

STAR WARS

DARKNESS RISING

4-05: DIE & LIVE

BY STEPHEN J DUTTON



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When a thief is killed during a robbery the Sector Rangers discover that she was supposed to already be dead. Looking for means by which the dead can come back to life they approach the Jedi Order for help.

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1.

Breaking into the vault had been easy for the masked figure despite the high level of security. Most of the countermeasures put in place to prevent anyone from breaking in were designed to alert local the security forces to an intruder rather than make the vault physically impenetrable and all the masked figure had had to do was lower herself down a utility shaft that ran down past the vault and cut through with a high energy plasma cutter. Of course this had set off the vault alarms the moment the cutter first breached it and trigger the thermal sensors inside and the masked figure knew that she had only a short amount of time before security arrived to stop her.

Lighting a flare to give her sufficient light to see by the masked figure moved quickly through the vault. The masked figure collected the valuable items that she had come here to steal and loaded them into a large holdall. The weight of the loot was too much for her to lift unaided and so she instead made use of a wheeled cart from inside the vault to move the bag over to where she had cut her way into the vault. From here she was able to connect the holdall to the safety line she had used when making her entry into the vault before tugging on it as a signal for the winch at the top of the shaft to begin operating.

Then just as the holdall was dragged into the shaft the vault doors opened and a group of large security officers armed with stun batons entered.

"Stay where you are!" one yelled at the intruder and she turned to face them.

"Sorry boys but I have to be going now." she replied calmly and then before the guards could stop her she jumped back into the shaft and plummeted downwards.

"Stang! She jumped." one of the guards exclaimed when they saw this.

Rushing to the hole in the wall the guards looked down into the shaft where they could hear the sound of the intruder's body bouncing off the walls as it continued to fall the hundreds of metres to the bottom.

"Ow!" Brae Udra exclaimed as the medical droid in the jedi temple's infirmary prodded her shoulder with a sharp probe.

"Nervous system regeneration now at ninety-eight point four percent." the droid said as it turned towards the two men standing behind the machine while it examined the teenage padawan.

"Hear that kid? You're strong enough to pull the arms off a gundark." the former smuggler Tylo Kurrast said, smiling at Brae.

"I'm glad you've recovered from you injury so quickly Brae." the second man, the jedi knight that was training Brae added and she smiled at him.

"Thanks dad." she replied and the jedi knight instinctively looked around as some of the other jedi present in the infirmary heard this and looked towards them. Although jedi having offspring was not unheard of after the Ruusan Reformations, a jedi who had such a child would not be expected to have any contact with them even if both were members of the Jedi Order. However, when Jayk Udra had first been assigned to take over Brae's training both of them had been under the impression that he was her uncle and the truth had only been revealed by accident when a medical scan was carried out in a civilian facility far from the temple.

"You do smell like bacta though." Tylo added and Brae turned to him.

"Really? I thought that smell was just you." she said.

"Is she fit enough to return to duty?" Jayk asked the droid.

"Affirmative." the hovering machine answered, "The patient should be observed for any signs of complications but full function is available."

"What an amazing bedside manner that bucket of bolts has." Tylo said, "So shall we get a move on?"

"To where?" Brae asked.

"As surprising as it may seem Tylo is impatient for us to visit a law enforcement agent." Jayk told her and Brae frowned.

"An agent who happens to be on a planet I've visited before and there's this place I want to check out again. Let's just say that the staff are very friendly." Tylo said.

"Let's not. I know what you mean by that." Brae said and Tylo shrugged.

"Her kid you can't blame me. My dating options are somewhat limited while I'm still under court order to chauffeur you and your father around the galaxy.

"The Sector Rangers have contacted us with an unusual case that could be linked to either Teron Sharr or Morton Crayne." Jayk explained.

"More stolen artwork?" Brae asked.

"Among other things, yes. No details have been provided yet but they consider their prime suspect to be worthy of the Jedi Order's attention." Jayk said.

"Okay if someone can return my robes to me then we can be off." Brae said, holding out her hand.

The Sector Rangers acted as the Republic Judicial Department's primary law enforcement agency across the galaxy and they had at their disposal a wide range of resources from undercover agents to highly trained paramilitary assault teams and even squadrons of warships. This gave them the ability to handle most investigations themselves without outside help but on occasion they would reach out to the Jedi Order for

help with more specialised cases such as this one.

Two sector rangers were waiting by the side of the landing pad as Tylo brought his ship, the YT-700 class light freighter *Swift Exit* in to land and as the ship's access ramp lowered they walked forwards to greet the occupants.

"Jedi Udra, I'm Special Agent Losto and this is my partner Special Agent Tarren." one of the agents said and Jayk nodded.

"I understand you have a case that may affect an investigation of mine." he replied.

"Possibly, we're not sure but some of the details match. If you'd like to come with me I can show you what we've got." Losto answered.

The Jedi and Tylo were taken to a nearby Sector Ranger office where Losto and Tarren showed them to the room set aside for their investigation.

"Your suspect? Nice. I wish I'd been able to work with her when I was on that side of the law." Tylo commented when he saw the image of an attractive female human shown on one of the large monitors present in the office,

"She doesn't look so good more recently." Tarren replied, "It's hard to be exact but she may have landed face first when she hit the bottom of a shaft after a drop of three hundred and twenty metres."

Tylo winced.

"Ick." he said.

"She fell while trying to escape?" Brae asked.

"Jumped it seems." Losto answered, "She'd broke into a vault and was cornered by security agents. Rather than surrender she jumped down the utility shaft she'd used to gain entry to the vault. We think that her plan had been for the accomplice she passed the stolen goods to to lower the winch for her afterwards but she reckoned without the response time of security."

"What was stolen?" Tylo asked, "You can tell a lot about a thief from what they steal."

"In this latest case it was a consignment of precious stones and metals. The vault was used by a jewellers and they frequently had stocks of them for use in custom pieces." Losto explained, "The other break ins have also targeted small pieces of artwork, jewellery and cash."

"The artwork could represent a link to our case." Jayk commented.

"The rest of it is easy to move on the black market. Jewellery that is easy to identify can be melted down and sold for the value of the materials." Tarren added.

"So you're hunting for the accomplice?" Tylo said.

"That individual is not associated with our investigation that I know of. This looks like an ordinary case of breaking and entering so far. Why did you request the assistance of the Jedi Order?" Jayk added.

"Because when we looked into the woman's background we found out that she was already dead. Fried by a plasma field while stealing from a customs clearing yard six months ago." Tarren said.

"Twins?" Tylo suggested.

"Unlucky twins." Brae commented.

"It would have to be triplets." Tarren said, "A third one was electrocuted shorting out a security fence. DNA tests on all three corpses came back identical."

"And if you like that's then it's gets weirder." Losto continued, "Less than a day after each body was delivered to the morgue they were removed. DNA analysis suggests they got up and left even though the most recent was pieces stored in a tub and the first was just a few charged lumps of meat. What we want to know is how can someone come back from the dead like that?"

"Could Sith sorcery resurrect someone?" Brae asked, looking at Jayk.

"Maybe this is linked to Teron after all." Tylo said.

