

STAR WARS

DARKNESS RISING

4-07: OVER & OVER

BY STEPHEN J DUTTON



STAR WARS

DARKNESS RISING

4-07: OVER & OVER

Life imitates art with tragic consequences when the owner of a series of paintings created by Thal N'Krey begins re-enacting the killings depicted in them. The Udras find themselves in a race against time to prevent the pattern continuing before it leads to the deaths of millions.

Darkness Rising is available from:
<http://thehazugfiles.uk/Index.htm>

Copyright notice:
Star Wars is the intellectual property of Lucasfilm Ltd. This story is completely unofficial and Lucasfilm has not endorsed or approved of any part of it.

1.

In the privacy of his home the man sank to his knees and dropped the blood covered metal bar to the floor in front of him. With a wide smile on his face he looked up at the painting that hung on his wall that depicted an ancient warrior wielding a glowing red lightsaber in the process of striking down an enemy.

"I have done as you willed." he said.

As soon as the YT-700 class light freighter *Swift Exit* dropped out of hyperspace it was granted priority clearance to land at the Ministry of Justice headquarters building on the planet Katermass. The planet had been settled in the early years of the Republic's history and now most of its land masses were covered by urban sprawl while the space around it was crowded with commercial traffic and for many vessels there was a wait of several hours before a landing slot would become available.

"*Swift Exit* follow beacon trill herf xesh one-one-three-eight. All other craft have been cleared from you approach vector." the voice of the planetary traffic controller said and in the *Swift exit's* cockpit Tylo Kurrast, the vessel's owner looked at the Jedi knight sat in the co-pilot's seat.

"Nice to be made welcome for once isn't it Jayk?" he said.

"I would expect no less. We were specifically invited here after all. Plus this planet has a connection to the Jedi Order that goes back thousands of years to when it was invaded by the Sith." Jayk replied.

"So have any of the Udras been here before then?" Tylo asked, knowing that Jayk's family had served as Jedi for thousands of years as well. In addition to both Jayk and his daughter Brae, Tylo was also responsible for transporting a holocron created by the Jedi knight Cal Udra who had lived more than three and a half thousand years earlier. Now a virtual recreation of the ancient Jedi acted as an advisor to Jayk and Brae while Jayk was responsible for training his daughter to become a Jedi.

"I couldn't say. The Jedi Order has never provided me with the specifics of my family's service." Jayk answered and Tylo nodded.

"Yeah, I suppose you wouldn't have even known Brae was your daughter rather than your niece if you hadn't had to take her to a regular hospital." he said.

"Quite." Jayk said, "Can you follow the beacon while I go and tell Brae that we have arrived?"

"Jayk, the autopilot could follow the beacon down. Of course I can handle it." Tylo replied and Jayk got out of his seat and exited the cockpit, heading back to the ship's lounge area where he found his daughter sat on the floor with her eyes closed as she meditated. Meanwhile a holographic projection of Cal Udra appeared to watch over her.

"How is she doing?" Jayk asked.

"She can hear you dad." Brae commented, opening one eye, "And I'm doing fine by the way."

"I've not detected any encroachment by the Dark Side during her meditation." Cal added and Jayk nodded.

"Good." he replied. Twice in the past few weeks Brae had lashed out through the Force while under stress and drawn power from the Dark Side. This had been a habit of hers before being assigned as Jayk's padawan, Brae had an extremely high midi-chlorian count but she lacked control over this power. This lack of control had almost led to Brae being expelled from the Jedi Order and the knowledge of this had further undermined Brae's control. The Jedi council hoped that Jayk would be able to demonstrate to her that control of her power was within her grasp by being an example of her family's long history of service to the Jedi Order.

"So are we there yet? I felt us coming out of hyperspace." Brae said.

"Yes, we're entering the atmosphere of Katermass now. Traffic control has given us priority clearance to the surface." Jayk told her.

"Any idea of why the council sent us?" Cal asked.

"Not yet. All I know is that the government of Katermass requested the help of the Jedi Order and someone on the council decided we should come. They didn't go into details."

"It must have something to do with Thal N'Krey." Brae said. Thal N'Krey was a kiffar artist who had created a large collection of work based on Sith culture and history. However, in addition to the innocent and harmless paintings and sculptures he had created there were also some that featured elements of Sith knowledge that were restricted and also genuine Sith artefacts that had become mixed in with his work after he mysteriously vanished. Now Jayk and Brae were tasked with locating him and any of his work that potentially posed a threat to the Republic.

"Beacon right up ahead. ETA two minutes." Tylo announced over the intercom and Jayk reached down to help Brae to her feet before the pair made their way into the *Swift Exit's* hold where the ship's access ramp was located.

As soon as they felt the ship touch down Jayk reached out and opened the ramp and as it lowered the two

jedi saw that they were on a rooftop landing pad.

"So do we just go inside?" Tylo said as he came rushing into the hold.

"Actually I think we have a reception committee." Jayk replied when he saw a door open ahead of the *Swift Exit* and a group of uniformed men holding highly polished but obsolete plasma fusils came rushing out to form a line that extended from the door to the base of the ramp.

"Honour guard to attention!" the leader of these troops ordered and all of them stood up straight, their ancient ceremonial weapons resting over their shoulders.

"I think we should go and meet our hosts." Jayk said and the *Swift Exit's* crew all began to walk down the ramp. As they were nearing the bottom a smartly dressed woman emerged through the same doorway that the honour guard had come from and she smiled at Jayk and Brae before bowing.

"Honoured jedi as High Minister of Justice I welcome you to Katermass." she said.

"On behalf of the Jedi Order I thank you minister." Jayk responded when the woman straightened up, "I am Jedi Knight Jayk Udra and this is my padawan Brae. Our pilot is Captain Tylo Kurrast."

"And my name is Cler Lemas." the woman said before she looked at Tylo and the heavy blaster pistol he carried holstered on his hip and added, "However, I should warn you that the law of Katermass forbids private citizens from carrying weapons in public. As servants of the Republic jedi are of course exempt from this. However, I shall have to ask Captain Kurrast to leave his weapon on his ship."

"Tylo is also a Republic agent." Jayk said. This statement was somewhat deceptive, Tylo was a former smuggler who had become involved with a gang that was targeting works of art by Thal N'Krey and in exchange for his freedom had agreed to transport and assist Jayk and Brae while they hunted for the artist and his work, "He is on special assignment by the Judicial Department."

"Of course, I should have realised that you would not travel by commercial transport. I apologise and Agent Kurrast is of course welcome to keep his weapon." Cler responded.

"Thank you minister. Now perhaps you could fill us in on why we have been summoned here." Jayk said.

"Ah yes. I think you should come with me. What I have to say may be somewhat hard to believe but I can assure you that it is the truth." Cler said and she beckoned for the jedi to follow her back into the building.

"The truth from a politician." Tylo whispered to Brae, "Now that's hard to believe for starters."

As they entered the building Cler handed Jayk her datapad and he saw that the device showed an image of an ordinary looking man.

"This man is why you asked for our help?" Jayk said and Cler nodded.

