in low over the frozen lake and brought the ship to a halt several metres over the ice. Slowly she then reduced altitude over the same spot so that the heat being given off by the freighter’s repulsorlift engines began to melt the ice covering it.

“Easy now. You want the ice to be too weak to bear our weight the moment we touch down.” Tylo warned Brae.

“I know.” she responded, continuing to reduce the *Swift Exit*’s altitude.

There was a bump as the freighter made contact with the ice covering and this was followed almost immediately by a cracking sound as the ice gave way and the *Swift Exit* lurched as it dropped further into the freezing cold water beneath. Looking out through the cockpit canopy the occupants of the *Swift Exit* could see not only the thickness of the ice covering the lake but also the cold, dark water beneath it in a bizarre cross sectional view.

“Okay that’s it. Power down.” Tylo said Brae quickly shut off the freighter’s engines, leaving the vessel floating in the hole in the ice.

“I told you I could do it.” she said and Tylo smiled.

“Don’t get cocky kid. We still need to anchor ourselves. The ship will float but if it flips over we’ll have trouble taking off again.” he said.

“Put your coat on. We’re going outside.” Jayk added, “Cal, keep an eye on the ship for us.”

“Of course.” Cal’s voice responded over the intercom.

The approach of the *Swift Exit* had not gone unnoticed and as it descended over the snow covered terrain the members of a native hunting party heard the sound of its passing and looked up into the sky. Although their technology lagged tens of thousands of years behind that of the Republic they knew of spacecraft from other visitors to their world recorded in their history so they were not afraid when they saw the freighter descending. Such visitors were not common though and this was only the second time in living memory that the planet had been visited so the sight of the *Swift Exit* was of great interest to the hunters.

When the ship disappeared over the horizon the leader of the hunting party pointed in the direction it had gone, noting that it appeared to be heading for the frozen lake. Under the instructions of the party’s leader the natives then split into two groups. Most of them began to head in the direction that the *Swift Exit* had gone while four of them turned around and walked back in the direction the party had come from, heading for the nearby settlement to warn them of the latest unexpected visitors.

Jayk, Brae and Tylo emerged from the *Swift Exit* through the freighter’s dorsal hatch, Jayk and Tylo each carrying a pair of thick syntherope lines that ended in grappling hooks.

“Where do you suggest we fix the lines?” Jayk asked Tylo as the former smuggler looked around.

“Equally around the hull. We can start with one beside the cockpit.” he replied, pointing to where the cockpit assembly extended forwards of the ship’s circular hull.

“Okay Brae, you need to fix the lines when we throw them.” Jayk said and Brae nodded before she clambered across the ship’s hull. As she moved the *Swift Exit* gently rocked back and forth and she reached down to steady herself on the hull as she went.

“Concentrate Brae. You can do this without needing to hold on.” Jayk called out to her as he and Tylo followed her. Like Brae, Tylo steadied himself on the ship’s hull but Jayk remained upright instead, using the Force to sense the motion of the freighter and rocking back and forth himself in time with it to maintain his balance.

“I don’t know, maybe the kid should just be as cautious as possible. This water’s so cold she’ll get hypothermia in seconds if she falls in.” Tylo suggested.

“I’ll be fine.” Brae said as she carefully stood up straight. Closing her eyes she let the Force flow through her, focusing on the back and forth motion of the *Swift Exit* beneath her feet. Then she took a single careful step forwards before opening her eyes again and walking to the edge of the hull.

Looking over the side she saw that there was a gap of about half a metre around the ship between it and the ice and she leapt across this with ease, using the Force again to give her a boost that took her further across the ice so that she cleared the weakened section around the *Swift Exit* and avoided the risk of crashing



through it into the freezing water below.

"Catch kid." Tylo called out from behind her and he tossed a grappling hook towards Brae that she caught with one hand, "Good, now dig it into the ice and I'll tie it off at this end."

Brae did as she was told, using the grappling hook like an axe to hack at the ice until she could get it to stick in and it was then that Tylo pulled the syntherope tight before tying it around part of the *Swift Exit's* hull that looked suitably able to support it.

Tylo was about to throw the second line when he saw that Brae had turned to face away from him and he frowned.

"Hey kid, do you want this in the back of your head? Turn around." he called out to her.

"I don't think that Brae is merely not paying attention Tylo. She's sensed something." Jayk said.

"How do you know?" Tylo asked.

"Because I sense it too. It's not very clear to me but as you know, Brae's ability to sense the Force is far greater than mine." Jayk replied before he looked at Brae and called out to her, "Brae, what can you sense?"

"There's a group of natives over there." Brae replied, looking towards the shore of the frozen lake but avoiding taking any action that would make it obvious to an observer that she knew they were there.

Tylo looked around, trying to assess their location as best he could.