"We should check with Cal. Brae go back to the ship and fetch him." Jayk said before he looked at the two Sector Rangers, "I want to know everything about this woman." he told them.

The information that the Sector Rangers had on file about the mysterious woman was limited. She had gone under various aliases, the most recent one seeming to have been Xehra Connert. As an adult she had several arrests on record going back more than a decade but these had all been for relatively minor crimes compared to the thefts that appeared to have killed her over and over again. Unfortunately information about her earlier than ten years ago was almost none existent. An immigration record showed her arriving on the planet from the isolated Hapan Consortium but other than that there was nothing. The Hapan border was supposed to be closed but that was at the decision of the hapans themselves and the Republic did not prevent them from travelling beyond their territory. However, there were no formal relations between the two governments and so no way of requesting any records that might exist of Xehra Connert in the Consortium. While Jayk and Tylo studied what little information there was concerning Xehra and her crimes Brae returned to the *Swift Exit* before coming back with a fist sized crystal cube. This was a holocron, an incredibly advanced form of data storage device. This particular example had been created by an ancestor of Jayk and Brae almost four thousand years earlier called Cal. Cal Udra had also been a Jedi knight and during his life he had put all his knowledge and experiences into the holocron, adding a virtual recreation of himself to act as its gatekeeper. Cal's experience in training his own sister had been thought by the Jedi Order to be of use

to Jayk and Brae and so they had been granted permission to take the valuable device from the temple archives.

"So how's the search for the smooshed girl?" Brae asked as she set the holocron down on a desk and Jayk glared at her.

"I don't think that is entirely appropriate Brae." he said.

"Of course not." the voice of Cal Udra said as a hologram of an older man in jedi robes appeared, attracting the curious attention of the sector rangers in the room, "Smooshed isn't a real word."

"The answer is that it isn't going anywhere. This chick keeps turning up, dying and then escaping from the morgue." Tylo told Brae, "As an escape strategy it's unique I suppose."

"Cal we need to know whether any of this sounds like the Sith or their technology are involved." Jayk said.

"Explain it properly and I'll give you my opinion." Cal replied and Jayk nodded.

"This woman is Xehra Connert and she is responsible for several high profile break ins on this planet." he said, pointing to the wall mounted display that showed Xehra's face. At each one she was supposedly killed during the later stages of the robbery but her remains then vanished from the morgue. The crime scenes suggest that she had an accomplice but the only DNA at the mortuary was hers."

"Basically we want to know how this woman could come back from the dead." Tylo commented.

"Hmm. That's interesting." Cal said, "The Sith could reanimate flesh, there's no doubt about that. But actually bringing someone back from the dead? No. That would require manipulation of the midi-chlorians far beyond anything that has ever been achieved by the jedi or the Sith. What the Sith created were just monsters made of flesh."

"No Sith so no no reason for us to stay then." Tylo said.

"Don't be so hasty. The Sector Rangers have asked for our assistance and we will give it to them. Just because it does not appear that the case is related to our investigation that does not mean that we can ignore it." Jayk responded.

"So where do we start?" Brae asked.

"The last place that this woman was seen. The morgue." Jayk answered.

2.

The morgue was much like all of the other similar facilities that Jayk had seen. Run entirely by droids, every surface was kept spotless and there was a strong smell of disinfectants.

"I want to know how bodies are processed when they arrive." Jayk told one of the droids, a first degree medical model that had been modified for carrying out post mortems.

"Understood." the droid responded, "Bodies are catalogued on arrival with all physical details recorded."

"Is that when you test the DNA?" Jayk asked.

"Affirmative. Samples are gathered and entered into our databank." the droid said. "If the nature of the body is such that it requires immediate autopsy it is then transferred to one of the examination rooms. Otherwise it is placed in cold storage until released."

"I take it that not many of the bodies release themselves." Tylo commented.

"Error. Your statement is not understood." the droid said and Brae smiled.

"Looks like this droid has you figured out already Tylo." she said.

"I want to see where the body of Xehra Connert was kept before it was removed." Jayk said, ignoring Brae and Tylo's exchange.

"Please follow me." the droid responded and it rotated on the spot before rolling away.

Jayk, Brae and Tylo followed the droid from the entrance to the morgue past a row of examination areas.

Some of these were in use, with more droids carrying out examinations on bodies. As a precaution against contamination each of these examination areas was sealed off by a transparent barrier that lowered into place when in use. This allowed observers to watch the process from the hallway while remaining safe from being exposed to any hazardous toxins or infections that the body may be carrying.

After passing by the examination areas, the droid rolled up to a large door that opened automatically for the machine and immediately the trio of humans felt the coolness of the room on the other side.

"This is the cold storage section." the droid announced as it rolled into the room.

"Cold is the right word." Tylo muttered.

"The temperature is maintained at six degrees to prevent ice crystals forming in bodies." the droid said as the three humans looked around.

Along both sides of the room were row after row of doors and the droid made its way to one of these. This particular door stood out from the others owing to the damage that had been done to the edge where it had been forced open.

"The body of Xehra Connert was removed from this unit." the droid said as it triggered the opening sequence and the door swung open to reveal the stack of shelves inside, each one intended for a single body.

"So someone obviously broke in to get the body." Tylo said as he looked at the damaged section of the door.

"Which doesn't exactly fit with the idea of her coming back to life and breaking out herself." Jayk added. Then he looked at the droid again, "Why wasn't the intruder challenged when they arrived?" he asked.

"Access to the morgue was gained via the cooling system output. The culprit or culprits left the same way." the droid answered and it pointed towards a grill in the wall. Brae then walked over to this and held her hand up to it.

"I can feel the draught." she said.

"The system remained operational throughout. Otherwise an alarm would have been triggered." the droid said.

"So we're looking for someone who knows how to break into a building without triggering alarms." Jayk said.

"A professional burglar in other words." Tylo added, "Sounded like Mara to me."

"I thought we'd already discounted the involvement of Morten Crayne. Or Teron Sharr, or whoever that freak's working for now." Brae pointed out.

"Just making the point that whoever took the body knew what they were doing." Tylo replied.

"I've got the police report about the investigation here." Jayk said, taking out his datapad and calling up the report. All of what the morgue droid had told him was included in this but he still preferred being able to see the scene of the crime for himself, "It says that a forensic analysis of the cooling system revealed only Xehra Connert's DNA."

"That is correct." the droid replied.

"Okay so someone crawled in through the cooling system, forced open the storage unit holding the body and then dragged it back out the same way they came in." Tylo said.

"Dragging a body through that duct would be difficult." Jayk pointed out, noting the small size of the grill.

"What if she didn't need to be dragged out?" Brae suggested, "What if she was revived here?"

"What and then just climbed out herself?" Tylo said and Brae nodded.

"Exactly." she said as she returned to stand with Jayk and Tylo.

"That may have left traces the police did not look for." Jayk said and he turned to the droid again, "Do you keep logs of the power consumption for this room?" he asked.

"Affirmative. Building power consumption is logged by section so that defects in the system can be detected." the droid said.

"What sort of defects do you look for?" Jayk added.

"Sustained increases in power consumption."

"Sustained? So a brief increase would not be acted upon?" Jayk said.