"Yes. That is Matten Tren and until about two months ago he was a normal upstanding citizen on Katermass. He was a successful lawyer known for supporting numerous good causes." she said.

"So what happened two months ago?" Brae asked.

"I bet he went vacc brained and killed a bunch of people in unpleasant ways." Tylo commented.

"Your analogy is crude Agent Kurrast, but sadly accurate." Cler said, halting beside a turbolift and summoning the car. Then as she stepped inside she continued, "It was two months ago that the first in a series of brutal murders was committed. Despite our strict weapon control laws we still have enough murders on Katermass that the police did not originally establish any sort of link between the killings. Each one appeared random. The victims were totally unrelated and the circumstances and methods of every killing were different. Some people were stabbed, others poisoned. One was even electrocuted." the doors to the turbolift then opened again and Cler stepped out into the hallway, "However, when a man was found bludgeoned to death a week ago there was surveillance footage that put Matten Tren at the scene of the crime. The police of course went to his home to question him but he was missing by the time they got there. What they did find though was this." and Cler then opened a door to a large room that she went inside.

Following her into the room Jayk, Brae and Tylo saw that it had been set up as the operations centre for the investigation into the killings, with images of victims and crime scenes all around the room. However, what attracted their attention most was the row of large paintings hung along one wall. These were not present as decoration though, instead every one of them appeared to match almost exactly the crime scene photographs displayed elsewhere in the room, "The records taken from Matten's Tren's home indicate that he bought all of these ten years ago. We don't know if they were painted much earlier than that but they were definitely created before the killings took place. Each murder replicated one of these paintings though. It's as if the artist knew how the killings would take place."

"Really?" Tylo said, "Because in these pictures I see Sith killing people, not some guy who worked in an office for years."

While Tylo was speaking Brae began to walk towards the nearest of the paintings, one that showed a gaunt looking Sith with his hands pressed against the sides of a screaming individual's head.

"Brae what's wrong?" Jayk asked, suspecting that his daughter had picked up on something that he had not.

"The paintings." Brae said, "They're more than just paint on canvas. I can feel them in the Force calling to me. They don't just want to be art, they want to be real."

"Who painted these?" Jayk said, walking up to one of the paintings and putting on a pair of glasses as he

searched for a signature.

"Do you really need to ask?" Tylo said from behind Jayk just as he found a discrete signature at the bottom of the picture.

"Thal N'Krey." Jayk read and Tylo winced.

"I knew it. It just had to be him." he said.

"Minister Lemas, has your ministry carried out any chemical analyses on these paintings?" Jayk asked, standing up straight as he turned to look at Cler again.

"What, you think that there could be something physical causing Tren to commit these heinous crimes?" she replied and Jayk nodded.

"Yes I do. The artist who created these paintings is a being that we have been trying to find for more than a year now. Among his works we have found not only examples of forbidden Sith knowledge but also genuine Sith artefacts that have been mistaken for his art. From Brae's reaction to them I am of the opinion that Matten Tren's actions were caused by more than a mere mental breakdown. I need to know exactly what these paintings are made of."

"Of course. I'll have our best analysis droids put to it immediately." Cler said, "What about the others?"

"Others? You mean that there are more of these paintings?" Jayk replied.

"Yes, I understand that the police found three more that were unrelated to any of the crimes." Cler said.

"Minister I think we need to see those paintings. They could indicate to us where Matten Tren will strike next." Jayk told her.

"Certainly. I'll have images of them sent to your ship and the paintings themselves sent for analysis. Will that be acceptable to you Jedi Udra?" Cler asked.

"Yes, that's ideal thank you. In the meantime I would also like access to your immigration records for the last twenty years. Thal N'Krey was probably here and I want to know when and where he went." Jayk added.

"That's millions of beings." Cler said, "Tens of millions even. How will you know where to look?"

"Don't worry minister." Brae replied, "We know someone who works very fast."

2.

"You want me to search through the entire database of visitors to Katermass for the last twenty years?" Cal asked when Jayk told him about the paintings by Thal N'Krey and the influence they had had on their owner. "Yes. Thal has been surprisingly able to locate Sith artefacts around the galaxy. Whatever he did to the paintings that triggered Matten Tren to commit murder could be related to something he found here and that is something that the Jedi Order needs to know about." Jayk answered.

"Very well, I just wanted to make sure. I should warn you that the files I've been given access to are rather large and it may take some time to conduct a full search. Can you narrow it down for me?" Cal said.

"Try starting with the period ten to fourteen years ago then work back." Jayk suggested and the image of Cal nodded.

"As you wish." he said before vanishing.

"So you think that Thal came here to find something that can make anyone go nuts just by putting it in a painting?" Tylo said.

"And then just abandon them?" Brae commented, "Why leave them behind if they were so important to him?" "It is possible that he didn't consider them that important, why sell them if they were? Perhaps he came for something else and whatever he added to those paintings just happened to be here as well." Jayk said.

"About those paintings, what's going to happen to them if they can make people starting killing one another?" Tylo asked and Jayk frowned for a moment.

"Tylo raises a good point." he said.

"I do?" Tylo responded.

"Yes. Whatever influence the paintings can have on someone is only slight or I would have sensed it as well. But that suggests that in order for someone to be affected they must be sensitive to them." Jayk said.

"Sensitive? As in Force sensitive?" Brae asked.

"Yes, that's what I'm thinking." Jayk answered.

"Stang. That means we're not just looking for some psycho running around killing people because he saw it in a picture painted by another psycho, we're looking for a Jedi psycho. Weren't Neela Vortress and Teron Sharr enough for you?" Tylo said.

"Neela is the only one who was actually a Jedi Tylo." Brae pointed out.

"Whatever. All three are Force users." he said.

"I think we should try finding out whether there are any blood samples of Matten Tren available." Jayk said.

"Are you thinking of running a midi-chlorian test on it?" Brae said and Jayk nodded.

"Yes. It's possible that he has a level higher than normal but still below the threshold for being recruited by the Jedi Order." he said and Tylo smiled.

"I love the way you say 'recruited' when you're talking about taking younglings away from their parents." he said.

"You've seen the chaos when they are missed Tylo." Brae reminded him.

"Yeah I know, but Cal's told me that it used to be different. Jedi still had families back then and no-one batted an eyelid. Or whatever their species used to protect their visual organs." Tylo said.

"And since the Ruusan Reformations we've had more than seven centuries of peace." Jayk replied, "That was unheard of under the Old Republic's system."

"Freedom is something worth fighting for Jayk." Cal said as he reappeared.

"Have you finished searching the database already?" Brae responded.

"No of course not. I've barely scratched the surface. I just wanted to let you know that a message just arrived for you from the Ministry of Justice. Looks like a set of image files." Cal said.

"The missing paintings." Jayk said and he pointed to a large video screen that had been installed in the lounge, "Can you put them on the monitor?"