"I think that the quadrillium we detected is in the other direction. Providing the locals won't risk coming across the ice then we can probably make it there ahead of them while they're still circling around. On the other hand if they come straight for us then they'll be on us before we can finish securing the ship." he said.

"I don't want to risk an encounter with the natives if it can be helped." Jayk said and he handed the lines he held to Tylo before drawing his lightsaber and there was a 'snap-hiss' as he ignited the blade.

"Hey, what are you doing?" Tylo exclaimed as Jayk swung the lightsaber down and sliced through the anchor line.

"Get the other lines back inside." the jedi told Tylo as he shut off his lightsaber again, "Then make sure Cal is patched into the flight controls. Have him take off and wait for our signal. It's the only way to guarantee that the locals won't try to gain access to the ship."

"Okay, I get it now." Tylo replied, nodding and as he began to head back to the *Swift Exit's* dorsal hatch Jayk jumped down from the ship's hull onto the ice.

Although the spacecraft was some distance away and largely obscured by ice, the native hunting party could make out the figures moving around on top of and close by it. It was even easier to see the sudden flash of blue when Jayk activated his lightsaber just long enough to sever the anchor line and they ground to a sudden halt when they saw this.

In the same way that the natives were familiar with spacecraft, they also understood that the visitors to their planet often carried advanced weapons as well. However, the reaction of the natives was not one of fear but anger when they saw the lightsaber and regardless of any risk that crossing the frozen lake might bring to them they began to walk across the ice directly towards the *Swift Exit*.

## 4.

"Dad, look." Brae said when she saw the native approaching at the same moment as he landed on the ice and she pointed towards them.

"I've got a bad feeling about this." Jayk said as he looked towards the approaching natives as well.

"They don't very friendly do they?" Brae commented and Jayk shook his head.

"No they don't. Although we should remember that we are trespassing on their planet." he said and then he took out his comlink. "Tylo we need to move. Is Cal ready?"

"All set in here. He'll lift off as soon as we're clear. I've just grabbed a rifle and I'm on my way back out now." Tylo responded.

"Good. The natives are coming this way." Jayk said before he put his comlink back in his coat and then he looked at Brae again, "Come on, we should get moving. Tylo can catch us up." he told her.

The two jedi circled around the hole in the ice and began to make their way towards the shore on the other side. Despite wanting to keep ahead of the natives they walked rather than ran to reduce the risk of losing their balance on the surface of the ice. This meant that when Tylo emerged from inside the ship again they were still relatively close by.

"Hey, wait for me." he called out as he jumped from the hull to the ice. However, unlike the two jedi he had to leap without the benefit of the Force to guide him and as he landed he slipped and fell, sliding across the ice.

"Tylo, are you okay?" Brae asked and he nodded.

"Sure kid. Nothing hurt but my pride." he said as he got back to his feet and wiped his gloved hands against one another to clear them of ice. Then he nodded and added, "After you then."

Tylo was about twenty metres away from the *Swift Exit*, with Jayk and Brae a similar distance in front of him when all of a sudden the freighter's repulsorlift engines roared and there was a cracking sound when more of the ice around the hole broke as the ship rose up into the air.

"Down!" Tylo warned, crouching down and shielding what skin he had exposed as the take off created a spray of freezing cold water. Some of this covered Tylo's back and he knew that it would soon create a layer of ice if it was not removed

Jayk and Brae also ducked but they were far enough away that very little of the spray reached them before the *Swift Exit* was high enough above the water that Cal could bring the repulsorlifts up to full power and take the ship upwards into the sky.

Jayk's comlink then chirped as Cal signalled him and he came to a halt as he took the device from his coat.

"I'm up. All systems running normally. I'll circle around the area and let you know if the ship's sensors spot anything." he said.

"Good. Can you see any more natives ahead of us?" Jayk asked.

"Negative. The sensors are clear ahead of you for now but the terrain isn't very friendly towards airborne scans." Cal answered.

"Understood. We'll signal you to arrange a pick up as soon as we need it." Jayk said before he put the comlink away again.

By this point Tylo had caught up with the jedi and all three of them continued across the ice, glancing back over their shoulders every so often to check on the progress of the natives coming after them. It was easy to see that while the natives were still a significant distance behind them but that they were also keeping pace with the jedi and Tylo. However, this meant that the trio were able to reach the edge of the frozen lake well ahead of their pursuers and from this point on they were able to break into a run across the snow covered ground, unafraid of breaking through ice and plunging into freezing water.

"I take it that you two have noticed that we're leaving a pretty easy trail to follow." Tylo said when he glanced over his shoulder again and saw the footprints behind them in the snow.

"Look, there's a cave up ahead. Maybe it comes out somewhere else. We might be able to throw off the locals in there." Brae responded, pointed to a dark cave opening ahead of them.