"Correct. Momentary disruptions that self correct are logged but no action is taken regarding them unless they repeat." the droid said.

"What are you thinking Jayk?" Tylo said.

"If Xehra Connert was revived here then whatever process was used to do this would have to have produced an energy spike and I would expect that to manifest as heat." Jayk told him and Brae smiled.

"Heat that the cooling system would have had to get rid off," she said, "and that would show up as an increase in power consumption."

"Did the police or Sector Rangers check the power consumption for the time of the break in?" Jayk asked the droid.

"Negative. The logs were not accessed." it answered.

"Can you access the logs?" Jayk added.

"Affirmative."

"Then do so." Jayk ordered.

"Accessing. Power consumption for this section increased by seven percent for a period of six point three minutes at the time of the break in. This corresponds with a heat source being active within this time." the droid said after calling up the log file.

"Our resurrection tech." Tylo said and Jayk nodded again.

"That's what it looks like." he said before he looked at the droid again and added, "We're going to need a copy of that log."

"Understood. Your authority is recognised and a copy of the log will be made available to you. I can download it directly to your datapad if you wish." the droid said.

"Hey look at this." Brae said suddenly from beside the exposed shelves used to store bodies.

"What's wrong?" Tylo said.

"This shelf looks different to the others." Brae said, "Tarnished. You have to look closely but it's there."

"Brae's right." Jayk agreed as he looked closely at the shelf, "Is this the shelf used to store the body of Xehra Connert?" he asked, glancing at the droid again.

"Affirmative." the droid told him.

"In that case we need to examine this. Maybe whatever was used to resurrect her left some trace behind."

Jayk said and then he smiled at Brae, "Well spotted." he told her and she smiled also.

"Don't get cocky kid." Tylo then whispered to her and she frowned.

"What? What did I do?" she responded.

The droids at the morgue were able to remove the shelf from inside the storage unit but they were not equipped to carry out a metallurgical examination and so for this it had to be sent to a different location. While the results of this were being awaited the Udras and Tylo returned to the *Swift Exit* and as soon as they entered the lounge area Cal's hologram materialised.

"Find anything interesting?" he asked.

"Only that whatever process is being used to bring Xehra Connert back from the dead is portable." Jayk replied and the image of Cal appeared to frown.

"What are you doing that for?" Tylo said as he walked past the hologram on his way to the fridge, "And does anyone want a beer?"

"Sometimes I wish that the real me had programmed the option for drinking beer into my holographic files." Cal commented.

"That doesn't answer Tylo's question. What about the resurrection technology being portable makes you frown?" Brae asked.

"Well while you have been poking around dead people-" Cal began.

"You've been dead for more than three thousand years." Tylo interrupted.

"Quite and sometimes I'm glad that I have." Cal responded, "However, getting back to my point while you three have been poking around corpses I've been taking a look at the video evidence. Of which there is more than I was expecting."

"You mean like security cameras from inside the places that were burgled?" Tylo said.

"Actually I took a look at the footage from outside. The police gathered footage from every external camera that had a view of the targets to try and identify the accomplice who kept escaping." Cal explained.

"The Sector Rangers said that there was an accomplice but they didn't know who it was." Brae said.

"No, their face doesn't appear in any of the footage. However, we do have shots of the vehicles they were operating, a mix of landspeeders and airspeeders for the main break ins and we clearly see the stolen goods being brought aboard. That's where things get interesting though." Cal said.

"Why? What happens?" Jayk asked.

"Well in the case of each break in the vehicle starts to move off immediately that the stolen property is secure. Sometimes it has to get inside but in others it is still being winched aboard. Whoever was driving those vehicles had no intention of waiting around for this Xehra." Cal said.

"Take it from me, there's no honour among thieves." Tylo commented, lifting his drink before drinking a mouthful of it.

"Each of the vehicles involved in the initial stages of the crimes was stolen and were later recovered having been burnt out to destroy any forensic evidence." Cal continued, "This brings us on to the second stage of each crime."

"The body snatching." Brae said and Cal nodded.

"Exactly. This is where the police and Sector Rangers messed up. They decided that there had to be a vehicle capable of transporting a body without it being seen and so they looked for larger landspeeders and airspeeders again. However, they found nothing because that isn't the sort of vehicle being used." he said.

"If there was no body then a smaller vehicle would do. Something just big enough to carry a driver and one passenger." Jayk said.

"Yes but the footage I found doesn't show any vehicles present at the times the bodies were snatched that contained more than one person either. What I do have though is a Moboquet Turbo-Six speeder bike in the vicinity of every morgue that a body identified as Xehra Connert was taken from at the right time. However, there is obviously just a single rider on this vehicle whether it is heading to or from the morgue. Look." Cal said and he pointed to the large video screen that had been installed in the *Swift Exit's* lounge. As the others turned to look at the screen as well Cal called up a set of still images taken from the video footage he had examined. Each of these showed a female looking humanoid figure, the exact species of and facial features hidden by the skin tight clothing and protective helmet that she wore riding on a speeder bike. Both the figure and the speeder bike appeared to be the same in each image. In every image the rider was alone though, no pillion passenger was visible in any of them. The speeder bike had been fitted with a pair of storage bags behind the rider but these were obviously too small to contain a body the size of a typical human being.

"So the accomplice is female as well." Tylo said, smiling as he studied the figure hugging bodyglove that the rider wore.

"Is there some other way that Xehra could have escaped?" Jayk said.

"Not if she came out of the morgues the same way as her accomplice. One of the sets of footage I found was a partial image of this individual entering and exiting a morgue through a window and she was definitely alone. Xehra Connert definitely did not come out with her." Cal replied.

"This is getting us nowhere." Brae said, sighing, "We've got an accomplice that apparently leaves their partner to die but then breaks into the morgue afterwards to resurrect them but arrives and leaves alone. So what's happening to Xehra Connert?"

"Teleportation?" Tylo said.

"Is that a thing now?" Cal asked, "When I was alive there were tales about ancient species or the occasional jedi master who had been able to accomplish the art but as a technology it didn't exist."

"So there is something you don't know. I must make a note of this." Tylo commented, grinning.

"Teleportation technology does exist but it is exceedingly rare and only comes from sources outside the Republic." Jayk told Cal.

"Anyone who had it wouldn't need to steal." Brae added, "They could just sell the technology and be billionaires. Even if no-one could reverse engineer it, the devices are that valuable."

"Plus of course if you could teleport at a whim through solid matter then you wouldn't need to creep in through a window. You could just teleport yourself into wherever you wanted to burgle." Jayk pointed out.

"Well that depends on whether the technology lets you teleport to somewhere you haven't seen doesn't it? Plus don't underestimate people's greed. Sure they could sell the technology but they could also use it to steal all the money they'd get from selling it and more besides." Tylo said.

"In any case we have no evidence that any form of teleportation was used." Jayk said, "Assuming it is likely to do nothing but distract us. Until we get the results of the examination of the morgue shelf I think that we should concentrate on looking for this accomplice."

"Agreed." Cal said, "That is what I've been working on. Since the speeder bike is the one constant we have I've been trying to track it. The problem is that although I think it's the same bike in each recording the registration details have been altered so it could be any of them or none."