"Of course." Cal replied and a set of three images appeared on the large screen. Each one showed one of the paintings by Thal N'Krey that Matten Tren had owned but that unlike the others had not been connected to any crimes yet. Two of these were similar to the others, each one showing a Sith killing a foe. In one case the armoured figure was shown apparently using the Force to throw someone from the top of a tall tower while in the second the victim was being impaled by a lightsaber. However, while the third painting showed no people in it at all it was the most worrying of them all.

"Stang. Is Tren go to try and do that?" Tylo said as they all stared at the image of a burning starship plummeting from space to a city below.

The walkway stretched between two of the city's massive skyscrapers and was at an altitude where some beings found it difficult to breathe if they exerted themselves too greatly because of the thinner air. Therefore,

it was not immediately suspicious when the man emerged from one of the towers onto the walkway and saw someone slumped against one of the safety rails.

"Hey are you okay?" he called out as he rushed to see if the other man needed help, "I said do you need help? I can summon a paramedic droid if you-" but before the man could finish his sentence Matten Tren suddenly leapt to his feet and grabbed hold of him by his collar.

"I have no choice. I have seen the way and I must follow it." he said.

"Let go of me!" the man shouted as he tried to break Matten's grip on his jacket. However, before he could manage to do that Matten pushed him sideways and then flipped him over the safety rail.

The man screamed as he fell and Matten looked over the side of the walkway to see the limbs of the complete stranger he had just murdered still flailing as he plummeted to his death more than a thousand metres below.

"My lord it is done once more!" he then shouted, tilting his head back to look up into the sky, "Your path will be followed exactly as it was before and this city will burn when fire falls from the sky!"

"According to planetary records Matten Tren once held a private starship navigation licence but he chose not to renew it seven years ago and it expired. Before deciding on a career in the legal profession it appears that he considered working in space instead." Cal said, having switched from searching for evidence of when Thal N'Krey had visited Katermass to what was seen as the far more urgent matter of how he might go about crashing a starship into the planet.

"To be a navigator he'd need to know how to fly a ship as well." Tylo pointed out.

"Yes and although officially he can't any more I doubt his lack of a licence will bother him." Jayk added.

"Supposing he does manage to take control of a ship, what can the government of Katermass do to stop him?" Brae asked.

"Not much." Jayk replied, "The planet has no standing military and no spacecraft armed with anything other than ion cannons. There is a planetary shield but raising that would require adequate warning that something was wrong before Tren was able to get a ship within its area of effect."

"What about contacting the Judicial Department for help?" Brae suggested.

"Oh like that's going to be any use. You know how thinly spread their anti-piracy flotillas are." Tylo said, "They'll say that since we're here there is no reason to deploy any more assets."

"In my day the Republic Navy would have been able to set up a blockade." Cal commented, "Too bad there isn't one any more."

"No matter what we need to alert Minister Lemas. She might be able to acquire some ships somehow but the issue of getting enough warning for them to do any good is still a problem. Shooting down a ship that is already in the atmosphere will just turn one large falling object into many smaller ones."

"That are already on fire." Tylo added.

Just then there was a the sound of light hearted music.

"What the hell is that?" Brae said, frowning at the sound she considered ridiculous.

"I thought I'd change some of the system alerts." Tylo told her, "That means that someone is calling the ship."

"It's Minister Lemas." Cal said, "Do you want it on the monitor?"

"Yes please Cal. But Tylo, kindly chose a better warning tone." Jayk replied.

"Hey nothing about our deal says you can tell me what warning tones to use." Tylo commented as the images of the paintings by Thal N'Krey were replaced by a video feed from Cler's office.

"Jedi Udra, thank goodness you're there." she said.

"I take it that there has been a development." Jayk said.

"It doesn't have anything to do with a missing starship does it? A big one?" Brae asked.

"No, why should it? I'm calling to tell you that there's been another killing linked to Matten Tren." Cler said.

"Where?" Jayk asked.

"A city walkway. I'm sending you the location now." Cler said and a string of text appeared across the bottom of the screen that gave the location of the latest murder.

"Okay we've got it. We'll be on our way now." Jayk said, "But there's something else you need to be aware of. We think that Matten Tren will attempt to steal a starship and if he succeeds then the loss of life could be catastrophic."

There were just two police officers on the walkway along with an analysis droid when Jayk, Brae and Tylo stepped from the tower onto it after having landed the *Swift Exit* on the rooftop landing pad. The police officers stood either side of the droid to prevent anyone from disturbing the area it was scanning for evidence.

"I assume that you are Jedi Udra." the nearest officer said when he saw the trio.

"Yes, I'm Jedi Udra. What happened here?" Jayk asked.

"As near as we can tell Tren threw someone off the walkway." the police officer answered and Tylo glanced

over the side.

"That's a long way down." he said.

"That's a very long way down." Brae added.

"More than six hundred metres." the police officer replied, "Some people get a bit faint this far up and it made one hell of a mess when Tren pushed someone over. Especially since they bounced off a few windows before they finally hit the ground." he added.

"There was nothing identifiable left of the body." the other officer added, "Just a collection of blood smears everywhere he hit."

"Ouch." Tylo commented. Then he looked at the officer, "How do you know this is where Tren pushed him from?"

"Witnesses say that the victim had to cross this bridge to get where he was going." the first officer replied.

"I thought you said that there was nothing that could be identified." Brae said.

"Of the body, no. But the victim's wallet had his ID in it and he was identified after the blood was cleaned off that. Then another witness put Matten Tren in that tower you just came out of, rushing out of the lobby not long after everyone inside heard the victim hit the ground." the officer replied.

"I've been saying for years that walkways like this ought to be enclosed." the other officer added, "This is the first murder I've heard of but every now and again someone can't handle the altitude and needs medical attention or they decide to commit suicide by throwing themselves off."

"What can you tell us about the victim?" Jayk asked.

"Not much. Apparently he was an architect and had no connection to the killer." one of the police officers replied and Jayk sighed.

"What's wrong?" Brae asked.

"I was hoping that this killing would offer us some clue as to Matten Tren's intentions." Jayk said.

"I thought we knew that. He's going to try to crash a starship into the planet." Tylo added.

"Yes, but there are a lot of starships in the system to choose from. If all his killings match the depictions in the paintings then I was hoping that one of them would point towards his intended target. However, as far as I can tell nothing about any of his victims so far gives us any indication of what he intends to do." Jayk explained.

"So that leaves us waiting for his next victim. Assuming that he doesn't decide that he can kill a few more people to get a ship." Tylo said before Jayk's comlink sounded.

"Yes?" Jayk said into the device.

"Jayk it's Cal, I've found the entry in the planetary immigration records for Thal N'Krey. Also the planetary Ministry of Justice just got in touch. Their droids have finished their analysis of the composition of the paintings and they've come back with some interesting results." Cal told him.

"Okay Cal. There's nothing that we can do here. We're on our way back now." Jayk responded before he shut off his comlink and put it back in the pouch on his belt.

3.

"Matten what are you doing here?" the man asked when he opened the door and found his brother standing outside.

"I need your help Prell." Matten replied as he pushed his way through the doorway.

"Hey hold on a moment. The police have been here asking about you, they say that you're a murderer. Matten, what have you done?" Prell said.