"Good idea." Jayk said.

"Yeah, unless it turns out to be inhabited by a hibernating rancor." Tylo commented.

"Just don't wake it up then." Brae said as they turned towards the cave.

The leader of the hunting party called his companions to a halt when the arrival of reinforcements was pointed out to him and he waved his arms at them to attract their attention. The newly arrived force was much larger than the hunting party and was led by a pair of the tribe's shamans. In reverence to these shamans the members of the hunting party all dropped to their knees and bowed their heads until told that they could look up by one of the holy men at which point the leader of the hunting party pointed in the direction that the crew of the *Swift Exit* had gone and spoke a single word.

"Jedi." he hissed and the shaman snarled.

As he took his first step into the cave Tylo drew his heavy blaster pistol in one hand and held his glow rod in the other, using it to light his path. On the other hand both Jayk and Brae simply ignited their lightsabers to provide illumination and protection if it was needed. As was expected the cave was largely free of snow, only a short section near the entrance was covered where the snowfall had been carried in by the wind. After that though the ground was firm and the trio left no significant tracks as they continued deeper into the cave. The cave divided up into different paths after a while and each of the trio looked down a different path for any indication that it might lead back to the surface soon. However, it was not an exit that caught Tylo's attention when the light from his glow rod illuminated one of the walls.

"Hey, take a look at this." he said, walking down the passage and shining his glow rod specifically onto the wall.

"What's wrong?" Brae asked.

"Nothing's wrong, but this doesn't look natural to me." Tylo answered and Jayk and Brae followed him.

There on the wall of the cave passage Tylo's glow rod had revealed some of a set of paintings that looked to have been made a long time earlier. The image that they were looking at showed a large group of stick figures that seemed to represent members of the native population looking upwards while about them a shooting star fell towards them.

"A meteor." Brae said, "Or maybe a comet. Don't a lot of primitive cultures have superstitions about comets?"

"Yes that's true, but in this case I think the explanation is somewhat difficult." Jayk said as he walked further along the passage and saw that the next image seemed to depict some sort of structure that was on fire while a pair of tall figures emerged from it, each one holding something that could have been a stick or a sword had they not been outlined in red with more red lines extending out from them as if to represent bright lights, "I think this is a record of when the Sith arrived on the planet."

"Looks like they sure made an impression then." Tylo added as he looked at the next image along in which what looked to be like a group of native warriors was carrying the Sith above them. After this the paintings showed large groups of natives assembled in front of the Sith, watching while they cut down large native beasts. Next came another group of natives, this time knelt before the Sith in worship and it was at this point that the basic native images were joined by writing. However, this was not in Republic Basic, instead the characters were unmistakably Sith. The final image on the walls showed the Sith lay down while flames burned around them.

"A funeral pyre." Jayk said when he saw this, "I'd say that the Sith were already injured when they crashed. They lived long enough to establish themselves in the native society and gave them a written language, presumably to make it easier for them to be worshipped, but succumbed to their injuries before the Republic caught up with them."

"So do you think that the Sith taught the locals to make candy?" Brae said and Tylo frowned.

"What the hell are you talking about kid?" he responded and when he and Jayk both looked at her she held up a discarded candy wrapper.

"This isn't very badly decayed so it can't be more than a couple of years old." Brae said, inspecting the wrapper, "Plus the sell by date was only a month ago."

"Thal N'Krey was here." Jayk said, "He studied these paintings as well."

"Well they all look intact so he didn't take anything from them." Tylo added as he shone his glow rod along the wall again, searching for any signs that part of it had been chipped away.

"But if the natives based their culture around the Sith then what will they think of us?" Brae asked.

"Brae's right." Jayk said, "I doubt that they would have omitted to tell the natives about the Jedi. They may have been expecting a Republic force to follow them and they would have wanted the natives to fight for them if it came down to that."

"Oh that's just great. It's like that planet where the pirates were posing as gods to impress the primitives. Only the Sith will have had magical powers. I've got a very bad feeling about this." Tylo said.

"We should hurry. I doubt that Thal N'Krey would have limited his visit to just a few paintings. We need to find what's left of the ship that the Sith arrived in and then try to get away before the natives can catch up with us." Jayk said.

"What if they do?" Brae said and she pointed to the paintings on the wall of the cave, "If we go by what's here then they'll be hostile."

"Well I can be hostile right back if it comes down to that. All they have is bows and spears. Hokey religions and ancient weapons are no match for a good blaster at your side kid." Tylo said.

"No. We use violence only as a last resort." Jayk ordered, "We do whatever is necessary to avoid conflict. Perhaps a Republic diplomatic team can follow up our visit and convince the natives of the true nature of the Sith. We are just here to find out what Thal N'Krey came for."