"Have you run the registrations against the planetary database?" Jayk said.

"Of course I have. All of them exist and correspond to speeder bikes of this general model so whoever switched the details of this bike did their homework rather than just putting on random numbers." Cal replied before there was a chiming sound from the *Swift Exit's* communication system.

"Sounds like someone wants to speak to us." Brae said as she walked over a nearby intercom panel, using it to access the ship's main communication array, "Brae Udra." she said simply.

"Padawan Udra it's Special Agent Tarren. We've just had word of a silent alarm being triggered in a secure warehouse. The live feed from the security cameras shows a suspect that looks like Xehra Connert." Tarren's voice said.

"I'll start the ship up. Just get me a location." Tylo said, tossing what was left of his beer into the trash and he and Jayk both rushed towards the cockpit.

"Agent Tarren, we're lifting off now. Can you send us the location?" Brae said.

"Yes, I'm forwarding the details now. It's in the city of Horra, local law enforcement is already responding."

Tarren told her.

"Details are coming through now." Jayk called out from the co-pilot's seat when he sat down and saw the navigation data being fed to the *Swift Exit* on a sub channel to Agent Tarren's message.

"Okay we've got it. Thanks." Brae told Tarren and she shut off the communication system before running to join Jayk and Tylo.

"Hold on, I've skipped most of the checks so this could be bumpy." Tylo said as he pulled back on the controls and the *Swift Exit* suddenly took off, it's internal gravity field was not quite stabilised yet and so the occupants of the ship felt the downward pressure as the ship rose up off the ground and then sped off.

3.

The city of Horra was more than two hundred kilometres from the capital city where the *Swift Exit* had landed and even accelerating rapidly to the freighter's maximum speed it still took Tylo almost half an hour to reach the secure warehouse. By this time the thieves had fled the scene and the local police had already sealed the area off.

"This area is restricted. You'll have to leave." a uniformed officer said as the occupants of the *Swift Exit* walked down the access ramp, his hand resting on his sidearm as he spoke. In response to this Jayk and Brae simply both brushed their robes aside to reveal the lightsabers they were carrying, "I'm sorry." the police officer said, "We were told that you were coming but we were expecting a Judicial Department craft."

"Captain Kurrast's vessel has been placed at our disposal." Jayk explained, "Can you tell us who is charge here?"

"Sure, Dectective S'En is over there now." the officer replied and he pointed to a neimoidian in civilian clothing but with a law enforcement badge displayed prominently. The detective was standing beside a blast door that despite its solid construction had had a large hole blown in it from the inside so that large pieces of shrapnel now lay scattered on the ground outside the warehouse.

"Thank you." Jayk said and he, Brae and Tylo walked towards the neimoidian, "Detective S'En." he called out, "I am Jedi Jayk Udra. Can you tell me what happened here?"

"Of course, we were warned to expect you. I was given the basics of the cases you're investigating and this looks like it's another." S'En replied, "About half an hour ago a cargo air speeder touched down about where your ship is and a single individual was caught on security recordings making their way to this blast door and using a plasma cutter to break through that vent up there." and the neimoidian pointed to a vent high up on the wall. Once inside she then fixed a number of detonite charges to the inside of the blast door and triggered them all simultaneously. The blast was enough to destroy the door and expose a number of the pallets being stored inside the warehouse. An accomplice inside the air speeder then used a tractor beam to remove these and load them aboard their craft."

"Let me guess," Tylo said, "the person who broke in was caught up in the explosion."

"Correct. The security of this warehouse is based around the amount of explosive force needed to penetrate it being so great that it would be lethal to anyone close by and that is exactly what happened in this case." S'En explained.

"So she blew herself up to clear the way for whatever was stored here to be taken." Brae said.

"I need to see the body." Jayk said.

"That might be difficult. It's not so much a body as pieces of one. The force of the blast burned her and ripped apart what was left. We've got a field analysis droid picking them up now.

"I take it that you'll be sending the pieces to the morgue." Jayk asked and the neimoidian detective nodded.

"Yes, though I'm sure I'll never hear the last of this from the examiner when he has to make his report." he said.

"I think this gives us an opportunity." Jayk told Brae and Tylo.

"You mean steak out the morgue and wait for the accomplice to turn up?" Tylo asked.

"Exactly. Which if the existing pattern continues, should happen tonight." Jayk answered.

Unlike the capital, where the primary morgue was a separate building on hospital grounds the facility in Horra was in the basement of the main hospital building and this posed an additional problem for the jedi and Tylo. Whereas in the capital they could have easily monitored anyone approaching the morgue, here in Horra they had to contend with the building being full of people at all hours. This meant that Xehra's accomplice would have a crowd to blend into, her unknown appearance being an added advantage in this case.

The one advantage that the jedi had was in having identified the vehicle the accomplice was using to travel and so upon their arrival at the hospital they made their way to the security office where a trio of droids monitored the feeds from the cameras scattered around the facility, including its grounds and the parking structure beside it. Most of the feeds came from cameras in fixed positions but from the way some of the feeds changed it was clear that there were also a number of mobile security droids sending their optical sensor feeds back to the security office.

"We're looking for a Moboquet Turbo-Six." Jayk told one of the droids while a junior hospital administrator stood back and watched, under orders to provide the jedi with whatever assistance they needed.

"Understood, searching now." the droid responded and on one of the numerous screens that covered one of the walls in the security office still images captured of every vehicle to have entered the parking lot but not been seen leaving began to cycle, each one staying on the screen for little more than a second as the droid inspected them.

"There are currently four such vehicles on the premises. One of which is registered to employee number trill herf xesh one-one-three-eight, Staff Nurse Burbra." the droid announced.

"So that leaves you with three choices." the administrator added.

"Not necessarily." Tylo replied, "Can you check if Burbra is here?"

"You think that our suspect could have copied their plate?" Jayk asked and Tylo nodded.

"I would. We know that she's running under false plates so why wouldn't she replicate a set that would make her appear to be someone who is supposed to be here?" he answered while the administrator checked his datapad.

"Staff Nurse Burbra is not listed as being on duty. It's possible that she has swapped shift though, that happens a lot." the administrator said and Jayk stared at him.

"Possible? Then why don't you go and find out?" he said sternly.

Fear.

The administrator obviously found Jayk's demeanour intimidating and the man hurried from the security office.

"I think you scared him." Tylo commented.

"I know he did." Brae added.

"Regardless of what answer the administrator comes back with we need to secure the morgue." Jayk said, "Xehra's accomplice could already be on the premises."

"I'll go and take care of that." Tylo replied, "I can guard a door as easily as you but if it comes down to a room to room search of the building then I think your ability to read minds could come in useful."

"Good idea. We'll let you know if there is any new information." Jayk said and Tylo exited the security office, leaving the two jedi to wait for the administrator to return.

While they waited Jayk and Brae studied the multitude of camera feeds. Even with the wall covered in monitors there were too many cameras for every feed to be shown at once and so the screens often changed which feed they showed, giving the droids time to assess whether anything was out of the ordinary before moving on to another image. The rate at which they cycled ensured that nowhere in the hospital that was covered by a security camera remained unobserved for more than half a minute. For a normal being the rate at which the images changed was too great for them to gain any useful information from them but thanks to her skill with the Force Brae was able to follow them. Jayk on the other hand rubbed his eyes when he tried to do the same.