"Nothing. Only what was asked of me. Look Prell do you have something to eat? I haven't had a decent meal in four days."

"Okay come on, I'll fix you something but I want to know exactly what's happened." Prell said and he led his brother towards the kitchen, the two men walking right past the jacket hanging on the wall that had a starport traffic control logo on the front and a security pass hanging just below this.

In the kitchen Prell went to the refrigerator and took out a pair of frozen meals that he then placed in the oven. As he was doing this Matten instead went to one of the drawers and opened it, peering inside.

"What are you doing?" Prell asked, looking at his brother.

"We'll need forks." Matten answered.

"They're over there, you know that." Prell replied, pointing to a different drawer and Matten smiled.

"Of course. The stress of everything that's happening is getting to my memory." he said. However, he waited to move until Prell had turned his back again, at which point he quietly removed a long skewer from the drawer he had just opened and concealed it behind him as he closed the drawer again and then went to the one that his brother had pointed to.

Matten took the forks from the drawer as he said he wanted to and held them up as he then approached his brother from behind while he remained by the oven. Walking right up to Prell, Matten held out the forks close to his head.

"We don't need them right now. There's still another two minutes to go." Prell said, turning around and at that moment Matten struck. He thrust the skewer forwards so that it entered his brother's chest between two of his ribs. The metal spike was long enough that Matten was able to push it all the way through Prell's body so that it emerged from his back, covered in blood.

"Why?" Prell gasped as he sank to his knees, staring into his brother's emotionless face.

"I'm sorry Prell but I had no choice. No choice about any of them. They were all doomed thousands of years ago when this happened the first time. I have to follow the pattern and thanks to you my lord's will shall be done." Matten replied as his brother died in front of him.

Leaving the body of his brother where it lay, Matten left the kitchen and made his way into the bedroom where he quickly found his brother's traffic controller uniform and changed into it before checking himself in the mirror. Matten and his brother had a strong family resemblance and wearing his brother's uniform made it likely that Matten would be able to penetrate starport security without raising an alarm. Of course he still needed Prell's security pass for this and Matten went back into the hall and took down the jacket that this was attached to. He did not leave the apartment just yet though, instead he returned to the kitchen where the body of his brother still lay and stepped over it to reach the oven that had now completed its heating cycle. Removing the two heated meals from inside, Matten set these down on the table, sat down at it and calmly began to eat.

"This is the result of the spectrograph scan." Cal said as the others looked at the monitor in the *Swift Exit's* lounge.

"Can we assume for a moment that not everyone knows how to read one of these?" Tylo said.

"Make that two of us." Brae added.

"As a matter of fact it's managed to skip my training so far as well." Jayk said.

"I'm just showing what the Justice Ministry sent me, okay?" Cal told them, "I'm actually reading from the report that came with this graph anyway. The original me wasn't a scientist either." and then he remotely switched the monitor to show a list of the elements that had been discovered in the paintings along with the level of their occurrence as a percentage of the whole, "The report indicates a rather high level of calcium." Cal said.

"Isn't calcium used in paint?" Brae asked.

"As calcium carbonate, yes. But the analysis droids found significant amounts of calcium salts that suggested that they came from the bones of some vertebrate creature." Cal said and Tylo winced.

"You mean that sick sleemo Thal killed someone so that he could use their bones in his paint?" he said.

"Unlikely. Not unless whoever he killed was somewhat over three and a half thousand years old. There are some species believed to live that long but they're very rare." Cal answered.

"Three and a half thousand years?" Jayk commented, "So about the time of the Civil War then?"

"You were alive then weren't you?" Brae said and Cal's hologram nodded.

"Yes. I fought in the war. I was fortunate to get through it." he said.

"That was when the Sith invaded Katermass." Jayk added.

"So Thal dug up a body to grind up to make his paint from." Tylo said, "Well I suppose it beats killing someone for it, but not by much. I wouldn't want a picture like that hanging on my wall."

"Not just any body." Cal continued, "A more detailed analysis of the bone material showed that it had been subject to some sort of preservation process and that had also trapped some other interesting biological material with it.

"I've got a very bad feeling about this." Brae said, "It was midi-chlorians wasn't it?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so." Cal responded.

"But hang on a moment, I thought that those existed inside every living thing. Isn't that what you're always telling me?" Tylo said and Jayk smiled.

"Very good. You're paying attention. Maybe there is hope for you yet Tylo." he said and Tylo frowned as Jayk went on, "However, midi-chlorians die off and decay without a living host. Unless whoever's bones were used for these paintings was preserved very soon after their death, within a few hours at most, then the midi-chlorians in their body would have gone. The exception to that would be if there were an unusually high number of them present. In effect they would feed off their own presence and some could survive for a few days, maybe even a week if the level was high enough. More than long enough for the Sith to recover the body and preserve it for burial."

"You're sure it was a Sith?" Tylo asked.

"It has to be." Brae said, "The Jedi don't mummify corpses, they cremate them. The Sith are obsessed with trying to preserve their physical existence. For them that is all that there is. They can't exist within the Force, the Dark Side would consume them but by preserving their bodies they hoped that some way would be found to bring them back."

"You mean like those nerf herders on primitive planets that freeze themselves in the hope that medical science will be able to cure what killed them in the future?" Tylo said and Cal nodded.

"Yes, the principle is the same and the biggest flaw is the same. Why would future generations want them back anyway? No Sith lord was ever going to resurrect a potential rival, although a few were rumoured to take great pleasure in using the remains of defeated rivals as host bodies for their creations." he said.

"Are you trying to tell me that because bits of a Sith Lord were used to make paint that he's somehow alive inside the paintings?" Tylo asked.

"No, not at all. The Sith whose body was used is long dead. However, his body would have acted as a focal point for the Dark Side. Not to the same degree as a true Force Nexus, but the Dark Side would still have greater influence near it. Or whatever it was turned into." Cal said.

"That's what I sensed from the paintings." Brae said.

"Yes and if Matten Tren is even slightly Force sensitive then he could have done as well. Most likely he wouldn't even be aware of it but over time he'd feel the Dark Side call to him the longer he was in close proximity to them." Jayk added.

"What effect would that have?" Tylo said.

"It's hard to say but without the training of a Jedi he wouldn't be able to protect himself. Over time I'd expect him to become more obsessed by the paintings." Jayk said.

"Yes, obsessed that he'd be driven to try and recreate them in real life. He may even think that the subjects of the painting are issuing him with verbal commands." Cal said.

"So he's nuts basically." Brae commented.

"From a certain point of view, yes." Jayk responded.

"A certain point of view?" Tylo exclaimed, "What other point of view is there? This guy is a few co-ordinates short of plotting a hyperspace jump."

"Well he's proven good at evading detection for a crazy person." Cal said, "About the only time he surfaces is to kill someone."

"He had money." Brae pointed out, "Plus as a lawyer he could have had contacts in the underworld. He's probably bribed the right people to hide him."

"I suspect that Brae is right. The records provided to us suggest that he closed his financial accounts and drew the balance in cash. That gives him the ability to spend without being traced so we won't find him that way and I'd rather track him down before he strikes again than wait for another killing that we are too late to prevent." Jayk said.