One of the shamans brought the native war party to a halt when they saw that the tracks left by the Jedi and Tylo led into the cave where they had recorded some of their history. The cave itself was not considered sacred and any of the natives were permitted inside but for the enemies of the Sith to have gone inside posed the risk that they would destroy the contents. The shamans leading the war party gathered together to discuss their next move now that they knew the alien visitors had gone inside the cave. The natives were familiar with the layout of the cave system, including the location of the other entrance. They quickly came to the conclusion that the best way to proceed was to split the war party into two equal groups. One of these would proceed inside the cave system and try to track the aliens while the other would continue above ground and head for the other entrance.

## 5.

Tylo halted as he led the way through the cave system and turned off his glow rod.

"Shut down those lightsabers for a moment." he said.

"What for?" Brae asked.

"Because I think I see daylight and want to be sure. Something I can't do with artificial light sources around me." Tylo answered and Brae nodded as she and Jayk both turned off their lightsabers. Sure enough rather than the cave being plunged into total darkness the trio found themselves seeing a light shining from around a corner ahead of them, "I knew it." Tylo added as he walked forwards, heading for the light that indicated a way out of the caves.

Jayk and Brae followed Tylo and just as they reached the mouth of the cave and looked out onto the snow covered ground they both felt a tremor in the Force.

*Danger.*

"Tylo get down!" Jayk yelled and he pushed Tylo out of the way moments before the arrow aimed at the smuggler could hit him, instead passing between the two men.

"Stang!" Tylo exclaimed before there was a shout from outside the cave and a group of native warriors came charging towards it. Most were armed with axes and shields but there were also a pair of archers among them and as they charged they loosed more arrows, "Still keen to avoid using violence Jayk?" he added.

"Perhaps some suppressive fire is in order." Jayk replied.

"Quickly. There are more behind us." Brae said as she turned to look back into the cave and saw the flickering light of burning torches.

Tylo holstered his pistol and unslung his rifle, setting the weapon to fully automatic.

"Ready?" he asked.

"Ready when you are." Jayk told him.

"Then go now!" Tylo snapped and he and the two jedi burst out of the cave and began to run across the snowy ground.

The screaming natives turned to follow them but Tylo opened fire with his blaster rifle and sent a sustained burst of energy blasts in their direction. The weapon was aimed low, however and instead of cutting through the native warriors the blasts struck the ground in front of them. Ordinarily this would have simply blasted chunks of mud and other debris into the air but the extreme heat of the plasma energy at the core of the blaster shots melted and then boiled off the snow to produce a cloud of steam that stopped the natives in their tracks.

"There are rocks over there that are clear of snow. If we can reach them then we won't leave any more footprints." Brae said and she pointed to a rocky outcrop close by.

"Brae we need to cover our trail." Jayk said and both he and his daughter came to a sudden halt and spun around, extending their arms as they unleashed waves of telekinetic energy at the snow on the ground. This ripped up the snow and hurled it into the air, creating a thick cloud that served to block the natives' view even further. Using the combination of steam and airborne snow as cover, Jayk, Brae and Tylo ran for the rocks and climbed up between them before starting to follow the path they took to avoid leaving any more tracks that the natives could follow.

Pausing after a while, Jayk took out his datapad and called up a map of the area that had been generated from the *Swift Exit's* airborne scans so that he could figure out where they were in relation to the source of the quadrillium readings.

"So how far off course has this little diversion taken us?" Tylo asked as he looked around, searching for any signs that the natives had found them again.

"Actually not that far. Just a few hundred metres if I'm reading this right. Look." Jayk said and he showed Tylo the datapad display, "These rocks lead almost all the way to the location of the quadrillium, there's just a short stretch of open ground we have to cover along the way. I suggest we follow them, but keep an eye out for the natives. They probably won't spend forever searching for tracks in the snow and they might figure out how we managed to avoid leaving any more."

The group then continued on their way, climbing between the rocks until they reached a point where the ground ahead suddenly gave way.

"What happened here?" Brae asked.

"I'd say that this is where the Sith landed kid. Although landed is probably being charitable when describing their arrival. I'd say that their ship hit the ground in that direction and then skidded along, ploughing up everything in its path until it finally came to a halt. These rocks were probably thrown up into the air by the force of the impact before coming back down." Tylo said.

Like most of the ground in the area, the trench left by the crash of the Sith starship was covered by a layer of

snow and thanks to this being a sacred place to the natives that few of them were allowed to visit this was undisturbed.

"Well at least we know that no-one arrived here ahead of us to be lying in wait." Jayk commented as he made his way to the very edge of the trench and looked down into it, "And there's their ship." he added, pointing to where the back end of the Sith craft could be seen. This too was largely covered in snow and it made identifying the exact class of vessel impossible from this distance. The snow also covered any obvious entry points and this meant that the trio would have to get closer if they wanted to find a way inside.