"Too fast for you master?" Brae commented.

"Sometimes you just have to admit that you're getting old." Jayk replied and he took a pair of glasses from a pouch on his belt that he put on to look at the array of screens again. Now that he could focus his eyes more easily he was able to concentrate his own Force abilities on identifying details in the footage he was looking at. Meanwhile Brae smirked as she turned back to the screens as well, "Don't laugh young lady. Even jedi get old and deteriorating eyesight is hereditary." Jayk told her.

"Gee, thanks dad. I wish I'd inherited the family height instead." Brae responded, noting that although the Udra family were typically tall she was barely one and a half metres in height, considered below average for an adult human female.

"Wait." Jayk said suddenly and he pointed to one of the screens, "Go back on monitor fourteen."

"Affirmative." one of the security droids said and the feed on the screen Jayk was pointing at switched back to the previous feed.

"That's it." Jayk said, "Brae tell me what you see at the back of that set of shelves."

"The ones with the cleaning supplies on?" Brae asked.

"Yes, that's the one."

"It looks like a helmet." Brae said.

"That's what I thought as well. A crash helmet of the type that is often worn by the riders of speeder bikes." Jayk said as he took out his datapad and called up a still image taken from the recording Cal had discovered of Xehra's accomplice on her speeder bike, "Specifically this kind." he said, holding out the datapad.

"And since any ordinary hospital employee would probably leave a helmet in a changing area we can assume that this one belongs to someone who wants to move about the hospital without it but isn't a member of staff." Brae said.

Jayk just nodded in reply and it was then that Jayk's comlink sounded.

"Jayk Udra." he said, lifting the device to his mouth.

"Jedi Udra it's Special Agent Losto, we've just had the preliminary results back from the lab." Losto's voice said.

"Is there a problem with them?" Jayk asked.

"They might not be able to recognise the effects of Sith resurrection technology or teleportation." Brae commented.

"That depends on your point of view." Losto told Jayk, "The lab reports that the surface of the morgue shelf was suffering from molecular distortion caused by exposure to a high energy source."

"Teleportation?" Brae commented.

"Could they identify the source?" Jayk asked.

"Yes, that's why I'm calling you. Jedi Udra the pattern of the disruption was consistent with the shelf being caught by a beam from a directed energy weapon of unusually high power, far more powerful than any ordinary blaster on the market." Losto said and Brae winced.

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

"The analysis droids at the lab have concluded that our suspect is armed with a disruptor." Losto added.

“Stang.” Brae muttered when her fears were confirmed.

4.

Disruptors made use of the same basic technology as the old pulse wave weapons that pre-dated the more efficient blasters that had replaced them. However, it had been discovered that by massively increasing the power of a pulse wave weapon the spatial distortions that they fired could be used to literally disintegrate matter. Short ranged and consuming vast amounts of energy, disruptors were illegal on every planet in the Republic. However, like most contraband items there was a black market for the devices and they continued to appear in the hands of criminals occasionally.

"Thank you for the warning agent. We'll be careful." Jayk said before he switched the comlink to contact Tylo, "Tylo it's Jayk." he transmitted.

"Go ahead Jayk." Tylo responded.

"Are you at the morgue yet?" Jayk asked.

"Not quite, I'm in the turbolift. Have you found the woman we're after here?" Tylo told him.

"Not quite, though we have spotted a protective helmet hidden in a storeroom that looks like the one the woman we're after was wearing in the footage we've seen though. What I really wanted to warn you about though was the message we've just received from Agent Losto. He says that the initial analysis of the shelf from the morgue in the capital indicates that she is armed with a disruptor." Jayk warned him.

"Did you just say a disruptor? Stang, where the kriff did she get one of those from?" Tylo responded in alarm.

"We don't know that. But if she is armed with a weapon like that then watch out. It is essential that we apprehend her as fast as possible." Jayk said.

"Oh don't worry, I'm right there on the same page as you. Mind you I'm not throwing myself in front of any blasts from one of those things. Being killed by a blaster is one thing, but being hit by a disruptor and becoming just a whole lot of nothing is another altogether." Tylo replied and then the doors to the turbolift opened to the basement level with the door to the morgue right in front of him, "I'm there. I'll get back to you if anything happens." he added before shutting off the comlink and putting it away.

Exiting the turbolift, Tylo crossed the hallway outside and was about to just wander right into the morgue when he hesitated, considering what he had just been told about Xehra's accomplice being armed with a disruptor. Then he drew his own heavy blaster pistol, wanting all the advantage he could get if the mystery woman happened to be on the other side of the door when he opened it before he reached out for the controls with his free hand.

Immediately the door slid open to reveal the section of the morgue where bodies were first delivered to and the startled nurse on duty gasped when she saw Tylo standing in the doorway with his blaster pointing into the room.

"Hey no need to worry." he said quickly, turning his blaster aside so that it clearly was not aimed at her, "I'm just here to look for someone."

"Just because you've been bereaved is no reason to-" the nurse began, her initial fear now turning to anger.

"Bereaved? No, you got it wrong. There's someone in the hospital who might be trying to steal a body, or rather what's left of one. I'm here to stop her." Tylo tried to explain but the nurse did not believe him, instead reaching for her intercom.

"Security this is the morgue." she said into it and Tylo sighed.

"Security office." the voice of a droid replied.

"Security there's a man down here claiming that someone wants to steal a body. He has a weapon." the nurse said. However, the response she got to her report was not what she was expecting.

"Is he acting like a stuck up scruffy looking nerf herder?" Brae asked and Tylo frowned.

"Who's scruffy looking?" he said, hoping he was loud enough for the intercom to pick up.

"Don't worry, he's with us." Brae said.

"Who is this? What's your operating number?" the nurse said, confused.

"I don't have one. My name is Brae Udra and I'm a jedi. Tylo really is there to help." Brae said.

"Very well." the nurse said as she now sighed and turned off the intercom. Then she looked at Tylo and said, "Can you at least get out of the way while I sort this out?" she said, waving him to one side as another nurse arrived pushing an enclosed repulsor cart that bore the hospital's logo and was large enough to hold a corpse.

"What? Oh yes, of course." Tylo said, stepping back to let the newly arrived nurse past him.

As she walked past him, Tylo studied the nurse. She wore the same uniform as the one sat behind the counter but with the addition of a surgical mask that covered most of her face, leaving only her eyes visible between the top of the mask and the bottom of her hat. The nurse looked back at Tylo briefly and he noticed her eyes look down at the blaster he was still holding. He was about to try and explain himself to the woman when he realised that although she had a lanyard for a hospital identity card around her neck it was twisted so that only the back of the card holder was visible, not the card itself.

"Let me see that." he said, reaching out for the lanyard and he grabbed hold of it before the masked nurse could react and turned it around to reveal that the holder was empty.