"Jayk, have you considered the possibility that more than just his murdering spree could be dictated by those paintings?" Cal suggested.

"You mean that there could have been something in them that is helping him evade detection?" Brae asked.

"Yes, that's exactly what I mean. Take a look at these three." Cal said and he brought images of three of the

paintings up on the monitor, "Notice how in each of them there is a structure in the background?"

"It's the same building." Tylo said.

"Yes it is." Cal replied.

"Are you telling us that this building exists here on Katermass?" Jayk said.

"No, not any more at least. But during the Civil War when the Sith invaded Katermass they built themselves a headquarters from where they directed their armies and took anyone unfortunate enough to make them angry where by all accounts they were subject to various experimentation." Cal explained.

"So if it doesn't exist any more then how can Tren use it to hide?" Brae said.

"The structure was destroyed when the planet was liberated. The victorious planetary forces decided to raze what was left to the ground, with the full support of the Jedi Order I might add." Cal said.

"The order must have known that to leave it in place risked creating a nexus of Dark Side energy." Jayk pointed out.

"Yes well whatever their reasoning was the structure was demolished but the records don't mention whether or not the foundations were dug out. If they weren't then-" Cal began.

"Then whatever the Sith built underground might still be there." Jayk interrupted, "Cal can you tell us where this headquarters was built?"

"Of course I can. It was right here in the capital. Of course the Sith were able to clear an area of ground that couldn't be done now so you'll have to go right down to the bottom of the city to reach it. You won't be the first visitors to it though." Cal said and Jayk frowned.

"Why do you say that?" he said.

"That brings me to what else I had to tell you. Like I said I've managed to find details of Thal's visit the Katermass twelve and a half years ago. His arrival was registered at a private docking bay built into a rather expensive hotel. How he managed to afford it is something I still can't figure out." Cal said.

"You're about to tell us that the hotel is built on the site of the old Sith headquarters aren't you?" Tylo said.

"Yes I'm afraid I am." Cal replied with a smile, "To make matters even more interesting can you guess who worked for the same legal firm that represents the hotel?"

"Matten Tren." Brae said.

"Matten Tren. I pulled a bunch of images from their online corporate data profile and there are plenty of them that were taken at the hotel for official functions. Like charity galas and such." Cal said.

"Charity galas, just the sort of thing that a lawyer who supports good causes would be present at." Jayk added, "He must have known the layout of that hotel like the back of his hand."

"As much as I'd like to stay as far from centres of Dark Side activity as possible, give me the address of this hotel and I'll get you there." Tylo said.

"Already uploaded into the navigation computer." Cal told him.

4.

Matten used his dead brother's landspeeder to get from the apartment building where he had lived to the capital's main commercial starport. The licence plate was cleared for access and the gates to the parking lot opened automatically for him. When he got out of the speeder Matten kept his head down to avoid his face being seen by any of the surveillance cameras, although he was careful not to make it too obvious that he was avoiding them. To assist him with this he had found a cap at his brother's apartment and although this was not part of the uniform of a traffic controller it did not make him look out of place by wearing it.

There were security checks of course, but Matten was able to get through these easily. He carried no weapons and so there was nothing for the security scanners to detect and he looked enough like his brother whose face was on the security pass that the security guards paid no attention to him. As soon as he was through the security screening and into the operations section of the starport. In addition to the traffic control centre, this part of the starport also handled terminal security, regulated the internal environment and organised the boarding of tens of thousands of passengers per hour onto hundreds of flights both to other starports on Katermass and off world destinations.

Despite wearing a traffic controller's uniform, Matten was not interested in heading for the traffic control centre. The destinations and flight paths of starships leaving the starport did not concern him at all, all he wanted was a vessel that matched the profile he had. This had to be a ship at least three hundred metres long so that when it crashed into the city the destruction it caused would be as great as was caused when a warship from the Sith fleet crashed into Katermass during the Jedi Civil War, as depicted in the last of his prized paintings. Matten knew from his brother that the details of every ship present or expected at the starport within the reasonable future could be accessed from the maintenance section, it was from here that droids would be despatched to inspect, refuel and make necessary repairs to vessels that landed here and so it was essential that they knew what they were dealing with.

"Don't usually see you boys from the tower down here." one of the organic maintenance staff said when Matten walked in, "Is the sky falling?"

Matten smiled.

"Soon." he said.

"So what do you want? If your speeder has broken down and you're looking to avoid paying to have it fixed then I have to warn you that the droids aren't programmed for that sort of repair work." the technician told him, thinking that Matten was joking.

"No, nothing like that. What I need to know is what classes of ship we have docked here right now. I'm looking for something large."

"How large?"

"Three to four hundred metres or more." Matten said and the technician turned to his computer terminal.

"Okay that is big." he said, "A lot of ships that large don't bother landing. They offload their cargo at an orbital station and shuttle it down."

"What about a liner?" Matten asked.

"Ah, now that's more likely. People don't like to have to change from ship to ship. Mind you there aren't as many liners that are that big. Ah wait, here we go." the technician said and he pointed to his computer display.

"You've found a liner?"

"No but we've got a Rin Assid bulk hauler in from the Corporate Sector. After a flight that long I'm not surprised the crew chose to land here instead of staying in orbit. They obviously wanted to get their feet back on the ground. That ship is three hundred and fifty metres long. Will that do you?"

"Perfectly." Matten said, smiling back at the technician.

"Okay it's in docking bay seven. The *Heart of Talith*."

"Thanks." Matten said as he turned to leave.

"So are you going to tell me what you needed this information for?" the technician called out after him.

"No. Don't worry though, you might find out sooner or later." Matten responded and the technician frowned.

"Well if you need any more help feel free to find some other nerf herder's time to waste." he said just as Matten left the maintenance section and the door dropped shut behind him.

After leaving the maintenance section Matten headed straight for the docking bays, following the signs that pointed him towards docking bay seven. With his stolen uniform and security pass he was able to continue to use the starport's operations section to travel through. This bypassed the general security checks for passengers and cargo and also avoided the crowds of passengers in the main terminal. Despite his disguise, Matten knew that it was still possible that a member of the public might recognise him from the wanted bulletins put out by the police and so avoiding crowds was more important than just avoiding the

inconvenience of having to push his way through a dense crowd of other beings. Being a freighter, the docking bay for the Heart of Talith was filled with cargo containers and dozens of binary load lifters moving these into the ship. Matten smiled when he saw this, knowing that the ship being loaded meant that it would be leaving soon. Binary load lifters were also some of the most simple minded droids in existence, barely more advanced in processing power than the primitive single function robots that could be found on some worlds that had yet to find a way of efficiently travelling to other planets in their own system. This meant that although they might notice Matten entering the ship through the unguarded cargo access ramp they would be unable to report it, even if they knew that he was not supposed to be there. Matten still moved cautiously up the access ramp into the ship's massive cargo hold. It was not impossible that one of the crew could be inside monitoring the droids and he did not want to be caught before he could make his move to take control of the ship's flight path. Fortunately for him though the crew obviously trusted the droids to do their job properly and no-one was present to monitor their progress.