"This thing won't be booby trapped will it?" Tylo asked as they carefully made their way down the slope into the gully. With the ground frozen and covered by snow there was a significant chance that they could slip and they stayed close enough together that they could help one another until they reached the relatively flat ground at the bottom where they looked at the portion of the ship still visible.

"Unlikely." Jayk said, "At least the Sith probably won't have set traps to deter visitors. They would have been too eager to escape to waste time building booby traps. Of course the natives might have done something to protect it."

"You mean that if they worshipped the Sith then they might think that the place where they first arrived is sacred ground?" Brae commented and Jayk nodded.

"Exactly. We should take care as we approach. Any traps laid by the natives are likely to be on the outside." he replied. The he waved his hand to send a wave of telekinetic energy at the ground and a large plume of snow was blown aside, leaving a path towards the crashed starship that was almost totally devoid of snow. The trio advanced along this path, watching for anything that looked out of place and might be the trigger for a trap. However, there was nothing to prevent them from reaching the ship and as they got close enough they saw the open hatchway.

"There's our way in." Brae said, "Shall I check it?"

"Go ahead, but be careful." Jayk replied and Brae smiled.

"Hey, it's me." she replied. Then she activated her lightsaber and walked up to the open hatchway where she held out the blade of her weapon and slowly moved it up and down the whole height of the hatchway, confirming that there were no trip wires set in it, "It's clear." she announced and then without waiting to be told she climbed inside the ship, "Wow, you should see this thing." she called out from inside.

"Hang on kid." Tylo responded before he too climbed into the ship and turned on his glow rod, clipping it to the barrel of his rifle to keep both his hands free to hold the weapon, "Wow this place is in need of a clean." he said when he saw the condition of the ship.

"After more than four and a half thousand years of neglect a little dirt is only to be expected." Jayk added as he followed them into the ship and also looked around, "I think that this was a personnel carrier." he commented.

"You can tell that from one corridor?" Tylo asked.

"I'm going off the size of the trench it left in the ground when it crashed. It's about the right size for either a battleship or a personnel carrier. A battleship would have had a large control tower at the rear though, so unless that broke off before impact and burned up then that just leaves the personnel carrier option."

"Okay, so we know what sort of ship it was. Now I take it that we're after the bridge so where do we head?" Tylo asked.

"A good question. Unfortunately this is the first time I've been aboard one of these ships so I don't know." Jayk admitted.

"What about Cal?" Brae asked.

"Was Cal alive when these ships were in use?" Tylo added.

"No. At least not as front line warships in the Republic. The Sith Empire fell a thousand years before he was a Jedi. Though he might have come across them. I'll try contacting him and see what he has to say." Jayk said and he took out his comlink, "Cal can you hear me?" he transmitted.

"Just about. Where are you?" Cal's voice replied.

"Inside the Sith ship." Jayk told him.

"Ah, so you made it." Cal said.

"Yes, I think that it's a personnel transport. Do you know anything about that class of ship?"

"A little. I got aboard a couple in the clean up after a major campaign in the Narthis Sector." Cal said.

"Then can you tell us where the bridge is located?" Jayk asked.

"Of course. It's on the upper surface about half way along." Cal said.

"Excellent, we're on our way. We'll be in touch." Jayk replied and then he turned off the comlink before pointing down the corridor the trio were standing in, "That way." he said.

Although there were no tracks to follow, the leaders of the native war party were confident that they knew where the Jedi were heading. The alien visitors had already visited the caves where the arrival of the Sith was recorded and that just left the site of their landing itself. As the holiest place on the planet the idea that



this would be desecrated by the enemies of the Sith filled the shamans with rage and a decision was quickly made that the usual rule prohibiting anyone other than a shaman from entering the Sith starship would be waved in this case. All that mattered was clearing the ship of the Jedi so the war party, reunified after splitting up to search the caves, headed for the starship as quickly as possible.

Tylo stopped and stared when he entered the bridge ahead of the two Jedi.

"Wow," he said.

"What?" Brae asked as she stepped through the open doorway behind him and then she too looked around in amazement, holding up her lightsaber so that it would better illuminate the room, "Well I think it's obvious that this is where Thal N'Krey came." she added as she looked at the paint that now covered the inside of the bridge viewports. Each pane of transparisteel had been used for a separate image, some of which showed Sith lords in their stylised custom made armour while Thal had chosen to depict natives from this planet in others, "Dahlis would love this." Brae said.

"Do you want me to record any of this?" Tylo said.