All of a sudden the masked nurse punched Tylo and he staggered backwards, startled and lifting his hands to his face instinctively as he tasted the blood coming from his nose. The nurse behind the desk gasped

when she saw this and her hand reached for the intercom again. However, before she could activate it the fake nurse opened the repulsor cart and produced a disruptor. Pointing the pistol at the nurse, she pulled the trigger and a bright blast of energy shot from the muzzle of the weapon. This struck the nurse in her chest and whereas a blaster bolt would have burned through her, killing her by destroying her heart, the disruptor blast instead spread out on impact and the nurse screamed in agony as her body began to disintegrate. The screaming stopped relatively quickly as the damage from the disruptor killed the nurse but the energy continued to flow over her body until it had been entirely consumed and there was nothing left of the woman who had been sat behind the counter just moments earlier.

Tylo shook his head as he recovered his senses just in time to see the masked woman turning towards him and he lunged towards her, diving under her line of fire. As he dived Tylo heard the sound of the disruptor discharging again, followed by the sound of it impacting against the wall of the morgue just as he slammed into the woman and knocked her off her feet.

As the pair landed on the floor they grappled for control of the disruptor, the woman trying to bring it to bear on Tylo while he responded by trying to rip it from her grasp while keeping the lethal weapon pointing in any direction other than at him. All of a sudden Tylo felt a switch beneath his thumb and smiled as he realised what it was that he had found. Pressing down on the button the disruptor's power pack was suddenly catapulted from the grip and skidded across the floor when it landed. Glancing downwards Tylo saw the power pack sliding close to his foot and he gave it a swift kick, sending it flying right across the room. With the disruptor now useless Tylo was able to focus his efforts more on the masked woman in the nurse's uniform instead and he returned the blow that she had struck him earlier by punching her in the face as well. The force of this blow was enough to sending her head backwards and it struck the floor with a satisfying 'crack'. The impact also caused the woman to finally let go of her disruptor and the weapon fell to the floor. Tylo ignored this though, instead reaching for the surgical mask that covered the woman's nose and mouth and he pulled it down to reveal her entire face. However, what he saw startled him as much as the blow he had received at the start of the fight and his eyes widened.

"What the kriff?" he exclaimed as he tried to process what he was seeing.

Taking advantage of Tylo's confusion the woman brought her knee up between Tylo's legs sharply and he gasped as intense pain shot through his body. The woman then pushed Tylo off her and scrambled away before getting back to her feet. She quickly retrieved the disruptor she had dropped but as she looked around she could not see where the power pack had ended up.

"Stang." she hissed. Having no spare power pack with her, the woman now had no way of doing what she had come to the morgue to do and escape was her only option now. She had no idea exactly who Tylo was, he certainly did not act like a police detective and she could not take the chance that he was alone. Therefore, while he lay on the floor helpless she kicked him once more as hard as she could before spinning around and rushing for the exit from the morgue, pulling her mask up before she got to the door so that she could retain her anonymity as she hurried through the corridors of the hospital.

One of the hospital's security cameras was located in the reception area of the morgue and as soon as the feed was shown in the main security office both Jayk and Brae saw Tylo grappling with the woman in the nurse's uniform.

"She's in the morgue!" Brae snapped and both she and Jayk rushed from the room, almost knocking over the administrator returning with details about the nurse called Burbra.

"I have the information you asked for he called out after the Jedi.

"Never mind, I think we've got our answer." Jayk responded without turning around.

The Jedi drew their lightsabers as they ran but did not activate them until they reached the turbolift that took them down to the basement level the morgue was located on.

Darting from the turbolift as soon as the doors opened they found the entrance to the morgue still standing open and the two Jedi charged inside, holding up their lightsabers ready to block a shot from a disruptor. However, by the time they arrived the woman in the nurse's uniform was gone and Tylo was in the process of slowly getting back to his feet using one hand to steady himself on the counter while the other was still clutched between his legs as he continued to wince from the pain.

"You're too late." Tylo gasped when he saw Jayk and Brae standing in the doorway and the pair shut off their lightsabers and put the weapons away.

"Where did she go?" Jayk asked.

"Right out of that door." Tylo answered, nodding towards the open doorway, "I managed to disable her disruptor and she decided to leave after that. One thing though, before she left I did manage to get a good look at her face. It looks like Xehra Connert doesn't have an accomplice after all."

"What makes you say that?" Brae said, "You just fought with her."

"I just fought with Xehra Connert." Tylo said, "I ripped off her mask and it was Xehra's face that I was looking at."

"Are you certain?" Jayk said, frowning.

"She was less than half a metre in front of me." Tylo said and noticing that Jayk was still wearing his glasses he added, "There's nothing wrong with my eyesight granddad."

"But if Xehra Connert is the accomplice we've been hunting for then who is it that's in the morgue?" Brae said.

"That is a very good question Brae. One that I think needs answering urgently." Jayk responded.

Special Agents Tarren and Loslo joined Jayk, Brae and Tylo to hear the results of the examination of the remains brought into the morgue, delivered by the chief medical examiner of Horra himself.

"The DNA test identified the remains as belonging to Xehra Connert." the examiner began, "The same for the one fingerprint that was still intact."

"So not twins then. Even they have different fingerprints." Tylo commented.

"Quite," the examiner said, "and of course for a standard examination that would have been enough to convince a droid that the corpse was that of the individual concerned. However, given the additional information provided to me I ran some further tests and the results were to say the least interesting. In my eighty-four years of medical practice this is the first time I have come across a clone of this kind."

"A clone?" Brae said, surprised by this revelation.

"Indeed. There were errors at a genetic level that indicated that the remains examined were those of a clone. Specifically one created using spaarti technology."

"How can you tell?" Agent Loslo asked.

"Spaarti technology permits the very rapid reproduction of an organism. The current research suggests that an adult humanoid can be grown in a little over a standard month. However, such clones are unstable and the errors in their genetic make up more obvious. Some unknown factor of the process means that a clone grown in anything under around a year, such as the one whose remains we have here will deteriorate both physically and mentally very rapidly and is unlikely to survive a year after their birthing." the examiner explained.

"I don't get it." Brae said, "What good is a clone that only lives for a year? Even if you've accelerated its physical growth it would be born knowing nothing. You would have to teach it everything and there wouldn't be time before it died."

"Not so with spaarti technology young lady." the examiner said, "The donor for the clones' genetic material can have information copied from their brains that can then be flash loaded into the clones as they develop. The process is not without its limitations, however. A cloner couldn't create an exact physical duplicate of you for example and give it all of your knowledge and skills. However, a few key pieces of knowledge that are central to your life could be copied into any number of clones."

"So Xehra Connert is creating disposable clones of herself to steal from high security targets and the clones are the ones perishing in the process. She then goes to the morgue and destroys the remains with a disruptor to guarantee that no-one can carry out a detailed examination that would reveal the ruse." Jayk said.

"That is my professional opinion, yes Jedi Udra." the examiner replied.

"I've never heard of this spaarti technology before. Where the hell would someone like Xehra Connert get her hands on it and how would she know how to use it?" Tylo said but the examiner shook his head.

"That is outside of my area of expertise Captain Kurrast." he said.

"She doesn't know how to use it." Agent Tarren said suddenly, looking up from the datapad he had been studying while the examiner had been giving his report.

"What do you mean Agent Tarren?" Jayk asked.