Dashing to a nearby computer terminal while making sure he was not being observed, Matten was easily able to call up a schematic of the Rin Assid bulk hauler and he quickly determined where the navigation computer was located. This was towards the aft of the vessel in the engineering section and Matten turned off the terminal before he started to make his way there, leaving no trace that he had accessed the computer. Getting as close to the computer as he could, Matten found himself a hiding place in an emergency equipment locker. Among the contents of this was a space suit that he pulled on over his traffic controller's uniform. He then pulled on the helmet as well and lowered the anti-glare visor to hide his face before moving towards the rear of the locker, anticipating that even if anyone walked in they would assume that the suit was empty.

Then all he had to do was wait for the ship to take off.

"Over here!" Tylo called out across the hotel's subsurface parking lot, waving Jayk and Brae towards him.

"What have you found?" Jayk asked as the two Jedi came rushing over to him.

"Could be a door. Look." Tylo replied and he pointed to a wall panel that did not quite fit properly, bending out at one corner.

"Stand back." Jayk told him and Tylo nodded as he stepped backwards.

Jayk then raised his hand and pointed it towards the wall panel, drawing on the Force to exert a pull on it. Initially there was some resistance but then all of a sudden the panel fell away and came crashing to the floor, exposing the ancient flight of stairs behind it.

"Looks like you were right Tylo." Brae said as she drew her lightsaber and activated it. Then she held the glowing blade out in front of her and used the light it cast to illuminate the stairs, "Tracks." she said when she saw the footprints in the grime that covered the stairs.

"They go down and come back up again, numerous times." Jayk commented.

"So one guy moving up and down on multiple occasions or dozens of them just once." Tylo added.

"I sense the Dark Side." Jayk said and he looked at Brae.

"Me too." she replied, nodding, "But I don't sense anyone down there."

"We should investigate anyway." Jayk said before his comlink chimed, "Jayk Udra." he said into the device.

"Jedi Udra it's Minister Lemas, another body has been found that is probably the work of Matten Tren." Cler's voice said.

"Probably?" Jayk asked.

"There are no witnesses to the killing but the victim is Tren's brother." Cler said, "According to the police report he was impaled through the chest."

"Just like that painting." Tylo commented, "That just leaves the big one. The ship crashing into the planet."

"There's more Jedi Udra." Cler added.

"Go ahead." Jayk said.

"Prell Tren was a traffic controller at the capital's primary starport and according to security there he checked in for work about an hour ago but never reported to his duty station."

"He's at the starport." Tylo said, "Which means he could already have a ship."

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

"Minister we are on our way." Jayk said into his comlink, "But what about assistance from other systems?"

"We've got two corvettes coming in from Lyten Major. They're well armed and they have tractor beams, but they won't be here for another three hours at least." Cler told him.

"Then we have to hope that we're in time to stop him from seizing a ship to start with. We'll get to the starport as soon as we can. Can you arrange for us to get priority clearance?" Jayk said.

"Thank you Jedi Udra. I'll get right on it." Cler answered and then the channel went dead.

"We need to go." Jayk told Brae and Tylo.

"But what about the creepy hole in the ground? Aren't we going to investigate that?" Tylo asked.

"Do you want to?" Brae added.

"Oh hell no. I just wanted to know if I needed to come up with an excuse for later." Tylo replied before the trio set off running back to the *Swift Exit*.

"The starport has given me access to their database." Cal said, his hologram standing at the back of the *Swift Exit*'s cockpit while Brae held the holocron itself, "Most of the ships docked there are light vessels like the *Swift Exit*."

"Well if he takes one of those then we might be able to shoot him down ourselves." Brae commented.

"You know if we're going to be taking my ship into combat a lot then I think that the Jedi Order ought to spring for a few upgrades to our defences." Tylo added.

"You mean weapons?" Jayk asked.

"Well you can't deny that this would be a lot easier if we could get one of those new quad cannon mountings installed. A few concussion missiles wouldn't go amiss either. Right Cal?" Tylo answered.

"In my day my sister and I were assigned a ship that we could use as a mobile base of operations and that had sufficient firepower to deal with any threats we encountered." Cal said and Tylo smiled.

"See, shouldn't we have a ship like that too?" he said.

"Tylo, the Jedi Order may have been willing to pay for all the upgrades that you strenuously claimed were essential to our operation but I doubt they will agree to handing you control of a gunship." Jayk replied and then he looked over his shoulder at Cal's hologram, "What about ships large enough to threaten a city?" he asked.

"There are four ships at least two hundred and fifty metres long docked at the starport now. One of these is undergoing extensive maintenance as is not fit to fly. Then there are two liners, the *Princess Lacal* and the *Prosperous Path* and a freighter, the *Heart of Talith*, that are fit to fly." Cal answered.

"If our man is thinking straight then he'll avoid the liners. Too many people to get in the way of a one man hijacking. Then again I think we've already established that he's nuts." Tylo pointed out.

"The freighter is also the largest of the three operational ships." Cal added and Jayk nodded.

"Then let's make sure that it doesn't get off the ground at all." he said, as he reached out to activate the *Swift Exit*'s communications, "Starport control this is the Jedi vessel *Swift Exit*."

"*Swift Exit* this is starport control. We have been advised of your mission and you have priority clearance." one of the controllers responded.

"Control according to your database you have three large vessels docked. I want the *Princess Lacal*, *Prosperous Path* and *Heart of Talith* prevented from departing." Jayk said to the controller.

"Sorry *Swift Exit*, the *Heart of Talith* departed three minutes ago." the controller said, "She hasn't let the atmosphere yet though. Do you want the ship recalling?"

"Yes, do so immediately. All three vessels need to be searched." Jayk said.

"I've got a bad feeling about this." Brae commented from behind him.

5.

Aboard the *Heart of Talith* the ship's captain frowned when he received the order to return to port.

"Say that again control, it sounded like you were calling us back." he responded.

"Affirmative *Heart of Talith*, the starport is now closed to large traffic." the control tower told him.

"Closed to large traffic? What the hell is that supposed to mean? Look I've already taken off and I've got a deadline to keep." the ship's captain protested.

"*Heart of Talith* if you do not return to port then BoSS will be informed of your violation and your licence may be revoked." the controller warned.

"Do you believe this?" the captain said to his three man flight crew, "I'll lose my licence if we don't turn around."

"That's poodoo captain." the ship's navigator said, "They already cleared us out of the gravity well."

"If we were in space I'd be inclined to agree, but we're still in the atmosphere. Bring us around and take us back down." the captain said.

"If you say so captain. I'll." the navigator began before he suddenly stopped speaking and began to frantically work at his console.

"Nav?" the captain said when he saw this, "What's wrong?"

"Captain someone has disconnected the navigation computer. I can't change our course." the navigator said, his eyes widening.

"Helm override the computer. Take us in on manual." the captain ordered.

"Manual controls not responding captain. It looks like someone's linked the nav computer directly to the drive system." the helmsman responded and the captain activated the communication channel again.