"No, I'll do it." Jayk replied, holding out his hand for the recording rod that Tylo carried with him, "I doubt that Thal N'Krey came all the way here just to paint on the windows. Check the flight systems to see if they look to have been tampered with or accessed since this ship crashed."

"Sure. Though what I'm supposed to be able to tell from any of these antiques is questionable." Tylo responded, nodding as he handed over the recording rod.

"What about me?" Brae asked.

"Stand watch. I do not believe that the natives will have given up their search for us and if they get anywhere near the ship they'll see that we came inside." Jayk told her.

With Jayk recording images of the paintings Thal N'Krey had created and Brae keeping watch from the doorway for any signs of the natives Tylo began to check the flight controls of the Sith personnel transport. None of these remained active after more than seventeen centuries since the crash and initially at least it did not appear that they had been tampered with either. However, when he got to a console that resembled a primitive navigator's station he saw that the circuitry had been exposed and loose connectors demonstrated that something had been removed. There was no damage visible to any part of the console or the internal circuitry, suggesting that the removal had been careful and deliberate to protect whatever it was that had been taken.

"This could be something," he said.

"What have you found?" Jayk asked.

"Someone took something from in here." Tylo answered, "From the looks of the vacant space I'd say it was a computer drive of some kind."

"What sort of console is it?" Jayk said as he stopped recording and approached Tylo.

"Navigation I think. It's no where near as advanced as the systems aboard the *Swift Exit* but the general layout gives it away."

"The navigation log." Jayk said, "That's what Thal wanted."

"But why?" Brae said from the doorway, looking towards her father.

"Yeah I don't get it. Why would he need to know about Sith navigation data? The old Sith Empire was absorbed into the Republic wasn't it? Where their systems are is a matter of public record." Tylo agreed.

"Yes but this ship fled from the Republic at the end of the war and that log would have a full record of every system that it visited. Any of those could have some piece of ancient Sith technology that has never been discovered in it."

"So Thal could check them all out and see if there's anything left to turn into artwork for collectors who like owning bits of one of the most oppressive cultures in galactic history." Brae said before all of a sudden she spun around to look out of the doorway again.

"What's wrong kid?" Tylo said.

"They're here." Brae replied.

Each of the shamans knew the layout of the Sith vessel by heart and they directed the nervous warriors directly towards the bridge. Some of the warriors had been nervous about entering the ship that had been off limits to them ever since it had arrived but the shamans had reassured them that the Sith would understand that it was essential for them to go inside to root out the Jedi.

In the confines of the ship the native warriors armed with axes and shields took the lead, using their shields to form a continuous barrier in front of them while the archers remained behind this with the shamans. They made their way through the darkened corridors of the ship until the entrance to the bridge came into sight and from inside this the native war party saw the lights being cast by the devices the alien visitors carried and the shamans urged the warriors onwards.

## 6.

Tylo leant around the door frame and fired two rapid shots from his rifle down the corridor. Rather than aim them directly at the advancing natives he aimed higher so that the bright red energy blasts passed over their heads. However, his demonstration of the power he possessed did not have the effect he had hoped for and although the natives flinched when he fired they did not panic.

"Okay that didn't work. They're still coming. Either of you two got any ideas?" Tylo asked, retreating back into the bridge.

"Escape." Jayk replied.

"Obviously. But how?" Tylo said.

"Just keep them back." Jayk told him.

"And does that include killing them if I have to?"

"If you have to, yes." Jayk said and Tylo grinned.

"It's about time." he said and then he leant back through the doorway and fired his rifle again. This time the weapon was aimed directly at the wall of native shields and the energy blast struck one of these centrally. The primitive wooden shield was useless against a weapon as advanced and powerful as Tylo's blaster rifle and the wood splintered under the assault. The energy blast was not fully absorbed by the disintegrating shield either and it continued onwards to strike the native that had been wielding it and he fell dead as his comrades looked on.

Most of the other natives looked at their dead comrade in horror but one of the archers retained enough of his wits to release an arrow towards Tylo. This missed by a narrow margin and once again Tylo retreated back through the doorway before more arrows could follow.

While Tylo was firing at the natives both Jayk and Brae found an open area of floor and plunged their lightsabers down into it before dragging them around in a circle. With the natives blocking their exit from the bridge through the hatchway, the two jedi instead sought to create another exit of their own.

"Any idea where this will come out?" Brae asked, looking up at Jayk and he smiled back at her.

"None whatsoever." he replied, "But I doubt that it can be worse than here." he said just before they finished the process of cutting loose a section of floor and it suddenly collapsed, the rough circle of metal dropping down to the deck below, "Quickly, into the hole." Jayk said as he withdrew his lightsaber and Brae jumped down into the darkness below.

"It's clear." she called out, "Looks like it might be a medical unit. Or maybe a torture chamber."