"As I'm sure I mentioned when we first discussed this case Xehra Connert has a criminal record on this planet and I've been checking all of her known associations, including the beings that she is known to have associated with during her spells in prison. These include an individual known as Mariah Shellto, an arkanian biologist who was charged with attempting to import restricted chemicals." Tarren said.

"And the arkanians are renowned as genetic engineers. Cloning is just a slight variation on what a lot of them do." Tylo said and Tarren nodded.

"Xehra Connert served her sentence while the case against Mariah Shellto was dismissed due to procedural errors. Both of them were released from prison within a week of one another." Tarren said.

"But why bother growing clones just to steal things? No matter how expensive the stolen goods are it can't be worth it." Brae said.

"It is if it means that no-one is looking for the thief." Tylo pointed out, "Xehra Connert is listed as dead so the police don't distribute wanted details to other jurisdictions. But thanks to this Mariah Shellto she can keep on committing crimes."

"Then I think that it is time we paid this Mariah Shellto a visit." Jayk added.

5.

Mariah Shellto had an address on record just outside a small town far from either Horra or the planetary capital and the fastest way to reach it was to fly in the *Swift Exit*. Rather than just set down on the property though Jayk had Tylo fly over it first, low enough that the freighter's sensors could be used to scan all of the buildings on the property. Only a single pass was carried out to avoid attracting attention from the ground and although the freighter had to be low enough to conduct a scan Tylo still maintained enough altitude that it would not be obvious what was being done. As a final measure only passive sensors were used just in case the arkanian had any scan detection systems in place.

The property consisted of three structures in a large area of ground. As well as the main residential building there was a large storage shed a short distance away and also a generator building located beside a river that ran across the property.

"It looks like there's some sort of structure underground between the house and the storage structure." Jayk said as he studied the sensor readings, "Thermal imaging is showing a lot of heat for what ought to be dead ground."

"Plus that generator is running hot for just a house." Tylo added as he glanced at the screen as well, "This arkanian must be operating some serious technology down there to require that much power."

"We'll set down here." Jayk said, pointing to a spot not far from the main house. This was well within the limits of the property and Brae frowned for a moment.

"Can we do that?" she asked.

"The Republic writes the laws kid." Tylo commented.

"I want Cal given control of the ship. He'll take off and fly a holding pattern as soon as we've disembarked." Jayk said.

"Leaving our cloner and her thief friend thinking that we've got support in the air if they try anything. I like it." Tylo said.

"Exactly. Take us down Tylo." Jayk ordered and Tylo turned the *Swift Exit* around to fly back towards the property.

"Touching down now." Cal's voice said over the intercom while Jayk, Brae and Tylo stood inside the ship's cargo hold at the top of the access ramp.

"Copy that. Ramp opening now." Tylo replied as he activated the ramp controls and it began to open.

The ship's occupants walked calmly down the ramp and across the grassy ground towards the house. When they were about a quarter of the way Tylo briefly turned and gave a thumbs up towards the *Swift Exit*. Detecting this, Cal then engaged the ship's engines and as it rose back up into the air the access ramp closed again.

"Hey!" a voice called out from the direction of the storage shed and the trio looked around to see an female arkanian wearing overalls heading towards them. Arkanians were a near human species and the woman now walking towards them looked almost human. The only things that set her aside from an ordinary human were her milky white eyes that matched the colour of her hair and more significantly the fact that each hand had only four digits instead of the usual five, all of them clawed, "What do you think you're doing landing a ship here on my property? Get off it now." she shouted.

"Miss Mariah Shellto I presume." Jayk said.

"You presume wrong." the arkanian woman replied.

"You aren't Mariah Shellto?" Jayk asked.

"Of course I'm Mariah Shellto. You already knew that. But I'm not a 'miss', I haven't been a 'miss' in a long time." she said.

"I'm sorry missus-" Jayk began.

"It's doctor." Mariah interrupted, "I hold advanced degrees in biology, microbiology, medicine and genetics. Not that it's really any of your business. Now get off my land before I call the law man."

"We are the law." Tylo said, and then he glanced at Jayk and Brae and added, "Well technically they're the law. I'm just their ride really."

"My name is Jedi Jayk Udra. We are here to search your property." Jayk told the woman and she came to a sudden halt.

Fear.

Both Jayk and Brae sensed the brief flash of emotion before it changed.

Anger.

"Then you can definitely get off my land. I know my rights, you can't just come here and barge into my house. Get a warrant if you think you have any proof I've done anything wrong." Mariah hissed at him and Jayk held out a datapad.

"Doctor Mariah Shellto, by the authority of a court sanctioned by the Senate of the Galactic Republic I hereby serve you notice that we will be conducting a search of your property for scientific equipment used in the committing of a crime.

The arkanian woman glared back at Jayk, refusing to take the datapad on which a copy of the warrant was

shown.

"Go ahead then. But you won't find anything." she said, still glaring at Jayk.

"Let's start with that building right there." Jayk said, pointing past Mariah to the storage building, "Tylo, you keep an eye on the good doctor while Brae and I carry out the search."

"Don't think I'm letting you out of my sight." Mariah said sharply and as Jayk and Brae headed towards the storage building she followed them, Tylo following her in turn with his hand resting on his blaster. Ahead of her Jayk leant closer to Brae to whisper in her ear.

"Did you notice what she said when she found out that we had a warrant?" he asked her.

"What, that we wouldn't find anything? I didn't sense any deception from her." Brae replied softly.

"No, neither did I. But consider her wording. She didn't say that there was nothing on the property to find, only that we wouldn't find anything." Jayk pointed out.

"So you think she is hiding something but she just thinks that it's well enough hidden that we won't find it?" Brae said and Jayk smiled.

"Exactly. Now let's see what she keeps in here." he replied as he reached the storage structure and opened the door.

Both Jayk and Brae could sense the presence of life all around them as they entered the storage building. Looking around them they saw that the structure had been converted into a research facility. Tanks of fluid stood in rows connected together by bundles of wires and pipes that appeared to move the fluid between different rows.

"If you break anything I'll sue." Mariah said when she stepped through the door behind the jedi and Tylo snorted.

"Try it. They don't have money. Not enough to make it worthwhile suing them anyway." he said.

Jayk and Brae split up and moved along two different rows of the tanks, briefly studying the contents of each as they walked past.

"What is in these tanks?" Jayk asked.

"Fertiliser." Mariah answered, "Not that it's any of your business but I'm producing a microbial fertiliser for the farms around here. It cleans up the soil."

Farmers pay well do they? I bet running an operation like this is expensive." Tylo commented.

"Very clever." Brae added.

"Yes, it is actually." Mariah replied before Brae came to a sudden halt.

"What's wrong?" Jayk said when he sensed Brae's emotional state change but when he looked around he saw that she was smiling.

"You know doctor the Force is a wonderful thing. It surrounds and binds every living thing in the universe." she said.

"Yes, I've heard all of that before young girl. Stuff and nonsense for the scientifically illiterate." Mariah said, avoiding looking at Brae.

"But what a lot of people make the mistake of thinking is that it means you can easily hide anything by surrounding it with other living things." Brae continued as if ignoring what the arkanian woman had just said.