"Traffic control this is the *Heart of Talith*, we are declaring an emergency." he transmitted.

"*Swift Exit* this is starport control." a voice said over the radio.

"Tell them I'm following their beacon." Tylo commented as Jayk prepared to respond.

"Go ahead traffic control." he transmitted.

"*Swift Exit* the *Heart of Talith* has declared an emergency and is unable to return to port. The crew report that their ship has been sabotaged and is locked on a course they cannot control." the controller said.

"Matten Tren must be aboard. He's overridden their nav computer." Tylo said.

"Will the crew be able to do anything about it?" Brae asked.

"Maybe, if they can get to the nav computer in time." Tylo answered.

"Control advise the crew of the *Heart of Talith* to abandon ship. We'll handle it from here." Jayk told the controller.

"We will?" Tylo said.

"What can we do that the crew can't?" Brae added.

"I expect that Matten Tren will have taken steps to ensure that his sabotage cannot easily be undone.

Probably by blocking access to the nav computer. However, we have the perfect tools for getting past any obstacle and destroying it. Once that is done then Tylo can make sure that the ship doesn't crash." Jayk said.

"Hang on then. This could get bumpy." Tylo said and he accelerated the *Swift Exit*, pushing the light freighter as fast as he could towards the *Heart of Talith*.

Even among the crowded skies above the capital a ship the size of the *Heart of Talith* was easy for Tylo to find. The massive freighter was ponderous in its movement and the *Swift Exit* could easily outpace it.

"Okay we're coming up on the ship now." Tylo said when he first saw it through the cockpit canopy.

"What was that?" Brae asked when she saw a flash from the freighter and something dropped away.

"Hopefully the crew doing what they were told and abandoning ship." Jayk said, "Tylo can you dock us with that ship?"

"No, but I can get us real close." Tylo replied.

"That will have to do. Brae you and I need to go to the top hatch. Tylo will get us as close to the freighter as he can and then we will cut a way into it." Jayk said.

"You mean we're going to jump?" Brae asked.

"Jump? Are you insane? Do you know how high up we are?" Tylo exclaimed.

"Yes, though if it makes you happier we will be using safety lines." Jayk said, "Once Brae and I are across you will follow. Cal can take the *Swift Exit* down."

"Oh I've got a very bad feeling about this." Tylo said, shaking his head.

"Just get us close to that freighter." Jayk told him as he got up from the co-pilot's seat and exited the cockpit. Brae followed Jayk to the *Swift Exit*'s top hatch where he took a length of syntherope from a locker and tied it around his waist.

"Leave enough for Tylo." he told Brae as he handed her the loose end of the line and then began to climb the ladder leading up to the hatch.

As soon as the hatch opened there was the roar of air rushing past and an alarm began to sound.

"That's the decompression alarm." Brae said and Jayk nodded.

"We must be up high enough for the computer to think the hull has been breached. We don't have much time to do this." he said.

"Okay we're approaching the freighter now." Tylo announced over the intercom just as the huge bulk of the *Heart of Talith* appeared outside and blocked the view through the open hatchway.

Jayk then climbed the ladder to reach the hatch and as he stuck his head out he felt the shift in gravity caused by the steep angle of the *Swift Exit's* flight. Inside the ship the floor was always 'down', but the ship was flying almost vertically and Jayk could feel Katermass' planetary gravity wanting to pull him towards the rear of the ship where he would undoubtedly be incinerated by the engine exhaust. The *Heart of Talith* was just a few metres away at this point though and Jayk could see an antenna cluster sticking out of the hull below him that looked strong enough to use as a handhold. Trusting in Brae to prevent him from falling if the Force failed him, Jayk leapt from the *Swift Exit's* hatch and reached out, grabbing hold of the antenna array as he dropped past it.

"Dad!" Brae called out.

"I'm fine. I'm on the freighter's hull." Jayk responded as he drew his lightsaber one handed and then ignited the blade. Pushing the blade into the freighter's hull, Jayk dragged it around in a circle to create a way into the ship and as he did so Tylo came rushing into the airlock.

"Okay Cal's flying the ship, he says that he's steady enough to keep us a fixed distance from that freighter. Now where's your dad?" he said.

"Out there. Here, take this and tie it around your waist." Brae replied, pointing up through the hatch while she handed Tylo the end of the syntherope line.

"Have I told you what a bad idea this is?" Tylo responded as he hurriedly tied the line around himself.

"If you have a better one then you need to explain it quickly." Brae said before she heard Jayk shout across the gap between the two ships.

"Okay Brae, I've cut the hole and I'm in the ship. Come on over." he called out.

"I'm coming." she replied as she began to climb the ladder.

From just inside the top hatch Brae could see the hole that Jayk had cut into the *Heart of Talith* and she aimed for this as she jumped from the *Swift Exit*, using the Force to both propel and guide her.

"I've got you." Jayk said when he caught hold of Brae and then he pulled her into the ship where she now found that the hole was cut into the floor of the lowest level of the cargo hold, "Now you Tylo." Jayk shouted. Tylo also climbed the ladder but when he reached the hatch he came to a halt, staring down at the ground thousands of metres below.

Fear.

"He'll never do it." Brae said.

"He must." Jayk replied, "Tylo, jump. We've got the line, you won't fall."

"That's easy for you to say." Tylo responded as he remained in the hatchway.

"Oh we don't have time for this." Brae said and she thrust her hand out through the hole and focused on Tylo.

"Oh hell no! Don't you-" he exclaimed, realising what she was about to do but he was too late to prevent her from using the Force to pull him through the hatch. His arms and legs flailing wildly, Tylo screamed as he flew through the air towards the hole.

Jayk grabbed hold of one of Tylo's arms and pulled him through the hole, depositing him on the floor beside him and Brae.

Anger.

"Why you little-" he began, glaring at Brae. Then he added, "Mark my words I'll get my own back and you won't like it at all."

"Later." Jayk said as he took out his comlink, "Cal we're all across." he transmitted.

"Understood. See you on the ground." Cal responded and outside the freighter the *Swift Exit* pulled away.

"Okay so now what?" Tylo asked.

"Now you head for the flight deck while Brae and I find the navigation computer. We'll wait for your signal before we destroy it." Jayk told him and he nodded.

"Okay." he said.

"And watch out for Matten Tren." Brae added.

"Thanks for reminding me. We're not only aboard a starship that's out of control, we're aboard an out of control starship with a madman aboard as well." Tylo replied.

6.

Tylo kept his blaster drawn as he made his way through the freighter to its flight deck, alert for any sign that Matten Tren was about to leap out at him. However, he found the path from the hold to the flight deck to be completely lifeless, the crew had already abandoned ship and there was no sign of Matten Tren in any of the passageways. Just to be sure, Tylo closed the hatch behind him when he reached the empty flight deck and sealed it. Despite being on the day side of the planet, stars were visible through the viewport which indicated that the freighter was either in space or very close to it.