"Tylo you next." Jayk said, standing up and facing the doorway.

Tylo sprinted across the bridge towards the hole and slung his rifle before lowering himself down into it while Jayk stood watch in the bridge. With Tylo no longer guarding the doorway the way was clear for the native war party to rush the bridge and they roared as they stormed into the chamber to find Jayk standing by the hole with his lightsaber raised.

"Jedi!" a shaman hissed and one of the native warriors hurled his hand axe towards Jayk.

The primitive thrown weapon spun as it travelled through the air towards Jayk but he did not attempt to move out of the way. Instead he simply waved his hand and used the Force to push the axe aside and it missed him by a considerable distance before it struck a support beam covered in Sith carvings and then fell to the floor. Jayk then jumped down through the hole in the floor before any more axes or arrows could be sent at him, landing in front of Brae and Tylo.

"I think we should be leaving now." he said.

"You think?" Tylo commented sarcastically before the trio began to run.

Now using a different route to the one they had taken to get to the bridge, the group could not be certain of the fastest way back out of the Sith personnel transport and they had to double back when they found themselves facing a hatch that at one time had been the docking port for one of the externally mounted drop pods the ship was designed to carry but that had been buried in the crash and no longer offered them an exit.

"I think it's this way." Brae said suddenly, pointing along a side passageway.

"Are you sure? It sounds like the natives are getting closer." Jayk commented as the sound of alien voices was heard from behind them.

"Look, we know that the way out is at the back of the ship, why don't you two just use your lightsabers to make us a direct route?" Tylo suggested, "Give me free reign and I'll keep the locals off our backs."

"Yes, I'm sure you would." Brae commented.

"But how would you deal with keeping all the dirt and rocks above us off our backs?" Jayk added,

"Remember that this ship is largely buried. After a thousand years of neglect I wouldn't want to bet my life that the whole superstructure won't collapse if we start cutting through bulkheads."

"Okay I get the point. But we can't just keep wandering around at random and hoping to get to the hatch

while we've got an army of primitives chasing after us." Tylo said.

"Then we go with Brae's suggestion." Jayk said and he started down the corridor that Brae had suggested. Brae's assumption had been correct and the corridor led the trio back to one that they recognised as leading to the hatch. However, as they neared the opening both Jayk and Brae sensed a disturbance in the Force.

*Danger.*

Moments later a pair of axe wielding warriors leapt screaming out of the darkness, their shields held in front of them and their weapons raised high ready to strike. Jayk ground to a halt and positioned his lightsaber to parry the attack so that as the native brought his axe down Jayk cut through it and severed the head of the axe. Then as the startled warrior tried to decide what to do next Jayk delivered a blow to his throat that cut off the flow of blood to his brain just long enough to render him unconscious.

On the other hand although Brae sensed the attack from the second native before it happened she misjudged how it would fall and her lightsaber was in the wrong place to defend against it. At the last moment she dived out of the way to avoid being split in two by the axe but she still caught part of the blow on her shoulder and she cried out in pain as she felt. Instinctively she reached out her hand towards the native and unleashed a powerful telekinetic blast.

"Brae no!" Jayk warned, sensing the Dark Side as she acted out of fear and pain but he was too late to prevent her from releasing the strike and the native who had attacked her was hurled back against a bulkhead before he dropped to the floor and slumped forwards in a lifeless heap.

"Brae let me see your shoulder" Jayk asked as he knelt down beside Brae while she clamped her hand over the wound. Pulling this back Jayk saw the blood pumping from it, "We need to get this closed." he said.

"Then I suggest you do it quickly." Tylo added, turning around to face into the ship where the sound of the approaching war party was getting louder.

Jayk took a medpac from his belt and ripped it open, discarding the various anti-venoms that fell to the floor as he hurried concentrated on getting out a medical sealant and applying it to Brae's wound. Even with this in place it was obvious that Brae needed further medical attention and that she would have difficulty moving quickly.

"I'll have to carry you." he said.

"No, I can walk." Brae replied.

"No you can't Brae." Jayk said, "Not fast enough for us to get back to the lake ahead of the native."

"Then let me carry her." Tylo said, "You concentrate on keeping the natives off our backs. Here, take this."

and rather than sling his rifle he handed it to Jayk. In turn Jayk took the weapon and looked at it for a moment, but as Tylo was picking Brae up the jedi slung it over his shoulder instead and kept his lightsaber in his hand.

"Let's go." he said.

Exiting the Sith ship, Jayk helped Tylo up the side of the trench until they reached the level ground at the top. With speed now being of the essence they did not follow the same path back towards the lake that they had used to get here, that would have been far too difficult while carrying the injured Brae and instead they set off following the tracks left in the snow by the native war party who had come by a more direct route. As they ran through the snow Jayk took out his comlink again and activated it.