"You mean like hiding a single piece of fruit in an orchard?" Tylo commented and Brae nodded.

"Exactly. But the thing is that there are certain events that just cannot be hidden to someone who is sensitive to the Force. The creation of new life, especially sentient life for example." she said and now Jayk smiled as well, knowing where Brae was going with this.

"Where is it Brae?" he asked and Brae pointed to one of the fluid filled tubes close to her.

"Right below there." she told him.

Jayk drew his lightsaber and there was a 'snap-hiss' as he ignited it while walking towards the tank indicated by Brae.

Panic.

"Hey! What are you doing?" Mariah demanded and she began to try and move forwards only to have Tylo grab her arms and hold her back.

"Let him finish doc. You don't want to get in the way of that blade, trust me. I've seen what a mess it can make of someone." he said before Jayk slashed at the floor with his lightsaber, cutting a hole that was large enough for a person to fit through. When the section of flooring cut loose crashed to the floor below Jayk looked down into the hole, seeing that the chamber beneath was well lit and then he jumped down into it. Like the room above this chamber contained a number of cylindrical tanks. However, these were significantly larger, large enough for each one to hold the humanoid form developing within most of them. In some cases this being was tiny, barely large enough for Jayk to make out but in others it was clearly recognisable as an adult female and in one case the face was close enough to the transparent side of the tank for Jayk to recognise its features.

Xehra Connert.

"It's the cloning facility." Jayk called out as he moved along the row of spaarti cloning cylinders. At the end of the row he could see the computer that not only monitored the development of the clones but also formed the core of the flash learning system that would imprint the desired skill set, in this case breaking and entering, into the clones as they developed.

Not far from where Jayk stood he saw a set of stairs that led upwards until it terminated in a trap door that obviously led to the chamber above and he cautiously headed towards this, remaining alert for any sign that the real Xehra was also somewhere in this hidden chamber with him. Reaching the bottom of the staircase he found a control panel and when he activated it the trap door slid open.

"Come on down." Jayk called out and then stood back as Brae came down the stairs, followed by Tylo dragging Mariah along with him.

"So these are spaarti cloning tubes then." Tylo said as he looked around and he grinned when he saw the face of one of the as yet unborn clones, "Oh and that's a face I recognise. But what's the point doc?"

"What else Tylo? Money." Brae said before Mariah could respond, "Like you said, that set up above us looks expensive and I'll bet that all this is just to finance that."

"None of which would be necessary if the Republic would just let scientists get on with their work in peace."

Mariah hissed, "But funds are only available to those who play by your narrow minded rules."

"Like the rules that saw you arrested Doctor Shellto?" Jayk said, "I expect that even the suggestion of criminal activity caused your funding to dry up. Is all this to replace that?" However, before Mariah could be given the chance to respond Jayk's comlink sounded and he lifted the device to his mouth, "Go ahead." he said.

"Jayk it's Cal. You're about to have company. Looks like a Moboquet Turbo-six speeder bike with a single rider." Cal's voice told him.

"Thanks Cal. We've found the cloning lab right where it should be. We'll be waiting for Xehra." Jayk responded before he put his comlink away and turned to the others, "Okay let's get out of sight." he told them.

Jayk, Brae and Tylo all concealed themselves so that they would not be seen by someone coming down the stairs and Tylo pulled Mariah out of sight with him as well, pressing the muzzle of his blaster into her side.

"You can stay quiet or I'll put you down, I promise." he whispered to her.

The trio waited for Xehra to arrive before they heard her call out from the laboratory above.

"Doctor we've got a problem." she said and then as she descended the stairs she added, "There was some sort of security agent waiting for me at the morgue. I wasn't able to destroy the body so it's only a matter of time before they find out that we're using clones."

"Actually we already do." Jayk said as he stepped out of his hiding place and Xehra came to a sudden halt, staring at him in disbelief.

"Xehra Connert you are under arrest for breaking and entering, theft, assault with a deadly weapon, attempted murder and murder." Brae added as she too appeared from her hiding place and Xehra drew her disruptor, the weapon now reloaded and ready to use again.

"I wouldn't try it if I were you." Tylo warned when he then emerged and aimed his own blaster at her. Seeing his blaster as more of a threat than the jedi's lightsabers that could only be used in close combat.

"Xehra Connert drop your weapon and surrender." Jayk ordered.

"No Xehra, run!" Mariah yelled from behind Tylo and Xehra fired her disruptor at Tylo.

Fortunately Tylo noticed the telltale movement of the weapon as she confirmed her aim before firing and he was able to dive out of the way just before Xehra pulled the trigger. The blast headed right for where Tylo had been standing, passing close by him and continuing on to where Mariah now stood and she was hit instead. Just like the nurse in the hospital morgue, Mariah now screamed in agony as her cells were ripped apart and in a matter of moments there was only an empty space where she had been standing.

"No!" Xehra screamed as she realised what she had done and in that moment both Jayk and Brae activated their lightsabers and charged towards her. Acting quickly Xehra turned and fired at Jayk but he sensed the incoming attack before it happened and moved his lightsaber to block it. The energy blade could not deflect the powerful spatial distortion as it could with a blaster bolt but it did burst the spatial distortion fired by the weapon with an audible 'pop'.

This was followed by the more conventional flash of blaster fire as Tylo opened fire across the room with his heavy blaster pistol and Xehra threw herself to the floor as shots flew over her head. Xehra returned fire but Tylo was already on the move and once again she missed him, the shot from her disruptor instead striking one of the cloning tubes and burning a hole in it large enough that the partially formed clone toppled out onto the floor. Its eyes suddenly flickered open as it began to convulse and splutter as it died, not yet ready to exist outside its tube of nutrient fluids.

Next Xehra turned her weapon on Brae, the teenage padawan being closest to her and she fired her disruptor again. Brae side stepped the shot easily but rather than allow the energy blast to continue she held her lightsaber out beside her and swatted the spatial distortion with it, triggering yet another 'pop'.

While Xehra's attention was focused elsewhere Jayk leapt through the air towards her and landed barely a metre away from her, at which point she span around to face him. However, even as she pointed the disruptor at him Jayk just smiled at her and shut down his lightsaber.

"Hand over the weapon. You are under arrest." he told her calmly.

"Are you insane?" Xehra responded and she pulled the trigger of her disruptor again.

"No." Jayk replied as nothing happened, "But I can count. I've studied the specifications of that model of disruptor and four shots is your limit." then he formed his outstretched hand into a fist and punched Xehra in

the face as hard as he could, knocking her back to the floor and then kicking the disruptor away from her as it fell from her hand, "Secure her." he said, looking at Brae.

"So what now?" Tylo asked as he wandered over to the disruptor and picked it up.

"Now we summon the Sector Rangers." Jayk replied as he looked around, "The Republic will have to determine what is to be done with these clones."

"Will they be destroyed?" Brae asked as she was binding Xehra's wrists behind her back.

"Perhaps. Even if they are advanced enough to be birthed from these cloning tanks they will probably have to spend their short lives in an institution." Jayk replied and then he looked at Tylo who was studying the disruptor, "And no Tylo, you may not keep that weapon." he said.