"Let's see him get in now." Tylo said to himself as he rushed to the helm station and tried the controls only to find that they did not respond, the console informing him that all commands were being overridden by the automatic pilot. Instead Tylo took out his comlink and activated it, "Okay Jayk, I'm all set whenever you are." he signalled. All of a sudden the star field visible outside the viewport shifted and then vanished as the surface of Katermass filled it instead, "And hurry." Tylo told Jayk, "The ship just turned around so I think that means we're on our way back down."

Cler Lemas was sat behind her desk when the intercom activated and a holographic image of her secretary appeared in front of her.

"Yes?" she said.

"Minister Lemas we're receiving a feed from starport tracking. They've been tracking *Heart of Talith*."

"There is news?" Cler asked.

"Yes minister, I'm forwarding it to you now." the secretary said and beside the hologram a flat image appeared in mid air showing the tracking data from the starport. Among all the signals the *Heart of Talith* was highlighted, along with a projection of its current course. A course that was bringing it straight back down to the ground, "As you can see the freighter will crash very close to us. What should we do?"

"Two things." Cler said, "Firstly we can pray that the jedi are successful in preventing this catastrophe. More importantly though I think the time has come to evacuate as many beings as we can from the danger zone."

"Understood Tylo, the nav computer should be just up ahead." Jayk responded while Brae attempted to open a hatch leading to the freighter's engineering section.

"It won't open." she said, "I think the mechanism has been disabled."

"Then we make our own doorway." Jayk replied and simultaneously both jedi activated their lightsabers before plunging them into the sealed doorway.

Not intended to resist anything more than a sudden loss of pressure on the other side, the door was not heavily armoured and it offered minimal resistance to the jedi's lightsabers. In less than a minute Jayk and Brae had cut through the door and a large section crashed to the floor of the darkened room on the other side.

Danger.

Both Jayk and Brae sensed the tremor in the Force and dived out of the way just as there was a loud 'bang!' and a projectile came flying through the hole they had just cut.

"He has a gun?" Brae exclaimed.

"A rivet gun it seems." Jayk replied when he saw the deformed projectile now embedded in the floor and knew immediately that it was not a bullet from a slug thrower or magnetic accelerator. Then there was another 'bang' and a second rivet came flying through the hole in the door, "However, that is not to say that they are not dangerous." Jayk added and Brae nodded.

"I get it." she said, "Though I'm kind of wishing we had a blaster right now so that we could shoot back."

"Brae we are jedi. We don't need blasters."

"We don't?"

"No. All we need is to run very fast." Jayk said and he smiled before suddenly diving through the hole in the door.

"Dad!" Brae called out as another shot from Matten's improvised weapon rang out but Jayk was moving fast enough that the rivet missed him by a considerable margin. Guessing that Matten's attention would now be focused on Jayk, Brae leapt through the hole as well and headed in the opposite direction to Jayk.

Both jedi now moved between the rows of machinery in the chamber on the other side of the door as they searched for Matten. They kept low to maximise the cover that the machinery provided but the light given off by their weapons made them easy for Matten to track. On the other hand although they could sense his presence in the room through the Force it was hard to get an exact fix on his position so all they had to go on were the rivets he fired at them as fast as the pneumatic gun he had armed himself with would allow. Matten was not willing to remain in one place while the jedi hunted for him though, instead after each shot he fired

he moved a short distance before firing again. Fortunately for the Jedi, the rivet gun was not intended for use as a ranged weapon and combined with Matten's inexperience in its use the projectiles were easy to avoid. "Matten Tren in the name of the Galactic Republic you are under arrest for murder." Jayk called out and then he smiled to himself when Matten did exactly what he had hoped he would and responded. "Never. You can't deny destiny Jedi. The Sith beat you before and now the Sith will beat you again." he shouted.

"The Sith lost the war Tren." Brae shouted as she turned and headed towards the sound of his voice, "We drove them from Katermass."

"Yes, now you're about to lose as well." Jayk added and then he saw a slight flash in the dimness of the room as another rivet was fired in his direction. This time rather than dodge out of the path of the rivet Jayk brought up his lightsaber and blocked it. He could not deflect the rivet as he could with a blaster bolt but the extreme heat within the blade melted the rivet and instead of a single fast moving projectile, Jayk was struck by a light shower of numerous tiny objects with so little energy that they barely even stung him.

Now that he had a fix on Matten's position Jayk straightened up and rushed directly towards him, vaulting over the machinery in his path.

In a panic Matten fired again and screamed.

"No!" he yelled as he continued to fire his weapon at Jayk without moving and in doing so he also gave away his position to Brae, causing her to charge towards him as well.

Jayk had a head start on Brae though and he reached Matten first, striking at him with his lightsaber. He could easily have cut Matten in half with a single swing of his weapon but Jayk instead opted to attack the rivet gun in his hands. The rivet gun was bulky, designed to withstand being dropped and containing a large supply of rivets along with a compressed gas cylinder that provided the pressure to fire them. It was the gas cylinder that Jayk aimed for and when his lightsaber punctured the tank there was a sudden blast of escaping gas that ripped the heavy tool from Matten's grasp.

"No! You'll never stop me, it's too late now!" he hissed, lunging at Jayk and attempting to grab his lightsaber. Brae then dived at Matten, shutting off her lightsaber before she used the pommel of the hilt to strike the side of his head and he fell away from Jayk, who then shut off his lightsaber as well.

Both Jedi then dived on top of Matten to restrain him, pulling the man's arms behind his back as Jayk took a set of plastic handcuff ties from a pouch on his belt and used them to secure him.

"Brae can you handle him?" Jayk asked and she nodded.

"I'll be fine." she said and Jayk jumped up and looked around for the navigation computer that he knew was somewhere in the room. Seeing it in the centre of the room he activated his lightsaber again and rushed towards it before bringing his blade down on the computer hard enough that he cleaved it in two with one strike and there was a shower of sparks as the machine was destroyed.

In the flight deck Tylo watched the ground getting steadily closer through the forward viewport, the altimeter on the console in front of him showing ten thousand metres and falling at just over six thousand metres a minute.

"One way or another this is going to be over soon." he said to himself when all of a sudden the flight controls lit up, a message appearing on one of the screens.

NAVIGATION COMPUTER FAILURE. AUTO-PILOT OFF LINE. PILOT TAKE MANUAL CONTROL.

"Jayk you did it!" Tylo exclaimed, grabbing hold of the controls, "Now let's just hope you did it in time." and he pulled back on the control column as hard as he could.

The three hundred and fifty metre long freighter was not designed to be nimble in space or an atmosphere and Tylo could only adjust its course gradually. However, with each passing moment the ship began to level out and its rate of descent slowed. However, even as Tylo was doing his best to prevent the ship from crashing its sensors detected the imminent danger from the city's larger towers.

"Alert! Alert! Collision warning. Take evasive action immediately." an automated voice announced.

"What do you think I'm doing you electric know it all?" Tylo snapped as the freighter's instruments finally read that it was horizontal and he breathed a sigh of relief as the ship began to pull up again. However, another alarm then sounded as the underside of the ship ripped an antenna array off one of the city's towers and Tylo's eyes widened.

"No way am I paying for that." he said.