"Cal we need a pick up. Quickly, Brae's hurt. Tylo's carrying her so we won't be able to jump up." he transmitted.

"Can you make it to the lake?" Cal asked.

"I think so, but we have natives in pursuit." Jayk said.

"I hate to break it to you Jayk, but I don't think that's all. I'm seeing a lot of movement from up here. I think there's a large force of natives moving in." Cal told him.

"Understood. Watch for my lightsaber, we're heading for the lake now. Let us know if there are more natives in our path." Jayk replied before shutting off the comlink again.

Jayk and Tylo moved as quickly through the snow as Tylo could manage while carrying the injured Brae, following the path laid out for them that took them right back to the frozen lake. Behind them for most of the way was the sound of the native war party they had escaped from aboard the Sith ship but although they could hear this in the distance they were far enough ahead that they reached the lake without seeing them. However, although the natives behind them were still too far away to worry about there was a larger group of warriors on the far side of the frozen lake that upon seeing Jayk's lightsaber turned towards them and began to cross the ice.

"Cal we're at the lake. We need you." Jayk said into his comlink.

"I'm on my way in now." Cal responded.

"Be advised that there are natives here as well." Jayk added.

"I see them. Don't worry, I've got it covered. Just get to the centre of the lake and I'll keep the natives away from you." Cal said and then as Jayk and Tylo began to cross the lake there was a roaring sound from

overhead as Cal brought the *Swift Exit* down towards the ice. Rather than coming in to hover just above the frozen surface of the lake though, Cal made a fast low level pass over the ice close to where the native warriors were crossing it. Passing in front of the natives, Cal suddenly increased the power to the ship's engines and pulled up. The intense heat from the engines then melted through the ice in front of the natives, creating a wide crack in the ice that blocked their advance while the back blast sent the closest warriors sliding back across the ice. Cal then turned the *Swift Exit* around and brought it back down towards Jayk and Tylo.

"Told you I could do it. Now get ready to climb aboard quickly. Even at low power the ice will melt pretty quickly." Cal transmitted as the freighter's access ramp opened.

Cal brought the ship in low over the ice again and this time cut the power to the engines to the bare minimum needed to keep it airborne, hovering over the ice in front of Jayk and Tylo so that they could rush aboard.

"We're in!" Jayk called out into an intercom and then the engine's roared again as Cal increased altitude before the natives could find a way to reach them, "You get to the cockpit, I'll take care of Brae now." Jayk told Tylo and the smuggler nodded as he set Brae down on the deck.

The *Swift Exit* had just entered hyperspace when Jayk entered the cockpit and sat down beside Tylo while Cal's hologram gave the appearance of watching from behind them.

"How is she?" Tylo asked.

"Sleeping. I gave her something to keep her out until we can get her to the medical facilities at the temple. I don't want a repeat of what happened on the Sith ship." Jayk answered.

"What happened?" Cal asked.

"When Brae was injured she lost control and lashed out through the Force." Jayk said.

"Killed one of the natives. Mind you he had it coming if you ask me." Tylo added.

"That may be, but she used the Dark Side and that is not a good sign." Jayk pointed out.

"In fact it's a very bad one. It shows that she still can't control her power properly." Cal said, "But right now there's something else that bothers me more."

"Really, what's that?" Tylo said.

"The natives follow Sith practices, yes?" Cal said.

"We didn't get much of a look at their cultural practices but that seems likely. The Republic will have to try and correct that." Jayk replied.

"Well if they attacked you because you weren't Sith and we know that Thal N'Krey came here then-" Cal began.

"Then why didn't they kill him?" Jayk interrupted.

"Oh I've got a very bad feeling about where this is leading." Tylo said.

*Thal N'Krey looked up at his work and smiled. It seemed a shame to leave the painting here on this remote planet in a location where only a handful of the native population would ever be able to see it but the urge to create had got the better of him and he had thrown himself into the task of creating the images. He turned to look at the native shaman who had watched him coating the inside of the viewports with paint to produce the pictures and he saw the shaman gazing at them with a look of wonder on his face.*

*"I leave these for you in thanks." Thal said and the shaman looked back at him and bowed his head.*

*Turning back to his equipment again Thal began to pack it up, returning every brush and tube of paint to its correct place in his case. However, as he did so he accidentally knocked one of his brushes and it rolled across the console it was resting on and fell to the floor. Thal sighed when he saw this and went to pick it up off the floor. He did not just crouch down and grab hold of it though. Instead he reached out one of his gloved hands and opened the palm towards the brush, at which point it leapt up off the floor and flew through the air towards him until his hand closed around it. Glancing at the shaman again Thal saw the native's eyes wide open at seeing the demonstration of this power he had only heard of in legend.*